

‘Dispensationalism’

Dispensationalism is an outgrowth of Premillennialism. The word “**Premillennial**” is a combination of two words, “pre” and “**Millennium.**” Pre means before and Millennium is the word for one thousand. It is a religious term which has reference to the belief in certain dramatic events that are supposed to happen before Christ returns to earth to establish his kingdom over which he will rule for a 1000 literal years, on the literal throne of David, in the literal city of Jerusalem.

Dispensationalism is different in the emphasis that it places on Israel and the Jews in God’s plan for their salvation and His giving them an earthly kingdom. It is this variety that has become so widespread and popular in our day.

John Nelson Darby is considered to be the father of dispensationalism. C. I. Scofield took the KJV and added his notes often in such a way it is difficult to know which are scripture and which are his notes. The Scofield Reference Bible did much to spread the dispensational doctrine. During the 1970s, this doctrine became popular in wider circles, in part due to the books of Hal Lindsey including **The Late Great Planet Earth**, which sold over 15 million copies.

In 1995 Tim LaHaye’s book **Left Behind** sold millions of copies that popularized the dispensational doctrine. Television evangelists, Pat Robertson and John Hagee are advocates of this doctrine. Well known men like Jerry Falwell have advocated this doctrine. It has captured the attention of practically every conservative religious group of our day. Beyond doubt it is the most popular religious doctrine of our day. There is no doubt that dispensational preachers and lobbyists have had the ear of the White House and State Department in the past.

If we are to discuss this doctrine it is important that we understand what it teaches. Also, it must be kept in mind that dispensationalists differ with one another on some of the details of this doctrine but there are certain main events which they are all in agreement over. We will attempt to set forth some of the most basic tenants of their false teachings.

First, Jesus originally came to establish an earthly kingdom, which God had promised the Jews. He came to rule over the Jews as their Messiah but was rejected by them. This rejection was unexpected, thus God’s plan had to be postponed until a later time when the Jews would be more willing to accept a kingdom. We ask, **could an omnipotent God make such a mistake?**

Thus there followed the church period sometimes called “**The great parenthesis**” period where the church was set up until Christ returns again to set up His kingdom. This makes the church becomes an afterthought. The church would bridge the gap until the Jews are willing to accept Jesus as their Messiah. This is the fatal flaw of their doctrine because the church is the kingdom. The Bible makes no distinction between the kingdom and the church. They are one and the same.

When it is time for Christ to come and establish His kingdom, the church age will end. When the church end comes to an end there will be ushered in a period of seven years called “**the great tribulation**” which will be characterized by several severe and dramatic events.

(1) First, there will occur the “**rapture**” which is an English word used in place of the Latin word raptus. The Greek word is harpazo, which means “**caught up**” or “**taken away.**” The English word “**rapture**” is not used in any Bible translations. This will be a sudden and mysterious disappearance of church. Those alive will be caught up in the air and those in the grave will come forth to be with the Lord. All will “**hover**” over the earth invisible for seven years. Some say it will be three and one half years. The purpose of the rapture is that God’s saints might be rescued from a great tribulation that will follow the rapture.

(2) The “**great tribulation**” as it is called will literally last for seven years. The tribulation will be a period of great and intense suffering such as the world has never experienced before. The world will get worse and worse and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The key scripture they use for this event is **Daniel 9:27**. It is from this verse alone that they get the idea of a “**seven-year tribulation.**”

They also assume that **Daniel 9:27** calls for the rebuilding of the old Jewish Temple on the very site of the present day “**Dome of the Rock.**” The fact this mosque is considered the second most sacred spot on earth for the Arabs. The “**Dome of the Rock**” (a Mosque) is located on the spot were the temple once stood.

However this seems to pose no problem for dispensationalist. Should the Jews attempt to do this it would turn the entire Arab world against them in a religious war.

(3) Either just before or halfway through the tribulation an important figure - the antichrist - will make his appearance. He will be a world dictator who has his roots in the old Roman Empire. At first he will appear as a peacemaker. He will lead a confederacy of ten European nations, which is represented in the seven headed beast with ten horns cited in the book of Revelation. It would seem they have a problem here in that the number of common market nations has almost tripled the ten he is suppose to rule over.

Nevertheless, the antichrist will go to Jerusalem and exalt himself in the new Temple. He will stop all sacrifices, break a peace treaty he had made earlier with Israel and proclaim himself to be God. They get all this by cutting and pasting [Daniel 9:27](#), [Matthew 24:15](#), [2 Thessalonians 2:4](#) together, and then associating those passages with everything that will be going on in [Revelation 4 – 19](#).

An important part of their doctrine is Daniel's prophetic clock of 70 years found in [Daniel 9:24-27](#). The clock supposedly stopped at the end of the 69th year when the Jews rejected Christ. With the appearance of the antichrist the prophetic clock will restart and the 70th year will begin. During this time 144,000 Jews will be converted setting the stage for their acceptance of Christ as their Messiah. By the end of 70th week the battle of Armageddon will be about to begin. Armageddon will be a series of battles in the plain of Jezreel in northern Palestine.

First, there will be war between the Arabs and Russians. After this the war will end up as a conflict between Red China and the Western forces under the Antichrist. This battle will be fought in the great plain of Jezreel in Palestine. Many will be wiped out. As the battle reaches its climax and it appears that all life is about to be destroyed on the earth Christ will suddenly return with those who were raptured and save man from self-extinction.

Christ will now set up His kingdom. It will be the literal throne of David in the literal city of Jerusalem for a literal thousand years. It will be a reign of peace, righteousness and justice. There will be universal spirituality. Even the animals and reptiles will lose their ferocity. There will be plenty for everyone. It will be a real utopia. Those who were raptured will return with the Lord to reign with him as heads and leaders in government in different areas and at different levels. Satan will now be bound for a thousand years.

At the end of this period there will arise some unbelievers who will rebel under the leadership of the devil. He will lead an army against Jerusalem. Why He will be released we are not told. Swift destruction will now be brought upon him and his army. This will end human history. Final judgment will now take place. The ungodly dead will be raised to enter hell. A New Jerusalem 1500 miles square will be put on the very spot of present day Jerusalem. There God and the Jews will live forever. The righteous Gentiles will enter heaven.

Premillennialist and Dispensationalist are very materialistic. They are very active watching world affairs. They see every event as something fitting into the picture of the coming rapture and tribulation. For all of this to happen Israel has to be a nation again. They say this happened on May 14, 1948 when the United Nations formed the State of Israel. This started what they call the "[count down](#)."

There is little we can do to stem the tide of evil. The world can only get worse. When dispensationalist hear talk of peace summits in the Middle East, they assume it must have evil origins. The Middle East must further deteriorate. Any talk of peace in the Middle East is fruitless. It will come temporarily, but not by Christ but rather by the antichrist. It will be short lived because the antichrist will break his treaty with Israel which will result in the battle of Armageddon. It is at this point Christ will return to the earth with all those who were raptured to rule for a thousand years in Jerusalem.

[CAN AN OMNISCIENT GOD BE MISTAKEN?](#)

Dispensationalism believes that Christ will rule for a literal thousand years, in the literal city of Jerusalem. They say God had promised the Jewish people an earthly kingdom to be ruled by the Messiah through all the Old Testament prophecies. True to His promise God sends the Messiah to offer the Jews their earthly kingdom.

But unexpectedly the Jews rejected Christ so that he was unable to establish this kingdom of the Jews. This stopped God's plans. Thus God's plan for the Jews had to be put on hold since God did not anticipate this rejection. This makes God a failure.

It is argued the church was not prophesied in the Old Testament that there is no mention of the church in any of the Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament prophecies were only about the Jews and the kingdom God was going to set up for them. To fill in the space from the rejection of Christ until Jesus will return and establish a kingdom, God had to devise a parenthesis period sometimes called **(The Great Parenthesis)**.

This is also frequently referred to as the **“church age.”** The church then becomes an afterthought. It is as if God had to come up with a substitute plan to fill in the gap until the Lord would return to establish His kingdom. The church then becomes a kind of inferior spur of the moment substitute.

The rapture however will end the church period. The church will be caught up in the sky. Then the prophetic clock can start ticking again and God’s plan for the kingdom he had promised the Jews will again begins to unfold. There are four things we will look at which totally disprove the Dispensationalist doctrine.

FIRST OF ALL WE HAVE AN OMNISCIENT GOD.

God has infinite knowledge. The word **“infinite”** means: **“without any limits whatsoever.”** Thus, he is without any limits as to knowledge. He knows everything. There is no knowledge that he does not possess. God knows everything about the material universe. The weight of the mountains, the number of hairs on our head, the cause of cancer, how long the world will last, etc. Any discovery man makes God already knows about it because he created it to begin with.

God can know every move we will ever make. He knows our hearts, thus every thought. **Hebrews 4:13** says, **“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”** Furthermore God does not change. **James 1:17** says, **“With whom is no variableness, either shadow of turning.”** Thus by his very nature, God cannot cease to be perfect in all his plans and undertakings. Dispensationalism is a disrespectful insult on the intelligence of God Almighty.

