

CRUCIAL QUESTIONS ON CHRIST'S RETURN



*A short series of sermons on
frequently asked questions
about prophetic subjects
by Pastor David Legge*

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Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 1

"Pre, Post Or A Millennial: Does It Matter?"

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Revelation 20

I. A Comparison

II. An Evaluation

III. A Conclusion

Tonight we're taking up a subject that I would have to say I have never ever heard dealt with as a subject on its own. It's referred to in many of the prophetic series that you will hear from pre-millennial pulpits, but I feel it's neglected in the sense that many folk assume, before even launching into the holy Scriptures, and particularly prophetic passages, that we have one particular scheme of thought with regards to our interpretation of Scripture. I would have to say that perhaps many, who we are numbered among, pre-millennialists, don't even understand our own belief, or indeed the belief of other brethren in Christ who could be classed as a-millennial or post-millennial - and believe it or not, that's not all there are, there are a whole lot of others, but we're just going to keep ourselves to those three main viewpoints: a-millennial, post-millennial, pre-millennial. We're asking the question tonight: does it matter? Does it really matter? Many people are saying today that it doesn't matter as long as you believe that the Lord is coming ultimately, what does it matter what you are in relation to your interpretation of prophetic matters?

I want to take as a springboard of Scripture tonight this passage, Revelation 20, which really is the major passage in the whole of the word of God on the subject of the millennium. Whether you're a-millennial, post-millennial, pre-millennial, the word 'millennial' comes into your definition in some shape or form, and we'll define them for you a little bit later - but we need to understand where this phrase and understanding 'millennial' comes from in the word of God. Revelation 20, beginning to read at verse 1:

John says: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years", now that's where the phenomenon of millennial reign comes in - it is the idea of 1000 years of Satan being bound, and subsequently the Lord Jesus Christ reigning on the earth for 1000 years. Verse 3: "And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" - there it is again. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" - there we have the idea of the millennium again. "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison".

We'll not go on any further, we'll probably deal with this passage in more detail in the weeks that lie ahead. 'Crucial Questions on Christ's Return' - the first fundamental one is this: 'Pre-, Post-, or A- Millennial: Does It Really Matter?'. During the history of the church of Jesus Christ three major views have been held of the

future kingdom of God. That's really all that this word 'millennial reign', or 'millennium' means - it's synonymous of the kingdom of God as we understand it. Most Christians fit into the category of being either a-millennial, post-millennial, or pre-millennial in their understanding of the kingdom of God. That's all 'millennium' really means.

Now, when I was at Bible College there was a group of people who called themselves the 'pan-millennialists' - and they simply said: 'Well, we believe that it will all pan out in the end!' It was symptomatic, really, of people's frustration with this whole debate in general. They get so tired, perhaps, of Christians and high-browed theologians bickering over issues that they think are of least importance, if any importance whatsoever, and they just believe that as long as you believe the Saviour is coming it really doesn't matter how He comes, it will all pan out in the end. Does it really matter whether you are pre-, post- or a-millennial? Are there not much more important things in the Christian life than these? Is it not much more important to be thinking of the here and now of Christian experience, rather than pointing your sights way ahead in the future when you don't really know what's going to happen ultimately?

Let me, before we go into any real deep study of these great issues tonight of pre-, post- and a-millennialism - let me lay down a preface first of all in answer to the question: 'Does it really matter?'. First of all, does it really matter for the issue of salvation? The answer is categorically 'No', it does not matter with the issue of salvation whether you are pre-, post-, or a- millennial. Of course we, to call ourselves Christians, must believe that in the same sense as our Lord Jesus departed in His ascension, that same Jesus will come again - that is a fundamental Christian belief. You can't really call yourself a Christian if you don't believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus, but it does not affect your salvation which interpretation you believe with regards to this issue. So let's clear that up very quickly.

Does it matter for your spirituality? It doesn't matter as regards to the question whether you're saved or lost, but does it matter in relation to your spirituality? Some people would tell us that you're more spiritual if you're pre-millennial, or a-millennial, or post-millennial - but let me say absolutely and categorically that it doesn't figure one iota on your spirituality what belief you have with regards to your interpretation of the Scriptures in this regard. Thirdly: does it matter for ultimate worldwide Christian fellowship? I have to believe, it is my own conviction, no, it ought not to matter. It is a fundamental of the faith to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again, but that is where the fundamental of the faith ends - not any individual interpretation, no matter how important we may feel personally it to be. I re-echo the words of, I believe, Augustine the great church father, that in the Christian church at large on essentials there ought to be unity, on nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity. I hope tonight to strike a note of charity and grace in our deliberations on this subject tonight.

Let me, before we go on any further, illustrate this issue in this way: imagine that the long-lost cousin, Joshua, is coming home. He has sent a letter that he's going to return to the homestead. Brother Jimmy think he's going to come in a car, brother Joe think he's coming by plane, and brother Jimmy thinks he's coming by boat - and the next minute the three of them are all fighting over the matter. Then the doorbell rings and there's Joshua, and they've missed the whole joy of anticipation of Joshua's coming because they've been bickering about how he's coming. He was coming, and that is and ought to always stay the most important thing in our minds - and because they were fighting about it they even missed, not only the joy of anticipation, but the actuality of his personality as he came.

Now let me say that we must not allow the issues surrounding Christ's return to divert our attention from the great personality of this subject. This subject is not about dates, or charts, it is chiefly about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ - and let's never forget that. We come to the book that we have read out of tonight, it chiefly ought to be called and entitled 'The Revelation', not of St John the Divine, but 'The Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is about the consummation of all things, prophetically, in the will of God, in the person of His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Himself.

I would have to say that it worries me a little that prophetic meetings like this one tonight attract more people than any others. Let me strike a note of caution by quoting C.H. Spurgeon's beloved hymn that we often sing around the Lord's Table, and I freely admit that I am quoting it completely and utterly out of context - hopefully I won't do that with any of the Scriptures tonight! - but he says this:

If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him,
O, may His love the scales displace
And bid us see Him face-to-face'.

Now with all those words of caution, if we conclude at the end of all that it doesn't matter what your particular interpretation of Scripture is in regard to prophetic issues, you have made a grave error. It may not be all-important, it may not affect your salvation or your sanctification or your ultimate universal fellowship with the church of Jesus Christ at large - although it is not all-important, we have to say that it is very important. Twofold: one, I believe for Assembly teaching - it begs the question: how can any local church teach on the subject of the second coming of the Saviour if it doesn't follow a certain line on it? I believe that the dearth in second coming teaching today is for this reason, that's why it's seldom preached on, because no one really wants to commit themselves to one particular interpretive view. We need to have, and it is healthy to have a particular line on prophecy, that we may teach this great fundamental truth. Secondly it is an important matter because Bible interpretation stands or falls on it. To a large extent the method of your Bible interpretation is affected on the whole by the view that you take on how to interpret prophecy. Of course, the prophetic Scriptures in the Bible are gravely affected by your interpretation, but I believe that indeed the whole of the interpretation of the word of God can be affected depending on which particular view you take: pre-, post-, or a- millennial. Most people delve, as I've said, into these prophetic passages without even considering these issues.

So although they are not all-important, let us get them into perspective tonight: they are very important. So let us begin, I want to start this evening with a comparison of these views. If you look on the back of your sheet tonight, we've gone to some trouble to put three diagrams that you may not be able to make head or tail of, but hopefully as we go through tonight's meeting - and I hope you won't restrict me to time at all this evening - we'll be able to understand them a little bit more and come to some conclusions at the end of our evaluations. If we are to compare these diagrams that you see, the first one that you have is a-millennialism, that we would have to say has had a very popular revival in our modern evangelical age.

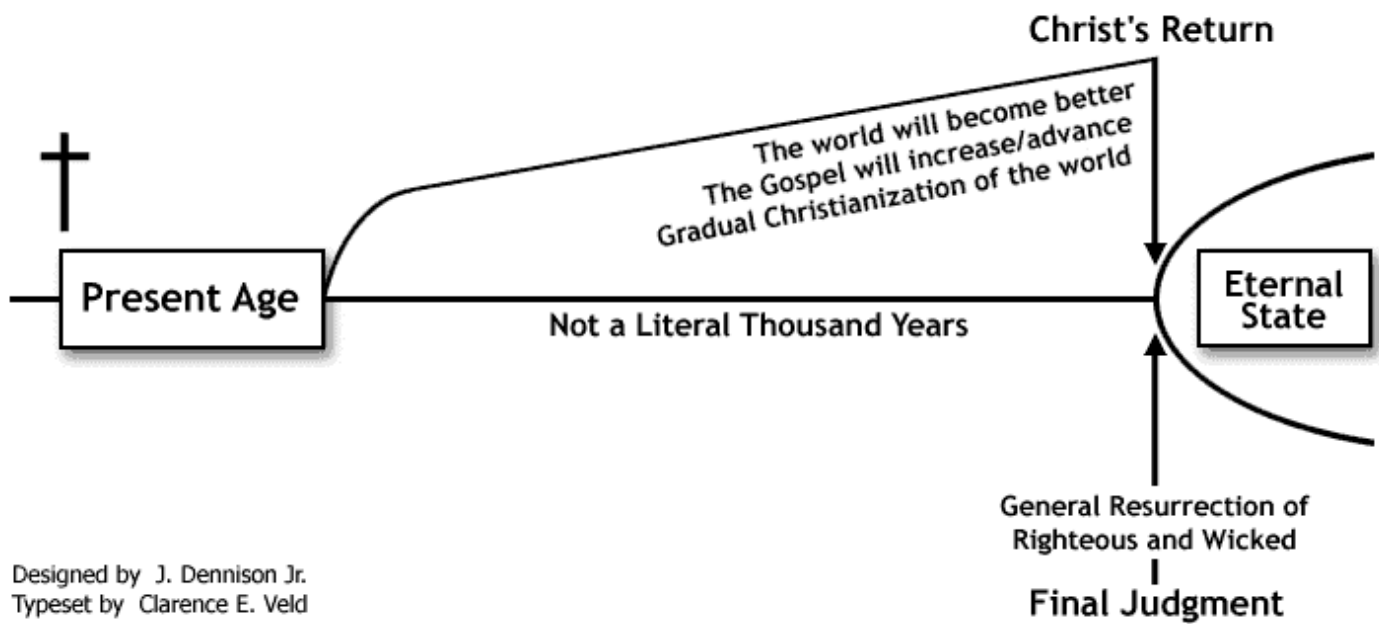


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Now let me break down this word 'a-millennialism' for you. This prefix 'A' means 'no' - it just means 'no', 'no-millennial', no millennium or millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. So a-millennialists are people who believe that there is no literal 1000 year political kingdom of God reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth. Now hopefully you can see this little red dot, if you don't you need to get your eyes tested, but here is the cross of the Lord Jesus, and a-millennialism simply teaches that the present church age in which we live is the millennial reign of Christ. Do you understand that? This is why you have this line, we are now in the millennium, the consummation of the ages is not yet but it will come one day. The Lord Jesus Christ will come to the earth, there will be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, there will be a final judgment and then the eternal state will be issued in.

They believe that the future kingdom that's foretold in Daniel's prophecy chapter 2 and chapter 7 is a totally spiritual kingdom in nature - not literal on the earth for 1000 years, but that kingdom consists of perhaps a few things. It either consists of the church age, you and I down here on earth now as we live for Christ; or it can also consist of Christ's present rule from heaven over the hearts of all His believing people down on the earth; or it can also consist of the future eternal state - what we would call the new heaven and the new earth. When Christ comes there will be a general resurrection of all the dead, there will be a general judgment and the sheep and the goats will be separated, and then the end will come of this present earth and the immediate future eternal state will be ushered in. Now I hope that you can understand in brief what a-millennialism is from that diagram.

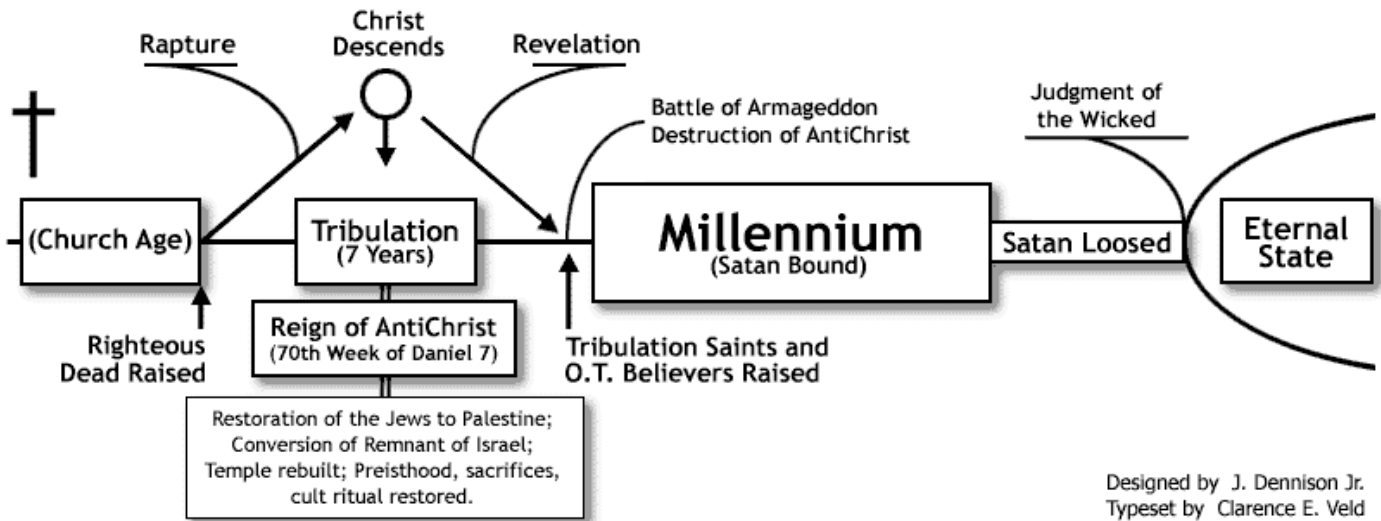
Then the second major school of thought is what we call post-millennialism. Now if the prefix 'a' means 'no', the prefix 'post' means 'after'. This is a belief, which may seem strange to some, that Christ will come after the millennium. Now they believe in a literal kingdom of God upon the earth, maybe not a literal thousand years, but they believe that it will not be established by the Lord Jesus Christ coming to the earth and issuing in a thousand year reign on the earth, but instead through human effort - that means you and me as Christians, and the word in general through the effort of man's expanding knowledge, his new discoveries and inventions, his dominion over nature increasing as technology and science evolves, and also primarily in the Christian Church the expanding influence of Bible-believing Christians - they believe that we can usher in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.



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I hope you can understand that - look at your diagram up here or on your sheet. This is the present age, but through our effort as the world becomes better - whether it be through technology or evolution, some even believe, or the influence of us, the salt and light of the Gospel in society - we through the gradual Christianisation of the world will usher in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then there will be, very similar to a-millennialism, a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and the final judgment, and then the eternal state will be ushered in. So the second coming is post-millennial - in other words, the second coming is the crowning of the golden age where things get better because of, from a Christian perspective, the influence of the Gospel.

A-millennialism, post-millennialism and now finally pre-millennialism - 'a' means 'no', 'post' means 'after', and 'pre' of course means 'before'. This is the belief that the Lord Jesus Christ will return before the millennium, the thousand years or the kingdom of God, and His return will usher in this earthly reign of righteousness. In fact pre-millennialism believes that His return is for the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth. Revelation 20 is probably the major passage of Scripture on this theme, and a casual, simple, literal understanding of these seven verses that we read together tonight we're sure that there is to be a political kingdom of God with Christ ruling worldwide as King together with His saints - it's the most simple understanding of those verses. Pre-millennialists believe that the present church age, the one that we are in, will finish at the rapture of the church at the instigation of seven years tribulation. Pre-millennialists believe this is taught in the Scriptures, they separate the rapture of the church from the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth to judge the wicked and to bring His millennial reign to this planet.



'Millennium' is made up of two Latin words, it's made up of the word 'mille' which means '1000', and the word 'annum' which means 'years'. Pre-millennialists are those who believe that Christ's millennial reign is a literal 'mille-annum', 1000 years reign on the earth. Let me say before we go on any further that pre-millennialists believe that there are two distinct plans, one for the church of Jesus Christ which was a mystery never revealed to the Old Testament saints, and another programme for the people of Israel - ultimately they all come to the glory of God and the one consummation in Christ - but pre-millennialists are those who, as far as I can understand, chiefly believe the Scriptures as they are read in a literal, grammatical, historical sense in the word of God.

Now let's move on as we compare these views to an evaluation and examination of the three of them. We do so with this connecting feature: pre-millennialism is, I believe in my research and study, the undisputed view of the early church of Jesus Christ - there is no doubt about that. It used to be called 'chiliasm', and early Christians were called 'chiliasts' for the fact that they believed in the thousand year reign of Christ, and 'chiliasm' is simply derived from the Greek word for 1000 - they believed in the thousand year reign of the

Lord Jesus. Now we do not have time to look at a complete detailed critique of these three views, but let us look at the evaluation of them in a twofold way. First: historically, as I have mentioned; and second: hermeneutically - now that word 'hermeneutics' is simply a big theological word for how you interpret the Bible. One: historics, two: hermeneutics.

Let's look at this from a historic point of view, and evaluate these three views: pre-, post-, and a-millennialism. Let me say that many historians disagree on whether they themselves are a-, pre-, or post-millennial - but most of them agree that the early church, just at the apostles and after that, the first view about prophetic things was pre-millennial. It was the predominant orthodox view of believers in the church of Jesus Christ, and in fact we can record that for the first three centuries of Christendom there was no other view but pre-millennialism. Now I could stand up here tonight and bore you with a whole list of past and present historians who all disagree on their own personal interpretation of prophetic Scriptures, but who all agree with the fact that the early church was orthodoxly pre-millennial.

I'm not going to give you them all, you're glad, but I will give you one - a man by the name of J.N.D. Kelly, nothing to do with the J.N.D. of the Brethren, or Kelly of the Brethren, a totally different person altogether - he is acknowledged internationally as an authority on patristic Christian thought, that is the Christian thought of the early church fathers. He is typical in his scholarly opinion on this regard of the historicity of the pre-millennial view - in fact, if you do A-level R.E. [Religious Education], his book is your core textbook for all of early church history. It was quite depressing at times, I will have to confess to you! But on this issue he says these words, I quote from his book 'Early Christian Doctrines': 'The great theologians who followed the apologists, Iraneaus, Tertullian and Hypolitus were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism'. Now mark this: 'They are all exponents of millenarianism, that is the belief in the thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth'. He is saying that these patristic fathers, early church fathers, just after the apostles, to a man were all exponents and defendants of millenarianism.

Another historian by the name of Joseph Cullen Ayer in his book 'A Sourcebook for Ancient Church History', says these words - I quote: 'Primitive Church history was marked by great chilistic enthusiasm' - that is this belief in the thousand year reign of Christ - 'By Chiliasm, strictly speaking, is meant the belief that Christ was to return to earth and reign visibly for 1000 years. That return was commonly placed in the immediate future'. Now I want to lay this down as a fundamental right away: the historicity of the pre-millennial view of prophetic Scripture - and I want to say this, categorically: pre-millennialism was not contradicted by a single orthodox church father until the beginning of the third century AD. There was no other view, history defends and declares that.

Let me give you the examples of this in first century Christendom: Clement of Rome was pre-mille, Ignatius was pre-mille, Polycarp who incidentally was a disciple of John the Apostle who wrote the book of Revelation - he could be nothing else but pre-mille. In the second century Justin Martyr, Iraneaus who also was under Polycarp who was a disciple of John, and obviously Polycarp would have taught the teachings of John to Iraneaus, that is why he was pre-millennial - and indeed in some of his writings that I was reading today he warned against any attempts to allegorise Old Testament Scriptures on the thousand year reign of Christ, to somehow see them as a metaphor for the Christian age today - he warned against it! Tertullian also in the second century was pre-millennial. Third century Christians: Cyprian, Comedianus (sp?), Lactantius - many others, I could go down a whole list - but what I just want to prove to you tonight is the history of the church, before we even go near the Scriptures, the history of the church in the first three centuries knew nothing else but pre-millennial thought concerning the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Well, where did it all go wrong for the pre-millennialists? Well let me bring you a little further in this history lesson which I believe is so important: the rejection of pre-millennial thought came chiefly from the Greek

church of the east during the second century. The eastern Church were appalled at the heresies of a group of people called the Montanists - now I haven't got time to go into the controversial issues concerning the Montanists, but they were heretics and the eastern Church was justified in being appalled at them. But the fact of the matter was that the Montanists were also pre-millennial in their view - and, as we would use the expression today, the eastern Church threw out the baby with the bath water. Because they rejected the false doctrine of the Montanists, they also rejected their pre-millennial view of the second coming of the Saviour. Many in the eastern Greek church also rejected this view of a literal kingdom on the earth because they thought there was political danger in it, it could encourage perhaps an actual literal democratic uprising of Christian people, so they shied away from it. Also native to the eastern Greek church there was what we call today an anti-Semitism, they saw Jewish people and Israel as 'Christ-killers' - and therefore they couldn't even entertain, for one moment, that God would still have the Jewish people in mind with regards to His future prophetic programme.

Now add to all those factors that infiltrating the eastern church at this time was what theologians call 'Alexandrian theology'. Now please keep following with me, if you can't follow all this get the tape afterwards, but we have to lay this down for it's important and so relevant to our day and age and the understanding of prophecy that the church has today. This Alexandrian theology was developing in the Greek church, and Alexandrian theology was starting to imbibe the teaching of Plato and other Greek philosophers, who were saying this: every physical matter around us is evil - i.e. the things you see around you, and even your body, anything physical is evil; but anything spiritual is good. Therefore to conceive in their minds of a literal, physical, earthly kingdom of Christ was absurd and even to be despised - because everything physical was evil, therefore they opted for a spiritual kingdom. Now as this Alexandrian theology infiltrated the eastern church, one of its major proponents in Alexandria was a man called Origen - and he developed the common, even today, allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Now what does that mean? It simply means this: that you don't just take Scripture as it is read, but you read into it some kind of allegory or a metaphor, that it all represented something. Now we're not saying that you can't ever take metaphors from Scripture, and we believe highly in typology and so forth, but allegorical interpretation ignored the literal, historical, grammatical interpretation - the most plain and normal understanding as you read the word of God - and that got Origen into a whole lot of difficulties that we can't go into tonight.

That teaching was taken from the east to the west by a man called Jerome, who rejected everything Jewish within the Scriptures, and it was also promoted in the Western church now by a man that we all know well as St Augustine. Augustine, who incidentally previously held the pre-millennial view, began to develop his thought into a-millennialism - and he wrote a book that you can still buy cheaply in your popular Christian bookshelves called 'The City of God'. Augustine was the first Christian, the first Christian, to teach that the organised catholic universal church of Christ is the Messianic kingdom and the millennial reign today that began with the first coming of our Lord Jesus. Let me say that Augustine's view dominated the church of Jesus Christ for seventeen centuries, right up to the 17th century. That was the major view of the church: a-millennialism, coming from its forefather Augustine, and before him Origen and Alexandrian theology, to allegorise Scripture, particularly prophetic Scripture.

Now, what happened then in the 17th century? Well, in the 17th century - I was nearly going to say some of you could remember it! - in the 17th century there was an intellectual revolution. There was the beginning of the thought of evolution, there was also an industrial revolution, and you could say it was a real golden age beginning to start among humanity. There was an optimistic view on the threshold of time, both in the world and in the church, and so - you can almost see it now, can't you? - there was a move from Augustine's a-millennialism to post-millennialism, believing that this golden age was coming when there would be a great revival and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ would be ushered in.

Let me say first of all that many of the most godly men that ever lived were post-millennial. During the 17th

and 18th centuries there were revivals, of course there was Reformation, and then there was revival age - men like Whitefield and Wesley, men like Jonathan Edwards, Hodge and his great theology, post-millennial men. You could almost forgive them for thinking they were in a golden age, but the fact of the matter is: what chiefly encouraged their prophetic view was not the Scriptures, but was the situation in which they found themselves. Well, post-millennialism isn't too popular today - do you know why? Very simply: World War I and World War II - post-millennialism came almost to extinction. Now it's being revived today in some forms of charismatic theology, but ultimately people could no longer believe in a golden age when Nazism came to the fore. Now here's what happened in the church: most post-millennialists who came to World War I said: 'We can't believe in this golden age', and so they rejected totally any idea of the millennial reign of Christ for 1000 years - and guess what, they couldn't become pre-millennial because they believed in a thousand year reign, so what did they become? They became a-millennial. That's why the predominant belief of the church today is a-millennialism, worldwide I'm talking about. Even though there was a revival in pre-millennialism around the time of the early Plymouth Brethren and J. M. Darby and so on, a-millennialism has been the major prophetic theology of Reformed Protestantism, Covenant Protestantism, Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. What I want you to see from this history lesson tonight, even if you don't remember any of it, is this: a-millennialism and post-millennialism, rather than developing out of biblical understanding of the Scriptures, have chiefly evolved out of the influence of these historical factors in Church history, not from the Bible.

Now let's move on from history to hermeneutics, for this is where it really comes home to us as Bible-believing Christians - hermeneutics being, as I've said, your interpretation of the Bible that you have before you. Dr Walvoord, now deceased and gone to glory, a great prophetic teacher, was asked a few years ago this question: 'What do you predict will be the most significant theological issue over the next ten years?'. His answer included these words: 'The hermeneutical problem of not interpreting the Bible literally, especially the prophetic areas. The church today is engulfed in the idea that one cannot interpret prophecy literally'. Now listen, I'm not talking about a wooden literalism that doesn't see any symbolism in the book of Revelation - that is a misrepresentation of pre-millennialism. There is symbolism in all of prophetic Scripture, but what we're talking about here is that in a general sense, whenever we come to prophetic Scripture, we ought to come to it the same way we come to any piece of Scripture and read it with a plain, normal, and - mark these words - literal, historical and grammatical understanding and interpretation. You don't take a way-out, pie-in-the-sky meaning rather than the literal meaning. You don't pluck the Scripture out of its history to take it into present-day age and apply it only to ourselves and not to the ancient people who it was historically given to - i.e. the Jew. You don't just interpret it how it suits you today, and fit it into your scheme of prophecy, but you have to take it grammatically as it is written down whether in the Hebrew or the Greek language.

