

**THE
APPROACHING
DAY**

by

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*And let us consider one another
in order to stir up love and good works,
not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,
as is the manner of some,
but exhorting one another, and so much the more
as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24-25

Dear Reader,

From one point of view, if the events of our times are *not* making us fearful there is something very wrong with us.

Our economy is spinning out of control. Our schools are teaching our children everything but the basics of education. It now takes much more than locks on our doors to keep thieves from stealing our wealth. The food we eat is less nourishing and more susceptible to containing poisons than ever before.

At an even deeper level, the strongholds of our morality have been swept away by the winds of relativism and personal preferences. Who would have thought the day would come when such foundational terms as “life” and “marriage” would become radically redefined? Who could have foreseen that almost overnight America would not only turn from her allegiance to the God of the Bible, but would instead begin to embrace and encourage every religion and philosophy *except* Christianity?

Yet for those of us who read the Bible, none of this should really be surprising, or even ultimately a source of fear. Rather, as Peter tells us (II Peter 3:12,13 ASV), we should be “looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God,” after which God will bring us into new heavens and a new earth, “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

But in the meantime, the writer of Hebrews has directed us to gather together and to exhort one another, especially when we think that the Day may soon be arriving. Because I cannot “gather” directly with very many of you, I am writing this book as my word of exhortation and encouragement.

You see, I truly think the Day is very, very close. I could be wrong. Nevertheless, there are too many places in scripture that advise us—all of us, in every generation—to live as though Christ will come soon. We should never forget that one day, in one point of history, He actually will come. How sad it will be in that day for those who did not think it necessary to watch and wait.

May God help us all to prepare wisely for the “great and very terrible” Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11).

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Introduction

I believe we are on the doorstep of the end of the age. In fact, I am willing to say that I believe Christ will return to earth before the middle of this century.

Of course, I don't know this with absolute certainty. But I believe it strongly enough to write about it. Some of you may never have thought much about the second coming of Christ as being an event you will live to see. Others of you may live every day wondering if this will be the day.

I have two important things I'd like to communicate to you in these writings. First I want to explain to you why I believe we are truly entering the end times. The scriptures, as I read them, give us some very clear descriptions of God's plan and purposes for human history. I want to paint for you the picture of what I have found through reading those passages.

When I'm through explaining my understanding of history, I still may not have convinced you. That's fine. Exhortation is never compulsion—it's persuasion. If you don't agree with my conclusions, perhaps they will at least stir you to do your own searching.

But even more than you or I coming up with an accurate prophetic timetable, I believe my second purpose is one that will be of great importance. Because I believe I myself may be living in the end times, I have given much thought to how I should best prepare for those days.

As you will learn, I do not believe Christians will be spared the time of severe testing about which the Bible warns us. Again, I could be wrong. But if I'm wrong and God does spare us, the preparations I am making will nevertheless be of real spiritual value. But if I'm right, then those who have disregarded this important season of preparation may soon find themselves with deep regrets. How much better for all of us to live wisely and soberly, deliberately exchanging our human priorities for those of the kingdom of God, and watching carefully for the Day which is most definitely approaching.

Chapter One - Are These the End Times?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” So opens the most amazing and significant book ever written, our Bible. It concludes with these words, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” Framed within these two acts of God is the span of time we call history.

There is a modern propensity to remove that frame, to see time as being endless, or at least as having an uncertain beginning and an uncertain end. In this view, God put things in motion, somehow, back in the early mists of an infant universe. From that point on, He is only one of many participants in the outworking of its history.

Because we are astonished by our own wisdom and creative powers, we have come to suspect that these are the result of a great season of human advancement, and thereby assume that such advancement will continue, somehow, into an essentially endless future.

The Bible makes no such assumption. This is part of the reason those who choose to believe in human evolution find the Bible so troublesome. The pages of scripture are not only bounded by a definite beginning and end, there is also really no evidence that humankind has improved itself over the time span it records. Adam is not that different from Ananias, and neither of them are that different from us.

But the deeper problem with our focus on human development is that it draws our eyes away from the centerpoint of scripture and of history, which is God Himself. The divine power which spoke us into existence did so for a very specific purpose: to give an expanded manifestation of His glory.

While I certainly do not understand all that was in God’s mind when He created our universe and placed in one remote corner of it a civilization of beings who carry His image, scripture gives us hints as to some of His motives. The first man and woman held within themselves the potential to choose life or death (Genesis 2:16,17). They could reproduce their own kind, a miracle which heaven may not have previously witnessed (Mark 12:25). Even after the fall, they had the creative ability to do anything they set their minds to (Genesis 11:6).

In these, and in the many other powers and privileges God chose to invest in His created humans, there was one overriding desire in His heart. He wished for them to seek Him, to know Him, to receive and reflect His love, and thereby to become like Him. His goal was a universe populated with millions upon millions of god-shaped beings, each a unique and eternal expression of His own infinite beauty.

Far from being a random, free-wheeling, open-ended cosmic adventure, the history of humanity portrays, I believe, a very well-designed and perfectly executed Plan. While many of its patterns are admittedly dark and obscure to us, that does not negate either God’s wise purposes or His sovereign control. In fact, the Bible tells us He deliberately veiled His ways so most people would not be able to detect them.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Jesus Himself spoke in cryptic parables (Matthew 13:10-17), to fulfill this prophecy in Isaiah:

Make the heart of this people dull,
And their ears heavy,
And shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart,
And return and be healed. (Isaiah 6:10)

Nevertheless, God also promised to reveal Himself to those who diligently seek Him (Jeremiah 29:13), and who are willing to enter His kingdom as children (Matthew 18:3, John 3:3). In other words, we who would find God must first understand that He is central and we are not. He does not stand in judgment by our standards; we stand in judgment by His.

For those of us who have learned to delight in His great wisdom and His perfect ways—confident that our questions and confusion and even our pain will one day be revealed to be a necessary part of His ordained goodness—there opens the prospect of great discovery. God has told us what He is up to. Far from being out of control, history is actually moving forward with unwavering precision.

I will now present my understanding of human history, which gives the context for my belief that we are entering the end times. If I am wrong, in part or in full, that does not negate the need for each of us to take very seriously the solid truth that Christ will come again. Nor does it lessen the urgent necessity for every believer in every age to live as though He will return in their day.

One of the most visible aspects of scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, is its diligent concern to document human lineages. People established their place in history not only through what they did, but also through their connection to their parents and children. This has enabled scholars to deduct a fairly reliable timetable for the scope of scripture, and what they have determined is that Adam was created approximately 4,000 years before the birth of Christ.

Another significant milepost in the journey of time was the birth of Abraham, who lived at the half-way mark, that is, 2,000 years after Adam and 2,000 years before Christ. Then (as you know) there has been a third 2,000-year period between Christ and our present day.