SECOND, WHY WAS JESUS WILLING TO DIE FOR THE CHURCH?

Supposedly the cross was the final rejection of Jesus and his Kingdom. This makes the death on the cross lose its meaning. In **Acts 20:28** Paul in speaking to the elders at Ephesus said, **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

In **Ephesians 5:25 – 27** Paul writes, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”**

Such glowing language does not indicate the church was an after-thought but of the utmost importance to His great scheme of redemption for mankind.

THIRD, THE CHURCH WAS SPOKEN OF IN PROPHECY

Jesus promised His disciples He would build His church over a year before this event would take place (**Matthew 16:18**). Included in the promise was the promise **“The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”** Even his death on the cross would not stop it from being established nor destroy it at some future date, not even the so called rapture.

The very day the church was established (**Acts 2**) Peter quotes from **Joel 2** to show this great event they were observing had been prophesied. In **verse 23** Peter quotes David who prophesied the death and resurrection of Jesus. **“Him being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death whom God raised up having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it”** (**Psalm 16:8-11**).

In **Acts 1:16** Peter quotes **Psalm 69: 25 and 109:8** to show that the Holy Spirit had even spoken by David about Judas and his evil deed. Jesus says in **John 12:27**, **“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour.”** In **Matthew 21:33-46** Jesus tells a parable where he actually predicts his own death.

FOURTH, THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS NOT OF THIS WORD

Jesus plainly stated that His Kingdom is not a worldly kingdom. Standing before Pilate he said, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now My kingdom is not from here.”** So there will be no throne in Jerusalem with Jesus ruling from it for a 1000 years.

The Jews and even the disciples had made the mistake of thinking a kingdom would be set up here on earth. They were looking for a Messiah king who would rule over Israel and would drive the Romans out of the land. For this reason Jesus did not fit the picture they had of an earthly king who would rule as David and Solomon did. To them He did not have the background or appearance of a king. He was a poor man thus would have been looked upon as uneducated and unprepared to serve as a king over a kingdom.

WHEN WAS THE KINGDOM TO COME INTO EXISTENCE?

Dispensationalists deny that Jesus established His kingdom. They say He came to do this but because the Jews rejected Him He had to postpone its establishment. In its place he substituted the church until a time when the Jews will be ready to accept him as the Messiah. They believe Christ will return again and will then establish an earthly material kingdom. He will rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem for a thousand years. **Is it plausible that an omnipotent, omniscient omnipresent and sovereign God would fail in His attempt to establish His kingdom?**

THE KINGDOM WAS PREACHED “AT HAND” IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Matthew 3:2 it is said concerning John the Baptist, **“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** **Matthew 4:17** tells us, **“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Mark 1:14 – 15 informs us, **“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”**

Matthew 10:6-7 Jesus gave instruction to the twelve apostles saying, **“And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** **Luke 10:11** Jesus instructed the seventy to preach, **“The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”**

In all of these passages we have a total of 84 preachers saying the kingdom of heaven **“was at hand.”** **Were all these men mistaken? Did they teach error? Could it be that Christ and John who were both inspired did not know what they were talking about? Does “at hand” mean two or three thousand years later on?**

There can be no doubt as to the meaning of these verses. They taught the kingdom was ready then to come. It is an insult to the character of God to say he did not anticipate the Jesus would be rejected and His plans to establish would have to be put on hold.

THE JEWS DID NOT REJECT CHRIST ON THE WHOLE.

Jesus was the most popular man in Palestine in His day and the people wanted to make him their king. It was the leaders and Jewish officials that wanted Him to be put to death. This is what led to His being crucified, His popularity offended the leaders.

John 6:14 -15 says, **“Then those men, when they had seen the miracles that Jesus did, said this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, he departed again into the mountain Himself alone.”**

When Jesus came down the slope of the Mount of Olives in His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem with the crowds cheering Him it is recorded that the Pharisees said, **“Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him”** (John 12:19).

In **John 11:47-48** says, **“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”**

Jesus was very popular with the people. The Jewish leaders despised him. They are the ones who plotted His death.

If Jesus had been so disposed to establish an earthly kingdom He could have had the backing of the people and easily accomplished it. He could have had the aid of angels. But it was not his purpose to rule over a material kingdom from a throne in Jerusalem with by military power.

THE CHURCH WAS NOT ESTABLISHED AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT.

Ephesians 3:9-11 clearly teaches that the church was in the mind of God from the beginning to “make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus used the terms “church” and “kingdom” to refer to the same institution. The word “church” means “the called out.” It refers to all those who have been called out of the world to be in fellowship with Christ and His people. The word “Kingdom” is a term, which describes the form of government of the church. It is an absolute monarchy with Christ as its king.

In **Matthew 16:18 – 19** Jesus uses both terms in talking about the same thing. “And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Hades is the realm of the unseen dead. This is where all the dead go after death. Jesus was simply saying that even Hades (death) could not stop him from establishing his spiritual kingdom. Death came to Jesus but it did not stop him from establishing His kingdom.

CHRISTIANS IN THE FIRST CENTURY BELIEVED THEY WERE IN THE KINGDOM

Paul speaking of the conversion of the Colossian brethren said, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear son.” The apostle John told the seven churches in Asia he was in the kingdom. He said, “I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom” (Revelation 1:9). In **Hebrews 12:28** the writer says. “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

Many living during the preaching of Jesus would live to see the kingdom come. Jesus had taught his disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come.” On another occasion He said, “Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). This they did on the day of Pentecost. **If the kingdom is yet to come there are some Christians almost 2000 years old today who are still waiting!**

The apostle John told the seven churches of Asia, “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). The kingdom came into existence on Pentecost when they “received power from on high” (John 24:49). The fundamental mistake of Dispensationalism is their failure to recognize this truth.

DANIEL’S 70 PROPHETIC WEEKS

Dispensational doctrine contends that Jesus came to establish His kingdom but had to postpone His plans until a later time because He had not anticipated His rejection by the Jews. When the time approaches for Him to establish His kingdom there will be ushered in a seven year period of time which will signal His coming back to Jerusalem to give the Jews the Kingdom God had promised them.

This seven year period of time is the 70th prophetic week of **Daniel 9:23 – 27**. Everything in **Revelation chapters 4 through 19** is supposed to take place during this seven-year period. Thus dispensationalist use **Daniel 9** to prove their parenthesis or gap theory.

Seventy weeks equals 490 days. It is generally supposed that a prophetic day represents a literal year of earth time – thus 490 years. A week (7 days) would then equal seven years of earth time. This prophecy was to begin with the command to rebuild and restore Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity. Six Sixty-nine weeks or 483 years would bring us up to the time of the crucifixion of Christ leaving one week or literally seven years yet to be fulfilled. Dispensationalists say that the prophetic clock of Daniel chapter nine suddenly stopped at the end of the 69th week.

This 69th week brought the Jews up to the time of Christ and His rejection and ending with his death on the cross. Thus we are now in a gap or parenthesis period waiting the 70th and final week (**seven literal years**) to take place. The clock will be re-wound and will start ticking off these last seven years when certain things begin to take place. First will be the rapture. This will be followed by the tribulation. Next the anti-Christ will make his appearance deceiving many nations. His appearance will be followed with the battle of Armageddon.

A number of questions come to mind. [Where do the scriptures indicate that the prophetic clock of Daniel suddenly stopped at the end of the 69th week, 483 years after Daniel received the vision given him by the angel Gabriel? What do the scriptures speak of a gap or parenthesis period?](#)

As already observed the church is not a temporary thing willing in the gap period for the church is the kingdom. There is no kingdom to establish as it already exists. The church and the kingdom are one and the same institution. During the reign of Darius the Mede it seems Daniel made a study of Jeremiah and in particular **Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10**. These passages clearly stated that the captivity of the Jews in Babylon was to last for seventy years. The difficulty was determining the exact year punishment began for the Jews. He seems to have concluded that 68 of the 70 years of captivity had now passed and the period of captivity was almost at an end.

Yet, he could not see any hope that the Jews were about to be released. Thus he prayed to God making confession of the sins of the people and his own. He recognized the justice of God for their punishment in Babylon. In substance Daniel prayed that the temple and Jerusalem might be rebuilt.

In answer to his prayers God sent the archangel Gabriel to Daniel to comfort him. By a vision the angel showed him there would be a period 70 weeks (**490 years**) during which time God would accomplish the end of captivity but would also accomplish even more important things for the Jews. God would redeem them from captivity but Gabriel tells Daniel of a more important redemption – the redemption from their sins.

In other words Daniel received far more than what he had been praying for an insight into the distant future. The 70 weeks is 490 days. It is generally accepted that in prophecy a day represents a year thus certain things are going to happen over the 490 years. While Daniel is concerned with getting back to Jerusalem, God is telling there will be many other things that will happen after their return to Jerusalem.