Now listen: if you read Revelation 20 in that literal, historical, grammatical way, you can only come to an interpretation that it is a pre-millennial understanding of the second coming of Christ. Now, if that doesn't prove it to you, let me quote you an a-millennialist - he's an a-millennialist, I didn't pay him to say it, he wrote it himself - Floyd E. Hamilton, and I can give you where he quoted it. Here's what he said: 'Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the pre-millennialists picture'. He quite freely admits 'We don't interpret prophecy literally, that's why we come to our a-millennial standpoint' - but if you want to interpret Scripture literally, grammatically, historically as we believe we ought to as fundamentalists - you will come to a pre-millennialist picture of things future. Pre-millennialism, and I say it categorically, is the only consistent hermeneutic of interpreting the Bible that interprets it the same from Genesis to Revelation. History testifies to it in examination, hermeneutics testifies to it.

Let's really get to grips with the Scriptures tonight and take a conclusion upon these views that are expressed. I believe the weight of biblical truth supports the pre-millennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I believe

in turn that there are serious biblical problems with a-millennialism and post-millennialism. Now I'm not saying, or implying, that there are no problems with pre-millennialism and there are no differences between pre-millennialists - because there are an awful lot! I'm losing count of them as I study it more and more! Let me leave you tonight in the moments that are left to us with a list that was first given by Gerald B. Stanton, quoted by Mr Tommy Ice who's coming soon to preach in the Iron Hall, and also in an article in the dictionary of pre-millennial theology - reasons why we know and believe that the Lord Jesus Christ must come before He ushers in this thousand year reign.

I give you it under ten headings, and I want you to note them down if you have a pen - if you don't have a pen, bring one next week, I don't think we have any extra pens, have we? No? Bring three next week, and if anybody forgets one you can give another two. Here are ten reasons, in conclusion, upon these views. The first we have already dealt with: the early church was pre-millennial. We all agree on that. Secondly we have looked at hermeneutics, it is the only consistent, literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Let me give you one example - Isaiah 11 and verse 6 talks about a day when the lion will lie down with the lamb. You know that passage, don't you? Now, a-millennialists and post-millennialists both interpret that as a metaphor of saying a sort of peace that comes from being a Christian. The fact of the matter is that that interpretation is problematic when you move out of Isaiah 11 and move into Isaiah 53 - 'He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We hid, as it were, our faces from Him, with His stripes we are healed'. The Jews today still take that passage as a metaphor, liberal Jews, as a metaphor for the Jewish nation suffering down all the ages - because they take an allegorical interpretation of it. But if you're consistent, literally, you have to assume that throughout the whole of Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the major and minor prophets that whenever this great golden age of a millennium is spoken about it is literal.

Thirdly, there is the unconditional nature of the covenants in the word of God. Now what am I talking about? Well, in Genesis 12 you read of the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant that God made with Abraham. Then it's reiterated in Genesis 13 and Genesis 15, Genesis 17 and Genesis 22; and then it's confirmed to Isaac in Genesis 26; then to Jacob in Genesis 28 and Genesis 35 - and really the sum total of that covenant that God made with Abraham and his progeny was that his seed would increase as the grains of sand on the seashore, as the stars in the sky, and that a great nation would come from his bowels, and that that nation would bless the whole earth one day - obviously through Messiah, but ultimately the next promise in the covenant was this: that they would be given a land, and God gave him the border of that land that he would be given, and until this day Israel has not inhabited the whole of that land that was given in covenant promise to Abraham. That was an unconditional promise that was given to Abraham, that will be fulfilled - the church does not fulfil it in a spiritual sense, it cannot unless you're a thief taking Abraham's promise as your own when you're a Gentile! There is the Abrahamic Covenant yet to be fulfilled, so we understand - and we'll maybe look at this later on - that Israel is not the church, as a-millennialists understand and post-millennialists and some historic pre-millennialists. Israel and the church cannot and ought not to be confused. The unconditional nature of the covenants.

Now what leads on from that in one sense is fourthly that the Old Testament teaches a literal earthly kingdom. Now let me bring you to another covenant, you can turn to it if you wish, 2 Samuel 7:16 - this is the Davidic Covenant, the covenant that was given to David. Saul had been rejected, and Nathan said by God's hand upon him to David: 'And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee' - for ever - 'thy throne shall be established for ever'. Now does 'for ever' mean forever? Or does it suddenly become the Gentile people who are in the church of Jesus Christ in our modern age - it cannot if you take it literally, and you take it historically and grammatically. It was spoken to David, it was spoken about his throne in Jerusalem and about the Jewish nation. In Daniel 2:44 the Old Testament speaks of a literal earthly kingdom, it says: 'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these other kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever' - Daniel 2:44, forever! A literal earthly

kingdom that will wipe out all other kingdoms.

Now this kingdom is on the earth, not in heaven. Look at the prophecies of the Old Testament - Isaiah, taking one just, 11 and verse 9, Isaiah says that 'on that day', that millennial reign, 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' - the earth, not heaven, the earth! Other passages tell us that the Lord will reign as King over all the earth. He will be the King, He will reign, Zechariah 14 speaks of that - turn with me to it, Zechariah 14 and verse 4: 'His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem', a mountain, literally and geographically, a nation, a city, Jerusalem, 'on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south'. Verse 9: 'And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one'. Verse 16: 'And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles'.

You read about it in Psalm 2, Ezekiel 37, Hosea 3, Zephaniah 3, and Isaiah 2:4 tells us that during that thousand year literal reign of Christ there will be peace that will reign on earth for the first time, and Isaiah 2 says in verse 4: 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. Read about it in Micah chapter 4, verses 3 to 4. We'll spend a week looking at Israel - bear with me, I've got the cold, and that day I'll have a new throat, praise the Lord! - but Israel shall have a final and permanent return to her homeland, this is Old Testament prophecy! It has to be fulfilled literally - Amos 9:15, just for one example, Amos 9:15: 'I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God'. Regardless of their sin and their backsliding, God promised to bring them back - if you don't believe that, read the latter chapters of the book of Ezekiel 37, 38; read also Isaiah 43, Jeremiah 30 - they all testify the same thing. Old Testament prophecy shows that Messiah's government shall not only take place in the land of Israel presently, but in the very city of Jerusalem - Micah 4, Zechariah 2, Zechariah 8 - and there will be, imagine this in the light of our contemporary situation and political unrest in Palestine, there will be no more unrest in the land, no more violence in Israel!

Isaiah 60 verse 18, listen to these words: 'Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise'. We read too in Daniel 9 and 12, and Ezekiel 40 to 48 - and we spent several long weeks looking at it - that Israel will rebuild a literal temple in Jerusalem, no doubt about it! Israel will be a redeemed people - now I could go on and on and keep you here most of the night going through these Old Testament prophecies, but I think you get my point, don't you? Do you think it is reasonable to just say in a nebulous way that this is all spiritual and applied to us today as the church of Jesus Christ in heaven when we get there one day? I do not think so, do you?

Fifthly: the kingdom is carried, as we have seen it prophetically in the Old Testament, it is carried unchanged into the New Testament. The understanding that the Jews had of the kingdom in the Old is still the understanding in the New. Matthew's gospel is the gospel of the kingdom, it's the gospel that sets forth the King of the Jews to us - His genealogy in chapter 1 is the genealogy of the Lord Jesus as the King, and the rightful King at that! When we go to Luke's gospel, if you turn with me to it, Luke chapter 1 verse 30, and the angel says unto Mary: 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David' - the Davidic Covenant. Now did He get that in His lifetime on the earth? He did not: 'And he shall reign over the house of Jacob' - who's that? It is Israel - 'for ever', has that happened? 'And of his kingdom there shall be no end'.

I think the Bible is clear, of course in the New Testament - although we have to say that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is in our hearts and is not fully consummated as yet - in the New Testament there is still this prophetic idea and view that the literal kingdom of God is coming soon. There is an imminence, waiting on the Lord Jesus, as we'll see next week in the rapture - the believers in the New Testament were ready at any moment for Christ to come and for His kingdom.

Following on from that in the New Testament, sixthly: Christ also supports this earthly kingdom. In Matthew 6, just to cite one example, verse 10 in the Lord's prayer, or the disciple's prayer: 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done' - where? - 'on earth as it is in heaven'. Let me take you to another example - do you remember the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God one day? The promise that the Lord Jesus included in His reply to them was that they would be sitting on thrones, and they would be judging the twelve tribes of Israel - the twelve tribes of where? Israel!

Now as I said, there is a kingdom in men's hearts, there's no doubt about that - but there is a literal kingdom yet to be fulfilled upon the earth, where the Lord Jesus will reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run. Christ testified Himself - seventhly, there are multiple resurrections in scripture. I only take time to cite two: there is the resurrection unto life that is spoken about, we'll look at it next week - 1 Corinthians 15, the rapture of the church, the resurrection of those who are dead in Christ. Paul talked about it in 1 Thessalonians 4: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them that have died in Christ before us, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord'. The unrighteous dead are not mentioned, but then there is the unrighteous dead resurrected coming unto judgment that we read about in this passage in Revelation 20 verses 5 and 6, and later on in 12 to 15 - a different resurrection. There are other resurrections, don't confuse them all.

Eighthly - we've already mentioned this - Revelation 20 teaches in a simple understanding, you cannot read it any other way as you read it chronologically, pre-millennialism. Ninthly, pre-millennialism harmonises the entire Bible - there is no other system of biblical prophetic interpretation that attempts to bring all of the spheres of biblical literature together in one final consummation as this does. Tenthly and finally, only pre-millennialism provides a satisfactory conclusion to history - only pre-millennialism. What do I mean? Well, I mean this: what greater glory to the Lord Jesus Christ could there be than the fact that one day He will reign over this depraved old world? What would it be if He never had sway on the earth as the Old Testament testified to and prophesied? One of the glories of Christ is that He will come, and He will reign, and He will rule with a rod of iron and dash His enemies in pieces as a potter's vessel. Not only that, it'll be a righteous reign - and how could God take satisfaction in the whole running of human history if it didn't end in a satisfactory way in the reign of righteousness? Only this view concludes history in a satisfactory way.

I'm not getting paid for this tonight, but on the 13th of November we are having a teacher of the word of God by the name of Dr Thomas Ice - he's coming to open our new church building just across the way here. He probably, I would imagine, will be touching on prophetic themes at least at some point within his ministry. Thomas Ice is an authority on prophetic Scriptures, and in a discourse that he gave just there in 2003 on the subject: 'The Unscriptural Theologies of A-Millennialism and Post-Millennialism', which he gave to the pre-tribulation study group, he said these words - and it's with these words that I want to conclude. They're up here on the screen if you can see them, but I'll read them out to you - he says this, and I say it too: 'More could be said, suffice to say that neither post-, or a-millennialism is taught in the Bible'. That's an astounding statement, but it's true - neither a- nor post-millennialism is taught in the Bible: 'Show me a single text that teaches it! Pre-millennialism can be inductively gleaned from Revelation 20, in fact that is why we have these terms pre-millennialism, a-millennialism, post-millennialism - because Revelation 20 speaks of a 1000 year reign of Christ that will take place after His return in Revelation 19'. Now mark this statement, the next paragraph: 'Since sound theology should be developed from the Bible itself, and since the Bible teaches only

a single viewpoint on any issue, a-millennialism and post-millennialism are nowhere to be found - but pre-millennialism is found in every page of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation'. Now mark these words: 'The strength of pre-millennialism is the text of Scripture, study it, teach it, proclaim it, hope in it, live it - Maranatha!'

He also said in that lecture that historically only the Bible looks ahead to the future as a time when life will be better than it has ever been in the past. Have you ever thought about that? All the pagan religions of our world look into the past, and think: 'If only we could return to the good old days then everything would be wonderful. If we could just return to the days of the Pharaohs of Egypt, if we could bring back the wonderful days of Nebuchadnezzar' - maybe you're saying: 'If we could only get back to the 50's and the 60's when I was young' - listen: only the Bible teaches that the best is yet to come! It also teaches that He could come at any moment, He could even come this evening.

Well, I hope you see that I believe it matters - it may not be all-important, but it's very important. Hopefully it will serve as a foundation for the next five weeks - come back next week when we'll be looking at 'The Rapture of the Church - Biblical Fact or Fairytale?'

Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 2

"Rapture: Fact Or Fairytale?"

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John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. *Fairytales*

- (1) *The word 'Rapture'*
- (2) *The Irvingites*
- (3) *The Secret Rapture*

2. *Facts*

- (1) *A comparison of texts*
- (2) *A contrast in the comings*
- (3) *The imminence of the Advent*
- (4) *A time interval is required*
- (5) *The nature of the Tribulation*
- (6) *The nature of the Church*
- (7) *The work of the Holy Spirit*

3. *Focus*

- (1) *Motive for sanctification*
- (2) *Energy for soul-winning*
- (3) *Comfort for suffering and sorrowful saints*

John's gospel chapter 14, and this is a very familiar passage to most of you so we'll only read just the first three verses, because that's all that will be taking our attention really this evening. Verse 1: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also".

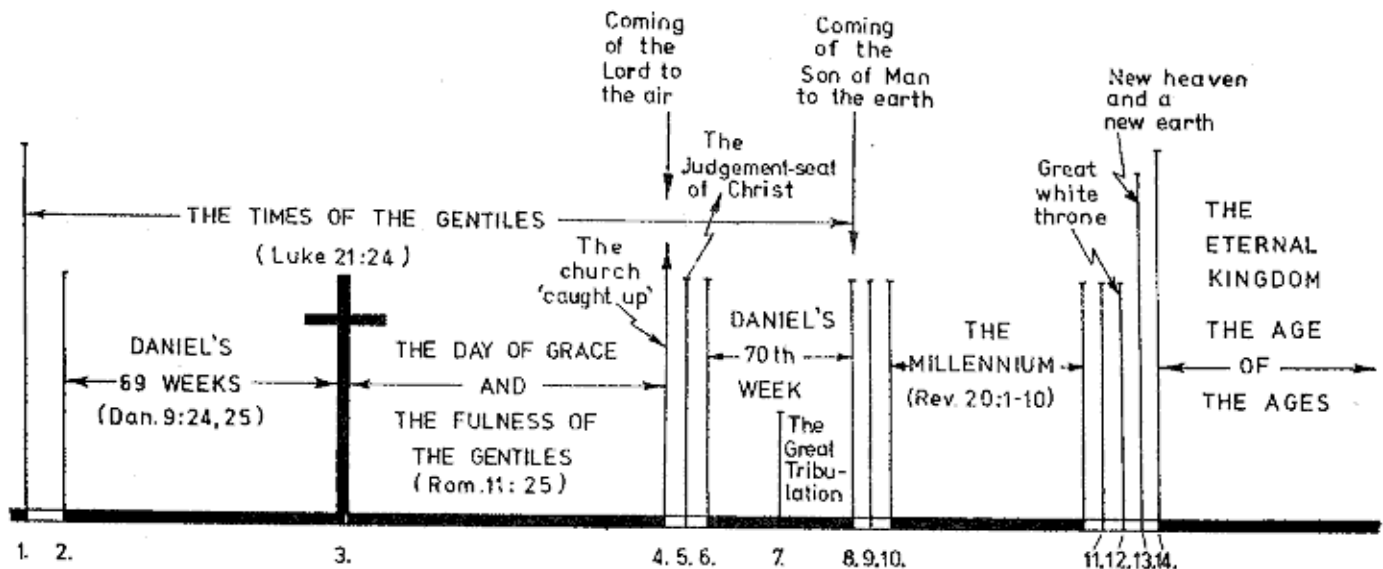
Put a finger, or if you don't have enough of those put a marker in chapter 14, and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 - all these three passages are on the theme of the rapture, and we'll prove that later on in our meeting, but just keep that in mind as we read these verses. Again this is a great passage of Scripture that we spent several weeks on recently in our exegesis of the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, specifically on resurrection, but we'll take just these verses 51 to 58 on the subject of the rapture: "Behold", Paul says, "I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".

Put a marker in 1 Corinthians 15, and now turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 13 - Paul, again, writing to this church in Thessalonica says: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep", which is just a phrase for those who have died in Christ, "that ye sorrow not, even as

others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent", or go before, "them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words".

Now I hope we established to most people's satisfaction last Monday evening that the only possible, as far as I'm concerned, biblical interpretation of prophetic truth within the Scriptures is a pre-millennial one. I hope that we showed that not just from the word of God, but from history and the fact that the early church predominantly, if not exclusively, for the first 300 years of her history was a pre-millennial church. Then we looked hermeneutically - that is the method of interpreting the Scriptures - we saw how the only real consistent way to interpret God's word is a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation read from Genesis to Revelation. That did not mean that there is no symbolism within the word of God, that we cannot read typology into certain truth - but first and foremost, the primary interpretation of all Scripture must be literal, historical and grammatical, and consistent throughout.

So we saw that pre-millennialism was the most biblical way of interpreting prophetic Scripture, yet I did allude last week to the fact that even among those calling themselves pre-millennialists there are different interpretations of prophetic Scripture - specifically on this subject that we're looking at tonight, the subject of the rapture of the church. There are about three major sections within pre-millennialism - that's right! Three more sections in pre-millennialism alone, in their understanding of the rapture of the church. Now, if David kindly puts the first diagram on the screen here which you have on the back of your study sheet, just to make it a little bit easier for me to point it out even though I don't have a pointer tonight - what we're talking about here with regards to the rapture of the church is this little line here, the coming of the Lord to the air, which is under number 4 in your diagram.



SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

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| 1. The times of the Gentiles (Jer. 25:1). | 8. The coming of the Son of Man (2Thess. 2:7,8; Mat. 24:30). |
| 2. Decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8). | 9. The judgement of the living nations (Mat 25:31-33). |
| 3. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke. 23:33). | 10. The Millennium (Rev. 20: 4-6). |
| 4. The coming of the Lord to the air (1Thess. 4:16,17). | 11. The final rebellion (Rev. 20: 7-9). |
| 5. The Judgement-seat of Christ (2 Cor: 5:10). | 12. The judgement of the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). |
| 6. The 70th week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:26,27). | 13. The new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-5). |
| 7. The great tribulation (Mat. 24:21). | 14. The eternal kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11; Eph 3:21 RVM). |

Now pre-tribulationists are people who believe that the rapture will take place before the tribulation - Daniel's 70th week - the Great Tribulation when God will pour on to this world, trouble that has never been seen before. So a pre-tribulationist is someone who believe that the rapture will take place before, pre- the tribulation. That's easy enough to understand, I hope. Then there's a group of people called mid-tribulationists, and they believe that after this false peace that is brought in by Antichrist after the first three and a half years of the tribulation's seven years, then the Lord Jesus will come to the air and rapture His church just before all of the - what would you say? - obvious wrath is poured out upon the earth. So in the 'mid' period, that's the mid-tribulationists. Then there are post-tribulationists, even among pre-millennialists, people who believe that the Lord Jesus Christ's coming to the air and the rapture of the church will take place almost simultaneously with His coming to the earth. His coming to the air for His saints and rapturing them will take place at the same time as His coming to the earth, the Mount of Olives, at the very end of the Great Tribulation just about number 8 there - it's all going to happen round about together at that point.

So even among people who would call themselves pre-millennialists, there are different views with regards to the rapture of the church. There's also a group of believers who call themselves partial-rapturists, and they believe really - some of them at least - that the rapture could take place at any point during the Great Tribulation, but the initial rapture will take place before the tribulation but specifically only of people who are really sanctified, really going on with God, and they would call them 'the overcomers' - real spiritual people will be raptured.

Now we'll deal with some of these features as we go throughout our study tonight, but of course we looked last week at a-millennialists and post-millennialists who generally believe that this idea of a rapture, being different and distinct from the actual coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth and His feet landing on the Mount of Olives, that it's a figment of the imagination, it's a fairytale of wooden literalistic Bible interpretation. It's a fairytale. So we're asking the question tonight under our title: 'The Rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ: is it a fact, a biblical fact that we can prove from the Scriptures, or is it a fanciful fairytale from our futuristic imagination?'

In recent years a pre-wrath advocate, and that simply means one of these mid-tribulationists who believe that the Lord will take the church to be with Himself midway just before the real wrath starts three and a half years into the tribulation, a pre-wrath tribulationist by the name of Marvin Rosenthal - a converted Jew - wrote that 'the pre-tribulation rapture', I quote, 'is of satanic origin'. What are we talking about? Those who believe, and we include ourselves among those here in the Iron Hall tonight, we who believe that the Lord Jesus is going to rapture the church before the Great Tribulation are believing a satanic deception, something that he says - I quote: 'was unheard of before 1830', just a couple of hundred years ago.

That's one modern day objection to the belief in the rapture of the church just before the seven-year tribulation period. But there are other objections, those who say that this idea of a rapture is a fairytale say: 'Well, it's not found in the Bible'. If you get your concordance down and look right throughout the Old and New Testament, you will not find the word 'rapture' in the whole of the Scriptures. It's some theology that has been dreamed up in a man's imagination, but it's not found within the word of God. Then others who believe it's a fairytale believe that it was first introduced by John Nelson Darby of the Brethren movement - it's not from the Bible, but it was his invention. There are others who go even further to say that his invention came and was engendered by a prophetic utterance of a woman called Margaret McDonald in a meeting by a man called Edward Irving, who was really a precursor to the modern day pentecostal movement. J. N. Darby heard this prophetic utterance at Edward Irving's meeting, and it talked about a pre-tribulation rapture and he imbibed it, and he built his eschatology all around it, and that's where we get the idea of a rapture today.

Now the objections continue, and I could go on through a lot more this evening - save to say that they're all

as ridiculous as those that I've just mentioned. All of them fail to credibly react with the Holy Scripture's biblical weight with regards to the evidence we have in the word of God for a rapture, and indeed for a pre-tribulation rapture before the Great Tribulation on the earth. So what I want us today is systematically tonight, first of all deal in brief with some of these fairytales that we've mentioned; and then secondly deal with the real biblical facts that we would rather get to tonight; and then finish off, God willing, if time permits focusing ourselves on what the rapture really ought to mean for us as Bible-believing Christians.

So let's look first of all at your first point: fairytales concerning the teaching of the rapture. I don't know whether you've ever heard of 'straw doll argumentation' - that simply means that if you're going to pull down another argument, you don't really grapple with the real issues that they're propounding, but you erect the issues that you want people to think they're propounding, and then you seek to destroy them and show that you have defeated their argument. It's not really dealing with the issues of your opponent, but rather it's inventing the issues that aren't there, that they're not propounding, and then seeking to prove those wrong when they aren't authentic in the first place. I believe that this is such, in a sense, as we go through some of these fairytales concerning what people say pre-tribulationists teach with regards to the rapture.

Let's deal with the first objection: those who say that the word 'rapture' is not found in the Bible, it doesn't appear within the word of God. You're right in one sense, if you believe that a linguistic translation such as the Authorised Version is the original Scriptures - which of course, it is not, it is the translation into English from the original Greek - but there's more than an English translation of the Bible, of course you know that. Before we go on any further with regards to the word 'rapture', which I believe is found in the Bible, you will not find the word 'Trinity' in the Bible, you will not find the word 'Bible' in the Bible - but we don't object to the use of that word, I hope. The fact of the matter is that the word which we read in 1 Thessalonians 4, if you want to turn to it, in verse 14 'caught up' is one word in the Greek language: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air'. It is the Greek word 'harpazo' - you find it in Acts chapter 8, where you remember Philip went to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch. After his job was done and he'd led him to Christ, preaching from Isaiah 53, the Bible says that the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip - 'harpazo' is the Greek word. He was caught away, he was snatched away in a spiritual sense, he just disappeared.

You find the same word 'harpazo' in 2 Corinthians 12 and verses 2 and 4, where Paul is speaking of another man it seemed, but of his own testimony, spoke of how he was caught up to the third heaven and saw things that couldn't be uttered in our own languages - but this word 'caught up' is 'harpazo', to be snatched away. Now listen to me: it is a verb, but the noun corresponding to the verb 'harpazo' is simply the idea of rapture - Philip was raptured away from the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul was raptured into the third heaven - it means to seize upon with force, to snatch up, and the Greek word is the word that we get our English word 'harpoon' from... 'harpazo'... 'harpoon'. Now many years ago there was a translation of the Bible that was in Latin that was mostly used during the medieval times, and was adopted also by the Roman Catholic Church, and it was called the Latin Vulgate Version. The Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible used the word 'rapere', which is the root English term for 'rapture' - it is the word we get 'rapture' from. The idea is there, the root of the word 'rapture' is there - but apart from all that, many people that throw this stone at pre-tribulationists and say 'rapture' is not in the Bible, don't even realise that most, if not all, biblical commentators when they come to 1 Thessalonians 4, no matter what they believe about when or if the rapture will take place, interpret this as a rapture. The issue is not so much is it a rapture, but when it will take place and who it applies to. It is a false argument, so that's all the time we're going to spend on tonight - it is a fairytale in itself.

Secondly, here is another objection that people bring to the idea of a rapture before the tribulation, and I've just entitled it 'The Irvingites'. Marv Rosenthal, that I mentioned to you in my introduction, is a modern day adherent to this. He claims that this idea of a rapture before the tribulation was unheard of before 1830. In fact, I quote him, he says that 'It was introduced by Satanic means', I quote, 'to thwart the Lord's warning to

His children'. He claims that Satan, the father of lies, gave a 15 -year-old girl named Margaret McDonald a lengthy vision. This vision was said to happen at a meeting of Edward Irving, and it was claimed by Rosenthal that Darby, who was there, adapted that prophetic utterance in a charismatic sense, and he built his eschatology around it. Now let me say that, as far as I can see, Rosenthal and other claimants of this issue of this prophecy that was given, cannot or do not substantiate their claims - they do not document the claim. Apart from the fact that the authenticity of those accusations cannot be ascertained, I ask this question: if you know anything about John Nelson Darby - and I hasten to add that I don't agree with him on all terms - but if you know anything about the man and the modern day Plymouth Brethren movement of its age and origins, who could believe that a man like J. N. Darby could base a complete system of eschatology on such a source as a 15 -year-old girl in some pre-charismatic meeting? Apart from all this, it is categorical that J. N. Darby clearly held an early form of pre-tribulation rapture in January 1827, three full years before this prophetic utterance in 1830.

