Dear Reader:

The book *The End Of The Church Age And After* was written in 2002 by Mr. Harold Camping of Family Stations, Inc. Mr. Camping was just over 80 years of age when he began to teach on the Open Forum program that the church age had ended in 1988 on the day before Pentecost of that year, which happened to be May 21, 1988. In that book, the time patterns of the Bible were projected indicating that the great tribulation would be 8400 days or 23 years in length, ending on May 21, 2011. Indeed, at that time, the proofs in the Bible appeared to be solid that Christ would return on that date and bring salvation to an abrupt end. Christ did not appear, however, on that date, and the believers were not caught up into heaven, leaving many to wonder, what is God's plan for the end?

We are helped when we study the book of Jonah. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to proclaim that God would overthrow that great city in 40 days. And yet, amazingly, when Jonah made this proclamation, the people believed God, and from the king on down, sat in sackcloth and ashes piteously crying to God for mercy. And God did have mercy.

The salvation of Nineveh was a preamble, a prefigurement, of the salvation that God is performing today outside the churches during this great tribulation period. If we are honest with the Bible, we must acknowledge and conclude that May 21, 2011 was not the end of salvation. ZionInTravail ministry has written an in-depth study showing many proofs for this. Salvation continues until the last day when Christ visibly appears, and the believers are caught up to heaven in the sight of their enemies and instantly changed into their glorified spiritual bodies. That will be immediately followed by the final judgment that takes place here on this sin-cursed earth, which the Bible indicates in Revelation 9:5,10 shall be five months or 153 days in length, culminating in the total annihilation of this present universe, and the creation of new heavens and new earth wherein righteousness dwells.

Accordingly, we at ZionInTravail.com have updated and condensed several chapters of the original text to bring it in-line with what we presently can know, based on the principle of progressive revelation, that is, the fact that God at the time of the end is opening our understanding of a great many truths not previously understood.

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THE END OF THE CHURCH AGE… AND AFTER

Parts I, II, VI and VII

By Harold Camping

Updated February 2024 by ZionInTravail.com

Introduction.

The Bible is the Final Authority

This book is entitled The End of the Church Age and After, however, the essential issue that is being presented is not the subject of the end of the church age. The essential issue is the authority of the Bible. Is the Bible the ultimate and final authority to which every true believer is subject?

The big question each one must face is: Do I have such a fear of God that I tremble before Him if I suspect a doctrine I hold may be contrary to the Word of God? Or is it possible that I feel secure with God because I faithfully obey each and every doctrine that my church teaches. Do I realize that some of the doctrines held by my church may not be faithful to the Bible? In turn, do I trust that everything my church teaches is altogether true to the Bible?

If I discover that a doctrine my church teaches is not faithful to God's Word, do I tremble in fear?

To say it another way, if I discover that a doctrine my church teaches is not faithful to God's Word, do I tremble in fear? We must remember that any doctrine we hold that is not faithful to the Bible is a lie. It is something developed by men. Therefore, to believe that this doctrine is true, when in actuality, it is not true to the Bible, is to place our trust in men rather than in God. Actually, it is a sin equivalent to that committed by ancient Israel when they worshipped God in Jerusalem but also worshipped other gods at their high places. This was such a serious sin that God finally destroyed Israel in 709 B.C. and Judah in 587 B.C.

As we will discover in this book, it is such a serious sin of our day that God's judgment is upon today's churches.

The same principle must be applied to this study. Has every effort been made to be sure that everything presented in this book is altogether faithful to the Bible? The teachings and conclusions must have nothing to do with visions or voices or dreams. The teachings and conclusions are to be unrelated to human speculation. They must be carefully founded on the Bible alone. It must be admitted that at times, it is very difficult to obey the Bible. That is, sometimes, as we carefully read the Bible, we find that God is giving us a command to take some kind of action. And sometimes, we don't like that command. We don't like it at all. Then

comes the big question that each of us must personally ask: In my fear of God, am I ready to be obedient to the command even though I don't like it? The answer has to be, "If I am a true child of God, I want to be obedient to each and every command. My delight is to do the will of God." If I keep hesitating to obey, I must ask myself the fair question, "Am I truly a child of God?"

The Saved Person is a New Creature

The reason why obedience is the spiritual mentality of the true believer is because at the moment he became saved, he became born again. He received from heaven above a new resurrected soul in which he never wants to sin again. In I John 3:9, God assures us of this as He declares:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

The seed that remaineth in him is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Therefore, the true believer has become a new creature in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). At death, which could come moments after salvation or years after salvation, in his soul existence, he goes immediately, without any change, into heaven to live and reign with Christ. Because he was given his new resurrected soul, God can say of him in I John 2:3-4:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

The true believer can understand Romans 7:22**:**

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

He is in accordance with the testimony of Romans 7:24 where we read, **"who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"** He deplores the fact that he must live in a sin-cursed body that will not be redeemed until Christ comes on the last day.

> *Ordination or acclaim that I am a faithful Bible teacher or elder or pastor give no guarantee that I have become saved.*

Frankly stated, if a highly successful pastor or any pastor or a Biblical theologian or I do not find an intense desire in my life to be obedient to all that the Bible commands, so that I tremble before God lest I teach something contrary to the will of God, I may have evidence that I am not saved. Ordination or acclaim that I am a faithful Bible teacher or elder or pastor give no guarantee that I have become saved. Unfortunately, those who are not saved may not be able to understand these truths. They may conclude that these statements concerning a new resurrected soul are merely the opinion of the writer of this study. In fact, that judgment can extend to this whole study so that the reader may conclude that this

study is merely the opinion of the writer. The best this writer can hope for is that each one who reads this book will carefully and diligently check the Bible for the validity of each conclusion that is taught in this study.

Progressive Revelation

The Bible is the complete revelation of God's Word to the human race. We are not to add to it. We are not to take away from it. It alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. However, when we consider how we receive truth from the Bible, we have another matter altogether. God insists that there is a timetable known only to God by which He reveals the truths of the Bible to mankind. For example, Jesus clearly told His disciples that the time would come when He would be killed and after three days, He would rise again. Mark 8:31 declares:

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Even though this is a plain, clear statement, it was not understood at all by the disciples. It was only after His resurrection, as the disciples were reminded by the two men in shining garments, who stood outside the empty sepulchre, that they understood. Luke 24:6-8 informs us:

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words,

God had given them the revelation that Christ was to be killed and rise again, but it was not a revelation that became a part of their understanding until Christ had risen. Likewise, we read in Ephesians 3:3-5:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

God is indicating that a mystery was made known to the Apostle Paul, **"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"** (verse 6). However, this truth was repeatedly written about in the Bible, for example, Abram's name was changed to Abraham because he would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:5-7).

Many years earlier, Jesus had told the disciples in Matthew 28:19:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

The truth that those whom God would save would include people from all nations of the world is taught in many places in the Bible. But while this truth was included in God's revelation to mankind, only when Saul of Tarsus had become saved was it truly revealed to the minds of the apostles. The principle of progressive revelation is especially emphasized in Daniel 12, verses 8 and 9:

And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

God has a timetable for giving understanding of these truths.

In God's revelation, which is the Bible, God has a great many things to say about the end of the world and about details of things that lead up to the end of the world. But God has a timetable for giving understanding of these truths. The true meaning of these end-time statements was not to be revealed to the minds of men until the time of the end. This is why many devout, God-fearing theologians of the past have endeavored to explain the meaning of Biblical end time passages, but they did not even come close to the truth. This was not a failure on their part. It was simply not time for God to reveal the meaning of these end-time passages.

Thus, we can expect that in our day, when the signs are showing that we must be close to the end of time, the meaning of a great many Biblical passages should become revealed to the minds of careful, diligent students of the Bible. The very fact that we can find great harmony in our understanding of Biblical passages that heretofore have been very obscure greatly encourages us that God has placed us on the right track. We can expect, therefore, that many passages of the Bible, which in earlier times have been somewhat mysterious, can now be understood.

The Bible, The Supreme Law Book

It must be emphasized that the Bible is a book of law. It is the supreme law book by which God governs all mankind. Even as each political government has written laws by which the rulers govern, so, too, God, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, has a written law by which He governs. Moreover, rulers of nations are subject to the written law of their land. So, too, God is subject to the written law, the Bible, by which He governs the nations. This principle is set forth in the language of Psalm 138:2, where we read:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

We stand amazed at the idea that the Word of God is magnified according to His name. But when we understand that the Word of God is a synonym for the law of God, we learn that God, too, is subject to all the laws He has written in this law book, the Bible. In more than 170 verses of the 176 verses of Psalm 119, for example, there is a reference to words such as "law," "precept," "commandment," "word," "testimony," "statute," etc. Each of these words is a synonym for the word "law." The Bible is the law book God uses to govern the nations.

The fact that the Bible is essentially a book of law is not normally apparent to the reader of the Bible. This is because God declares His laws in the context of history, in the context of examples of peoples and nations that disobeyed His laws and suffered the consequences of their sins. God's laws are frequently hidden because God sometimes spoke utilizing metaphors and parables. But in the measure we begin to understand these obscure passages, we always find that the basic truth being brought is the law of God.

An integral part of God's law book is the declaration of His purpose and plan to publish the teachings of His law book to all the world. Moreover, the laws that govern God's salvation plan, a plan that is required to maintain the integrity of His law, are a most important part of God's law.

Because God is subject to the laws set forth in the Bible, He cannot have a people for Himself eternally unless all their sins (that is, all their violations of the law of God), have been paid for, and the penalty demanded by the law has been paid. Therefore, when God the Father gave those whom He had elected for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:37), it meant that Christ first had to somehow satisfy the requirements of the law of God, as it applied to these individuals, before they could be His. That is, before these individuals could be with Christ eternally, the penalty for the sins of these elect individuals had to be paid so that they could be forgiven. Christ did all this tremendous work of payment for our sins from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:3), and then demonstrated that payment at the cross.

Once we have learned this tremendously important principle, that the Bible is God's supreme law book, we should tremble as we read it. God, in the Bible, is constantly declaring the laws by which we are to live. Violation of His law will absolutely bring the penalty of destruction. Therefore, as we read, in the Bible, God's laws that governed the church during the church age, and that relate the end of the local church age and the final harvest, we should carefully study God's law book, the Bible, to know God's will. The seriousness of disobeying God's laws as they are set forth in His divine book, the Bible, cannot be emphasized too strongly.

Because God Himself is subject to the laws of the Bible, He must bring to completion the punishment that He has decreed for any and all human beings, even church leaders and all those in local congregations who transgress His laws.

Chapter 1.

What is Going On?

We See Churches Falling Away from the Truth of the Bible

Everywhere we look, we see that the churches are increasingly falling away from the truth of the Bible and following their own wisdom. They are departing from the rules of the Bible and developing their own rules. Also, we see that there are very few in the churches who are concerned about the faithfulness of their church or their own doctrines. There may be concern that "those liberal churches" are unfaithful to God or that this "cult" is bad. However, we do not see individuals looking at and analyzing their own doctrinal positions or the positions of their church. In many churches, effectively, the confessions are the highest authority. The confessions have been around so long the church leaders will not change them. Any new idea is tested against the confessions rather than the Bible. If the idea does not square with what the church believes or the confessions, it is rejected.

A few believers in a church may get nervous and speak with their pastor or an elder, but their suggestions do not have much impact. In fact, these people will probably find that their church continues to depart further in doctrine and practice from the truths of the Bible.

If we honestly examine our own church or the churches in general, we find many areas in which the truths of the Bible have been set aside. If we had made the same examination 50 or 100 years ago, we would have to conclude that most of the churches then were much more faithful. Here are a sampling of areas in which the churches have departed from the Bible. A careful examination could add many more items to this list.

(a) **Divorce and remarriage.** The Bible clearly commands that the wife is bound to her husband until death (I Corinthians 7:39, Romans 7:1-3). Therefore, there is not to be divorce and remarriage. Passages like Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 are being used to teach that divorce and remarriage are permissible. However, a careful study of the Bible shows that this is not the case. The church traditionally has correctly understood this, but in the last 50 years, this rule has been completely set aside, so that the divorce rate is as high in the churches as in the secular world. Virtually every denomination has made provision for divorce, and the result of this has been great damage upon society. There are broken homes, mixed-up children, single parents, etc.

However, no denomination is dealing with the root problem, namely, how can we stop the divorce plague and return to the sanctity of marriage? The solution is to go back to the Biblical rules of no divorce and remarriage, but we do not see this happening. (For more information about the Biblical rules for marriage, please contact info@ZionInTravail.com and ask for the booklet, "What God Hath Joined Together.")

(b) **The Sunday Sabbath.** God has established Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath day. It is the Lord's Day, a day to be used entirely for the things of the Lord. It is a day for worship, evangelizing, training our children in the things of the Lord, Bible study, visiting those who need encouragement, etc. The

churches have historically kept this day exclusively for the Lord's things. They may not have fully understood the Sunday Sabbath, and confused it with the seventh-day Sabbath of the Old Testament, but nevertheless, it was kept pretty much according to the Bible. However, in the past 50 years, this day has been turned into a day of pleasure, a day for our pleasure, and not for God's pleasure. God warned about this in Isaiah 58:13-14. Virtually every church has departed from God in this area. (For a detailed explanation of the Bible verses that explain the Sunday Sabbath, please contact info@ZionInTravail.com and request the booklet, "Sunday: The Sabbath.")

(c) **Gospels of signs and wonders.** In the past 50 years, the churches that feature "tongues" as described in I Corinthians Chapters 12, 13, and 14 have increased enormously, to the point that almost every denomination has been impacted. Tongues are frequently a part of those churches that are the fastest growing in our day, and it is very difficult to find pastors who will say definitively that this is not from God. Tongues are a world-wide phenomenon, showing up in the fastest growing churches worldwide. In addition to tongues, many of these churches also feature other kinds of miracles, including the miracle called "falling down backward."

However, God completed His divine revelation when He completed the last chapter of the last book of the Bible. In Revelation 22:18-19, God indicates that there is not to be any addition or removal from this "book." The "book" in view can be only the Bible (Revelation 22:9-10, Hebrews 10:7). Therefore, once the Bible was completed in approximately A.D. 95, that ended all divine revelation. This means that the phenomenon of speaking in tongues in the church at Corinth would have ended. And of course, the other signs and wonders that occurred during Bible days would have ended.