Gabriel divided this period of seventy weeks (**490 years**) into three periods. The first period would be seven weeks (**49 years**). The second period would be sixty-two weeks (**434 years**), and finally the last period would be one week (**7 years**).

The **first** period of 49 years would begin with the decree of Artaxerxes the king of Persian Empire freeing the Jews to return to their homeland. Although restoration would be slow and “**in troublous times**” yet Jerusalem, its walls, its streets and the Temple were restored under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

The **second** period would be sixty-two weeks (**434 years**). This is the period between the Old and New Testaments. These would be turbulent years for the Jews. They would be overrun and controlled by no less than four nations.

The **third** period is the final week (**70th**) or a seven-year period of time. Gabriel said that God would make a firm covenant with many for one week and that in the midst of one week (**three and one-half years**) He would cause the sacrifices and offerings to cease. Christ began his ministry at the age of thirty around A.D. 27. Three and one-half years later He would put to death on the cross.

Thus once and for all this would remove the necessity of the Temple with its sacrifices for His bloodshed on the cross would forevermore atone for sins. The remainder of the would involved the period between his resurrection and ascension into heaven, the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost and the preaching of the gospel to Jerusalem and surrounding villages. The ministry of Jesus was to the Jews and the apostles continued this ministry to the Jews only (**Matthew 10:6, 15:24**).

During this period of time the Jews were given ample opportunity to hear the gospel, believe and obey it. Preaching was often accompanied by miracles to prove that the Holy Spirit was leading those preaching the gospel. As it became evident the Jews began to reject the gospel it was then carried to the Gentiles. This would seem to complete the seven year period of the 70th week.

Thus Gabriel gave Daniel the assurance for which he prayed and much more than he had asked for.

One word of caution. We always have to be careful when dealing with figurative language. This is especially true of numbers. However, the application of the above numbers certainly fit the historical facts concerning the Jews during this period of 490 years of Jewish history better than the dispensationalist gap period with all the spectacular event they claim will take place in the 70th year.

In **verse 26** Gabriel sounds a sad note. Jerusalem would be destroyed again. While he does not say when, he did say that **“the people of the prince shall come and destroy the city and the sanctuary.”** The **“prince”** is Titus a Roman general, and the son of the Roman Emperor Vespasian. The **“people”** is the Roman army. They overflowed the city like a flood, destroying it and the Temple in A.D. 70.

This brought to an end the system of Judaism. It was the end of the priesthood, the sacrifices and the Sanhedrin. The only thing left were the synagogues, which were spread over the Mediterranean world. The dispersion of the Jews into all part of the world resulted in intermarriage with different races. No Jew today can trace his ancestry back to some specific tribe.

From the death of Christ until the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple there were uprisings, wars, and insurrections by the Jews. This caused Nero the Roman Emperor to give orders to subdue and destroy the land of Palestine. While Gabriel; gave no date he did say. **“And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.”** The **“wing of abominations”** indicates the swiftness with which the Roman General Titus would come and destroy Jerusalem.

Dispensationalist say that Daniel’s prophetic clock of 70 weeks was stopped at the end of the 69th week and that we are now in a gap period until the 70 week arrives. **Isn’t it strange God could accomplish what he intended to do in the first 69 weeks but failed in the 70th week to bring His Kingdom into existence?** The truth is Daniel’s 70 years were fulfilled nearly 2000 years ago. We do not have to wait for the kingdom to be established, as it is already establish. The kingdom which is the church is alive and well.

THE RAPTURE

Dispensationalist teach that Christ is coming a second time to take all the saints both living and dead up in the sky where they will be with Him for seven years. They call this the **“Rapture.”** The purpose of the rapture is to deliver the righteous from the terrible tribulation which will be poured out on all the unrighteous during this seven year period of time. Our English word rapture comes from the Latin word raptus.

The Greek word is harpazp, which means **“caught up”** or **“taken away.”** This will be a sudden and mysterious disappearance of the church. Those who are alive will be caught up in the sky (**clouds**) and all saints in the graves will also be caught up with the Lord. They will **“hover”** over the earth invisible for seven years.

The time that the rapture will occur varies among dispensationalist. Some say it will be at the beginning of the seven years of tribulation while others say it will come at the midpoint of this period. This block of seven years is to proceed the thousand-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem. At the end of the seven years Christ is to descend with all his saints. He will then set up his kingdom and the saints will rule with him by being placed in high positions all over the earth.

With all the wars and turmoil taking place on the earth each generation sees and thinks there is clear evidence that the tribulation is about to begin thus everyone should be ready for the rapture to take place at any time. This is very exciting to many.

While they will not be caught up into heaven itself they will be with the Lord in the sky above the earth. From this vantage point they will be able to observe the tribulation taking place on the earth. The thought of suddenly without warning being snatched up into the sky by the Lord can sound very sensational and exciting.

The main proof text for their rapture doctrine is **1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.** **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again so also God will bring with Him those who asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.**

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

A careful reading of this scripture will reveal that it does not teach the rapture doctrine. Note the following observations.

First, the word “**rapture**” does not occur in the passage. The fact is the word “**rapture**” is not found anywhere in any of the translations of the Bible.

Second, not one word is said about “**hovering**” over the earth for seven years.

Third, Paul plainly says that the dead in Christ will rise first. Then he says those who are alive at the time will be caught up next to meet the Lord in the air. The order of being caught up is just the opposite from the rapture doctrine. This passage written to the Thessalonians deals with a concern they had for their loved ones who had already died. They had the impression that their dead loved ones would be left behind in their graves when Christ returned. Paul is assuring them that the dead in Christ arise first—before the living—when Christ returns

Fourth, when we meet the Lord in the air we will “**ever be with the Lord.**” Paul did not say it would be for seven years but “**ever be,**” which means always, eternal, forever – not just seven years. Obviously Paul is speaking of the end of the world and the great general resurrection of both faithful and wicked and not some theory about hovering in the sky. This will be the second and only return of the Lord. “**Ever be**” also destroys the theory that those in the rapture will come back again to earth to reign with the Lord a thousand years. If they are to “**ever be**” with the Lord in the heavens then there is no time allowed for them to return back to the earth again.

Fifth, nothing about this event suggests it will be secret or mysterious as the rapture doctrine claims. This return of the Lord will be accomplished by a “**shout,**” with “**the voice of the archangel**” and “**the trumpet of God.**” This will be anything but secret.

Dispensationalists also use **Jude 14, 15** as proving a third return of Christ. This supposedly will occur after the rapture (**His second return**) and just before He is to begin a reign of a thousand years. Notice the wording of this passage. “**And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’**”

A careful reading of these two verses puts the judgment a thousand years ahead of the dispensationalist theory. According to their theory the judgment of the “**ungodly**” will not take place until after the thousand year reign. Notice that the Lord will come to execute judgment “**upon all**” in the above passage.

If this passage applies to a third return then according to Jude the judgment will take place immediately when Christ returns. Thus, Jude has the wicked being judged a thousand years before the millennial theory allows for the judgment of the wicked. The theory that this is a preliminary judgment of the nations will not hold up, as nations are not mentioned in the verse. It is the ungodly, not nations that are to be judged.

The theory of two future comings with the rapture between would really require four comings. **First**, there would be the coming of Christ into the world as an infant (**John 34:6**). **Second**, there would be the coming for His saints (**rapture**). **Third**, there would be His coming with His saints to begin the thousand-year reign in Jerusalem on David’s throne. **Fourth**, He supposed to come to judge the unrighteous. This is an impossible theory with absolutely no Biblical basis whatsoever.

What does the Bible teach about the return of Christ?

First, the Lord has gone to prepare a place for His faithful disciples. **John 14:2, 3** says, “**In my Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were no 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**”

Second, He will return a second time only. He will take the faithful with Him to heaven for eternity and the wicked will be condemned to an eternal hell.

John 5:28, 29 states, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Third, the earth will be burned up. 2 Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

The conclusion to all the above is that there is no room in scriptures for four comings of the Lord with a period of seven years between the second and third comings. There is no room for a thousand year period between an unproven third and fourth coming. All this goes beyond what the Bible teaches.

THE TRIBULATION

Dispensationalists believe Christ will return to earth to establish a kingdom over which He will rule for a thousand years. Great emphasis is placed on what will transpire during a supposed seven year period of time before Christ comes to rule over His kingdom. This is supposed to be the 70th week of Daniel 9:24-27. It will be a time of great tribulation, worse than anything man has ever experienced before.

It will begin immediately after the rapture although some say the rapture will occur half way through this seven-year period. The Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the antichrist will arise to deceive men. The tribulation will come to an end with the battle of Armageddon which will be WW III. A vast number of people will be wiped out.

Hal Lindsey says, “The largest descriptive volume of the tribulation is found in Revelation chapters 5–19.” He points out that the first five chapters mention the church 30 times but beginning with chapter six the church is never mentioned again. This is because the church has been raptured and no longer exists. The purpose of the rapture is to rescue all faithful Christians from the terrible calamity that is about to take place on the earth. With the purpose of the church now completed God will direct His attention toward the nations and especially the Jews with the establishment of a Kingdom over which Christ will rule for a thousand years.