Tommy Ice, who's coming to us in the not too distant future, he quotes F. F. Bruce who was part of the Brethren movement his entire life - and I hasten to also add that he was not a pre-tribulation rapturist, he didn't agree with what we're going to propound tonight - he said: 'When did he', Darby, 'get this idea of a pre-tribulation rapture?', I quote, 'The reviewers answer would be that it was in the air in the 1820s and the 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy. Direct dependence by Darby upon Margaret McDonald is unlikely'. Here is a man who is among the Brethren, who is an astounding scholar, but who is not a pre-tribulationist, who says it is unlikely that Darby built his eschatology around Margaret McDonald's utterance. A man who is definitely not a pre-tribulationist is called John Bray, he is an opponent of the pre-tribulation rapture. He says in even stronger terms: 'It is impossible for me to believe that Darby got his pre-tribulation rapture teaching from Margaret McDonald's vision in 1830, he was already a believer in it since 1827, as he plainly said'.

In fact, J. N. Darby, if you read his writings, says, testifying that in convalescence around these years of 1827 he was reading the word of God, and the views that he later espoused jumped out of the biblical page simply for one reason - he began to make a distinction between Israel in the word of God and the church, and when he did this everything fell into place. Darby was not the first in history to espouse to it, I'm not going to give you another history lesson tonight - I fear that I may have bored you all last week - but the fact of the matter is that many of the early church fathers believed in the immanency of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, which points to a pre-tribulation rapture. I hope you see that this accusation is not dealing with the biblical facts and the issue is concerned, but it is throwing mud and hoping that it will stick, and it is even happening in our modern age.

Here's the third objection that some make, which I believe is in a sense a fairytale. People say that it's 'a secret rapture' - Revelation 1:7 says that every eye will see the Lord when He returns, but you believe in this sort of secret rapture, an obscure abduction almost like a UFO, when no one will know about it - and all these Christians will disappear. Let me say that years ago pre-tribulationists did use the phrase 'secret rapture', but they did not use it in the way that opponents of pre-tribulationists use it as they erect this straw doll that I'm talking about, to dislocate it and pull apart in their argumentation. It has been misused and misrepresented, and that's why pre-tribulationists have stopped using it, because the idea of a secret rapture does not mean a secretive rapture - the sense is immanency, the sense is that there is nothing left for God to fulfil in His prophetic programme before the Lord Jesus can catch up His church. The very nature of the word 'rapture', 'caught up', is the sense of happening quickly, and people all around us astounded at what has happened.

First Thessalonians clearly teaches that the Lord will shout, there will be the voice of an archangel, there will be a trumpet blown - and although every eye will not see the Lord, I believe eyes will see what has happened, and the vacancy that there is on this planet of Bible-believing Christians. The whole world will

know it has happened, even if they don't understand what has happened. Now if you're going to argue against this issue of the rapture of the church, whether it's biblical fact or fanciful fairytale, let's argue with the word of God - not these silly issues that don't really exist. So hopefully, now that we've dispensed with these fairytales concerning the teaching of the rapture, let's go to our second point - the facts from the Bible establishing the teaching of the rapture, and why I believe in the pre-tribulationist view of the rapture.

Now, if we could all turn to one single verse in the Bible tonight to prove that the rapture will take place before the seven-year tribulation, well, I wouldn't have to go on tonight. But there isn't one verse, one plain key verse - when the rapture will take place, where it will take place before the second coming and the tribulation - there is not one verse, or even a couple of verses all together that would really satisfy everyone. That's why there's so much debate about it! We would only be ignorant if we were to say anything else tonight. But as well as saying that, let me also say that there are many doctrines in the Bible that we hold very dear, and there is not one particular proof text that we can turn to to prove it. Systematic theology is a very worthy and valuable endeavour, that is simply taking a theme throughout the word of God, collecting all the facts that you can find within it, putting it together and coming to some conclusions - and there are certain facts that we have come to a conclusion on with regards to doctrine using systematic theology, not just a single verse, but taking a load of verses, harmonising passages and coming to systematic conclusions.

There are proof texts that we could turn to with regards to the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, something we hold as a fundamental - but in order to get a real picture of the whole deity of our Lord, and how His deity, the fact that He is God, relates to His humanity; the fact that He has two distinct natures unmingled in one personality - He was not two people in one body - all these things cannot be found in just one specific verse, you have to take the whole spectrum of Scripture and the weight of evidence there. The Trinity that I mentioned earlier, you will find it very hard to get one verse as a proof text for the Trinity - but we believe it because it's the testimony of the whole of the panorama of the word of God. Do you see what I'm talking about? It's similar with regards to this teaching of the rapture, that if you take a literal interpretation of the New Testament from start to finish relating to the rapture, it will, I believe, lead you to a pre-tribulationist interpretation.

Now that we've laid a foundation, let's look individually at some of these facts. Here's the first fact: if you do a comparison of some of the texts with regards to the second coming of our Lord Jesus, you will find that they're similar. I want you to turn to two passages: John 14 and 1 Thessalonians 4, and keep the two of them open because we're going to flick from one to the other. Some would doubt me, perhaps, reading John 14 as a passage on the rapture, but I hope that you'll see in just a moment or two that John 14 is talking exactly about the same event as 1 Thessalonians 4 - it can only be doing so, and you will see that the words that are used by the Lord are identical almost to the words that are used by the apostle, the phrases, even the order of the phrases are identical, showing us that they all refer to the same event.

Let me prove this to you. First of all look at verse 1 of John chapter 14, He talks about trouble, the Lord: 'Let not your heart be troubled'. Now go on to 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 13, he talks about trouble: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not'. He starts to talk of trouble in John 14:1, and in verse 13 of 1 Thessalonians 4 he's talking about sorrow. Then He goes on in chapter 14 of John: 'ye believe in God, believe also in me' - He talks about belief. Look back at verse 14 of 1 Thessalonians 4: 'For if we believe that Jesus died' - he talks about belief - 'and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him'. Now go back to John 14, and in verse 1 - we haven't even got out of verse 1 yet - He talks about God and He talks about Himself: 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me'. Now go back to verse 14 of Thessalonians 4: 'For if we believe that Jesus', there's Jesus, 'died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him'.

Now verse 2 of John 14, He talks about the fact that He has imparted this knowledge to the disciples, He told

them: 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you'. Verse 15 of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says: 'For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord'. Then in verse 3 of John 14, again He talks about coming: 'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again'. Verse 15 of Thessalonians 4: 'For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them' - 'unto the coming of the Lord', the coming is there also. In verse 3 of John 14 again: 'I will receive you unto myself', and in verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4 there is the 'caught up' which is the reception of the church unto Himself. In verse 3 He says 'I will receive you to myself', and then in verse 17 of Thessalonians 4 'caught up together to meet the Lord in the air'.

What does He say in verse 3 John 14? 'Where I am, there ye may be also'. In verse 17 Thessalonians 4: 'and there we shall ever be with the Lord'. Have you seen that before? They are talking about the same event! Of course Paul is talking about the word of the Lord, could it not be the word of the Lord in John chapter 14? I don't know whether it's specifically so, but it certainly is the same event, the words are the same, the phrases the same, almost exact and in the same order - both passages only deal with righteous men, saved men; and both, if you will look at it for a moment, take the saint of God from trouble and sorrow to be forever with the Lord in glory, not on earth, they're taken from earth to heaven. Do you see the progression? There are certain comparisons of Scripture that are exact with regards to the issue of the second coming of the Lord - that is one biblical fact: certain Scriptures are in tandem and in agreement.

But we would have to say, on the other side of the coin, that there are certain Scriptures with regard to the second coming of the Lord which are not in agreement. Now what do I mean? I don't mean that the Bible is contradicting itself, but your second fact is that there is a contrast in the comings of the Lord within scripture. There's a contrast in the comings of the Lord in scripture, and what I mean by that is there's a difference between the rapture and the coming of the Lord to the earth when His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. Now this truth of the rapture of the church is unique, Paul said that, and we read it tonight in 1 Corinthians 15:51: 'Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump'. A mystery in the word of God is something that had not been revealed to the Old Testament people of God, it is a mystery that God has only declared in this new dispensation to the apostles, and the apostles have given it to us in the Scriptures, the apostle's doctrine in the word of God. This mystery, not of resurrection, that is found in the Old Testament; not of the second advent of the Lord, that is found in the Old Testament, we looked at the prophets last week - but this mystery specifically that not only the dead would be raised, but those who are alive and remain who are saved will be changed at the coming of the Lord, and there will be a translation of the living as well as of the dead - that was never ever known before.

Now when we realise that we see that there is a contrast. The general idea in the Old Testament about resurrection, and even in the New Testament about resurrection, was never ever linked with this idea of rapture and translation of the living when the Lord Jesus comes to establish His kingdom. We see that this mystery, and what had previously been revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures, seem to be quite different when you compare them with one another. So what we're saying is, and I'm going to prove it to you in a minute, that this idea that we've established from John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4, and 1 Corinthians 15, is distinct and contrasting to what we have known in the Old Testament Scriptures with regards to the second coming of the Lord. Now in a sense that should make sense, because if this is a mystery it has to be different somehow from what has already been in the Old Testament Scriptures - do you understand? It cannot be the same if there is something that has not been revealed.

Let me show you the contrast in these two comings - I don't like calling them two comings, because really there's only one second coming of the Lord, but it's for our help. I know you're...well, I'll not say anything...I know you're a bit like myself - you have 'the rapture', and then we'll call it 'the coming in judgment' to distinguish it. You'll need be quick with me tonight to look for these verses. In 1 Thessalonians 4 and verses

16 and 17 the rapture is taught to us as the Lord's coming to the air, I think that's clear - do you see that? Take these down if you don't have the mind to remember them, write them down - 16 and 17 - we'll not read it. Then we turn to Zechariah 14 and verse 4, you can take that down, Zechariah the prophet speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ coming to the earth, not to the air but the earth, and His feet shall land on the Mount of Olives. There's a seismic shift takes place in the geography of Jerusalem and all the rest, and He's coming in judgment, He's coming for His people Israel, and He's coming in judgment - it is distinct. One is to the air, one is to the earth, do you see the difference?

Then a second distinction and contrast is found in these same verses, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17, He doesn't come with His saints, He comes for His saints. He is catching them up to be with the Lord in the air, but when we look at the coming to judgment we find in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, look at this one and we'll read it: 'To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints' - now is that a contradiction of what he's just about to say in chapter 4? It cannot be - He's coming for His saints, but there's a second coming with His saints - Jude 14 talks about it as well, chapter 1 and 14. Then the third contrast of the comings is found 1 Corinthians 15:51: 'We shall all be changed'. The first coming, the rapture, is a translation of all believers - now I'm not going to go into a critique of partial rapture teaching tonight, but save to say that one verse that for me defeats that argument is that verse that says to Corinthian carnal believers, remember what they were like! 'We shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye'.

The first coming, the rapture, is a translation - but there's no translations at all in the second coming of judgment, there's no change bodily that is spoken of in these passages. Then fourthly, this rapture is spoken of in the same verse as a mystery - 'Behold, I show you a mystery', 1 Corinthians 15 verse 51 - something that has not been revealed, but yet the second coming in judgment is right throughout the whole of the Old Testament in the minor and the major prophets. It's spoken of in Zechariah 14 we referred to just a moment ago - but the theme, the major theme perhaps, of the prophets in the Old Testament was not so much the Lord's first coming to Bethlehem, but His second coming in judgment. So if this is a mystery that has not been revealed, how could it be anything else but this rapture?

Fifthly, the rapture is never said in the New Testament to be preceded by signs in the heavens. If you were to turn tonight to Matthew 24, which is probably one of the most difficult passages in scripture on the second coming, you find that preceding the coming of the Lord in judgment there are celestial disturbances in the skies. In verse 29 of Matthew 24: 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'. There is nothing like that in relation to the Lord's coming for the church, you will not find anything preceding it.

Then sixthly under rapture, the rapture is presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 as a time of blessing: 'Wherefore', he says, 'comfort one another with these words'. They were worried about their dead believers, friends and relatives, loved ones - 'Don't worry about it, you're going to be raptured! We don't know when, but the Lord's coming! Then, when you're raptured, they will go before you and rise a split-second before, and you will be with them and go to be with the Lord'. The emphasis of the second coming of judgment is not comfort or blessing, it is God's wrath. Turn to 2 Thessalonians and chapter 2 this time, verses 8 to 12 - look at the contrast here: 'And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth', the Antichrist, 'and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness'. A totally different slant, for it is judgment - God coming and devouring, through the Lord Jesus Christ, His enemies.

Seventhly, we see from 1 Corinthians 15:51 that it takes place in the twinkling of an eye, which is 1/50th of a second. But in Revelation 1 and verse 7 we read of the coming in judgment that every eye shall see it - every eye shall see it! The fact of the matter is that this is going to be visible, when He comes in judgment, and in fact the implications are ongoing. As you read Revelation 6 through to 19, look at how many chapters there are about what will happen on this earth when God's wrath is poured out. Eighthly: rapture involves the church primarily - if you look at these passages of comfort, John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, they're all in relation to the church of Jesus Christ - but when you go into the book of Revelation from chapters 6 to 19, do you get the import of that? Chapters 6 to 19, the church is not mentioned, Israel is mentioned, the nations of this world are mentioned; because it's about Israel on the earth, not the church in heaven! It is important to see that distinction.

Those are the first two facts - these are shorter, and I hope you'll give me the time to deal with all of these tonight. Thirdly, another major fact in the New Testament is the imminence of the advent within the New Testament Scriptures, the imminence of the second coming, that means that it could happen at any time. That doesn't mean that things can't happen before it, but it does mean that certain things don't have to happen before it - do you see the difference? That is why, as you read verses in the New Testament about the second coming, you read words like this: 'look', 'watch', 'wait', 'be alert', 'be sober'. Let me give you a few: 1 Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. Listen to this one about deliverance from the tribulation, 1 Thessalonians 1 and verse 10: 'We wait for God's Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come'.

We could quote other verses about waiting and watching, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 1:13, Jude 21 - now listen, if you had to wait for the Antichrist, or wait for what Jesus called the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, or the installation of the Tribulation before the Lord Jesus Christ was going to come - would the command not be futile to wait and be ready, because in such an hour as ye know not your Lord doth come? This is what is called the 'blessed hope' - it would be some hope if we had to wait for all these things to happen before we could hope for it! I know there are certain things in scripture that men like the apostles knew was going to happen, but that is a personal knowledge given in personal revelation, we are looking to the word of God here tonight and the panorama of God's programme - as far as that is concerned, the second advent of the Lord is taught as imminent.

Fourthly, a time interval is required. This is why you will see that there are seven years - we'll look at that maybe next week when we look at the Tribulation - there is a time interval from the coming of the Lord to the air to the coming of the Lord to the earth, and it is necessary to facilitate events that are predicted within the word of God. Now here's one, in 2 Corinthians 5 we read that we must all, believers, stand before the judgment seat of Christ - the Greek word is 'bema' - it means a judgment for believers. Now if that is to happen, and after which in Revelation 19 we read that there is the marriage of the Lamb, and after the judgment seat of Christ when you get your rewards or you experience loss - whatever the case may be - you will then be fitted and given robes, robes which are the righteous act of the saints, the righteousnesses of the saints, from your own life I believe, and part of the reward perhaps, and you will be clothed in those and made ready to meet the Bridegroom in heaven for this great marriage ceremony. Now an interval is needed between the first coming in rapture, and the second coming in judgment if He's coming with His glorified saints, for the judgment seat to happen, for the marriage supper to happen, before He can bring them back to earth. So this idea that the rapture and the coming all happen together, you go up and then you go down, cannot happen if you understand these verses chronologically - there's too much to happen in between. I hope you can see that.

Fifthly - I could talk about other things there - but fifthly there is the nature of the Tribulation. I don't have time to go into all these verses, but the Bible teaches that this Tribulation period, this seven years between 6 and 8 there - that 'Great Tribulation' title should be all over there from 6 to 8. This time on the earth is equated with Daniel's 70th week in the book of Daniel. Now I know I'm blinding some of you with science, you don't understand any of this, but save to say that Daniel's 70th week - remember Daniel was a Jewish prophet - was spoken about for Israel's restoration and regeneration. You can go back as far as Deuteronomy 4 to read about this time, you can read about in Jeremiah 30, Ezekiel 20 and 22. In Daniel's 70th week the church of Jesus Christ, as we are, is not mentioned at all. The church is never mentioned as participating in Israel's time of trouble, or what in other places is called Jacob's trouble. This is synonymous with what we call the Great Tribulation, it's also called the Day of the Lord, it's also called the wrath of God, but wouldn't it be very strange if in Daniel's prophecy 69 of those weeks in the prophecy, which correspond to various years - we'll go into that maybe in another week - but if 69 of those weeks had all to do with Israel, and then all of a sudden the last week is now shared with a lot of Gentiles, whether they be redeemed or not. The fact of the matter is that Daniel 9 verse 24 tells us, turn with me to it: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people', that's the Jews, 'and upon thy holy city', that's Jerusalem, 'to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy'.

There you have Israel, you have Jerusalem, you have Messiah - it's Jewish, it's a Jewish prophecy. This Great Tribulation is specifically for the Jewish people, to bring them back to God, it's for Israel! The tribulation is not for the church, and although the Lord said in John 6 'In the world ye shall have tribulation', it is a general type of tribulation that we all face day by day - but this is the Great Tribulation, for the purpose of God pouring His wrath onto the Jews, His earthly people. But I suppose the mirror image of that is also not just the fact that the nature of the tribulation proves that we will be raptured before it, but the nature of the church also would teach us this. This mystery of the rapture is not the only mystery in the New Testament, there's another mystery in Ephesians 3 which is the church itself - that Jews and Gentiles should be united in one body, and be brought together, and there'll be no Jew and no Gentile. This explains why the church should be translated to heaven, it's never mentioned in an Old Testament scripture dealing with the second coming - it's never mentioned, do you know why? Because the church isn't there in the Tribulation, and all these Old Testament prophecies are about the Tribulation for the Jews! Why would a mystery be mentioned if it was a mystery?

I hope I'm making some sense to you all tonight. The church alone has the promise that all believers will be taken - remember what the Lord said in John 14: 'to the Father's house', a translation not to the earth. Even this view at the end of the tribulation that you're raptured, and then you're changed while you're going up, and then you come down to earth - that's not taking you to the Father's house, is it? The nature of the church necessitates it - then seventhly: the work of the Holy Spirit. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 2 - this talks about the man of lawlessness, the man of sin, the son of perdition, the Antichrist - but it talks about him being held back, his influence being restricted. There is spoken of, in verse 6, a restrainer - verse 5: 'Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time'. Now another translation puts it like this: 'Now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time' - in this chapter to do with Antichrist there's something restraining Antichrist's influence in the earth. Now most Bible scholars, as far as I can ascertain, believe - and I do to - that this restraining influence is the Holy Spirit of the Living God, and specifically His indwelling ministry within His church. Now, do you know what it's saying here? The Antichrist cannot come to the fore if there is this restraining influence, so this restraining influence has to disappear - and the only way the Holy Spirit can disappear as He is in His church, is if the church disappears. That doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit won't be doing a work on the earth at that time, but it means that as the Holy Spirit came in the capacity of Pentecost, the way He had never been there before, He will go so that the tribulation can

come. Do you see this?

Those are the facts, now let's in the remainder of the time look at the focus for living derived from the teaching of the rapture. Some practical implications with regards to this teaching, here is the first: there is a motive in this teaching for sanctification. What a motive there is! What do I mean? Well, at any hour - tonight! - the Lord Jesus can come. In 1 John 3:3, John said that one day we shall see Him as He is, and we shall be like Him at His coming, we shall be translated, we shall be changed - I wish I could talk about the resurrection body, it's just wonderful! But here's what John goes on to say: 'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure'. Let's get past all this fascination about facts with regards to the second coming, and see the motivation there is in it to be holy - the Lord could come, and maybe the sin that you're dabbling in this very night, He'll catch you in it! How ashamed you will be.

The imminent return of the Lord Jesus is vitally connected with Christian living, and perhaps this is the reason why there is so little holiness in the church today - because there's so little watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord, some don't even believe He could come today, they're waiting on the Antichrist and seven years tribulation and all the rest. I'm not saying one view is more holy than the other, I think I cleared that up last week, but I'll tell you this: if Christians again were saying to one another 'Maranatha! Our Lord comes!', and were waiting and watching for His coming, do you not think we would be more holy in the light of it? How would we serve the Lord?

D. L. Moody, that great evangelist, who incidentally was also a pre-tribulationist, said: 'I never preach a sermon without thinking that possibly the Lord may come before I preach another'. Campbell Morgan said: 'I never begin my work in the morning without thinking that perhaps God may interrupt my work and begin His own; and I am not looking for death, I'm looking for Him'. Does it motivate you to holiness? It ought to! How long have we left? You might think you've another good 20 years in you - the Lord could be here tonight!

Does that not lead us on from a motivation for sanctification to an energy for soul winning and for service? I don't have time to go into this, but it's self-explanatory. In 1 Corinthians 7:29 Paul said in relation to marriage that 'the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none'. Paul said in Ephesians: 'Redeem the time, for the days are evil', the iniquity is already working of the Antichrist in our midst. The devil is champing at the bit, look at the things that are going on around us! There are still loved ones and friends and neighbours and work colleagues without Christ, should it not be an energy for our soul winning?

Then thirdly, the third focus for living derived from the teaching of the rapture, the third practical implication is this: comfort for the suffering and the sorrowful. You see, the Thessalonians were asking the question: 'Look, we believe in this imminent return' - let me tell you that they believed in it so much that some of them left work, and were all sitting about waiting on it! They believed in it, but they said: 'What if the Lord comes, my mother, my father, my husband, my wife, my brother, my sister they have died, they were Christians? You talk about this rapture and this coming, but what will happen to them?'. Paul says: 'Don't you worry, you'll not leave them behind, in fact they will go before you - you will not prevent them that sleep, but we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together to be with the Lord, with them in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort' - what a comfort! - 'one another with these words'. 'With the Lord forever' - we sing it in a hymn:

'Jesus is coming, the dead shall arise,
Loved ones shall meet in a joyful surprise:
Caught up together to Him in the skies,
Jesus is coming again!'

Think what it will be like! C.A. Blackmore was one of America's first radio preachers, and on one occasion he was preaching on the second coming of our Lord, and he talked of the blessed hope - the trumpet sound - and he said: 'Dear friend, all your suffering and pain will be over. You'll have a new body, arms and legs that are missing will be replaced. Friend, we'll be like Jesus, you'll have a glorified body one day, some golden daybreak when Jesus comes back'. A few days later Blackmore received a letter from a woman listener, she said: 'Your message was such a blessing, I've been an invalid for almost 25 years, and sometimes I get so discouraged. I can hardly wait for the Lord to come, to think that I'll be able to walk again and there'll be no more heartaches there - thank you so much for your sermon'. Mr Blackmore's son, Carl, was a pianist and a soloist for the broadcast, and he too had been moved and touched by his father's message, and so he sat down one day at his piano and he wrote these words:

'Some glorious morning sorrows will cease,
Some glorious morning all will be peace,
Heartaches all ended, labour all done:
Heaven will open, Jesus will come!

Some golden daybreak Jesus will come,
Some golden daybreak, battles all won.
He'll shout the victory, break through the blue,
Some golden daybreak, for me, for you!

I received an e-mail recently on the 14th March from a woman called Norma Braun from the USA. Her husband had been dying, and she was listening to our studies in first Corinthians, and this e-mail said these words: 'Another seed has been sown in hope, praise the Lord! On Friday afternoon Clay', her husband, 'was taken home to his Lord, and we rejoice. The last sermon he heard was yours on 'The Resurrection Body', and that sermon so prepared us for this change. In fact Kelly and I, her daughter, 'had gone into town to do some business and, leaving the hospice caring for Clay, returned after listening to your message in the car to find that Clay had quietly gone home. Those wonderful truths confirmed our hearts in rejoicing and praising' - that is what Paul meant when he said 'Comfort one another with these words!'

'Earth, what sorrows lie before thee,
Unlike it in the shadows past;
The sharpest throes that ever tore thee,
Though the briefest and the last!

I see the shadows of the sunset;
I see the dread avenger's form;
I see the Armageddon onset,
But I shall be above the storm.

There comes the mourning and the sighing,
There comes the heart tear's heavy fall,
The thousand agonies of dying—
But I shall be above them all!'

Maranatha!

Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 3

"Tribulation: Now Or Never?"

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(Selected Scriptures)

1. ***What Is it?***
2. ***When Will It Take Place?***
3. ***Why Must It Happen?***
4. ***How Will It Unfold?***
5. ***Who Will It Involve?***

I want you to turn with me first of all to one text, Jeremiah chapter 30 - we're reading from three texts, although there's no text on your study sheet, there are so many verses that we're going to be looking at tonight just in introduction. It would be good if you had some bookmarks to actually mark these portions of Scripture as we will be, later on, going back to them. The first is Jeremiah 30 and verse 7 - just the one verse: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it".

Then Daniel chapter 9 and verse 24 - Daniel is given a vision of the Lord, and he recounts it here: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy" - that is, the Messiah. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks", now it's self-evident that that can't be seven literal weeks, "the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times". Verse 26: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week" - now this personal pronoun 'he' here cannot refer to Messiah, because Messiah is not going to make a covenant with the people of God that should bring in a tribulation. It's talking about Antichrist, "he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate".

Then one more verse, just the one from Matthew 24. Matthew 24 is chiefly on the subject of what we're looking at tonight, the Great Tribulation period, that is the theme. Verse 21 of Matthew 24, the Lord Jesus is speaking to His disciples in this, what is called the Olivet Discourse: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be".

A common statement that's often made when prophetic matters are discussed is: 'I believe that the church will go through the Tribulation, because the Bible says that we as believers will suffer persecution'. Many people are very keen on reading their Bibles, and they come across verses which tell them that we as believers in this world will suffer, we will go through trials, temptations, and tribulations of all sorts - and therefore they assume that this time that will come upon all the earth, called the Great Tribulation, we will also partake of. Now the problem with such a statement is that while it appears to have a veneer of biblical correctness, in reality it really lacks an understanding concerning God's purpose for what the Bible calls the

Great Tribulation. I hope that we will see tonight that God's purpose has nothing to do with the church of Jesus Christ on the earth.

Now there's no doubt in my mind, and I hope yours, that the Bible does clearly teach that we as believers will go through trial here on the earth. In fact the Lord Jesus Himself in John 16 verse 33 said: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world'. So there is a general trouble that we all face from day-to-day because of our Christian testimony. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12 that they: "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution". It is inevitable that if we are following Christ in this age that is against Him, and anti-Christ, we will face some tribulation or other. But the question before us tonight is: is there in the holy Scriptures such a thing as the Great Tribulation? A period of time that can be isolated to what we call the pouring of God's wrath upon the earth. Then the further question is: when was it? Has it happened? Is it in the past, as some believe? Will it be in the future, as others believe? Will the church experience it, as many believe?

