

Prophecy & Eschatology

By

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Introduction

The book of Revelation states that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). Therefore, as we begin this seminar, the place to begin is “prophecy” because that is the “testimony of Jesus.” From prophecy, we will go into what is termed as “eschatology,” which is made up of two Greek words: ἔσχατος (*eschatos*), which means “last or end,” and λόγιον (*logion*), which means “saying, revelation, or teaching.” Thus, when these two words are put together in “eschatology,” the meaning is “teaching/revelation of the end.” So before we begin to study about the “end,” we want to first of all study about the beginning with Jesus, through Whom all of existence came into being according to Scripture (Colossians 1:15-17).

It is very interesting to note, however, that oftentimes those who focus on “end times” teaching as a major emphasis of their ministry, do so with a de-emphasis of Jesus and a primary emphasis of events happening around them. Indeed, Jesus gave us some rather graphic word pictures of the events that would happen leading to the “eschaton” (i.e., end of time on this earth) both in the Gospels, as well as in the Book of Revelation, but there are two things that Jesus said with reference to “end times” that seem to be consistently forgotten and dismissed by such preachers and teachers, and they are found in the following scripture passages:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matthew 24:36)

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. (Acts 1:6-7)

Now we will unequivocally take a much deeper look at these two passages, as well as the verses and contexts surrounding each of them, but let it suffice to say for the moment that Jesus made it real clear that **NO ONE KNOWS WHEN HE IS COMING BACK!** He did not equivocate by saying that no one knows, “except some learned and insightful preachers and teachers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries” – no, He said, without any exceptions of time, men, etc., that **NO ONE KNOWS WHEN HE IS COMING BACK!**

Having laid that foundation, we are now ready to begin studying the prophetic promises that relate to Jesus’ first and second comings, and in doing so, we will also look at the Dead Sea Scrolls and some very amazing prophetic predictions relating to Jesus’ first coming that were

absolutely “right on the money” as far as their accuracy is concerned. We will also look at some of the predictions in the Dead Sea Scrolls relating to the “end times,” and we will observe that with those predictions, as well as more recent predictions within the last 170 years, Jesus was right – NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THE END WILL OCCUR AND WHEN HE WILL RETURN!

Prophecy Concerning Jesus' First Coming

From the beginning of the biblical revelation, we see glimpses of God's promise of a Savior to come who will deliver God's people from the penalty of sin, and who will provide an eternal relationship for those people with God. Therefore, we are going to look for some of these promises through the Old Testament according to its three major divisions: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. I say some of the promises because time does not permit us to do an in depth analysis. But the purpose of looking at the few scriptures we will examine concerning Jesus' first coming is to demonstrate that God's promises are ABSOLUTELY AND UNEQUIVOCALLY REAL AND TRUE, AND HE WILL KEEP THEM!

I. The Law

When we speak of the Books of the Law, we are referring to the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And the promise of the first coming of the Messiah we are going to look at in the Law is found in Genesis 49:8-12:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you.⁹ "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?¹⁰ "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.¹¹ "He ties *his* foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes.¹² "His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk. (Genesis 49:8-12)

As you read this passage, you will immediately see a connection with verse 11 and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem just prior to His crucifixion in the following passages: Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; & Luke 19:28-40. I will quote Matthew 21:1-11 for our reference:

And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,² saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied *there* and a colt with her; untie *them*, and bring *them* to Me.³ "And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.⁴ Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'⁶ And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed

them,⁷ and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat.⁸ And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road.⁹ And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"¹⁰ And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"¹¹ And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:1-11)

What is significant for us in this passage is that the specific prophecy being referred to in verse 5 is from Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." However, what is very interesting is that the precursor of this prophecy may be seen as Genesis 49:11: "He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes."

Therefore, as we look at the progression of this prophecy, from Jacob of his son Judah and his progeny, to Zechariah, to Jesus fulfilling this, we see God's thread of prophetic truth, that indeed, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). In addition to the colt in verse 11, we can see a very clear metaphor of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins as it says "He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes."

And not only are the above two aspects of prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, but also what is stated in verse 10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples." This whole phrase is both Messianic and eschatological, which is oftentimes what we find in biblical prophecy. The phrase, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" is describing the fact that both the human rule (i.e., kings of Judah, including David and Solomon) and the Messianic rule is going to come out of Judah.

The second phrase, "nor the ruler's staff from between his feet," is also of tremendous importance from both the Messianic and eschatological perspective. In the Hebrew, this phrase is written, **וּמִתְּקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו** (*ûmĕḥōqēq mibbên raglāyw*), and literally it is read, "and he intensely continues decreeing between His feet." The word, **מִתְּקֵק** (*mĕḥōqēq*), is what is called a polel participle, and it is the word that is translated "ruler's staff." Participles can be

translated as both a verb and a noun, and as a noun it is what is called a “substantive,” meaning, it substitutes for a real noun. In this particular instance, therefore, the Polel form of the Hebrew verb indicates intensive action, and the verb from which it comes is **חָקַק** (*ḥāqāq*), which means “to cut into, to inscribe, to engrave, to decree, to enact, and to prescribe (a law, etc.).” Thus, the term, “ruler’s staff” is a Hebrew idiom for this verb which means “someone who is continually ruling, unceasingly.” When translated as a verb, it means “one who intensely continues decreeing as a ruler.”

Therefore, as we put all of this together, and as we look at the context of this passage, which is expressing both a Messianic and eschatological perspective, it is saying that Jesus, the Messiah, is coming from the tribe of Judah, and both as Messiah and coming King at the end of the age, He will continue to be “decreeing” His truth, regardless of what the “god of this world” has done, is doing, or will do to attempt to silence and negate His power and authority – Jesus wins, and His authority and power are forever permanent (i.e., “between His feet,” which means it will never depart).

The third phrase in verse 10, “until Shiloh comes,” complements the previous two verses as far as its Messianic and eschatological perspectives. The actual phrase in Hebrew is a bit uncertain, but it reads, **עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילֹה** (*‘ad kî-yābō’ šîlōh*), and it is the word **שִׁילֹה** (*šîlōh*) that is the center of the problem. Since every Hebrew noun comes from a verb form, the problem is trying to determine which verb it is, as there are three reasonable possibilities: the first word means “to be quiet, prosperous, content, and at ease” – **שָׁלָה** (*šālâ*); the second means “to draw out” – **שָׁלַל** (*šālal*); and the third means “to spoil or plunder” – **שָׁלַל** (*šālal*). However, each of these is difficult to justify because of the form of **שִׁילֹה** (*šîlōh*).

However, between ca. 250 BC – 132 BC, Jewish, Rabbinical scholars undertook to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language, and the result was the Greek Old Testament called the Septuagint, which in Latin means 70, which represents the 72 Jewish scholars who first began this translation. What is interesting to note about the LXX (the Roman numeral for

70, and the sign consistently used for the Septuagint) is that it was this translation that was predominantly used by the writers of the New Testament when quoting the Old Testament. Thus, it was considered to be divinely authoritative by the Apostles and early Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. That being the case, when we look at the translation of this phrase in the LXX, we find the following rendering in the Greek: ἕως ἄν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκεείμενα αὐτῷ (*heōs an elthē ta apokeimena autō*) – “until the things that *are* reserved for Him come *to Him*.” The translators of the LXX came to this translation by translating the word שִׁלְהָ (šîlōh) as שְׁלָה (šellōh), and then dividing into three different Hebrew words: the first is the Hebrew relative particle שֶׁ (še), which means “that or which”; the Hebrew preposition לְ (L), which means “to”; and the pronominal suffix הָ (ōh), which means “him,” which is typically הֶ – ô, but the הָ (ōh) can simply be an archaic, alternative form of “him.” Thus, the reading, up to this point in the verse would be, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, and he will intensely continue decreeing between His feet, until the things that *are* reserved for Him come *to Him*.”