However, mankind by nature is not satisfied with the Gospel of just trusting the Bible, he seeks something more, something such as a miraculous message from God. God will not accommodate this desire, but Satan, as he is seated (his rulership) in the corporate church body, will provide supernatural messages (II Corinthians 11:13-14, II Thessalonians 2:1-4). God warns that one of the signs that we are near the end is the appearance of these false Christs coming with gospels of signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24). We will cover this subject in much more detail later on this study.

(d) **Rulership and the place of women in the church**. Women's place in the church is another example of the decision by the church to change God's law to suit man's ideas. There is tremendous pressure to accept women in the pulpit and allow women to rule and have authority in the church. This is absolutely contrary to the law of God (I Corinthians 14:34, I Timothy 2:12). God has given strict rules regarding the leadership in the church (I Timothy 3). Not only must the leaders be men, but they must be married with children, giving evidence that they can rule their own home. Also, many other qualifications are given for these rulers. Therefore, most men do not qualify for leadership, and yet, churches today are appointing single men and married men without children. Thus, the churches have chosen to go their own way and to disregard God's law.

(e) **Music.** For hundreds of years, the church was blessed by Godly Christian music in which both the words and the music were God glorifying. The words of the music expressed important spiritual principles. These words helped encourage believers in the truths of the Bible. As believers would think about these words, they would be built up in the Word of God. However, today, it is different. There is much less substance to the words today. Often times anthems are sung that just repeat short phrases. These phrases tend to be very shallow in spiritual content. Also, the sound is patterned after the music of the world. Very often worldly music is chosen, such as rock-and-roll, and just the words are changed

to words from the Bible. One has difficulty telling the music of the world from the contemporary Christian music since it is difficult to understand the words. The Christian music effectively has become the music of the world because you cannot tell the two apart.

However, the Bible indicates that music is associated with worship and should reflect the holy nature of God. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the word "worship" identifies with bowing down. That is, when we worship God, we are bowing down before God, we are acknowledging His rulership over us. We are showing that we should be trembling before God because He is holy God. This is the proper setting for the music of the church. Christian music should reflect the holy nature of God. It should be music that reflects the idea of "bowing down" before God, the idea that God is His eternal majesty who is to be feared and held in awe. The music of the church through the ages has generally reflected this in both its lyrics and melodies. However, today the music of the church is closely patterned after that of the world.

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

This perverse teaching disregards all kinds of laws of the Bible. No recognition is given to the Bible's teaching that man is spiritually dead and has no desire to seek God (Ephesians 2:1-5, Romans 3:10-11). It denies the truth that Christ went to the cross to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), and the rest of the world will be destroyed on the final day of judgment. This teaching fails to face statements such as Revelation 17:8, which teaches that only some people have their names written in the book of life from before the foundation of the world.

Moreover, the Bible tells us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, we are to trust Him for all that He has done for our salvation, and that includes the fact that from before the foundation of the world, God chose those whom He would save, and therefore, He has obligated Himself to save those whom He has chosen (Ephesians 1:4-10).

Those, however, who believe that man has a free will to choose salvation, effectively are indicating that they do not trust Christ to save them in His time and in His manner. They want a salvation in which they, themselves, are the guarantor, that is, they can become saved any time they wish by simply reaching out and accepting Christ. In this way, they do not have to wait for God to act. Thus, effectively, they do not trust God at all. But if they do not trust Christ who is eternal God then they are not saved, for they do not believe on Him. The result of God saving us is that we believe on Him, our will has been broken, and we trust everything in the Bible that God has declared concerning salvation.

To some degree, the pernicious teaching of free will has plagued the church throughout New Testament history, but in our day, it has invaded almost every congregation. Thus, these congregations do not have God's salvation plan. The salvation they offer is designed by men and will save no one from the wrath of God. What a terrible situation the church has come into. (For more information, contact info@ZionInTravail.com and request the book, Baptism: The Washing Away of Our Sins, or the booklet, "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan.")

(g) **Today's gospel is a social gospel**. All people have three aspirations: 1) political freedom, 2) economic security, and 3) freedom from disease. All of mankind desires these blessings, and pastors and teachers increasingly incorporate these desires into their gospels. The social gospel, which has great concern for the physically hungry, is becoming the number one priority. Preachers say that the Christian ethic demands that all men have political freedom. It is believed that the church must do all it can to provide medicine and doctors to the world, and it is also believed that the church can expect God to provide good health (even miraculous healing), to those who claim the name of Jesus.

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

Lazarus, on the other hand, was a beggar. He had sores that were licked by dogs. He had no economic security, and he had poor health. His political freedom was of no consequence. Which of these two men most badly needed the Gospel? According to today's social gospel, it is obvious that Lazarus had the greater need, but did he? Both the rich man and Lazarus equally needed the Gospel. God strips the curtain of eternity aside and the rich man is seen in the grave and Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, a figure which signifies heaven. The beggar, Lazarus, had everything in this life because he was saved. The rich man had nothing because he was unsaved. Surely this teaches that the social-political gospel has nothing to do with the Gospel of salvation.

The Gospel is concerned with the spiritual needs of mankind.

The Gospel is concerned with the spiritual needs of mankind. Only within the congregation does the Gospel concern itself with physical needs. Many doctrines and practices that are prevalent today present evidence that the church has rewritten the laws of the Bible. Indeed, congregations are being encouraged to follow a salvation program different from that which is found in the Bible.

(h) **Preaching the full counsel of God, including God's wrath.** One frightening thing is that there is so little preaching about the wrath of God, and the final penalty for sin. All kinds of salvation messages are being presented with the general theme of God's love, the idea being that it would be salutary and wise to become identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. These messages imply that by accepting Him, things are going to go well and life will have purpose and meaning.

How can anyone even begin to understand salvation if he does not know from what he is being saved? How can he know what he is saved from unless it is thoroughly discussed and diligently taught that because of his sins, he is under the wrath of God. He is subject to eternal damnation. He ought to be taught what he needs to be saved from.

One can rightly fear eternal damnation only if the Bible's disclosures of the awful nature of eternal destruction are taught. God did not give multitudinous Biblical references to the awfulness and certainty of His wrath just to fill up space. These warnings are to be read, taught, discussed, and should instill fear in mankind. If these passages are neglected, it is not the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:2627). It is man's gospel and not the true Gospel.

These are just a few of the many areas in which churches have fallen away from the truths of the Bible. If anyone makes a close examination of their own church, they will see other areas in which their church has departed from the teachings of the Bible.

Does the Bible Speak about this Falling Away?

We have seen some of the areas in which the churches of today have departed from the Bible. There are many more items that could be added to this list. We are seeing that the Bible is no longer their final authority. When a concerned church member comes with a verse that disagrees with something that his church teaches and asks his pastor or an elder about the verse, the response is not encouraging. We might expect that pastors and elders would tremble before the Word of God if they discovered that they are holding a doctrine contrary to the Bible. But, generally, we do not find this.

So, the question is: Does the Bible speak about this falling away? Does the Bible predict what we are seeing today? The answer is, Yes! The Bible definitely speaks about this falling away. The Bible definitely predicts that this falling away would come first before the day of Christ is at hand (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

As we will see in this study, Matthew Chapter 24 as well as many other passages are definitely discussing this time. We read in verses 21 and 24 of Matthew Chapter 24:

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

Verse 21 tells us of a future time of Great Tribulation. It is a tribulation that is so great that there has never been such a tribulation in the history of the world. Then verse 24 tells us the character of this tribulation. It is a spiritual tribulation that plagues the churches. Notice that false Christs are arising. Since Christ has worked in the churches, these false Christs, of whom Satan is the chief, will work in the churches. That is why they are called false Christs. These false Christs are coming with all of their false doctrines, which is what we see in the churches today.

Notice the signpost that God gives us, namely, they come with signs and wonders. As mentioned above, gospels of signs and wonders, including tongues, are prevalent in the church today, like no other time in history. This is a big evidence. As we continue in this study, we will learn much more about these gospels of signs and wonders.

God also indicates that there will come a time in history in which Satan will be victorious over the body of believers. We read in Revelation 13:7:

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over

The saints are those in the churches and congregations. It was given to Satan to make war with the corporate body and to overcome it. Notice that it was "**given unto him**." God has given him this victory. Christ is the one who loosed Satan to come against the church. This explains what we read in II Thessalonians 2:1-4, which tells us that the man of sin (Satan) will take his seat in the temple. From I Corinthians 3, we know that the temple is a reference to the corporate body, the churches and

congregations, and the man of sin is Satan, and finally, to take one's "seat" is to rule. We will go into more details on these verses later in this study.

The Old Testament Book of Daniel also speaks of this time. We know this because God has directed us to look back into the book of Daniel in Matthew 24:15. We read in Daniel 7:21 and 25:

I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;

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

Verse 21 is very similar to Revelation 13:7. Satan is the "little horn" who will make war with the churches and will prevail. The changing of "times and laws" refers to Satan working in the churches to change the rules of the Bible. This identifies exactly with what we have seen. In the short list above, we can see many areas in which the churches have changed the laws of the Bible to suit their own desires.

God has not only allowed the churches to fall away, but He has appointed Satan as the ruler of the churches.

We also read in Daniel 8:23-25

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify *himself* in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

The king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, who shall stand up in the latter time, is a reference to Satan being appointed as the ruler of the churches during the great tribulation period. The phrase, "his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power," is again underscoring that it is God Himself who has given Satan the power to destroy the mighty and the holy people. The "mighty and the holy people" in this context are the true believers within the churches and congregations worldwide, who, though they are eternally secure in Christ, are nevertheless destroyed as a corporate body only in the sense that they are silenced and driven out from the local congregations during this period of great tribulation. We also see that through his (Satan's) policy he shall cause craft, that is, deceit, to prosper in his hand, and by peace shall destroy many. These verses agree altogether with Matthew 24:24

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

Therefore, we can see from this short sampling of verses that the Bible does speak of this time, and it indicates that it is a dreadful time, because God has not only allowed the churches to fall away, but He has appointed Satan as the ruler of the churches. We must remember that to "sit" or to take one's "seat" means "to rule."

Therefore, we can see that the Bible is not silent about the falling away that we see today. The Bible actually has a whole lot to say about what is happening today. And as we proceed in this study, we will see that the "Great Tribulation" that we are experiencing today is very well documented in the Bible. There are many more Bible passages that describe the time in which we are living.

What is God's Response to the Churches Falling Away?

We have seen that the churches and congregations have departed from the truths of the Bible, and that there appears to be little or no fear of God in the hearts of church leaders today. As we have compared what churches do and teach versus the Bible, we see the flippant disregard for the laws of God. Also, we have seen that the Bible is not silent about this time, but rather that God has declared that this time would come, and that it would be a dreadful time. We have seen these two important points, and now we are faced with the next logical question: What is God's response to this open rebellion? Is God just going to sit idle while all of this is occurring? Has God simply written about this so that the believers are not in shock when this happens? Is God going to allow all of this without any response?

We will find that the Bible answers these questions with a definite NO! Let us look briefly at a few passages to get an introduction to this topic. First, we read in I Peter 4:17-18:

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? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Just as God examines all of the unsaved of the whole world, as we read in Revelation 20:11-15 and in other passages, God is insisting in I Peter 4:17 that His judgment begins in His own house, in His churches and congregations. Now, just as in the final judgment on the last day when God will show no mercy, we will see in this study that there is no mercy in God's judgment upon the churches. This is truly a dreadful situation; it is a situation of such magnitude that God speaks about it in many parts of the Bible. For example, God speaks about this same judgment in Jeremiah 25. In Jeremiah 25, God expands the explanation of I Peter 4:17.

We read in Jeremiah 25:15-26:

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, And all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, And all the kings of the north,

far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them.

If we examine this language carefully, we see that it must be talking about Judgment. Notice how God emphasizes judgment upon all the nations of the world. He lists many known nations of that time and then transitions to speaking about all of the nations that are "**upon the face of the earth**." This can be only the final judgment, which includes the final five months of a literal hell on earth, (Revelation 9:5,10), after the true believers have been raptured. This will be followed by the final day of the earth's existence, when God will destroy everything (2 Peter 3:10).

Notice where this judgment begins. It begins at Jerusalem and Judah. This parallels I Peter 4:17. Also, look at Jeremiah 25, verses 28 and 29:

And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts.

Notice God's response if the peoples of the world complain that judgment has come on them. God declares that those in the world who have had no connection with the churches of God will be judged but God has begun with His own house. God is insisting that He is not a respecter of persons. His judgment upon the unsaved in the churches is no less severe than it is on those outside. We see the exact parallel between Jeremiah 25 and I Peter 4:17-18. Judgment begins with the corporate body, the people of God, the churches and congregations, then it transitions to the whole world. No one will be able to complain that God is unfair because He began with His own people.

So, God is using two parallel passages to indicate that when the final judgment comes, it begins with the churches and congregation. They are the visible house of God that we can see in the world today.

Therefore, God is teaching in these two passages that He is not silent in all of this falling away. Rather, God's judgment has already begun, and it has begun in the churches. We will see more Biblical verification of this as we proceed in our study. God's response is that the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

As further evidence that God is not silent, we can examine how God has dealt with His people in the past. We can see God's patience with national Israel in the Book of Judges. We see God's continued patience in I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. This is really parallel to God's patience with the New Testament churches and congregations. As we study Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, we can see that most of these seven churches were already in trouble with God, indicating that even back to the beginning of the New Testament era, there were problems in the churches. However, God persisted with the New Testament churches for over 1900 years, just like He did with Israel for many years. However, there came a time that judgment fell upon Israel for their increasing wickedness. For the ten northern tribes, it came in 709 B.C., and for the two southern tribes, known as Judah, it came in 587 B.C.

We read in Hebrews 13:8:

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever

So, we know that as Jesus Christ dealt with His people in the Old Testament, we can expect the same thing for His people, the churches and congregations in the New Testament. Therefore, we have further Biblical evidence of the judgment of God that has come upon the churches.

