# **Chapter 7 HIS BANNER OVER WHO?**

Wilfred C. Meloon's book. We've Been Robbed [see chapter 1] is the perfect counterpoint to what we've been saying in this book. The two studies taken together make embarrassingly clear the dispensationalist's opinion of the church: In the past the church had one great century of ministry before its supernatural powers were divinely removed, in the present it's not doing so well because it's gasping through its final lukewarm Laodicean period, and in the future a glorious ministry will be given to the nation of Israel. We are told there's to be no power in the church's ministry today and, since God is planning to resume soon His dealings with His natural people, there's to be no ministry at all for the church tomorrow. God will consummate His eternal purposes with the church on the sidelines. Don't you believe it! In chapter 1 we mentioned how foolish it is to teach a return to the former natural people in view of its violation of the rule of "first the natural, then the spiritual." We also mentioned the companion foolishness of implying that our one God would simultaneously be married to both the nation of Israel [Jer. 3:14 and 31:32] and the church of the New Testament [Rev. 19:7; Rom. 7:4 and 2 Cor. 11:2].

Listen. God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost now and forever have one true love and the church is it. You're the bride, believers; His banner over you is love [Song 2:4] and, unlike some natural brides, you don't have to worry about your bridegroom seeing other women. He's not going to call you to a marriage feast in the sky and then while you're distracted with that start going around with some former friend for the next 1,007 years. The New Testament teaches one man and one wife, the two to be as one flesh, and because God would not prescribe that for man and something else for Himself, His Word makes it plain that the same arrangement is eternally true for Christ and the church [Eph. 5:31,32]. Since there is no way for "another woman" to fit into the picture, it is obvious that anyone, Jew or Gentile, who seeks any future in God has to become a member of the bride which is the church [and the only way to do that is through repentance and belief in Christ in this present age].

The Israel God was married to was the faithful remnant, not the idolaters and sinners, and to that has been added today all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who like Abraham are justified by faith. The principle is the same as the olive tree of Romans 11:16-24, the church was built on the faithful remnant of Israel and the Gentiles were added to it, to the same olive tree. Individual Jews, "if they abide not still in unbelief" [Rom. 11 :23] will be added to this same tree. The dispensationalist apparently has this terrible feeling that the national Israelites didn't get a fair shake during those Old Testament days when God was dealing with them. He will tell you heatedly that God "unconditionally" promised them certain things, regardless of how they behaved, and that they haven't yet received those promises. The Millennium is to be the payoff. Now there are three things wrong with that proposition. First, a careful reading of the Scriptures shows the promises were conditional; they had some strings attached. Second, despite that, they already have been fulfilled. Third, the New Testament position is that believers in Christ, not national Israel, are the true descendants of Abraham and thus heirs to the promises. The dispensationalist's views typically echo Jewish fables of a bygone era and this is nowhere better demonstrated than in the question of the conditional nature of the promises. The Jewish leaders in the days of John the Baptist took pride in their blood lines, their natural descent, and assumed that these were worth something because the promises made way back in their family tree were "unconditional" John knew better and warned them the promises they were depending on were conditional, and the condition was that they "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" [Mt. 3:8].

We all have heard the conditions laid down by God to Israel but we intend to forget them as we come under the hypnotic spell of the 'fable spinners'. They were conditions like those of Exodus 19:5, "'if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant. . ." Or like Deuteronomy 28:1, "if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments. . ." God said if you do all the things I ask then I'll do all the things I promised. We know Israel's sorry record in that regard. The four major promises made to Abraham were the promise of Messiah, the promise to make the descendants of Abraham into a generation, the promise of a great posterity, and the promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. There is no question about the fulfillment of the first of these, but how about the other three? The promise to make the descendants of Abraham into a great nation is contained in Genesis 12:2 with no time given for its fulfillment. Two generations later, however, Israel [formerly Jacob] was told by the Lord to "go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation" [Gen. 46:3]. This was fulfilled under the leadership of Moses, as confirmed by Deuteronomy 4:6,7. The promise of a great posterity is contained in Genesis 13:16 where it was promised that Abraham's seed would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and in Genesis 15:5 where their number was promised to be as the stars of heaven. Fulfillment according to the former description is confirmed in 2 Chronicles 1:9 where Solomon said, "Thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude." Fulfillment according to the latter description is in Deuteronomy 1:10 where Moses told the people, "Ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude." The promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan is contained in Genesis 12:7; 13:14,15. Its fulfillment is contained in Joshua 21:43: "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein." Now that seems plain enough. The Jewish people received the natural fulfillment of natural promises. Can a fair reading of the scriptures above lead to any other conclusion? Is it reasonable to say that they weren't fulfilled and that instead their fulfillment will take place in some future 1,000-year period?

But even if someone insists that we haven't seen a complete fulfillment, me for instance, because I see spiritual fulfillments still to be realized in every generation of Christians, then the New Testament will still very effectively deny that any future fulfillment is for national Israel. In his valuable book, A New Heaven and A New Earth (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley, N.J.) Archibald Hughes quotes [page 123] Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, who, until his death 30 years ago, was known as The Prince of Expositors: "I am quite convinced that all the promises made to Israel have found, are finding, and will find their perfect fulfillment in the church. It is true that in the past, in my expositions, I gave a definite place to Israel in the purposes of God. I have now come to the conviction, as I have just said, that it is the new and spiritual Israel that is intended." The what? The new and spiritual Israel! The church! Let's back that up with scripture.

Have you ever noticed how much time Paul spent refuting Jewish customs, fables and expectations? He himself was "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee" [Phil. 3:5] but he spent his mature life teaching, among other things, that ancestry, law and circumcision did not make him a descendant of Abraham! To the Jew who rested on those credentials as a guarantee of any kind of standing with God, Paul would respond, as he did in his brilliant and devastating letter to the Galatians, "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Paul made it clear beyond argument that Abraham was justified by faith ["Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness" [Gal. 3:6] but despite that obvious fact, the dispensationalist says God will require future natural descendants of Abraham to keep the old Mosaic law, which came more than 400 years after God's dealings with Abraham, and to offer animal sacrifices in a restored temple in Israel. Paul summarizes very neatly the question of the promises we have been discussing. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. [God] saith not, And to thy seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ" [Gal. 3:16]. And thus, the great apostle to the Gentiles told his Greek readers in Galatia, "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" [Gal. 3:29. Paul clearly taught that all present and future fulfillments of the promises made to Abraham are for believers, because being Christ's makes us Abraham's seed and heirs to the promises. It is not the natural Jews or natural Israelites who are the heirs, according to Paul, but the spiritual descendants of Abraham, those who are his seed because they belong to Christ, who are the heirs. As believers we are spiritual Jews or spiritual Israelites. [If that goes down hard, remember that in chapter 1 we quoted Scofield himself as admitting that Protestant theology has very generally taught that all the kingdom promises are to be fulfilled through the church.] In case the Galatians didn't quite get the point, Paul went on to say that there were two Jerusalems, the physical city, the bondwoman, which is the mother of the children of the flesh, and Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and which is the mother of the believers [Gal. 4:23-26]. Then Paul said that believers, "as Isaac was, are the children of promise" [Gal. 4:28] but that with respect to the children after the flesh the scriptures said, "cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" [Gal. 4:30]. Today there are still two Jerusalems but Paul's teachings regarding them have not changed. The children of the flesh still "shall not be heir" with the children of promise who make up the church. Paul's words in Galatians 4:30 echo Christ's words to the chief priests and Pharisees: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" [Mt. 21:43]. The nation bringing forth fruit is, of course, the church, the "holy nation" referred to in 1 Peter 2:9. Paul also made it clear in his letter to the believers at Rome that the Jews had no future hope in God except through the gospel and a spiritual birth into the church in this present age. It was the Jews' futile expectation of salvation through race and natural descent that caused him such "great heaviness and continual sorrow" [Rom. 9:2]. Today, however, instead of sorrowing as Paul did over such false hopes, Christians sometimes wrongfully encourage Jewish people in those hopes. Because of a natural sympathy and compassion for the Jew, many believers attempt to draw comfort from vague assumptions that the Jew is somehow assured of salvation by their ancestry. We delude both them and ourselves in this false hope. Rather than falling prey to what is only a first-century Jewish fable perpetuated by nineteenth-century dispensationalist theo­rizing, the Christian should recognize that, now and forever, the gospel is the only hope of the Jew, as it is of the Gentile. Paul sorrowed because he saw that only a remnant of the Jews would be saved [Rom. 9:27,29; 11 :5] and he urgently desired that his ministry might "save some of them" [Rom. 11:14]. In making the same point that he had to the Galatians, Paul in Romans used the example of all three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Israel: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" [Rom. 9:6-8]. Again we have to ask ourselves if anything could be plainer? In the face of Paul's blunt statement that the children of the flesh are not the children of God, how can we argue that they are the children of God? Oh, yes, Paul says some of them are God's children. But only those who become believers in this age, only those who are in Christ and who thus are Abraham's descendants. Paul also told the Romans there was a serious misunderstanding about who is a Jew and who isn't a Jew: "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit" [Rom. 2:28,29]. And to the Philippian believers Paul wrote: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" [Phil. 3:].

The fact is that believers are the "Israel of God" [Gal. 6:16] and the heirs to all the promises has long been celebrated by the great hymn writers of the church. John Newton, for example, some 200 years ago wrote a famous hymn whose first line came from Psalm 87:3: "Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God; He whose word cannot be broken, Formed thee for His own abode." In verse three, Newton said he was a member of Zion's city through grace. He wrote another hymn about that called 'Amazing Grace' so we may safely assume he was saying that the church, not the physical city of Jerusalem, is the glorious Zion and the eternal abode of God. In another old hymn, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord", the second verse says the church is "dear as the apple of Thine eye, and graven on Thy hand." These two phrases, quoted from Zechariah 2:8 and Isaiah 49:16, once referred to natural Israel but now apply instead to spiritual Israel, the church. If the church as spiritual Israel had not replaced the nation of Israel in God's plan and purposes, believers today could lay no real claim to the Old Testament. Fortunately, however, it is all ours, as Newton clearly perceived. We are Zion, the habitation of God [Ps. 22:3; 132:13,14] and we may with confidence claim as our own the Old Testament and all of its spiritual blessings. When we read, for example, God's promise that He would bless those who bless Abraham's descendants and curse those who curse his descendants [Gen. 12:3] we may be confident, in the light of the New Testament's teaching that only believers in Christ are Abraham's descendants, that this promise, which once referred to natural Israel, has since Calvary referred only to spiritual Israel. Paul taught that since Calvary there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in God's eyes [Rom. 2:1 and 10:12; Gal. 3:28]. Nor does he hint that there will be any difference between them at some future time. Chapters 9-11 of his letter to the Romans show that Israel had initial advantages but stumbled and fell because they sought not Christ, but righteousness through their own works. At Calvary the way was opened for all believing Gentiles to share in the same salvation offered to all believing Jews, thus fulfilling various Old Testament prophecies such as Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, and breaking down the former wall of division between Gentile and Jew to make of the two the one new man of Ephesians 2:15.