Now we come to the last phrase of this verse, “and to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples,” which, once again, speaks clearly of both Jesus’ Messianic coming, and His coming again as King of Kings – in the first instance as Messiah, it refers to all of those who will come to Him as their Lord and Savior, and in the second instance as King of Kings at His Second Coming, it refers to those described in Philippians 2:8-11 who will affirm Him to their own eternal judgment in Hell:

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

Thus, here in the Law, we see a passage that is both Messianic and eschatological that is focused on Jesus, His Person, and His ministry.

II. The Prophets

There are a plethora of passages in the Prophets that refer to both the first and second comings of Jesus, but the one that I want to focus on with regard to His first coming is Isaiah 53:

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. ⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? ⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. ¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. (Isa 53:1-12)

This passage may be said to be the quintessential prophetic passage of Jesus' first coming and just what that coming means for all humanity – it is self-explanatory.

III. The Writings

One of the books that is in the Writings is the Book of Psalms, and there are several passages in the Psalms that are prophetically related to Jesus' first coming, but we are going to look at only one:

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³² and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." ³³ He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened." ³⁴ All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable, ³⁵ so that what was spoken

through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." (Mat 13:31-35)

As we look at Psalm 78:2 in its context from which this quote was taken, we observe first of all that Psalm 78 is one of the longest Psalms in the Bible. Secondly, the message of Psalm 78 is about God's continued blessing and provision for the children of Israel, both in the wilderness, as well as after they were settled in the Promised Land. However, this Psalm also speaks of the continued and repeated rebellion against the Lord in so many ways by the people because their heart was hardened toward Him whenever they encountered difficult situations. Therefore, as Jesus is speaking to the Jews in parables, He is equating the Jews of His day to those who were in the wilderness and in the Promised Land, but who were also rebellious in their heart and blind in their mind to the things of God. Thus, what He is saying to them are truths that only the Holy Spirit can and will make real, and He will only make those truths real to those whose hearts are broken over their sin and are truly looking to the Lord for the salvation, support, strength, provision, and guidance. On the other hand, for those who are not looking to the Lord in this fashion, the words of the Kingdom that He is speaking appear to be mere "foolishness" to them, including the fact that all Scripture points to Him as the Promised Messiah!

IV. The Dead Sea Scrolls

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find what has been called by some a *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521), which dates back to the beginning of the 1st century BC at Qumran, some 100 years before Jesus' birth. What we read in this Hebrew document from Qumran is a repeat of Psalm 146:7-8, Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1 regarding the work and ministry of the coming Messiah, as well as what Jesus said of Himself over a hundred years later in Luke 4:16-21 where He went into the synagogue in Nazareth and read Isaiah 61:1-2, telling the people that "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), and in 7:18-23 where Jesus responded to John's disciples who were asking Him if He was indeed the coming Messiah:

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are downtrodden, ¹⁹ To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." ²⁰ And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat

down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

And the disciples of John reported to him about all these things. ¹⁹ And summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" ²⁰ And when the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'" ²¹ At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He granted sight to many who were blind. ²² And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them." ²³ "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." (Luke 7:18-23)

Concerning the last passage, John had already been imprisoned for rebuking Herod in public for having married his brother Philip's wife (Matthew 14:3-5), and as he was facing what he probably knew was going to be his death, coupled with all of the emotions that are related to one facing the end of his life, he was wanting to know for certain that Jesus, his cousin, was indeed the promised Messiah. Jesus responded by identifying Himself in a manner that made it abundantly clear that He was indeed the Promised Messiah by stating those things that were done through Him that identified Him as the Messiah.

Thus, we have two portions of Scripture in Luke in which Jesus was unequivocally proclaiming Himself to be the Promised Messiah. In the first He supported His claim by a direct reference to Scripture, and in the next, although He didn't quote any Scripture directly, He was clearly referring to the following passages in Psalms and in Isaiah that affirmed His Messiahship by the ministry being performed in and through Him:

Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free. ⁸ The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; The LORD raises up those who are bowed down; The LORD loves the righteous; (Psa 146:7-8)

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. (Isa 35:5-6)

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)

It is at this point that the *Messianic Apocalypse* from the Dead Sea Scrolls comes into focus in a very important and major way. As I stated initially, this manuscript was written about 100 BC, and it tells what the coming Messiah will do:

And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom, He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent] (Ps. 146:7–8). And f[or] ever I will clea[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy ... And the fr[uit ...] will not be delayed for anyone and the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He ...] For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor. (Vermes, Geza: *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Revised and extended 4th ed. [Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 412-413)

As we look at all of the above, you will notice that I underlined the things that are attributed to Jesus' Messiahship in the Old Testament passages, as well as to what Jesus attributed to Himself in Luke 7:22, and it is that portion that we will use as our guide, along with His quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19: (1) "blind receive sight"; (2) "lame walk"; (3) "lepers are cleansed"; (4) "deaf hear"; (5) "dead are raised up"; (6) and the "poor have the gospel preached to them." (7) "release to the captives"; (8) "set free those who are downtrodden"; (9) "proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

As we look at these nine aspects of the things Jesus attributed to Himself as demonstrating His Messiahship to the people, I am going to list beside them where they are found in the other Old Testament passages in Psalms and Isaiah, as well as the Messianic Apocalypse, in order to show you that those at Qumran clearly understood the role, purpose, and meaning of the first coming of Jesus, and they were only 100 years out from His being born! The significance of their prophecy, in my opinion, is that it was born of God and in complete agreement in this particular area concerning the person of the coming Messiah:

- 1) "blind receive sight" – Luke 7:22; Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 35:5; *Messianic Apocalypse*
- 2) "lame walk" – Luke 7:22; Isaiah 53:6
- 3) "lepers are cleansed" – Luke 7:22
- 4) "deaf hear" – Luke 7:22; Isaiah 35:5
- 5) "dead are raised up" – Luke 7:22; *Messianic Apocalypse*

- 6) “poor have the Gospel preached to them” – Isaiah 61:1; *Messianic Apocalypse*
- 7) “release to the captives” – Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1; *Messianic Apocalypse*
- 8) “set free those who are downtrodden” – Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1 (“brokenhearted”); Psalm 146:8; *Messianic Apocalypse* (“straitens the bent” & “heal the wounded”)
- 9) “proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” – Luke 4:19; Isaiah 61:2

Therefore, as we can see from our analysis, the Scripture is replete with accurate and specific prophecies of Jesus first coming, and even the *Messianic Apocalypse* was accurate in its anticipation of the coming Messiah and His role and ministry.

Prophecy Concerning Jesus’ Second Coming

As we come to this second area, however, we enter a completely different approach than the prophecies concerning Jesus’ first coming, and this is because of Jesus’ own words about it, which we have already quoted:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matthew 24:36)

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. (Acts 1:6-7)

The importance of the above two passages cannot be overstated, as many of us here, in our lifetime, have seen what might be described as a “plethora” of attempts to pinpoint when Jesus was supposed to come back based on various current events (i.e., after Israel became a nation on 5/14/48; the Six-Day war from 6/5/67-6/10/67; the assassination of Anwar Sadat on 10/6/81; the expulsion of the Shah of Iran and the installation of an Islamic state in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979; the 40 year generation theory from 1948-1988; Y-2K; the 40 year generation theory from 1967-2007; the terror attack of 9/11/2001; the election of Barack Obama; the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iranian President in 2005; and many more). However, this is not something new, as we will see, but it has been going on for at least 2000 years!