These questions, I believe, can be answered by asking a further question, simply this that I mentioned at the beginning: what is God's purpose in this Great Tribulation? By answering that question we will answer the question of when it is, and who will go through it, and what the goals and purpose of it really are. I want to answer that question - what is God's purpose for the Great Tribulation? - by answering some interrogatives. Now if you know your English grammar, you will know that interrogatives are the questions: why, what, where and how and such like. So we're going to interrogate this subject 'The Great Tribulation', and ask the five questions at least that are before you on the sheet this evening. Now do bear with me, we've a lot of Scriptures to get through tonight, but hopefully we'll get to the bottom of the answer: Tribulation - is it now or will it ever be?

Now we're asking the first simple question, an elementary one: what is it? What is this Great Tribulation? Now we have to say, we've just read Matthew 24 and verse 21, and that is the only occurrence in the New Testament Scriptures where the technical expression 'The Great Tribulation' is mentioned. It is the Greek statement 'flipsis megala' (sp?), and you find it in verse 21 that we read: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be". A period on the earth that Jesus is describing in Matthew 24, that has never ever been experienced before, and will never ever be experienced again. Now we read of it in Jeremiah 30 and verse 7, hundreds of years before Jesus spoke of it, and he said, as we read: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it".

We read from Daniel 9, but if you were to turn - if you want to - to Daniel 12 verse 1, Daniel speaks in almost identical language to that which the Lord used in Matthew 24:21, and describes a similar event that will come on the world. Daniel 12 and verse 1: "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people", of course Israel, "shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book". So it's clear, and we'll see a little bit later that the whole of the Scriptures from Genesis to the book of Revelation right at the end testify of a Great Tribulation period at some time that will come upon the earth.

Turn with me again to Matthew 24, because the Lord Jesus, after He mentions this Great Tribulation in verse 21, He goes on and He talks about how immediately after the tribulation of those days, verse 29, that the Lord Jesus Christ would come again. Look at it: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". Now if David puts the first diagram, I think it's the first one, on the screen - you remember this from our first week - this is the pre-millennial interpretation of the understanding of biblical prophecy.

Really what you have up to verse 29 in Matthew 24 is this period here of the tribulation, seven years, and then in verse 29 immediately after those days, then there will be the sign of the appearing of the Son of Man, and He will come to judge the world at that final Armageddon battle at the end of it all.

What I want you to see is that these events that the Lord has been describing up to verse 29, have not been to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather have been topical of Antichrist - the rising not of the coming of Christ, but the rising of the man of sin, the son of perdition, who is Antichrist. This is very interesting because the Great Tribulation has really got more specifically to do with Antichrist, his forces, his influence on the earth, than it has to do with the Lord Jesus Christ - because the Lord comes at the very end of it all. Now that coincides with Revelation 13, because in Revelation 13 we read how Antichrist comes on the scene, and really this is his stage in his theatre during the tribulation period - of course, all in the sovereign will of God. He is now setting himself forth as a deity, he is deifying himself in the eyes of men and women in this world. We read there in Revelation 13 that he enters into the temple of God that has been rebuilt during the tribulation time, and he actually proclaims himself to be God.

Now the Lord spoke of this in Matthew 24 as the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel - a man actually entering into the temple of God, sitting, as it were, on the throne of God, claiming he is God and wanting to be worshipped as God - what an abomination that is! Now we read of it in 2 Thessalonians, if you turn with me to it, chapter 2 and we read from verse 1: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders".

Revelation 13 tells us that the tribulation period, this great time of God's wrath, will also be a time when Antichrist will come to the fore. Then when we move on from Revelation 13 to Revelation 14, it seems to highlight that the Great Tribulation period will be God pouring tribulation upon Antichrist, upon the Beast, and upon the people of the earth who have followed the Beast and pledged allegiance to him. Now turn with me to Revelation 14 till I show you this, and we're just laying a foundation to show you some of the themes of the Great Tribulation. We read in verse 10 of Revelation 14 that the Antichrist, the Beast will: 'drink of the wine of the wrath of God', verse 10, 'which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb'. Then Christ moves, during the tribulation period, from judging the Antichrist who has arisen, destroying him, to come to his followers - those who have taken the mark of the Beast. In verse 15 we see that the Lord Jesus wields His sickle because the harvest of earth's iniquity and sinfulness is now ripe: 'And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe' - it is ripe with sin.

Thus this world's great experience of tribulation, is the great winepress of the wrath of God against all sin in humanity, all of the spirit and personality of Antichrist and the followers of his. In verse 19 we read: "the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God". It is the greatest ever manifestation upon the earth of God's wrath against sin. We must grasp that, that is what the tribulation period really is - and we will tease it out and specify it a little bit more throughout our study this evening. But what I want you to see just now is that throughout all Scripture this

tribulation period is clearly taught.

Now it is given many names, as I've already said it's only called 'The Great Tribulation period' in Matthew 24; but if David brings up the next slide you will see that the Old Testament Scriptures teach us this truth under many names. You'll find first of all it mentioned as 'birth pangs' in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and also Jeremiah again. Another name for it is 'the day of the Lord', and this is probably - it is indeed, in fact - the most popular name for the tribulation period; look how many books: Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Zechariah - this is mentioned, this period, as 'the day of the Lord'. Now please don't confuse that with 'the day of Christ' that you find in the New Testament, which describes the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus, that's a different period completely. Then another statement that is given to this period is 'the great and terrible day of the Lord', now that 'LXX' simply means the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures - just as you have an English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, some of the Greek speakers had a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and in it it is called 'the great and terrible day of the Lord' - Malachi 4 and verse 5. Another title that is given to it is 'the day of wrath' in Zephaniah 1:15. The next is 'the day of the Lord's wrath', Zephaniah 1:18. 'The day of distress', Zephaniah 1:15. 'The day of trouble', Zephaniah 1:15 again. 'The day of desolation'; 'the day of vengeance', Isaiah; 'the day of Jacob's trouble', as we read in Jeremiah 30:7; 'the day of darkness and gloominess', Zephaniah, Amos, Joel; 'the day of clouds and thick darkness', Zephaniah and Joel; 'the day of trumpet and battlecry', Zephaniah 1:16; 'the day of alarm', Zephaniah 1:16; 'the day of the Lord's anger', Zephaniah; 'the day of destruction and ruin from the Almighty', Joel 1:15; 'the day of calamity and distress' in Deuteronomy and Obadiah; 'trouble and tribulation', in Deuteronomy and Zephaniah. One week, we read of it in Daniel 9, Daniel's 70th week; 'the time', or the day, 'of trouble and distress' in Daniel and Zephaniah; simply 'the indignation' in Isaiah 26; Isaiah 28 'the overflowing of the scourge' - and finally 'the fire of His jealousy' in Zephaniah 1:18. That's all under the Old Testament I think, but look at it! The Old Testament Scriptures clearly teach that there is this great day of God's wrath, they give various names to it, but it's right throughout all of the prophets major and minor.

Now when we go into the New Testament we find that it correlates exactly to what is taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. Look at the different names in the New Testament alone: 'the day', simply 'the day' in 1 Thessalonians 5:4; 'those days', Matthew 24 that we read and Mark 13; 'the day of the Lord', and again I stress that you don't confuse that with the day of Christ, but it is the day of God's judgment, the day of the Lord, not the millennium. 'The wrath of God', 1 Thessalonians 5, Revelation 11; 'the wrath to come' 1 Thessalonians 1; 'the great day of their wrath' Revelation 6; 'the wrath of God' Revelation 15:14 and 19; 'the wrath of the Lamb' Revelation 6; 'the hour of trial' Revelation 3; 'the tribulation', as we read in Matthew 24; 'the time of tribulation' Mark 13; 'the Great Tribulation', 'the hour of judgment', 'birth pangs'. Those are the New Testament names for the Great Tribulation period. Now I don't know how many there were, I didn't count them, but there's a great number of names! The weight of evidence in both Old and New Testament is that Scripture teaches that there's going to be this great day of God's wrath poured upon all the world, and all of the names correlate together to prove this.

So let me just say, before we go on any further, to understand what the Lord Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24 and what we have read together about in Revelation, we've got to understand how the Old Testament used this word 'Great Tribulation' and all the variants of it. We understand the New Testament theory of the Great Tribulation by understanding how it was used and understood in the Old Testament. That's terribly important - but what a lot of people do is, they disregard prophecies in the Old Testament, and as we saw in our first study this spiritualise them all to the church or to this present age of grace; and they ignore completely how these Old Testament prophecies were given, understood by listeners, and how they knew they would be fulfilled in the future. So I hope we've looked and saw, quite clearly, what this tribulation period really is.

Now the big question is: when will it take place? When will the tribulation period take place? Well, there are various views on that question. There is the school of 'realised eschatology', which simply means that it's all already happened. C.H. Dodd, who is an intellectual scholar - if you study theology, or even A-level Religious Studies you will read of him - he holds the view that the Lord Jesus, when He suffered and died, He endured the Great Tribulation - that was the Great Tribulation, when the Lord went to the cross and died and bore our sins. Therefore he interprets every reference in scripture to tribulation as occurring in the lifetime, and particularly the 'passion' of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Now the offshoot of that is that he believes that eschatological salvation comes in a general resurrection that happened at the resurrection of our Lord - so we have no resurrection to look forward to, or second coming, as it were, because it all happened through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. That is the realised school of prophecy or eschatology.

Then there is the 'reformed' school - we looked at it in our first week: a- and post-millennialism. They interpret the tribulation period as just being before the close of the age. They believe that we're in the millennium now, you remember that, and they believe that the Great Tribulation will just come before the Lord Jesus returns - we are raptured, go up and then come down again, and then the Lord will bring eternal life to all those who believe in Him. That is the reformed school of prophecy.

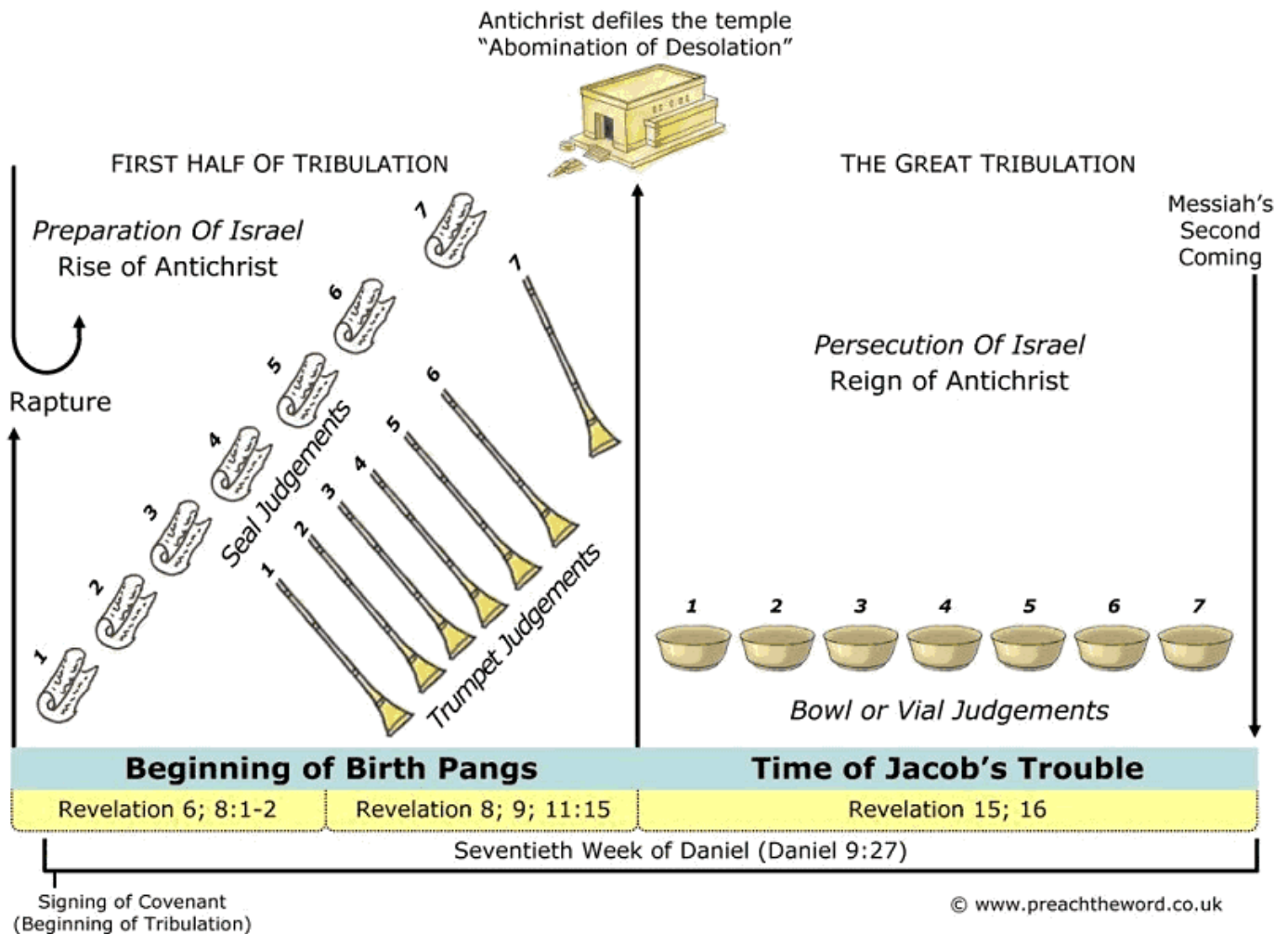
Then there is the 'symbolic school' which takes an allegorical interpretation, so it believes that the tribulation and the millennium are symbolic and allegorical of the Christian's death and resurrection in baptism. The tribulation, in other words, is when you die with Christ and go under the water. The millennium is when you rise again unto newness of life in Christ - and so they spiritualise it all to mean the Christian experience.

Then there are the 'historicists' - these are people who believe that the tribulation period occurred in the experience of the church of the past, usually at some point during the Roman persecutions. Whether it was Nero, or Caligula, or Domitian - they believe that when Christians were being fed to the lions, and being put on stakes and crucified and hanged, that that was the Great Tribulation and it's all past. That's an interesting view.

Then there are what is called the 'preterists', this school believes that Daniel's 70th week was fulfilled completely in AD 70. Now what happened in AD 70? Well, there was the destruction of Jerusalem. What happened was the Roman persecutors came in, and they destroyed the temple, they sacked the city of Jerusalem; and they believe that that was the coming of judgment upon the Jews, that was the Great Tribulation - and therefore it is done, it's dusted, it's over, in the past. There are actually more extreme preterists who believe that the Lord Jesus actually came at that the event - He came spiritually, not literally, no eye saw Him - but when He came there was judgment, the Jews were judged, scattered in the diaspora, and that was Jesus coming again and we don't look forward to His second coming in a day which is yet to be.

Now you may not have known that there were all these views on the tribulation of the world, and you ask the question: which is true? How can we discern with so many varied views? Some of them, the more you read them, can seem quite legitimate to a reasonable and rational mind. But the fact of the matter is this - and I remind you of something that I've taught you already - we have established, I hope, that the only consistent way of interpreting prophetic scripture is to interpret it as we interpret every other part of Scripture: that is, literally, historically, grammatically. We take it first and foremost at face value, we interpret it according to its first primary historical context, and then we also look at it grammatically - and whatever it says, we believe that that is what it means. Our hermeneutic in interpreting prophecy is of primary importance - and if you don't know much about that, and think I'm talking up in the sky, get some of the tapes of previous weeks and I hope that you will understand. Now if you take that as granted, that you believe that you interpret prophecy literally, historically, grammatically, all these other views concerning the tribulation period are confounded because none of them satisfy all the biblical requirements of the Great Tribulation that we have just cited. They're described for us in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and none of these other views satisfy those requirements.

Take, for instance, the preterist view that the Lord Jesus came in judgment in AD 70 and there's nothing to look forward to. Well, they're right in the sense that the temple was destroyed, the Lord Jesus foretold that the temple would be destroyed. He spoke in Matthew 24 of people, Jews, fleeing to the mountains - that is exactly what happened at that time in AD 70. There was the Masada fort, you know all about it, the suicides and everything, and all the Jews went into that fort up on the mountain. There are other facts, there are historians that tell us that not a stone was left upon a stone when the Romans came into Jerusalem. All these things seem, at face value, to fulfil the prophecies that the Lord gave in Matthew 24 - but the fact of the matter is, when the Lord is quoted by Luke in Matthew 21 and 22, He speaks of a future day, the days of vengeance 'when all things which are written may be fulfilled' - when all things that are written may be fulfilled! What was not fulfilled in AD 70 was Christ visibly coming. Every eye shall see Him, Revelation chapter 1 tells us. The opposing armies of the Romans against the Jews were not defeated by the presence of the Lord as prophecy teaches they will be. All Israel was not saved in AD 70, and the Jews as the people of God were not grafted into the olive tree once again. In fact we read in Scripture that the tribulation period starts with the signing of a covenant between Israel and Antichrist. We read in Daniel 9 that it will end after seven years at the second coming of the Lord.



Now if you want to study in great detail an exposition of those tribulation days, read Revelation 6 through to 19. If David puts up the second slide there, you'll see what you've got on the back of your study sheet that really details what will go on in some kind of a general way during that tribulation period. Now if you read Revelation 6 to 19, you will read of all these seal judgments, of the trumpet judgments, of the bowl or vial judgments, the beginning of birth pangs, the time of Jacob's trouble - and you will find that none of those things have ever been fulfilled in the history of humanity. It has never ever happened!

Now you'll get an exposition in Revelation 6 to 19, but the time framework is found in Daniel 9:24-27, a framework for what is called Daniel's 70th week, which is this seven-year tribulation period. Daniel was informed by God that God had appointed 70 weeks to finish the transgression of the Jews - in other words, to bring the Jews finally to Himself for all eternity, 70 weeks. Now these were not 7-day weeks, all prophetic scholars agree on this: they were seven-year weeks. That means that the 70th week, the last week, lasts seven years. That is where we get the seven years of the Great Tribulation period.

So I hope we've answered the question of when it will take place, it is not something that has taken place in the past, whether you believe AD 70 or not; it cannot be anything that is now taking place because we are not going through any of these experiences that have been prophesied in Revelation 6 to 19 - therefore it is a future thing. There must be a futurist interpretation of the Great Tribulation.

Now here's perhaps the question that is foremost in many people of the world's minds: why must it happen? Why must the Great Tribulation happen? We've seen what it is, when it will take place, but why must it happen? Well, the simple answer to that question is: it is God's purpose to judge the world - judgment is at the forefront of the idea of the Great Tribulation. While at the same time God has in mind judgment, we find also within the book of the Revelation that the tribulation period will be a time when God, through various means, will hold forth the gospel of grace. Now this is hard for some of us to understand, but we'll understand it hopefully by the end of some of what we'll say under this heading of 'Why it must happen' in a few moments. The reason why God, first and foremost, must judge the earth is that this Great Tribulation period precedes the millennial reign of Christ. You remember this? He will come to the earth, and then He will bring in His reign for 1000 years. Therefore, before that reign, the Lord needs to put down rebellion of mankind of every shape and form, in preparation for Christ's reign of absolute righteousness. There needs to be a judgment before the Lord Jesus can reign in righteousness on the earth.

Now if I can summarise the purpose and the reason for the Great Tribulation period, why it must happen, into three for you - here they are. Here's the first: the first purpose of Tribulation is simply Gentile judgment. As I have said, before the Lord comes and reigns and rules for 1000 years in righteousness, He must judge the world in order to prepare for righteous rule. The first purpose of Tribulation is seen to be punishment in history, in human history, upon the whole world for its sins against God. If God just came in and took us all, as believers, away there would be no record on the earth that God had judged humanity for their sin historically. It is a judgment a bit similar to the judgment that came upon the earth during the flood of Noah. If you recall the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24, He actually cites Noah as an illustration: 'For there shall arise false Christs and false signs', and then we go on to read in verse 37 that 'as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man'. Just as the world was destroyed in a flood in those early days, the Lord in history, human history, will show His indignation towards man's sin.

We also read further that there will be more indications of Gentile judgment. In Deuteronomy 30 and verse 7, God told His own people way back there that He would punish their enemies as His enemies, and He would inflict all those curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. So during the tribulation period Gentile nations will be judged for their sinfulness, but they will also be judged according to how they have related toward the Jewish people upon the earth. One purpose of the Tribulation is for Gentile judgment - it has got nothing to do with the church of Jesus Christ in that regard.

The second purpose is this: worldwide evangelism. The Great Tribulation period will be a period of phenomenal evangelistic outreach - in fact, one unlike any other time in human history. The purpose is given in Revelation 7, if you want to read about it, but during the first half of the tribulation, the first three and a half years, we read in Revelation that God will evangelise the world. He will do it through various means - first He will do it through 144,000 Jews, and He will fulfil the prophecy that we read in Matthew 24 verse 14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and

then shall the end come". These, as someone has described them, 'Jewish Billy Sundays' will go around the whole world preaching the gospel of the kingdom in this mass evangelisation. If that's not enough for you, you read of two witnesses in the book of Revelation with supernatural powers, and they will provide a witness primarily to the nation of Israel. Finally we read, if you look with me at Revelation 14, at the midpoint of the tribulation, three and a half years into those seven years, we read in verse 6 of chapter 14: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people". This was not just for the Jews, but the everlasting gospel is being preached to all nations!

We read further in verse 8: 'And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'. He announces the downfall of religious Babylon, economic Babylon, this world system has been judged by God and it's heralded in a message of evangelisation. Then in verses 9 to 11 we also read that God says He will use angels to preach the gospel and to warn earth dwellers, all earth dwellers, not to take the mark of the Beast - 666. Now again, in all of chapter 14, we don't see the church mentioned at all. There are Gentiles mentioned, there are Jews mentioned, there are evangelists of all shapes and forms, but the church is not there.

The first purpose of the tribulation is to judge Gentile nations, the second is worldwide evangelisation, and the third is the conversion of the Jews. I think this is one of the most glorious and important purposes. God, through evil influences and agencies, is preparing Israel, His ancient earthly people, for her conversion. By almost pummeling her into submission, He gets her to raise her eyes heavenward and to acknowledge that Jesus is Messiah - 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!', they will say. It will all culminate in the second coming of our Lord Jesus to the earth, but you've got to see that the major purpose of Jacob's - that is Israel's - trouble is to bring her back in conversion. Now we read within Ezekiel that first of all the Lord will start to bring Israel as an ethnic people back to her land, and that's already happening but it will be further realised during that period, for He says in Ezekiel 20:34: 'I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out'. He has already started to do it, in 1948 when Israel became a national state, and He's been doing it ever since - but it will all come to a head during this period. Once they're all gathered together the tribulation period shall begin, and God says in Ezekiel 20 to His people Israel: 'I shall make you pass under the rod'. So He brings them together to their land, He begins to judge them, and the purpose of judging them is to purge from them unbelieving Jews. Then we actually read in Zechariah 13 that only one third of those Jews will survive the fire and the judgmental wrath of God - imagine that! Only one-third, but the purpose and the goal of God is what we read in Romans 11 and verse 26 and 27, that after that purging of fire Paul says: 'And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins'. All Israel will be saved, just as it is written, the Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove all ungodliness from Jacob - 'this is my covenant with them, when I will take away their sin'.

Why this Great Tribulation? One, Gentile nations need to be judged; two, worldwide evangelisation in view of the millennium period coming upon the earth; but thirdly and perhaps primarily, the conversion of the Jews. But you see, in all these three categories, that the church is not found at all, for the tribulation is not for the church, it does not involve the church - because God's purpose for the tribulation are these three.

Now if we were to ask the fourth question: how will it unfold? We wouldn't even begin to have time to talk about it. As I've said, we read from Revelation 5 through to 19 all about it - but just to recap, if David goes to the first slide, we read in Revelation 5 to 19 first of all that God pours out these seven seal judgments as you see them on your sheet just up here, seven seal judgments. What He does, effectively, is He allows the devil to reign upon the earth, a reign of unrighteousness - it doesn't mean God's not in control, but He allows the devil to run riot. Then we read that He pours out these seven vial judgments at the end of the tribulation

period. Then He destroys the world's religious systems that we read about in Revelation 17; He destroys the world's political and economic systems; He defeats sinners and Satan and Armageddon at the end of the tribulation period; and then He condemns the antichrist and the false prophet to hell.

But there's more: there are seven seal judgments, I mentioned them, and the seven trumpet judgments. The first seven seal judgement is what we read of the white horse of the apocalypse, it is simply a false peace that will come over the earth because of this covenant that Israel signs with Antichrist. Then we read of the red horse of the apocalypse, which will be a hot war upon all the earth that the world has never seen before. The third seal judgment is the black horse, a famine that will come upon all the earth because of that war and the expense of it. The fourth will be a pale horse of widespread death by war, by starvation from the famine, by wild beasts roaming across the whole earth. The fifth seal is the cry of the martyrs; the sixth is the greatest earthquake that this world has ever seen, and the cosmic disturbances described in Matthew 24 and elsewhere that have never been witnessed before in the skies.

The seventh seal is these seven trumpet judgments that we read of in Revelation. The first trumpet judgment is that a third of all vegetation on the earth will be destroyed. The second is a third of ocean life and ships will be destroyed. The third is that a third of freshwater will be polluted and poisoned. The fourth is a third of the sun, the moon, and the stars will be darkened. The fifth is the first ever in the history of the earth hellish invasion of demons poured out upon the globe. The sixth is a second hellish invasion of demons. There are the seven vial judgments that I have mentioned, but just to say that all of these comprise together to make up the Great Tribulation Period on the earth, the flipsis megalá that the Lord Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24:21 - a time on the earth, if you took all the holocausts and disasters and combined them, there has never been a time to compare to this one or to surpass it! That is how it will unfold, well might it be called 'The Great Tribulation Period'!