It boggles the mind to see the disagreement between the New Testament and the dispensationalists regarding the fulfillment of some of the Old Testament scriptures. For example, in Romans 9:24-26 Paul said that the fact that God "hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles," fulfilled Hosea 1:10 which says, "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." The New Scofield Reference Edition's note to Hosea 1:10 says, however, that it "yet awaits fulfillment." [Similar blindness is displayed toward the New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31 :31-34. Throughout the Christian era, prior to Darby-Scofield, believers understood that this was fulfilled at the first coming of Christ. Chapters 7-12 of Hebrews comment at length on this fulfillment, and Hebrews 8:6 clearly says that this better covenant already "was established" in the first century. The New Scofield Reference Edition's note to Jeremiah 31:31 says, however, that it "remains to be realized for Israel."]

In Romans 11:26 Paul speaks of the only way in which salvation has been, or ever will be, made available to the  Israelites, namely, through the Deliverer who came out of Zion more than 1,900 years ago. To harmonize with Paul's clear teaching elsewhere, the controversial statement, "and so all Israel shall be saved," must be interpreted, "and in this manner all those of Israel elected for salvation shall be saved, by the Deliverer who came out of Zion, as prophesied." The dispensationalist makes the verse refer to the time rather than the means of salvation and thus makes it read, "and at that time all Israel shall be saved by a future Deliverer." Unfortunately for the dispensationalist, his "at that time" is not one of the dictionary's definitions of "so." The dictionary carries only two definitions that are pertinent here. One is the "in that manner or fashion" that we suggested is preferable. [In the present context I particularly like the 13th definition given by the American College Dictionary, which is "in the way that follows."] The other is "consequently" or "therefore," which usage would deprive the dispensationalist of his future time frame and require him to say that all the Jews who ever lived will be saved. By using the dictionary to take away the dispensationalist's claim that the salvation described in verse 26 occurs at some future date, we have also denied him his use of the words "all Israel" to describe those who are saved. "All Israel" does not refer to the salvation of every living Israelite at any given time any more than John 1:7 ["that all men through Him might believe"] or John 3:17 ["that the world through Him might be saved"] or John 4:42 ["the Saviour of the world"] would refer to the salvation of every person in the world. Paul has already told us that "they are not all Israel which are of Israel" [Rom. 9:6], so clearly he is confirming in Romans 11:26 what he has said elsewhere in his letters, namely, that a remnant of national Israel in every generation will be saved through the Deliverer who came out of Zion as prophesied. The possibility remains that there will be a great turning by the Jews to Christ before He comes for His church - but not afterward.

Scholars down through the centuries have been aware that the Old Testament prophecies of the Jews' return to the land, the re-building of the temple and city, and the restoration of Mosaic law and ritual, referred to events that occurred after the captivity in Babylon, and thus were fulfilled long before the first advent of Christ. The prophecies were all given by the prophets before. the return and re-building, and after there fulfillment more than 2,400 years ago there were no further prophecies of an additional return and rebuilding. For some reason, however, many believers today choose to ignore the historical fulfillment of such Old Testament prophecies as well as the clear revelation of the New Testament that the church eternally replaced Israel in the first century.

Paul was severely persecuted by the Jews of his day for declaring that the church had forever succeeded the nation of Israel as the focal point of God's purposes and dealings. But the dispensationalists who today perpetuate first-century Jewish yearnings for national supremacy through a restored Jewish monarchy, rather than being persecuted, would have been welcomed with open arms by the Jews who attacked Paul. They are teaching just what the Jews of Paul's day wanted to hear. Believers should not allow themselves to be confused by the fact that there are two Israels today. There were also two Israels in the first century but Paul, as we have shown, clearly taught that only the spiritual Israel, the church, has a special place in the purposes of God. The physical, political state of Israel established under United Nations auspices in 1948 is not the "holy nation" of Exodus 19:6 that God established for Himself. The "holy nation" of God is the church, as shown in I Peter 2:9. The New Testament teaching that there is no difference in God's eyes between Jews and other people is also good advice for believers to keep in mind when making assessments of political matters in which natural Israel is involved. In the present smoldering Mid-East conflict, for example, we should pray for equal justice and mercy for all parties and we should try to judge the cases of each on their merits, without weighting the scales with doctrinal convictions based on futurist fables. In God's sight none of the parties to the conflict is any better or worse than the other; there is no difference between them "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" [Rom. 3:23]. None of the nations involved is God's special instrument for working out His purposes on the earth, the church alone fills that role, and the only outcome to be desired is an immediate end to all bloodshed and a fair and equitable peace. To avoid confusion, it is important to recognize that the final rejection of the nation of Israel as God's special treasure did not eliminate the Jews as a people any more than God's earlier rejection of Ishmael in favor of Isaac eliminated Ishmael's descendants as a people. It is simply a  question of identifying what God says is the focus of His activities from the first advent on through eternity, and that is now and forever only the church.

The Jews' former relationship to God as His holy nation [and God's former focus on that nation as the instrument to fulfill His purposes] came to a final end in the first century, but we should not confuse that spiritual relationship, that special heavenly bond they once enjoyed with God, with their physical existence as natural human beings. Their survival as a people is no more remarkable than the survival of the Arabs who are Ishmael's descendants, and their desire to settle in the Middle Eastern land of their ancestors is no more remarkable than the desire of the Arabs to do the same, or of the Irish to want to live in Ireland. The attachment of all of Abraham's natural descendants to the land of their forefathers, the urge to live among people sharing common customs, traditions and beliefs, reflects the same natural urge felt by other races and nationalities, and particularly minorities. But we should not confuse the merely human motivating factors that stimulate such a desire; whether religious tradition, patriotism, nostalgia, common interests or the instinct for survival, with the sovereign will and on-going purpose of God. That purpose, as revealed to Paul [Eph. 3:3-5], is that all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, as one body [Eph. 3:6], as the spiritual habitation of God [Eph. 2:22] are to demonstrate, now, to the whole universe the manifold wisdom of God [Eph. 3:10]. And Paul says this is not just God's temporary purpose during this "age" but His eternal purpose [Eph. 3:1]).

But what do the dispensationalists say? Cox demonstrates what he calls their "haughty attitude" and "utter disdain for those who hold to the historic Christian faith" when he quotes Oswald J. Smith from his book, When The King Comes Back. Cox [page 217] says that Smith, in commenting on the historic Christian belief in the past fulfillment of Isaiah 12 [the last verse of which is: "Cry out and shout thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of thee"] remarks that none of that scripture "was fulfilled at the first advent, and none of it can be spiritualized, for it has no fulfillment in the church, In spite of what the great commentators say. God did not see fit to enlighten them."

Does the theory that God is pursuing two different purposes with two different people pass our tests for acceptability? Does this major piece of the dispensationalist's puzzle give glory to Christ, or does it imply that our God who is one God, and not the author of confusion, is somehow still married to the Israel of the Old Testament while at the same time being the bridegroom of the church of the New Testament? Does it honor the church which is the body of Christ, or does it twist and wrest the scriptures to undo all of Paul's teaching that the church has eternally replaced Israel and is now heir to the promises?

Does it help to mature and edify the individual Christian, or does it attempt to snatch away truths that belong to the believer and reserve them for unbelievers? The answers to these questions are too obvious to require further comment. The belief that God has two different people would fail any test devised by reasonable men,  it fails the three tests above, it fails the test of Christian orthodoxy, and it fails the test of a fair reading of the scriptures.

# **Chapter 8 THE GREAT REIGN ROBBERY**

IF you want to make the same mistake that the Jewish leaders of the first century made, the right way to do it is to believe that Christ came to sit on the throne of a man. The scribes and Pharisees looked for a physical kingdom to be established. But Christ and the New Testament say: The kingdom doesn't come with observation, but is within you. [Luke 17:20, 21]. It isn't physical things like meat and drink, but spiritual things like righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost [Rom. 14:17]. You can't see or enter it except by the new birth [John 3:3-5]. The Lord Jesus is already reigning "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named" [Eph. 1:21]. The Christian has already been translated into the kingdom [Col. 1:13] and is already reigning with Christ [Eph. 2:6; Rom. 5:17].

Despite the absolute clarity of this New Testament teaching, the dispensationalist is hanging on as hard as he can to the so-called Davidic Covenant, which to him means that Christ came to establish a human, natural, political kingdom in Israel. The confusion the dispensationalist exhibits in this area at least equals, and perhaps exceeds, his confusion regarding the promises to Abraham and his seed. The great reign robbery of the Darby-Scofield teaching is theft on a grand scale. It steals from us the precious and vital truth that Christ's kingdom is a present reality and that He is presently reigning in glory and power, and that the believers of this age reign with Him, and instead tends to pass off the counterfeit belief that Christ's reign will be references to His present glory.

The dispensationalist says Christ's future glory and power will be the boast of the Jews in the future restoration of a physical kingdom but the New Testament, knowing nothing of that idea, says Christ's present glory is shared with believers in this age, the Lord now is "bringing many sons unto glory" [Heb. 2:10] and likewise His present power "worketh in us" [Eph. 3:20]. Scofield said that the Davidic Covenant, upon which the future kingdom of Christ is to be founded, was an unconditional promise to David of a house, a throne and a kingdom, all of which "shall be established forever." He insisted that the disobedience of the kings that followed David would result in chastisement, but not in annulment of the covenant. For some strange reason, however, the Scofield footnotes and marginal references do not refer to 1 Kings 9:4-9 where the Lord told Solomon that "if thou wilt walk before Me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep My statutes and My judgments: then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. But if ye shall at all turn from following Me, ye or your children. . . . then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them, and this house which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight."

We know the failures, the loss of reign and the captivity that followed the disobedience of Solomon and succeeding kings but the dispensationalists don't see any of that. Instead they jump thousands of years from the last of the kings prior to the captivity to a time somewhere in the future when they believe Christ finally will be enthroned.