At this point, we are going to begin looking first at the Scripture that foretells the Second Coming of Jesus in both the Old and New Testaments, and then we will look at some attempts throughout history that have tried to pinpoint when Jesus was returning.

Old Testament

Prophecies

One of the most important Old Testament prophecies concerning the return of Christ and the reestablishment of Israel is found in Ezekiel 37-39. In chapter 37, we have an account of the nation of Israel being resurrected, and, without falling into the trap of eisegesis (i.e., reading into the text something that isn't there), I believe that most any knowledgeable and objective individual, be they a biblical or historical scholar, or any adult who has a solid grasp on Scripture and world history, would have to say that these chapters have and are happening before our very eyes. Below is a very succinct analysis of these chapters, verses by verses:

- 1) 37:1-14 – In these verses, we see both the political and spiritual revival of the Nation of Israel after it appeared that they were completely dead and forgotten:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. ³ And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'" ⁵ "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. ⁶ 'And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' ¹² "Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of

your graves, My people. ¹⁴ "And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD." (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

a) In the late 19th century, a movement called Zionism emerged under the direction of a man named Theodor Herzl, and his unabashed goal was the reestablishment of Israel in Palestine. In 1895, Herzl met with a wealthy Jewish businessman in Paris, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, and suggested to him the vision of the Jews once again having their own nation and flag, but Hirsch was unresponsive to the idea. That in turn led Herzl to strike out on his own:

The conversation was notable for its effect on Herzl rather than on the Baron de Hirsch, who refused to hear him out. It led to Herzl's famous pamphlet *The Jewish State*, published in February 1896 in Vienna. The Jewish question, he wrote, was not a social or religious question but a national question that could be solved only by making it "a political world question to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council." Some of Herzl's friends thought it a mad idea, but the pamphlet won favourable response from eastern European Zionist societies. In June 1896, when Herzl was en route to Constantinople (Istanbul) in the hope of talking to the Ottoman sultan about obtaining the grant of Palestine as an independent country, his train stopped in Sofia, Bulg.; hundreds of Jews were present at the station to greet Herzl and to hail him as a leader. Although he remained in Constantinople for 11 days, he failed to reach the Sultan. But he had begun the career as organizer and propagandist that would end only with his death eight years later. ((*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Herzl, Theodor")

Herzl next attempted to rally Jewish leaders in Great Britain to embrace his vision, but they were politely indifferent to his proposal. He then felt that what was needed was a worldwide counsel meeting of those who shared his same Zionist aspirations. He finally settled on Basel, Switzerland:

The congress met at the end of August 1897, attended by about 200 delegates, mostly from central and eastern Europe and Russia along with a few from western Europe and even the United States. They represented all social strata and every variety of Jewish thought—from Orthodox Jews to atheists and from businessmen to students. There were also several hundred onlookers, including some sympathetic Christians and reporters for the international press. When Herzl's imposing figure came to the podium, there was tumultuous applause. "We want to lay the foundation stone," he declared, "for the house which will become the refuge of the Jewish nation. Zionism is the return to Judaism even before the return to the land of Israel." One of Herzl's most faithful supporters was the writer Max Nordau, who gave a brilliant address in which he described the plight of the Jews in the East and in the West. The three-day congress agreed upon a program, henceforth to be known as the Basel Program, declaring that "Zionism

aspires to create a publicly guaranteed homeland for the Jewish people in the land of Israel.” It also set up the Zionist Organization with Herzl as president. (Ibid.)

b) After WWI, the Balfour Declaration, which was a part of the settlement of the War and the dismemberment of the former Ottoman Empire under Turkish control (Turkey was an ally with Germany, and thus, on the losing end), provided for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (Ibid., vol. 1, 832-832).

c) After WWII, President Harry Truman was a strong proponent for letting the European Jewish refugees move and resettle in Palestine. This was ultimately referred to the United Nations, and the following is the account of what happened:

The General Assembly voted on May 15, 1947, to create a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP-United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) to submit “such proposals as it may consider appropriate for the solution of the problem of Palestine.” When it arrived in Jerusalem, UNSCOP was boycotted by the Arabs but actively aided by the Zionists. Few issues had been more studied than Palestine, and UNSCOP found nothing new but urgency. The only solution, it suggested, was partition, but it urged that the consequences of partition be mitigated by the maintenance of economic union. On November 29 (1947), the UN General Assembly approved, with slight frontier modifications, the UNSCOP recommendations. . . .

On May 14 (1948), the State of Israel was proclaimed and was immediately recognized by the Soviet Union and the United States. On the following day, as the British announced the end of their mandate in Palestine, troops of the modern Transjordanian army and their poorly trained and ill-equipped counterparts from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq entered the country. (Ibid., Elahu Elath, “Israel,” 143)

d) Thus, for the first time since 63 BC when Israel came under Roman domination by Pompey, in exactly 2,011 years, Israel was once again a nation of its own authority and government. However, during the 1948 War of Jewish Independence, the Jordanians retained control of the Old City, while the modern state of Israel retained control of the modern city of Jerusalem and declared it to be its capital. However, between June 5-10, 1967, during what is called the Six Day War, Israel regained control of the Old City of Jerusalem, and for the first time since 70 AD when Titus sacked and destroyed Jerusalem, the whole of Jerusalem was once again under Jewish control.

- 2) 37:15-20 – This passage is simply talking about the reunification of the Jews around the one element of their nation, Israel, and the fact that they are all Jews, versus one of the ten northern tribes or the two southern tribes.
- 3) 37:21-28 – These verses have a twofold application: verses 21-22 may be seen to have a modern prototype with the establishment of the Nation of Israel, but they also portend of the future during the millennial reign of Christ.
- 4) 38:1-39:29 – These verses are describing an end-time war and conflicts, but it is not altogether clear just when these battles will occur.
 - a) However, in 38:1-6 delineates all of the enemies of Israel who will be joined against her.
 - b) In 38:8-16, we have the battle plan, if you will, that is aimed at Israel.
 - c) The ultimate victory over Gog is described in 38:17-39:20, and the last portion of this carnage is also described in Revelation 19:17-18, and this passage in Revelation is considered to be associated with the battle of Armageddon.
 - d) As stated initially, the exact time of when this battle occurs is not certain. Some think it might occur toward the end of the first half of the Tribulation period while Israel is at peace, but, as has already been stated, the description of the birds and animals eating the flesh of those killed during the battle is clearly a description of the battle of Armageddon that takes place not during the middle of the Tribulation, but rather at the end (Revelation 19:17-21).
 - e) However, in Ezekiel 39:21-29, at the end of this battle, the defeated nations will observe God's judgment against them; Israel will forever know the Lord their God who brought them back from exile; and God will pour out His Spirit on Israel:

And I shall set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them.²²
 "And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward."²³ "And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword."²⁴ "According to their uncleanness and according to their

transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them." 25 Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. 26 "And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their *own* land with no one to make them afraid. 27 "When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. 28 "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them *again* to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. 29 "And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God. (Eze 39:21-29)

This being the case, we also see in Revelation that John also saw a vision wherein Gog and Magog would fight at the end of the millennium in Revelation 20:7-9:

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (Revelation 20:7-9)

- f) This, therefore, is an example of true biblical prophecy, but also of our inability to fully understand how it is all going to play out. Thus, as we look at all of the above, the following scenarios are the possible considerations: (1) an initial battle just before the middle of the Tribulation; (2) a continuing struggle leading up to the battle of Armageddon; (3) two battles with Gog and Magog, with one being during the Tribulation (either at the middle or end), and the other at the end of the Millennium.