Let's look finally at who it will involve. Well, again we don't have time, and in the nature of this series it's only possible to give you a general resume of all these subjects night after night. If you were to read the whole of the book of Revelation you will find that this tribulation period involves the nations, it involves the Holy Spirit although He will be taken away in the capacity which He came at Pentecost - don't believe what is taught at times that the Holy Spirit goes, He doesn't go, He is still here. Satan will be chiefly involved and a prime mover and actor in this whole scene of the Great Tribulation; Antichrist will be here, his sidekick the false prophet; these 144,000 Jewish evangelists; the two special preachers and witnesses for Christ; the tribulation saints - those who will believe, many of them being martyred, many out of every tongue, people, tribe and nation who have washed their robes in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be this multitude of demonic activity, and even special angels that will come and announce upon the earth God's purposes and sovereign judgments.

Can I just say, as I pause for a moment tonight, the most terrifying thing as I have been looking at this today in great detail before God, the most terrifying thing about the Great Tribulation period for me is that if you, my friend, are without Christ you will be there! Allow the import of that truth to sink into your mind and into your heart: you will experience all of this that the Scriptures speak of being poured upon the earth for seven years! Is it any wonder that the prophet says: 'Flee from the wrath to come!' - run!

Who will be there? Well, the world will be there, those who are unsaved - and that brings upon us as believers a great responsibility to do, first and foremost, something towards them, warn them - the world should be warned about this great day of God's wrath that's going to be poured upon the earth! If they're not saved they will not be raptured, and if they're not raptured they will face all of this! The second thing that should be done in the light of who will be involved in this: the church of Jesus Christ should be winning the lost. The world ought to be warned, but we as God's people ought to be winning the lost - for who knows who will believe the lie, who will take the mark of the Beast and follow the Antichrist - none of us knows who in the world among our friends or relatives or neighbours or work colleagues, so we as God's people in

the light of these events ought to be out and winning people for the Lord Jesus Christ!

The world should be warned, the church should be winning, and thirdly the saints - you and I personally - should be waiting, should be watching, because our Lord is coming. Don't forget - if David could put up the chart of pre-millennialism - that we as God's people, we do not look to these passages of Scripture in waiting and watching for the Lord Jesus, those that we've mentioned tonight. We made a comparison of them in our last week. We look to 1 Thessalonians 4, we look to John chapter 14, we look to these Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 15 that speak of a great day of hope, a great day of comfort, a great day of delight when the Lord Jesus shall come for us and we shall go to be with Him rather than He come to the earth in judgment.

Maybe you don't see that distinction, can I recite you a few verses that I think clearly teaches? We have looked at the weight of evidence concerning the fact that this day will come upon the earth, here's the evidence to show that we will not experience it - Romans 5:9: 'Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him'; 1 Thessalonians 1 and verse 10, listen, we as God's people are to be waiting 'for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus', watch this, 'which delivered us from the wrath to come'. Can it be any clearer? What about this one? 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 9: 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ'. In Revelation 3 and verse 10 He says to the church at Philadelphia: 'Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of tribulation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth'.

My friend, the weight of the evidence of Scripture is simply this: the early believers in Christ were not looking for something to happen that we've been talking about this evening, they were looking for Someone to come - the Lord Jesus!

During the early days of World War II a little group of passengers were shipwrecked on a Pacific desert island in the middle of that great ocean. After many weary months a passing ship saw their plight and sent a boat ashore, but the boat didn't land at once - one of the sailors threw a bundle of newspapers on the beach. You wouldn't imagine that would be the first thing that they would want, rather they were looking for a lifeline. But that sailor that threw the bundle of papers onto the beach shouted that they were from the Captain, and he said these words: 'After you've read these papers, he wants to know whether you want to be rescued after all. When you find out what's going on in the world, do you want to get off your desert island?'. Isn't it wonderful tonight, in all of the light of the scriptural teaching that we found tonight on the Great Tribulation period: our rescue as believers in Christ will be literally out of this world! We will go! Who in their right mind wouldn't want to go!

Last night after the Gospel meeting a brother in Christ said to me: 'Isn't it great to be saved?'. My friend, after all that we have seen within the Scriptures regarding what's going to come upon this world in the not too distant future - and who knows only the Lord Jesus Christ - isn't it wonderful to be saved? We are not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. We wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come. Glory to His name!

Can I ask you, believer tonight, are you warning folk in the world of what is going to come upon them? Are you winning the lost for our Lord Jesus Christ? Where you are in your home, in your business, in your occupation - are you waiting and are you watching, for in such an hour as ye think not your Lord doth come! May God bless His word to our hearts this evening.

Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 4

"Israel: Finished With Or With A Future?"

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(Selected Scriptures)

I. HER PAST

1. Election
2. Unconditional Covenants
3. Mosaic Law

II. HER PRESENT

1. Rejection of Messiah & Consequences
2. Distinction from the Church
3. The Modern State

III. HER FUTURE

1. The Great Tribulation
2. The Second Coming
3. The Messianic Kingdom

This is our fourth study, as I've said, and we've entitled it tonight: 'Israel: Finished With or With a Future?'. Chuck Missler, who is a Bible scholar and prophetic teacher, has said many times in his prophetic ministry that there is only one piece of real estate on the face of planet earth that God has specifically said belongs to a specific people, and that is Israel. There is only one nation that can look up the pages of the Bible and say that God has granted them, and preordained them, a piece of literal geographical land on the face of this earth. This is a most categorical fact, yet it is also one of the most contested facts not only in the halls of theological excellence and debate, but even today in our contemporary halls of political deliberation. This very evening there is, as there seems to have been for almost 2000 years, a dispute as to who has a right and a claim to the land of Palestine. I think that dispute is even hotter because God enters into it in the sense that He is claimed by the various parties to specifically speak on this matter. Palestinians claim that God has given them the land, the Israelis claim from the Old Testament Scriptures - many of which we will look at tonight - that God has told them that it is their right to have the land of Palestine.

Yet what would astound us, perhaps tonight, is - even though this very evening, in the year of 1948 when Israel became a modern national state, even though that is the fact historically and geographically, and politically this evening - there are even evangelicals in the church of Jesus Christ who think currently that Israel as a nation, as an ethnic people, the Jews, have absolutely nothing to do with God's prophetic programme of the future. In other words, they believe that the Jewish people, the ethnic nation of Israel as we know of it tonight and as it was known in the Old Testament Scriptures, is finished with! God has passed them over in unbelief, and He has now turned to His New Testament people, the church, and Israel are finished with as a people of God.

So we want to consider this claim, which you will hear quite a lot, you will read of it in many of our Bible commentaries that you can buy in your normal Christian bookshops, and many godly men believe this

doctrine. But we want to weigh it up with the weight and evidence of Scripture, and I want to do that in a threefold way. I want us, as it says on your sheet, to first of all look at Israel's past. We want to see where Israel came from, and some of the claims which they even have to this day and age. Then we want to look at Israel's present, why they don't believe in the Lord Jesus as we do. Then we want to look at Israel's future, and see if the Bible really does teach that God is finished with His ancient people Israel - are they finished with, or are they with a future?

So let's look first of all at her past. The first thing that I want you to notice is found in Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verses 6 to 8 which clearly states that God elected Israel as a people out of the world to be a nation unto Himself. Deuteronomy 7 and verse 6: 'For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt'.

It clearly states that God in election, in His sovereign election, chose not individuals, now, but chose a national people to be His people, to be a peculiar people among the nations of the world, to be a holy people, a kingdom of priests unto their God Jehovah. If you turn back to chapter 6 and verse 18 of Deuteronomy you will see that a land is entailed within that promise of election. God says: 'And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware', mark that word, 'sware unto thy fathers'.

So right away we see, right at the beginning of the Old Testament Scriptures, that once God brought the people of Israel out of bondage from Egypt He told them - we see He told them it before - He told them then, once they were freed, as it were, from sin and bondage that they were special people unto their God, they were chosen not because they were a great number, but because they were the fewest of all the people in the world, and He would give them the land. Now the basis of God's election, if you were reading carefully in chapter 7 and verses 6, 7 and 8, was God's covenant relationship with Israel's fathers, the forefathers. Look at Deuteronomy chapter 10 just so that I can prove this to you categorically, Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 15: 'Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day'. The election of Israel was chiefly founded on the basis of the covenant relationship that God Jehovah had with their forefathers - that is the basis of election, the relationship that you will read of over and over again in the Old Testament that Jehovah is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob whose name of course was changed to Israel, and whose twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. That is the basis for God's election of Israel, the covenant relationship that God Jehovah had with their forefathers.

Now you might ask the question: well, what are the purposes for their election in such a way? Well, we haven't got time to go through them all because there are several, but Exodus 19 tells us that one of the purposes of the choosing of Israel out of all the peoples of the world was to become a kingdom of priests, to be a special people - when every other nation in the world was falling down to pieces of wood, and stone, and silver and gold, and fine gems, and worshipping the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field; that there was one people who were worshipping the true and living God, and worshipping Him in a way that was acceptable unto Him, that God should be glorified through this national people Israel.

Not only were they to become a kingdom of priests to worship God, but they were also to be recipients of God's revelation. If God was going to speak to men and women on this earth, He needed a people to do it through, and He chose the nation of Israel. You can read in Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 6 that God gave them His laws and precepts, and He told them to teach them unto their children and their children's

children, the prosperity and the genealogy of the people, in order that God's revealed will should be always passed down. Israel was chosen for the purpose of keeping God's revelation alive. Now let me show you this, even from the New Testament, for a moment, in Romans chapter 3. Romans, strangely enough, apart from the title, has a great deal to say about the nation of Israel - and we'll see that in further detail tonight. Romans chapter 3, thinking of how God chose Israel to reveal His divine will, verse 1: 'What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way', there's a lot of profit in being Jewish, 'chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God'.

The revelations of God were not committed to Gentiles, or Gentile people nations, but were committed to the Jewish nation. Verse 3: 'For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?'. The Jewish people were given the revelation of God whereby men could believe, the message of God had come to men through the Jew. Another purpose of their election was to propagate the doctrine of one true and living God. To hear the Muslims today, you would think the Nation of Islam was the only people that believed in one true and living God, but the Jewish people - that is one of the reasons for their election and their existence, to tell the world that there is but one God, and none other God beside Him and Him alone shalt thou serve. That is why Israel was chosen and elected.

Perhaps the most important primary and chief reason for the purpose of Israel's election was simply this: that through this ethnic national people Messiah would come. Let me turn you to a few verses even in the New Testament - Romans 9 verses 5 and 6: 'Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel'. Now we will find out later in a bit more detail in chapter 9, 10 and 11 that Paul directs his attention to his kinsmen according to the flesh, the Jewish race. But he is now asking this question rhetorically in verse 5: 'What nation did God choose to bring the Christ out of?' - it was the Jewish nation! Because the reason why they were elected way back in Deuteronomy, and right before it in the very bowels of Abraham through that promise in Isaac, was that the Messiah should come - and as God said to Abraham, that all the nations of the earth should be blessed through the Jew - why? Because, as the Lord said in John's gospel, salvation is of the Jew - why? Because Messiah is from the Jews. Never you forget that, my friend. Your Saviour and your Lord Jesus Christ was a Jew, He was a Jew, He is a Jew, He always will be a Jew.

That was the chief reason why Israel was elected - the first thing in their past that we need to lay as a foundation stone. Here's the second thing I want you to notice in her past: not only was she elected, but she was given through her forefathers unconditional covenants. Now 'unconditional' simply means that God didn't lay down any particular conditions that they should be ultimately fulfilled - in other words, God gave His word on a thing - now it's not that He didn't require obedience from His people, but ultimately that obedience was not required for the ultimate sovereign fulfilment of what He had said He would do. That's important.

Now there are four unconditional covenants that we read of in the Old Testament. The first is found in Genesis 12 through to 13, it is the Abrahamic Covenant given to Abraham, as I've alluded to - where God told him that out of his bowels at that very old age there would come a son, and his progeny would be greater than all the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky. It was an unconditional promise. Then we read further in Deuteronomy 28 to 30 of the Palestinian promise, that has often been called the promise of the land. This map that you see up on the screen, the promise of God's geographical piece of sod that is the land of Israel that we know today - and even farther than that. God was guaranteeing them in an unconditional Palestinian promise, a promise that they would possess the land ultimately - it would be guaranteed.

The Abrahamic Covenant, unconditional; the Palestinian Covenant, unconditional; then we read of the Davidic Covenant given to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7, and also in 1 Chronicles chapter 17. David was told

that his throne would endure for ever, that his lineage, his children would continue forever on his throne, and his kingdom, the Davidic kingdom would be an eternal kingdom - in other words, that Davidic Covenant assures us that there will, and has to be one day if we interpret Scripture literally, grammatically, historically, a literal reign of Christ upon the earth for 1000 years from Jerusalem.

The Abrahamic Covenant, the Palestinian or Land Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and fourthly what is called the New Covenant. God promised His people Israel, primarily this promise was given to them that He would take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, and He would live within them. We read of the valley of dry bones in the book of Ezekiel, and that still has yet to be fulfilled - the New Covenant coming to national fruition in the life of the Jewish people. Now we have entered into the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ, but as yet to the people of Israel as an entity, they do not enjoy those blessings this very evening. What I want you to notice is that these covenants were unconditional - that means God promised, and you and I both believe that when God says something and promises something, He will fulfil that thing. These promises have, to this very day, as yet remained unfulfilled. Please remember that as we follow through tonight.

The third aspect of their past that I want you to notice is the Mosaic Covenant, or the Mosaic Law. Now this is a conditional covenant, because God said 'Do this and you shall live, and you shall remain in the land'. In the centre of the Mosaic Law - we know it as the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, but there are a lot of other laws right from Exodus through to Deuteronomy that we are very unfamiliar with, perhaps, but the Jewish mind knows, and the lawyers, the Pharisees and the Scribes were experts in all of this - the centre of it all was the blood sacrifice. Now the blood sacrifice in the Old Testament, please do not misunderstand this, it only serves to cover over in a temporary sense the people's sin in order that they could worship God, but it did not remove their sin. It covered it over.

Although the sacrifice is central, God gave Israel these commands in His Mosaic Law, and those commands were not given to Gentile nations, they have not been given in the New Testament to the church - although we in the spirit would obey the spirit of the law because Christ lives in us by the Holy Ghost, but these laws were not given to the church of Jesus Christ, they were given to the Jews. Read about it in Exodus 19 and 20. Let me also sound a word of caution: the law, the Mosaic Old Testament Law, never means salvation - you cannot be saved through the Mosaic Law. Salvation, from beginning to end of the Scriptures, is always by grace through faith - but the Mosaic Law was given really, if I could summarise it, for two reasons. The children of Israel were going into the wilderness, and God knew they would be in the wilderness, and God gave him these commands first and foremost to keep them from sin, as a moral code. But secondly, and really what is enlightened by the New Testament Scriptures to us today, the law was given to them primarily to reveal their sin - not just to keep them from it, but we find that right after they were given the Law, remember Moses was coming down from the Mount - and what were Aaron and all the children of Israel doing? They were sinning and worshipping the golden calf, and having an orgy of drunkenness and sexual immorality. Right at the moment they were given the law, it was proved to them that they couldn't keep the law. So the law is the school master, as Galatians says, to bring us to Christ, in anticipation of the ultimate Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Now we've laid down the foundation, I hope, well of Israel's past. She was elected of God; there were unconditional covenants, four, given to her; and the Mosaic Law has been given to Israel. Now let's look at how she is in the present predicament this very evening - her present. Why is it that the nation of Israel does not recognise the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah as we do? Well, let's look at when it all happened - if you turn with me first of all to Matthew chapter 12, Matthew being particularly the Jewish gospel. That does not mean, as some ultra-dispensationalists teach, that there's nothing for us in the church in the book of Matthew - of course there is. But primarily the chief context of this book is written to the Jew - verse 22, the Lord has been performing miracles: 'Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he

healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?' - that means Messiah - 'But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you'.

Christ is saying: 'I have come to you, and the kingdom of God has come to you, and you are attributing the power behind the kingdom of God to the prince of demons'. As we read on the Lord Jesus pronounces His judgment upon them, verse 31: 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come'. From that moment on the nation of Israel officially rejected the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord Jesus starts in the next chapter, chapter 13, to talk about the mystery kingdom.

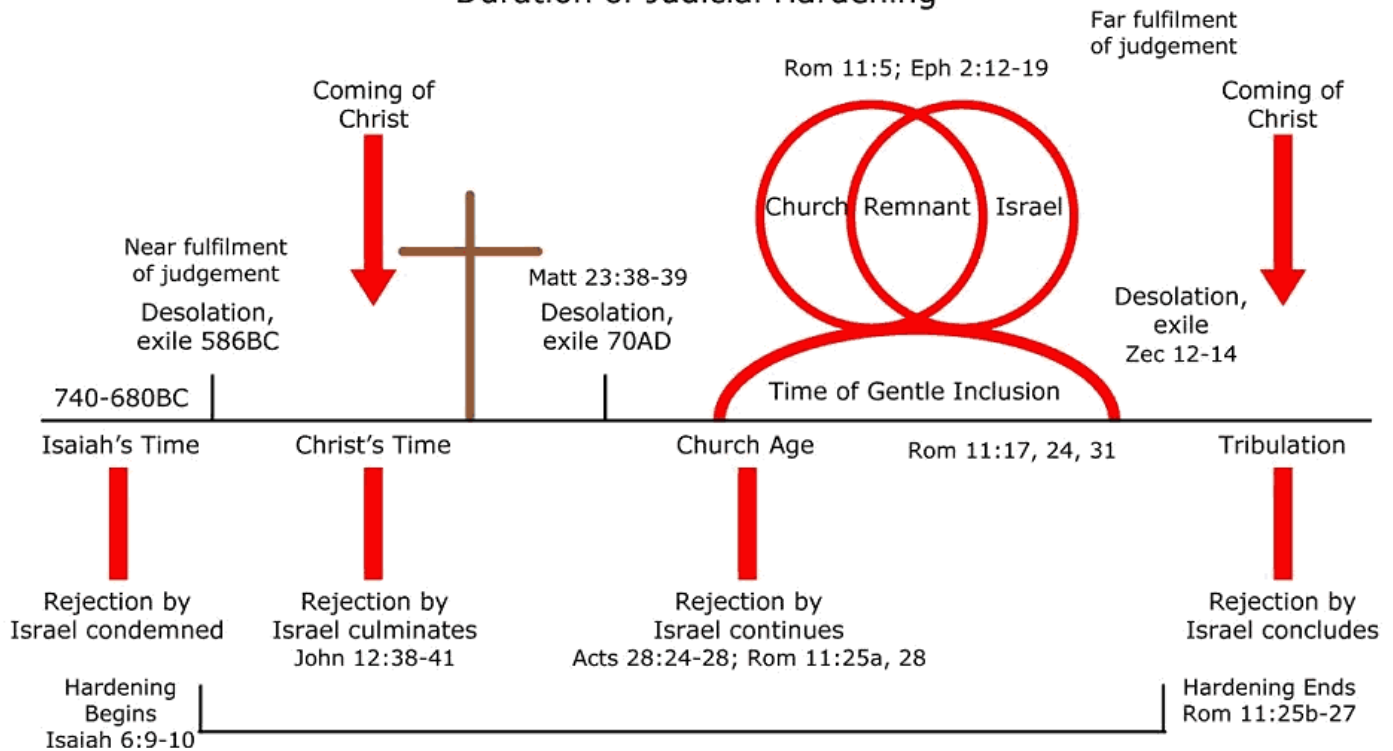
My friend, this really proves the rejection of Messiah by the nation of Israel in the New Testament Gospels and the consequences which are on the nation this very evening because of what we have read in Matthew chapter 12. Israel officially rejected the Kingdom of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the consequence of that was, as the Lord said, your house will be left unto you desolate. We heard last week, and it's a fact of history, that in AD 70 Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed and rifled by the forces of Rome. Jerusalem as a city was destroyed, the temple was plundered and not one stone was sitting upon another, and those were the partial fulfilment of Christ's judgment upon the nation of Israel because of their rejection of Him.

Now you can bring various gospel spiritualities out of what is called the unpardonable sin, or the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost - and there are some legitimate applications that you may make, but the fact of the matter is that the primary contextual interpretation is this: the unpardonable sin was Israel's national rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. This was their sinning against the Holy Ghost. You can read of it in John's gospel chapter 13 verses 38 to 41, and John said there that what was happening to the Lord Jesus from the Jews was a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that God allowed them to have eyes but not see, and ears but not hear, and their hearts were hardened because of their rejection of the Lord Jesus. You read in John's gospel chapter 13 that they could not believe - now don't change that into 'would not', they could not! They had hardened their hearts, rejected Christ's works, attributed it to demonic forces, and from that point on they forfeited the kingdom of God - now not ultimately or finally, but for the time being, partially, they were blinded.

Now that is the point of Paul's teaching in Romans 9 to 11. You've got it on the back of your sheet tonight, Israel's national rejection - you see there Christ's first coming, the big arrow pointing down - you see the arrow? And then below that, not long after the Lord came, John 12 that we've quoted, the rejection by Israel culminates. Then there's the desolation in part in 70 AD, but we are now in the time of Gentile inclusion - that means the age of the Gentiles, because the Jews have rejected God's word. Israel's rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, it was final in the sense of when Christ was upon the earth, but don't for one minute think that God had got caught by surprise because they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. It was very much part of God's plan that it should happen this way. It's not that we, as believers coming from the Gentile world, were some kind of 'Plan B' for God, and He thought He had to save somebody because the Jews wouldn't have Christ, so He brought us into the blessings. It's nothing of the sort! From the very beginning God would bless all the nations of the world, and He had prophesied that they would reject Messiah in Isaiah 53 and many other portions of Scripture. God was not taken unawares by this - in fact it was His plan, in this age that we are living in, to bring you and I as Gentiles into the blessings of Israel.

ISRAEL'S NATIONAL REJECTION

Duration of Judicial Hardening



The Remnant

Isaiah 6:11-13; 10:20-22;
Rom 9:27; 11:5

Now we read in Romans chapter 9 and 10 that God does not deal with men and women in this age of Gentile grace nationally - it doesn't matter whether you're from Ireland, or whether you're from Timbuktu, or whether you're from Israel or another Gentile nation - God doesn't deal with men in this age in their national allegiance, He deals with men individually. That's why you have, in Romans 9, 10 and 11, particularly chapter 10 and verse 13, this pronouncement that there shall come a day when 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. When any person from any nationality, if they cry in the name of the Lord, shall be saved - the word of God is nigh thee, it is even in thy mouth; that if thou shalt confess the Lord Jesus Christ with thy lips, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Now listen, I know this can be complicated for some folk, but if you're not saved and you're in this meeting tonight, you need to be thankful that you were born this very day, that you're alive in this age - because there's an opportunity that has never been before for men and women of every creed and colour and people and nation and tongue and culture to be saved, because God is a God of grace and He has come out to the Gentile peoples of the world in the offer of salvation. But what I want you to notice, and this is an answer to our question 'Is Israel finished with?' - this age of grace today does not mean that the church is God's only plan, and that Israel is finished with, but Paul tells us in Romans 9, 10 and 11 - read those when you get home - he tells us that Israel will be restored. He even says in chapter 11 that all Israel will be saved in a day! They will be converted and they will come back to Messiah. He tells us in verses 1 to 11 of chapter 11 that there will be a remnant of Israel who will come in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. He tells us in Romans 11 that the purpose of Israel's stumbling was not just to bring Gentile people like you and me into the blessings of God, but in fact he actually says that we have been saved as Gentiles to make Israel jealous that we are enjoying the blessings of God! Did you know the way that Jews are converted today is through that method,

jealousy that we are enjoying their blessings that they have forfeited!

Isn't it amazing? If you don't believe me turn to Romans chapter 11 for a moment, verse 25: 'For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness', or hardening, 'in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in'. It's not a complete and final ultimate hardening that God has left them off, but this age of Gentile salvation and Gentile rule will come to pass one day, and when the last Gentile in the church is saved the Lord Jesus Christ will rapture them to glory, the tribulation period will come in which ultimately will bring the Jew back to Christ, and they will cry out to their Messiah at the end of the seven years. Christ will return to the earth and all the remnant of Israel on that day will be saved - don't you believe for one moment that God is finished with Israel!

Now, that might be a bit simplistic for some folk - particularly theological folk, or people that think they are at least - they will come and say: 'Well, are we not as the church today, spiritual Israel? Are we not the new Israel? Has the church not, in some spiritual sense, taken the place of God's people in the Old Testament? Do we not really inherit many of the promises that the Old Testament people were given by God?'. Now let's look at this in detail tonight, your second point under 'Her Present' - the distinction of Israel from the church. There are primarily two views: one is that the church is a continuation of Israel, that we in the New Testament are a continuation of God's people the Jews in the Old Testament. The second view is that the church is completely different from Israel, and that is the one that I espouse to.

Now this first view is the predominant view of the church of Jesus Christ today, and I would have to say always really has been the predominant view, that the church is simply a refinement or a higher development of God's nation Israel. All the promises that we've read about that were made to Israel in the Old Testament, they are now owned by the church of Jesus Christ today, they are fulfilled in the church in a spiritual sense. So these promises that we read to Abraham about the land and so on, they take these promises and spiritualise them into blessings that are in the church today - 'we are blessed in all heavenly places with spiritual blessings'. But the strange thing about this theology is that they take all the blessings and apply them to the church, but all the prophecies of condemnation and judgment that have been given to Israel, they retain them literally by the Jewish nation - for they don't want all those curses as their own!

Can I say categorically that the church of Jesus Christ is never called spiritual Israel in the Scriptures, never is the church called spiritual Israel! Now if I can anticipate some protests that might come from those who believe this doctrine, they often turn to Galatians 6 verse 16, particularly if they hear someone say what I have just said - that the church is never called spiritual Israel in the Bible. Galatians 6:16, do turn with me to it: 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God'. 'There are you have it', they say, 'the Israel of God, it's a New Testament book speaking to New Testament Christians, and he calls them the Israel of God because he's invoking God's blessing upon them'. Now can I say to you tonight there is a spiritual Israel, there is a spiritual Israel, but that spiritual Israel never refers to the church: it refers to Jewish people who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why Paul says 'all Israel is not Israel' in Romans 9, 10 and 11. To be a true Jew you need to be circumcised in your heart as well, not an ethnic Jew, but a spiritual believing Jew. Jews who trust the Messiah today, yes they could be called spiritual Israel, but the church as the people of God both Gentiles and Jews together is never called spiritual Israel. 'Well', you say, 'how do you explain this verse 16?' - well, I haven't got time to explain the whole of Galatians, but really Galatians was a debate whereby the Jewish Christians were saying: 'Look, you Gentiles, if you want to be saved you need to become Jews. If you want to be saved you need to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses as we keep it, and you can't be saved unless you become ad hoc Jews'.