I see each of these eras as representing a different phase in God’s plan. In the first phase, God gave instructions to Adam, but otherwise left human beings pretty much on their own. Humanity began to populate the earth, but their willingness to obey God (with the exception of a few individuals) was almost immediately abandoned. After about ten generations, God took a survey and saw that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5-6).

At that point He took the human race back down to one family (Noah’s), and gave them another chance. But again there is nothing to indicate that humanity was able to maintain any kind of

spiritual integrity. After another ten generations, at the 2,000 year mark, God began His second phase. Finding in Abraham a man who was willing to obey Him, God established a select earthly family from Abraham's offspring through Isaac and Jacob.

It was to this family, through Moses, that He communicated His law, which contained the restrictions and principles whereby humans might understand how to conform themselves and their behaviors to the nature and ordering of God. While there was a measure of success in this phase, it became a spiraling of obedience, disobedience, punishment from God, and return to obedience. In the long run, only a small number of individuals actually remained faithful to Him, even though they now knew much more about what He required.

The transition to the third phase, 2,000 years later, was of course God's decision to send His own Son to earth. While He was with us Christ raised the bar on our understanding of righteousness which the law had set in place. Moses taught that murder was sin; Jesus taught that anger against a brother was the same as murder. Moses taught that adultery was sin; Jesus taught that thoughts of adultery were the same as the act (see Matthew 5:21-30). More importantly, Jesus Himself fulfilled the requirements of the law, through His death and resurrection, thereby restoring for mankind the open doorway to eternal life.

The other significant characteristic of phase three was the outpouring of the Spirit of God, which gave all believers access to a supernatural empowerment which had only been experienced by a few individuals during phase two. We who live in this era have a far greater ability not only to follow and please God, but also to demonstrate His power and mercy to those around us, because the very nature of God inhabits our own.

Nevertheless, even this mighty blessing has not proven sufficient to bring humanity fully back on track. While the Christian church was yet in its infancy—and while it even included some who had known the human Christ—we find serious strains of sin already being manifested (for example, see I Corinthians 11:17-22). Subsequent centuries have only reinforced this evidence of ongoing corruption within the family of God.

Yet the Bible describes a time when God's people will be fully restored to the closeness that Adam and Eve experienced in Eden. Consider these passages:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow

and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11:1-7)

Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him.
He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young. (Isaiah 40:10-11)

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:24-27)

We should notice several things. First, this is not talking about heaven. Although Christ is physically present, caring gently for His flock, He is also ruling with a “strong hand,” severely judging those who are wicked. It is also not the present era, for lions and wolves still eat lambs, not straw. More importantly, even those of us who have the Spirit of God within us do not consistently keep His statutes. Our hearts have not been fully cleansed.

I believe these and other similar passages are a depiction of the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20, a period traditionally known as the Millennium. This is a time during which Satan is bound, when Jesus and others of His saints will rule. It seems to me that ruling, by definition, means that there is the possibility of disobeying the rules. If there were no possible disobedience, Christ’s “rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15) would not be necessary. Instead this is an earthly kingdom in which both the redeemed and the wicked yet dwell.

At the end of this final thousand years, Satan is fully defeated and cast into the lake of fire, and history draws to its final close with the entrance of the “new heaven and the new earth” (Revelation 21:1). At this point there will be no more need for ruling, for all of creation will be drawn together under the glorious authority of the Father.

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (I Corinthians 15:24-28)

If we compile these four eras—the 2,000 years between Adam and Abraham, the 2,000 years between Abraham and Christ, the 2,000 between Christ and the present, and the 1,000 year

Millennium—we have a total of 7,000 years. This quickly brings to mind the words of two mighty men of God.

First, Moses prayed this prayer:

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
You turn man to destruction,
And say, “Return, O children of men.”
For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night. (Psalms 90:1-4)

Peter reminds us of this prayer in the midst of a discussion of the end times:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:8,9)

Creation was accomplished, we are told, in seven days. Six days God labored, and on the seventh day “God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2,3).

The sacredness of the seventh day is echoed in the fourth commandment. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work” (Exodus 20:9,10). It is very credible, I believe, to see the Millennium as God’s final great Sabbath, the time when His people no longer have to struggle to know and to obey Him, but instead can finally rest in the full care of the Great Shepherd.

If in fact the seven days of creation are the template for seven thousand years of human history, then the obvious and vitally important question is this: when will the transition between Day 6 and Day 7 take place?

When the year 2000 A.D. was approaching, there was a pervasive uneasiness. Most of us were focused on the “Y2K” threat, the possibility that computers would not be able to adjust to the new date format. But there was also an underlying sense of being at a turning point, and at least some of us were prompted to soberly ponder our place in the larger context of history.

As I write this it is the year 2010, and we appear to have survived both the computer scare and the transition into the new millennium. Does that mean that there was no significance to our uneasiness?

Here is my thought. Our modern system of numbering the years, as you probably know, was originally based on the year Christ was born. It has since been determined that the man (Pope Gregory XIII) who set up our present calendar was likely off a few years, perhaps as much as seven years one way or the other. Thus the “turn of the millennium” might have more accurately happened somewhere between our years 1993 and 2007.

Nevertheless, we’ve now made it past that margin of error. Or have we? You see, despite what has historically been assumed, *it is completely possible that God may actually have chosen to “hinge” history not on the birth of Jesus, but on His death and resurrection.*

We have no accurate dates for the creation of Adam or the birth of Abraham. As mentioned, we really don’t have a specific date for the birth of Christ, but we can generally identify the span of years during which He lived on earth, based on what other historical records tell us about the rulers and events of those days. We also know that He died and was resurrected in the thirty-third year of His life. If my theory has merit, then the transition from the 6th to the 7th millennium will take place in the approximate timeframe of 2025 to 2040 A.D.

What gives enormous support to this proposition, of course, are the amazing circumstances of our present culture. We are rapidly moving toward a one-world government, a unified currency, and a common language (remember what God said about those people building the tower of Babel in Genesis 11?). The technology is already here that would allow the “mark” of the Beast to be on a tiny computer chip embedded in our hands or foreheads, restricting commerce to those who receive it (Revelation 13:16,17). When Revelation 11:9 tells us that “those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations” will all see the dead bodies of the two witnesses for three-and-a-half days, this is easily possible through the reaches of global internet viewing.

Moreover, many of us are persuaded that society is now operating under the “strong delusion” that was promised in II Thessalonians 2:11,12.

And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This delusion has many faces, but I believe it is essentially the idea that truth is derived from the particulars of our internal personal experience, rather than being externally grounded in the person and purposes of the eternal God. What is most alarming is the extent to which believers themselves are being drawn into this lie. Only by receiving from God the love for His truth (verses 10,13) can any of us avoid being deceived.