The other Old Testament prophecy that we will look at is in Daniel 9:20-27:

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, 21 while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. 22 And he gave me instruction and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. 23 "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. 24 "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy

place. ²⁵ "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. ²⁶ "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷ "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:20-27)

As you can see, this passage has much to do with the first coming of Jesus, and it is actually only verse 27 that has to do with the Second Coming of Christ, and that verse is of extreme importance with regard to the events during the Tribulation period that will usher in Jesus' return. However, the "seventy weeks" spoken of in verse 24 are controversial from the point of view of its historical context, versus a prophetic oversight that would transcend the historical perspective of Daniel's time period. And here too, from the prophetic perspective, there is a debate as to whether Daniel is really a prophecy, or rather a historical "retelling" of what occurred. The reason for that question is the specificity with which the book of Daniel lays out the prophetic future in such detail from Daniel's time frame in the early 6th century BC up to and through the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC, which is covered in chapter 11. Thus, the question arises as to whether or not this is prophecy or history because of the disbelief of some who say that NO PROPHECY could ever be that specifically correct, and the reason for their saying that is that they have a very limited view of God and His supernatural power and ability to give such a prophecy to a man, if they even believe in prophecy at all. Therefore, what is at issue for many scholars, teachers, and pastors is whether or not such specific prophecy could possibly be ascribed to God, and if they do not believe it can, then they see this as simply a "historical retelling" of events that occurred, and consequently, they view Daniel as having been written sometime in the late 2nd to perhaps the early 1st century BC. However, setting aside the critical analysis for the sake of brevity, we are going to look at the Book of Daniel as an authentic, accurate, and divinely inspired account of the historic events that occurred in the life of Daniel from 605 BC to 538 BC, and of future, prophetic and authenticated historical events that would occur up through the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC, and then to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the first half of the 1st century BC, and finally, to the final seven year "tribulation" period, wherein we will see the Antichrist come and fulfill II Thessalonians 2:1-

10 and Revelation 11 & 13. Therefore, with regard to verse 27, what we see being described is the peace treaty that the Antichrist will make with the Jews at the beginning of the Tribulation, but then in the middle of the Tribulation, he will break it off and seek to kill all of the Jews:

And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it." ² "And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months." ³ "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. ⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. ⁸ And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. ¹⁰ And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. ¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them. ¹³ And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. (Rev 11:1-14)

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, ² that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason

God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false,¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (II Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Thus, the above New Testament passages are a fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 regarding the Antichrist and his ultimate end at the Second Coming of Jesus described in II Thessalonians 2:8 above: "And then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming."

New Testament

Prophecies

We now enter the primary focus of this study, and that is the analysis of New Testament prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Jesus. We will begin with Matthew 24, which is of primary significance in that Jesus was the one giving this prophetic insight:

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.² And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."³ And as He was sitting 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?"⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you."⁵ "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many."⁶ "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end."⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes."⁸ "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name."¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another."¹¹ "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many."¹² "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."¹³ "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved."¹⁴ "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."¹⁵ "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;¹⁷ let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house;¹⁸ and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak."¹⁹ "But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days!"²⁰ "But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath;²¹ for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall."²² "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short."²³ "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him."²⁴ "For false Christs and

false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.²⁵ "Behold, I have told you in advance.²⁶ "If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them.²⁷ "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.²⁸ "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:1-31)

There are several important issues we will look at in this portion of Scripture, and I will number them as we go through:

- 1) 24:1-2 – Jesus is here making a statement about the soon to be destroyed city of Jerusalem by the Roman General, Titus, in 70 AD.
- 2) 24:4-14 – This portion is focused primarily on those things that will happen in general – that is, on “false Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy and indifference, false prophets, genuine discipleship, and evangelism.” We will, therefore, look at these various “forewarnings” as they apply to us today, and just what our response should be from a biblical perspective in practical, everyday life, which is what ALL OF US LIVE! In other words, if what we learn and study cannot translate to our real, everyday lives, then it is very likely not that which is truly biblical, but rather that which is “imaginary, biblical fodder” that we have ingested that is titillating to our “spiritual, intellectual, and emotional palates,” but it is only a “sugary” substitute for the true “meat” of the Word that changes us from the inside out to reflect the Life of Christ.
 - a) “Do not be misled” – This admonition in verse 4 covers the “false Christs,” as well as the “false prophets” in verse 11. The significance of this admonition, however, is that this is something that has applied to believers for the past 2000 years, and will continue to apply until Jesus returns. First of all, Jesus says “many will come in my name, . . . and will mislead many” (Matthew 24:5), from both the “false Christs” and “false prophets” perspective. How are they going to be able to do that? They will be able to do that by exploiting the ignorance of people concerning God’s Word and the place of the Cross in their lives – i.e., the degree to which Luke 9:23-24 is actively a part of their lives.

(1) How important is God's Word in your live on a daily basis? Psalm 1 makes it very clear the benefit of having His Word as being the grid of our lives in all venues of our lives: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶ For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalms 1:1-6)

(2) As you can see, the benefits of that man or woman who "meditates day and night" in

God's Word are enormous. The word for "delight" in the Hebrew in verse 2 is **פִּנְיָה**

(*hēphets*), and it means "delight, desire, longing, and business." For me, therefore, it is indeed "my delight," but I must tell you that there are days when my schedule is such that I don't "feel" like I have the time to take to read the Word devotionally. Consequently, I see the Word as "my business." That is, it is indeed the very means by which I am able to function in all the venues of my life, and without it, I will fail, not succeed, and that failure will be in those areas described in verse 1 through inadvertence based on lack of discernment and godly wisdom as a result of "leaning to my own understanding." I have been there before, and I DO NOT WANT TO GO BACK!

(3) The other vital aspect of our walk with the Lord so as not to be misled is the Cross of Discipleship as described in Luke 9:23-24: "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it'" (Luke 9:23-24).

(a) The word for "deny" in the Greek is **ἀρνέομαι** (*arneomai*), and it means "to refuse to consent to something, to disclaim association with, and to refuse to pay

attention to.” That is, we are “to refuse to consent to our narcissistic lusts,” whatever they might be (e.g., not just in the sexual arena, but with anger, pride, jealousy, etc.); we are “to disclaim association with our selfish, self-centered, egotistical motivations”; and we are “to refuse to pay attention to those thoughts that focus on our own exaltation, carnal and self-centered fulfillments at the expense of others, and the addictive emotion of self-pity.” In addition, the verb form used in this passage indicates that we are to do this each time one of the above thoughts, desires, or inclinations begins to motivate our focus and actions – thus, this is an all day, everyday occurrence each time we feel our thinking moving in the direction of the above thoughts (the verb form is an aorist active [deponent] imperative, which means you “start doing” whatever the verb is indicating). In addition, we have the adverb “daily” inserted here too, and in the Greek, it is **καθ’ ἡμέραν** (*kath hēmeran*), which literally means, “according/during the day.” That is, “all day, during the day.”