One of the major pieces of evidence they offer to "prove" there will be that future kingdom is the account in Acts 15 of the meeting in Jerusalem of the early church leaders where it was ruled that new Gentile converts did not have to keep the Mosaic law. The dispensationalist says that the prophecy of Amos 9:11,12 quoted by James at the meeting proves there will be a future "re-establishment of Davidic rule over Israel.” The facts fall far short of proving that, as we will see. Regarding the conversion of Gentiles, James said, "To this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, Who doeth all these things" [Acts 15:15-17]. Thus James was saying the fulfillment of the prophecy was future from Amos' time [having been fulfilled in the first century by the Gentile conversions] and not future from the time when James spoke. Further, even if the dispensationalist could claim a future re-building of the tabernacle or tent of David, it would afford him no proof of his desired revival of Mosaic law in an imagined future kingdom. Why? Because the tabernacle had nothing whatsoever to do with Mosaic ritual and the limited priesthood of the temple! According to 1 Chronicles 15:25-16:3, when David brought the ark [which symbolized the presence of God] to the tabernacle there was a time of rejoicing, dancing, shouting and music, and when the ark was set up in the tabernacle all the men and women of Israel were right there to be blessed and fed. It did not at all resemble the solemn temple rites and, in fact, signified the future separation of the presence of God from the Mosaic ritual. At the time Amos gave his prophecy, the temple built by Solomon was in full operation. However, God did not choose to say that in the future the temple would be re-built, implying a restoration of ritual and law, but rather that the tabernacle or tent would be re-built, implying the free and open access of all believers to the presence of God. Despite that, the dispensationalist attempts to twist this fulfilled prophecy to fit his needs.    There are many distasteful aspects about the concept of Christ inheriting the mere physical throne of a human being. The throne was not exactly occupied with honor by all of its previous holders. David had some bad moments, Solomon's wives and their strange gods turned his heart away from the Lord, and the successor kings as a whole were pretty bad. It was the throne of a local kingdom that came, prospered briefly, disobeyed, and faded into history. And we must remember that God never desired the Israelites to have a human king at all but that they sought one in order to be like the other nations. God told Samuel to let them have their way since they had rejected God, that He should not reign over them [1 Sam. 8:7].

But the major problem with the concept is the simple fact that Christ is already King and already occupies His promised throne. Take all the glories and potential of the natural throne of Israel at its very best and multiply them 10,000 times and you still can't begin to approximate the greater glory and splendor of the exalted Christ on the throne of His eternal kingdom. That is the glorious kingdom and rule that He desires to establish and manifest "within you" [Luke 17:21]. Long after the time of David and Solomon, during the Babylonian captivity, God made known when in history His kingdom would be manifested, through a dream of five kingdoms He gave to Nebuchadnezzar, as told in the second chapter of Daniel. In interpreting the dream, Daniel told the king that only four physical empires would ever exercise world dominion, namely, Babylon [of which Nebuchadnezzar was then king], Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The image the king saw in his dream showed the first of these kingdoms as a head of gold, the second as breast and arms of silver, the third as belly and thighs of brass, and the fourth as legs of iron, feet partly of iron and clay. Clearly this speaks of the historical deterioration of world power, and made the point that after the Roman Empire crumbled no single power would ever again rule the whole world [including the Nazis, the Communists, and the Roman prince of futurist fable]. The fifth kingdom in the dream was different from the other four. It was to be set up by God, not by men. It was to grow, not deteriorate. It was to be eternal, not temporal. As for the time of its establishment, Daniel said it would be set up in the days of the other four kingdoms [Dan. 2:44]. Of necessity, therefore, the kingdom of God had to be, and was, manifested prior to the fall of Rome in A.D. 476, and not at some imagined date that is yet in the future.

The dispensationalist tells us Christ came to offer an earthly kingdom to the Jews. Did He? Or did He resist their efforts to make Him a natural king [John. 6:15]? Did He come merely to offer the kind of fair and just reign that any well-meaning ruler would desire for his subjects? Hughes in his book, A New Heaven and A New Earth, says: "Christ came not as a social reformer, but as a true redeemer; not merely to improve the earthly conditions of men, but to so reconcile man to God, that through a spiritual birth from above he would be able to 'see' and 'enter' the kingdom of God, the true eternal sphere of every blessing" [page 89]. Christ said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" [John 18:36] but the dispensationalist insists that it is and that it has just been postponed all these years. Isn't there something wrong with that kind of reasoning? Peter on the day of Pentecost told a vast audience of Jews that when God promised David that "He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne," he "spake of the resurrection of Christ" and "this Jesus hath God raised up" [Acts 2:30-32]. Peter convinced 3,000 Jews that day but he appears to have had considerably less success with the dispensationalists of recent history. To believe that Jesus came to be the physical king of Israel but failed to accomplish His purpose is to believe that the supreme, eternal purposes of God can be defied and altered by the stubborn will of man. We reduce God to the level of mere humans if we say that Christ's death "was not God's own plan" but that it was instead "conceived somewhere else and yielded to by God." Christ's own words deny this. He told His followers that Moses and all the prophets had foretold His crucifixion from the beginning     [Luke. 24:25-27].

Further, we know that Christ, who was without sin, was unjustly tried and condemned. Pilate found no guilt in Him and tried to release Him. "But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh Himself a king speaketh against Caesar" [John 19:12]. Now if the Jews had been right, if Christ really had sought an earthly kingdom, He would have been guilty of rebellion and sedition, and would have been justly sentenced to die under Roman law. The serious implications of the idea that Christ came to be a natural king are vividly summarized in A New Heaven and A New Earth [page 201] in a quotation from Philip Mauro: ". . . the very radical doctrine that the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by Christ and His disciples, was of earthly character. . . is subversive in such degree as to call urgently for exposure by God's faithful pastors and teachers. . . if the said new doctrine were true, it would necessarily follow that Jesus of Nazareth was technically guilty of the 'accusation' brought against Him by the high priest and rulers of the Jews, and therefore, by the law of the land, was justly condemned to die on the cross. . . any reasons or supposed proofs that may be adduced in support of this new doctrine would serve equally to support the accusation brought against our Lord, upon which He was subjected to trial, sentence and execution." In those last few lines Mauro is saying that those who try to prove that Jesus came to be a natural king merely support the claim that He was justly condemned. Why anyone would want to carry that burden with him to the judgment seat of Christ is difficult to imagine. We are not inquiring into the motives of those who teach and disseminate these beliefs, but we feel that individual believers should understand all of their implications. In the light of Mauro's comments above, for example, it would appear that the new believer or the unquestioning older believer who casually accepts the idea of an earthly 1,000-year reign of Christ is through ignorance agreeing that Christ came to perform a seditious act for which He was justly condemned and executed. We must separate the fact that Christ came to change men through a spiritual rebirth from the fiction that He came to reform society through enforced rules. He came to extend the eternal kingdom of His Father into our lives, to set up His rule in our hearts, to establish His Lordship within us, and not to set up a temporary political kingdom.

God's kingdom doesn't turn on and off like a neon sign over the years. It towers over time and spans eternity. “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" [Ps. 145:13]. And in that kingdom the Lord reigneth [Ps. 93:1, 97:1, 99:1] Whether or not men see and acknowledge that He reigns now is immaterial. He reigns! After His resurrection Christ described in one word how much power, or authority, had been given to Him. "All," He said. Where? Just in heaven? No. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" [Mt. 28:18]. And as some have pointed out, when you've got it all, you've got it all. You've got all that there is to get. In the light of that, it's inconsistent to teach that Christ doesn't reign today. If He has all power, He's in complete control now. Undeterred by the futurist's plans to inaugurate His rule only at some date a couple thousand years or more after His resurrection, He goes right on ruling now. He reigns! The futurist's insistence that the kingdom age starts after this present church age ends not only postpones the rule of Christ, however, it also postpones the rule of the individual Christian. But Romans 5:17 says "they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ," and Revelation 5:9,10 says Christ has made of His followers "a kingdom and priests, and they reign on the earth" [The Emphasized Bible]. In his letter to the Christians at Ephesus Paul described in glowing, positive terms the present rule of Christ and those who are His. There is the Lord, far above all principality and power, and there is the believer, seated right there with Christ [Eph. 1 :21,2:6]. But the futurist doesn't care for any of this business of the present reign of Christ and His people. He has prepared many strange and exotic defenses against such beliefs, among them the quaint and long-discredited argument that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are two different things. [To prove they are identical, compare Matthew 13:31 and Mark 4:30,31, both of which say the kingdom is like a mustard seed; Matthew 19:14 and Mark 10:14, both of which say suffer the little children to come, for of such is the kingdom; Matthew 19:23 and Luke 18:24, both of which say it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom; Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16, both of which say men of violence enter the kingdom by force; Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1 :14,15, both of which say it was preached that the kingdom was at hand, and other scriptures such as Matthew 5:3-Luke 6:20 and Matthew 1 0:7- Luke 9:2. Clearly, as Cox teaches, the terms are used interchangeably to refer to the one kingdom, Gk. "basileia" meaning the "reign" or "authority" of the Lord.] The futurist looks forward to a natural, materialistic rule when He plans to wield a rod of iron, but that is a reign contrary to the lessons of the cross. The Christian's reign is spiritual and comes through grace and the righteousness that is in Jesus [Rom. 5:17]. Christ told His followers that "they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant" [Mk. 10:42,43]. After making that same point, the account in Matthew adds, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" [Mt. 23:13]. Teaching that Christ and His followers will have their reign sometime in the future in a kingdom of earthly splendor does the same thing the scribes and Pharisees did. It shuts up the kingdom of heaven against those who should be entering in now. Again, it clearly fails our three tests. It does not glorify Christ. It does not honor the church. It does not mature the believer.

# **Chapter 9 GREAT TRIBULATION WHEN?**

The setting for the spectacular events that highlight the futurist's incredible fable is the seven-year period [or three and a half-year period] that he calls the Great Tribulation. With his imagination aflame from a natural interpretation of the imagery of the books of Daniel and the Revelation, he envisions a rapid sequence of social, political, economic, ecclesiastical and military upheavals that culminate in the destruction of half the world. We have previously demonstrated the false, foolish and frequently damaging nature of some of the other pet concepts of the dispensationalists. Now we propose to do the same for his future seven-year period. We hope to demonstrate the dispensationalists' misuse of certain key prophetic scriptures, and to show that no seven-year extension of human history is possible after Christ comes for the church, and also that the proposed chief actor of that period, the Antichrist, will be unavailable for any performances at that time. It is impossible to present the views of the great  commentators prior to the 19th century regarding the action-packed seven year Great Tribulation, of the dispensationalists because, they never heard of it. Oh, they heard of the great tribulation suffered by the Jews in A.D. 70 when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. And they knew that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" [Acts 14:22] and that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" [2 Tim. 3:12]. And they probably would have agreed that in these last days the church faces a period of increasing tribulation and suffering, an intensification and broadening of the humiliation, torture and death currently being visited upon believers in Communist and Islamic countries, etc.