I realize scripture clearly states that we cannot know the day or the hour in which Christ will return. But note carefully His words in Mark 13:32-37:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the

rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!

Rather than allowing the unknowability of the timing to justify our not thinking about His coming, Jesus is strongly urging us to do the exact opposite. He is calling us to think about it with fearful urgency. We should also note that, if taken literally, this passage talks about only days and hours, about the “watches” of evening, midnight, dawn and morning. The larger context of Mark 13 is all about the specific signs that will foretell His coming: wars, famines, persecutions and deceptions. Although only the Father knows the precise day and hour, Jesus desires us to be very aware of the season as it approaches.

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! (Mark 13:28-30)

One statement in this chapter in Mark has prompted some people to feel comfortable about the probable future distance of the end times. Jesus says in verse 10 that “the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” However, it is not accidental that He places this comment in the middle of a discussion of the persecution of believers, of their interrogation by the authorities and their betrayal even by family members.

We might then surmise that this final global evangelistic event could happen rather quickly. Given the dizzying speed of technological advances in our day, it is not hard to imagine that in another decade or two the reach of media communications might easily support a simultaneous universal presentation of the gospel. Perhaps the very persecution of which Christ spoke will provide the context for Christian testimony to reach to the ends of the earth, as people witness the strength of the believers’ faith and perhaps even some accompanying miracles.

Then too, it’s also possible that this communication could be enhanced supernaturally. After all, in the opening hours of our present church era we read this:

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? . . . We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." (Acts 2:5-8,11)

Rather than envisioning this final harvest event within the limits of our present-day methods, we might be wiser to see it as simply God’s sovereign ingathering of the harvest at the end of this age—however it will happen.

Dear reader, it is because of what seems to be the unprecedented merging of so many factors that I feel compelled to exhort you through these writings. If the “approaching Day” is actually this near, then we are fools if we do not diligently seek out and put into practice the preparations and disciplines the Bible prescribes, so we might be truly ready for its arrival.

Chapter Two - Will God Heal Our Land?

Anyone who spends time on the internet has almost certainly encountered the many well-crafted warnings about the frightening times in which we live. There seems to be no end of strong commentaries, creative videos, and other presentations regarding the political precariousness, the moral collapse, and the spiritual pollutions of our day. If words alone could turn the course of history, then surely our moment in time would be highly steerable.

However, many sincere believers have reached the point where they understand that our society is now reeling out of control. In their desperation, some have found comfort in the promise given in II Chronicles 7:14: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

As appropriate and as reassuring as this promise sounds, we must be careful not to separate it from the context in which it was given. Modern Christians have a propensity to “pluck the positives” from what are often quite sobering surroundings. While God is indeed a God of great mercy, scripture clearly reveals that He has limits to His patience. We must always take the Bible as a whole, not as an array of options from which we can pick and choose.

The story in II Chronicles which contains the above promise actually begins in chapter five. Solomon had finished building the temple, an “exalted house” fashioned according to God’s precise specifications. To celebrate the occasion, the Israelites had sacrificed more animals than could be counted. They had triumphantly brought the ark of the covenant into the temple, and amidst the enthusiastic praises of the people, God’s cloud of glory filled His house.

By this time Solomon had been king over Israel for at least eleven years. He had also received from God a special gift of wisdom at the beginning of his reign. He had therefore discerned a number of clearly defined situations which he knew would require God’s assistance. As the worship swelled around him, these needs were on his mind.

Chapter six opens with Solomon’s pronouncement that he had now fulfilled the agreement his father David had made with God, that David’s son would build in the city of Jerusalem a glorious house in which God could dwell. Solomon then stepped onto a bronze platform he had placed in front of the altar, and raising his hands to heaven, he knelt before God and began to pray.

Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where You said You would put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

He followed this opening statement with seven specific problems which concerned him.

1. If anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple, then hear from heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, bringing retribution on the wicked by bringing his way on his own head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

Without such tools as fingerprinting, video cameras, or DNA testing, the guilt or innocence of a person could be determined only by actual witnesses. When there were none, the accused would come before the altar and swear that he was innocent. Solomon was asking God to make the final determination in these cases.

2. Or if Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to them and their fathers.

This appears to describe a prisoner-of-war scenario. Solomon understood that God did not bless efforts in battle when His people had sinned. Solomon asked God to forgive and rescue them when they repented and turned back to Him.

3. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance.

Another consequence of sin might be drought. When God afflicted the nation in this manner until they acknowledged their sin, Solomon was again asking for forgiveness. He saw this pattern as a training effort, to “teach them the good way in which they should walk,” so God’s blessings could continue in their land.

4. When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands to this temple: then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men), that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

This list was more comprehensive, and included both natural disasters and human oppression—all of which were designed by God to bring His people to repentance. We should notice Solomon’s understanding that in this training process God dealt not only with the entire nation (“by all Your people Israel”), but also on an individual level (“when each one knows his own burden and his own grief”).

5. Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched

arm, when they come and pray in this temple; then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.

Solomon here asked God to respond to foreigners who had heard of His power and who traveled—sometimes great distances—to pray in the temple.

6. When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name, then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

This request applied to those times when the Israelites were away from Jerusalem. When the people could not actually go to the temple, Solomon asked God to accept prayers that were prayed “toward the city.”

7. When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near; yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, and have committed wickedness'; and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place.

In this final request, Solomon was addressing the most serious matter of all. Unlike the training process described earlier, he knew there might come a point when the people had sinned so grievously that God would become angry with them—so much so that He would send them into captivity. Even in this extreme situation, Solomon once again asked for forgiveness if the people would repent “with all their heart and soul,” and if they would pray toward the land God had given to their fathers and toward the temple Solomon had built.

God’s first response to these prayers was to send fire from heaven which consumed the offering on the altar. He also again filled the temple with His glory. Seeing this, the people fell on their faces and worshipped God, and then continued their sacrifices and feasting for another seven days. Finally Solomon “sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the good that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel” (II Chronicles 7:10).

Some time later, however, in the privacy of his bedroom, God responded a second time to Solomon regarding some of the requests he had made. It is in this conversation that we find the “If My people” promise.

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Solomon and God both understood that natural disasters were sent as instruments of training, disciplinary measures designed to root out pride and the other "wicked ways" of the people. But then God brought up Solomon's request #7, and here we find a very different response from that which the king had sought.

. . . . But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, "Why has the Lord done thus to this land and this house?" Then they will answer, "Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them."

Normal human pride and "wicked ways" required only a chastening hand. However, the deliberate choice not only to forsake God and His commandments, but also to worship and serve other gods, was an entirely different category of evil. Solomon in his request had mentioned that it might make God angry, but he probably did not realize the extent of that anger. God promised that should the people rebel in this fashion, not only would He send them into captivity, but He would also destroy the very temple He had once inhabited, making it an object of scorn for all who passed by.

