

## **The Coming Time of Trouble**

by Ray C. Stedman

Message #1 in a series of 4 on Bible Prophecy

---

I hold in my hand a book called "The Fate of the Earth." [By Paul Erlich of Stanford University] This is a remarkable book. It is not a Christian book, but it is a very insightful penetrating analysis of the threat to the earth in our own day. It is not something coming. It is something that is here. Let me read a bit from the jacket describing the content:

This monumental work first appeared in three issues of the New Yorker and was quickly recognized throughout our country and throughout the Western world as the definitive statement on our plight. In defining the shape and the dimensions of our predicament Schell describes within the limits of what is defensibly and unarguably known to science a full scaled nuclear war. He describes the countless overlapping ways a paroxysm of redundancy in which human beings, and other creatures on earth would die if the existing 20,000 megatons of bombs with more than a million times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb were to fall. In moderate tone, but in unforgettable particulars, he tells us how the world would end.

This is a sobering book, as the jacket has suggested. It is not a panic-stricken book. It is not an attempt to arouse a reaction and to send people out into the streets in mindless protests and demonstrations. It is very calm and reasonable. It is therein lies much of the terror of the book. It faces very plainly the stark realism of the nuclear threat of our day and it takes that into the field of philosophy to explore the worth of human beings and to project, as far as the human mind is capable, what an earth would be like in which humankind had become extinct and the terrible irreversible fact of human extinction, and what is lost in the process of that. Then it postulates a very radical and painful way out. The only way out of our present dilemma, the author of this book can see, is that we abandon our commitment to national sovereignties as nations, surrender our national states, and somehow find a way to remove war as a means of settling disputes among peoples. If we cannot do that, there is absolutely no hope of avoiding a nuclear holocaust of some dimension at least, and one which possibly, and, in fact given the current of escalation in times of war, almost certainly would result in the dimensions of nuclear holocaust that threaten the human race itself. Now that is why I say this is a very sobering book.

When you read a book like this, the question of the day the leaders of the nations today, and particularly the two super powers, ask themselves is, "Will the decade of the eighties in which we now are living, bring into reality the terrible fate that the book outlines, i.e., Will the super powers themselves in the next few years trip the trigger of worldwide disaster and send nuclear terror riding their nuclear brooms across the skies to bring the world into its final night of doom." That is the question the world is facing today.

As I've said, this is not a Christian book. It views events purely from a humanistic outlook. It does not take God into consideration whatsoever. It is not an anti-Christian book. The writer seems to have had considerable exposure to Christianity. He quotes frequently from the Bible, from St. Augustine, from other writers of Christian persuasion, but he himself does not take a Christian viewpoint to enter into the examination the book engages in. God plays no part in the human dilemma according to the book, nor is He expected to. Though He may exist, the author does not in any way sense that He has anything to do with the fate of the earth.

The remarkable thing to me about reading a book like this is not only its sobering content and its very insightful analysis, but expressed, but the tremendous parallel it represents with what the Scripture has been saying all along. In other words, at a time when a secular press is saying the same thing the Bible has been saying for many many centuries, and saying it with the influence and power in the affairs of men.

That in itself is a very remarkable thing. If, as the opponents of Christianity would love to see happen, it were true that there is, as they claim, a mere psychological trick of the human mind, a religious trick that we play upon ourselves, and that there is no God and no reality to Biblical pictures, then we could expect that, as human life goes on, surely the world would have grown away from the picture that the Bible draws. But that has not been the case. Even in this tremendously advanced scientific age of ours, which opponents of Christian faith love to picture as having virtually wiped out any reason or

Christianity, it is nevertheless true that events of today are inescapably and visibly underscoring and supporting the : the Bible draws.

This is what you would expect if the Bible is true. If it is true that there is a "God who rules in the affairs of men," a Benjamin Franklin said at the Constitutional Convention of 1787. When the states were trying to form the document of all our American liberties, and they came to a place where there was an impasse, unable to make any progress in t he rose and said to the assembled delegates, "I have lived a long time, and the longer I live I am convinced that there governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his knowledge, how much less can without his help." And he purposed that they open the assembly from that day on with a prayer to God that he would deliberations.

I think this is a most remarkable thing because it shows that the events which men purpose are not finally in their l the affairs of men, and men may write books like this one that seem to infer that the fate of the earth is in the han Bible never takes that position. It says that it is God who is in ultimate control, and I want to start with that note "Coming Time of Trouble" lest anybody become faint of heart as they consider the fact that both the Bible and the sa foresee a terrible time of trouble ahead for us among not only the American nation but all the nations of the world a

I would like to read for you some of the passages from the Old Testament that picture and describe that "Coming Tir will start with the little book of Zephaniah, (the fourth book back from Matthew). In it is a passage describing, along passages in the Old Testament which we could sight, the coming period of trouble known as "The Day of the Lord" or Terrible Day of the Lord."