Dispensationalist see Revelation, chapters 6–19, Matthew 24:4-51 and Daniel 9:24-27 as applying to the final seven years and a third coming of Christ. Their doctrine misrepresents what is taught in these passages. First, it is to be recognized that the Bible nowhere teaches that there has been a pause between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9. Neither does the Bible say the 70th week will be a period of tribulation. Keep in mind that Daniel’s immediate concern was what will happen to the Jews in Babylon! Gabriel tells Daniel God is setting aside a seventy week period of time (490 years) to accomplish certain things. Sixty-nine weeks (483 years) included more than just the return of the Jews from Babylon Captivity to Jerusalem. Time-wise it brings us to the time of Christ.

Gabriel tells Daniel that during the 70th week (a seven year period of time) the “Anointed One” (Christ) will suffer a violent death, which happened when Christ was crucified on the cross. The remaining 3½ years is taken up with the establishment of the church and the gospel being preached to the Jews. So God gives Daniel more than he asked for.

The Jews will be restored to Palestine but something greater than that will happen. God’s Anointed, Christ, will come. He will die on the cross. Then He will establish His Kingdom (the church). The gospel (the good news) about His death and resurrection will be preached to the Jews. After this the gospel will then be taken to the Gentiles. Thus the 70th week was fulfilled long ago.

A study of Revelation reveals that the book was written to suffering Christians in highly symbolical (apocalyptic) language. It deals with the severe persecution that Christians would endure in the early years of the church. This persecution against the church came from Judaism, paganism and the Roman government. The book is written to encourage these suffering Christians. The conclusion is that the Lord will give victory to the church over its enemies.

When it comes to Matthew 24 Dispensationalist teach that verse 21 refers to the so-called “tribulation.” It reads, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world to this time.” With complete disregard of the context they teach that these words describe a worldwide catastrophe anticipatory of the second coming of our Lord. Jesus is speaking of a tribulation to be experienced by the Jewish nation (primarily Jerusalem).

Verses 4 – 35 describe the tragic fall of Jerusalem.

God's wrath and vengeance was brought to bear upon the wicked city of Jerusalem. Josephus the Jewish historian and an eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem writes: "O most wretched city, what misery and so great as this didst thou suffer from the Romans" Again he wrote: "Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world."

Due to the coming destruction upon Jerusalem these early Christians were told to flee to the mountains when they saw the Romans approaching. Jesus warned, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.....For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world to this time, no, not ever shall be" (Matthew 24:16-18, 21).

If the Dispensational view of the rapture is going on at the same time as their seven years of tribulation as some teach, then there would be no disciples left on earth to flee from Jerusalem because they (the church) would have been caught up in the rapture and thus would be somewhere up in the sky. The church would no longer exist because he has been raptured.

The documented historical fact is these disciples were spared the tribulation that fell on Jerusalem by escaping as the Romans approached. Josephus tells us that not one Christian perished in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Matthew 24:4-35 gives us a detailed account of the destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of Judaism. Jesus ends this discussion with these words in verse 34. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled."

Thus Jesus is not speaking of a seven-year period of time at the end of the Christian age. Instead he was speaking of what would happen later in their generation. The "tribulation" of Matthew 24 took place over 1900 years ago. Beginning at verse 36 Jesus speaks of the end of time. He said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Men have tried to set specific dates but they always prove to be false. The fact is that the church has faced tribulation in every age down through the years. The apostle John wrote, "I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus" (Revelation 1:9). John was in tribulation just as the churches to which he wrote were in tribulation. For example he told the church in Smyrna "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty" (Revelation 2:9).

In 2 Timothy 3:11, 12 Paul says that, "Persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra — what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Thus persecutions, tribulations, and hardships have been and will continue to be the lot of God's people.

In Acts 14:22 we learn that Paul and Barnabas warned the new churches they had established, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." In 2 Thessalonians 1:4 Paul said, "We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure."

Dispensationalist point to the earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, hurricanes and the wars in the Middle East and say these are more frequent than ever before which is a sign that a great tribulation is about to explode on the earth such as never seen before. The fact is we have always had these things. Years ago people did not have the communication technology that we have today thus they were not as aware of these things as much as we are today.

For example an earth-quake might occur in China and no one in Europe would know anything about it. Today, we would know within minutes. At least 200 battles have been fought in the valley of Armageddon. This was due to the fact this plain was a crossroads for many ancient kingdoms that fought each other. Israel and Judah were constantly at battle with their neighbours. Israel and Judah even fought each other. Since the time of Mohamed and the Crusades there have been constant wars in the Middle East. European nations have fought many battles with each other for centuries. If anything, there are probably fewer wars now than in past history.

THE ANTICHRIST

Dispensationalists place much emphasis upon the power and work of the "antichrist."

However they disagree as to exact time of his coming. Some think it will be before the tribulation and other think it will be during the tribulation. The word **Antichrist** is the English translation of the Greek "**antekhrestos.**" It is made up of two words, anti and Christ. Anti means against or opposite of.

This word appears 5 times in **1 John** and **2 John** once in plural form and four times in the singular. The word is not capitalized in most translations of the Bible. Some think he is spoken of more in detail by Paul in **2 Thessalonians 2:3** as "**the man of sin**" and "**son of perdition.**" Either just before the final seven years or during the time of the tribulation the antichrist will arise.

Dispensationalists believe he will have his roots in the old Roman Empire. There will be a confederacy of ten European nations (**European Common Market Nations**) over which he will rule. As it stands now there are almost three times this number of nations (**27**) that make up this union. The antichrist will become the greatest dictator ever known. He will make a pack with Israel guaranteeing them protection and security. When this pact is signed the prophetic clock will again start ticking – ticking off the final week of Daniel's seventy weeks (**Daniel 9.**)

After three and one-half years of progress the antichrist will break off his pack with Israel entering the Temple which has been reconstructed by then. He will set himself up as divine and is to be worshipped. The Jews will oppose him and suffer greatly as a result. This will signal that Armageddon is about to begin. The antichrist will be involved in a series of wars, which will culminate in the battle that is supposed to take place in the valley of Jezreel.

DISPENSATIONALISTS SAY THE ANTICHRIST IS A PARTICULAR PERSON.

Every age has singled out some individual as the antichrist. The list of those who have been designated as the antichrist would be too long to print. The list would include such names as Nero and other emperors, Popes, Mohammed, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt and Henry Kissinger. As long as the world stands and men continue to look for the antichrist they will find someone they think fits the bill.

Who will become the next antichrist? Since there have been so many failures in their attempt to name some specific person it seems now they are slow to name a specific person. The late Jerry Falwell said he thought it would be a Jew. With all the turmoil taking place in the Middle East now their feeling is that the tribulation is about to happen.

MEANING OF THE WORD "ANTICHRIST."

The word appears only in the writings of John the apostle. It seems to apply primarily to the Gnostics of his time who were false teachers. They believed all material things to be evil. Therefore Deity would not have taken on a fleshly material body which would be to robe himself with evil. Thus, they denied that Christ came in the flesh.

What people saw and thought was flesh was only an illusion and not real flesh. The result of this doctrine was that man was not responsible before God for what he might do in the flesh but was accountable only for what he was spiritually. This led to indulgence in all sorts of evil.

A close examination of these passages by John would indicate these people were antichrist by rejecting the possibility he live on earth in a fleshly body. John himself in his gospel had written "**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth**". As time progressed the Gnostic doctrine would take on many forms and would plague the church for many years. A look at the four times John writes about the antichrist will help us to discover who the antichrist is.

1 John 2:18 "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour." Those to whom John wrote to were already in possession of this information. Since they had been warned it would seem that antichrist was to come in their generation.

1 John 2:22 "Who is the liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son." To deny the humanity and deity of Jesus was to reject Him and to reject God who sent His only begotten son into the world. Jesus had said on one occasion, "**He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him**" (**John 5:23**).

1 John 4:3 “And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard was coming, and even now it is already in the world.” Here again is a refusal to confess the deity and humanity of Jesus. Notice that he was already in the world – thus the spirit of rejection was active at that time.

2 John 7 “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” The false teachers (deceivers) had gone forth teaching this false doctrine. It would seem there were several of these false teachers who were going around circulating this false doctrine.

From these four verses we conclude that the antichrist is a liar, a deceiver, a denier and one who refused to acknowledge that Christ came in the flesh. These four characteristics would make one who is against or opposed to Christ

WHO THEN IS ANTICHRIST?

Rather than some specific person in history it would seem John is speaking of a detrimental attitude toward Christ that anyone can possess if he chooses to believe that He came in the flesh. Thus in every age those who set themselves in opposition to the Lord on this truth would be antichrist.