As we read on in the Old Testament, we find that this is exactly what took place. After many, many warnings through His prophets, God reached the point of no return and gave the people over to these foreign gods and the nations who served them. While nearly all of the prophetic books carry some aspect of this theme, a good example is found in Jeremiah, where the prophet is pleading with God to forgive the sinful Israelites.

Have You utterly rejected Judah?
Has Your soul loathed Zion?
Why have You stricken us so that there is no healing for us?
We looked for peace, but there was no good;
And for the time of healing, and there was trouble.
We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness
And the iniquity of our fathers,
For we have sinned against You.
Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake;
Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory.
Remember, do not break Your covenant with us. (Jeremiah 14:19-21)

There had been times that God had been swayed by this argument. Once when He was ready to destroy the Israelites for their faithlessness, Moses had intervened.

Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: “Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Exodus 32:11-14)

But now even the mention of disgrace in the eyes of other nations, or the reminder of the covenant itself, could not change God’s determination to judge His people. Here is His response to Jeremiah’s plea.

Then the Lord said to me, “Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. And it shall be, if they say to you, ‘Where should we go?’ then you shall tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord:

“Such as are for death, to death;
And such as are for the sword, to the sword;
And such as are for the famine, to the famine;
And such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.” (Jeremiah 15:1-2)

As we look back across the centuries at this dramatic display of wrath, we may have a tendency to see this as only Israel’s problem. But I believe the wiser approach is to see it as revealing God’s eternal nature. He is indeed a compassionate father who disciplines His children so they might be freed from their bent toward wickedness. But in a far higher sense, He is almighty God who in the end cannot compromise His own honor and holiness.

Thus when He allowed a nation to be “called by His name,” they were given a sacred trust and a solemn responsibility to bear that name faithfully. The decision of Israel to scorn and reject the God of their fathers to follow other gods was something much greater than human-level sin—it was divine adultery, and after much warning, God unleashed His righteous wrath against them.

I personally believe the United States of America is a nation birthed out of a specific desire to worship the Christian God. Among other things, our government was established with a deep respect for Christian virtue and truth, and over the years we have received great favor from the Creator. If there has in fact been another nation besides Israel upon whom God has imprinted His name, the United States would arguably be that nation.

But even if you believe it is wrong to call our nation a “Christian” nation (or more accurately, a “previously Christian” nation), there can be little question that God has chosen to put His name on

those who are in His church, regardless of their nationality. James quotes Amos regarding this matter in Acts 15:16-17:

After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
Even *all the Gentiles who are called by My name*,
Says the Lord who does all these things.

It's fairly safe to conclude that our nation as a whole is rapidly losing most of the vestiges of its Christian origins. But the question comes, will God yet honor the repentance of "we His people who are called by His name" in our day? Can the church itself, through authentic humility and fervent prayer and the abandonment of our wicked ways, draw upon His mercy even as Abraham persuaded God to spare Sodom for the sake of a few faithful believers (see Genesis 18)?

Or are we entering a season of exile and persecution, a time when the judgments of God will begin (as foretold in I Peter 4:17) in God's own house? If I have a valid understanding of those words He spoke to Solomon in the quiet of the night thousands of years ago, then the crux of our answer as well depends on our loyalty to Jehovah as being our true and only god.

In other words, the critical question is this: is God still fully god of His church? I am becoming convinced that very few of us really understand what a false god is. We tend to think in terms of the little idols or the Asherah poles so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, and find comfort in our disinterest in such objects. If we go no further than this, we may be at serious risk of missing God's actual displeasure with us and may in fact be candidates for His just retribution.

We will return to this question later, but first I want to consider another common response to the prospect of pending judgment, which is the assumption that God will supernaturally rescue His people out of it. Many believe that because we live in the era of grace, we no longer have any reason to concern ourselves with the multitude of scriptural warnings. In the next chapter we will examine one of the focal points of this assumption, the belief in a "pre-tribulation" rapture that would remove true believers out of harm's way during God's end-time judgments.

Chapter 3 - What About the Rapture?

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

It will be a moment of unspeakable glory and wonder, foretold by the angels to the disciples as they stared at the clouds where they had last seen Jesus. “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Unlike His first entry as an infant, the re-entrance of Christ into the earth’s atmosphere will be much different. Jesus will descend from heaven in the clouds. The “dead in Christ” will then gather with Him, having been raised from somewhere (we don’t know exactly where). Then “we who are alive and remain” on earth will join them, never to be separated again.

There is a popular idea which teaches that the rapture will happen quietly, that Christ will catch away His followers in order to spare them from the great trials which are to take place in the final days of history. I believe this is contrary not only to the word of scripture, but also to the pattern of God’s dealings with His people throughout history.

The scriptures are not hard to understand. You see, Jesus’ own disciples wanted to know about the end times, and He was not reluctant to explain in detail what will happen.

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to

those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:3-31)

The progression is quite clear in this passage. First, the world will enter a season of sorrows, with deceptions, international wars, and natural disasters. Next there will be a time of "tribulation" involving persecution, betrayals, and martyrdoms. It seems evident that this sorrow and stress will especially affect those who follow Christ. Yet somehow during this time the gospel will be preached to all nations.

This period will escalate into "great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." It will be characterized by extreme deceptions, so powerful that even the elect will be in danger of being deceived. This is our enemy's greatest hour—which God Himself permits, but which He also "shortens." When God's purposes have been accomplished, He will then rapture His church.

Paul refers to this same sequence (of tribulation before the rapture) in his second letter to the Thessalonians.

Now, brethren, *concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first*, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (II Thessalonians 2:1-4)

The day of Christ's return will be no ordinary day. On the contrary, He specifically said His coming will be preceded by terrifying changes in nature: the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of stars, and great earthquakes. We find that same description elsewhere, for example in Joel 2:10,11:

The earth quakes before them,
The heavens tremble;
The sun and moon grow dark,
And the stars diminish their brightness.
The Lord gives voice before His army,
For His camp is very great;
For strong is the One who executes His word.
For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible;
Who can endure it?

There will also be nothing confusing or secretive about His appearing.

For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. (Luke 17:24).

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:30,31)

An earlier writer described it in this manner:

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God will shine forth.
Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent;
A fire shall devour before Him,
And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.

He shall call to the heavens from above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His people:
"Gather My saints together to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."
Let the heavens declare His righteousness,
For God Himself is Judge. (Psalms 50:2-6)

Some have argued that God has historically rescued His people in times of disaster, and thus we too will be spared the hardships of the tribulation. They point to such incidents as the story of Noah (Genesis 6-8) or of Rahab (Joshua 6). This is where the distinction we examined earlier is helpful. There are two reasons God sends sufferings and disasters. The first is to train and to purify; the second is to punish. God is not angry with His children, but He is very serious about chastening us so we will become holy (see Proverbs 3:11,12 and Revelation 3:19). His wrath will be directed against those who have rejected Him and will follow after the rapture.