One thing we want to note is that when God has judged His corporate body in the past, it was a complete judgment. He completely destroyed Israel, the ten northern tribes in 709 B.C. Then, in 587 B.C., He completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. We can therefore expect a similar complete destruction of the corporate body again.

As we continue in this study, we will see abundant Biblical evidence that the churches are under the judgment of God.

What Does God Expect from the Believers?

We are beginning to see that the churches and congregations are under the judgment of God. This explains why we see the falling away that we do, and why pastors, elders, and church officers are not really concerned about being altogether faithful to the Word of God. This is why when an individual in the congregation gets nervous about how his church is departing from the Bible and speaks to his pastor, he is pretty much ignored or rebuffed.

Now, we must face the question: In this situation, with all of the falling away of the churches, and given the fact that the time of God's judgment has begun for the churches, what is God's expected response from the believer? Does He expect anything from me? Should I continue to attend my church as I have always done? Is God only directing His judgment upon the "liberal" churches? Surely, some might think, my church is still under the blessing of God and my pastor is still preaching from the Bible, and so, I should not have to worry too much about these things.

Actually, God has a lot to say to the believer today, and He expects something from the believer. However, in order to understand God's command for the believer today, we are going to back up and study God's whole plan of salvation throughout time. We are going to see that what is happening today is not an isolated situation, but rather, that it fits neatly into God's plan of "times and seasons." Let's continue our study now by looking at God's salvation plan throughout the history of the world.

Chapter 2.

Times and Seasons

This world has existed now in the year 2024 A.D. for slightly more than 13,000 years, 13,036 years to be exact, the year of creation being 11,013 B.C. according to the Biblical calendar. As we shall clearly see in this study, we, by God's divine providence, have come very near to the end of the world's existence. Because we are so near the end, many truths of the Bible, which God had sealed, are now being revealed. This is particularly true of those things that are an integral part of the end-time revelation. We might recall that God prophesied in Daniel 12:9:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

Thus, we can expect that many passages of the Bible, which heretofore, have been somewhat mysterious, can now be understood.

For example, in Acts 1:7, the disciples ask Jesus if the time has come for Him to restore the kingdom to Israel. We can speculate that they had the same notion that appeared to be popular in that day amongst the Jews. That is, they expected that when the Messiah would come, He would reign as a king in Jerusalem and free them from Roman rule (John 6:15).

We have been taught by the Bible that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. It will be completed only when all of the elect have become saved. We see this implied in Jesus' answer to the disciples in Acts Chapter 1, verses 7 and 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.

Effectively, Jesus is telling the disciples that it is not for them to know the details of God's program to evangelize the world. Their task was to get busy proclaiming the Gospel to the world, and of course, this includes all believers who followed them. We are to witness to the whole world and proclaim the commands of the Gospel to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so on.

The proclamation of God's salvation plan is in some mysterious way divided into times and seasons.

However, as Jesus answered them, He made a very mysterious statement. He said, "**It is not for you to know the times or the seasons**" (Acts 1:7). In this statement, He is telling us that the proclamation of God's salvation plan is in some mysterious way divided into times and seasons. Again in I Thessalonians 5:1, we read of times and seasons. I Thessalonians 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.

What can this mean? We, of course, must find our answer in the Bible. One helpful clue we find that helps us to understand this statement is James 5:7:

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

The ultimate husbandman in view here is God Himself. In James 5:7, God is emphasizing that there is an early rain and a latter rain. In Deuteronomy 32:2, God explains that rain is a picture of the Gospel coming from heaven. There we read:

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:

Thus, we can know, based on James 5:7, that there are at least two seasons that identify with bringing the Gospel to the world.

Three Distinct Seasons of Rain

As we continue to examine the Bible, carefully seeking information concerning the early and latter rain, we find a beautiful outline of God's plan for His entire worldwide program of sending forth the Gospel. It is set forth in Joel 2:23 and further developed in other places in the Bible. Joel 2:23:

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

First, the Hebrew word translated "moderately" is more accurately translated "righteously." Secondly, the verb phrase "hath given" should be more properly translated "gives." Thirdly, the final phrase "the latter rain in the first month" is more accurately translated "after the first." Thus, the verse should read this way:

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he gives you the former rain "righteously" and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain after the first.

In this verse we read about three rains. The first is described as former or early. Following this first early rain there is additional rain that is divided into early and latter rain. Both the second early rain and the latter rain are rain that comes after the first early righteous rain.

Thus far, we have learned that there are three seasons, an early righteous rain of bringing the Gospel, an early rain after this first rain, and a latter rain after the first. The purpose of spiritual rain is to bring forth a spiritual harvest. This is indicated by Joel 2:24-26, which declares:

And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

Three Rains Bring Three Harvests

Continuing to examine the Bible for information that might relate to harvests being brought forth, we find that God speaks of three harvests. We shall discover that these three harvests can be identified with the three seasons of rain described in Joel 2:23. In Leviticus 23, verses 10 and 11, the Bible indicates:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits [*Hebrew* "*reshith*"] **of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.**

These verses speak of a time of harvest when the firstfruits are brought to the priest and waved before the Lord. These firstfruits are distinguished from the firstfruits that would be brought in after 50 days at Pentecost by calling them by the Hebrew word *reshith*. Later, we will learn that the firstfruits that were brought in at Pentecost were called by the Hebrew word *bikkur*. The time this (*reshith*, firstfruits) harvest was to take place was when Israel first came into the land of Canaan. It was a harvest that they did not plant. It was produce that was already there when they came into the land of Canaan.

In Joshua 4:19 we read that Israel crossed the Jordan River into the land of Canaan on the tenth day of the first month and kept the Passover Feast four days later, on the fourteenth day of the month (Joshua 5:10). It would have been at that time, therefore, that this first harvest took place. This harvest was also called "the first [*reshith*] of the firstfruits [*bikkur*]" (Exodus 23:19). That is, it was a harvest of firstfruits that anticipated the Pentecostal harvest of firstfruits (*bikkur*) that came 50 days later. Leviticus 23:15-17 speaks of this Pentecostal harvest:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye

shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baken with leaven; they are the first fruits unto the LORD.

These verses are speaking of Pentecost, which came 50 days after the Passover. Pentecost is also spoken as the feast of harvest, the firstfruits (*bikkur*) of thy labors (Exodus 23:16). Please note the Hebrew word firstfruits concerning the Pentecostal harvest is a different word from the Hebrew word "firstfruits" used in Leviticus 23:10-11, which describes the earliest harvest that was identified with the Passover.

God also speaks of a third harvest and it is called the feast of ingathering, which was at the end of the year (Exodus 23:16). This feast was also called the feast of tabernacles and was observed at the time of the final harvest. This harvest was never described as firstfruits. The Bible simply describes it as a feast of ingathering at the end of the year.

These three harvests were so important that God declared in Deuteronomy 16:16:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:

The feast of unleavened bread began with the Passover when "the first [*reshith*] of the first fruits [*bikkur*]" were brought into "the house of the Lord thy God."

We must remember that harvest is a consequence of rain. We can see the beautiful parallel that exists between the rain of Joel 2:23 and these three harvests.

Christ, the First Harvest Coming from the Early Righteous Rain

First there will be the early rain called the righteous rain in Joel 2:23. This first early righteous rain must be identified with the Gospel as God ministered it in national Israel, beginning with Abraham and ending with Christ being announced as the Lamb of God. The harvest that resulted from this first early righteous rain was the Lord Jesus Himself. When John the Baptist announced, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29), he was announcing that the Passover Lamb had come. The first of the firstfruits had arrived.

The announcement that Jesus the Passover Lamb was here effectively declared that the first early righteous rain had done its work.

The announcement that Jesus the Passover Lamb was here effectively declared that the first early righteous rain had done its work. It had brought the Lord Jesus into the world as the Passover Lamb. He was the harvest that must come before the early and latter rain that would follow could come. It is Jesus who is the firstfruits that we read about in I Corinthians 15:23:

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

He was typified by the *reshith* firstfruits of the Old Testament. He is also the firstfruits that we read about in Romans 8:23:

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.

Thus, the Passover was identified with this first early righteous rain because Christ is our Passover. He, therefore, is the first of the firstfruits.

The Church Age, The Pentecostal Harvest Coming from the Early Rain

This early harvest when the first (*reshith*) of the firstfruits, Christ Himself, was brought in was followed by the second harvest. It, too, is called a harvest of firstfruits (*bikkur*). But as we learned in the Old Testament, a different Hebrew word was used for the first of the firstfruits that identified with Christ as the Passover from the word that was used for the firstfruits identified with the Pentecost. This second harvest, in which the firstfruits identified with the Pentecost were brought in, is pointing to the entire New Testament church age. It began with the Pentecost in A.D. 33 when about 3,000 individuals became saved in one afternoon. It was a product of the early rain that came after the first early righteous rain that had brought Christ as the Passover Lamb. This Pentecostal rain of the Gospel in the entire world continued for more than 1900 years. It produced churches and congregations all over the world as external evidence of the existence of the kingdom of God. All of those who became saved as these churches preached the Gospel were the firstfruits. In fact, the believers are called firstfruits in James 1:18, where God declares:

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James 1:18 speaks of the believers as a kind of firstfruits. There were two kinds of firstfruits, the first of the firstfruits and the Pentecostal firstfruits. The church age was not the first (*reshith*) of the firstfruits (*bikkur*). The churches were the Pentecostal firstfruits (*bikkur*).

In Revelation 14, God speaks of the 144,000, which we will learn later in our study identify with all those who became saved during the church age. There, too, in verse 4, they are called the firstfruits. Revelation 14:4:

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

We thus have seen two distinct seasons of the Gospel.

Season	Description	Harvest
1. The Old Testament era of national Israel	First early righteous rain	Harvest is Jesus who is announced as the Passover Lamb. He is the first of the firstfruits.
2. The church age beginning with Pentecost in A.D. 33	Early rain	Harvest is all of those who are saved during the church age. They are called firstfruits.

These two seasons were in view when Jesus told the disciples in Acts Chapter 1, verse 7:

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.

The Season of the Latter Rain

But there is still another season that must be considered. It identifies with the term "latter rain." The early Pentecostal rain, which identifies with the Pentecostal firstfruits that come into the kingdom of Christ during the church age, is followed by the latter rain.

This latter rain identifies beautifully with the harvest of ingathering

This latter rain identifies beautifully with the harvest of ingathering, which is brought in at the end of the year. In Exodus 23:14-16, we read:

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.

These verses speak of the feast of ingathering in the end of the year. The phrase "first fruits" is never used in connection with this feast or harvest of ingathering because this feast celebrates the final completion of the harvest. It, therefore, must identify with the final gathering in of the believers. The final gathering in or harvesting of the believers must identify with the latter rain. Later, we will learn that this latter rain identifies with the great multitude, which no man can number, that becomes saved during the Great Tribulation period (Revelation 7:9-14).

Thus, we have learned that there are three seasons that God has in view of Acts 1:7.

Season	Description	Harvest
1. The Old Testament era of national Israel	First early righteous rain	Harvest is Jesus who is announced as the Passover Lamb. He is the first of the firstfruits.
2. The church age beginning with Pentecost in A.D. 33	Early rain	Harvest is all those who are saved during the church age.They are called firstfruits.
3. A great multitude coming in after the church age	Latter rain	Harvest is those who are saved during the Great Tribulation period.

As we view the three rains set forth in Joel 2:23, we discover a very interesting and significant truth. Between each of the seasons of rain there is a brief time of intense spiritual famine. It is not a famine of the failure of the true Word of God being preached, it is a famine of hearing the Word of God.

The Famine of Elijah's Day

This spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God was typified by a physical famine in Elijah's day. We read in I Kings 17:1:

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

This famine occurred in Israel when the wicked man Ahab, who was married to the exceedingly wicked Jezebel, was reigning over Israel. According to James 5:17 and 18, we learn that this famine continued for three years and six months. There we read:

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

According to Deuteronomy 11:13-17, the withholding of rain so that there is spiritual famine is a result of great wickedness. We read there:

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

In the situation that existed in Elijah's day, the famine of rain ended after Elijah called down fire from heaven, which consumed the bullock on the altar and the altar itself. Following this event and the killing of the 450 prophets of Baal, the famine came to an end as a great rain began to fall. This dramatic event occurred on Mount Carmel when Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to call down fire from heaven. Fire from heaven is a picture of God bringing judgment. The 450 prophets of Baal, who were emissaries of Satan, could not bring judgment, only God can do that. The bullock was a picture of Christ who came under the judgment of God for our sins. This event was actually a representation of what would happen when Christ went to the cross. Christ, represented by the bullock and the altar, came under the wrath of God because He had been laden with all the sins of those He came to save. The 450 prophets of Baal were killed by Elijah (I Kings 18:40), typifying the fact that Satan was vanquished by the death and resurrection of Christ. It was at the cross that judgment came on Satan. The three and a half years of famine, which preceded this dramatic event on Mount Carmel, typifies the three and a half years during which Jesus preached. Later, we will examine this Mount Carmel event in greater detail.

The Famine of Jesus' Day

Significantly, we will learn later in our study that during the time Jesus preached, hardly anyone became saved. There was a grievous spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God. Later, we will learn that the period of time from the announcement of Jesus as the Lamb of God until He was crucified was three years and six months. Thus, it was a spiritual famine that was parallel to the physical famine of Elijah's day.

We have learned that the early righteous rain continued until Jesus was announced as the Passover Lamb. We also learned that a few weeks after the cross, the spiritual famine dramatically ended as the spiritual rain began to fall, as is indicated by about 3,000 individuals becoming saved at Pentecost. Indeed, the prophecy of Deuteronomy 11 was fulfilled. The spiritual apostasy that existed at the time of Jesus resulted in a period of an intense famine of hearing the Word of God. This was followed by the early rain season that identifies with the church age. This early rain Pentecostal church age season would continue for over 1900 years, until the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

The Famine Beginning with the Great Tribulation

The beginning of the Great Tribulation signaled another time of spiritual famine. This time of spiritual famine is also identified with a time of three and a half years. But whereas the physical famine of Elijah's day and the spiritual famine of Jesus' day was a literal three and a half years, the spiritual famine that began at the beginning of the Great Tribulation was symbolically three and a half years. We might remember that this time continues for 42 months as indicated by the language of Revelation 11:2:

But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months

In Revelation 11:9 and 11, it is spoken of as three and a half days:

And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. . . .