Many think the antichrist is the same as Paul’s “man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3—4. Many have assumed Paul in this passage is speaking of the Pope of Rome. Paul says that this “son of perdition” would come after the “falling away.” This is the apostasy or falling away of the church.

John spoke of the antichrist as existing when he wrote which would be before the falling away. Thus, we do not believe them to be the same. In fact we do not believe the “man of sin” to be specifically the Pope of Rome. Rather we believe he represent the spirit of apostasy and its results which would take place after the first century.

Some equate the antichrist with the “beast” of Revelation 13:18 whose number was 666. All sorts of names and spellings have been derived from the number 666 allowing a person to come up with just about any specific person in history he feels is the antichrist. While it is our conviction that 666 is the code name for Nero we do not think of Nero going about as a false teacher thus he could not have been the antichrist in the sense John uses the term.

In a general sense all who oppose Christ would be antichrist. Specifically all false teachers who oppose the teaching of Christ, his church and his people are antichrist. We have many antichrist today. All sceptics who deny the deity of Christ would be antichrist. Most of the Jews of the world are antichrist. Christ came to save the world but many reject him and his salvation.

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

Dispensationalist builds a most fantastic theory concerning the battle of Armageddon. The word comes from a Hebrew word **Har-Magedone**, which means “**Mount Megiddo**.” The exact location is unclear because there is no mountain called **Meggido**. However “**Har**” can also mean hill, thus most likely the location is the hill country surrounding the plain of Meggido, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem. This valley extends from the Mediterranean Sea just north of Mount Carmel eastward to the Jordan valley.

It is the most fertile valley of Palestine. Famous battles have been fought in this plain. Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera there although outnumbered by the Canaanites. Gideon’s victory over the Midianites took place here. It is also the site of two great tragedies: the death of Saul and his sons and the death of the boy King Josiah.

More than 200 hundred battles have been fought in this area. Because of its history Armageddon became a symbol of death and bloodshed. However the word only occurs in Revelation 16:16, which reads. “**Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon**.” It is amazing what men have done with this apocalyptic word.

According to dispensationalist at the end of the “**period of the tribulation**” the antichrist will go to Jerusalem and set himself up in the temple of be worshipped. Christians will oppose him and suffer as a result. This will be the sign that Armageddon is about to begin. Dispensationalist try to tie **Revelation chapters 16 and 19** together giving them a literal interpretation thus a literal battle on the literal plain of Armageddon. This will become WW III. At first it will be the Russians and Arabs.

As things progress it will become a greater conflict between Red China and western forces composed of ten European nations. This battle will involve atomic weapons destroying two thirds of the Jews. One third of the earth's population will be wiped out.

When extinction seems eminent Christ will suddenly return to begin His reign of a thousand years of peace. All Jews will be converted. Those in positions of influence peddle this sensational but false doctrine to thousands of people who no doubt are easily attracted to things sensational.

The passage using the word "Armageddon" is connected with sixth bowl of wrath found in **Revelation 6:13-16**. It reads, "And the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the best, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 'Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

PROBLEMS INVOLVED

Since they assume these verses are literal and the battle is to be a literal carnal war there are many problems that emerge. In this battle millions of soldiers will be fighting and blood will run as high as horse's bridles for 200 miles. This is an awful lot of blood even if there are millions fighting. The plain of Megeddo could not accommodate the great armies that are to be involved. Hal Lindsey says there will be 200 million troops from Red China alone. It would be an impossibility to put this amount of soldiers into a confined space 14 by 20 miles long.

When you consider that atomic weapons will be used it becomes even more impossible. If literal then the nations will be led into battle by three frogs. Lindsey makes **Ezekiel 37, 38 and 39** refer to the invasion of Palestine by Russia. The weapons employed in those chapters are swords, shields, helmets, horses, bucklers, bows, arrows, hand staves and spears. They will be riding horses.

The commander-in-chief will be using a bow and arrow. The calvary would ride grasshoppers. One riding a white horse whose only weapon is a sword sticking out of his mouth would strike the ultimate blow! **Would a nation like Russia now equipped with all the modern instruments of warfare use such outmoded instruments of warfare?**

Ezekiel is referring to a time long ago of walled and unwalled cities with gates and bars (**38:11**). With the passing of each generation the nations to be involved change and the antichrist changes with dispensationalist. To apply these verses of **Revelation 16** to a war yet to come, removes its instructions from any relevancy to John's readers, thus contradicting the promise of a blessing to "all" who would read and keep fresh on their minds that which was to "shortly take place" (**Revelation 1:1, 3; 21:6**). The logical, consistent, and reasonable conclusion is that the Battle of Armageddon is figurative.

THE MEANING

Many believe these scriptures refer to the constant conflict between Christ and Satan. Thus, we are assured that on the final day of this spiritual battle, Satan and his evil forces will be destroyed. However, I am of the opinion it was relevant to the Christians living at that time and refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism as a system which had rejected Christ and were persecuting his church.

Revelation 16:12-16, Matthew 24:4-35, Zachariah 14:1-17 are all parallel. All employ the similar symbolism. Jesus warns in **Matthew 24:16 – 17**. "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountain. Let him who is on the house to not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes." These conditions are verified by both historian Josephus and Pliny who were eyewitnesses of this event.

In **Revelation 16:15** He says, "Behold, I am coming as thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

In **Zechariah 14:1** he says, "Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem." The provincial kings of the Roman Empire would assist in providing armies for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Because of what John wrote in Revelation the Christians of that day who lived in Palestine and especially in Jerusalem were waned and thus were aware of when the city would be attacked and destroyed. They were prepared to know when to flee and thus escape the terrible tribulation that would be brought to bear upon the city of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. Jerusalem had been given time and opportunity to obey the gospel. Instead they rejected it and persecuted the church.

God's longsuffering would run out and He would destroy the city. We conclude that the language of the book of **Revelation** is figurative and the battle Armageddon is figurative also. It was fulfilled in A.D. 70.

WILL THE TEMPLE BE REBUILT IN JERUSALEM?

Dispensationalists believe that the Old Testament temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt during the period of the tribulation. However, some think it will be built before the seven years of tribulation. Still others think it will be at the beginning of the 1000-year reign of Christ. Hal Lindsey says, "If this is the time that this writer believes it is, there will soon begin the construction of the temple."

Lindsey admits that there is a problem in that the Dome of the Rock, the second most holy place of the Moslem faith, is located on the spot of the old temple. But he says, "Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it."

Restoring the temple will of necessity involve restoring the bloody sacrifices for the atonement of sins as prescribed by the Law of Moses. It will also involve restoring the priesthood to offer these sacrifices. All of this is for the purpose of serving the Jews who are supposed to be restored to the land of Palestine.

THE LAW OF CHRIST SUPPLANTED THE OLD LAW

The law of Christ is recognized as superior and better than the Old Testament law. To restore these things would be to return to that which was inferior and could not save a single person. **Hebrews 10:1-4** clearly states the superiority of the new Law of Christ over the Old Testament Law of Moses.

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sins every year. "For it not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."

Hebrews 7:18-19 states, "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God."

THE PROPHETS DID SPEAK OF THE TEMPLE BEING REBUILT AFTER BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY.

While it is true that the Old Testament prophets foretold that the temple would be rebuilt, they spoke specifically of the rebuilding to take place after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. For example Isaiah said of Cyrus King of Persia, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, let it be rebuilt, and of the temple, let its foundations be laid" (Isaiah 44:28).

In **Ezra 1:1** we learn why he became a shepherd for the Lord. "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: This what Cyrus king of Persia says; 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.' Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem."

Dispensationalists are correct in affirming that the prophets said the temple would be rebuilt, they have just missed the time of the fulfilment by a few thousand years. **Ezra in chapters 3 through 6** tells of the rebuilding. **Ezra 6:15** tells us when this happened. "The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius."

TODAY THE CHURCH IS THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE OF GOD

The scriptures clearly confirm that the church is God's spiritual temple. Paul writes, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).

The church is made up of a holy priesthood. "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Then in verse 9 he says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

Concerning this temple Paul wrote, "And have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

The spiritual temple of God then is the church. Why would God revert to a physical house employing physical things now that we have His spiritual temple today – the church. The church offers so much more than the old temple could ever offer. The priesthood and sacrifices employed in the old temple were inferior to the church purchased by our Lord's blood. (See Acts 20:28.)

ALL MEN CAN BE INCLUDED IN THIS NEW TEMPLE

In Acts 15 a meeting in Jerusalem discussed the subject of adding Gentiles to the church. Peter stood up recounting the conversion of Cornelius and his household. Paul and Barnabas rehearsed their works among the Gentiles and their acceptance of the gospel. James stood up and quoted Amos 9:11, 12. He declared this prophecy had been fulfilled in the church; that the spiritual tabernacle of David had been built in order that "the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles." (See Acts 15:15-18.)

Thus according to James' argument the church (the Lord's spiritual tabernacle) was raised up so that the Gentiles as well as the Jews might seek after the Lord. If this had not been done then the Gentiles would not have been able to seek after him.