Now my friends, Paul came in and he quite categorically said that if you were born a Gentile you're saved by

grace, not by keeping the law - just as a Jew is saved by grace no matter what he wants to do. Now he's debating between these two parties, two parties that are both believers - Judaisers, some false teachers among them - but believers who were following these Judaisers. So there are two parties in this book, now read verses 15 and 16: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature'. 'You Jews, it doesn't matter that you're circumcised. You Gentiles, it doesn't matter that you're not circumcised. All that matters is the new creation in Christ in salvation'...'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God'. There are two parties in this book, and Paul in verse 16 pronounces his blessing upon the two parties: those that believe this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God - the Jews, whatever they believe, particularly the believers here.

Now some versions, the New International Version, translate it 'even the Israel of God', but the word is 'kai' in the Greek which should be commonly translated as the word 'and'. S. Lewis Johnson, a Bible scholar, has studied the different suggestions for translating this word 'kai', and he says it's normally translated 'and'; and he says: 'In the absence of compelling exegetical and theological considerations we should avoid the rare grammatical usages when the common one makes good sense'. It's usually translated 'and', a distinction from the church here in that it's believers who are Jews. So the first group are the Gentile believers 'them', and the second 'the Israel of God' are the Jews who have believed - is that not clear? Does that not make sense? Considering that there are no other Scriptures anywhere in the Bible that call the church of Jesus Christ spiritual Israel, is that not the only interpretation that you can take out of it? A simple rule of exegesis when you go through the Bible is this: Israel always means Israel. There's not a single instance in the whole of the Bible where Israel refers to anything other than Jewish people, it might be the Jewish people of the whole nation, it might be Jewish people who are a believing remnant believing in the Lord Jesus as Messiah, but it always means Israel.

Now hopefully that's clear. What I want to show you to prove this further to you, the distinction between Israel and the church, is a comparison and a contrast by Thomas S McCall which I got from the Pre-Millennial Dictionary of Theology. It's up on the screen here, and you see the contrast between Israel and the church, you. The birth of Israel was physical as a nation, the birth of the church is spiritual. Circumcision of the flesh to the Israelites, circumcision of the heart to the believer today. The promise to the Israelite was the inheritance of the land, the promises to us are the inheritance of heaven - we're not citizens down here, but citizens of heaven. The government of Israel was the Davidic monarchy, the priests, the national entity of the land, the temple worship, and all sacrifice; but our government in the church are the apostles' doctrine, the pastors, elders, overseers, the body of Christ, decentralised worship wherever believers meet, where two or three are gathered, and the Lord's Supper - not animal sacrifice. The destiny of the people of Israel is the millennial kingdom, but our destiny is the rapture of the church, going to glory right away and coming back to reign for 1000 years with the Lord Jesus. The Messianic King is particular to Israel, but ours is a Messianic Saviour. Israel is described as the wife of God, who was married to Israel in the desert when the law was given in the covenant; we are the bride of Christ who has not yet been married to Christ, we are espoused as a chaste bride to Him. There's a Levitical priesthood in Israel; there is a Melchizedek priesthood which is not Levitical that we have from the book of Hebrews. Jerusalem is the centre of the Israelite worship; missions is our centre - go ye into all the world and preach the gospel, not just one city. There is a believing remnant, even to this day, and always has been among the Jews; but we are a spiritual minority in Jesus Christ. The Jew keeps the Sabbath, we keep the Lord's day and celebrate the resurrection of the Lord - not under law. The Jew keeps the feasts, we have the ultimate fulfilment of the feasts, and the Jewish future as seen in the feasts. In eternity the Jew will be named, the twelve tribes, upon the gates of the New Jerusalem - but the church is not suchlike, in eternity the foundations of the New Jerusalem will be for the church.

Can I give you three other reasons of distinction between Israel and the church, given by Arnold Fruchtenbaum (sp?), a Jew himself? He summarises the distinctions in about five to six or seven ways. The

first is this: the church was born at Pentecost, Acts chapter 2; Israel existed for hundreds, indeed many many years - what a distinction! The second: certain events in the ministry of Messiah were essential to the establishment of the church, the Lord had to come, He had to die, the kingdom had to be rejected, the spiritual kingdom had to be instigated so that you and I might believe, He had to rise again, He had to ascend to heaven to give gifts to men, otherwise we couldn't be saved as the church. The mystery character of the church, Paul tells us in Ephesians that there has never been anything like the church before, that's what 'mystery' means in the Bible, it had never been revealed - so if it hasn't been revealed, how can the church be Israel of the Old Testament? Four: there is a unique relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles 'in one', Paul says, 'new man'. Well, if it's an old man from the Old Testament Israel, how can Paul then call it a 'new man', 'a new creation'. Five: Galatians 6:16 that we have read, it doesn't prove that Israel is the church today, it proves the exact opposite in fact - that there is a distinction between the two. Number six: read through the Acts of the Apostles and you will find that you find the nation of Israel, Jews and the church existing simultaneously. When the church was born in Acts chapter 2, there was no pronouncement: 'Now all you people of Israel are now the church, and the church is now Israel', but they are seen as two distinct entities and are not confused right throughout. The two are always kept distinct.

Let me read to you what C.E.B. Cranfield says about confusing Israel with the church, and he is a commentator of renown, who commentates in a critical and exegetical commentary on the epistle to the Romans, and he said these words: 'It is only where the church persists in refusing to learn this message; where it secretly, perhaps quite unconsciously, believes that its own existence is based on human achievement; and so fails to understand God's mercy to itself'. Now let me paraphrase that: when the church starts to take for granted God's mercy in its own life, it is then unable to believe God's mercy for still unbelieving Israel! You think, 'How could God bring them back now after rejecting the Messiah?' - how can God bring any of us to Himself? He says: 'It is so to entertain the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the Christian church. These three chapters, Romans 9, 10 and 11, emphatically forbid us to speak of the church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people, but the assumption that the church has simply replaced Israel as the people of God is extremely common'. Listen to what he says: 'And I confess with shame to having also, myself, used in print on more than one occasion this language of replacement of Israel by the church'. It is called today 'replacement theology' - replacing the church with Israel and all its blessings, it came into vogue through Augustine's work 'The City of God', this allegorical spiritualisation of literal Scripture.

Let's move on, thirdly - her present - the proof that Israel has a future can be seen in the modern state of Israel today. If Israel has been condemned to extinction and has no future, how do you account for the supernatural survival of Jewish people since the establishment of the church 2000 years ago, against all the odds? Furthermore, how do you account for Israel's resurgence among the nations as an independent state? These are facts, less than ten years after Hitler boasted that he would build his Nazi Empire on the graveyard of Israel, on the 14th of May 1948 Israel became a nation state, ten years after the Holocaust. From that moment on she was victorious in several wars, her war of independence in 1948 - she was numbered 80 to 1, and as soon as Israel declared independence roughly half a million Jews in Palestine were surrounded by over 40 million Arabs all wishing to push them into the sea and drown them! Israel overcame. In 1956, the Suez crisis, Israel wasn't allowed down the Suez Canal - the war with Egypt. They won. 1967, the six-day war, they won. 1973, the Yom Kippur war, they won. 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, Lebanon didn't invade Israel. From AD 70, the destruction of Israel, the Diaspora where Jews were scattered all over the world, to 1967 Palestine was ruled by 40 different nations - but tonight, she is under Israeli control, and from 1943 to today she has fought five national wars and won them all!

Now if that's not proof, what is? I could talk for a long time about economic flourishing of Israel, but the fact of the matter is prophetic Scripture, in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 20:22, Zephaniah 2, tells us that first of all Israel will be regathered in unbelief as a nation. This will be - the next slide, David - to prepare them for

the seven-year tribulation period that's going to come on the earth. So Israel is being prepared now, the nation is gathering in Israel and Jerusalem as we speak, they're being gathered in unbelief so that they may be judged for these seven years, and then ultimately be gathered together at the end in belief when they will cry on the Lord for salvation and usher in God's blessing of the millennial reign.

Present Israel is not the fulfilment of God blessing in that second regathering, but we would have to say that this fulfilment and what has happened since 1948 comes in the category of that first regathering in unbelief, getting ready for the tribulation period, those seven years when God will pummel His people into submission. Imagine this, AD 70, the Jews are scattered, there's no Jew, not one in Jerusalem; only a handful in the whole of the land of Palestine. Then by 1880 there's about 25,000 Jews, one way or another they got into the land. Then in 1914, the beginning of World War I, there's 90,000 Jews in Palestine. In 1923 there's 180,000. By 1935 there's 300,000, by 37 there's 430,000, by 45 there's 500,000. When independence came in 1948 it becomes 650,000, after independence immigration comes in like a flock. The first group, one group en masse, 25,000 Jews all at once - and all of them, to a man, survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Altogether 33,000 arrived during the first four months of national statehood of Israel. The new states' first-year total of immigration was 204,000. Before three years passed an additional 655,000 entered - thus by 1965 the total Israeli population was 2.2 million. In 1969 2.8 million; 1970 3 million; 1976 3.5 million; 1990 4 million - and it's even more tonight! Israel spends more on immigration than she spends on any other government department, even defence, and that's saying something for Israel! It has the highest rate of immigration ever recorded in the world - why? This is why! During the hearing of the British Royal Commission on Palestine in 1937 David Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, said: 'The Bible is our mandate'.

Let's talk in the final moments of her future. It's threefold - in Daniel 9:27 we looked and saw that 70 weeks were determined for the finishing of the transgression of God's people. That meant that God's people who were even then starting to harden their heart against God, God was going to bring them back over a period of 70 weeks. We saw that the final week, the 70th week, was a period of seven years, we looked at it in great detail last week, the tribulation period - but that time of, as Jeremiah calls it, 'Jacob's trouble' was to finish Israel's sin and hardening against God and to bring them back to Himself. You read about in Matthew 24, Revelation 12 - the final attempt of Satan to bring a Holocaust on the Jewish people, to wipe them all out, and ultimately what Satan and the nations mean for evil, God means for good to bring those people back to Himself.

During that period two-thirds of the Jewish people will be annihilated. Daniel 12 says that Michael the archangel will come and fight for the Jewish people to ensure their survival, but only one-third of them will be saved, and that one-third will become the believing remnant of national Israel's salvation. Now grasp this, at the end of this tribulation period, throughout it all two-thirds of the Jewish people, many of them unbelieving - all of them unbelieving in fact - will be wiped out. At the end of it here, when the nations gather around Jerusalem, there will only be one-third who will be left. Zechariah 13 is the passage that I want you to turn to, we're almost finished - what is Israel's future? Certainly they have a past, their present is obvious, but Zechariah 13 tells us that that one-third of Jews - verse 8 - who will remain in the land, speaking of them: 'And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts', two-thirds, 'therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in

the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south'.

Only one-third will survive the Great Tribulation period, that one-third will cry on the name of the Lord, at the end of their tether when all nations around Jerusalem. The Lord will hear their cry 'Baruch habah b'shem Adonai' - Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! He will come, His feet will rest on the Mount of Olives, He will defeat all the nation's enemies, and He will bring in His reign at His second coming. Israel's future is tribulation, then the coming of the Lord, Armageddon when the Lord will wipe away all their enemies.

I think I told you this before, that that company that builds hotels - Holiday Inn - tried to build a hotel on the Mount of Olives, and the engineers called off the project because they found that there was a fault line running down the centre of the Mount of Olives - and they said: 'That is threatening to split one of these days'. You're dead right it's going to split! The Lord's feet will come, Joel says that in the valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem there will be an awful sight of Messiah finally destroying the armies of the world. The battlefield will stretch from Meggido on the north to Edom on the south, 200 miles the whole battlefield. The Bible says that the war clouds south through the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba and the beautiful port of Elat that some of you have been at - the reason? Matthew 23:39: 'For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' - but when they say it, their Saviour will come and deliver them, and the nations of the world will be judged - our nation will be judged, our leaders will be judged!

God's word stands for ever, that's why we believe that Israel is with a future, she is far from finished with! Ultimately when the Lord comes, after Israel's tribulation, after the tribulation, after the Lord's coming, Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run. The unconditional covenants that we read at the very beginning in Israel's past will be fulfilled, all the prophecies of the major and minor prophets toward Israel about the land, about the throne of David, about a reunited nation, about Jerusalem as a centre of world government and worship, about a millennial temple and worship in the millennium in the last chapters of Ezekiel - they will all be fulfilled! We will enter into the eternal state, even after the millennial reign Israel will still be a people!

You're told in Revelation 21 that in the New Jerusalem, the eternal Jerusalem, twelve tribes of Israel will give the names of the twelve gates of that eternal City, so that even after the millennial reign of Christ into eternity there will still be a recognition of who the nation of Israel is. For all eternity those names of those sons of Jacob will be remembered! How could anybody believe that Israel is finished with? Now you might say: 'What is the application to me?'. Well, apart from the obvious that the Saviour must be coming soon with all these things happening in Palestine this very evening, here is the primary application to all of our hearts, wherever you find yourself tonight: God's word shall not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that wherewith it was sent. God and His word never fails, 'Though heaven and earth shall pass away, My words shall never pass away'.

Lord, help us to be a people that pray for Thine ancient people. Help us to be a people that give to the Gospel missions towards the Jews; help us, if we know any Jews ourselves, to always be witnessing of Messiah. But Lord, help us to realise ourselves in this age of grace in which we are so blessed, that very soon our Saviour is coming for us, and very soon all these events will be disposed, and very soon the Saviour is coming. Lord, fill our hearts with these facts tonight; and help us to realise, whatever circumstances we might find ourselves in, that God's word is settled in heaven and it abideth ever, unchanged and ever true. Amen.

Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 5

"Satan: Figment Of Imagination Or Emerging Foe?"

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(Selected Scriptures)

- I. HIS ORIGIN
- II. HIS INFLUENCE
- III. HIS ACCESSION
- IV. HIS LAST ATTEMPT
- V. HIS ULTIMATE DOOM

I want us to turn to Revelation chapter 20, and we'll begin to read at verse 1 - and of course, our title this evening is 'Satan: Figment of Imagination or Emerging Foe?'. Verse 1 of chapter 20 of Revelation: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever", and we end our reading at verse 10, and do keep a marker in Revelation chapter 20 for we'll need to look at it later on.

There were two little six-year-old boys who were heard arguing about the existence of the devil. One was heard to say: 'Oh, there isn't any devil', and the other was a bit upset by this and he said: 'Well, what do you mean there isn't any devil? It talks about him right throughout the whole of the Bible'. The first little boy very knowingly said: 'Oh, that's a lot of nonsense you know - is just like Santa Claus, he turns out to be your Daddy'. Now the fact of the matter is that a lot of people do laugh about Satan, and poke fun about Satan, as if he is a figment of our imagination, or as if he is a fairytale character. He is humorous, or he is some kind of clown caricature that we laugh at but don't really take seriously. One of the reasons for that is the way that Satan has been caricatured down all of human history. In fact, one of Satan's characteristic strategies is to give an entirely wrong concept of what his true nature and what his true character really is. In the Middle Ages, when there were no radios or televisions, magazines, newspapers, films, or any of the pastimes that we put in our time with in the 21st century - people were frequently amused by plays, many of them were

religious. Some of them were called 'miracle plays', a sort of religious pageant in which religious stories were acted out on stage. The audience became very familiar with some of the characters in these plays, and they in particular kept looking for one character out of them all - this was a character who was dressed in red, he wore horns on his head, he had a tail dangling out from behind him, his hooves were cloven, and he had a pitchfork in his right hand. The onlookers used to be just thrilled and excited when this particular character came on the stage - he used to sneak up behind the hero and the heroine. They used to poke fun at him - as in the pantomimes today that some of our children go to, where they all shout 'Behind you!' - it was such a fun-filled time, where they poked fun at the character of the devil.

That is where the idea of Satan in our world has arisen from today, this kind of 'Old Nick' character, or as he sometimes is called 'His Satanic Majesty' - a slightly comic character that no one really wants to take seriously. In fact when the Roman Catholic Cardinal John O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York said that he actually believed in the devil, he got into the newspapers and onto the television news bulletins across America - even Time magazine reported, and asked this question: 'Was O'Connor seriously suggesting that demons are loose in the land?'. They could hardly believe that even a so-called Christian cleric could really believe that the devil actually exists. The ironic thing is that Time magazine recently, around that particular period, also had many stories about mass murder, wild gang rapes, brutal wars, heinous negligence among health and all sorts of facets of our society - yet they are asking the question: 'Is it possible that we could believe in this day and age, which is filled with so much evil and wickedness, in a personality called the devil?'.

Now we must be very careful this evening, as Christians, because there can be an unhealthy fantasising - even among believers, sometimes particularly among believers - with the devil. Corrie Ten Boom, who you remember was in the Nazi concentration camps, a very wise old Christian lady, said: 'We must be careful not to advertise the devil by talking too much about him and his devices' - and that is one extreme we want to guard against even this evening. But we must beware of the other extreme, and that is completely ignoring or being lethargic with regards to the threat the devil is to our lives, to the church, and indeed to the world around us.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians: 'We ought not to be ignorant of his devices' - Satan's - 'lest Satan should get an advantage over us'. CS Lewis in his 'Screwtape Letters' said that 'there are two equal opposite errors into which our race can fall into about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence, the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them'. My desire tonight is not to engender within your minds and hearts an excessive unhealthy interest in the devil - but what we want to be this evening is real, and in an increasingly sceptic world we want to answer the question: is Satan real? Is Satan a personality? Or is Satan simply an influence, a force, some kind of principle of wickedness round about us? Or is there a demonic personality, that we find within the word of God, called the devil?

Before we actually look into the points that are before you tonight: his origin; his influence; his accession; his last attempt; and his doom - I want to prove to you the personal existence, or the personality, of the evil one, the devil - the fact that he is not an influence spiritually, that he is not simply a principle or a force, but he is a person. Now how do we do that? Well, the first thing that we notice - and you could note these down, I think they would be helpful to you in the future - is that there are personal attributes attributed to the evil one in scripture. There are personal attributes attributed to the evil one in scripture - let me give you an example, 2 Corinthians 2 and verse 11 that we read from already: 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices'. A principle does not have a device, or an intention in other words. Second Corinthians is clearly speaking of someone, a personality, who has a will and a desire to really take over believers minds and hearts - and in their ignorance of his existence, to really get one over them.

There are other attributes that we find in Ephesians 6 and verse 11, in that great passage about the armour of God. Paul warns us to put on the armour of God that we may protect ourselves against the wiles of the devil.

That word 'wiles' is just an old English word for the schemes and the stratagems of the devil. So he has plans, he has a plan for you believer, he has a plan for me. We see in Luke 22 and verse 31, very definitely, that the evil one has a will, a volition, and an intention. You remember the Lord Jesus said to Peter: 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat' - he desired to have Peter, he wanted to rip him to shreds - but he had a desire! A personality has a desire, not an influence, not a force, not a principle - no matter how wicked that may be.

First Peter 5 and verse 8 says that Satan is as a roaring lion, and Peter warns us: 'Resist him steadfast in the faith, because he is seeking to devour you!'. He seeks to devour Christians. In Revelation 12, that we'll look at later on in our meeting, and verse 9 Satan is described as 'he which deceiveth the world'. He wants to deceive people - now a principle on its own cannot have a will and an intention to actively deceive people. It may deceive them passively, but we read here of Satan actively desiring to deceive the nations, and we read more of that in chapter 20 verse 3, verse 7, and verse 8. So all I want to do is establish that there are personal attributes attributed to the evil one in scripture, which prove that he is a person.

Here's a second thing that proves to us his personal being: there are accounts of his encounters with God that portray him as a personality. Let me give you an example: Job chapters 1 and 2 - you don't need to turn to them, but read them when you get home - the narrative account of something that was going on in heaven that Job was ignorant of. God said to Satan: 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in all the face of the earth?'. God is talking to Satan as a personality, and Satan is there as God's equal - not in the sense of morally, or powerfully, but as a personal equal in the sense of a personality - standing before God, whom God is talking with and conversing with. You could go further and see in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ that Satan is portrayed as a personality. In Matthew chapter 4, Satan comes and tempts the Lord Jesus - you know all about it - but he comes as a personality, and he talks to the Lord Jesus, he converses, he interacts, he reasons with Him in His temptation.

So Satan is given to us in the scripture, in these accounts of his encounters with both God and the Lord Jesus, and he is seen as a personality. So there are personal attributes attributed to him, we see him in his encounters with God and the Lord Jesus as a person, but also the way that Satan's name is placed side-by-side with Christ's name and God's name shows that he is a personality - and, with some people in the world, he is worshipped as God. We read in 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 15: 'What concord hath Christ with Belial?' - Christ is a person, Belial is a person (behind which, the god Belial, is Satan; the spiritual force behind every demonic spirit and every god that is worshipped, whether they be idol or a real demonic power) - but he is set beside Christ as a real personal being. Satan is also set beside and juxtaposed with God in some verses in scripture. Take James 4 and verse 7 for instance, James says: 'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'. God and the devil juxtaposed, set side-by-side, as personalities - one to submit to, the other to resist.

Now add to those three facts the fact that Satan is named right throughout the Scriptures, maybe 150 different times, and many different titles. Sometimes he's called 'the accuser', which is simply the Hebrew translation of the word 'Satan'. He's also called 'the prince of the power of the air' in Ephesians 2 and verse 2; he's called in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 4 'the god of this world', or 'the god of this age'. He is a personality, not an influence, not a wicked principle, not a spiritual force, but a personal being. So hopefully we've established that fact, that the devil exists, he is not a figment of our imagination.

Now, if we are to know what a threat he is to us as believers, indeed what a threat particularly in a prophetic light of Scripture, what a threat he is to the future of this planet, we need to look at the whole of his history. So we want to start tonight by looking at his origins, the first point on your sheet: the origin of the evil one. What I want you to notice primarily in this point is: here we see Satan's original challenge to God's theocratic kingdom. Now God's theocratic kingdom just means God's rule over the whole of the universe throughout all of time. In Satan's origin, Satan's creation - as a demonic being now we're talking about - we see his first

challenge to God's sovereign rule in His created universe. I want you to turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 28, and we'll read a few verses from this chapter, verse 11: "Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more".

Keep a marker in Ezekiel 28, and turn with me to Isaiah 14 verse 12. Here you will see a name that you'll recognise as being that of Satan, verse 12: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart", notice the many 'I wills' in this verse, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit".

Now historically speaking Ezekiel chapter 28, that we read from this evening, was addressed to the King of Tyre - it says that very clearly in the first verse that we read, verse 11 and 12 - addressed to the King of Tyre or Tyrus as the Authorised Version says. But here we see more than just a simple word from God to an evil King. Many sceptical scholars say that we cannot see Satan in this, but I believe that if you look very closely you will see in verses 1 to 6 - yes, the pride, the wisdom, and the wealth of the Prince of Tyre are described - and in verses 7 to 10 we see his destruction by the Babylonian forces - and he is particularly the King of Tyre, Prince Ithobaal II - but as you look through these verses you will see something deeper than all that, because God's word is speaking of something more than just a pure earthly scene. He seems to be speaking to the spirit that was behind the King of Tyre that was animating this evil man in Ezekiel's day. We see a personality that is greater than simply a wicked earthly king.

Now let me show you this, verse 12 says that he was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty; the King of Tyre could not be described as being perfect in beauty. Verse 15 described him as being blameless, now the King of Tyre was far from blameless! In fact, I would put to you that no human being could be described as being blameless, for we all know Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Verse 13 of Ezekiel 28 says: 'You were in Eden, the garden of God', now when was the King of Tyre ever in Eden? He was never in Eden! Some scholars say: 'Well, it must be Adam that's being talked about here', but as you read on this one who was in the garden of Eden, the garden of God, is described as being clothed, bejewelled with every stone, every beautiful jewel, and in beautiful settings of finest gold. Jewels that speak of the glories of God - and incidentally in Revelation we read that one day the saints of God will be dressed in, and all the splendour to reflect God's glory - but this particular one is described as being bejewelled in a mass of brilliant colours, gemstones that have no light of their own, but reflect the Shekinah glory of God. Now I ask you: could that be describing the King of Tyre, a wicked man who God is pronouncing judgment upon? When was he in Eden? Is it not speaking of the spiritual force behind him? It is indeed, I believe, it's

speaking of Lucifer himself, Satan.

I believe that Satan was probably given jurisdiction over God's creation, that was God's plan in the beginning. In verse 13 we read further of Satan that 'the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes' - now what's that talking about? Well those are musical instruments that God is describing the workmanship of. Listen to what Dr Dwight Pentecost says in this particular verse, 'the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes', he says: 'Musical instruments were originally designed to be the means of praising and worshipping God. It was not necessary for Lucifer to learn to play a musical instrument in order to praise God, if you please he had a built-in pipe organ, or he was an organ. That's what the prophet meant when he said 'the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes' - Lucifer, because of his beauty, did what a musical instrument would do in the hands of skilled musicians: bring forth praise to the glory of God. Lucifer didn't have to look for someone to play the organ so that he could sing a doxology, he was a doxology'.

This angel of light, Lucifer, the spirit behind the King of Tyrus, we have to believe, was probably in charge of the praise of God in the heights of heaven. Just imagine this: that was his person, probably given jurisdiction over God's creation, given a leading role in the praise and the honour and the glory of God, shining and reflecting not his own glory but the Shekinah glory of Almighty God – that's his person. Listen to the privileges he had: verse 14 of chapter 28 says he was the anointed guardian cherub on God's holy mountain - an anointed guardian cherub on God's holy mountain. Now listen the Old Testament Scriptures know only three anointed offices: the office of prophet, the office of priest, and the office of King. Now those three anointed offices could not be attributed to the King of Tyre, could they? A wicked, Gentile King? The King of Tyre could not be called a guardian cherub whose purpose was to protect God's holiness, and primarily to guard God's throne. He is described here as 'one that covereth', in the sense that he is covering God's presence - imagine this! Verse 15 says: 'He walks up and down in the midst of the stones of fire', the sense of the meaning is this: that this being has unrestricted access into the very immediate glorious presence of God. Satan covered God's glory; Satan, as Lucifer before his fall, was a guardian cherub of God who guarded His throne, who guarded His glory, and actually brought glory reflected to Almighty God.