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.

Later, we will learn that three and a half days may be understood as three and half years because the Bible, in a number of places, used a day for a year. In all likelihood, it is the literal period 2300 evening mornings spoken of in Daniel Chapter 8. This time of spiritual famine is followed by the latter rain which completes the Great Tribulation time. The latter rain ends when all the believers are raptured to be safe and secure with Christ in heaven. In Acts 1:7, Jesus speaks of times and seasons in connection with His Gospel program. We are now beginning to understand these times and seasons.

1. Season of righteous early rain–The Old Testament period beginning with Abraham and ending with the announcement of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

2. Time of spiritual famine–The three and a half years during Jesus' ministry.

3. Season of early rain–The church age, which continued for more than 1950 years, beginning with the resurrection in A.D. 33 and ending at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

4. Time of spiritual famine–The first part (half hour) of the Great Tribulation (three and a half days or 42 months); 2300 days.

5. Season of latter rain–The last part of the Great Tribulation when a great multitude, which no man can number, is being saved.

6. Rapture of the true believers.

7. 5 months of judgment on the unsaved, followed by total destruction on the last day of this earth's existence (Revelation 9:5,10).

We will examine these truths as we continue our study. We will discover that the Bible approaches the question of God's three-season salvation program from the vantage point of a vineyard that God planted.

One Vineyard, Two Caretakers

The principle that God has divided His program of evangelizing the world into seasons and times is demonstrated and taught in many ways in the Bible. In this study, we will become acquainted with a number of them. Presently, we will examine God's use of the figure of a vineyard in illustrating the division of God's Gospel program into seasons.

We find numerous references in the Bible to a vineyard. However, two parables that feature a vineyard stand out. One is in Matthew 21 and the other is in Isaiah 5. We will examine these two parables and look at their similarities and their differences. We will learn that the vineyard described in Matthew 21 is speaking about the kingdom of God as it was externally represented by the nation of Israel. They were God's special people but that relationship ended when they crucified the Lord Jesus. Likewise, we will learn that Isaiah 5 is using the same vineyard as that of Matthew 21. But in Isaiah 5, it is speaking about the kingdom of God as it was represented by the local congregations throughout the church age. The church age became in evidence very dramatically on the day of Pentecost when about 3,000 were saved (Acts 2). It is clearly seen that a vineyard represents people by verses such as the following.

John 15:1**: I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.**

Isaiah 5:7: **For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.**

Matthew 21:45: **And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.**

Not only do these verses identify the vineyard with people, but it represents a special people who are to be identified with Christ Himself.

Matthew 21 and Isaiah 5 are speaking of the same vineyard

In fact, we will learn that Matthew 21 and Isaiah 5 are speaking of the same vineyard, but they are speaking of its existence at two different periods of time. Both vineyards are established and owned by Christ.

Isaiah 5:1: **Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:**

Matthew 21:33: **There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it roundabout, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:**

Both have God's protection and care.

Isaiah 5:2: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof,and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

Matthew 21:33: . . . and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress it in, and built a tower . . .

Both have caretakers or husbandmen who are given the responsibility to bring forth a harvest. They must answer to the owner of the vineyard.

Isaiah 5:7: . . . **he looked for judgment but behold oppression . . .**

Matthew 21:33: . . . **and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:**

In both vineyards, the caretakers fail their responsibility. Then in Matthew Chapter 21, verses 34 and 35, we read that God declares:

And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

Isaiah 5:2 declares:

. . . and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

But there is a dramatic difference in the reactions of the owner of the vineyard (God Himself) to the failures of the caretakers of the vineyard. In Matthew 21, the vineyard is not harmed or damaged by God. It is simply given to another group of husbandmen.

Matthew 21:41 records:

They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

On the other hand, the vineyard of Isaiah 5 is utterly and ruthlessly destroyed by its owner, God Himself. Isaiah 5:5 and 6 declare:

And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

This is the language of total and complete destruction. It means that God is forever finished with this vineyard.

But why did God deal so ruthlessly with this vineyard? Why did God destroy the vineyard of Isaiah 5 and not the vineyard of Matthew 21? We must remember that the purpose of the vineyard is to produce fruit. The vineyard of Isaiah 5, instead of producing good fruit, produced wild grapes. The Hebrew word translated in this passage as wild grapes is a word that is translated elsewhere as "stink" (Isaiah 34:3, Joel 2:20). Therefore, the vineyard produced a stench, something altogether evil. It, therefore, was completely destroyed by its owner.

On the other hand, in Matthew 21, God made no comment concerning a failed fruit production. He refers only to the treatment the husbandmen gave to the owner of the vineyard. We read in Matthew 21:37-39:

But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

Because of their terrible conduct in finally killing the owner's son, the vineyard is taken from then and given to other husbandmen.

Spiritually, we can see that these husbandmen who killed the owner's son can refer only to the nation of Israel who wanted Jesus to be crucified. Even though they were used of God, they as a nation did not want the Gospel.

Remember John 1:11 declares:

He [Jesus] **came unto his own, and his own received him not.**

The Jews to whom Jesus was speaking in Matthew 21 understood very clearly that Jesus was speaking about them.

Matthew 21:45 states:

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

The Fruits of the Vineyard

But why did God not destroy the vineyard of Matthew 21. The answer should be clear. The vineyard that was the nation of Israel, which represented the kingdom of God during the Old Testament, did produce the good fruits that God intended it to produce. Those fruits were Christ Himself and the Gospel that flows from Him. It was necessary that the Jews kill the owner of the vineyard. Had Jesus Christ not been killed, there would be no salvation, no Gospel, no Savior, and therefore, no fruits from the vineyard.

The fruit of the vineyard was Christ Himself together with the Gospel.

The fruit of the vineyard was Christ Himself together with the Gospel. By bringing forth its intended harvest of Christ and the Gospel, the vineyard had served its purpose. Therefore, once Christ was killed, the vineyard, which represented the kingdom of God, was transferred from the Jewish nation to the New Testament church during the church age. The temple, the synagogues, the Old Testament ceremonial laws, the high priest, and the other priests all ceased to function in any sense as representatives of the kingdom of God.

At that time, the kingdom of God was transferred from national Israel to the churches and congregations during the church age with their pastors, elders, deacons, and the New Testament ceremonial laws of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. The New Testament churches were appointed to be the caretakers of the kingdom of God. They also were given the mandate to bring the Gospel to the whole world.

Thus, the vineyard of Isaiah 5 is the very same vineyard as that of Matthew 21. The difference is that the caretakers of the vineyard had shifted dramatically from the nation of Israel with its temple and the synagogues to the New Testament church.

Unfortunately, the new caretakers of the vineyard already from their beginning began to bring forth some fruit that was not good fruit but instead, that which was a stink in God's nostrils. Even though the church age was still in its infancy, God warned the church in Ephesus that He would remove their candlestick if they did not return to their first love (Revelation 2:5). And the church in Sardis had already become a dead church with only a few believers within it (Revelation 3:5).

We may safely equate the stinking fruit of the church age with the high places of Old Testament Israel. We will learn in this study that the high places of the Old Testament were the worship of heathen gods alongside the worship of Jehovah God, and also, we will learn that the holding and teaching of false doctrines, doctrines that are not faithful to the Bible, are the spiritual high places of the church age. These high places or false teachings were evident in churches throughout the church age, but their numbers have been accelerated in our day as we will discover in this study.

They, to use the language of Isaiah 5, are a stench.

These high places, which are teachings from the mind of men rather from God, are not good fruit from the vineyard. They, to use the language of Isaiah 5, are a stench. It is indeed remarkable that for more than 1950 years, God put up with this stinking fruit. It is a testimony to the patience and mercy of God that He allowed this situation to exist for so long a period of time.

However, there is an end to God's patience. Isaiah 5, verses 5 and 6, describe the end of the vineyard. God Himself destroys it. As we are learning and will continue to learn in this study, God uses Satan to assist in the destruction of all the churches that are in existence at the end of the church age.

No Longer Under the Care of an Earthly Organization

Since the end of the church age, God has not assigned the care of the vineyard to a corporate external representative of the kingdom of God or any earthly organization. There is a major shift in God's divine economy from the use of institutions like Old Testament Israel and the churches and congregations of the New Testament. True, the kingdom of God continues to flourish but it is no longer under the care or responsibility of an earthly organization. This is indeed a major change in God's method of evangelization. After destroying the vineyard of Isaiah 5, God does not plant another vineyard. God no longer uses an organized body of believers under the supervision of God-ordained priests, pastors, elders, or deacons. During the season of the latter rain that follows the destruction of the vineyard described in Isaiah 5, the task of sending the Gospel into the world is assigned to individual believers. God, utilizing individual believers, is finishing the task of evangelizing the world.

For the first 9500 years of the history of the world, God did not utilize any divine institution like Israel or the local congregations to represent the kingdom of God in the world. The largest institution that existed was the family. But then for about 3500 years, God used an earthly institution to corporately represent the kingdom of God. From the time Israel came out of Egypt in 1447 B.C. until Pentecost of A.D. 33, it was the nation of Israel. Then at Pentecost in A.D. 33, God shifted the representation of the kingdom of God to another God-ordained institution, that is, the local churches and congregations that have existed throughout the church age.

During the time of God's use of the nation of Israel, God developed a legal entity with priests and a temple and synagogues. During the time of the church age, God developed a divine God-ordained entity which was the local church. It, too, by God's commands, had church overseers, such as elders and deacons and pastors and teachers.

However, with the end of the church age, the vineyard was totally destroyed. Never again would God use an earthly institution to externally represent the kingdom of God. During the final season, when the final harvest of believers will be brought in, God uses only individual believers.

Assembling Together of Ourselves

The principle that God now uses only individual believers agrees with the statement of Hebrews 10:25, where God commands that as Judgment Day approaches, we are not to neglect the assembling of ourselves together. The word "ourselves" surprises us. During the church age, we would expect to see the word "church" or "congregation" rather than the word "ourselves." However, during the latter rain, God does not use an earthly organization as He used national Israel in the Old Testament and as He used the local congregations throughout the church age. He uses individual believers.

It is true that believers can come together in a ministry such as SearchingHisWord.com or ZionInTravail.com to facilitate the sending forth of the Gospel into the world. But these ministries have no membership or spiritual rule over those who support them. They have no Biblical standing as a God-ordained external organization or institution. We know that God works in individual believers to will and to do of His good pleasure, so we know that only God can raise up such ministries for the purpose of publishing the true gospel throughout the world. We must give God all the glory for whatever success may come as a result of sending the Gospel into all the world. We know that salvation is God's business altogether. Remember, Revelation 9:7,14 says, **I saw a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues…clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. These are they which came out of [the] great tribulation.** No man can number them, because they are known only to God. Thus, these ministries are simply a convenient vehicle by which individual believers can be used of God to accomplish the task of evangelizing the world during the season of the latter rain. By bringing together the resources of a number of believers, radio stations and other means or vehicles of communication can be owned and operated to assist with the task of evangelization. This can be done on a scale that would be impossible for a single believer. This can only happen through the faithful prayers and financial support of God's people. Sending out the gospel through the airwaves, through internet or written tracts costs money, the unrighteous mammon. Anyone who is concerned can send in a donation to searchinghisword.com/donate.

The truth that during the latter rain season the Gospel mandate is strictly carried out by individual believers therefore agrees with the statement of Hebrews 10:25, where God commands that as the Day of Judgment approaches, we are not to neglect the assembling of ourselves together.

However, during the latter rain season, God does not use an earthly organization such as national Israel, which He used during the Old Testament time, nor the local churches, which He used throughout the church age. The vineyard that God had planted that externally represented the kingdom of God, which was first under the care of national Israel and then under the care of the churches, has ceased to exist.

More than One Season

It should be noted that in Matthew 21:41, the Bible records:

They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

The fact that the word "seasons" is plural tells us that God is anticipating more than one season that would come after the vineyard was taken from the nation of Israel. We have already learned that the first season that would follow was the church age season during which the harvest of the Pentecostal firstfruits was brought in. After that season was finished, the true believers, who are typified by the two

witnesses of Revelation 11, are driven out or they leave because they are commanded to come out of the churches. To use the language of Revelation 11, they are killed.

The two witnesses of Revelation 11:11 have been killed. From the language of John 16:2, we can understand that to be killed is equivalent to being driven out of the churches. John 16:2 records:

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

However, there is one more season. It is the season of the latter rain during which the final harvest is brought in. This final season that brings forth fruit is typified by the two witnesses who stand on their feet as the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Revelation 11:11 records:

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.

This language parallels that which we find in Ezekiel, when Ezekiel was commanded to take God's Word to Israel. Ezekiel 2, verses 1, 2, and 4:

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. . . . For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD.

It is parallel language to that which documents God's command to Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul. We read in Acts 26:16:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Thus, we can be sure that when the two witnesses are commanded to stand on their feet as the Spirit enters into them, it refers to the true believers who have been driven out of the churches. However, they continue to be used by God to bring the Gospel.

Fear of God Comes upon Those who Spiritually Hear the Gospel

Revelation 11:11 also indicates that great fear came upon them that beheld them. This must be speaking of those who became saved. They are the ones who truly fear God because they have become saved. They are the ones who see that the two witnesses are bringing the Gospel.

Thus, we know that these two witnesses represent the true believers who are driven out of the churches or in obedience to God's command, come out of the churches. As individuals without membership in an earthly spiritual organization like ancient Israel or a local congregation, without titles such as priest, pastor, elder, or deacon, they send out the Gospel into the world during the final season of the latter rain. Of course, each one who becomes saved during the latter rain season also becomes an ambassador of Christ and assists in sending forth the Gospel during the latter rain season.

Thus, we have learned that God planted a vineyard and placed it under the care of Old Testament Israel. Their era ended when the harvest that consisted of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself together with the

Gospel was produced. Following this, God took the vineyard, the external corporate representation of the kingdom of God, away from national Israel. The era of the temple in Jerusalem, the synagogues, the ceremonial law activities of the Old Testament, and so on, came to an end.