Today God adds all men, whether Jew or Gentile, who are obedient to the gospel to the church. There is no indication that Amos's prophecy had any other interpretation than that given it by James. All who obey the gospel by believing in Jesus Christ, repenting of their sins, confessing His name and being baptized into Christ are added to His church (See Acts 2:41, 47).

WILL ALL JEWS RETURN TO PALESTINE?

Dispensationalists teach that all Jews will be converted to Christ and restored to the land of Palestine. This will be the fulfilment of the Old Testament land promises made to Abraham by God. In Genesis 12-17 we read of many promises that were made to Abraham concerning him and his seed. However, an examination of the Bible will reveal that all the land promises made by God to Abraham were fulfilled by the time of Joshua's death around 1390 B.C.

I recently read an article submitted to our local newspaper that the Jews were being cheated out of lands that belonged to them. The implication was that Arabs (Palestinians) were holding and occupying land that really belongs to the Jews.

THE FACT IS THAT EVERY LAND PROMISE MADE BY GOD TO ABRAHAM WAS FULFILLED IN JOSHUA'S TIME.

Joshua 21:43 states, "So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their fore-fathers, and they took possession of it and settled there." After their possession of the land of Palestine Joshua gave his farewell speech to Israel. He said, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise was fulfilled; not one promise failed" (Joshua 23:14).

An outline of what actually took place can be stated as follows:

1. The land of Palestine was promised to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14, 15).
2. God made a covenant with Abraham concerning the land and stated that their land would extend from the Nile river to the river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:30-31).
3. This land was possessed during the days of Joshua.

4. Not all of Israel's enemies were cast out during the days of Joshua (Judges 2:20-23).
5. Portions of the land were retaken by their enemies during the period of the Judges
6. During the reign of David these areas were re-acquired (2 Samuel 8:3).
7. Solomon reigned over all the land that was promised Abraham (1 Kings 4:21, 2 Chronicles 9:26).

THE LAND PROMISES WERE CONDITIONAL THEY COULD KEEP THE LAND AS LONG AS THEY WERE FATHFUL TO GOD.

Joshua warned Israel, "If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you" (Joshua 23:16).

Israel's history is a history of rebellion against God. As a result of their repeated sins they were removed from the Promised Land. In 722 B.C. "The king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in towns of the Medes. This happened because they had not obeyed the Lord their God, but had violated his covenant—all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded. They neither listened to the commands nor carried them out" (2 Kings 18:11, 12).

The southern kingdom of Judah followed the same course 136 years later and was taken captive to Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:21).

In 2 Chronicles 36:13-21 it is stated, "He (Zedekiah) also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel. Further, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 36:13-14). Verse 17 tells us, "God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar."

WHILE IN CAPTIVITY GOD PROMISED THEY WOULD BE RETURNED.

When the 10 northern tribes rebelled and broke away from the king of Jerusalem there were those who were dissatisfied with the idolatry of Israel and made their way back south to Judah. From reading 2 Chronicles chapters 30-31 it is evident that during the reign of Hezekiah portions of all twelve tribes of Israel resided in the land of Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and prior to the fall of the southern kingdom in 586. Thus, in the Babylonian captivity there would have been portions of all 12 tribes.

There were actually three returns from Babylonian captivity. The **first** was in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1-6). The **second** was in 457 (Ezra 7-10). The **third** was in 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 1-13). Portions of every tribe of Israel returned to Palestine. These three returns fulfilled God's prophecies concerning their return from captivity. There is really no such thing as the "ten lost tribes of Israel." Jeremiah prophesied the return of all. He wrote, "In those days, the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel". "I and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have for an inheritance unto your fathers." Many other passages could be cited to show that God restored Israel to their land.

Dispensationalists say that these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled but will be when Christ returns to establish His thousand year reign over His kingdom. The Bible is very clear that all land promises were fulfilled.

NATIONALITY IS NOW LOST IN CHRIST

Since the establishment of the kingdom when one obeys the gospel, nationality is lost. Paul wrote, "We henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16). Colossians 3:11 Paul says, "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

Galatians 3:26-28 says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

The old Israel has been absorbed into the church, which is now God's new Israel. All land promises made to Abraham were fulfilled many years ago. When Israel was driven from the Promised Land, as the result of her disobedience, she was permitted to return because of God's mercy and his willingness to forgive. Since these promises are all fulfilled there will be no return of all Jews to Palestine.

There is nothing to indicate that all Jews will be converted. There is no such thing as a national conversion. There is only individual conversion. Each one must decide for himself. Most Jews living outside Palestine today would have no desire to return

WHERE ARE THE JEWS WHO WILL BE RETURNED TO JERUSALEM?

A fact often overlooked is that with the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world they have intermarried with those who are not Jews. Few would be full blooded Jews today. The average Jew cannot tell you which tribe he descends from. Since only those of the tribe of Levi could minister at the temple no Jew today can trace his lineage back to Levi or for that matter any other tribe.

THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST

The 20th chapter of Revelation is considered the most difficult chapter of the book of Revelation if not the entire Bible. Dispensationalists freely employ this difficult chapter to prove that Christ will reign on earth for a literal thousand years. Verse four specifically is the passage that is so heavily relied on to prove their theory.

The passage reads: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

A CLOSE READING OF THIS PASSAGE NOWHERE STATES ANY OF THE BASIC TENANTS OF THE DISPENSATIONAL DOCTRINE.

1. It does not mention the second coming of Christ with a rapture.
2. It does not mention a bodily resurrection.
3. It does not mention a thousand-year reign on earth.
4. It does not mention the throne of David.
5. It does not mention the city of Jerusalem.
6. It does not mention or say anything about those raptured reigning with Christ.
7. It does not mention the rapture anywhere.
8. It does not say that fleshly Israel will return to Palestine.
9. It does not say the raptured (faithful Christians) will be placed in positions of rulers.

NOW NOTICE WHAT THE TEXT DOES SAY

1. It does say “they” lived and reigned – not we (the raptured) will live and reign.
2. It says they “lived” and “reigned” with Christ – not shall live and reign (future tense).
3. It says they lived and reigned “with Christ” – not that Christ reigned.
4. It says “souls” “reigned” with Christ – not resurrected physical bodies.
5. It says it was the souls that were “beheaded” that reigned with Christ.

CONCLUSION

There is no way one can take Revelation 20:4 and make it teach the dispensational doctrine. A careful reading will show that it does not even hint such a theory. Men have no right to tamper with God’s word implying things it does not teach.

LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE?

Dispensationalists make a fatal mistake by making the book of Revelation literal. This is especially true of the 20th chapter. But are they willing to accept all of the passage as literal? Reading it as literal presents some very awkward problems.

1. Do they accept a literal angel coming down with a literal key and literal chain? Do such material things exist in heaven?
2. This was for the purpose of literally binding a literal dragon?
3. This literal dragon’s body literally filled the whole earth and his literal tail reached to the literal heavens and literally plucked the literal stars of the heavens out of their literal orbits millions of miles away? Are they willing to accept this position?
4. The literal dragon, which filled the whole literal earth, was to be put in a literal pit, tail and all. If his body filled the earth where could a pit be dug on earth large enough to accommodate his literal body?

5. If the thousand years is literal, then the beheading is literal and only those who have been literally beheaded will get into the millennium?
6. If the reigning ends with the thousand years, the living ends also, for John says they "lived and reigned" a thousand years with Christ. If we accept the dispensationalist view the inescapable conclusion is that when the millennium ends everyone dies?

We can see that if the 20th chapter is taken as literal we get into all kinds of problems. Any literal conclusions force us into positions that are ridiculous. The "thousand years" is but one symbol in this chapter. A proper understanding of the chapter as well as the other chapters begins by recognizing that all of John's visions are described in highly figurative (apocalyptic) language.

Also to understand this chapter we must keep in mind it is a sequel to chapter 19. Chapter 20 is the climax to the last scenes of chapter 19. The dragon (Satan), the instigator of all opposition to Christ and His church, is about to be cast into the abyss (bottomless pit), thus the final and complete defeat of Satan.

We must consider "a thousand years" as symbolic just as we consider most all the other numbers to be symbolic. It symbolizes completeness thus the complete defeat of Satan and his foes -- the complete victory of Christ and His Cause over persecution and oppression.

The Hebrews writer reminds us, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood. He also Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil." Through the death of Christ every persecuted Christian gained victory. If they would remain faithful till death they would gain victory. While the symbols of this chapter apply primarily to the early Christians and their persecutions it has a general application to all today that are faithful to him. In this last and great dispensation Christ is on the throne of His kingdom (Hebrews 1:8).