Zephaniah 1:14-18:

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on men, so they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the da the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, su end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

When the Bible uses a term like "all the inhabitants of the earth," though it is a frightening term, it does not necess total extinction of the race. Other passages make that clear, that there is not coming a time when the whole race o to be obliterated from the earth. When he says he will made a "sudden end" of all the inhabitants of the earth, it doe imply their death. It means the destruction of all the ways of life that they have adopted, and that judgment will stri of the earth, but not necessarily a total elimination. But that is a vivid description. Admittedly this is Hebrew poetry, poetry tends to paint in vivid colors. It can be in its literal interpretation subdued somewhat. It is not necessarily qui imagery implies. That is why I say you cannot take this as a fully literal statement. But it must be taken realistically it does deal with a terrible day of trouble that is coming which will be widespread and will be a very painful and terrib

Another passage somewhat similar to that is in the little prophecy of Joel which is further back a few pages in the C prophecy of Joel falls in the minor prophets just after Hosea and before the prophet Amos. In Joel chapter 1 you have a prediction of "The Day of the Lord" again. Immediately following the great passage that was quoted on the day the Apostle Peter when he said the Lord would "pour out his Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters would prophesy," passage from which he quoted. And it goes on in verse 30 to say,

Joel 2:30:

And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun s be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the. ~~Let me quote~~ that part and it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the surviv shall be those whom the Lord c a remnant shall escape the trouble in ~~Israel~~ hold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them dow the valley of Jehoshaphat...

There is some doubt as to just where that valley is located. Some have identified it with the Kidron Valley right outsi Jerusalem, between the Mt. of Olives and the City of Jerusalem. However, it seems it is identified more accurately wi down near the little village of Tekoa. Any of you know what famous prophet came from Tekoa? That was the home to prophet Amos, just south of Bethlehem. There King Jehoshaphat went forth to meet the combined armies of Moab and others that were coming up from the south against Jerusalem. As recorded in the historical books, God gave him a gr

without even a fight. God dispersed the armies, turned them against each other and by the time the armies of Israel and most of the enemy was already dead, having destroyed themselves. This is what was later known to be the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which seems to be associated with the scene around the mountains of Judea south of Jerusalem, and here God says, "I will ...

Joel 3:2b;

...and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up my land, [Notice how He insists He owns the land] and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it.

Then in a very dramatic, prophetic, poetic passage in verse 9 comes a very stirring challenge to the armies.

Joel 3:9,

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, and let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior." Hasten and come, all you nations round about, gather yourselves there. Bring down thy warriors, O Lord. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit and judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. And the Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

Many have taken these passages to be a picture of spiritual judgments, desolations, poverty, etc., but it is clear, I think from many passages in other parts of Scripture as well, that these are to be taken with both a spiritual application as to the mind and heart which turns away from God and destroys itself by idolatry and immorality and also with a literal fulfillment coming "Great day of the Lord." Scripture everywhere speaks of this coming time of trouble, "The Day of The Lord;" the day of the Lord's wrath; the day when he will settle his controversy with the nations, and it is impossible to read either the Old or New Testaments without running into this repeated theme. There is coming a day when God is going to settle accounts with all men, of course, the preaching of the "Grace of God." And God is a God of grace, but grace never sets aside the necessity of settling of the accounts of those who refuse to avail themselves of God's grace, and this is that time when among the nations God will bring forth his judgment.

One other passage from the Old Testament is in the prophecy of Jeremiah (back still further, Isaiah and the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Jeremiah you have a very vivid picture.

The prophet says in Jeremiah Chap 27:30:

You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: [This is God speaking] The Lord will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter his voice; he will roar mightily against his enemies, he will fold, and shout, like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth.

[Notice how many of these passages use the figure "treading out the winepress." This comes again in the Book of Revelation where the picture that God is, in a sense, like a man getting into a vat of grapes and treading out the grapes so the wine, the blood of the saints, and here you have it again, he will "shout like those who tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth."

The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations; he will enter into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked he will put to the sword, says the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, evil is going forth from nation to nation, and a great tempest is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth! [A great storm is forming] And those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be like chaff on the surface of the ground.

That seems to picture a terrible calamity which is so universal and widespread that virtually nobody is left to do the such a monstrous task to take care of the dead that they are simply left upon the surface of the ground.