God then transferred the vineyard, the corporate external representation of the kingdom of God, to another body. That body was the New Testament churches that expanded into all the world.

Finally, because of the stench, the evil, the high places, the wrong doctrines that were a constant weakness throughout the church age, God destroyed His vineyard. That is, He brought judgment upon all the local churches in the world. We will learn more about this sad fact as we continue this study.

However, it was not part of God's divine economy to replace the institution of the church with another visible external institution as a representative of the kingdom of God. Once the vineyard God had planted was completely destroyed, we do not read anywhere in the Bible that God would plant another vineyard. Instead, He completes the evangelization of the world utilizing individual believers without the help of a God-ordained external body. This, we are learning, is God's methodology for completing His work of bringing in the full number of the elect. God speaks of this final harvest of believers as the season of the latter rain.

Significantly, the opening verses of Revelation 20 also relate to the subject of the latter rain. We shall now examine these verses.

The Little Season

The opening verses of Revelation 20 intrigued and fascinated believers throughout the time of the church age. Now that we are very near the end of time, God is opening up the understanding of true believers so that we can know what God is teaching in these verses.

When we look carefully at the first seven verses of Revelation 20, we find that God makes reference to the church age as the time when Satan is bound. And God makes reference to the latter rain by calling it a little season. The terms "church age" and "latter rain" are not found in these verses, however, when we carefully examine them, we will find that these terms are definitely in view.

In these verses, we find that the phrase a "thousand years" is used three times with the information that it is a period of time that has a fulfillment or comes to an end. On the other hand, the term a "thousand years" is used twice with no indication that it has an end. Let us study these verses to see why this is so, and at the same time, we will discover references to the church age and the latter rain hidden within these verses.

Revelation 20, verses 1, 2, and 3, 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.

Immediately, we must ask, when was Satan cast into, or when will Satan be cast into, a bottomless pit so that he could not deceive the nations for a thousand years?

We know that the Greek word *abussos*, which is translated "bottomless pit" in Revelation 20 and as "deep" in Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7, is a reference to being reserved under the eternal wrath of God which shall be carried out at the great day of God's judgment. Romans 10:7 declares:

Or, Who shall descend into the deep [*Greek: abussos*]**? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)**

In this verse, the word "deep" (Greek *abussos*), is equated with Christ's death. We know that Christ's death means He suffered the penalty of eternal damnation on behalf of those He came to save. Therefore, we know that Satan was cast into, that is, reserved unto, eternal damnation.

But is there other information in the Bible that refers to a past or future time when Satan would be cast into a bottomless pit? Let us search the Bible.

In fact, there are no references that can be found in the Bible concerning a future time when Satan will be cast into a bottomless pit, and following that, be loosed again. But there are two passages that clearly show that before the Bible was completed, Satan had been cast into the bottomless pit. The first of these is found in II Peter 2:4, where God 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;

This verse is in the past tense, as are II Peter 2, verses 5 and 6, which speak of God's historic judgments that came by the flood of Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day.

The second verse is Jude 1:6 wherein God reports:

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.

This judgment is also in the past tense. It, too, is in the setting of two historic judgments. The first is recorded in Jude verse 5 and speaks of God's judgment on Israel when they died in the wilderness and did not enter into the land of Canaan. The second is Jude verse 7, which again records the historic judgment that came on Sodom and Gomorrah.

By comparing II Peter 2:4 and Jude 1:6, we learn that to be cast down to "hell" is to be reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

These verses of II Peter 2 and Jude are records of judgments that were already accomplished at the time Peter and Jude were writing these passages. Even as the judgments on Sodom and Gomorrah and on the world in Noah's day were history at the time this was being written, so, too, it appears that the judgment on the angels was history at the time this was being written. Therefore, we suspect that somehow, the judgment on the angels must have occurred when Jesus went to the cross. But how can that be? Don't we read in I Peter 5:8 that the devil goes about as a roaring lion? And doesn't Ephesians 6 speak of our adversary, the devil?

The answer to these questions can be known if we understand what being judged under the eternal wrath of God is. We learn this by searching the Bible. Ephesians 4:8-9:

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?

The phrase "**lower parts of the earth**," like the phrase "**heart of the earth**" in Matthew 12:40, surely refers to being under the wrath of God. Thus, Ephesians 4:8-9 can mean only that Christ experienced the eternal wrath of God to deliver the elect who were under the wrath of God.

The new heavens and the new earth will be a wonderful place where no one can be under the wrath of God. Therefore, we can understand that the first three verses of Revelation 20 are teaching that at the time of the cross, Satan was put under the wrath of God (in the bottomless pit, which is a synonym for being reserved to the eternal wrath of God). This was also the time that he was cast out of heaven. During the Old Testament era, he had access into heaven, as we read in the first chapter of Job. But Revelation 12 records his expulsion from heaven. There we read that he was defeated by the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 12, verses 9 and 11, tell us:

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. . . . And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Returning to Revelation 20:1-3, we read that Satan was cast into the bottomless pit so that he could no longer deceive the nations.

Satan Can No Longer Deceive the Nations

What does it mean that the devil could no longer deceive the nations? We have learned that during the time Jesus preached the Gospel, very few people became saved. At the same time, Satan was very active. Is there a connection between few people being saved and a very active Satan? Luke 8, verses 11 and 12, help us. There we read:

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

From these verses we learn that the prime method that Satan uses to assault Christ is to try to stop the growth of the kingdom of God. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. Mankind is fair game for his wiles as God declares in Romans 3:4, "**let God be true, but every man a liar**."

But something wonderful happened seven weeks after Christ went to the cross. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached one sermon and about 3,000 individuals became saved. In one day, 3,000 came out from under the tyranny and deception of Satan. Satan had been bound so that he could no longer deceive the nations. And ever since then, throughout the church age, all over the world, people have been coming into the kingdom of God.

Thus, we can be sure that the binding of Satan had to have happened at the time of the cross. This is further underscored in Matthew 12:29

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.

The strong man that must be bound is Satan. Through the faithful obedience of Christ going to the cross, Satan was bound in the sense that he could not prevent the word of God from taking root in the hearts of God's elect within the churches.

No wonder then that we see the parallel between, on the one hand, the language of II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, and on the other hand, the language of Revelation 20:1-3.

However, that means that the thousand years must be understood metaphorically rather than literally. In this study, we will learn that Satan was loosed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, and that was almost 2,000 years after the cross. Thus, in this context, the term "thousand years" must be understood spiritually as the "completeness of time." The completeness of time for the church age began with the binding of Satan at the time of the cross and continued for over 1950 years.

Satan Is Loosed

The "completeness of time" period ended with Satan being loosed. The loosing of Satan coincided with the beginning of the Great Tribulation. True, while Satan was bound he was able to intimidate, threaten, and kill believers. Throughout this period he had been able to go about as a roaring lion. But he could not stop the forward advance of the kingdom of God. Even though he killed Christians, he was not the winner. Revelation 20:4 declares:

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.

Those who were martyred simply changed residency. As disembodied souls, they reigned with Christ a thousand years. Please note the language carefully, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded." It does not say, "**I saw the souls who had been beheaded**." It says I saw the souls of them that were beheaded. This is parallel language to a statement like, "I saw the hand of the man who had been killed." I saw only the hand of the man who was killed. Likewise, when Christians leave their bodies, in their soul existence, they go to live and reign with Christ in heaven. II Corinthians 5:8 declares:

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Thus, in Revelation 20, God is telling us of a vision in which John saw the believers reigning with Christ after they had been killed.

We have learned that the term "a thousand years" in this context signifies the completeness of time. Earlier we noted that three times in Revelation 20 the thousand years have a beginning and an end. Therefore, the phrase a "thousand years" must identify with the period that began with the binding of Satan when Christ went to the cross and ended with the loosing of Satan at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Thus, it must encompass the same period of time as that of the New Testament church age.

However, the vision of the souls of the disembodied martyrs shows them reigning a thousand years with no ending or completion in view. That can be readily understood if we keep in mind that true believers were given eternal life at the time they became saved. Thus, they begin to reign with Christ at the moment they are saved (Ephesians 2:5), and they will continue to reign with Him forevermore. In their case, the thousand years cannot have an end because it goes on eternally.

The Rest of the Dead

That brings us to verse 5 of Revelation 20, where we read:

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Who are the rest of the dead who lived not again until the thousand years are finished? Since the end of the thousand years identifies with the loosing of Satan, which identifies with the beginning of the Great Tribulation, we can know that these dead come to life at the end of the church age, after the beginning of the Great Tribulation. The term "lived not again" implies that they had previously lived. Could this refer to the unsaved who had previously lived on earth being resurrected to stand for judgment on the last day? The problem with that conclusion, first of all, is that it does not fit very well into the context (the rest of these verses speak of those who are saved). In fact, we now understand that the unsaved who have died will never again come to life. They are dead forever more.

Secondly, ordinarily, when the Bible speaks of life or living it is speaking of eternal life or salvation. Indeed, verse 5 of Revelation 20 reminds us of the truth we read in I Corinthians 15, verse 22, where God declares:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

In Adam, each and every human being had become dead in his sins. Spiritually, before we are saved, we are dead. But in Christ there is a time when the elect of God become spiritually alive. They become alive again because before Adam sinned, they were alive. When Adam sinned, they became dead. Since we all came from Adam, in a sense, we were in the loins of Adam when he was on earth.

Returning of Revelation 20, verse 5, we now can understand that after Satan has been loosed, that is, after the thousand years are finished, the rest of those who had died in Adam and were to be made alive in Christ would become alive again. That is, they would become saved during the time of the Great Tribulation.

Now we can understand why Revelation 20:3 states:

. . . till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

Outside of the churches, a great multitude is being saved. But within the churches, Satan is reigning because he has been loosed to be used of God to deceive those within the churches.

Thus, the little season must coincide with the season of the latter rain. It is the season when the great multitude which no man can number are being saved. This is why Revelation 20, verse 5, speaks of the first resurrection, and then in verse 6, God describes the characteristics of those who have become saved. The first resurrection is experienced at the moment of salvation when we receive our brand-new eternal soul. This implies a second resurrection for the believers, and that will be on the last day for the believers, when we receive our eternal resurrected spiritual bodies at the moment of the rapture. (Revelation 1:9-14).

Thus, we have learned that Revelation 20:1-7 can be clearly understood when we realize that God is speaking of the church age as the time when Satan had been bound. Furthermore, He is speaking of the season of the latter rain as a little season during which Satan has been loosed and the rest of those who are to become saved (the great multitude which no man can number), do become saved.

Before we leave Revelation 20, we must ask the question: How can it be that at the time of the cross, Satan was bound reserved unto eternal judgment, and then later on, he is set free? And as we will learn later in this study, he is set free to rule in the churches.

In Revelation 13, Satan is typified by a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and we read in verse 3:

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.

We know, of course, that after the guilty have been judged and sentence is passed, nothing can change that sentence. By Christ's victory over death, as Jesus suffered death for the elect, Satan was given a death blow. He was sentenced (reserved) to the lake of fire. This is because he was judged and effectively sentenced to the second death forevermore by Christ's victory over death at the time of the cross. This is underscored in Colossians 2:13-15

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 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.

Therefore, we read in Revelation 20:10-12 of this sequence of events:

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night [into] ever and ever. 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 beast and the false prophets are pictures of Satan as he rules in the churches during the Great Tribulation. The Greek preposition *eis* translated "for" in verse 10, "**shall be tormented day and night for[*eis*] ever and ever**," can and should be translated "**into**" so that the verse reads, "**shall be tormented into ever and ever**," meaning that the five months of hell on earth culminating with the annihilation of the devil and of all the unsaved transitions directly into eternity.

Thus, while on the one hand, Satan remains reserved under the wrath of God, in another sense, he is temporarily loosed during the great tribulation because God still has some work for him before the world comes to an end. That work is to rule in the churches during the Great Tribulation. He is allowed to rule there as a judgment of God upon these churches.

The Souls under the Altar

We have learned that the words "little season," as we find them recorded in Revelation 20, identify with the season of the latter rain during which the final harvest is brought in. This term is also used in Revelation 6 in connection with the opening of the fifth seal. Revelation 6:9-11:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How

long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

Now we are able to have a clearer understanding of these verses. It can be shown that the earlier verses of Revelation 6 are detailing the sending forth of the Gospel during the church age. The rider on the white horse going forth to conquer can only be a picture of Christ sending forth the Gospel during the church age. The rider on the red horse who wishes to take peace from the earth can only refer to Satan as he goes about as a roaring lion. By persecution and physical killing, he tries to frustrate God's Gospel plan.

The rider on the black horse is a warning to the churches that if they do not remain faithful, God will begin to take the Gospel away from them. This parallels the language of Leviticus 26:23-26, where we read:

And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.

It parallels the language of Isaiah 3:1:

For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water,

The rider on the pale horse is a final warning to the churches that judgment will come upon them. It parallels the language of Leviticus 26:27-30, where we read:

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you.

Thus, these first four riders are declaring God's intentions for and His warnings to the churches and congregations during the church age. They can be summarized as follows.

1. The Gospel will be victorious.

2. Satan will attempt to restrain the Gospel.

3. If the churches are not faithful, the true Gospel will be severely curtailed.

4. Finally, the churches will be destroyed.

Revelation 6:9 then declares:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

The slain in these verses must refer to the believers throughout the church age in the sense of Romans 8:36, where we read:

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

This identifies with Satan going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8), and with the language of Matthew 10:28, where God declares:

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.

The desire of the souls of Revelation 6:10 is that God's perfect justice will be done. They are under the altar. This is a figure of speech that we can understand to mean they have been covered by the blood of Jesus. Therefore, justice has already been accomplished on their behalf because the Lord Jesus Christ is their Savior.

But what about the unsaved who continue in rebellion against Christ? Justice will not be done until they are destroyed on the last day. But the last day cannot come until God's plan of evangelizing the world has been completed. There is still a little season which we have learned is the season of the latter rain when believers will be killed.

They will be killed in the same sense as believers throughout the church age were killed.