We don't have time to read Ezekiel 1 and verse 10, but we read of the cherub in there, that it bore the likeness of a lion, the likeness of a calf, the likeness of an eagle, and the likeness of a man. Let me just remind you that Matthew's gospel, primarily to the Jew, is the lion-like gospel of the King, the King of the Jews. That corresponds to the face of the lion on the cherub. Mark's gospel is the gospel of the servant, which corresponds to the calf, to the ox, the servant of the land. Luke's gospel is the gospel of the perfect man, which corresponds to the face of the man on the cherub. John's gospel is the gospel of divinity, that the Lord Jesus Christ was God's Son, and God the Son; and that corresponds to the eagle soaring in the skies. The face of the cherub, the fourfold face of the eagle and the ox and the lion and the man, are actually in a typological sense showing forth the glory of Christ in a prophetic form. But could I suggest to you tonight that this guardian cherub of God, Lucifer before his fallen state, was actually given the role of telling forth the glory of Christ before He came into being on this earth as a man. Imagine this: this was the role and the privilege of the evil one.

What a great leader he was. We all know what happened, verse 17, God says: 'Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty'. We saw those five 'I wills' in Isaiah 14:12-14 - 'I will, I will, I will, I will ascend unto the heights, I will be like God, I will sit on His holy mountain', and on and on and on. It wasn't enough for him to reflect God's glory, it wasn't enough for him to point towards Christ, he wanted his own glory, he wanted to be his own Christ. The consequences of that fall was what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 10:18: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven', and he fell from heaven to earth, and on earth as a serpent in the Garden of Eden we know the outcome of it all. Romans 5, that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin in that all men have sinned, and all have fallen short of the glory of God. Friends this evening, that's why we're all in the predicament we are - not to exonerate responsibility from ourselves - but

the fact of the matter is that Satan fell, and Satan tempted Eve, and Eve gave to Adam, and that's why we're here tonight as sinners.

His origin - that is where we see, Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14, right before the world was ever created in a sense, the original challenge to God's theocratic kingdom, God's rule. Now let's look at the present-day in the sense of his influence. Now what this really is is his continuing challenge to God's universal kingdom. You see, just as in the beginning Satan desired to be like God, he still desires to be like God, he still likes to counterfeit and duplicate the things of God. J. Oswald Saunders, whose writings I commend to you, wrote a book on one occasion called 'Satan Is No Myth', and in that book he compared the things that Satan duplicates that God does. He still is desiring to be like God. Here's one: Satan has his own trinity - we'll find out later in Revelation 16 that there is the devil, that great dragon that is spoken of that we read of; there is the beast, which is the antichrist, the second person of his trinity instead of Christ is Antichrist, the beast; and the third person of his trinity is the false prophet, the one who does lying signs and wonderful miraculous works - he's a bit like the Holy Spirit in a sense, duplicating God's work through, supposedly, God's power. He has his own trinity, did you know that he has his own church? In Revelation 2 and verse 9 we read of the synagogue of Satan. Did you know that he has his own ministers? Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 4-5 that a minister of Satan was sent to him, and there are ministers of Satan preaching false doctrine. Did you know that Satan has thought out his own system of theology? When Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 verse 1 he warned him about the doctrines of demons - the devil has his own theology. Did you know that he has his own sacrificial system? In 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 20 Paul says the Gentiles sacrifice to demons. Not only does he have his own sacrificial system, he has his own communion service! We read in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 21 of the cup of demons and the table of demons. His own ministers that we spoke of a moment ago preach his own gospel. Paul said to the Galatians in chapter 1 verses 7 and 8 that it is a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, a gospel which is not a gospel, a gospel which is accursed, which is of the evil one. In Revelation 13:2 Satan has his own throne, in Revelation 13:4 he has his own worshippers.

I could go on in how Antichrist tries to duplicate the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth one day, but we've got to move on - save to say that in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 7 we read that the mystery of iniquity behind Antichrist already exists and works. Turn to that verse till I just show you, 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 7, talking about Antichrist he says: 'For the mystery of iniquity doth already work', or the mystery of lawlessness, 'only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked', the Antichrist, that wicked one, 'be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming'. In Paul's day, and he's writing to the Thessalonians, he saying that the spirit of this Antichrist who is yet to come, is already working; Satan's influence is all around us!

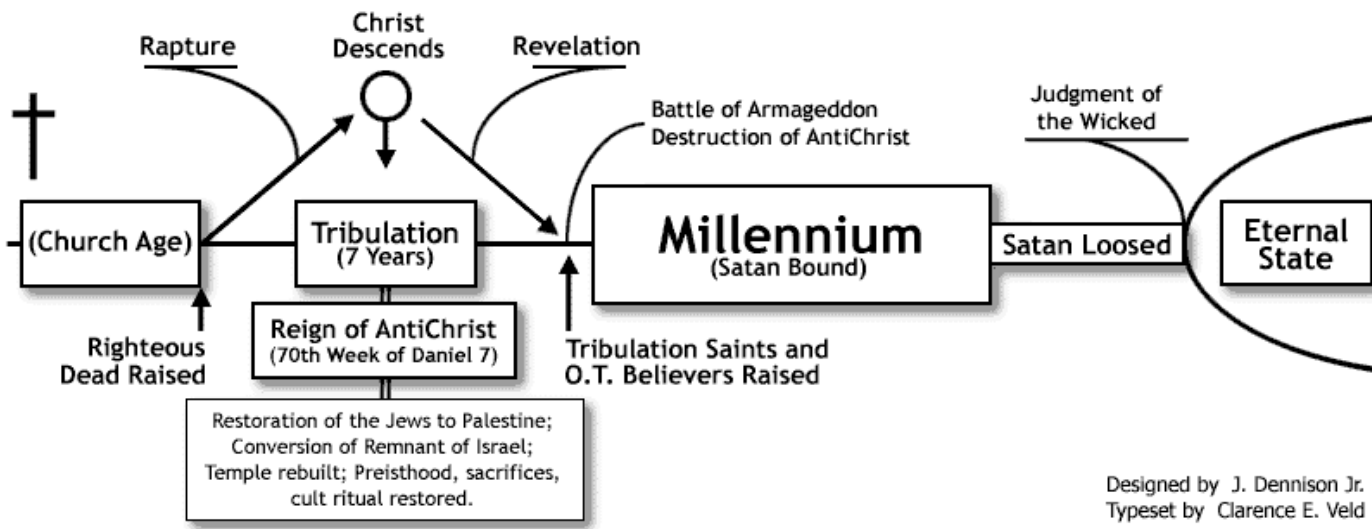
A lady on one occasion, who was a very nice lady who never ever spoke ill of anybody, was said to by her friend: 'I believe that you would say something good even about the devil if you were asked'. She says: 'Well, you certainly do have to admire his persistence, don't you?'. That's the truth, isn't it? Without giving credit where credit is not due, Satan has, through all time, been persistent in his desire to bring his man to the fore and to have his way with human beings. The mystery of iniquity has always worked right throughout all of time, he has been trying to defeat the forces of God in God's kingdom; right from Adam, through Cain the first murderer; through Nimrod, the first worshipper of false gods in a sense, the first false religionist; through the pharaohs of Egypt; through the Herods of Palestine - the attempt of Satan through various kings and potentates, and rulers and leaders of time, was to wipe out the line of Messiah. He tried to wipe out the Lord Jesus when he was on the earth in his own way, he did not succeed; and now that the Lord has died and rose again, he is still seeking to wipe out the influence of Christianity in this world. Since Babel, where that tower was built in the book of Genesis to worship God as they saw fit, anti-God and anti-Christ, Satan's agenda still today is a globalism where the world is united together in a false worship of him as king and

saviour.

Now here's where the crux of the matter comes prophetically: soon God is going to allow Satan to ride onto the battlefield of time; soon God is going to permit, as He has never done before, Satan to take the stage and, as it were, Satan to have his day. His influence has always been with us, and the continuing challenge to His universal kingdom, but what we're going to see come soon - thirdly - is his accession. He is going to be allowed by God to take that place of priority, as it were, in the eyes of the world - and his challenge throughout all of time, from the very beginning, will be allowed to come to fruition.

Turn with me to Revelation 12 till we see where this is, verses 1 and 2 of Revelation 12: 'And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars'. Now there's a great debate as to who this woman is, but it is obvious from scriptural typology in the Old Testament, and much of the symbolism in this passage, that this woman is not Mary but it is Israel - Israel, who gave the Christ child to the world. The twelve stars obviously represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Mary has never been persecuted in all of her life, but this woman is being persecuted - verse 2: 'And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered'. This woman is Israel, bringing the Christ, the Messiah, to the world. Here we see this woman is crying, she is suffering because she has brought Messiah into God's universe. Now we see the devil enters the scene in verse 3: 'And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born'.

There we have Satan against the Lord Jesus, and against the influence of the Lord Jesus in all of this universe. Incidentally, let me just say that probably the meaning of this tail of the great dragon sweeping the third part of the stars in heaven is a reference to the rebellion right there at the very beginning, that we read of in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. We believe that these stars are probably symbolic of the angels, telling us that a third of all the angels went with Satan in that initial rebellion. But as we read on, look further at verse 5: 'And she brought forth a man child', and we know what happened in the Gospels, 'who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron', that has not happened yet, 'and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne'. That is talking of the ascension now, the Lord Jesus is taken back to heaven and to His throne. Then in verse 6, primarily talking to Israel now: 'And the woman fled into the wilderness', read of that in Matthew 24, 'where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days'.



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Now if you look to the diagram that's on your sheet, what's happening here is that number that we have just read - that figure of days - totals to be the three and a half years of the second half of the Tribulation period, the second half of the seven years, the last three and a half years. What we are reading here is that Satan will really unleash his greatest persecution against Israel in that last three and a half years of the Tribulation period, Jacob's trouble. It will be a marked intense persecution of the people of Israel, and we read further of it in verses 13 to 17 - but you remember one week we read from Daniel 9:27, which said that there would be a man who would make a treaty with Israel. That treaty with Israel in Daniel 9:27 will bring in a false peace at the beginning of the Tribulation seven-year period, just at the start - a false peace! Everybody in the world is looking for peace, everybody in the world is looking for a man to bring the Palestinian and the Jew together, and the whole world together in a false utopia - and it will happen at the beginning of this period. But it all goes sour in the middle, and there is what is called the abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel, where this antichrist, this beast, Jesus said, will go into the temple of God and make out that he is God, and seek to be worshipped as God - and the Jews will lose faith in him at that moment, he will break up his covenant with them and he will begin to persecute them as never before. What a Tribulation that will be! Remember we saw last week that that Tribulation period, one purpose of it was to bring the Jews to their knees so that they would submit to Messiah, and repent and believe in Him, and there's no doubt about it that that's what will happen in what we're reading of in Revelation chapter 12.

Satan's chief instrument in the time of the Tribulation is Antichrist, and we read about him in Revelation 13 verses 1-9. He will be his chief man, his personality for venting his wrath on men and against God's kingdom, almost his last attempt against God's rule. We read in verses 11 to 18 of chapter 13 about his sidekick, the false prophet, who will perform great miracles. The Lord said in Matthew 24:24: 'For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect' - that's talking about the Jews, the elect from the four corners of the world that God has brought back to the land of Jerusalem. These signs and wonders will deceive many of them!

Revelation 13 tells us that many will take the mark of the beast, 666, upon their foreheads and upon their right hand - I don't know how that will be realised, but nevertheless it says it will happen, and God will pour upon this world, upon the forces of Antichrist, upon the followers of Antichrist and the systems of Antichrist His wrath, because the cup of iniquity of humanity is full! This is Satan's accession to power, and it is God's opportunity to judge him.

Now this will all end - praise God, it will end - when the Lord Jesus Christ comes. We read of it in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 7: 'He will devour that wicked one with the spirit of His mouth when He comes'. But in Revelation 20 verses 1 to 3 we read of it specifically, look at it - now we're talking about the end of this Tribulation, not talking about the rapture, we believers will be away seven years before this. But at the end of the Tribulation period, remember when all the world, through the forces of Satan and Antichrist, are around Jerusalem ready to wipe out that third portion of Jews that are left, that remnant - they will look to heaven and cry to their Saviour, and their Saviour will come and deliver them. Verse 1 of Revelation 20: 'And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season'.

There is at the end of this seven years the battle of Armageddon, you've heard of it spoken about - in that battle Jesus will wipe out all of His enemies and the enemies of the Jews, and it says that a chain will be taken, Satan will be bound, he will be thrown in a bottomless pit, and his influence will be prevented for this whole thousand year reign when righteousness will rule through the King, our Lord Jesus Christ. The battle

between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, and Christ shall reign, and righteousness shall be displayed - Satan bound and removed.

Let me just say in passing that a-millennialists who imbibe the teaching of Augustine - and I explained that in the past - right up to today many of them believe that this little word 'little season' in verse 3 of chapter 20 refers to this present age. They believe that Satan is bound presently, that's why they believe that we are in the millennium as we speak, this Christian age of salvation blessing. They believe that Satan was bound during the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he will be released just for a little time at the end of this age. But as you read Revelation 20 you see very clearly that the binding of Satan doesn't happen until the Lord comes - Satan cannot be bound unless our Lord came and we don't know about it. He comes, and He binds him - and his loosing, this chapter says, doesn't take place again until the thousand year reign of Christ is over.

Now let me take you through all this: Christ comes at the end of the seven years, Satan is taken and he is bound, and a thousand year reign takes place - but then we read in verse 7 that when the thousand years are expired Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go and deceive the nations across the four corners of the world. Satan will be loosed again at the end of this thousand year reign. Now a lot of people ask the question: why? Well, this is your final, or almost final point, your fourth point: this is Satan's last attempt, if you like it is the final ever challenge to God's authority. You might say: 'What purpose is there in releasing Satan and causing all this bother all over again after a thousand years of peace on the earth where Christ has been reigning in the millennium?'. Well, look at it first of all from Satan's perspective: he's going forth to deceive the nations in order to lead a final revolt against the theocracy of God, and if I could put it this way: he can't resist himself once he's released by God. It's one more attempt for him to reach the final goal of the first sin that he committed, to be like God, to be worshipped like God and to rule like God. But from God's perspective, and partly from our perspective as human beings, this final attempt, last attempt of Satan against the rule of God is the final test that demonstrates the corruption of the human heart. Did you get that? It is the final test that demonstrates the corruption of the human heart.

What am I talking about? Well, God has subjected fallen humanity to numerous tests down through all the ages, and as we look at them - take the law for instance, the law of Moses, the ten commandments and all the other rules in Exodus through to Deuteronomy - man failed, man has fallen short of the glory and the law of God. Walter Scott says this: 'Alas, what is man? He has been tried and tested under every possible condition, in every possible way: under goodness, government, law, grace, and now under glory - and he fails again!'. Now you see this thousand year period when righteousness will reign, the people who will enter that will enter because of their obedience. Now we can't go into all the ramifications of that, but many people will be saved during the Tribulation period, tribulation saints, and there will be resurrections and so on. The righteous resurrected will go into that period, but there will also be the nations - and because of their reaction towards the Jewish people, and how they have treated them throughout all the persecution, and them themselves not taking the mark of the beast or worshipping the beast, will enter into the millennial reign - but they will have children. They may live hundreds of years, as it says in some of the prophets, but they will have children and their children will be of the nature of Adam, just as they are even though they're redeemed. They will be little sinners, and some of them may trust Christ - they will be ruled with a rod of iron, no doubt about that - Satan's influence, that external influence of temptation in the world around us will be done away with, but they will have the same sinful desires and fallen nature.

Now, you put all that together and wait till the very end of the millennium, till Satan is released again, and right away you have an automatic army that will like magnetism react to his call. That's why you have Gog and Magog, and a number that can hardly be numbered, the progeny of men - whether they're redeemed men or not - born with fallen sinful human nature. Jennings writes this: 'Has human nature changed, at least apart from sovereign grace? Is the carnal mind at last friendship with God?', listen to this, 'Have a thousand years

of absolute power, and absolute benevolence, both in unchecked activity done away with all war for ever and ever?' - imagine this! Christ reigns for 1000 years over humanity with a rod of iron, righteousness and all the blessings upon this world and upon humanity, because Christ is King - yet that doesn't do some men any good, apart from grace!

Doesn't it make you thankful that grace has reached you? After this last attempt at the end of the millennium, Satan will come to his final doom. In Revelation 20 and verse 8 we read: 'He shall go out to deceive the nations', verse 9, 'And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever'. That is his end - many believe that the false prophet and the Antichrist have already been cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Tribulation when the Lord comes. If anybody believes in conditional punishment - i.e. that you just go out like a light, and your life is blown out, and you don't have an eternal hell - here's a proof against it, because for 1000 years probably the false prophet and the Antichrist have been in hell before the devil gets there. But here we have it, friends, the awful fact: Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, Gehenna, but my friend if you're here tonight and you're not saved, there's something that I want you to sit up very very definitely and take note of in these verses. Look at verse 11: 'And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works', verse 15, 'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'.

The devil's final doom will be the final doom of everybody who follows his way, who follows the mystery of iniquity, who follows the Antichrist, but who follows sin and opposes Jesus Christ - they will be there! You will be there, my friend! The Lord Jesus said that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, He doesn't mention anything about men - but men are going to be there, because they followed his rule rather than God's rule. Where will you be? What will you face?

According to doctors of the Good Samaritan Regional Medical Centre in Phoenix, Arizona, rattlesnakes are thought to be dead, but they can still strike you. Even if you shoot them and their head falls off, or you chop their head off, they still have the power to bite you. In fact, many patients come into this regional hospital suffering from bites, because they thought the snake was dead, and they had even chopped the head off - but there is a muscular reaction in the jaws of the snakes even after their head is severed, it can still bite you, and incidentally actually gives you more venom than they would usually do if they were alive and their head was still on their body!

My friend, it's wonderful tonight to be saved - and do you know what it means to be saved? It means, theoretically, that Satan's head is bruised, or could I say his head is cut off - Satan, the serpent who, in the garden, deceived all of the human race, his judgment was pronounced in Genesis 3:15: 'I will', God says, 'put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel' - and at Calvary, Jesus bruised the evil one's head. He said in John 12: 'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me'. John said in 1 John 3:8: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil'. Praise God, his head has been severed - but do you know something? He still has a venomous bite. His time is limited, and he knows it, but isn't it wonderful tonight to know that one day his time will be no more! Amen!

Martin Luther, who faced the emissaries of Satan, the enemies of God in the person of the Roman Catholic system - he was trying to deliver himself and others from it with the gospel of grace, and he wrote that

mighty hymn: 'A Mighty Fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing'. I believe this is one of the verses that you don't find in your hymnbook, he wrote this:

'The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure -
One little word shall fell him!'

He is defeated, Jesus' blood has defeated him - and just as the Tribulation saints in Revelation 12 shall overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the power of their testimony, we overcome him too - Hallelujah! But one day the consummation of it all will be that he will be gone forever! I love the sayings of Vance Havner, one of them is this: 'The adversary is not in the first two chapters of the Bible, nor is he in the last two' - Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Crucial Questions On Christ's Return - Chapter 6

"Heaven: Pie In The Sky Or Certain Promise?"

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(Selected Scriptures)

- I. The History Of Heaven
- II. The Future For Heaven
- III. Common Questions About Heaven

I want our initial reading to be taken from Revelation chapter 21, and we will be looking at a number of Scriptures tonight - particularly Revelation 21 and 22, but we'll be flicking through the pages, so be aware of that and do put a marker in this passage because we'll need it later. We'll just read a couple of the verses at the beginning of this portion to get the gist of the theme, our subject tonight is under the title: 'Heaven: Pie In The Sky or Certain Promise?'

John is now seeing a vision of what is commonly known as 'heaven': "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death", and we end our reading at verse 8.

It may be no surprise to most of you this evening to know that there are a lot more people in our world today who believe in heaven than believe in the reality of hell. MORI did a poll recently for the BBC, and they did it in a United Kingdom context - they found statistically that 60% of our population in the United Kingdom believed in God, that may surprise you but those are the facts. A further statistic was that 52% of those people in the population believed in heaven - 60% believed in God, 52% believed in heaven, but only 32% believed in hell. In a sense, it is natural for people to tend to accept that which is nice, rather than that which is nasty. People want to imagine a paradise, an idyllic situation, a utopia where all pain, and sorrow, and wickedness and discomfort, and depression and dejection are gone forever for all eternity. But when you consider these statistics for a moment, particularly that one regarding heaven - 52% of people in the United Kingdom believed in heaven - that is roughly half of our population believing in it, but therefore half of them also are sceptical where heaven is concerned. Half of them, perhaps, don't even believe in an afterlife, and certainly do not believe in the positive entity called heaven that we read of in the Bible.

Now we haven't got time tonight to go into all the beliefs that there are in our world's religious and philosophical systems with regards to the afterlife or even particularly heaven, but let me summarise them to

you just in about seven short points. These are the beliefs that there are in our world, basically speaking: first of all there is atheistic materialism, very popular today particularly in the Western world - that is the belief that there is no God, and therefore it follows through that if there is no God therefore there is no soul in our being, we are simply material organisms, everything that really exists is to be seen around us, to be touched and felt, there is no spiritual realm, and therefore when our bodies that we are living in die everything that is who we are dies with our body and dies forever. There is no part of the human being that lives on beyond the body's death - that is atheistic materialism, particularly popular in our 21st century age of affluence.

Another opinion that would explain the overlap between the 60% who believe in God yet only 52% believing in heaven, which seems strange, is because there are people who actually believe in God but don't believe that there is a heaven. That might seem astounding, but the fact of the matter is some people believe that either God is not loving enough to care and save us to bring us to a place called heaven, or - perish the thought - God is an individual, personality, who lacks the power to bring us, as fallen human beings, to His heaven. That is the second view: God exists, but there is no heaven.

The third view is scepticism: in other words, no one can really know, no one has proved the existence of heaven, no one has come back to tell us that it is there - as far as they are concerned - therefore they are sceptical about the whole thing, and they live sceptically and they die sceptically, without any hope or assurance in anything beyond the grave. The fourth view is ancient paganism, which is particularly popular today in our New Age world - that simply is this: that you become a pale existence of your former self, not in a corpse but in a ghost. You're a ghost who roams around this world, or even inhabits a dark underworld - that's where we get all the theories of ghouls and ghosts - but many people, even in our age today, believe in this ancient paganism.

Then there is a fifth belief called 'Platonism', coming from the philosopher Plato - that is the teaching of the immortality of the soul. It's often confused today with Christianity, but it is not Christianity at all. It is the belief that the body dies, and when the body dies it decomposes, rots, ceases to exist, but it is the soul and the spirit of the man that lives on. Only the spiritual part of the human being continues to exist into eternity - that is not the Christian doctrine that we believe in. Then secondly there is what is called pantheism. Pantheism simply means that all of us constitute, as human beings, and in fact as the universal nature, we all constitute God. In other words, there is a spark of divine light in all of us, in a sense we are drops, if you like, of a cosmic ocean - pieces of 'God-stuff' - we all make up God who is effectively the universe. Therefore at death, our drop just returns to the big ocean sea and there is no real individuality, we all make up God and when we die we all go back into this big ocean of a cycle of life - pantheism.

Then seventhly, also very popular today in our New Age society, there is what is commonly called 'reincarnation' - that is, after the body dies, the soul gets another body, if you like it moves house. It goes not into an immortal body, but into another mortal body - and if you get promoted through enough times being reincarnated, eventually your soul and spirit may escape the body and become some kind of spiritual entity. These are the views that we, of course, as Christians reject - and we'll explain in a moment or two why we reject them. But most of us would be lying if we did not say that there have been times in our lives, even as Christians, where we have doubted the reality of the afterlife called 'heaven'. Perhaps we have had doubts about the existence of a utopia, or a paradise, or an entity where there is the eternal peace and joy forever in the presence of God.

We would not be alone if that was the case. We read in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, a man who is called in Hebrew 'Kohala', which is 'the preacher', he said in a record of his gloomy reflections on death in chapter 3 verse 19-22 - listen to the words: 'For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts', in other words, just like the dog dies, the man dies, 'even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity'. In other words there's no speciality with regards to the human being in a spiritual sense, he is no different than animal life.

Listen to what he goes on to say in verse 20: 'All go unto one place', that is the grave, 'all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?'. In other words, he is a sceptic at this portion of life: 'Who really can know? Is it not more likely that we just die like an ordinary animal? Who can tell if man's spirit goes back to God into some heavenly existence?'

Maybe you have asked at times of grief, at times of despair and dejection in life: is there really a heaven? Is it all pie in the sky? Or is it a certain promise? Can we be sure as believers of this fact? Now listen, I have no time this evening to assess all of the views that I mentioned to you, all of those seven - but there is one piece of evidence that I want to present to you this evening that refutes in one fell swoop all of the claims of false religion and philosophy with regards to the afterlife. It is simply this: the proven historical fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. His coming again from the grave as a whole man - body, soul and spirit - on the third day after His death is categorical, historical, factual proof that can be proven in a court of law today, that all of these other theories are false. Now if that wasn't enough evidence, the scripture does teach us that in fact this belief in heaven is not, as Karl Marx says 'The opium of the masses'. Marxism criticises the Christian hope of heaven as an escape from confronting the grim realities of earth - it is far from that, because the Bible teaches that the resurrection power and life of Jesus Christ that is now imparted to us as believers is living in us, and we can confront life with His presence in us, and in fact we can love as He loves, and show forth the fruit of the Spirit and make life meaningful not only for ourselves but ought to for all those around us. 'They would see our good works', the Lord Jesus said, 'and glorify our Father who is in heaven'.

But there are five, I think it is, more facts - and they'll be up on the screen, but you would do well to note these down - the first, obviously as I mentioned, is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus - categorical proof that there is an afterlife. People say: 'No one has come back to tell us' - that is a lie, the Lord Jesus has come back and proven to us that there is an afterlife, there is a heaven. Here's another very interesting thought as to why there has to be a heaven: human souls have always longed for such a place. You can go back into civilisation and into anthropological history, right to 3000 BC, right to the very age before the flood perhaps if you can find documentation, and you will see that men believed in an afterlife. In 3000BC the Egyptians believed in it, and it is a record of history that they believed in an afterlife - it may be a far flung idea from what we believe as Christians, but nevertheless it is proof that God in His creation wrote on the human soul the reality that there is more than this material life down here on earth. The second proof that there has to be a heaven is not only that the soul always longed for such a place, but the human soul has always felt that such a place existed.