This, of course, is a very sobering picture, and there are many biblical expositors who claim that all these were fulfilled judgments that came upon Israel in the days of the Babylonian invasion and that these poetic descriptions were all fulfilled. Others says, as I have suggested, that they are to be spiritually taken. But it is very interesting that when you come

Testament, which comes long after the Babylonian captivity and all the terrible times of Israel's troubles during the Maccabees, etc., and you come to the Olivet discourse recorded in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew where Jesus, before his betrayal, is on the Mount of Olives teaching his disciples, he reviews what is coming in history. It is one of the most fascinating passages in Scripture, and in my judgment, the most revealing of all the prophetic passages of the Bible. It is the so-called Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 and 25, and it comes at a time when our Lord is facing his own death, and yet he speaks with calmness and confidence, going to come and clearly predicts that he will emerge eventually the triumphant one on the face of the earth. As he goes on for centuries he describes what will take place in all the periods of time between his first appearing and his second coming. He speaks of false Christs who go out and wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famines and times of trouble which will precede these words in verse 21 where he speaks of the fulfillment of a passage of the prophet Daniel which is yet to be fulfilled on that day.

In Matthew 24:21 he says:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now and never will be. [Never will be. Worse time of trouble ever seen on earth. When you think of the terrible days of the Holocaust in Europe when 6,000,000 Jews were put to death, you can see how terrible time this must be since it is a worse time than that. Jesus says] And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved...

Isn't that amazing? Here is the prediction of the Lord himself that there is going to come a time when the population of the earth will be threatened, when the extinction of the race will be possible, and when unless God intervenes it will happen. He says in verse 22, "These days will be shortened." Who will shorten them? God himself. He alone has power to do that. Jesus said to his disciples in verse 23, "The Father had not been shortened." Who will shorten them? God himself. He alone has power to do that. Jesus said to his disciples in verse 24, "The Father had put them in his own power and he governs in the affairs of the earth."

...but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

We do not know how much shorter they are going to be made, but in mercy God is going to see to it that he does not destroy himself from the face of the earth. Now, that is a very remarkable passage.

I refer now to only one more out of many passages that deal with this issue, but in the Book of Revelation you have extensive passages that describe this terrible time of trouble, "The Great Tribulation," and I will share with you, at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. John, you remember, saw a book sealed with seven seals, and, as the Lamb took the book and opened them one-by-one, terrible events happened on earth. When he came to the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, he said these words.

Revelation 6:12:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree casts its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"

That is a very vivid summary of what is coming on the face of the earth.

One question, among others, which we have to ask is, "These judgments produced by man; are they nuclear forces unleashed in the nuclear age creating worldwide catastrophe among the nations or are they natural powers released by God, such as, in limited ways, have occurred on our planet, i.e., volcanic eruptions, great earthquakes, even perhaps the shifting of the continents? Most scientists agree there was a time when the continents drifted apart, still are drifting in fact, and that much of the movement of California is caused by one plate rubbing against another deep in the surface of the earth, and by the continents moving apart, creating a great ocean of molten rock, creating many of the earthquakes. Will this time of trouble be a time of natural disaster or will volcanic eruptions occur in widespread areas or when even meteors or stars fall upon the earth?

I think you see a combination of forces like that. It seems to me, in looking at these passages, that you have both produced by man and natural powers released by God. Man is allowed to work his worst upon himself through the terrible powers of nuclear fission and fusion which have been discovered and, perhaps, combined with that an invasion from outer space. I am not talking about Star Wars. I am talking about perhaps the near approach to our solar system of a visitor from space, a comet, a meteor, another planet about to come.

Whatever you may think of the discoveries of Immanuel Velikowski, the Russian scientist, who startled the scientific world in the earlier decades of this century with several books, one of which was "Worlds in Collision." He documented from many sources around the earth, that in the past there have occurred such near approaches of planetary bodies to the earth that have been attracted to the gravitation of earth and have created tremendous tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, up-thrusts of whole levels of land, and many ways on the face of the earth, and we may be coming to something like that again. There is a passage in Luke 21:26 that strongly suggests this. Luke says that "men's hearts shall fail them with fear" as they look at the things that are coming upon the earth.

to pass on the earth, at the waves and the seas roaring. It is highly suggestive of terrible natural disasters. So, I think I suggest that we have both of these forces at work.

I do not have time to go into all the passages that deal with the coming time of trouble. In a brief survey like this it is impossible to cover in detail all the Bible says will happen, so I am going to have to content myself with a quick trip through a Biblical scenario of the "Last Days." You will understand that I will not be able to take time to either answer all the questions or expound all the passages to the extent you may wish me to. I am also going to have to summarize a lot of things and use knowledge that you may or may not possess.