But they didn't know about that specific time and all those specific details that the futurist has discovered. Obviously, God didn't choose to enlighten them in the ways He has enlightened the dispensationalists. And in particular God didn't explain to them as He has to the futurists how the last seven years of Daniel's 490 year prophecy would be separated by more than 19 centuries from the first 483 years.  The historic Christian belief has been that the great prophecy recorded in the ninth chapter of Daniel was completely fulfilled by the end of the first century. Dispensationalists, however, postpone the final period of seven years to an indeterminate time yet in the future [although some recklessly predict that the events they assign to that period must all occur within 40 years, the length of one generation, from the return of the Jews to Israel in 1948]. Daniel received the prophecy during the Babylonian captivity. Aware through his studies of the approaching end of the 70 years of desolations for Jerusalem that had been foretold by Jeremiah [Dan. 9:2] he fasted and prayed, confessing the sins of himself and his people and making supplication that God would turn away His anger and fury from Jerusalem [Dan. 9:16]. The vision was brought to Daniel by the angel Gabriel who seemed to have a special ministry of declaring the first advent of Christ. [It was Gabriel who appeared to Mary in Luke. 1 :26 to tell her she would give birth to Jesus.] Besides the tremendous revelation of the time of the appearing of the Messiah, Gabriel also had some bad news for Daniel, namely, that his people would commit an even worse sin in the future [killing Christ] and as their final punishment the city of Jerusalem, and the temple would be destroyed. The prophecy is one of 70 weeks, which Bible scholars agree means 490 years [seven times 70]. There are three time periods given: one of seven weeks or 49 years, a second of 62 weeks or 434 years, and a third of one week or seven years. In the first period, the return from captivity and the re-building of the temple and city were to be accomplished. Then would follow the long second period of 434 years [primarily the four centuries between the Old and New Testaments] lasting "unto the Messiah the Prince." After that would come the third period of seven years which orthodoxy has always held followed the second period in the same way that the second period followed the first.

Gabriel told Daniel that "seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy" [Dan. 9:24] and anyone who has never read the dispensationalists' literature would know right away that all those things [and thus the entire 70-week prophecy] were completely fulfilled at the first advent of Christ. The Jews of Jesus' day finished the transgression of their fathers, who had killed the prophets, by themselves killing the Messiah [Mt. 23:31,3]; and Christ's death, resurrection and ascension into heaven fulfilled the balance of the prophecy.

The specific details of the events of the 70th week of the prophecy are given in verse 27: "And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." The New Testament clearly testifies to the fulfillment of the three major parts of verse 27:1. The fulfillment of the words, "And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week," was testified to by Christ Himself when He said, "For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." [Mt. 26:28]. 2. The fulfillment of the words, "And in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease," is proved by the fact that in the middle of the final week of seven years, that is, after Christ's three and a half-year ministry, He ended any further need for the repeated temple sacrifices and oblations by offering Himself as "one sacrifice for sins for ever" [Heb. 10:12]. The plain teaching of Hebrews 10:1-18 is that the animal sacrifices were a mere shadow [10:1], that they could not take away sin [10:4], that God had no pleasure in them [10:6,8, and that through Christ's one, perfect, eternal sacrifice of Himself [10:12,14] the new covenant replaced the old [10:9,16] and thereby the believer's sins are remembered no more by God [10:17]. Therefore, since Calvary, there is no more offering for sin [10:18]. 3. The final words of the verse, "And for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate," meant that for the final and greatest transgression by the Jews, the killing of their Messiah, God would make their nation desolate, and it would remain desolate until its final destruction. Christ Himself pronounced that final sentence on the Jews of that generation when He said to them, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" [Mt. 23:38]. Berry's Greek-English New Testament Lexicon defines the word desolate as "deserted". Thus, when Christ departed from the temple for the last time [Mt. 24:1] He said their house [no longer God's house, but theirs] was left unto them deserted [Mt. 23:38], meaning that the presence of God no longer dwelt there. The Jews' rejection of Christ was the final act in their centuries-long rejection of the reign and authority of God [see 1 Sam. 8:7] and Christ's departure from the temple in turn represented God's final rejection of His once-holy nation. The actions of the first-century Jews in crucifying their Messiah and in persecuting and killing the leaders of the early church were symptomatic of the desolate spiritual condition of their generation. The subsequent destruction of the city and temple are prophesied in Daniel 9:26, but the time of their predicted destruction is not given. It is important to note that although the six events of verse 24 were to happen within the seventy weeks and the three events of verse 27 were to happen in the final week of that period, the prediction of the destruction of the city and temple is not included among the things which were to occur within the seventy weeks. That destruction of course occurred 40 years later, in A.D. 70, when a flood of Roman soldiers under Titus destroyed the city and temple, and slaughtered, captured and dispersed the Jews. [It is interesting to note that the nation of Israel began its existence with 40 years in a physical wilderness and ended its existence with 40 years in a spiritual wilderness. At the beginning of the nation the Jews suffered 40 years of punishment until, in mercy, they were allowed to enter the land. At the end of the nation, they were granted 40 years of mercy during which the gospel was preached to them, until, in punishment, they were driven from the land.]

The above interpretation of Daniel's prophecy appears both logical and scriptural. It has the great advantage of flowing in a smooth sequence from start to finish, encompassing all 70 weeks in one connected series of events, and crediting the prophecy with an amazing fulfillment that is a matter of historical record. Having been completely fulfilled 19 centuries ago, it obviously is not descriptive of events that are yet to unfold. However, the dispensationalist's needs are not satisfied by anything as simple as this orthodox interpretation. He must have that final week in the future, so he denies its prior fulfillment, cuts it loose from the rest of the prophecy, and says [without proof] that while the first 483 years have been fulfilled, there is a "gap" of more than 19 centuries prior to the fulfillment of the last seven years. It is clear from the scriptures, however, that the cutting off of Messiah [Dan. 9:26] was to come after the first 69 weeks of the prophecy and thus had to occur in the 70th week that followed. The futurist also creates an artificial separation within the words "the the people of the prince that shall come [Dan. 9:26] to permit his interpretation [again with no proof] that the coming of the people [the Romans] took place in A.D. 70 while the coming of the prince [the Antichrist] lies in the future.

Although the vision brought by Gabriel clearly concerned the most important event in all history, the first advent of Christ dispensationalist casually twist it to make much of it apply instead to the Antichrist. In particular, he gives him the entire 27th verse, where the pronoun "he" is assumed [of course, without proof or reason] to refer to the Antichrist who is said to confirm a future covenant with national Israel which will be broken after three and a half years when the Antichrist halts the sacrifices that presumably then are being offered in the re-built temple. At that point Israel will turn to Jehovah, the futurist says, and in retaliation the Antichrist will bring on the Great Tribulation that will threaten to destroy the whole world. The title for this imagined future worldwide period of devastation comes from the Lord's prediction on the mount of Olives of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" [Mt. 24:21]. In the context in which Christ spoke, it is clear that the tribulation he prophesied was to come upon the nation of Israel in the first century and not upon the whole world at some future date. Christ warned both the nation of Israel and His own disciples that judgment and disaster lay ahead for Jerusalem. In the latter  part of Matthew 23 He told all who would listen that the evil behavior of the Jews of that day in filling up the measure of their fathers [Mt. 23:32] would bring upon them all the righteous blood shed upon the earth since Abel [Mt. 23:35].

And in Matthew 24:1-28, He gave His disciples specific details of that vengeance, describing for them the great tribulation that would be visited upon Jerusalem for her sins. He clearly warned both audiences that the punishment He referred to would come upon the generation then alive [Mt. 23:36; 24:34] and history records that it did, in fact, occur 40 years later. In addition, the apostle Paul, writing about 20 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, said that the Jews had killed Christ and their own prophets and the leaders of the early church "to fill up their sins" and that, therefore, "the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" [1 Thess. 2:15,16]. Since God's wrath had come upon the Jews to the uttermost in the first century, reaching its consummation [Dan. 9:27] in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it appears contrary to the New Testament to teach that God's wrath is still reserved against the natural Jews for a future outpouring under the Antichrist. Confusion sometimes arises because the great tribulation prophesied in Matthew 24:21 was described as "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." It is often, and accurately, argued, for example, that Nazi Germany killed more Jews than the approximately 1,100,000 who died in the siege of Jerusalem. But the "such as" in the description does not refer to the size or magnitude of the tribulation as measured by the number slain, but rather to the king of tribulation. The description refers to the quality of the suffering and affliction, not to the quantity or number of those who suffered. It is simply not possible for a future tribulation to exceed in magnitude any that has been experienced "since the beginning of the world" since that would require the survival of fewer people than the eight survivors of the flood of Noah's day, and even the dispensationalist stops short of predicting that.

The tribulation in A.D. 70 was very special kind for at least three good reasons. First it involved the final destruction of what once had been God's holy nation, an event that had never happened before and one that can never be repeated since the church is now God's holy nation [1 Pet. 2:9] and it will never be destroyed.  Second the position of the Jews trapped in Jerusalem was unique in all history. Desolated by the withdrawal of God's presence, knowing only His uttermost wrath, and thus abandoned to their own evil, the residents of the doomed city turned on one another in hatred and panic, and inflicted upon themselves even more suffering than they received at the hands of the Romans. [The reader desiring more details of that tribulation is referred to Philip Mauro's book, The Seventy Weeks and The Great Tribulation [Reiner Publications, Swengel, Pa.] and to the writings of the first-century historian, Josephus.]

And finally it was a tribulation suffered by the Jews who had rejected Christ. Those who availed themselves of the hope of Israel, the gospel, during the nation's final probation period of 40 years were saved from the disaster of A.D. 70. History records that all believers fled to safety before Jerusalem was surrounded, having been warned years in advance by Christ's prophecy on the Mount of Olives.

We will discuss the Olivet prophecy [Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk.21] in more detail in the next chapter, but now we want to show why there cannot be a seven-year period or any other. We noted previously that Peter on the day of Pentecost declared that Christ already had ascended to His throne. We can read in Acts 2:34, 35 that the Father said to Christ: "Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool" Paul picks up this same theme in 1 Corinthians 15:25,26 where he says: "For He!" must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Thus we know that Christ is reigning now and will reign until His last enemy is under His feet, and we know that the last enemy is death. When that victory is achieved, Paul says, "then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom unto God, even the Father" [1 Cor. 15:24]. The question then is, when is death defeated? The answer is in the same chapter. Paul tells us it is when Christ comes for His church [1 Cor. 15:51-54]. At that moment the dead saints are to be raised with incorruptible bodies and the living saints are to be changed to also have incorruptible bodies [15:52] and that event, according to Paul, will bring to pass the saying that is written in Isaiah 25:8: "Death is swallowed up in victory" [15:54].Thus Christ's coming for His church and the defeat of death are simultaneous events, and at that point Christ's victory over the last enemy signals "the end", the end of time, the end of history, the moment when Christ turns over the kingdom to God the Father, "that God may be all in all" [1 Cor. 15:28]. Now the end is the end, and after the end there's not another seven years left in which the imaginary Great Tribulation could occur. There is, however, the eternity of the new heavens and the new earth [Rev. 21 and 22].