A little boy on one occasion was flying a kite through the clouds, and nobody could see the kite. He was asked the question: 'How do you know it's there?', and he simply answered: 'Well, I can feel its tug'. You know, that's like heaven, even in unregenerate human beings there is a consciousness deep within their being - even though they won't, perhaps, accept it or admit it - there is a tug of the supernatural, of the eternal, that there must be more than this all around them. Human souls have always felt that there was such a place. Another reason, fourthly, is that human souls need such a place. You might dispute this, but the fact of the matter is - I'm sure at some point in your life - you have asked the question, as you look around you at all the destruction and disease and death, 'Is this all there is to life? Is this what it's all about? Is there not more?'. If we are so perceptive to be able to see the imperfection round about us, does it not infer, therefore that there must be perfection somewhere? If we can tell that all things are not good, all things are bad, does it not necessitate that somewhere in this whole universe, in this whole existence, that there is something good, that there is some perfection somewhere?

Fifthly, another reason is: justice demands such a place. The blood of the martyrs cries out for such an existence. In a positive sense: why would Paul the apostle have lived the life that he did? In fact, he said in 1

Corinthians 15 that if there is no resurrection - i.e. eternal life - we are of all men most miserable. 'What's the point in all my suffering and being stoned, being near to death, being in shipwreck and all the rest if there is no resurrection from the dead? I've wasted this life and I'm not finding another one!'. But I'm losing my life now, Paul is saying, that I might find the true eternal life which is in heaven.

Not only does justice demand it in a positive sense of the martyrs and those who have suffered for their faith, but in a negative sense justice demands it for men like Hitler, men like Saddam Hussein, men like Mussolini and other dictators of our age. Imagine if Hitler had got away with it, shot himself or whatever happened to him, he got away with the Holocaust and all of the tragedies of the First and the Second World War in his Nazi regime - did he just get away with it all? Justice demands that there should be a judgment day for him, and if he is now dead, how else can it be unless there is an afterlife?

The final and perhaps most prominent reason for us tonight to believe that there is a heaven, is that God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ said there is such a place. In John 3:13 the Lord Jesus said: 'No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven'. So let's look tonight at what the word of God says about heaven. I want to look first of all, in our first point, at the history of heaven - now that's a bit of a misnomer in a sense, a contradiction of terms, because heaven is defined in the Bible as eternal - therefore how can it have a history? Well, I'm talking about having a history in the context of human understanding, chiefly tonight in the understanding that we get from God's word.

So let's look at how the Bible portrays heaven for us, right back to the very beginning. If you were to look in your Old Testament Scriptures this evening, the most common word in Old Testament Hebrew for 'heaven' is 'shamayim' - now this word, throughout the whole of the Old Testament, refers to the sky; first of all to the place that the birds inhabit and fly in, if you like, the atmosphere all around the planet earth. It refers also therefore to the source of our rain, what Genesis in the first couple of chapters calls the firmament - and we could define that as being the first heaven, or the atmospheric heaven. But then the Bible in the Old Testament refers to another heaven, which is not our atmosphere immediately around us, the sky, but outer space - the abode of the stars and the planets. It refers to this realm as the second heaven, we could call it the stellar heaven, where the stars and the planets and solar systems are. But heaven is also described in the Old Testament, chiefly and in a primary sense, as being the seat of God's throne and God's judgment and governments. In fact, as we go through the Old Testament, we find that heaven is also given to us in the sense of the direction to which we should pray - we direct our prayers toward heaven, we lift up our eyes to heaven up to the hills from whence cometh our help. When we are beseeching God we look to heaven for help, not to earth. It's the place where God resides, and in that sense it is the third heaven - it's not the first heaven, the system of firmament around our sky; it's not the second heaven, the place where the solar systems are, the stellar heaven; but this is the celestial heaven, where God dwells, where God's throne is, the eternal realm.

Deuteronomy chapter 31 tells us that the Old Testament understanding of heaven is the place where God keeps records of human history. The Old Testament tells us that injustice reaches heaven, prayers are heard and even recorded in heaven. We read that Elijah went, because he was translated alive, to heaven; and the Old Testament saints were promised heaven after death. You remember the Psalmist in Psalm 73 said: 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee'. 'Shamayim', heaven in the Old Testament.

Then we come to the New Testament, and there is this Greek word 'ouranos'. The same usage is there, the first heaven, it can mean 'the sky'; it can mean the second heaven, the stellar atmosphere around the solar systems, but it also chiefly means as well in the New Testament the seat where God is - God's eternal realm where He rules, and one day where the saints will go. Let me try to explain and bring you up-to-date with where we are today with regards to our understanding of heaven in this age. Many people do not agree on this fact, and I'm sure I'll not get all of you to agree tonight, but many believe that the Old Testament saints

went to a place - they believed, they had faith in anticipation of Messiah - but when they died they did not go directly into heaven and into the immediate presence of God, in fact they went to a place where they waited until the Lord Jesus Christ paid a ransom to deliver them from their sins, and effectively to take them into heaven.

If you were to turn with me to Luke's gospel chapter 16 for a moment, we see that the Lord Jesus bears this fact out. This was taught in Talmudic writings of the ancient rabbis, but the Lord Jesus takes it up Himself and puts His own divine seal of authority unto this fact. We read of a rich man, who the Bible says went to hell - the correct word in the Greek is 'Hades', the place of the departed dead - and then we also read of the poor man, the beggar, who went to heaven. Now, as we read that passage, it doesn't speak primarily of heaven but a place called 'Abraham's bosom'. As you read down that passage, we'll not take time to do it tonight, we see that the rich man in Hades was tormented - that's very clear - but the poor man in Abraham's bosom was comforted. So right away we see in this, what is primarily an Old Testament period before the Lord died and rose again and His church was born, in this period now the Lord Jesus is telling us that when you die you either go to a place called Hades, which effectively is a place of torment, a precursor of hell, or you go to a place of comfort called Abraham's Bosom, where you anticipate the final work of redemption that would be accomplished one day soon by the Lord Jesus who is telling this factual story.

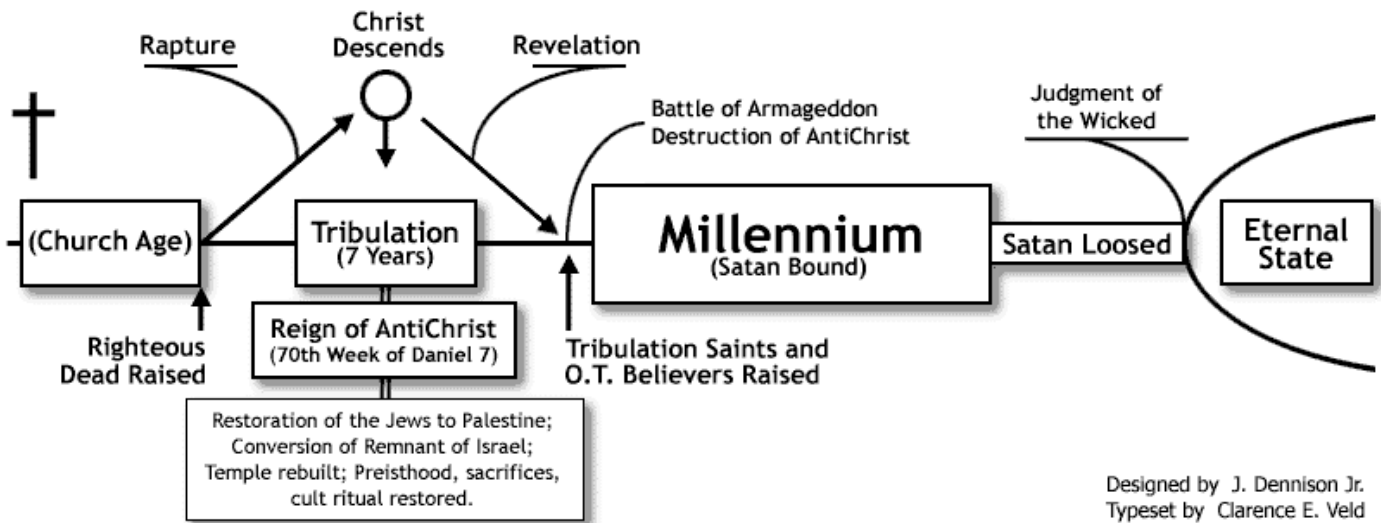
Now let me tell you the update of the things as we understand it to be today in this age of grace. Hades, as you have it in Luke's gospel chapter 16, we have no reason to believe from Scriptures that things have changed with regards to that place of torment. Often the Authorised Version calls it 'hell', but you find as I explained to you a couple of weeks ago, even last week looking at Satan, that the true hell is that Gehenna that we read of in Revelation chapter 20, and that the Lord Jesus mentioned in many of His sermons. But the departed dead without Christ go to this place called Hades now, and are tormented in waiting for that Great White Throne Judgment when the books will be open, they will be judged, and Revelation 20:13-14 says that death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. The dead were called out of Hades, they were judged, and then death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire.

Now what happened Abraham's bosom? Well, from my understanding of the Scriptures, I believe that the change took place that affected Paradise, or affected Abraham's bosom, when the Lord Jesus died, was resurrected and ascended. Now do bear with me on this: Paul the apostle talks of Paradise. He talks of a man in 2 Corinthians 12, who many believe, we all believe really, he was talking about himself, was caught up into the third heaven - that heaven where God dwelt - but he describes that heaven as 'Paradise'. He is insinuating in that passage that Paradise now is in the immediate presence of the Almighty God. That place of comfort that was Abraham's bosom, if you like, has been promoted into the third heaven, the place where God dwells. Now why do we think that? Well, Ephesians 4:8-10 indicates the time of that change as we believe. Paul says there in Ephesians 4:8-10: 'When the Lord Jesus ascended up on high, he led captivity captive', or it could be translated like this, 'he led a multitude of captives'. When He died and rose again, the Bible says that as He ascended after 40 days dwelling in the earth, He led a multitude of captives. Now immediately after it says that in Ephesians 4 it adds these tremendous words: previously, before ascending, He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. The lower parts of the earth speak of Hades, primarily that Paradise part of Hades, Abraham's bosom - and we believe that He delivered all these people who were anticipating Messiah into the immediate presence of God.

I hope you follow that. The Paradise division of Hades is now presently in the immediate presence of our Lord Jesus. Now, why am I so sure about that? Well, I'm not sure about a whole lot of things with regards to these matters, I don't think anybody really can be to an extent - but I do know this: whenever the apostle Paul was talking about dying, his belief and his great assurance was that he would be absent from the body and present with the Lord. To die, he said, and be with Christ was what? Very much far better! Very much far better than what? This earth, and I believe in an extent, everything that had gone before the Lord Jesus Christ

- because how could the Gospel not affect the afterlife in itself? All the Scriptures testify such. Now even though that is the case, we still await - whether we're the righteous dead in the immediate presence of the Lord in Paradise now; or whether we're in Hades, the hell part of the afterlife - we still await the resurrection of the dead, all of us, to be reunited to our bodies.

Now that very quickly, and hopefully not too confusingly, is the history of heaven as we understand it. Now let's look tonight prophetically at the future of heaven, your second point. Let's look at this diagram that you have on the back of your sheet, we've been following this every week. After the Great Tribulation period here, this seven years, the Lord Jesus comes to the earth of course. He brings in His reign of righteousness for 1000 years, the millennial reign when Satan is bound - Revelation 20 - then at the end, you remember last week we saw that Satan will be loosed and will be defeated finally, there will be the judgment of the wicked and then the eternal state will be ushered in. Now this is what we're talking about when we talk about heaven in the most forensic sense in the word of God. The Bible teaches that after the Great White Throne Judgment when the wicked are judged, cast into hell, the devil is cast into hell and there is punished for all eternity, that righteousness will reign in the whole of the universe - not the millennial reign now, but the whole of God's universe, righteousness will reign in what we read in Revelation 21 will be a new heaven and a new earth.



Now turn with me till I show you how this will happen - 2 Peter 3 - the word of God teaches that there will be a renovation of the earth. Now there's a bit of disagreement even among scholars whether it will be this old earth burnt up and reformed in a sense, or whether the whole of this earth and this whole universe will be completely destroyed and replaced - but whatever way it will be, 2 Peter chapter 3 tells us something will take place. 'But the day of the Lord', verse 10 in chapter 3 of 2 Peter, 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness' - very important, let's not skip over that, that's the main point - 'Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'.

Now this is not something new. In the Old Testament and Isaiah 65 and 66 - I'll just quote you Isaiah 65:17 - you read there in the prophet, he said: 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind'. He's saying, way back in Isaiah's day, that the new heaven and the new earth will come, along with a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven from God - we read of that in chapter 21 - and by a definite act of God's creative power, God will call into being a new heaven and a

new earth as He did bringing into being the first heaven and the first earth. God designed it in the beginning to display His theocratic rule in the whole of universe, and we know what happened in the fall and everything else. It didn't take God unawares, but His programme is moving swiftly as we speak toward the day when a new heaven and a new earth will declare the glory and sovereign rule of Almighty God for all eternity.

Now when that begins, when the world that we live in is burnt up, and the heavens in the sense of the atmospheric heavens and the stellar heavens are burnt up - there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that will bring into transition what we know as eternity - or as it is on your sheet 'the eternal state'. Now we know this from Revelation 22:5, where we read: 'And there shall be no night there', no night, no day or night, 'and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever' - that is eternity. No night there, because it is totally different realm, the restrictions that we have today are not upon us; and the Bible is teaching us that this is our ultimate hope as believers in the Lord Jesus. Peter said: 'According to His promise, we are looking for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'. Now I ask you the question tonight: do you even know that this is something that going to happen to us all? Let alone looking forward to it? Peter says this is our chief, our ultimate hope: a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells.

Now let me say a word of caution, because among dispensational pre-millennialists alone there is a great divergence of opinion on these verses of Scripture. In fact, after verse 8 in chapter 21, after our reading where we read up to, most dispensational pre-millennialists - all of them in fact believe verses 1 to 8 of chapter 21 are to do with the eternal state, but there are many godly men, able scholars, who believe that the verses from verse 9 through to verse 7 of chapter 22 describe again the millennial reign of Christ. They're going back, they're backtracking, as if John is reminiscing of what has been happening on the earth when Christ has been reigning for these thousand years of millennium. Many scholars believe this: Darby believed it, Ironside believed it, and others. Others believe that it is the eternal state being spoken to, and I fall into that category. It is different than the millennium, these last two chapters, I believe.

Now let me show you a couple of reasons why: here's the first reason - verse 8, all these people: 'fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death' - sinners will not inherit this eternal state, it will be the saved who will inherit it. Look at verse 27 of chapter 21: 'And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life'. Now I told you last week that there will be those born in the millennial reign of Christ, the thousand years of the earth, they will be born sinners like we're all born sinners - and when the final rebellion takes place when Satan is loosed, they will follow Satan. So this cannot be the millennial reign of Christ, because no one that defiles will ever enter in here. Another reason is that the curse on the old creation that we live in tonight will be removed, chapter 22 verse 3: 'And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him' - the curse is gone. The curse will not be gone during the millennial reign, in the sense that natural sin will still be in men and death will still be there, and death is the intrinsic proof of the curse upon all fallen humanity.

The third reason is that there is no temple there, that's very clear in verse 22 of chapter 21: 'And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it'. Now a couple of years ago I spent many weeks looking at Ezekiel 40 to 48 to prove to you that there is a millennial temple, and there will be sacrifices and offerings among the Jewish people during the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth - but there is no temple here, which proves that it is this eternal state, heaven. Now let's look at this city that comes down from God, the new Jerusalem, which is the bride of Christ and which we as believers will inherit. A description is found, and of course there is great debate as to the extent to which these can be interpreted literally - but just bear with me in a general categorisation of these facts.

In chapter 21 verses 12 to 14 we have the city's walls, the city's walls are described. We haven't got time to read it all, but just to say that the city's walls are described as having twelve gates. First of all there is no height to these walls, which suggests that you can't get in and you can't get out unless you inherit - but yet the opposite extreme here is not only is there exclusive holiness to this city, the walls are given no height at all, but there are twelve gates. The twelve gates are all open, the Bible says, and they're never shut which suggests the antithesis - which is absolute openness and freedom for the saints of God to come and go out of this celestial city. So it's exclusive to those who are made holy by the righteousness of Christ, but it's open to them: they have true freedom in this city. Isn't that lovely? One day we're going to be totally free!

The Bible says that those twelve gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles are written on the twelve foundations of that wall - so right away we're seeing that this city will be inhabited not only by the Jews who have been saved, but will be inhabited by the church of Jesus Christ. Israel is represented, the church is represented, the people of God together in this city of the new Jerusalem come down from heaven from God.

The city's walls, then there are the city's dimensions in Revelation 21:15-17. We'll not read them all, just to say that if you measure all this, what you find is you get a symmetrical city - in fact it actually becomes a perfect cube. It is not on a level as our cities are, but it is a perfect cube which parallels very closely to the earthly counterpart of the inner sanctuary of both the tabernacle and the temple, which were perfect cubes. It's speaking of the immediate presence of God, where this passage says 'God will come and dwell with His people and He will be their God'. Verse 16 gives us the area of the city, it says its 12,000 furlongs - now let me compute that for you: that's 1,400 miles cubed, or over 2 million square miles - imagine that! Over 2 million square miles! There's plenty of room for all the saints to live in this city. On a mere horizontal level, someone has said that a city of that area would very nearly stretch from our capital city of London to New York! That's the city alone!

The city's walls, the city's dimensions, then thirdly the city's riches - in chapter 21:18-21 we read of all these marvellous stones. We'll not go through them, a good study Bible or a concordance will show you colours of this vast spectrum of jewels - but there are twelve stones mentioned here that are said to adorn the foundations of the city of the new Jerusalem. These twelve stones, if you correlate them with Exodus 28, are exactly the same stones that were on the breastplate of the high priest, on which were written the twelve tribes of Israel. But here we have that on these stones in the foundation of heaven are written the twelve names of the apostles! Not only that but the shape of the breastplate on the high priest was foursquare, just like this city. Those are the city's riches. Imagine the spectrum of the glory of God is shone into these great stones in this city, and it reflects that great Shekinah glory of God into a myriad of beautiful colours.

Then fourthly the city's characteristics - we read it: fearful, unfaithful people, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, the immoral sexually, sorcerers, those dabbling in the occult, those who are idolaters worshipping other gods, liars, those who do not believe nor stand by the truth - they will not inherit that place. The characteristics of chapter 22:1-5 are this, that there was 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb' - in other words, not only will this be a place where there is no temple for the holy light of God in Christ shines forth always; a place where the gates are never shut, where there's total freedom and open access in the presence of God; but it's a place where there will be continual eternal life flowing down from the throne of God to His people. Verse 2 says there will be a tree of life for the healing of the nations, with twelve fruits upon it - in other words, there will be abundant life in heaven, and we will be continually satisfied, and we will never want a thing in God's heaven!

Now friends, I could spend all night tonight on the future of heaven, but I hope that you're starting to see what a wonderful place this is. Is it any wonder that eye has never seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him? I want to answer a couple of common

questions tonight about heaven that might be in your mind, and I hope on the last night you'll give me a special dispensation of five or ten minutes - you might say we do that every week, and you never thank us! Common questions about heaven, here is the first: who will be there? Who will be there? Will you be there? I can't answer that question for you, but what I can do is say that if you fall into any of the categories in verse 8 of chapter 21, you'll not be there.

Let me make it more specific in verse 27 of chapter 21: if your name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you will be sure not to be there. That means if you're not saved by sovereign grace - you cannot climb to heaven on a rung of morals, you've got to get in by God's grace. They're in heaven because they're loosed from their sins in the blood of the Lamb - will you be there? The second most common question is: how do I get there? Do you know how to get there? The Lord Jesus said in John 14: 'Let not your heart be troubled', and you would be troubled if you weren't sure you're going there, I'm sure, 'ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?'. And Jesus said: 'Listen Thomas, all of you listen, the world listen: I am the way, the truth, and the life', and the sense in the Greek is 'I am the only way, the only truth, the only life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'. Not by yourself my friend, or by your church, but by Christ and Christ alone is the way to heaven.

How do you get there? Repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. Here's the third question: what will we be like when we get there by grace? Can I remind you of the words of John the apostle who wrote Revelation, he also said in his first epistle chapter 3: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'. Now if you can remember from the Scriptures what the Lord Jesus was like, and I would encourage you to get our study on 1 Corinthians 15 on 'The Resurrection Body', but that was a prototype of what our bodies will be like, it was a precursor, He was the firstfruits of those who will be resurrected one day. That great spiritually controlled physical body that the Lord Jesus was in, that hadn't any of the restrictive restraints of time or physical appetites that we have today in our dispensation - they will all be gone!

Look at chapter 21 verse 4, all these 'no mores', it's wonderful: there'll be no more tears, God will wipe them all away. Dear child, those tears that you shed even last evening as you put your head to the pillow, there's going to be a day when you will rest and there'll be no wet cheeks. All tears are gone, there shall be no more death, no more cemeteries, no more funerals, no more headstones, no more undertakers - praise the Lord - looking you up and down, sizing you up for a coffin, that will all be gone! No more hospitals, no more medicine, no more doctors - can you imagine this? Neither sorrows, pain and sadness of any kind, nor crying - neither shall there be any more physical or spiritual or emotional pain! No more heartache! No more distress, depression, dejection, it's all gone!

My friends, isn't it wonderful to know that this is not a pie in the sky, some kind of utopian hope that ignores the realities of human life down here on earth - it is a certainty, because God's Son has promised us, and He has come back and shown us: 'As I am, so you will be'. Here's a very important question to a lot of people here in the meeting tonight, and to all of us I would say: Will we know one another? Well, many times I'm asked this question, and I understand why I'm asked. I want to try and answer it for you satisfactorily from God's word. I want to take you first to David, and you remember that David's child was very ill. It was near to death, and David decided that he would fast and pray, and beseech God that God would spare the child's life - but the child died. David said in 2 Samuel 12:23: 'But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast?' - what's the point any more? - 'can I bring him back again?' - answer: no - 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me'. Now that was what cheered him, that is what wiped his tears away and dried his eyes: the prospect that he would go to that child and meet it again. Is that not the case?

Maybe that doesn't convince you. First Thessalonians 2:19, Paul said to the Thessalonians who had all sorts of questions about the second coming of the Lord Jesus, he said: 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?'. What's going to be a joy for me when the Lord comes? 'I tell you', Paul said, 'having you all around me, the children that the Lord has given me'. Now if he didn't recognise them, how could it be a joy? Not only that, but in 1 Thessalonians 4 and verses 13-14 that we saw often hear quoted, we ignore the fact that these believers were asking about their loved ones who had died and gone before, what would happen to them at the coming of the Lord? Paul says: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him'. Now underline that, 'will God bring with him' - what would be the point of those verses to those inquisitive Christians, if they wouldn't recognise their dead believer folk? He doesn't just say to them: 'Look, don't worry, they're OK. They're at rest, they're at peace - and even though you might never see him again, they're happy for all eternity'. He says: 'You want to know what is going to happen to them when the Lord comes? God's going to bring them with Him to you!'

Spurgeon, who was very humorous at times in some of his quips, was asked the question: Will we know one another in heaven? And his answer was this: 'Dear man, do you think we will be more ignorant in heaven than we are down here on earth?'. Fanny Crosby, that blind woman who never saw anybody on the earth, wrote these words in one of her hymns:

'Know each other, blessed comfort
 When this mortal life is o'er.
 We shall know our friends departed,
 Kindred spirits gone before.
 In our holy thrill of transport
 They will be the first to share,
 First to bid us kindly welcome,
 We shall know each other there'.

Can I ask the final question: what will we do? What will we do in heaven? People think we're sitting on a cloud plucking a harp - is that that you think? There's very little detail given to us in the Bible about what we will do in heaven, but occasionally the curtain is drawn to give a slight glimpse of life, or a foretaste of glory divine as Crosby would say. I want to give you a summary by Dwight Pentecost of what it will be like in heaven - listen to these descriptions, and they're all scriptural: One, we will live in fellowship with the Lord. Listen to this verse: 'For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face-to-face', another, 'I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also'. Revelation 22:4: 'And they shall see his face' - and I shall see Him, face-to-face! Fellowship with our Lord, with nothing between.

Secondly: it will be a life of rest - are you weary tonight? John said: 'I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth, yea saith the Spirit, they that may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them' - rest forever! Thirdly: a life of knowledge. Paul said: 'Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known'. Elie Wiesel, who went through one of the Nazi concentration camps, said: 'Heaven is where questions and answers become one'. Fourthly: a life of holiness will be there. Struggling child of God with sin, the Bible says: 'And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth' - including your warped, depraved, fallen human nature; it will be gone forever. A life of joy will be there, fifthly, God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death, or sorrow, or crying, no more pain - the former things are passed away! That thing that's causing you the deepest pain will be gone forever! A life of service will be there, we'll not be lazing about. 'There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him'. There will be a life of abundance - no want! 'I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely'. There will be a life of glory, what did Paul said to the Corinthians? 'For our light affliction which is but for a

moment' - those pains, those aches, the heart-rendings of the soul - 'they work for us a far exceeding and eternal weight of glory'!

And a life of worship - 'After these things I heard great voice', Revelation 19, 'of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God'. Well might he have wrote that hymn:

'O Christ, He is the fountain
The deep sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted,
More deep I'll drink above.
There to an ocean fullness
His mercy doth expand:
And Glory, glory, glory,
Dwelleth in Emmanuel's land'

Pentecost ended that summary with these words: 'There is a danger that we become so occupied with the anticipation of our own experience of glory, that we do not realise that the supreme glorification of heaven is for the Godhead'. Our occupation in glory will be with Father, Son and Holy Spirit - not our position in heaven, not our rewards and our status, but God Himself! We shall see Him as He is! We shall be fully occupied with the One that loved us and loosed us from our sins with His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father. It'll not be so much the place of heaven that will occupy our attention, but the person of heaven - not where it is, but who it is!

'The bride eyes not her garment
But her dear Bridegroom's face.
I will not gaze on glory,
But on the King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand.
The Lamb is all the glory
In Emmanuel's land'.

Can I leave you with the challenge of a quotation from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, as Christian nears toward the Celestial City? Listen to this, as he goes there with Hopeful his companion: 'Drawing near to the city they had yet a more perfect view thereof. It was built of pearls and precious stones, while the streets were paved with gold. So that they reason of the natural glory of the City, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick; and Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease'. Can I repeat that again? 'Christian with desire fell sick; and Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease'. Do you know why? They were homesick for heaven. It's my prayer tonight that you have got a glimpse of that great city, but my question is: is it a glimpse enough to make you homesick? May God bless His word to our hearts.

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