- (b) The other very important aspect of this passage is Jesus’ call in verse 24 for us to “lose our life in order to save it.” The word translated for “lose” in Greek is **ἀπόλλυμι** (*apollumi*), and it means “to lose, ruin, and destroy.” Thus, by one holding on to his life, versus laying it down for the sake of Jesus, rather than “saving his life,” he is going to end up doing the very thing he was hoping to avoid – he will actually “lose, ruin, and destroy” it. On the other hand, if in laying his life down for Jesus sake in such a manner that it appears to his natural reasoning and emotions that he is “losing, destroying, and ruining his life,” he will in turn be “saving his life.” Thus, what Jesus is presenting is the antithesis of what our flesh, through the fear incited by Satan in our minds of following Jesus in obedient faith, sees as bringing on misery, unhappiness, failure, and loss of identity to our lives. Indeed, this is what it means to “walk by faith, not by sight” (II Corinthians 5:7), and as we do, that which Satan screams at us through fear that we are going to lose our lives by following Jesus, the very thing we give up in attempting to achieve by our carnal, fleshly effort for our glory, egotism, revenge, emotional fulfillment and satisfaction, etc., we will receive back in “holy attire”

that will bring true life, joy, fulfillment, stability, and eternal identity in Jesus that no one and no circumstance can take from us!

b) The other important thing to note is that in verses 5 & 11, the word “many” is used to describe the number of false “Christs” and false “prophets” that will be coming, as well the number of people they will “mislead” – “many”! That brings up the important question, “Can a true, born again believer be misled by a false ‘Christ’ and a false ‘prophet’? And the answer is, “Yes, they can!” I have seen such with my own eyes, and I have also seen men who I consider to be godly pastors and teachers mislead people, and especially so in the area of eschatology. However, the thing I want to point out is that the adjective “many” is used to describe the number of people who will be misled, and in that “many” will not only be the obvious non-believers, but also, tragically, true believers who have not imbibed of God’s Word and taken up the Cross of Discipleship in a consistent, committed, and yielded manner. All of us as believers at some point in our walk with the Lord have been “misled” by various and sundry things, from false teachings, to false leaders, to false and self-deceptive emotions from anger and revenge, to pride, to covetousness, etc. However, if we are a true, born-again child of God, God will, unequivocally, “discipline” us in order “that we will share His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). Thus, the admonition that Jesus gives to “His disciples” is, “See to it that no one misleads you,” is meant for every born-again believer because the possibility exists that we could be. The phrase, “See to it,” in Greek is βλέπω (*blepō*), and it means “to be able to see, to pay especially close attention to something, to be ready to learn about something that is needed or is hazardous, and to process information by giving thought.” Therefore, that which Jesus is categorically and unequivocally calling us to do is to beware of false “Christs” and false “prophets” who say they either are “Christ,” or they know when and where He is coming – such individuals are FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS, and DO NOT BE TAKEN IN BY THEM, NOR BY THEIR TEACHING!

c) The other important thing to note is the actual word, “mislead,” which in Greek is πλανᾶω (*planaō*), and it means “to cause to go astray from a specific way, to be deceived, to proceed without a proper sense of direction, to be deluded and wander about

aimlessly.” Thus, once again, to avoid this happening to you, your commitment to ingesting God’s Word and embracing the Cross of Discipleship is not optional – they are essential imperatives! But there is also another thing that is extremely important with regard to not being “mised,” and that is to look to Jesus as your ULTIMATE LEADER, and the Holy Spirit as your ULTIMATE TEACHER – DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED by rejection, being ostracized, or by not being included in the “group” for not accepting the carnal and ungodly pressure that in order to truly understand the Scripture, you must look at it through the “eyes” of a certain man, or group of men because they are just mere men. God indeed gifts men to be pastors, teachers, and leaders, but THEY ARE NOT THE ONES THROUGH WHOSE EYES YOU MUST LOOK IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND AND GRASP THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD, NOR ARE THEIR TEACHINGS THE “STANDARD” THAT ALL TEACHINGS SHOULD BE JUDGED BY! In I Corinthians 3:1-7, Paul says that those who advocate such things are at best “men of flesh” and “babes in Christ,” but it is to God, our ULTIMATE and TRUE source, that we must continually look:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? ⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1Corinthians 3:1-7)

Once again, God, without any question, gives us pastors and teachers to whom we are to show respect and be submitted to as the leaders whom God has called and placed in their position. However, we are to do so viewing them and what they say as being subordinate to the Lordship of Jesus and the FINAL TRUTH of His Word: “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7). And in addition, ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS YOUR ULTIMATE TEACHER, NOT ANY MAN, NOR GROUP OF MEN, NOR ANY ONE DENOMINATION OR CHURCH: “And as for

you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him” (1John 2:27)

- d) “wars, famines, and earthquakes” – Jesus says all of these things are “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matthew 24:8), and in addition, and probably most important, He says, “see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end” (Matthew 24:6). In this instance, the phrase, “see that,” is from the Greek word ὥρα (hora), which means “to perceive with the eye, to be mentally and spiritually perceptive, and to experience an event.” Thus, here in this instance, Jesus is confronting head-on the “fear” that would come with seeing “wars, famines, and earthquakes,” and He is saying I, Jesus, want you, my disciples, to spiritually perceive and experience my peace in the midst of what looks like chaos and know that I am in control. In every age, therefore, we have seen these very things occur, and in every age, Jesus’ message has been the same for the past 2000 years, and it will remain the same until He returns – “but that is not yet the end” (Matthew 24:8). For example, many people thought for sure that Adolph Hitler was the Anti-Christ, and that WWII was the prelude to the Tribulation – however, he wasn’t and it wasn’t. On the other hand, God sovereignly used WWII as the staging ground for the re-establishment of the Nation of Israel! Consequently, “God is in control,” but we DO NOT KNOW WHEN JESUS IS RETURNING, BUT HE IS!
- e) “they will . . . kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name” – The persecution that is going to accompany the Return of Jesus is quite significant, because that, along with the false teachers and false teachings, will permeate the world’s population in every geographic area. Thus, that which we as believers have been promised is that we will be delivered from “God’s wrath” (I Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:9-11), but on the other hand, we have also been told and promised that persecution will come to all who are following Jesus Christ:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. ⁶ For among them are

those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith. ⁹ But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those two came to be. ¹⁰ But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! ¹² And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:1-13)

Therefore, we have been living in “the last days” for 2000 years, or in God’s sight, two days – “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ, that which we need to prepare ourselves for is to stand for Jesus in the midst of intense opposition and persecution, just as believers have for 2000 years, and just as believers are in countries around the world today, and especially so in those countries where the sick and dark religions of Islam and Hinduism prevail, as well as those where the tyranny of godless communism rules. That means that here in the West (metaphorically, Western democracies, which would include Japan), and in particular in America, we as believers need to become even more aggressive in proclaiming the Gospel, as well as standing up for and fighting for the biblical rights of freedom contained in the Bill of Rights that helped to make this country what it is, versus caving in to a pseudo-spirituality that says we should not become involved in political issues – if indeed that were the grid for our lives as believers, then there would be no 1st Amendment in the Constitution of the United States of America providing for us “the free exercise” or our religious beliefs that we are practicing here today, and there would be no 2nd Amendment whereby we as individuals can protect ourselves from tyranny and oppression of all sorts and remain a “free state.” Those who were integral in putting together our Constitution were not only Christians, but quite a few were even pastors, such as Isaac Backus, a Baptist pastor who was instrumental in helping to develop the 1st Amendment! Therefore, let us indeed be those who are focused on being “salt and light” on a “hill” for all to see, versus a people who are hiding behind a pseudo-spirituality, that

is really a cover for fear of taking a public stand for the truth of the Gospel in the “public square”:

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. ¹² "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ "Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:10-16)

f) “apostasy, endurance, and evangelism” – These three areas are a very real part of the “end days,” and we want to look at them carefully. What is important to realize, is that II Thessalonians 2:1-12 parallels what Jesus is talking about here in Matthew, and we are going to be referring to that portion of Scripture as we continue through Matthew. But in this last portion, all three of these issues are of great importance:

(1) The actual word “apostasy,” from the Greek word **ἀποστασία** (*apostasia*), only occurs five times in the whole Bible, but in each instance, it is clearly talking about people who have “rebelled against the truth” and rejected God’s rule over their lives (Joshua 22:22; II Chronicles 29:19; Jeremiah 2:19; Acts 21:21; II Thessalonians 2:3). Unfortunately, however, some who embrace a pre-tribulation rapture of the church (which I happen to believe) have resorted to eisegesis in trying to support this view based on II Thessalonians 2:1-3:

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, ² that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, . . . (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)

The actual Greek word, **ἀποστασία** (*apostasia*), is made up of two words: **ἀπό** (*apo*), which is a Greek preposition meaning “away from”; and **στάσις**

(*stasis*), which means “a condition of being in a certain position or state of affairs.” Thus, when put together, **ἀποστασία** (*apostasia*) is clearly referring to one “moving away from one position to another” and throughout Scripture, WHENEVER it has been used, it is ALWAYS referring to one “moving away” from faith in God and obedience to Him. However, some “pre-tribulationists” have tried to say that **ἀποστασία** (*apostasia*) here in II Thessalonians 2:3 is actually referring to the “rapture of the church”! The truth is that when you read the passage in its context, the term “gathering together” is clearly referring to the “rapture” of the Church, and thus, to say that **ἀποστασία** (*apostasia*) is referring to and means the “rapture,” it would read something like this:

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our ***being raptured*** to Him, ² that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the ***rapture*** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)

Thus, before the “rapture” occurs the “rapture” will occur! Now that makes perfectly good sense, doesn’t it? NOT ONLY DOES IT SOUND RIDICULOUS, IT IS RIDICULOUS, AND THAT IS BEING COMPLIMENTARY! But even more so is the tremendous, misdirected, “false teaching” that is being demonstrated in this passage that excises the “apostasy,” or “falling away” that will unequivocally occur before the “rapture” that will lead up to the manifestation of the Anti-Christ who will eventually enthrone himself as being “God”: “who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (II Thessalonians 2:4). According to Revelation 11:1-13 & 13:1-10, the Anti-Christ’s ascension in the Temple will occur midway through the Tribulation Period after the Anti-Christ has killed the “two witnesses” and dissolved the peace treaty with the Jews. However, before any of this occurs, the “rapture” will have occurred 3 ½ years before, and leading up to the “real rapture” will be a time of great persecution and “false teaching” that will cause many to turn away from Jesus and follow the “false teachers” and “false Christs.”

Therefore, from my perspective, to not teach this obvious truth, and instead offer some ludicrous teaching that the word ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) is actually the “rapture” is dangerous and destructive beyond description, and that is being complimentary! Thus, all of the things that Jesus is warning us about in Matthew 24:4-14 are those things that will lead up to the “rapture” of all true believers.

- (2) When we discuss the matter of “endurance” with regard to our salvation, and in particular with the “end times,” it is important to make a distinction between what might be described as the “true believer,” versus the one who is an “imitation believer,” and it is the latter who will be among those who “fall away” during the “apostasy” before the “rapture” occurs. In Luke 8:4-15, Jesus talks about the “true believer” and the “imitation believer”:

And when a great multitude were coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: ⁵ "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ "And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ "And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out. ⁸ "And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ⁹ And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. ¹⁰ And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. ¹¹ "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. ¹² "And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ "And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴ "And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵ "And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. (Luke 8:4-15)

The “first soil” is described as those whose heart is hardened like hard soil, and that “the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Thus, these individuals never make a pretense of committing their lives to Jesus Christ. The “second soil,” however, does make a commitment, but

it is a “superficial” one that has no depth, or as Jesus puts it, “no firm root” – that is, it is an emotionally “surface” commitment that never really went to the depth of the person’s soul and spirit. Jesus says this person will “believe for a while,” and the word “while” in the Greek is **καιρός** (*kairos*), and it simply means “a period of time” that could be a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade, two decades, etc., but this time period has an end, versus an ongoing, eternal period of existence. Thus, at some point in the future, “in time of temptation,” they “will fall away,” and the word “temptation” is **πειρασμός** (*peirasmos*), and it means “a trial, test, enticement, & temptation,” which would definitely include persecution that would cause one to completely deny and totally turn away from Jesus. The “third soil” appears to be a true believer, but one that never fully surrenders to the Cross of Discipleship, and consequently, they are constantly trying to find their identity and security in both the world and in Jesus, the result being that they “bring no fruit to maturity,” but their fruit does not die – it just stagnates, and their life is one of misery, confusion, and misdirection, versus one of victory in Jesus. The “fourth soil,” however, are the truly saved, and in the midst of their failures and mis-directions in their growth in Christ, they always return in brokenness and repentance, “holding fast” the Word of God, and they “bear fruit with perseverance.” It is the noun “perseverance” that comes from the same root as the verb “endure” in Matthew 24:13: “perseverance” in Greek is **ὑπομονή** (*hupomonē*); and “endure” is **ὑπομένω** (*hupomenō*). Thus, Jesus is talking about the same person in both of these instances, and the “third soil” will also go through a great trial of “discipline” where they too will be saved, “yet so as through fire” (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

- (3) When we discuss “evangelism,” we are talking about the heart of the Gospel – that is, communicating the Gospel “to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This brings us, therefore, to one of the most important aspects of this study, and that is, just what it is that God has actually called us to do. Just before Jesus’ ascension into heaven after His resurrection, the Disciples were anxious to know from Jesus “is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” That seemed to be a very reasonable question, especially since everyone was looking not only for the first coming of the

Messiah, but also His second coming. However, Jesus' response to them at that time is EQUALLY AS RELEVANT FOR US TODAY, IN THE 21ST CENTURY, AS FOR HIS DISCIPLES 2000 YEARS AGO! Jesus responded by saying, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8). Ladies and gentlemen, THIS SAME TRUTH IS EQUALLY VALID TODAY, IF NOT MORE SO, as we are now 2000 years closer to His return! Therefore, let us be busy with sharing and ministering His Word of Salvation, versus trying to figure out when He is coming back: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, our energies need to be focused on doing what Jesus gave us as the priority of His call for our lives, and that is how we can best share the Gospel with those who do not know Jesus; how we can best encourage believers to grow in Christ; and how we can come along side and help those believers who have fallen in sin to be restored. These, I maintain, are the priorities that we need to have in our ministering the Gospel, which ministry unequivocally includes warning and exhorting people about the fact that Jesus is coming back, but not WASTE OUR TIME AND THE PRECIOUS TIME GOD HAS GIVEN US HERE ON THIS EARTH IN TRYING TO GUESS WHEN! I believe, therefore, that part of that exhortation would include I Corinthians 13:1-13 that includes the real aspect of our mortality and facing Jesus one day:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all

things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.¹³ But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1Corinthians 13:1-13)

In addition to this portion, the following passage also pinpoints what we, as believers, need to be focusing on as we see the difficulties ahead of us, and our walk with Jesus and with others is going to be challenged, and that is “walking in the Spirit, versus walking in the flesh”:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:16-26)