From what we are told, when the Day of the Lord arrives (heralded by the appearing of Christ in the clouds), most of God's saints will be caught up with Him into the heavens, having been purified during the preceding time of tribulation (the Greek word for tribulation, *thlipsis*, literally means pressure). However, Revelation speaks of 144,000 Israelites who will be "sealed" and thus somehow protected through the unprecedented season of God's wrath (*orge*, which means violent anger or vengeance).

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed. (Revelation 6:15-7:4)

Immediately after these men are sealed, John sees "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" Then one of the elders asks him, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" When John cannot answer, the elder explains, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-14)

For anyone who believes the testimony of scripture, the rapture must be accepted as a certain event. However I believe those who participate in it, who "are alive and remain" when Christ comes to gather them to Himself, will have been purified through the intense tribulation pressure. If we are wise, we will not allow ourselves to be deceived by the idea that we may be whisked away before the distresses come. What better tactic than this could our enemy have contrived to ensure that many, many people will be unprepared when the time of testing comes?

Nor can we allow ourselves to be lulled by the common argument that since every generation has thought they were in the end times and all of them have been wrong, why should we think ours will be different? In Peter's final words to the church, this very possibility was heavy on his heart.

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all

things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (II Peter 3:1-13)

The Day of the Lord is definitely coming. I personally believe it is coming very soon. If I am right, then Peter’s question is the most important one we can ask: “What manner of persons ought we to be in holy conduct and godliness?” But before we answer this, let us look a little more closely at what the Bible teaches us about the nature of the approaching Day.

Chapter 4 - The Day of the Lord

There are two prevalent themes throughout scripture which describe the Day of the Lord. First, it will be a day of unspeakable wrath and vengeance. But also, it will be a day of powerful restoration and grace. I think the easiest way to join these together is simply to see them as sequential. God will pour out His wrath following the rapture, after which Christ and the saints will return to earth to rule for the thousand-year “day” that is the final portion of human history.

The Old Testament prophets depict the coming wrath with remarkable consistency. While some of these warnings may also have applied to the pending judgments faced by Israel and Judah at that time, I believe their universal scope and dramatic severity point to a supernatural outpouring of wrath which is better fitted to the end-time context.

Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. (Isaiah 13:9-10)

Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground. (Jeremiah 25:32-33)

“Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,” says the Lord God. “Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 38:19-23)

Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. (Joel 2:1-2)

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18-20)

The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of

trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. (Zephaniah 1:14-16)

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch.” (Malachi 4:1)

Certain details of this season of wrath reverberate through the scriptures. For example, God’s fury is frequently characterized by great physical poverty, including what Ezekiel calls “the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction” (Ezekiel 5:16). There is also a description in Joel 2 of an eerie army that will sweep over the land.

A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. . . Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. . . The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

Many of the prophecies speak of a great shaking of the earth, where mountains are leveled or even melted.

A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. (Psalms 97:3-5)

The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, the world and all who dwell in it. (Nahum 1:5)

The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. (Micah 1:4)

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (II Peter 3:10)

Some have speculated that this will involve some kind of nuclear event. Zechariah 14:12 fearsomely supports this possibility.

And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.

The residues from these explosions may in fact be responsible for what two of the prophets call “the day of clouds and thick darkness” (Joel 2:2 and Zephaniah 1:15) which will effectively prevent any light from the sun, moon or stars from reaching the earth.

Of course, the most extensive description of this time of wrath is found in chapters eight through eighteen of the book of Revelation. Here we find stories not only of unspeakable hardship and disaster, but also of mighty battles fought both on earth and in the realm of the supernatural.

But eventually, the holy anger of God will be satisfied.

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” (Revelation 19:1-2)

Yet despite the extensive devastation, the earth not only still exists, but there are people who have survived all the destruction. It is at this point (according to the account in Revelation) that Christ re-enters our history as the conquering King.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Revelation 19:11-16)

As we can see, this King will be anything but gentle with His enemies. He apparently arrives at the scene of Armageddon, which is described in detail in Ezekiel 38 and 39. He and His armies capture the beast and the false prophet, cast them into the lake of fire, and destroy all their followers. Next, an angel from heaven chains up Satan and shuts him up in the bottomless pit where he will remain for the duration of the Millennium (see Revelation 20:1-3).

In addition to the army of saints, Christ also brings with Him those who are to rule. If we read Revelation chronologically, the beast arises to power after the rapture. These rulers may thus be (or at least include) the 144,000 who were sealed through that season, but who immediately thereafter appear in heaven—probably because they are finally martyred (see Revelation 13:11 through 14:5).

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God,

who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)

At this point Revelation skips directly to the end of the Millennium. However, the prophecies of the Old Testament give us many insights to what these years will look like. The primary characteristic of this era will be the centrality of Christ. Consider again this passage from Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist. (Isaiah 11:2-5)

As a result of His sovereign protection and perfect judgments, there will be great tranquility.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11:6-7)

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. (Isaiah 54:13-15)

It will also be a season of plenty and a time of healing.

Then He will give the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures. . . . Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound. (Isaiah 30:23,26)

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be

unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. (Isaiah 35:4-6)

As I examined the many prophetic passages in preparation for this writing I gradually became aware of a strong, consistent pattern. In almost every discussion there was a specific mention of either Israel, Judah, or both. It then dawned on me that this final “day” of history will actually be the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham.

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:7-8)

After four thousand years that witnessed the continual failures of His people, and after the fullness of the punishments God promised they would receive if they broke their side of the covenant, their Messiah will finally come to the children of Jacob and will gather them from the ends of the earth back to their promised land.

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. . . .Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.” (Isaiah 43:1,5-7)

For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord—for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. (Jeremiah 31:11-12)

“In those days and in that time,” says the Lord, “The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; with continual weeping they shall come, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces toward it, saying, ‘Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that will not be forgotten.’” (Jeremiah 50:4-5)

“I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward. The Gentiles shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they were unfaithful to Me, therefore I hid My face from them. I gave them into the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and hidden My face from them.” Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be

jealous for My holy name—after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their own land and no one made them afraid. When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," says the Lord God. (Ezekiel 39:21-29)

Thus says the Lord: "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain." Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness." (Zechariah 8:3,7,8)

I realize some people have associated this promised gathering of Israel with the events that took place in 1948. However, it should be noted that there is much in these passages that does not yet apply. For one thing, many descendents of Jacob did not return to Jerusalem at that time. Also, it is certainly not yet true that those now living in Jerusalem "sorrow no more at all."

Moreover, scripture speaks of a "great highway" that will be built in that day, upon which God's people will travel in safety, with no danger of being lost.