[Scofield's disagreement with Paul in the above matter is striking, and typically Scofield. The resurrection of the dead believers and the fact that the living generation of believers will pass into immortality without ever seeing death might have been enough to convince Paul that the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "He will swallow up death in victory" [Isaiah 25:8] occurs when Christ comes for His church; but Scofield 1ooks 1,007 years beyond that event for the imagined fulfillment of that prophecy. The New Scofield Reference Edition's margin notes at Isaiah 25:8 cross-reference that verse to Revelation 20:14, which is after the 1,000 years have expired, and to Revelation 21:4, which is in the eternity of the new heaven and new earth.] The fact that time and history end when Christ comes for His church precludes the possibility of the Antichrist having any time left in which to perform his deceitful and vengeful deeds after that event. But it is also possible to demonstrate that even if he had any time left he simply wouldn't be around anymore after the meeting of Christ and His saints. Although there are several different Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the second coming of the Lord, the one that is specifically used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, the famous passages used by the dispensationalists to try to prove the Secret Rapture, is "parousia": "We which are alive and remain unto the parousia of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven. . ." [Parousia is also the word used in 1 Corinthians 15:23 to describe the event we discussed above.] Now another place where we can find the same word is in the second chapter of the second epistle to the Thessalonians where we read about the individual generally considered to be the Antichrist. Paul says this is the "man of sin" or the "son of perdition" [2 Thess. 2:3], "whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His parousia" [2 Thess. 2:8]. Now clearly if the Antichrist is destroyed at the same time that Christ comes for His church, he obviously won't be around to cause all that tribulation afterward. And, furthermore, if he is the one who causes the final outpouring of tribulation in the end times, then clearly that tribulation will have to occur before Christ comes for His church, and the church obviously will have to go through that period.

We have previously said that tribulation, persecution, testings and trials are to be expected, and in fact welcomed, by the individual believers as a means by which God matures and perfects His people. Tribulation, wrath and judgment also come upon the people and nations of the world, and the book of Revelation tells how those acts of God are visited upon the earth throughout that long period of time between the first and second coming of Christ. But the final tribulation that yet lies ahead appears to await the church at the close of this present age. Revelation 20:9 speaks in symbolic language of the church ["the camp of the saints" and "the beloved city"] surrounded and massively outnumbered by her foes but saved by fire coming down out of heaven. That passage refers, of course, to the return of Christ when He is "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel" [2 Thess. 1:7,8]. As for the Antichrist, despite many mistaken identities with notorious figures in prior times, we probably have yet to see in what form that ultimate manifestation of lawlessness will appear, and I'm open to all kinds of speculative theories as long as it's agreed that whatever deeds the Antichrist is going to do will be done before Christ comes for the church.

The weakest argument many Christians use in discussing tribulation is their claim that God is going to take them out of the world before the dispensationalist's Great Tribulation occurs, because, as they say, "a loving Father wouldn't make His children go through that." That's an American doctrine. Try telling that to the Christian martyrs in the Communist and Islamic countries and elsewhere! Their daily lot is to be humiliated, beaten, tortured, starved and killed. Could any worse physical suffering occur to them during the imagined Great Tribulation? Wouldn't instant thermonuclear annihilation be preferable to the daily horrors, repeated year after year, that the martyrs must endure? Perhaps, in addition to praying more for our brothers and sisters who are now suffering great tribulation, we should give some serious thought to the possibility that at some future time we could be suffering in the same way.

What if those really are nothing but fables that the dispensationalist has been spinning for us? What if we, and he, have to go through that final period of persecution? Will we have been built up, strengthened and matured by the diet He has urged upon us, or will we be disappointed, milk-fed babes?

If we believe God's Word, we'll prepare now [just in case the Lord would make even American Christians go through such times]. Let's start reigning with Him today. Let's believe Him when He says we are seated now with Him above all principalities and powers, from which position nothing can separate us, not "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword. . . neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature. . . . in all these things we are more than conquerors" [(Rom. 8:35-39].

# **Chapter 10 THE OLIVET PROPHECY**

The great prophecy that Christ gave His disciples on the Mount of Olives shortly before His crucifixion, as told in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, is a favorite tool of the futurist. In the futurist typical fashion he largely ignores past fulfillments and sets his sights with single-minded determination on using as much of it as he can in the future.

The great commentators of the past, however, taught that Christ was warning His disciples of the signs that would accompany the coming destruction of Jerusalem and impressing upon them that those signs did not signal the end of the world, and-or His own second coming. It should be a source of wonder to us that although the Scriptures teach throughout that no one can know the date of the second coming of Christ, we nevertheless are constantly told of this or that sign proving that His return is imminent. Down through the centuries such signs have been sought and "found", and they always have proved erroneous because the Lord said there are to be no such signs. Christ said, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" [Mk. 13:33]. Peter and Paul taught that His coming will be unexpected, sudden, as a thief in the night [2 Pet. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:4], and surely a thief gives no sign before coming in the night. The futurist thinks it will be at a time seven years after the church is taken away but the Word says it will be "in such an hour as ye think not" [Mt.24:44 and Lk. 12:40]. The context of the prophecy is important. Upon viewing the great stones of the temple, Christ told His disciples the stones would be completely thrown down. Later, according to Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7, His disciples asked when that disaster would be and what would be the sign of it. That is all they asked and that is the question Christ answered. However, since He knew the disciples would in their own minds connect such a startling, catastrophic event with His own second coming, He also added a few comments on that subject as well, to assure them that His coming wouldn't coincide with the temple's destruction. Matthew recognizes this in his account [Mt. 24:3] by expanding the question to include the second advent, but it is important to see that in Mark and Luke that question was not asked, and that the Lord's answer referred almost entirely to the events that took place in A.D. 70.

Christ's prophecy breaks down neatly into four separate parts, and the King James version has gone to the trouble of marking these off for us in Mark 13. Matthew 24 is not similarly marked, but can be easily divided into the same four sections. In the first part [Mk. 13:5-8, Mt. 24:4-8] Christ told His disciples that wars, earthquakes, famines and troubles "must needs be" but they are not the sign of the end. Despite this warning, however, every major catastrophe of that nature down through history has been taken as a sign of the end. In the second part [Mk. 13:9-13, Mt. 24:9-14] Christ warned His disciples against specific dangers and hardships they would have to face, the beatings in the synagogues, their testimony before kings, the false prophets, and the betrayals. We are particularly reminded here of Paul's experiences. The third part [Mk. 13:14-23, Mt. 24:15-28] is the specific answer to the disciples' question about the time and sign of the destruction of the temple. Christ's answer was that the time and sign would be "when 'ye shall see' the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing where it ought not" [Mk. 13:14].

Now there's no great mystery about the abomination of desolation. Luke, who wrote in clear terms for Gentile converts unfamiliar with Old Testament prophecies, tells us in the plainest language possible: "When 'ye shall see' Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh" [Lk. 21 :20]. Christ simply was warning His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the Roman armies approach. They were not to believe anyone who said God would deliver the city from the Romans; they were to get out immediately because its destruction would be complete, as predicted in Daniel 9:26, and the city's inhabitants would suffer terribly. Because the believers in A.D. 70 remembered and acted on Christ's warning, they fled in time to escape the great tribulation that fell on those who remained behind in the doomed city. Christ told them not to be deceived by false Christs [Mt. 24:24] nor to believe that He was hiding in the desert or in secret chambers [Mt. 24:26] because when He really came later it would not be a secret, but would be like the lightning coming out of the east and shining unto the west [Mt. 24:27]. And He said they should pray that they wouldn't have to flee on the Sabbath [when the old Rabbinical laws, were still in effect in that day, would have impeded their flight].

Mark referred to the punishment to be visited upon Jerusalem at that time as "affliction" or "tribulation" and Matthew elaborated a bit to describe it as "great tribulation." Luke, with his tendency to clarify, said simply, "These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" [Lk. 21 :22].

My grandfather's old Bible published in 1867 cross-references all three of those descriptions to Daniel 9:26,27 in keeping with the historical interpretation that the vengeance visited upon the Jews 1,900 years ago for their final sin of killing the Messiah fulfilled Daniel's prophecy. God's wrath against Israel had been reserved for the time when that generation would "fill up the measure of their fathers" who had killed the prophets [Mt. 23:31,32] by killing the Messiah, which thus would "finish the transgression" [Dan. 9:24].

The most important point in all this, besides the obvious fact that it refers to a past, not a future event, lies in Luke's statement that the events in A.D. 70 fulfilled all things that were written about the vengeance to be visited upon the Jews. With that generation having been punished in A.D. 70 in the terrible way prophesied for Israel's terrible final sin against God! What future sin could the Jews commit to warrant the even worse future punishment that the Dispensationalist envisions under the cruel hand of the Antichrist? Obviously none, and thus it appears the Jews are not singled out as the target for any future "great tribulation." There is now no difference between the Jew and the Gentile [Rom. 10:12] and all are offered the same opportunity to save themselves from God's wrath through the gospel. Christ's words summing up the first three parts of the prophecy are contained in Mark 13:23: "Behold, I have foretold you all things." Clearly, He gave His followers all the signs and explicit details they would need to escape the specific horrors that were to be visited upon that generation of Jews. But, as for His second coming, Christ nowhere said that He would foretell all things. Instead, He said, "Of that day, and that hour, knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" [Mk. 13:32,33]. And again, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" [Acts 1:7].

It is worth mentioning here that since the Lord said wars must needs be but are not the sign of the end  [Mk. 13:7] we have no basis for saying that His coming will be at the height of World War III, as many futurists contend, since such a war would serve as the very sign He said we would not have. Instead, we are told He will return suddenly, unexpectedly, when the world says "peace and safety" [1 Thess. 5:3. His coming will be at a time when life is proceeding at a normal pace, when people are eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting and building, just as they were in the days of Noah and Lot [Lk. 17:26-30].

The fourth segment [Mk. 13:24-27, Mt. 24:29-31] refers to the long period of time from A.D. 70 until the second coming of the Lord. Since He has already told us there are to be no specific signs of that event, Christ speaks here only in veiled terms about general circumstances that will prevail throughout that long period. "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall He send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" [Mk.13:24-27].

Matthew's account of those events uses the same veiled terminology, reflecting the Lord's use of figurative speech to describe that long period of time leading up to the dramatic moment of His second coming, an event which He told His disciples was to take place at a time unknown to Him and to the angels, and known only to God the Father. Since He said no signs would accompany that event, and since He is talking here of something occurring throughout that long period, we may be reasonably certain He is speaking figuratively in His reference to celestial phenomena.