- 3) 24:15-28 – These warnings are referring to the time when the Antichrist has made his move described in II Thessalonians 2:3-4: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”
 - a) The “Abomination of Desolation” is mentioned in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, & 12:11, and in 9:27 & 12:11, it is referring to the end times described in II Thessalonians 2:1-4, while 11:31 is referring the historical account of Antiochus Epiphanes in the middle of the 2nd

century BC, who became the proto-type of the future Antichrist in the end times. This is a very common feature of biblical prophecy – that is, using a historical personage or event as the proto-type of a future prophetic fulfillment, and the brutal actions of Antiochus Epiphanes are a foretaste of the horror that the Antichrist will enact against the Jews and Jerusalem. The following is an account of Antiochus:

In 167 B.C., Apollonius, his chief tax collector, was dispatched with 22,000 men and attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Most of the male population was killed and the women and children enslaved; those few who could left the city. The city walls were demolished and the old city of David refortified (the Akra) and furnished with a military garrison (1 Macc 1:29–36; 2 Macc 5:24–26). There followed the prohibition of all Jewish rites and the rededication of the high temple to Olympian Zeus. A monthly check was made, and anyone found with a copy of the Book of the Law or a child who had been circumcised was put to death. In December 167 b.c. (on 25 Kislev) the first pagan sacrifice was performed on the altar to Zeus which had been erected over the altar of burnt offering in the temple: . . . (David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, *Antiochus (Person)* [New York: Doubleday, 1996], 270)

Once again, this is the “Abomination of Desolation” that Daniel is referring to historically in Daniel 11:21, and it is also the proto-type that is being referred to for end time events Daniel 9:27 and 12:11, as well as the proto-type that Jesus was referring to that will be repeated in a far greater capacity of brutality, wickedness, and absolute, human corruption in the end times description found in II Thessalonians 2:3-4: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

- b) After the Antichrist displays “himself as being God,” then we see Jesus saying that “then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be.” It is at this point that there is a discussion as to whether or not there will be a pre-tribulation rapture occurring at the beginning of the seven year tribulation; a mid-tribulation rapture that will occur after the first 3 ½ years, which will be a time of great trial and persecution for believers, but not the “great tribulation,” which will begin at the midway point, and then the Church will be raptured; and a post-

tribulation rapture, which believes that even though the Church will remain during the 7 year tribulation period, God will sovereignly protect and shield the Church from His wrath. However, regardless which position one may take on this issue, there are two things that are certain: (1) all true believers in Jesus Christ will suffer persecution:

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed **we suffer with Him** in order that we may also be glorified with Him. . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** ³⁶ Just as it is written, "For Thy sake **we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.**" ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:14-17, 35-39)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴ who comforts us in **all our affliction** so that we may be able to comfort those who are in **any affliction** with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For just **as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance**, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. ⁶ But **if we are afflicted**, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the **patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer**; ⁷ and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are **sharers of our sufferings**, so also you are sharers of our comfort. ⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of **our affliction** which came to us in Asia, that we were, **burdened excessively, beyond our strength**, so that **we despaired even of life**; ⁹ indeed, we had the **sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead**; ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, ¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many. . . . But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ **we are afflicted** in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ **always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus**, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For **we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake**, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-11)

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, **but also to suffer for His sake**, ³⁰ **experiencing the same conflict** which you saw in me, and

now hear to be in me. . . . But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things**, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and **the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death**; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 1:29-30; 3:7-11)

For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that **we were going to suffer affliction**; and so it came to pass, as you know. (1Thssalonians 3:4)

But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ **persecutions, and sufferings**, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; **what persecutions I endured**, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! ¹² And indeed, **all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**. (2 Timothy 3:10-12)

(2) God has unequivocally promised to deliver those who are His children from His wrath that will be poured out on this earth:

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, **who delivers us from the wrath to come**. . . . Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ **For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ**, ¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1Thssalonians 1:8-10; 5:1-11)

- c) What is also significant about the verses in this section (24:21-28) is that it is a reiteration of what we find in Revelation 13 concerning the "dragon," the "first beast," and the "second beast" with regard to "false Christs . . . great signs and wonders" (v. 24),

and the fact that “unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short” (24:22). In addition, verse 24 states that the deception of those “great signs and wonders” by the “second beast” would be so great “so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect,” but, according to Revelation 13:7-10, concerning the “beast” and his rule and deception, those who are the “elect” will not turn:

And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. ⁸ And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰ If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:7-10)

The next question, therefore, is, “just who are the ‘elect’ in this section of Scripture in Matthew, as well as in Revelation 13:7-10, if the ‘church’ has already been raptured?” The answer to that is that these are the 144,000 Jews who will come to Christ during this time, as well as those Gentiles who may come to Christ during the “Great Tribulation” as a result of their evangelism (Revelation 7). Then, at the end of the “Great Tribulation,” Jesus will return, as is stated in Matthew 24:27, and then will begin His millennial reign. However, another very interesting verse in this section is verse 24:28: “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” The word for “vultures” is *ἀετός* (*aetos*), which is also translated “eagle.” The idea behind both is that of the “swiftness” of the eagle to retrieve its “prey,” and the circling of the vulture awaiting the proper time to swoop down on its “dead prey” – that is, with regard to the “vulture,” wherever “dead prey” may be, that is where the “vulture” will also be, and thus, wherever God’s “elect” will be, that is where Jesus will come and retrieve them unto Himself.

- 4) 24:29-31 – This section is clearly talking about the Second Coming of Jesus, at the end of the Seven Year Tribulation, that will usher in His millennial reign.
- 5) 24:32-41 – It is in this section that we see the division of the different eschatological positions, as well as the various “eschatological sects” that have sprung up over the past 2000

years in thinking “they were the generation to see the Lord’s return” – that is, He would come in their lifetime! The passage reads as follows:

Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; ³³ even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. ³⁴ "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. ³⁶ "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. (Matthew 24:32-41)

a) There have been those throughout the 2000 year history of the Church who have interpreted the “signs” of their age as being the heralding of Jesus coming in their lifetime. However, we are still here, and it would appear, therefore, that Jesus was correct, not the “teachers, preachers, theologians, etc.” over the years who have thought they “figured out” when Jesus was returning – “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (24:36). Consequently, there are four major eschatological views that have prevailed over the years and are current today, with offshoots of each. However, we are going to focus on the major views:

(1) Amillennialism – This is the view that does not see the millennium as being literal, but rather figurative. However, in the early church, there were those who believed that as the time clock approached the year 1000 AD, Christ’s return was imminent. However, we are still here, so that must not have been the correct interpretation. On the other hand, there are those over the centuries who viewed the term millennium as a figure of speech that was actually referring to the victorious reign of Christ over sin and the devil now since His resurrection. The rapture is seen as the end time event, immediately after which the Church will enter into a judgment of the nations with Christ and then enter their eternal position with Him in the “New Jerusalem.” In addition, many of the amillennial position believe that the Church has replaced Israel

in biblical prophecy and fulfillment – thus, the nation of Israel really doesn't play any significant role in the present day fulfillment of biblical prophecy. They also see the “kingdom of God” as a present reality now, but that when Jesus returns for the Church, it will be fully experienced, and they base this position on Jesus' response to the Pharisees: “Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20-21).