A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:8-10)

One of the significant features of the Messiah's kingdom will be the presence of a glorious new temple, which will be both the center of His government and a place of great peace.

Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. (Zechariah 6:12-13)

For thus says the Lord of hosts: "Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the Lord of hosts. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the Lord of hosts. "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:6-9)

Probably the most miraculous aspect of this Messianic reign, however, will be the changes He will make in the hearts of His people. After six thousand years of evidence that humans cannot purify themselves, God promises to make them holy.

For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart. (Jeremiah 24:6-7)

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:24-28)

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. (Zephaniah 3:11-13)

There is much more to be learned about the Millennial kingdom in scripture, and I encourage you to search it out. However, there is one last observation I need to make. The ancestors of most of the people we consider to be Jews today originally populated Jerusalem and the region south of it, commonly called the Southern Kingdom or the Kingdom of Judah. Many more of Jacob's descendants lived in the Northern Kingdom (known also as the Kingdom of Israel), and after they were captured by the Assyrians they became dispersed into unknown places.

For this reason, it is hard for us to say who the children of Jacob actually are in modern times. Many nations have claimed to be in their lineage, but only God knows His people with certainty. Nonetheless, there is consistent mention of both Israel and Judah in these prophecies. We know too that the 144,000 who will be sealed will come from all twelve tribes. Jesus Himself told His disciples, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). James wrote his letter to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1).

Then there is this cryptic comment that Hosea makes:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," there it shall be said to them, "You are sons of the living God." Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint

for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel! (Hosea 1:10-11)

It's even possible that God may resurrect His people in that day, if we are to believe this prophecy from Ezekiel:

Therefore prophesy and say to them, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,' says the Lord." (Ezekiel 37:12-14)

Thus it is unwise for us to say with certainty what God has planned for this final act in earthly human history. But it will be a long and wonderful era, both for the Israelites and for others who are alive during these years. For in fact, scripture tells us that many will come to worship the King in Jerusalem.

The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also." Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" (Zechariah 8:21-23)

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things. (Acts 15:16-17)

Chapter 5 - No Other Gods

When we read descriptions of the coming tribulation, or when we see a movie depicting Armageddon, it may all seem completely surreal. We think about the terrorizing events, we see the catastrophic scenes on the screen, and it puts a chill in our spine. But in the end, when we shut the book or when we walk out of the theater, nothing has really changed in our lives. We go safely home to our beds.

I once read an account of the people who were trapped in the Superdome after the ravages of hurricane Katrina. Some of them became catatonic, that is, they were completely immobilized by the unreality of their circumstances. Nothing had prepared them for actually living through an actual disaster of that magnitude.

An honest reading of the Bible should make us aware of God's deep concern to warn us of events that could very possibly take place in our lifetime. But because we view so many disasters on a daily basis that don't affect us, we have become "immunized" against the idea of them touching us personally. From another side, some Christians who focus on the grace of God and His blessings see the unpleasantnesses of life as simply attacks of a defeated enemy which can be prayed or even commanded away. They too don't expect God to let them suffer deeply.

While God does sometimes perform miracles of deliverance—especially to demonstrate His power to unbelievers who are seeking Him or to those who are young in their Christian walk—He often seems more concerned to bring His "older" children into full maturity through the pressures (*thlipsis*) He permits them to go through. It is this strengthening process which actually equips us not only to survive the increasing challenges of our times, but also to discern and resist the very real attempts of our enemy to destroy our faith.

Another belief held in some Christian circles is that God intends the church to eventually bring His kingdom to this world by means of our faithful efforts. But Jesus specifically told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). I personally find the consistent picture of scripture—even in the New Testament—to be that of a righteous remnant in an evil and unregenerate world. The subsequent testimony of history also offers only occasional sparks of societal sanctity which are quickly reabsorbed by the darkness.

If in our day the kingdom of God is only "at hand," and if it will not be fully realized until the Millennial Day, then I believe we should pay careful attention to the instructions we have been given regarding how to live within that darkness. Even more, if we are in fact now nearing the end times, then we should be soberly aware that the previous "restraining" of God's Spirit is now being "taken out of the way" (II Thessalonians 2:6,7), resulting in a far more powerful reign of darkness than we have heretofore known.

If all we had to deal with was our ordinary wickedness—our lust and selfishness and dishonesty and pride—that would be challenge enough. But as we learned in chapter two, the far more dangerous temptation (both for the Israelites then and for us in our day) is to be drawn after other gods. It is clear that God specifically protects those (such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) who honor Him and do not bow to other deities. If we too wish to be preserved in an increasingly pagan

society where we are being continually invited—and sometimes even compelled—to follow other gods, then it is vital that we be able to identify those gods.

What exactly is a “god”? We are wrong if we think of a false god only in terms of mythical creatures or carved statues. Something becomes a god when it plays a certain role in our lives. A god provides the standard against which we determine the value of everything else. A god is usually given a significant part of our attention, our energy, our time and our resources—in other words, we tend to conform ourselves and our lives to whatever the god represents or requires. This is because we truly believe it will provide us with security, with comfort, with pleasure, and with personal worth.

By way of example, here are seven of the many “other gods” I see being worshipped in our contemporary culture.

1. Wealth. This god is easily understood. Paul warned Timothy, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (I Timothy 6:9-10) Those who pursue wealth tend to order their lives around it, to find their pleasure primarily in its increase, and to depend on it for their significance and security.

2. The environment. While aspects of the environment have been worshipped throughout history (e.g. sun worship), modern environmentalism tends to go beyond this. It combines two assumptions: first, that nature is divine, and second, that humans are only one among many components of nature (and a troublesome component at that). In this religious system, virtue resides primarily in services that benefit some pristine concept of the natural world, and people are far less important than the planet.

3. Health. Similar to environmentalism, the religion of health sets the human body as the center of what is sacred. Exercise and diet and beauty treatments define virtuous living. Fat is a moral failure. Smoking is sin and needs to be punished. To grow old is to lose your authority and even your value.

4. Technology. There was a time in the past century when people were convinced that science could be trusted to solve all problems. In the aftermath of the world wars that hope has lessened. However, technology is still a central part of our culture’s pursuit of both significance and safety. Technology is largely responsible for our sense of ourselves as being little more than a set of passwords and PIN numbers, orbiting some nebulous computerized deity that wisely controls our destiny.

5. Entertainment. Perhaps the most powerful of modern gods, entertainment has all but bought our souls. Very few of us can walk through a day without seeking after something designed to make us laugh or cry or cheer or shudder. We pour millions of dollars and hours on the altars of entertainment. Our finest sons and daughters are given to its worship.

6. Liberty. Unlike the freedom Christ offers—the freedom not to sin, the freedom to become fully alive in Him—our culture encourages us to demand freedom from restraint. We are deceived into thinking that unrestrained humans will make choices that are good not only for themselves but for

all of society. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, much passion is invested in this grasping for liberation as the answer to our miseries.