Luke again comes to our assistance. To his description of the changes in the sun, moon and stars He adds: "and upon the earth, distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring" [Lk. 21 :25]. In Bible terminology the sun, moon and stars frequently refer to various levels of power and authority. In Joseph's dream [Gen. 37:9,10] they stood for the higher authority of his father, the lesser authority of his mother, and the still lesser authority of his brothers, as those individuals clearly perceived when he told them his dream. Likewise, "the sea and the waves roaring" may be explained by the statement in Revelation 17:15 that "the waters. . . . are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." And Mark's statement that "the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken" probably signifies the same continuing and intensifying process mentioned in Hebrews 12:26,27. Thus we may be reasonably sure that Christ was referring to certain broad, general characteristics of human history from A.D. 70 until His second advent, namely, the same continuing deterioration in governmental power and authority as that described in Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We have seen throughout the centuries the progressive decline of royalty, and in our own day we see the increasing inability of world governments to control their own destinies, or even their own subjects. Respect for authority is rapidly declining, and anarchy is growing; the nations are perplexed and the sea and the waves of humanity are roaring.

While Christ had told His disciples that specific signs would accompany the localized, single event of the destruction of the nation of Israel, the implication is clear that no such signs were to accompany the continuing decline over the centuries of the powers of the other nations of the world. Rather, that would be an ongoing, steadily intensifying process until His coming. The accelerating lack of respect for authority obviously will contribute to the growing persecution of the church.

[Although the Dispensationalist says the end of the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ will occur simultaneously, since to him the tribulation period will be cut short by the Lord's sudden return, a careful reading of Mark 13:24-26 shows that between the end of the tribulation and the second coming of Christ there are "those days" during which the phenomena discussed above occur. There is no problem, however, when we understand the occurrence of "that tribulation" to have been in A.D. 70, and the second coming of Christ yet future, and the events described by Mark as occurring between those two dates.]

# **Chapter 11 MILLENNIAL MUSINGS**

Although three long, parallel accounts of the Olivet prophecy are given in Matthew, Mark and Luke, it is not included in John. Many commentators believe the reason is simply the fact that the gospel of John was written well after the prophecy's fulfillment in A.D. 70 and there was thus no longer any need to warn the believers.

For many twentieth century Christians the Great Tribulation and the Millennium are two periods of time to look forward to with eager anticipation. During the Great Tribulation they foresee an appropriate degree of physical punishment for those hard-hearted people who won't receive the Christian witness today [as if separation from God in time and eternity isn't punishment enough]. And during the Millennium they visualize themselves ruling in a way that is somehow more satisfying than "just" ruling spiritually, namely, by wielding a rod of iron and a measure of physical authority [despite the fact that Christ said only the Gentiles exercise lordship in that manner, Mk. 10:42,43].

One of my hopes in writing this book has been that the Lord will revise expectations such as these so that we can see and appreciate the present kingdom and reign of Christ and our present reign with Him. It is important to understand that God already "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" [Eph. 1:3] and to stop yearning for more present or future natural and materialistic blessings [on which it is easy to overdose.]

New Covenant Christianity is a foretaste of eternity. We have been given God's Word, His Son and His Spirit. For eternity He will also give us an immortal, incorruptible body and we will be with Him in the new heavens and new earth, but otherwise He has already given us everything. In the final chapter of this book we want to discuss the superiority of the spiritual sphere in which we live and move over the natural sphere of the Old Testament saints, but for the moment suffice it to say that they had the shadow while we have the substance. But despite all this, many believers want to give up the new Cadillac of their present inheritance and go back to driving a pre-war Ford. The natural reign they look forward to in the Millennium is an inferior product not worthy to be compared with their present legacy as heirs, priests and kings. And besides that, it's unscriptural.

I'm far from being an expert but I've heard that it is a 'cardinal rule to compare scripture with scripture'. 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established'. In that respect, the problem with "the so-called "Millennium" is that it is not mentioned in all of scripture",  The word "Millennium", of course, is never used in the Bible, but is merely a term that has come to be applied to the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 in several verses, and what is without doubt the most symbolic and figurative book in the whole Bible.

In chapter 1 we showed that the Dispensationalist admits that the idea of a future 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth is a departure from the beliefs of the Protestant Reformers such as Calvin, Luther, Knox and Zwingli. Those men and the great Bible commentators historically have rejected that idea. In Biblical Studies in Final Things [page 196] Cox quotes Luther's views on the subject: "A millennial reign of Christ, characterized by a pre-eminent knowledge of the mysteries of God, by a holy life and an earthly prosperity for those involved, is not to be expected by God's children in this world. “More recently, however, largely through the agency of the notes Scofield inserted among the pages of the Bible, the belief in a natural, physical reign of exactly 1,000 years duration has increasingly crept into the beliefs of many individuals.In chapter 8, drawing on Philip Mauro's warning, we pointed but the danger of agreeing that Christ came to establish an earthly reign, without investigating or understanding the implications of such a belief. If we accept the Dispensationalist's proposed Millennium in its standard form, that is, as the postponement of the earthly reign Christ supposedly came to establish, we then stand in embarrassed agreement that Christ was guilty of the 'accusation of sedition', and therefore was justly crucified. We agree with Mauro that it is time for God's faithful pastors and teachers to urgently warn believers about this danger. Christ came to manifest 'a kingdom that is not of this world', not physical or natural or political or earthly, and He did it with a thoroughness that all the purveyors of gaps and postponements can never undo. Pilate rightly saw that Christ was innocent of any threat to Caesar's physical reign; and He was crucified unjustly.

In this chapter we will also discuss the subject of resurrections, having reserved it for this space because of the Dispensationalist's exotic belief that the Millennium is bracketed by two separate bodily resurrections, that of the saved before the 1,000 years and that of the unsaved after the 1,000 years. Various commentators have recommended that we just read a passage of scripture and let it speak for itself, without bringing to it any preconceived ideas of what we want it to say, and this is especially good advice in the case of the book of Revelation.

This last book of the Bible tells us a great deal about itself, if we will let it, in the first verse of the first chapter where it is announced as "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." From this, two points are obvious. First, the things described in this book were to 'start happening immediately after they were revealed'. Second, they were given in the form of signs, or symbols.

The Emphasized Bible makes these points even clearer, calling the foretold events "the things which must needs come to pass with speed" and saying that "He shewed them by signs." Thus in our approach to the Revelation, or parts thereof, it is necessary [1] to accept the fact that the immediate audience for its message was the churches of that generation and that it has had applicability and value for every generation of Christians since the first century, and [2] to accept the fact that it is written in the vivid, symbolic, figurative style known as apocalyptic literature. It is also necessary [3] to accept the fact that the whole book, not just the first few chapters was written to the churches, and [4] to accept the fact that John was "in the spirit" [Rev. 1:10] and not "in the flesh" when he received the Revelation.

It is beyond the scope of this volume to attempt an exposition of the book of Revelation, but it is necessary to at least remark that the book makes little sense if it is tackled as an ongoing sequence of events from front to back. If the book is read as a chronological account it is hard to explain the location of the story of the birth of Christ way back in chapter 12. There we read of the repeated efforts of Satan to destroy the Saviour, of Christ's victory at Calvary when salvation, strength, the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ came and when the accuser of the brethren was cast down [12:10] and finally of how Satan, having failed against Christ, attempts instead to take out his wrath on God's people.

It is more reasonable and useful to recognize that the Revelation tells and re-tells the story of the events between the first and second coming of Christ, in each case using different imagery and symbols to describe the triumph of Christ and the church over their various enemies. The unifying theme of the book is the throne in heaven, where the Son is exalted with the Father, and the certain victory over all foes.

The controversial 20th chapter can properly be viewed as one of the separate accounts of the events transpiring between the first and second coming of Christ. It is a concise [15 verses] record of the period from Calvary to the end of time. Its explanation can be made so simple and uncomplicated that a child can understand it, and for that reason it will perhaps appear inadequate at first to the reader accustomed to the intricacies of Dispensationalist fare.

Revelation 20 says that Christ [the messenger, Gk. 'angelos' of verse 1] came to earth more than 1,900 years ago and laid hold of Satan and bound him for a long period of time so that Satan could no longer deceive the nations of the world by keeping them ignorant of salvation through the gospel. During this long period of time, many people are raised from spiritual death through the new birth [the first resurrection] and they reign with Christ and are priests of God and of Christ. Those who have a part in that spiritual resurrection are blessed and holy, and on them the second death has no power; all the others will know only the bodily resurrection at the end of time.

At the end of the long period of time, Satan will be released to again deceive the nations and keep them from the truth of the gospel, and to incite them to persecute and attempt to annihilate the believers. Though surrounded and desperately outnumbered by their enemies, the believers will be saved by the second coming of Christ. Satan, the Antichrist and the False prophet will be eternally punished. All who ever lived will be resurrected and stand before the great white throne to be judged worthy either of life eternal or of everlasting fire.

This simple, uncluttered interpretation harmonizes with the scriptures as a whole and needs no fine-print footnotes to explain inconsistencies. The Dispensationalists, of course, will complain that we are "spiritualizing" the scriptures while they interpret them "literally" but we are reminded here of Paul's warning that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" [2 Cor. 3:6]. In fact, the Dispensationalists themselves are quick to apply figurative or symbolic meanings to passages in this book whenever it serves their purposes. We mentioned in chapter 6 their far-fetched interpretation of John as a symbolic representation of the entire church of modern times [Rev. 4:1]. Further, they will surely agree that John is speaking figuratively in describing Christ as a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes [Rev. 5:6]. And if that is true, how much more of the Revelation should be interpreted similarly?

In the chapter we are studying, the first two verses say Satan was bound with "a great chain." Are we to take this literally or figuratively? Would it really be possible to bind Satan, who is a spirit, with an iron chain? Obviously not. And if that is true, if the writer is speaking in figurative terms in the first two verses of the chapter, is it too great a step of faith to believe that he is also speaking figuratively in the third verse, where the 1000-year reign appears for the first time in the Bible? Interpreting the 1,000 years in a figurative or symbolic manner does not put one in the embarrassing position of having to explain why. There. is no mention elsewhere of this 1,000-year period, either in the words of Christ or in all the other chapters of the Bible. Further, to interpret the 1,000 years as symbolic of the long period of time between the first and second coming of Christ is to use the term "thousand" in a way in which it is used frequently in the Bible, namely, as a descriptive term for "as many as there are" or "all." Thus, "the cattle on a thousand hills are mine" (Ps. 50:10) means the Lord claims title to the cattle on as many hills as there are, not just to those on the first thousand hills. "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday" (Ps, 90:4) means all the years of history are but as yesterday to God as viewed from His perspective in eternity.