Christians who overcome "sit with Him in His throne" NOW in complete victory over the devil. Every Christian today is a citizen of the kingdom of Christ for that kingdom is now in existence. We do not have to wait for a future time. It was established on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

This kingdom is not an earthly temporal kingdom manifesting political, military and carnal characteristics but it is entirely spiritual. Those in Palestine who heard Jesus preach had great difficulty in understanding the nature of His kingdom because they were looking for a kingdom, which would have its capital in Jerusalem. Jesus told the woman at the well that Jerusalem would not be the central place of worship (John 4:21), yet, dispensationalist like the Jews in Christ's time want to put it there in a visible way. Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world.

In Luke 17:20-21 Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'see here!' or, 'See there!' For, indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Thus, the kingdom would not have a visible earthly manifestation. While this 20th chapter is difficult yet it certainly does not teach any of the doctrines of dispensationalist.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

The New Testament teaches that there will one great resurrection of all the dead both good and evil at the same moment. Dispensationalists teach there will be two resurrections. They say that the resurrection of the righteous and wicked will occur at two different times, one thousand years apart.

The righteous will have already been raised at the time of the "rapture" but the wicked will be raised at the end of the thousand years. Thus, we have a literal thousand years separating two resurrections. An examination of God's word reveals that there will be a simultaneous resurrection of all the dead when Christ returns for the second last and only return. Nowhere do we have pictured in the Bible two resurrections one thousand years apart.

CONSIDER WHAT JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE RESURRECTION.

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40).

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). From these two verses we learn that Jesus taught that righteous believers would be resurrected at the "last day."

In John 12:48 Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him---the word that I have spoken will judge him the last day.” Jesus includes those who reject Him as also being judged on the “last day.”

From these passages it is clear that the Lord says that both the righteous and also those who have reject Him and His word will be judged on the same “last day.” It is obvious there will be no separation of one thousand years between the two. Thus, judgment for both will take place on the same identical “last day.” There is not the slightest suggestion there will be two judgments that will be separated by a thousand years.

JOHN 5:28 AND 29 SHOULD ANSWER THE QUESTION ONCE AND FOR ALL.

“Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

In this passage Jesus declares that both the righteous and wicked will be resurrected in the same hour. There is no room for a thousand years between the two if it is the same hour. However, dispensationalists say this is a dispensational hour of “one thousand years.” Who has ever heard or read of such?

It is said that the righteous are to be raised at the beginning of the hour and the wicked at the end of the hour. When men attempt to defend a false theory they often find it very convenient to make up their own definitions for certain words. In this case “hour” suddenly becomes a thousand years.

PARABLE OF JUDGMENT IN MATTHEW 25:31-46.

Jesus introduces this parable by saying, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

All nations then will be gathered before Christ for judgment when He comes again. This is also clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:16; and 14:10-12.

Now note the parable of judgment and what Jesus says in verse 46. “And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.” There is no one thousand years mentioned in Mathew 25 between Christ’s coming and the separation of the righteous from the wicked. It is obvious that both will be together at the same time on the Day of Judgment but will then be separated.

Finally note John 5:28, 29. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

We do not know when that hour will come but when it does come both good and wicked will be judged. The false thinking behind the thousand years is that Jesus will give the Jews the kingdom he promised in the Old Testament. However, that kingdom has already been given. It began with Saul and ceased when before the coming of Christ. It will never again exist. Christ has replaced that old kingdom with His new and eternal kingdom.

The thousand year theory is convenient so as to allow the Lord to give the Old Testament earthly kingdom back to the Jews which they say had to be delayed because Jews rejected Christ. This also gives all Jews a second opportunity to become believers in Christ and thus be saved.

CONCLUSION

The New Testament does not teach two resurrections. It teaches one general resurrection of all. No thousand year gap between judgment of the good and evil. All will take place on the Day of Judgment or the **LAST GREAT DAY** of the Lord. The Second Coming will be the last coming of our Lord when all will be judged to enter heaven or hell.

“Resurrection” is a distinct doctrine in Christianity. The teachings of the New Testament about an afterlife is far superior than pagan and even some Jewish beliefs about afterlife. There were people who died and were brought back to life such as Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus, Dorcus and Eutychus but they still would die later on.

Jesus died, arose, and was visible to his disciples about 40 days and then ascended to heaven. He did not have to die again. This will be true of us. We will die but will be resurrected to enter heaven unless the “last day” comes before our death.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Dispensationalists say that at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ in Jerusalem some of the children of the believers who started out in the kingdom will become unbelievers. These will rebel under the leadership of Satan. He will lead an army against Jerusalem but Christ will bring swift judgment against them and they will be defeated. They base this theory on **Revelation 20:7**. “And when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison.”

This event will end human mortal history on earth. The unbelievers will be judged and removed. Christ will now completely change the old heavens and earth creating a new heaven and new earth. All the atoms will be broken up and put back together so as to make everything new. It seems that only persons with new glorified bodies will live in the new earth. It will be a place without the old sinful bodies of mortal man.

There seems to be differences among dispensationalist as to who will live the on mew earth. Some say a New Jerusalem 1500 miles square will be put on the very spot of the present Jerusalem. There God and the Jews will live forever. Supposedly the Gentiles will live in heaven. Some advance the theory that only 144,000 will go to heaven and the rest will live in the new earth. Some think that heaven will be the new earth.

AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST THE WORLD WILL BE DESTROYED FOREVER

Peter says, “But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). This passage declares that just as the world suffered destruction by a flood in the time of Noah so the present havens and earth by the same word will eventually be destroyed by fire at the Day of Judgment.

Again Peter writes, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (1 Peter 3:10).

The day will be the day of the Second Coming of Christ who will judge all men according to their works. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

It will come suddenly without warning. No man knows the time. Accompanying the dissolution of the heavens and earth will be a great noise. A tremendous fire will consume everything. Everything man has accomplished such as great buildings, inventions, human knowledge, monuments, etc will be consumed according to Peter with a “fervent heat.”

Christians are not to despair or be afraid for Peter says, in 2 Peter 3:13. “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteous dwells”. The word “new” means that which is fresh in contrast to that which is worn out. The phrase “new heavens and earth” must be understood to designate heaven. It is according to God’s promise.

John had a vision of it, which he describes in **Revelation 21:1**. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” It is pure folly to speculate beyond what is revealed about the new heavens and earth. If God had wanted us to know more he would have revealed it to us. We must be satisfied with what has been revealed. There is no room for the theory that there will be two places for the righteous – one on a renovated material earth and the other in a spiritual heaven.

This earth will go out of existence and the dwelling place for the righteous will be in heaven where God dwells. There is nothing in Peter’s statements to indicate the Lord will put all the atoms back together so as to renovate the earth and make it like new. Peter makes it clear the earth will cease to exist.

REVELATION 21 AND 22 DESCRIBES A PLACE OF UNPARALLELED BEAUTY

The old Jerusalem will be no more. A New Jerusalem will be a special place prepared by the Lord. It will be a beautiful place. It will be like “a bride adorned for her husband.” God will dwell with his people forever. His people will be removed forevermore from persecution, sorrow, pain, and death, everything that they have had to suffer on this present planet that we call the earth.

In describing the beauty of heaven the Lord employed earth things which to us are considered to be the most beautiful and costly things men can possess. This is God’s way of saying that heaven is beyond anything we can conceive. John uses word pictures to signify beauty and grandeur.

Paul wrote, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such was I caught up to the third heaven.....and heard inexpressible words which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2). Heaven is beyond the ability of any human words to describe.

Also stressed is the close and direct relationship between God and His people. There will be a perfect fellowship between God and the redeemed. We will see him face to face as He is. Neither will we be inactive. John informs us that we will be involved in serving Him (Revelation 22:3). We would like to more about the kind of service but it will a great privilege and joy to serve God.

CONCLUSION

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” The Christian then does not look for a material existence.

Peter says it is “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away” (1 Peter 1:4).

Revelation 21:4 says, “And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall e no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Hebrews 11:13 suggests that we are only pilgrims on this earth. Like Abraham we are looking for something far better than what this earth has to offer. Even if the atoms were all put back to form a new earth it would still be a physical earth and could not compare with the place that Christ has gone to prepare for us.

In view of the transitory nature of this old world and all that belongs to it, children of God should cease their concern about it and fix their attention on spiritual and eternal matters. We are admonished to set our “affections on things above.” In view of the fact that the end will come as a thief – without warning -- we must at all times be prepared. “Seeing then that all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11).

AN EXPOSITION OF MATTHEW 24

At the beginning of Matthew 24 we find Jesus with his disciples at the temple. With apparent pride His disciples point out to Jesus the buildings of the temple area. These building had been erected by Herod the Great and it took 40 years for everything to be completed. Jesus shocks them by saying, “not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Vs. 2).

Later having passed over to the Mount of Olives they asked Jesus privately: “Tell us, when will these things be?” Then they asked a second question: “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” In answer to the first question Jesus describes the signs that point to the impending destruction that was to come upon temple and Jerusalem. He discusses this through verse 35.

Beginning with verse 36 to the end of the chapter he answers the second question. Some have tried to make the entire chapter apply to the second coming Christ at the end of the so called “tribulation.” Until one can see and recognize that the Lord is answering two questions one will never be able to deal adequately with its contents.