7. Spirituality. Fascination with the supernatural can express itself in everything from an infatuation with angels to deep immersion in the occult. What it rarely considers is the stark biblical emphasis on sin and redemption, preferring the softer lines of esoteric insight or emotion-laden experience.

In most cases, all it takes to determine if one or more of these has become a god to us is to deliberately turn our attention away from it for at least a few weeks. This will reveal the hold it has on us—physically, financially, emotionally, or spiritually. It's one thing to say we can walk away from something; it can be far more difficult to really do it. Many of these priorities and activities have been with us all our lives, possibly passed on to us by our parents. They not only are well entwined into our daily schedules and habits, but they often represent an important part our self-identity. We don't know who we would be without them.

Yet it is precisely at this point that the warnings of scripture are most needed. If in fact the "beginning of sorrows" is actually approaching, then *it will actually matter if we are actually ready*. For example, if we cannot practically function—or maybe even more importantly, if we cannot emotionally survive—without our computers and televisions and cellphones, we will either be at risk of becoming catatonic in a crisis, or else we will easily give in to someone who takes them away from us and then offers them back if we'll simply "bow down."

It is my strong conviction that these present years have been given to us as a time of preparation. During this season of relative calm, the trials we do encounter should be recognized as God's custom-crafted training program to purify and equip each of us for the days ahead. In every specific situation of our lives He is working to increase our knowledge of His ways, to sharpen our ability to hear His voice, to improve our response time when He asks us to obey, and to help us "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares" (Hebrews 12:1).

This training has really not been optional for any true child of God in any generation. Back in Zephaniah's day, Jerusalem was judged for four very specific failures:

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the Lord, she has not drawn near to her God. (Zephaniah 3:1-2)

If God required these things of a people who only heard His voice occasionally through the words of a few prophets, how much more does He require them from those of us in whom His very Spirit resides?

Yet while it is vitally important for us to recognize the value of this time of preparation for the coming tribulation, we must also never forget that on another level we are already at war. Our enemy has always been relentless in his efforts to defeat God's purposes on earth, and he continually attacks us on every possible front—ever seeking to deceive and to destroy those who have chosen to follow Christ. Unless we are very careful to set our hearts and minds on the things of God daily, even hourly, there are many traps into which we can fall.

1. We can be distracted by signs. God is not the only source of supernatural manifestations in our world, and for many this can become a place of dangerous confusion.

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods”—which you have not known—“and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (II Thessalonians 2:9,10)

2. We can be enticed by our families. While God established family loyalty as a high priority, it should never be the highest. Jesus told His disciples, “Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Obedience to God Himself must supersede every human tie.

If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods,” which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him. (Deuteronomy 13:6-8)

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. (I Kings 11:4)

Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (Luke 12:51-53)

3. We can be lulled by our “fat.” Often prosperity can bring a false sense of security and of our own competence. We then may choose to turn from the costliness of following God, not realizing we do this to our own peril.

Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. (Deuteronomy 31:19-20)

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19)

4. We can follow the inclinations of our hearts. Our generation has been taught to trust our instincts. It takes discipline, determination, and humility to consistently give the principles and priorities of the Lord precedence over our own understandings and desires.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Thus says the Lord: ‘In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and walk after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing.’” (Jeremiah 13:8-10)

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. (Jeremiah 17:5-6)

Each of these snares comes to us in the form of ordinary choices. While the circumstances (and the decisions they require) are sometimes large and obvious, often they are small and subtle. But to see them as anything other than eternally significant is to miss the fearsome warning of scripture. We cannot know what we know and dare to disregard it.

The picture I have drawn of the end of the age is not Hollywood or science fiction or mythology, but comes out of my study of God’s revealed word and from my actual observations of our present world. If the end of the “sixth day” is as near as I believe it to be, you will either be prepared—or you will not be prepared—for what will inevitably be the most traumatic period human history has ever known.

For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it? (Joel 2:11)

Chapter 6 - His Glory Revealed

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 40:4-5)

Thus says the Lord, “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it.” (Isaiah 56:1-2)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:18,19)

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (I Peter 4:12-14)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (I John 3:1-3)

We have an understandable propensity when discussing the end times to think primarily of their impact on us. But this approach results in a distorted view, for it takes our mind away from the fact that God is the true center of everything. All of creation and all of human history only make sense to the extent that we acknowledge His centrality. As we explained in the opening chapter, God created the human race specifically to bring into the universe an expanded manifestation of His glory.

At the same time, God also desired to demonstrate to us (and to the angels) the magnitude of His own eternal power and divine love. To accomplish this, He devised a background against which these would be most vividly revealed. He allowed humanity to go through what I believe to be the three phases of history: the pre-law phase when we simply followed the “intents of the thoughts of our hearts” (Genesis 6:5); the season of the law when we knew what we should do but lacked the power to do it; and the season of grace wherein we now have been given both the standard and the empowerment.

In each of these eras there have been some people who have been able to see and know God—a few in phase one, more in phase two, and many more in phase three. But the time will come when God will reveal Himself fully to all people. In the final Day of history, everyone will understand His power and His love—although it appears that even then some will choose not to obey.

When we consider the miracle of the incarnation—of Christ’s birth into humanity—we begin to comprehend a very important aspect of God’s nature, which was His willingness to leave heaven to walk among us and to fully embrace the miseries and humiliations of our world. We also see in His earthly life a radical demonstration of perfect wisdom, perfect strength, perfect compassion, and perfect obedience. But it was through Christ’s death and resurrection that the greatest revelation was accomplished.

It will require all of eternity for us to fathom the profound glories that reside in this sacrifice of God for a lost and undeserving world. As He willingly went to the cross, Jesus took into His pure being the full vileness of our sins, choosing to receive in His body the wages of wrath that we ourselves deserved. He thereby not only conquered death, but also purchased for us a share in His own reward. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a greater manifestation of power or a clearer expression of love.

It is for this reason that I believe the seasons of history hinge upon that event, and accordingly that the final Kingdom era will soon be upon us. It has produced in me great soberness, but also a great sense of anticipation. I am presently sixty years old. By the end of that same length of time, another sixty years, the rule of Christ on this earth may be well underway!

When we deliberately back away from the details of our lives and begin to consider the broad strokes of history and of scriptural revelation, we are better able to evaluate our circumstances in the context of God’s divine planning. For example, whenever I read the book of Ezekiel I am astonished by the number of times (I count 67) where God says, “...then you [or they, or the nations, or Egypt, or Israel] shall know that I am the Lord.” All of the events and warnings in that book were permitted—and recorded—for one overriding purpose: that we might know He is God.