Only when the little season, the season of the latter rain, has ended will God bring forth His perfect justice. At that time, God will bring the final Day of Judgment, the final 153 days spoken of in Revelation 9. Thus, we have learned that the words "little season" are used as a synonym for the final harvest season, which is also called the latter rain. In both Revelation 6 and Revelation 20, God speaks of this little season.

And now, as we continue our study, we look again at the early rain season of the Old Testament, which brought forth the harvest of Christ and the Gospel.

Chapter 6.

Time No. 2.The Great Tribulation

Thus far in our study, we have examined the following.

The season of the early righteous rain of the Old Testament that brought, as its first of the firstfruits harvest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The time of three and a half years that immediately followed the early righteous rain. The time was a time of spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God and a time of judgment on Christ and Satan.

The season of the early Pentecostal rain that continued for more than 1950 years and brought in the Pentecostal firstfruits harvest of all those who became saved throughout the church age.

We are now ready to examine, in some detail, the time of spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God that began with the beginning of the Great Tribulation. We will discover that it was symbolized by a time of three and a half years. It, too, was a time of judgment, that is, the judgment falling on the churches of the church age.

When God made the transition from the Old Testament early righteous rain season to the three and a half year time of Christ's ministry, during which there was a spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God, in the historical setting, it impacted a very small percentage of the world's population. Most of the peoples of the world knew nothing about what was happening in the nation of Israel. Likewise, when

God made the transition from this three and a half year time of spiritual famine and judgment to the season of the early Pentecostal rain, that is, to the season of the church age, it impacted a very small percentage of the world's population. Only those cities in which a Jewish synagogue was located, and they were few in number compared to the number of all the cities of the world, were impacted in any way by this transition.

A Worldwide Trauma

But in our day, when God has made the transition from the season of the early Pentecostal rain, the church age, to the time of Great Tribulation, the impact is worldwide. Churches are located in cities and villages all over the world. Hundreds of millions of people are members of churches. Therefore, a sudden transition to a time of spiritual famine of hearing the Word, a time of judgment upon the churches, is an enormous event in the history of the God's Gospel program.

Therefore, the transition to the time of Great Tribulation is written about exceedingly extensively in the Bible. Because this huge event took place very near the end of time, the numerous Bible references to it were not understood for many years, not even by the finest God-fearing theologians. God explains this in Daniel 12, where God is explaining some of the end-time events, and He declares in Daniel 12:9:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

But now we are very near the time of the end, and God is revealing to the believers a great many things from the Bible that previously had been hidden from God's people. We now find that all the way from Genesis to Revelation there is information concerning the transition from the church age to the Great Tribulation. Amongst the extensive Biblical references to this traumatic event are the following passages.

Genesis 45, in which God tells of the famine in Joseph's day that caused his father Jacob to go into the land of Egypt.

The strange account of Judges 19, which describes the killing of the concubine by the men of Benjamin.

A great many chapters in the Book of Isaiah.

A great many chapters in the Book of Jeremiah.

Almost all of the Book of Lamentations.

Many of the first 39 chapters of Ezekiel.

Daniel 7, Daniel 8, Daniel 11, and Daniel 12.

Portions of the Book of Hosea.

Almost all of the Book of Joel.

Much of the Book of Amos.

Portions of the Book of Micah.

Much of the Book of Nahum.

Much of the Book of Habakkuk.

Parts of the Book of Zechariah.

Matthew 24. Mark 13. Parts of Luke 17.

Luke 21.

The last seven chapters of the Book of Acts.

II Thessalonians 2.

Revelation 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, and 20.

This is not a complete list but it is sufficient to show that the transition to the Great Tribulation is very extensively documented in the Bible. In this study, we will examine a number of these passages to show the harmony that exists between them.

As we study some of these passages, we will discover that they all fit into a plan wherein at a precise time in history, the end of the church age did occur. It was immediately followed by a time of Great Tribulation that symbolically continues for three and a half years. In actuality, it is probably the literal time of 2300 days spoken of in Daniel 8:14.

At the end of the symbolic three and a half years, the final season of the latter rain did commence. This latter rain season that will bring in the final harvest of believers will be a very short season during which the judgment of God will remain on the churches. The churches will continue to experience a spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God, and they will continue to be under the judgment of God. This very short season of the latter rain will be followed by the final time, that of the judgment at the end of the world.

We shall now begin to examine some of the evidence in the Bible that describes the transition from the season of the early Pentecostal rain, the church age, to the time of the Great Tribulation.

The Bible shows that a time would come when God would no longer use the churches and congregations to bring the Gospel to the world. They instead would come under the wrath of God.

The Old Testament Anticipates the Great Tribulation

To see this plan, we will first carefully examine Old Testament Israel. They, without any question, typify the New Testament church, which the Bible speaks of as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). As we discover how God related to national Israel, we will learn how God interrelates with the churches of the New Testament.

Old Testament Israel began with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It reached its highest glory during the reigns of David and Solomon. It was a nation brought out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan under the leadership of first Moses and then Joshua. God bestowed His love upon this nation, making it His people. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 beautifully records this fact:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were

the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And Israel continued for hundreds of years under the patient guidance of God. Again and again when they went astray, God sent judges or prophets or priests or kings to bring them back to a more obedient faithfulness to God.

One problem did persist and became a continuous problem. That was the problem of high places.

One problem did persist, and it became a continuous problem, and that was the problem of high places. High places were sites outside of Jerusalem where false gods were worshipped. This was already a serious problem when Moses received the law at Mount Sinai. The golden-calf worship was similar to the later high-place worship. However, until the temple was constructed by Solomon, the correct worship of Jehovah God was also observed at high places. But once the temple was built, any worship at high places was always the worship of false gods.

The division of the kingdom upon the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. stimulated the worship of false gods. The first king of the nation of Israel, which consisted of ten tribes of Israel, built worship centers in Dan and Bethel that featured the worship of calves. This sad condition never changed throughout the history of the ten tribes of Israel. In the nation of Judah, which consisted of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the situation was somewhat better in that many of the kings who reigned were God-fearing men. Even so, with the exception of two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, to some degree, high places were always in evidence in the land.

These high places were obviously an act of rebellion against the law of God. Yet for hundreds of years, God tolerated them and especially blessed Judah in spite of them. But they were not unnoticed by God. In Leviticus 26:27- 31, God solemnly warned:

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours.

Note that in this warning, God is specifically talking about the high places. This warning was given before Israel entered the land of Canaan.

The High Places Will Be Destroyed

But how and when would God destroy the high places? Remember in Leviticus 26 God declared that He had chosen them to be a special people. He had set His love upon them. Surely God would be very gentle with Israel when and if He carried out His threat to remove the high places.

But also remember that God said in Leviticus 26:31, "**And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation**." Would God really do that? Yes, He would. And He did do that.

In the year 709 B.C., disaster struck the ten tribes of Israel. This nation that God loved was entirely destroyed by the Assyrians. Except for the city of Jerusalem, at the same time the ten tribes were destroyed, much of the nation of Judah was also destroyed. Only because Hezekiah the king of Judah removed all of the high places was Jerusalem spared. How could God bring this horrible disaster on the people to whom He had pledged His love.

But there was more. One hundred years later, in the year 609 B.C., the nation of Judah was again struck with disaster. King Josiah, the most God- fearing king who ever ruled over Judah, was killed in battle when he was only 39 years of age.

One hundred years earlier, King Hezekiah had destroyed the high places, and so, Jerusalem was spared at the time the ten tribes of Israel were destroyed. But following Hezekiah, his son and then his grandson reigned, and during their reigns, they rebuilt the high places. Thus, Judah continued in its rebellion against God. And then Josiah became king. Truly, he was a wonderful king. Concerning King Josiah, God declared in II Kings 23:25:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

King Josiah's Godly acts were wonderful. The Bible records in II Kings 22 and 23 and in II Chronicles 34 and 35 all the righteous acts of this great king. Included among his acts was the destruction of all the high places.

But it was too late. When God warned in Leviticus 26 that He would destroy all the high places, He gave sufficient information so that we can know precisely when this occurred. He had said in Leviticus 26:33-34:

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths.

God identifies the time when the land would enjoy its sabbaths as a time of 70 years. He states in II Chronicles 36:21:

To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

The Bible shows us that this 70 years began with the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. and ended with the conquering of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C.

The fulfillment of this prophecy required the death of King Josiah because the year 609 B.C. was to be the beginning of the 70 years that had been prophesied. Indeed, God's wrath began to be poured out upon Judah.

Although four more kings would reign, they were all wicked. During their reign, first Egypt assailed them and then Babylon began to destroy them. Finally, in the year 587 B.C., 23 years inclusive after King Josiah was killed in battle, the end came.

> *This terrible end came on the people whom God had loved*

And what an end. Jerusalem, the temple, and the holy of holies were all destroyed. This terrible end came on the people whom God had loved, who had been chosen as a special people. God carried out His warning that He would destroy the high places. He did so first in 709 B.C. and then completed the task in 587 B.C. Truly, God does not give empty or idle warnings.

But how does this relate to the church and the New Testament era, the congregations and denominations by means of which God has sent the Gospel into the world during the past more than 1900 years?

High Places: A Warning to the Churches

When we consider the plight of the churches and congregations in our day, at least four facts became abundantly evident.

1. The eternal church, which is made up of all true believers, will never be destroyed.

2. The corporate or external church as represented by the various denominations and local congregations that have existed during the past more than 1950 years could be destroyed even as the seven churches of Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 were eventually destroyed.

3. Ancient Israel that was loved by God and protected by God for hundreds of years was finally destroyed. The nation of Israel was destroyed in 709 B.C. and the nation of Judah in 587 B.C.

4. An insistent cause of their destruction was their persistence in maintaining places of worship, which are called high places, where heathen gods were worshipped.

With this background in view, we must ask the logical question: What does the destruction of ancient Israel in 709 B.C. and 587 B.C. have to do with us today? The answer must be loud and clear. What God did to ancient Israel has everything to do with the churches today. In Hebrews 13:8 the Bible declares, "**Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever**." Jesus is Jehovah God of the Old Testament. As we learn about His treatment of ancient Israel, we can know how He deals with the New Testament Israel, the churches and congregations that are all over the world.

The logical conclusion then might be: Since the high places of Israel were a dominant cause of the destruction of ancient Israel, it appears that the churches of today are safe from God's judgment because we do not have high places where heathen gods are worshipped.

Today's Churches Have Their High Places

But is it true that our churches are free of high places? The Bible shows us that the churches of today are not at all free of the high places. The Bible defines the nature of the New Testament high places in II Corinthians 10:4-6, where we read:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

In this very revealing passage, God has set forth His plans for the New Testament church. And as we shall see, they are parallel to His plan for ancient Israel. We can readily see this parallelism if we recognize the nature of the Old Testament high places. True worship faithfully identified with a careful following of the laws of God set forth in the Bible. But many in Israel had their own ideas concerning the nature of worship.

Out of their own imaginations and rationalizations they designed places of worship for gods that they felt should be honored as Jehovah God was honored. So, they designed and constructed their high places. They were probably called high places because these places, where false gods were worshipped, normally were built on the top of a hill.

In the New testament era, it was not fashionable to construct places of worship to worship false gods. But New Testament individuals have the same kind of thoughts and imaginations as Old Testament individuals. They, too, have opinions as to the proper worship of God that frequently include ideas from their own minds rather than from the Bible.

During the Old Testament days, it took serious thought as to how to properly design and build a high place in order to make the overall worship scene more complete. In the New Testament era, serious men have carefully thought about teachings that they felt were pleasing to God. They reasoned together in solemn meetings such as church councils, consistories, and synods.

After prayerful consideration, they adopted doctrines that were not always true to the Bible. Some of the erroneous conclusions were even written into and became a part of very prestigious Confessions. This was so even though they had arrived at conclusions that are not taught in the Bible. Conclusions such as there can be divorce for fornication, baptismal regeneration, our faith is an instrument that God uses to bring us to salvation, a future millennium, women can pastor a church, universal atonement, and that our acceptance of Christ is a requirement for salvation, are typical of many wrong doctrines that have been solemnly adopted by churches. These are high places in that they have come from the minds of men, not from God.

These are high places in that they have come from the minds of men, not from God.

At the beginning of this study, we briefly examined some of the high places in the churches. We saw that there are quite a number of high places in our churches today. Churches have rewritten the rules concerning divorce and remarriage, the Sunday Sabbath, gospels of signs and wonders, the tongues

phenomenon, the role of women in the church, music, and preaching about hell and damnation. These are all high places that have grown extensively in the churches in the past 50 years.

We must never forget that the pillar and ground of the truth cannot be the church (I Timothy 3:15). The pillar and ground of truth can be only God. Therefore, any doctrine held by a church must come under the careful scrutiny of the Bible. Fact is, the teaching, which is held by a great number of churches, that the church is the pillar and ground of truth is in itself an enormous high place because it tries to make the church, and that which it teaches, an authority at least equal to God.

The New Testament High Places Will Be Destroyed

For over 1950 years, God overlooked these spiritual high places even as for many hundreds of years He overlooked the high places of Israel and Judah. But remember, God had warned ancient Israel that eventually, He would destroy the high places. This destruction commenced when Judah began to go into bondage at the time their last good king, Josiah, was killed in 609 B.C. The destruction was completed in 587 B.C. when Jerusalem and the temple were entirely destroyed, 23 years inclusively after 609 B.C.

Ominously, the passage in II Corinthians 10:4-6, which speaks of the New Testament high places, also warns of a time when God will destroy the high places. Remember, God said, "**For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God . . . having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.**"

In this very revealing passage, God is declaring that punishment will come when the obedience of the churches has been fulfilled, that is, when their work of sending the Gospel into the world has been finished, God will begin to bring judgment upon them. This coincides with the warning to the churches that we read in Revelation 11, that is, the time will come when their work of proclaiming the Gospel, as typified by the two witnesses, is finished. When it is finished, the two witnesses will be killed. Revelation 11:7 declares:

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.

In Revelation 11, verse 4, God explains that the two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And remember, in Revelation 1:20 and Revelation 2:1, God indicates that each church is represented by a candlestick. This is so because within each church or congregation, there are true believers. They individually are light bearers of the Gospel. Because they are an integral part of the congregation, the church itself as an entity becomes a light bearer. In this way throughout the church age, the churches that have remained reasonably faithful to the Bible have been represented by a candlestick.