[The reader need not be concerned over the identification of the "angel" as Christ; Scofield makes exactly the same interpretation for the "angel" in Revelation 8:3-5, as shown in his note to Hebrews 1:4.] It may be objected that the interpretation that holds that Satan was bound at Calvary, rather than at some time in the future, ignores the fact that Satan has been doing quite a lot of damage in all the centuries since the crucifixion. The point being made, however, is that Satan was bound, not destroyed; his power was limited, not eliminated. If you have a dangerous, biting dog and you put a great chain on him, he's bound but he can still bite anyone who gets within the length of his chain. Satan is bound in the same way.

Christ said He would first bind the strong man [Satan] and then spoil his house [the world], according to Matthew 12:29, and because He did just that it has since been true for those who follow in His Name that "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" [Mt. 16:19; 18:18]. At Calvary, Christ cast out Satan [John 12:31,32] and made a show of him openly [Col. 2:15].

Beyond these truths, however, lies the further observation that Revelation 20 speaks of binding Satan that is, limiting his power, in a very special way, namely, "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled." This clearly refers to the fact that until Calvary only the nation of Israel, of all the nations in the world, knew the salvation of God. The rest of the world lay captive to Satan, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" [Eph. 2:12]. After Calvary and Pentecost, however, the gospel went forth to all the world and Satan was powerless to stop it.

It is indeed ominous that Revelation 20 speaks of Satan being loosed again for "a little season" at the end of the long period of time to deceive the nations one final time. As Satan originally opposed the nation of Israel, unto which at first "were committed the oracles of God" [Rom. 3:2], so at his loosing he will unleash his final, violent opposition of those who today possess and preach the truth of the salvation of God. That is, of course, the church [the "saints" and the "beloved city" referred to in verse 9]. That the final onslaught against the church will be massive and intense is clear from verse 8 where her enemies are said to be as numerous as the sand of the sea.

That final period of persecution is not a pretty one to contemplate, It apparently will be worldwide ["the nations that are in the four quarters of the earth"] rather than being largely limited to the Communist and Islamic countries as at present. The nations of the four quarters of the earth are called Gog and Magog, and, of course, the futurist always identifies Gog and Magog as fighting in the big battle before the Millennium. It is obvious from verses 7 and 8, however, that Gog and Magog, the nations, fight in the battle against the church after the Millennium, during the "little season."

Are we already in this little season? The reader must judge that for himself. But whether we are or soon will be, one fact is clear. Though we may be troubled by the times that lie ahead, the Revelation of Jesus Christ says that when the final persecution reaches its peak, fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour the enemies of the church [verse 9], Paul describes that event in these terms: "To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God , and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" [2 Thess. 1 :7-9].

For those believers who have a pleasant materialistic vision of the Millennium as just some future extension of the Great American Dream, it should be pointed out, that the Scofield version of the Millennium is somewhat different. Life styles would be strictly circumscribed by the old Jewish laws, despite the fact that those were weak, unprofitable and made nothing perfect [Heb. 7:18,19] and were faulty [Heb. 8:7,8] and old and decayed way back in the first century [Heb. 8:13].

The New Scofield Reference Edition says [page 997] that the Mosaic law will be "the governing code" in the Millennial Kingdom, which is strange indeed since that kingdom is supposed to start up with only believers in it and "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane" and for the other unrighteous persons listed in 1 Timothy 1 :9,10.

In addition to obeying the sacrificial laws and keeping the feasts there will be some other required changes in behavior at that time. As far as the dress code, there will be little restrictions such as the one against wearing a garment made of two different kinds of material [Lev. 19:19]. Dietary regulations will require the elimination of pork chops, pork hot dogs and ham from some existing diets [Lev. 11 :7] but, on the other hand, it wiII be all right to add locusts, crickets and grasshoppers to the menu [Lev. 11 :22]. As for the Sabbath, the penalty for doing any work on that seventh day will, of course, be death [Ex. 31 :15]. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses" [Heb. 10:28] and that includes little things like gathering sticks, for which the specific penalty is death by stoning [Num. 15:32-36].

Before moving on to a discussion of resurrections we would like to remind the reader that although the interpretation of Revelation 20 given above differs sharply from the views propagated so urgently by the futurists in their books and charts, it is nevertheless akin to that of the Protestant Reformers and the great Bible expositors of the past [prior to the Darby-Scofield outbreak] in its denial of an earthly 1,000-year reign of Christ, in its recognition that the first resurrection is the new birth, and in its interpretation of the "saints" and "the beloved city” [verse 9] as the church.The first resurrection, the new birth, is a spiritual resurrection and is never shared in by any except believers. The only other resurrection, the one that will come when the Lord returns at the last trumpet, will be physical and general, that is, shared in by everyone who has ever lived and died. As a Christian you have already been resurrected. You have been made alive in Christ [Col. 2:13], you have been made alive from the dead [Rom. 6:13], you who were dead in sins have been quickened and raised up with Christ [Eph.2:5,6]. The only thing you do not have is that immortal, incorruptible body that will be received at the general resurrection at the end of time [1 Cor. 15:52-54]. Of course, there also will be a generation of believers alive when Christ returns whose mortal bodies will be changed to resurrection bodies without ever having known death.

It is generally accepted that the same John who received the Revelation also wrote the gospel of John, and there we read a parallel description of the two resurrections. In John 5:24-27 we read of the spiritual resurrection, the new birth experienced by believers during the centuries between the first and second coming of Christ. Jesus says in verse 24 that he who "heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life. . . . is passed from death unto life." In verse 25 He says that in the present time [the hour that now is] those who are spiritually dead who hear His voice shall gain spiritual life. In verses 28 and 29 Jesus says that at another time, a future time [the hour that is coming] "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Surely that hour when all shall hear His voice is at the last trumpet when "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" [1 Thess. 4:16].

The general resurrection that occurs at the second coming of Christ involves all who have ever lived and died. This is clear from Revelation 1:7 [which the dispensationalist agrees refers to the second advent]: "Behold He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see, Him, and they also which pierced Him." I believe "every eye" can be taken to mean the eyes of everyone who has ever lived, but it's not necessary to press that point to disprove the dispensationalist's idea that the physical resurrection of the saved is separated by 1,000 years from the physical  resurrection of the wicked. To show the error of believing in two physical resurrections with a 1000 year gap between them it is only necessary to recognize that when Christ comes "they also which pierced Him" shall see Him. You can take that to mean either the Romans or the Jews of Christ's day, but either way they're in the category of the "wicked." As such, Scofield says they shouldn't be resurrected until a thousand years later, and yet there they are, raised from the dead to see Christ return in flaming vengeance. At this point the hard-pressed dispensationalist will take the position that the above passage refers to the future descendants of those who pierced Him, but the scriptures relentlessly close every loophole. We can prove the reference is to the resurrection of those who pierced Him at Calvary by turning to Matthew's account of Christ's appearance before Caiaphas, the high priest. In this passage, Christ specifically says Caiaphas himself would be there to see the Lord "coming in the clouds of heaven" [Mt. 26:64]. The margin note in the New Scofield Reference Edition admits this refers to the second advent of Christ, and although the notes are careful not to cross-reference that verse to Revelation 1:7, which Scofield also identifies as the second advent, the implications are obvious. When Christ "cometh with clouds" [Rev. 1:7 the resurrected Caiaphas will be there to see the event, although as one of the wicked he would have to be resurrected 1,000 years later under the Scofield scheme. Conversely, although the dispensationalist says the resurrection of the saved is at the Secret Rapture, Martha told Jesus she knew her brother Lazarus would rise "in the resurrection at the last day" [John. 11:24]. Obviously the day of the Secret Rapture as described by the dispensationalist is not the last day. It is followed by all the days of his seven-year period and then by all the days of his 1,000-year period.

In chapter 2, we pointed out the dispensationalist's need for four future resurrections, including three for the saints of all the ages [one at the Secret Rapture, one at the end of the Great Tribulation and one at the end of the Millennium] and one for the wicked [at the end of the Millennium]. Compassion and mercy require that we make no further comment on that theory.

# **Chapter 12 O ZION  HASTE**

One of the ways in which the first-century scribes and Pharisees "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men" [Mt. 23:13] was through their compulsory habit of offering natural solutions to spiritual problems. The showers of blessing, the spiritual food, the sunshine of love that God desired to pour out from His heaven never reached the starved and thirsting souls below. The scribes and Pharisees saw to that. Their shallow, natural interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures gave them a moldy and impenetrable canvas of tradition, ritual and law with which to shield the people from God's spiritual provision.

In due time, however, God sent His own Son to change all that. And suddenly the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Love of God stood in the midst of the world between His people and those who had robbed them, and with hard words He rebuked them. He called them serpents, vipers, hypocrites, thieves and robbers, and when they protested that they were the descendants of Abraham He denied it and said, "Ye are of your father, the devil!"

When they stood on their ritual and law and circumcision, He said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing!" When they pointed with pride to the traditions of their elders, He said, "Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" If they looked to the glory of Solomon's day, He said, "A greater than Solomon is here!"  If they looked ahead to a future kingdom, He said, "The kingdom shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof!"

Time and again He showed how their carnal, natural interpretation of the scriptures led to error. When the scribes insisted that Elijah must return before the coming of the kingdom and the Messiah, He said bluntly they would have to "spiritualize" the passage in Malachi making that prediction [Mal. 4:5].

"Elijah is come already," He said, referring to John the Baptist, "and they knew him not. "He came preaching that the kingdom had "come nigh" and was "at hand" and "is come upon you," but they looked around and said, "We don't see it. The Romans are still running things. When the kingdom comes, we'll be ruling like David ruled. And so they missed it. Christ manifested His eternal kingdom right in their midst, but their natural  expectations blinded them to its spiritual reality. There were others, however, who saw and entered His kingdom through a new and spiritual birth, and to these He threw open a realm of blessing and provision, the promised land of the perfect goodness of God. Compared with the spiritual riches of that kingdom, all of their previous hopes of material blessing and prosperity were but wood, hay and stubble.

The first-century scribes and Pharisees directed their converts' gaze to the power and glory of the past and of the future, and gave them nothing but the dry dust of men' traditions in the present. The futurist today does the same He looks backward with longing to the temporal splendor of the Davidic kingdom and he looks forward with even greater longing to an imagined day when that kingdom will be restored.

Meanwhile, he is forced to tolerate this present age, this "parenthesis" in which he feels God is dealing temporarily with another people on this earth. Like the Pharisees shields the people from their present, spiritual blessing 'Without a vision, they perish'. They cry out from spiritual; wounds and he offers them fables of the future. Their eyes plead for healing balm and he gives them prophetic chart They seek deliverance and guidance; he promises them the Secret Rapture and the Millennium. They want the miracles of Jesus; he's busy with the exploits of the Antichrist.