This realization requires a shift in a very basic part of my thinking. I (and probably many others) tend to view history as the framework out of which the United States was established and in which it is sustained. The prospect of our nation being swept away is not easily envisioned. And yet God views us, just as He did the people in Ezekiel’s day, through the perspective of His own centrality. If He was willing to destroy Israel, His proclaimed chosen nation, how much more will He reject us as He witnesses our growing rejection of Him?

By moving from the grid of self-centrality to one of God-centrality, we are also able to better understand why God will allow believers to go through a time of intense purification just prior to the rapture. Christ paid the ultimate price for His bride, and she must be fully cleansed and radiantly beautiful in preparation for Him. Anything less than this would diminish the grandest marriage ceremony ever to take place, of which our most lavish weddings are but a pale shadow.

When we finally accept the truth that God does not exist primarily for our benefit—although of course our relationship with Him does benefit us greatly—but rather that we exist because it brings honor and pleasure to Him, then we can begin to comprehend the cosmic and eternal impact of our personal choices. In other words, our decision not to sin in a certain situation doesn’t merely lessen our risk of discipline (or eventually, punishment), it actually adds in some small measure to the eternal revealed glory of God.

With this new lens in place, our vision of the approaching end times is changed dramatically, and we begin to see why the writer of Hebrews specifically admonishes us to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25). Rather than focusing on some plan of self-defense, in which we essentially “hunker down” as the enemy forces increase, God calls His church to stand strong and fearless, specifically so His final harvest can be gathered.

We have as our model Jesus Himself. In the days leading up to His crucifixion, He consistently cared for the people He was with. He washed His disciples’ feet, served them the bread and cup, and then prayed over them one of the most powerful prayers ever prayed. He counseled Peter (in Luke 22:31,32) regarding the test he was about to face. He healed the high priest’s servant’s ear. Then on the cross, with His life draining from Him, He forgave the thief and made provision for the care of His mother. He even asked His Father to forgive His executioners.

Nevertheless, the only way any of us can truly follow Christ’s example of “love and good works” is if we authentically have His nature within us. I believe that the radical pressures which are presently mounting in our society will eventually produce two very distinct groups of people. One group of people will focus on saving their lives. The other group will choose to give their lives away. Today these groups are intermingled, and some people might even seem to have a foot in both camps.

But as the days progress, the soul-level priority in each of us will be made evident.

For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43-45)

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” (Matthew 16:24-27)

Paul also describes this division quite bluntly in Romans 2:4-11.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone

who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

As the gathering clouds of apostasy continue to darken this final hour of history, God is now stirring the hearts of His people to become the visible manifestation of His truth and holiness and love in this world. As this happens, we will encounter two very dramatic responses. We will either be the “fragrance of Christ” to those who are looking for truth, or we will be the “aroma of death” to those who prefer the gods of this world (see II Corinthians 2:14-16). We will be loved, and we will be hated.

As I understand it, this true body of believers will not be contained within any denomination, but instead will be scattered across the religious landscape. Nevertheless, as the season of tribulation intensifies, I believe we will begin to find each other, to nourish each other both spiritually and practically, and to work together to find those who will join the family of God in these closing hours.

What will these end-time believers look like? Here is what I see.

1. They will have a deep reverence for the entire Bible. Much of the distinctive power of biblical Christianity has been polluted by the influx of secular ideas into both the structure and practice of modern churches. In part this is because many modern Christians have little knowledge of God’s word beyond what might be called the “happy verses.” I believe the end-time church will emulate the early church—who “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42)—in order to accurately understand God’s principles and properly obey His instructions.

2. They will seek to live in radical purity. Rather than concerning themselves with the external appearance of righteousness, believers will be deeply grieved by anything within themselves that displeases their Lord. They will also realize the danger of any moral compromise, for they will understand their vulnerability to the enemy in precisely those places.

3. They will no longer indulge in worldly amusements. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?... ‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘Do not touch what is unclean.’” (II Corinthians 6:14,17). No longer will God’s people give their time or attention or resources to anything that depletes His power in their lives. They will understand that they are at war, and that as His soldiers they cannot “entangle themselves” with anything other than that which is required by the battle (II Timothy 2:4).

4. They will be unaffected by humiliation or rejection. Jesus, we are told, had no regard for the shame of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). As their awareness of God’s presence and His approval increases, the weight of the opinions of everyone else—even of their own families—will diminish. Instead, their hearts will be passionately directed to finding others who also need to know they are valuable in the eyes of God.

5. They will understand and embrace godly authority. Scripture warns that in the last days people will develop a hatred for authority (see II Peter 2:10, Jude 8). But alongside those who reject authority will be those who lean too heavily on false authorities. A false leader can usually be

distinguished by his desire to make disciples for himself (Acts 20:30). True leaders endeavor to make those whom they lead increasingly less dependent on them and more fully connected to God.

6. They will restore godly manhood and womanhood. One of the most damaging aspects of our modern culture is the dramatic depletion of true masculinity and femininity. In a world of womanly men and manly women, the beauty of God's chosen model for Christ and His church has been nearly obliterated. This inversion of the sexes is also costing us the engagement of men in the serious matters of real life. I believe the end-time church will intentionally oppose these distortions.

7. They will expect the supernatural. The severe realities of Satan's expanding power on earth will require God's people to draw on God's greater strength. Scripture tells us that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (II Chronicles 16:9). I believe we will see miracles not only like those that were performed in Jesus' day, but also some that are even more dramatic (John 14:12).

As God's people exhibit these and other countercultural characteristics, the world will clearly witness the glorious nature of Christ. It will be a time of venomous hatred and persecution—and a time of joyous adding to the community of God. It will be a time of suffering, of the loss of worldly goods, even of martyrdom—and a time of stronger friendships and of sweeter communion with God than this generation has ever experienced.

You see, when Jesus purchased "eternal life" for us, He actually accomplished two things. First, because of His sacrifice we who are His family will enjoy life without end in the realms of heaven. But in the upper room Jesus also prayed a very significant prayer. "*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*" (John 17:3). John reiterated this revelation, "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (I John 5:11,12).

I believe the most powerful aspect of the end-time community of Christians is that we will know God in the same way that the truest saints throughout time have known Him. We will thereby become the living manifestation of the church which Paul envisioned in his letter to the Ephesians, a church which has come "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" and which, "speaking the truth in love, [will] grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:13-16).

This is a description of Christ's bride. It is the revealed glory of God toward which all of our history has moved, a glory which also will soon flow out of history and will merge into the endless glories of heaven.

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean

and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

But prior to this final celebration, Christ will stand in righteous judgment to declare the final dividing of humanity.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:31,32)

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who 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, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Dear reader, that day will be a real day, more real in fact than any other day of our lives. We will have no more questions, no more doubts, no more arguments, no more choices. Each one of us will stand before Christ either gloriously clothed in His righteousness, or naked and without excuse. I beg you to ponder these realities deeply. Nothing matters more than this.