- (2) Premillennialism – Within the premillennial view, there are two primary positions:
- (a) Historical Premillennialism – This is the view that sees the rapture occurring just before the Millennial Reign of Christ, and then Christ will institute His millennial rule, during which time both worship and sacrifices will be reinstated in the restored Temple, showing homage to Christ and His ultimate sacrifice. In addition, here too the Church is seen as the fulfillment of the biblical prophecies concerning Israel (with present day Israel having no special role in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy), and the Kingdom of God is now with us and experienced by faith, based on the same previous Scripture, but when Christ returns, it will be experienced by sight!
- (b) Dispensational Premillennialism – This view holds to the rapture of the Church occurring just before the seven year tribulation period; Christ will return at the end of the seven year tribulation period to establish His millennial reign, and those who survive the tribulation period here on earth, including the 144,000 Jews who come to Christ and their converts, will populate the earth during that 1000 years, and the raptured believers will reign with Christ in heaven; here too, the Temple will have been rebuilt, and temple worship and sacrifice will be reinstated in homage to Christ and His ultimate sacrifice; at the end of the millennium, the “White Throne” judgment will occur, in which Satan and all of his host, along with all unbelievers, will be cast into the “Lake of Fire” for all eternity:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴ And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

One other very important aspect of Dispensational Premillennialism is that it maintains that both Israel and the Church are distinct as far as biblical, prophetic fulfillment, and that God's redemptive plan, through Christ, will be fulfilled in and through both – thus, the reestablishment of the Nation of Israel is viewed by Dispensational Premillennialists as of PRIMARY SIGNIFICANCE in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning Christ's return.

- (3) Postmillennialism – This view believes the rapture will occur at the end of the age, at which time the Church will share in the judging of the nonbelievers as it enters its eternal home in the “New Jerusalem” with the Lord. Here too, the Church is seen as the biblically, prophetic fulfillment of Israel and of all the prophecies referring to it in our time – that is, since the resurrection of Christ – and thus, the Nation of Israel has no real significance for us today as being a fulfillment of biblical prophecy in relation to Christ's return. And once again, Postmillennialism views the “Kingdom of God” as here with us now, and that the spiritual reality of that “Kingdom” will be realized as the Gospel is preached, people are saved, and the population of the earth and its total inhabitation is gradually transformed into a God-honoring and Christ-worshipping habitation, where Christ, through His people, will be ruling and reigning, and this is what they see as the “millennium.” It is therefore, at the end of this figurative “millennium” that Christ will return, and that is when the Church will be raptured and share in judging what unbelievers remain before entering the “New Jerusalem,” their eternal home.

- (4) Preterism – This is the view that holds that basically all of the prophecy that Jesus gave concerning His return was fulfilled by 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus of Rome. In preterism, there are two camps, as in the premillennial camp, of those who embrace preterism, the full preterists and the partial preterists:
- (a) Full Preterism – Those embracing Full Preterism believe that all of the prophecies concerning the Return of Christ, the rapture and resurrection, the Day of the Lord, and the final judgment all were fulfilled in 70 AD.
- (b) Partial Preterism – The Partial Preterists, on the other hand, do not believe that all of the prophecies that Jesus gave in Matthew were fulfilled, but rather most. For example, they see Christ’s Return as fulfilled in 70 AD as a form of judgment against the Jews, but they also see His bodily return at the end of the age; they see the rapture and resurrection occurring at the end of the age, not in 70 AD; however, they see both the Day of the Lord and the Judgment as having a dual fulfillment in both 70 AD, as well as at the end of the age. Thus, where they see dual fulfillments, they are looking at the 70 AD fulfillment as being more of a spiritual nature and the beginning of that fulfillment, whereas the end of the age fulfillment is viewed as the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in a literal sense (e.g., the Return of Christ).
- b) We will now look briefly at some of the things that have caused great confusion and division with regard to these various eschatological views:
- (1) The word for “generation” in the Greek is γενεά (*genea*), and it means “race or ethnicity; a contemporary generation of people; and an undefined period of time.” Thus, when you see the meaning of this word, you can easily see that all three definitions and applications are quite significant. The second meaning, however, is the one that has caused the consternation and confusion, both with the Preterists and modern day Premillennialists, where the latter in particular have attempted to relate “generation” to that contemporary group of people who were alive when Israel became a nation, or who were alive when the Six Day War occurred June 5-10, 1967, and many of those who push this view also maintain that the word “generation” here

in 24:34 is “forty years” (Numbers 32:13), whereas others say perhaps “one hundred years,” based on the “100 year” use of “generation” in Genesis 15:12-16. This is a sincere, but desperately misdirected attempt to try and “figure out” just when Jesus is going to return. Indeed, as we look back on the 2000 year history of the Church, we see that Jesus has not yet returned, and that EVERYONE who has EVER attempted to determine just when HAS BEEN COMPLETELY WRONG! Thus, it would appear that the two alternative meanings have to be what Jesus was referring to – that is, a “race,” which would include the Jews, and it could also possibly be referring to the “race” of His believers, because He said the Gospel would be preached in all the world before the end came (Matthew 24:14), as well as “an undefined period of time” until all of the things He spoke of are fulfilled in God’s time, not our finite and pitiful attempts in trying to “figure out” just when that is.

- (2) “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (24:36), and guess what, JESUS WAS RIGHT ALL ALONG! I have actually had people tell me, “Yes, but Jesus didn’t say anything about the minute, week, month, or year.” Now with all compassion and mercy toward those, taking into account my own sin and God’s grace and mercy toward me, that is close to being the APEX OF IMBECILITY, IGNORANCE, AND SELF-DECEPTION! Once again, Jesus lets us know quite clearly just what our focus needs to be, and IT MEANS THE SAME IN ENGLISH AS IT DOES IN GREEK – PREACH AND SHARE THE GOSPEL:

And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. (Acts 1:6-8)

- (3) That which verses 37-41 are exhorting us to do is to be ready and looking because as it was in “the days of Noah,” so too will it be when Jesus returns and the rapture occurs.
- 6) 24:42-51 – These verses two parabolic exhortations for us to be ready because “you do not know which day your Lord is coming”(24:42).

*Historical Failures In
Attempting to Determine
Christ's Return*

With regard to historical failures in attempting to determine Christ's return, I am going to give four:

- 1) William Miller (1782-1849) – Miller was raised a Baptist, but then he turned to Deism as a young man. However, in about 1815-1816, he came to Christ and returned to his Baptist roots. He soon began to study Scripture, and he became convinced in 1818 that Jesus was going to return in 1844. As he continued to study, he ultimately announced the results of his study and his personal conviction that Jesus was going to return in 1844. In August, 1831, he began his public lecturing regarding the return of Christ, and in 1832 he wrote a series of articles about his views. Miller gradually began to narrow the time frame down from a general time to actually predicting that Jesus would return on March 21, 1844. When nothing happened at that time, he then changed it to April 18, 1844, and that date too passed without incident. Then, a gentleman named Samuel Snow, a follower of Miller, predicted Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. That day too passed, but Miller continued to believe Jesus coming was soon, and out of his teaching and error emerged the Seventh Day Adventists, who developed what is called the “Investigative Judgment” of professed believers by the Lord that began in 1844, and that is what they said actually began in 1844, not Jesus' bodily return.
- 2) 1948 & 1967 – Predictions began to run wild after the events of these two dates, and are still being maintained today, even in the face of obvious error and misdirection.
- 3) 1981 – They were many people who, based on a “generation” being 40 years, predicted that Jesus' Return would be sometime in 1982, so that it would coincide with 1948 when Israel became a nation and be fulfilled in 1988.
- 4) Y2K – All of us are familiar with this error, and here too, it was by very sincere people, who were unequivocally misdirected.