However, when the true believers are silenced within the congregation or are driven from the congregation, effectively, they have been killed. John 16:2 declares:

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

This killing of the witnesses can occur only when the work of the church to bring the Gospel to the world has been finished. Only God determines when that work is finished.

As we continue our study, we will learn that the end of the time for the churches to work to bring the Gospel to the world coincides with the beginning of the Great Tribulation. One thing is certain, when the two witnesses are killed because their work is finished, it means that the church is dead, the candlestick can no longer give light. That is, God is no longer using the church to bring the Gospel.

That is, God is no longer using the church to bring the Gospel.

When we say, God is no longer using the church to bring the Gospel, it is imperative that we understand that for anyone to become saved, two things are required: the faithful preaching of the word of God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to apply that word to the hearts of those who are God's elect and give them spiritual ears to hear. In our day, however, the Holy Spirit has been taken out of the midst of the churches (see II Thessalonians 2:7, in which the Holy Spirit shall restrain Satan within the churches **until he be taken out of the way**, that is, **out of the midst** (the word 'way' should be translated 'midst'), and there is a famine of hearing the words of the LORD, as we read in Amos 8:11

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

Therefore, we see clearly that God had predetermined a time during the New Testament era when punishment would come against the high places and the exalted reasoning of men. This punishment would take place when the obedience of the churches was fulfilled, and we have seen that the obedience was fulfilled when the work of the two witnesses was finished.

This identifies with the warning of I Peter 4:17, "**For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God**." The event of this judgment on the churches is a terrible blow to them. In a way, it is as traumatic and awful as the destruction of ancient Judah by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Therefore, God speaks of this event as a time of Great Tribulation. In Matthew 24:21, the Bible declares that there will be Great Tribulation such as this world has never known nor ever shall know.

How terrible when God's blessings no longer rest on the churches and congregations, which only a few years earlier were God's evangelists to the world.

But now we ask the big question: Has this Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:21 already begun? We also wonder if a church removes its high places, can it avoid this judgment? Moreover, how does God bring judgment upon the churches?

Chapter 7.

The Church Age Has Come to an End

The Bible discloses the fact that following the season of the early Pentecostal rain (the church age), which has brought in the harvest of the firstfruits, there would be a time of a spiritual famine of hearing the Word of God. This would also be a time of judgment on the churches. This time symbolically would be three and a half years in duration. It is called the time of Great Tribulation. This time of Great Tribulation will be immediately followed by the return of Christ and the end of the world. We read in Matthew 24:21:

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

And in Matthew 24:29, 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:

This Great Tribulation period is not only described in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, but it is also described in the language of Revelation 13, Daniel 7, Daniel 8, and many other Scriptures.

It is typified by the 70-year period beginning with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C. and ending with the conquer of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C.

It is a time typified by God bringing judgment upon Judah because they refused to remove the high places where heathen gods were worshipped. God had warned in Leviticus 26:30:

And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you.

He reiterated this warning in Ezekiel 6, verses 3 and 4:

And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols.

The character of the events occurring in the 70-year period from 609 B.C. to 539 B.C. was the total rule of Babylon over Israel. When the Israelites were taken captive into Babylon they had no temple, no holy city, and no priesthood. They were entirely separated from Jerusalem and all the sacred activity that previously had been taking place there.

Likewise, the character of the Great Tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24 is that Satan has occupied the churches and has become victorious over the saints. In Revelation 13:7, we read:

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

In Daniel 7:25 God prophesied:

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

In Daniel 8:11 and 12 the Bible declares:

Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.

These passages show that the time was to come when God would give Satan the victory over all the local churches and congregations. This was at the end of the church age, when Satan was given complete victory over the external corporate church.

This is the end of the church age, when Satan is given complete victory over the external corporate church.

When we understand that Satan is given victory over the external church, which consists of all the local congregations, we wonder how this can be. Don't we read in Revelation 20, verses 2 and 3:

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 thou sand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

We do know that Satan was bound in the sense that he could no longer frustrate the purpose of the Gospel to save people. During Jesus' ministry, virtually no one became saved. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit was not at work applying the preached Word of God to the lives of those who were to be saved. On the other hand, Satan appeared to be present almost everywhere Jesus preached. As Luke 8:12 indicates, the devil took the Word out of the hearts of those who heard the Word lest they should believe and be saved.

The fact that about 3,000 people were saved seven weeks after the time of the cross indicates that this was the dominant meaning of the truth that Satan had been bound. It was at the cross that Satan was given the death blow and was bound so that he could no longer deceive the nations. Beginning at the time he was bound and all through the church age, people all around the world did become saved.

We must, therefore, ask the question: How is it possible that Satan is able to gain victory over the churches during the Great Tribulation? Did he finally figure out a plan whereby he could do this? The answer is, No! It is God who loosed Satan as a judgment upon the churches. We read about this loosing of Satan in. Revelation Chapter 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.

Chist alone has the key that opens and shuts (Revelation 3:7). Very deliberately, Christ loosed Satan in the sense that He again allowed Satan to frustrate the preached Word so that it could not save. The time coincided with the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from the churches. Once he was loosed, Satan, as the constant enemy of Christ, of course could be expected to immediately attack the body of Christ, which was found in the local churches all over the world.

Thus, we can know that it is only because God is orchestrating the details of the Great Tribulation and the end of the world that Satan can become so victorious during the time of the Great Tribulation.

The Two Witnesses

When we look at the sending forth of the Gospel during the church age, we must take note of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. These two witnesses represent the true believers. Initially, they identify with the true believers in the churches during the church age. The command to go into all the world with the Gospel had been given at the beginning of the church age. The carrying out of this command was typified by the two witnesses of whom the Bible speaks in Revelation 11. Revelation 11:3 and 4 declare:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall proph esy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sack cloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

The two witnesses are identified in Revelation 11:4 as two olive trees and two candlesticks.

The two olive trees identify with the olive tree of Romans 11:16-24. This underscores the fact that these two witnesses represent the true believers. The two witnesses also identify with the two candlesticks. This immediately identifies them with the church age. Revelation 1:20 and Revelation 2:1 teach us that symbolically, each church is represented by a candlestick amongst which Christ walks. The candlestick represents the light of the Gospel as it is sent into the world during the church age by the churches and during the latter rain by true believers who are outside of the churches.

The number two (two witnesses, two olive trees, two candlesticks), identifies with true believers who faithfully bring the Gospel. Remember, Jesus sent the twelve disciples out two and two (Mark 6:7), and also, the 70 were sent out two and two (Luke 10:1).

We see the end of the church age in the death of these two witnesses, as we read Revelation 11:7, which declares:

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.

The death of the two witnesses identifies with the destruction of the church. Satan is loosed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation and is allowed by God to destroy the churches.

The Churches Will Be Judged

Even as God finally destroyed Judah and Jerusalem in 587 B.C. because they had not removed the high places, God indicates that the churches, too, will be destroyed because they do not remove their high places. Remember we read in II Corinthians 10:4-6:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imagina tions, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowl edge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

As we learned earlier, the high places of the churches are the doctrines held and taught by the churches that are not true to the Bible. Some of these doctrines are imbedded in their Confessions but additional wrong doctrines are also taught. Divorce for fornication is one example of such perversion of the law of God.

Even as Israel refused to permanently destroy its high places, so, too, the churches and denominations of our day refuse to remove from their Confessions and from their other teachings those doctrines that are not true to the Bible. As we learned earlier, their refusal to remove wrong doctrines from their Confessions and other doctrinal teachings may be a result of the false notion that the church is the pillar and ground of truth. Later in our study, we will learn that only God can be the pillar and ground of truth.

Thus, both Revelation 11:7 and II Corinthians 10:4-6 teach that there comes a time when the work of the church is finished (Revelation 11:2), its obedience has been fulfilled (II Corinthians 10:6), and then judgment comes upon the church. This is so even as God's judgment came upon Old Testament Israel and Judah. It is true that during the 322-year duration of Judah, from the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. until the death of Josiah in 609 B.C., God tolerated and overlooked the high places.

Likewise, throughout the entire New Testament era, God overlooked and tolerated the high places in the churches. Even though many churches and denominations insist that the Bible is the only infallible Word of God, they cling to a number of doctrines of men rather than submit entirely to the truth of the Bible. We have learned that these false doctrines are equivalent to the high places of ancient Judah. As we have seen, the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24 was typified by the destruction of Jerusalem in the period from 609 B.C. to 587 B.C. Therefore, we can expect that even as Judah and Israel were destroyed because they would not remove their high places, so, too, the New Testament Israel will be destroyed during the Great Tribulation because high places are found in the churches throughout the world.

The destruction of the churches is not a physical literal destruction as was the situation in 587 B.C. Instead, it is a spiritual destruction as God allows the true believers to be driven out. The churches become spiritually desolate because, as we will learn later in this study, the Holy Spirit no longer works in the churches and Satan rules in them.

This destruction of the churches is made evident by the declaration of Revelation 11:7, where God says:

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.

It is seen in the language of II Corinthians 10:6:

And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

II Thessalonians 2, verses 3 and 4 speak of it in this way:

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.

All of these passages tell us in different ways that the end of the church age will come.

All of these passages tell us in different ways that the end of the church age will come. We see the believers in the churches killed in Revelation 11:7. God will "revenge" the disobedience of the churches after their work is done. The phrase "**when your obedience is fulfilled**" matches Revelation 11:7, which says, "**when they shall have finished their testimony**." The II Thessalonians 2 passage tells us that the death of the churches comes with Satan ruling in the churches. So, all of these passages are telling us the same thing, namely, that the end of the church age will come at some point. As we will see in this study, that time is now.

The Beast that Comes from the Sea

Let us examine some verses in Revelation 13 to better understand this Great Tribulation time and the end of the church age. We will start with verses 1-3, where we read:

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. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. 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.

This beast is a representation of Satan. But this passage is looking particularly at Satan's rule over all of the unsaved during the Great Tribulation of our day. We know this to be so for at least two reasons.

The first reason is that he comes out of the sea. In the Bible, the sea frequently represents all of the unsaved who subject to the eternal wrath of God because of sin. Remember, Satan became subject to the eternal wrath of God at the cross. But remember, too, that Revelation 20 teaches that just before the end, Satan is loosed from his prison so that he would go out to deceive the nations of the world (Revelation 20:7-8). That is why Revelation 13:3 declares his death wound was healed.

This beast has seven heads and ten horns but the ten horns are crowned. This indicates the rule of Satan during the Great Tribulation period. In Revelation 17:12, we read:

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.

The phrase "one hour" in this verse refers particularly to the entire Great Tribulation period. This same phrase "one hour"is used in three verses in Revelation 18 where God is speaking about the destruction of Babylon. Remember we learned that Babylon represents the churches and congregations that are under the judgment of God during the Great Tribulation. The verses are Revelation 18, verses 10, 17, and 19, where God declares:

Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come…For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, … Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Significantly, God uses the same phrase, "one hour," in Matthew 20:12 in connection with the men who received a full day's wages for one hour of work. The only other place we find the phrase "one hour" is in connection with the suffering of Jesus in Gethsemane when he asked Peter, who together with the other two apostles had gone with Him into the garden, "**couldest not thou watch one hour?**" (Mark 14:37, Matthew 26:40).

The setting of the phrase, "one hour," in Revelation Chapters 17 and 18 is that of the entire Great Tribulation period. We can be sure of this because Revelation 17:12 says the ten horns receive power as kings for one hour. We must understand from Revelation 13 that the ten horns rule as the beast that comes out of the sea and as the beast or false prophet that comes out of the earth. Once we understand this, we receive a fresh insight concerning the laborers who received a full day's wages for one hour of work in the vineyard. They are a picture of the last to become saved. They are saved during the "one hour" period, that is, they are saved during the Great Tribulation. In Matthew 20:16 Jesus speaks of them as the last who shall be first.

But what about the use of the phrase, "one hour," in connection with the suffering of Christ in Gethsemane? In that situation, Peter is a picture of the body of believers who are not watching. He was told to "**Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation**" (Matthew 26:41). The occasion was Judgment Day. On that Judgment Day, the wrath of God was being poured out on Jesus. Peter, representing the believers, was asleep. A few hours later, he will deny his Lord. He had not been watching. This report is pointing to another Judgment Day, that which begins with judgment on the churches and congregations, which has already begun in our day. In Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter to watch one hour. The Great Tribulation is also one hour. Therefore, we, too, are being admonished to watch.

Revelation 16:15 warns, "**Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth.**" Mark 13:35 warns, "**Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh.**" Many other verses of a similar nature can be cited.

In one sense, we must always be ready for Christ's coming because physical death is effectively the end of the world for those who die. Since no one has a guarantee he will be alive tomorrow, we must be ready right now. However, when we come to the time in history called "one hour" or "one day," which identifies entirely with the Great Tribulation period, then the admonition to "watch" takes on a far greater meaning. For example, if we are young and healthy, normally, we can expect to have a great many years of life ahead of us. But when we live in the time of history that God calls "one hour," it means the last day of this earth's existence has drawn very close. Thus, no matter how young and healthy we may be, the end of the world and the return of Christ have drawn very close.

Returning to Revelation 13:2, we read that this beast, who we now know represents the rule of Satan during the time of the Great Tribulation, was like a leopard, a bear, and a lion. It is a picture of Satan coming as a savage wild beast to destroy.

Verses 4 and 5 continue:

And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

The unsaved all over the world worship Satan during this time of Great Tribulation. It might be noted that in our day, the intense interest in the occult and in things like Halloween indicate the enormous adulation that Satan is receiving. Verses 6 and 7 state:

And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. 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.

Because Satan has been loosed by God to again deceive the nations, his chief attack is against the true believers in Christ. This is so because they are the body of Christ, and Christ is the chief enemy of Satan, and Satan wishes to destroy Him.

God has loosed Satan to prepare the world for Judgment Day . But in God's divine arrangement, judgment is to begin at the house of God (I Peter 4:17). Therefore, verse 6 teaches that Satan blasphemes, that is, he mocks, ridicules, and speaks scandalously against the true believers, and he was able to overcome the saints (the true believers)

How can Satan overcome the saints?
Aren't they forever safe with Christ?