There are two ways you can try to discourage a bride about her relationship with her bridegroom. First, you Can tell her she doesn't have what it takes anymore; she's getting old; she's lost the excitement, the allure and the glamour of their courting days. If that doesn't work, if she finds out she's still got it, then you start telling her it doesn't matter anyhow because the bridegroom is interested in another woman.

That is what Dispensationalism has tried to do to the church. First, it said the church just didn't have the stuff it had in the first century, no more supernatural power for tired old Mrs. Laodicea. [We cited Wilfred Meloon's rebuttal to that argument in chapter 1]. To make sure that effort to discourage the church failed, God sent a renewed spiritual outpouring in this present century and the bride suddenly started to like what she saw in the mirror.

Having failed there, Dispensationalism has redoubled its efforts on the second front. The bride has needed all of her new-found strength and pride to withstand that onslaught. If they couldn't belittle what she is today, at least they could work overtime trying to prove that someone else was going to replace her tomorrow. So like backyard gossips they spread the rumor that the bridegroom had eyes for someone else. At first it was just a whisper behind her back, but gradually it became louder and louder until today they shamelessly taunt her to her face. But just as surely as she hasn't lost her first-century power, so also she hasn't lost the sole, eternal love of the bridegroom. She is His forever, and no other will ever take her place.

Relying largely on a natural interpretation of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation, and generally ignoring both the past fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies and the superior teachings of the New Testament, the dispensationalist tells us tales of a future age of blessing and national supremacy for restored Israel. But the Old Testament prophets did not speak of blessings that are to come upon a people other than the church in an age that was still in the future. Peter said the prophets' ministry was to believers in this age [1 Pet. 1:10-12]. And their message was not the future restoration of the monarchy of a small nation, but the coming of Christ ["the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy "Rev. 19:10] as the Saviour and Lord, the Redeemer and King, who would manifest, at His first advent, a worldwide golden age of blessing and triumph.

In describing the blessings of the new age that was to dawn at Calvary, the prophets were inspired to speak in natural terms that could be understood by the people of their day. If, for example, they prophesied about the peaceable nature of the kingdom of God, both in its present form in this age and in its final form in the new heavens and new earth, they might speak in prophetic terms of the wolf lying down with the Iamb, as in Isaiah 11:6. As Hughes says in A New Heaven and A New Earth [page 160]:

"The Old Testament prophecies abound with such expressions as "The house of the Lord," "mountains", "Zion", "eating abundantly", "drinking choice wines", "resting under trees", and general pictures of scenes of earthly prosperity and that for ever. The very fact that "the blessings" are said to be "forever" precludes the thought of any limited period of a millennium. But the New Testament reveals the true interpretation. The natural of the old is but a symbol, or type, of the spiritual of the new era. At present, spiritual blessings are enjoyed by faith without sight, but in the New Heavens and New Earth all will be visible, but that which will be seen will not be that of the past old order but the transformed glorified creation, a truly literal spiritual creation."

In our preoccupation with Christ's second coming we all too often fail to appreciate the tremendous changes wrought by His first coming. We forget that the gospel not only results in the salvation of individual souls, but also that through it the world was turned upside down [Acts 17:6]. Nothing was ever quite the same again after the Deliverer came out of Zion as prophesied. Darkness and captivity fled before that Light and those nations and people who welcomed His illumination prospered beyond measure.

Those who instead chose false religions and gods who were no gods remained locked in the ignorance, bondage and poverty which they still attempt to export today through their "gurus" and "spiritual leaders." In this present age, as the world we live in becomes increasingly lawless, clamorous and complex, it is natural for humanity to yearn for an escape to a better place or for a total change in our present society. In the people of the world this yearning may find its outlet in dreamy speculations of a new and simpler life in a tropical paradise or in fantasies of utopian changes in the existing social order. Believers who cannot resist this all too human desire find the dispensationalist ready to cater to them with similar speculations built around his promise of an escape to a better place in the sky and later the supposedly ideal society of the Millennium.

The undisciplined and unenlightened worldling, of course, is unaware of any better hope and has nothing and no one to check his flights of fancy; but the believer, buoyed by the New Testament truth of his present inheritance and the unfailing hope of the eternal new heavens and new earth, appears to have no license to indulge in similar imaginative excesses.

But the dispensationalist's fables involve us in more than just speculative flights of fancy. They belittle the first coming of Christ and claim that He failed to gain a natural, political throne and kingdom that His Father had willed Him to have. They teach that the stubborn will of man forced God to change His plans and to allow His Son to be crucified against His will. They imply that Christ came to perform a seditious act as a political revolutionary and that His crucifixion was therefore justified by law. They deny the present reign of Christ and the present co-reign of the believers. They imply that the church is a failure and that the mission it could not accomplish will later be accomplished by the present political state of Israel.

With his fables the dispensationalist pre-conditions individual believers to immaturity through false promises of escape from tribulation, and with the same fables he lures the believer into a prolonged and fruitless study of books, charts and invasion maps of Palestine, a futile activity that keeps the believer so preoccupied that he has no time to seek the will and purpose of the Lord in his life, and no time to grow and mature and be conformed to the image of Christ.

The same fables wrongfully threaten the Jewish people with dread future punishment under the cruel hand of the Antichrist while the New Testament, in fact, teaches that God's vengeance against the Jews reached its consummation with the destruction of the city and temple, and the slaughter, capture and dispersal of the Jews in A.D. 70.

The same fables obscure Paul's teaching that there is no longer any difference between Jews and Gentiles in God's sight, and they encourage Jewish people in the false hope that their ancestry somehow guarantees their future salvation, thereby creating further obstacles to their understanding that the only hope for them, as well as for Gentiles, is their acceptance of Christ as Saviour in this present age.

In his classic book, The Screwtape Letters [Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, London] Christian author C. S. Lewis has the experienced demon Screwtape correspond with his nephew Wormwood about the advantages of keeping believers occupied with the future rather than the present. [In the demon's letter the Enemy, of course, is God.] His letter [pages 76,77] says in part: "The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to Eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity. Of the present moment, and of it only, humans have an experience comparable  to the experience which our Enemy has of reality as a whole; in it alone freedom and actuality are offered them. He would therefore have them continually concerned either with eternity [which means being concerned with Him] or with the Present. . . .    "Our business is to get them away from the eternal, and from the Present. With this in view, we sometimes tempt a human [say a widow or a scholar] to live in the Past. But this is of limited value, for they have some real knowledge of the Past and it has a determinate nature, and to that extent, resembles eternity. It is far better to make. them live in the Future. Biological necessity makes all their passions point in that direction already, so that thought about the Future inflames hope and fear. Also, it is unknown to them, so that in making them think about it, we make to them  think. of unrealities. In a word, the Future IS, of all things, the thing least like eternity."Rev

If the present alone offers us freedom and actuality, and if the future is the thing least like eternity and makes us think of unrealities, why then do we display such a lack of appreciation for the present realities of the kingdom of God, and such a preoccupation and fascination with some imagined physical kingdom of the future?

We know the heathen are obsessed with a desire to know the future, but shouldn't God's children be satisfied and secure in the knowledge that the times and seasons are in His own power? Christ said, "Take no thought for the morrow. . . Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" [Mt. 6:34], and James said, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow" [Jas. 4:14. But despite that inspired advice many believers have become almost obsessed with the future.

They rightly deplore the world's reliance on horoscopes, tea leaves and Ouija boards to foretell future events, but then they themselves seek after signs in the futurist's polished crystal ball.

They reason that all the events of Daniel's 70th week of seven years must occur within 40 years [one generation] after the establishment of the modern, political state of Israel in 1948. That, of course, would set 1988 as the outer limit of their time frame, and since their Secret Rapture is to occur before the seven-year period they obviously are predicting 1981 as the latest possible date for the Rapture. Despite His own unparalleled knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, Christ told His disciples that neither He nor the angels knew the time of His second coming. Some of the dispensationalists, however, claim superior understanding and tell us His coming will be by 1988 at the latest. [However, please note that it is now Sep 2009 at the amending of this work].

Nowhere do the scriptures tell us to yearn for such knowledge of the future. Instead, they teach us to live one day at a time in the present reality of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is right here and now, a kingdom in which we reign over every difficult problem and circumstance because of the victory Christ won at Calvary.

But the futurist says, forget the here and now and let me tell you about the by and by. And then he tricks us into selling the birthright of our present inheritance for a future mess of pottage. [Esau at least took delivery of his pottage on the spot, but we are supposed to agree to delivery at an indeterminate future date.]

What a difference between our New-Birth-right and the pottage the futurist offers. One is a sumptuous spiritual feast and new wine spread right now in the New Covenant Banqueting House; the other is a rain check for stale bread, lentils and sour grapes to be served up at some uncertain date in an old, abandoned building. The covenant under which God's people live, now and forever, is grace, not law; the blood of the Lamb, not animal sacrifices; the eternal priesthood of Melchisedec, not the earthly order of Levi; the temple of believers which is the spiritual habitation of God, not a stone building made with hands; Jerusalem above which is free, not Jerusalem on earth in bondage; spiritual Israel, not natural Israel, and the present eternal King in his glorious, present, eternal kingdom and not the imaginary revival of a faded human monarchy. As believers we are seated now with Christ in heavenly places [Eph. 2:6] where we are already blessed with all spiritual blessings [Eph. 1:3. We now are heirs to the promises made to Abraham [Gal. 3:29] and heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ [Rom. 8:17]. We now are members of the household of God [Eph. 2:19] and a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's special people [1 Pet. 2:9]. We have already been translated into the kingdom of God [Col. 1 13 and we are now kings and priests unto God (Rev. 1 :6) and reigning in this life [Rom. 5:17].

Despite the fact that we are now enjoying blessings that the Old Testament merely foreshadowed [Heb.8:5; CoI.2:17] the futurist yearns to return to the old ways, to the bondage of the "weak and beggarly elements" [Gal. 4:9]. In his hopeless effort to prove the truth of his nineteenth-century theories he twists the scriptures recklessly, blatantly disregarding orthodox beliefs, and claims his '150-year-old fables' have equal standing with the inspired elations given to the church in the first century.

Fortunately, however, the rushing mighty wind of the Spirit is blowing through the church today to sweep away the musty odor of myth and fable and to restore the fresh, sweet smell of truth and reality. God is telling His people to seek no more after Mount Sinai [Gal. 4:24-31; Heb. 12:18-21], but to realize instead that they have come to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem [Heb. 12:22]. The church is the Zion that God has chosen for His eternal habitation. It is of the church that He speaks when He says, "This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy" [Ps. 132:13-16]. In their joy the saints are shouting, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness" [Ps. 48:1]. They're shouting, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the Great King" [Ps. 48:2]. And they're shouting, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following" [Ps. 48:12,13]. Let's tell that next generation facts, and not fables. AMEN!