SIGNS OF THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Vs. 4-5. Jesus warns that false teachers would come in His name. Josephus writes that near the fall of Jerusalem false messiahs appeared all claiming to be the Christ.

Vs. 6. Many small nations were in rebellion against Rome. There were many wars in progress during the reign of Roman Emperor Nero.

Vs. 7. It is a known fact there was worldwide famine during the reign of Claudius Caesar. Agabus a New Testament prophet reported its coming in **Acts 11:28**.

Vs. 8. It is a historical fact that great earthquakes occurred during Nero's reign. Many cities in Asia Minor were destroyed as a result.

Vs. 9. Many Christians were put to death including Paul, Peter and James the Less before the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus warned, **"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."**

Vs. 10-13. Many Christians under the strain of persecution would become unfaithful to the Lord and His church and even turn against fellow Christians.

Vs. 14. By A.D. 70 the gospel had reached into all the world. Paul writes, **"But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world'" (Romans 10:18).** Again he wrote that the gospel **"was preached to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:14).**

Vs. 15. The symbols and standards of the Roman army were placed in the temple after the city was captured by the Romans. This was a great abomination to the Jews for Gentiles to so desecrate such a sacred place as the temple.

Vs. 16-18. Seeing the approaching Roman army the disciples were to flee immediately. There would be no time to take care of trivial matters. Remembering this warning the Christians fled to Pella which was in Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

In **Luke 21:20**. Jesus warned **"And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near."** For some unknown reason Cestius Galius the Roman general upon reaching the city suspended the siege. This gave all Christians an opportunity to escape. Zechariah prophesied this event. He wrote **"I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city."**

Another General, Titus, relieved Galius and completed the siege. This sudden with-drawl can be explained only on the basis of **Mark 13:20** that it was for the elect's sake. God's providence spared them from death. With the approach of the Romans the Christians must flee as fast as possible. Jesus mentions hindrances that could stall their escape.

Vs. 23-26. The Lord warns against deceivers with fraudulent signs.

Vs. 27-28. **"The coming"** is the Roman army. The **"carcass"** is the Jewish nation, which was devoured by the Roman **"eagles."** This represents the swiftness of revenge of God upon the wicked persecuting city of Jerusalem.

Vs. 29. The Roman siege began Aug. 10 A.D. 70, six hundred years after Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the city and destroyed the first temple. It lasted 1260 days. Thousands perished, many by starvation and disease and the rest by the sword.

Vs. 30. This was the sign of divine visitation upon the Jews. There was great lamentation of the Jews all over the world when they received the news. Jesus foretold this to Caiphias in **Matthew 26:64**.

Vs. 31. The gospel would go forth into all the world no longer hindered by Judaism.

Vs. 32-33. As nature offers signs of approaching summer so these signs announced the approaching doom of Jerusalem. The Christians recognized these signs as the time approach but the unbelievers ignored them.

Vs. 34. These signs and the destruction would occur in their own generation. Thus these events are not of some generation many centuries later on.

Vs. 35. The words of Jesus were sure and certain. Everything would be fulfilled.

THE END OF THE WORLD

Beginning with **verse 36** Jesus now begins to answer the second question the apostles had asked about the end of the world. It has nothing to do with the first question which is answered by Jesus in **verses 3 – 35**. Jesus tells them. **"But of that day and hour (time for the world to end) no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven."** Mark adds that **"Neither the Son knows."** We will consider this subject in our next lesson.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION VS. DISPENSATIONALISM

No book of the Bible has been more abused and misrepresented than the book of Revelation. Dispensationalists are among the greatest abusers. They contend the book teaches a seven year period of tribulation followed by a thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Their anti-Christ, the battle of Armageddon, and all their other theories are an abuse of the **book of Revelation**.

They divide the book as follows: **Chapters 5 – 22** are events yet to be fulfilled but always seem close at hand.

Chapter 20 is a description of the 1000-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem. **Chapter 21** is a picture of the New Jerusalem 1500 miles square, which will be located on the spot of present day Jerusalem.

REVELATION MET THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

At the very beginning of this book the churches addressed were instructed to **read, hear and keep** the words of the book. This was because it was about **“things which must shortly take place,”** and because **“the time is at hand” (1:1-3).** **If it had no application to them why these admonitions?** If it was for a future generation 2000 years later as they claim then it met no immediate need for the Christians then. Every book of the New Testament met some immediate need at the time it was written.

The truth is it did meet their needs. The book is a book of comfort to those who were suffering persecution. It let them know what was coming and thus they would be prepared. Inspired teachers could de-code the apocalyptic language so they would have a full understanding of the book.

It also instructed them that righteousness would prevail, and that God was aware of their sufferings. He had not forgotten them and tells them that Christians must be willing to suffer. Eternal life would be worth every sacrifice and persecution they experienced. God also let them know that in the end the wicked would be punished and the church would prevail. Jesus had promised His disciples that **“the gates of Hades would not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18).**

JOHN DECLARES THESE SEVEN CHURCHES WERE ENDURING A TRIBULATION AT THE TIME HE WROTE TO THEM

The time of tribulation was not some far off future seven-year period of time. These early Christians were at that time experiencing tribulation. The seven churches of Asia were then facing a severe crisis. John tells them that he too was enduring the same tribulation (1:9). Thus his main purpose in writing the book is to encourage them.

Dispensationalist says that **chapters 5–19** describe seven years of tribulation which is soon to come. Instead, these chapters reveal that the Lord employed symbolical language to speak of the overthrow and destruction of Jerusalem, which brought an end to the system of Judaism, which desperately tried to destroy the church. These chapters also take into account the opposition of the Roman Empire and paganism two other formidable enemies of the church.

JOHN SAYS THAT HE WAS AT THAT TIME IN THE KINGDOM

Dispensationalists contend the Kingdom is yet to be established. It is supposed to take place when Jesus returns to earth following a seven-year period of tribulation. But John clearly states that he was their **“brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom” (Revelation 1:9).**

As already observed the church and kingdom are one and the same divine institution. **(The two words are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18, 19).** In **Revelation 17:14 and 19:16** Jesus is declared to be **“king of kings and Lord of lords.”** If Jesus is the king then obviously He is now ruling over His kingdom, which has been in existence since Pentecost A.D. 33.

IN APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE NUMERALS USUALLY ARE SYMBOLICAL

An example of the misuse of numbers is **Revelation 13:18** where the beast has the number 666. Over the years various names and spellings have been derived from this number thus allowing them to come up with just about any prominent political person which at the time seems to fit into their time schedule.

Every age comes up with a new name. They have been such a failures at naming someone that they are now reluctant to give a specific name for fear of failure. This constant changing from one person to another demonstrates the weakness of their position. The battle of Armageddon mentioned in **16:13-18** where supposedly literally millions will be involved is so small it would be impossible to accommodate just one million. This is absolutely preposterous.

GOD’S MESSAGE IN REVELATION

Faithful Christians must be willing to suffer. God has never promised escape from trials and difficulties. Early Christians suffered much but what they gained was far greater than anything they lost. Righteousness would prevail. Evil may gain the upper hand for a period of time but in the end it will be defeated. God has not laid down his sceptre. He still reigns and will have His way. The evil forces that opposed Christ and His church at the time the book was written are now ancient history.

However, the church still exists and will continue to exist. While many of the ancient books have been destroyed and others gather dust on some library shelf the Bible is the best seller today and is the most read book in the world. Righteousness will prevail.

Eternal life is worth every sacrifice, persecution hardship they suffered. The book of Revelation is of great comfort to those who have had to sacrifice and suffer because of Christ. They learn that their rewards will far exceed whatever they have been called upon to give up. God is aware of every congregation and every Christian in each congregation. He knows all about their works, their failures and weaknesses as well as their strengths and good works. The Christian is never alone.

Many things that God has revealed to faithful Christian he has concealed from the wicked. Jesus did this in his parables. His disciples were able to learn their meaning but his enemies, the Pharisees, Sadducees and priests did not understand. Revelation is an example of how God revealed to His saints things which were about to take place and at the same time conceal them from the enemies of the church.

Vengeance and retribution belong to God. His patience with the Jews had run out. Judaism as a system would be eliminated. Rome's attacks on the church and its persecution of Christians were also noted by God. In announcing His retribution on these enemies it was concealed by the use of apocalyptic language.

The reference in 1:3 "**blessed is he who reads**" probably refers to inspired teachers in the church who could de-code the apocryphal language in the book. If it had been written so the enemies of the church could understand it then it would have been looked upon as subversive material.

To have written the name of the emperor Nero or the chief priest and other high-ranking Roman and Jewish officials would have brought on even more severe persecution against Christians. Today we do not have inspired men to interpret everything we do not understand about the book but the early Christians did, and thus they knew when to flee from Jerusalem. These early Christians needed encouragement and John a fellow sufferer could reveal God's concern and care for them. There is still a large amount of material that we too can understand.