How can Satan overcome the saints? Aren't they forever safe with Christ? True, but he overcomes them in the sense that they are driven from the churches and congregations. Remember John 16:2:

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

During the Great Tribulation, as we will presently see, Satan rules in the congregations, and the true believers are killed (driven out of the churches). This identifies with Revelation 11:7:

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

Thus, during the Great Tribulation, except for the true believers who are no longer a part of the churches and congregations, Satan rules over all, both in the churches and outside of the churches. Satan's rule in the churches corresponds with the end of the church age, when God is no longer using the churches to evangelize the world.

Thus far we have learned that the beast that comes out of the sea represents Satan as he rules during the Great Tribulation period of our day. Continuing with Revelation 13, we read in verses 11 and 12:

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. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

The Beast that Comes Out of the Earth

God now is speaking of a beast coming out of the earth. We know that this beast also is Satan. However, Satan now is presented as antichrist, that is, he looks and acts like Christ. He has two horns like a lamb (that is, like Christ the Lamb of God). Yet we are not to be deceived, "he spake as a dragon." It is Satan masquerading as Christ as he takes over the rulership of the churches and congregations during the Great Tribulation of our day. This identifies with the language of II Thessalonians 2:3-4:

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

> *During the Great Tribulation, Satan will be sitting (that is, ruling) in the churches.*

The temple of God is the churches and congregations. But during the Great Tribulation, Satan will be sitting (that is, ruling) in the churches. God the Holy Spirit will no longer be in the midst of the congregations. Satan has overcome the true believers by driving them out (they are killed), and now he is free to rule as he pleases. Those who remain in the churches think they are worshipping God, but in actuality, they are worshipping Satan. Thus, this beast that comes out of the earth also represents Satan. More particularly it represents Satan as he rules in the churches and congregations during the Great Tribulation period of our day. Later on, in Revelation 19:20, he is called the false prophet. Satan is called the false prophet because he is ruling in the churches and congregations, where false doctrines are taught.

Fire from Heaven

Returning to Revelation 13, we read in verses 13 and 14:

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

We read here that Satan will be calling down fire from heaven. However, as we study the Bible, we learn that Satan cannot literally call down fire from heaven. This is proven by the contest between the 450 prophets of Baal, who were Satan's emissaries, and Elijah. We read about this in I Kings 18. But God gave Satan a demonstration that showed that causing someone to fall backward is equivalent to calling down fire from heaven.

In Numbers 16 we read that the rebellion against Moses was led by three men, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Numbers 16:2-3:

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

The consequences of this rebellion were that the earth opened up and swallowed the families of the three men and the destruction by fire of the 250 men who rebelled. Numbers 16:35 says, "**And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense**." The next day the Israelites complained. Then Numbers 16:41 says, "**But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD**." As a result of this added rebellion on the part of Israel, God sent a plague into Israel that began to kill the Israelites in great numbers. Only the timely intervention of Aaron in making an atonement for Israel kept God from killing all of Israel. We read of this terrible judgment and its remedy in Numbers 16, verses 45-48:

Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

In this account, rebellious Israel is representative of mankind who has rebelled against God. The plague that killed many of the Israelites and the fire that came down and destroyed the 250 men point to the judgment of God that will destroy all the unsaved. The atonement offered by Aaron and Aaron himself, as he stood between the dead and the living, represent Christ who stopped the wrath of God from falling on all those for whom He made atonement. Thus, we see much of the Gospel of salvation in this account.

Does Satan Make Fire Come Down from Heaven?

We read in Revelation 13:13, 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? Actually, this phenomenon is presently happening worldwide, but 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, Satan, through his emissaries, threatened believers, and 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 Revelation 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.

There was another time when Satan assaulted the kingdom of God and fire should have been called down from heaven to destroy him. But instead, a different action was taken in order to show that Satan could have been destroyed by fire. That action, therefore, became the equivalent of calling down fire from heaven.

The event was when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and Judas and the temple soldiers came to take Jesus. Satan 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? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am**" (John 18:4-5).

At that moment, following the action of Elijah as recorded in II Kings Chapter 1, and the action against the forces of evil as recorded in Revelation Chapter 20, Jesus should have called down fire from heaven to destroy the enemies who would bind Him, but Jesus could not take that action at that time. 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 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.

The Bible also instructs us that Satan cannot make fire come down from heaven.

We learned from Revelation 13:13 that Satan will cause fire to come down from heaven, but the Bible also instructs us that Satan cannot make fire come down from heaven. Do you recall the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18? The 450 prophets of Baal, whose head is Satan, tried all day to cause fire to come down to the altar they had made. But they failed totally to accomplish this. Elijah, on the other hand, prayed that God would send fire on the altar that Elijah had built, and fire came down and consumed the offering, the wood, and even the stones of the altar.

Therefore, Satan cannot literally call down fire from heaven. Satan was present when Jesus caused those who came to take Him to fall backward as a substitute for calling down fire from heaven (John 18). This is the solution to the prophecy that Satan would call down fire from heaven, that is, he causes people to fall backward to the ground under some supernatural power, which is the equivalent of calling down fire from heaven. Thus, this could be the manner through which Revelation 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 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.

Falling Backward Equals Fire from Heaven

Thus, this miracle of people falling backward to the ground, which is occurring all over the world, is clear evidence that we are now in the Great Tribulation period of Revelation 13 and Matthew 24. This supernatural activity is one of the signs Satan employs to assure those in the churches that Christ is still active within these churches. Satan wishes to be like God. God is the judge of all the earth. God shows His right and ability to judge by calling down fire to destroy the one being judged. Satan is not the judge in any sense, but he tries to show he is a judge by causing people to fall backward. That is why in the churches where he does this, they speak of it as being “slain in the spirit.” Additionally, other supernatural activities, such as people receiving messages by means of visions and speaking in tongues, are from Satan as he tries to assure those in these churches that Christ is still ruling there.

In these verses in Revelation, God tells us that Satan, as he comes as the beast out of the earth or as the false prophet, causes those who dwell on the earth to “make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live” (Revelation 13:14), that is, to make an image of Satan. Furthermore, concerning this image, we read in Revelation 13:15:

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.

How are we to understand this image of Satan to which life has been given? This is a very important question because in Revelation 14:9, we read about those who worship his image. And remember in Revelation 14:7 we read the warning that we are to worship only God the Creator.

The Image of the Beast

Making an image is the same as making a likeness of any entity. The image or likeness is not the entity but it represents the entity. The true believer, for example, has become the image of Christ. We read in II Corinthians Chapter 3, verse 18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We read in Colossians 3:10:

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

And in Romans 1:23 we read:

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Studying these verses assures us that the image of God is the true believers. The image of Satan is all the unsaved. This agrees with Jesus’ assessment of the Israel of His day. He declares in John 8:44:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Thus, we can understand that the image of Satan consists of the unsaved within the churches. They have been given life only in the sense that they have contact with the supernatural as they receive messages by means of tongues or voices or visions. They have contact with the supernatural by falling backwards. It, of course, is false life, but to those who experience these things, the experiences assure them that they must be alive in Christ.

What then could the Bible mean when it speaks about worshipping the image of the beast? We worship our master, the one we look to as our authority. To worship means to bow down before the one to whom we have surrendered our will. Thus, as true believers, our will has been surrendered to Christ because we worship Him as our Lord and our God.

The question must be posed: In any church or congregation, who is the authority that rules in our life? Is it the Bible alone? Or is it the theologians and Bible teachers of the denomination to which we belong?

In any conservative church of today, the answer comes very quickly, the Bible alone is our authority. But is that really so? Who developed the doctrines that we must accept Christ to become saved, that we must be baptized in water as a condition for salvation, that faith is an instrument God gives us so we might become saved, that water baptism seals us in some way, that a wife can divorce an adulterous husband, etc. Since these doctrines did not come from God, they could have come only from the minds of men.

Some or all of these doctrines are adhered to and effectively obeyed in virtually every church and congregation of our day.

If these doctrines came from the minds of men, the lofty thinking of theologians, they did not come from God. The very fact that they dare to hold these doctrines as truth when they are not truth means that they are trusting a lie. That in turn means that ultimately, they are worshipping the father of lies, who is Satan. And they themselves are the image of Satan.

We must remember that throughout the history of the New Testament church, many false doctrines existed in churches that God used to further the great commission of evangelizing the world. However, we must also remember that God is a long-suffering God. He has tolerated these New Testament high places for a long time. We have seen the same patience of God as He tolerated the high places of Israel and Judah for hundreds of years.

But there is an end to God's patience. God has decreed that there would come a time when He would destroy all the high places. He did this by destroying Israel in 709 B.C. and Judah in 587 B.C. He did this by loosing Satan so that he would rule in the temple, that is, in all the churches and the congregations of our day.

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Significantly, in virtually every church that exists anywhere in the world, the image of the beast is worshipped. That is, doctrines developed out of the minds of men are regarded as God's truth.

Fact is, the matter of regarding any doctrines that are spawned by the thinking of theologians as God's truth betrays the mentality that the corporate church effectively rules over the Bible. Protestants fault the Roman Catholics because they plainly contend that the church rules over the Bible, but the reality is that the same condition prevails in the Protestant churches. This is another way of saying that the image of Satan, that is, the minds of corruptible man is being worshipped.

Worship the Image of the Beast or Be Killed

Remember we read in Revelation 13:15, "**that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed**." The evidence of the reality of this statement is seen in startling fashion in our day. In any conservative church today, which we may have considered to be the most faithful to the Bible, if we try to remain there as a member but take serious issue with statements of the confessions of that denomination, statements that can be shown to be in violation of the Bible, for example, if we take issue with that church's stand on marriage and divorce, ordinarily, such action will cause us to be driven out. Spiritually, in a sense, we will be killed. If a pastor of such a church begins to object to the doctrines of his church , and which he can show to be in violation of the Bible, he will be driven out of that denomination. Spiritually, in the sense of the illustration in Revelation 11, he will be killed.

Returning to Revelation 14:7, now we can understand why God is warning that the Gospel we are to proclaim during the latter rain should emphasize that we are to worship God who "**made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters**." Trusting our church, theologians, or any entity rather than God the Creator will no longer be tolerated by God.

In fact, this is a solemn warning to a ministry like SearchingHisWord.com or ZionInTravail.com, that is, we better be sure that the doctrines we bring to the world are as Biblical as possible. As we have already learned, we are to be especially concerned that the salvation message does not in the slightest way teach that any work that we do can assist in our salvation.

And now, continuing a bit longer in Revelation Chapter 13, we read in verses 16 and 17:

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: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

These two verses introduce more questions. What is signified by the mark of the beast? What does it mean to buy or sell?

Satan's rule in the temple, that is, his rule in the churches and congregations during the Great Tribulation, causes everyone there to receive Satan's mark. We must understand this to mean that those who are not saved carry the ownership brand of Satan. Like a cattleman puts his ownership brand on his cattle so there is no question about who owns the cattle, so Satan spiritually has his mark or brand on those who worship him or his image.

Similarly, we read in Revelation 14:1 that the 144,000, who are the complete fullness of all those who became saved during the church age, have an identification mark. They have their Father's name written on their forehead. We know, of course, that a name is not literally or physically placed on each

believer's forehead. Rather, it is language to show that these 144,000 are eternally owned by God and they are citizens of His kingdom. Later in our study, we will look again at these 144,000.

What Does Buy or Sell Mean?

What does the phrase "buy or sell" signify? This is a crucial question because Revelation 13, verse 17, declares that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark of the beast.

When we search the Bible to help us understand the phrase "buy or sell," we find that God employs language that identifies Jesus as a merchant. In Matthew 13:45 and 46 we read:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

The merchant in this parable can only be Christ. The pearl is the kingdom of God. Christ sold all that He had, that is, He emptied Himself of His glory and became the suffering servant in order to obtain the kingdom of God. In Isaiah 55:1 we read:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

This language is also the language of a merchant who has the Gospel for sale. It is the Gospel that can be bought without money and without price. In other references, the sending forth of the Gospel is typified by merchant ships (for example, the ships of Tarshish), that bring gold, silver, and all manner of precious things to Jerusalem.

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:18, "**perceiveth that her merchandise is good**," and Proverbs 31:14 says, "**She is like the merchants' ships**." Proverbs 31:24 says, "**She maketh fine linen, and selleth it**." She can be shown to be a picture of the believers as we buy without money the Gospel and sell it to others who buy from us without money. Thus, buying and selling has entirely to do with sending forth the Gospel.

Returning to Revelation 13:17, we read that in the churches and congregations that are under the rule of Satan, no one can buy or sell, that is, no one can bring a gospel there unless they have the mark of the beast.

What terrible information this is. Effectively, God is saying that in these churches and congregations where Satan now rules, no one can preach or teach there unless they are not saved. What is even worse is that, since everyone in the congregation believes they have a prophetic office to declare the Word of God, based upon passages like Acts 2:17, the ominous warning of Revelation 13:17 in principle can apply to everyone in the congregation.

This information dramatically increases the problem faced by pastors and Bible teachers in churches. It cannot mean that every pastor ministering in any church is automatically proven to be unsaved. But it does mean when a pastor or any believer within that church is faced with the Biblical information concerning the Great Tribulation and then insists that this is not the time to flee from his church, or if he insists that somehow his church is the exception and he can continue to minister in this congregation, or if he offers any other rationale as to why he should not leave, the serious question must be raised, "How

then does this pastor or believer answer to the terrible warning of Revelation 13:17?" Indeed, these are extremely serious verses. The serious nature of these warnings is further set forth in Revelation 14:9-11:

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

As we have studied these verses in Revelation 13, we have seen more and more evidence that the beginning of the Great Tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24 corresponds with the end of the church age. Revelation 13 shows that during the Great Tribulation, the churches are under God's judgment and that God has given the churches over to Satan. With the churches under God's wrath and under Satan's rulership, we can see clear proof that the beginning of the Great Tribulation signifies that we are at the end of the church age.

As we close this brief study, we earnestly beseech each one reading this material to ask God for wisdom, and to search out the Bible to see whether the conclusions in this study are faithful to God's word the Bible. As you do so, May the LORD Richly Bless You.

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