Clearly the Bible has said in the last days there will arise another figure, a remarkable figure in human history. Jesus gave the first clue to the nature of this individual in **Chapter 5** of John's gospel when he said to the Pharisees of his day, "I have come in my Father's name, and you received me not. Another will come in his own name and him you will receive." That suggestion was picked up by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Thessalonian church. He speaks in the second letter of a "Man of Sin" who will arise, a man of lawlessness who will exalt himself against the knowledge of God and sit in the temple claiming to be God.

This remarkable figure appears in many passages of Scripture under various names and guises, and it is only necessary to read these passages and compare them together to see emerging a portrait of a very powerful, influential, remarkable man who is referred to by various terms. The "Antichrist" is one term given to him. The "Man of Sin," Paul calls him. The "Beast" of Revelation 13 is a political ruler who is the incarnation of Satan on the earth and is described in that remarkable chapter. He has associated with him another individual called the "Second Beast" or the "False Prophet," a kind of religious surrogate of the first beast who activates on the power of the political ruler. He is called the "False Shepherd" in the prophecy of Zechariah, and by various other names designated throughout the Bible. But Jesus speaks of him, and all the apostles speak of him, and the prophets have predicted his coming one who will, in a sense, gather up in himself all the humanistic philosophies of earth and by them oppose the true God.

I am going to devote a whole evening to this man, so I will say no more about him now. We will be taking up the "Man of Sin" our next study together.

According to the Scriptures, this man, when he appears, will do some remarkable things. Probably the most remarkable thing the world is concerned, is that he will offer a solution to the present conflict between the Arab nations and Israel. He will resolve the tensions of the Middle East. You know how long people have been trying to do that, and how futile the effort has been. There has been progress here and there, two steps forward and three back. It has been very difficult. But here will come a brilliant man who will somehow resolve that conflict and bring peace to the Middle East. That will be one of his major accomplishments. He will permit the rebuilding of the temple on Mt. Zion in Israel. Lambert and I and others have been very closely associated with a group of Jews who are intent on rebuilding the temple. We know how far their plans and programs have progressed and how much yet to be done. It is not there yet, despite what you may hear, but there is a strong group within Israel which is intent on rebuilding the temple. They live, breathe and die for that purpose, and this will be accomplished under the covenant which this "Man of Sin" makes. He will rise, apparently, in connection with the Western Confederation of Nations. Those present nations which derive their foundation from nations which were part of the old Roman Empire. Several passages both in Daniel and Revelation substantiate that he will be the leader of the Western Confederation of Nations.

It is clearly evident from many Scriptures that, while we do not come to quite a one-world society, as many people are predicting today, there is a lessening of national authority in great confederations of nations, and the world seems to divide up into major camps. The Western world, which gives much of its authority and power to this single leader and thus is able to effect much of the current events all over the earth. And also there is a Northern confederation of nations headed by Russia. There is no doubt about that identification. It is clearly documented from the prophecy of Ezekiel. There are passages which refer to the northern powers of the earth, northern in relationship to Israel, which are dominated by Russia. And there is a group called the "Kings of the East." This seems to be a very loose confederation of eastern powers, probably including China and India, those nations in the eastern part of Asia. These three are the major camps of earth. It is interesting that the Bible has predicted that any of the, so called, southern nations, below the equator, or equatorial nations, would ever have much of an influence in the world of the "last days." History confirms that. No nation below the equator has had much of an influence on world events, all in the north and the division of the world confirms and conforms to the Biblical pattern in this regard.

Now I want to turn to a specific passage in the Book of Daniel. **Chapter 11** comes at the end of a very long series of predictions given to him by the angel Gabriel and which traced the course of prophetic events after Daniel's time, between what is called in the chapter, "The King of the North" [which happens to be Assyria, north of Israel, and includes the present nation of Syria and Iraq] and "The King of the South" which was the Ptolemaic nation of Egypt. Alexander the Great, you remember, had two generals, Seleucus and Ptolemy, who ruled in his kingdom when Alexander died. Seleucus developed the area north and Ptolemy took over Egypt and the nations south of it. "The King of the North," all the different personalities that occupied that throne, and the Egyptians were called "The King of the South." This passage details much of the conflict that would follow.

I would say that everything up to verse 36 of the chapter has already been fulfilled. This is one of the most remarkable in the Bible. If you want to see the accuracy of prophecy, get some books that will help you understand these clearly. They have already been fulfilled in history. They include predictions about Cleopatra who is a figure in one of the books of the Romans who come in and take over the land of Israel, and it brings up it right down to the time of the coming of the Messiah.

But beginning at verse 36, you come to the "last days," what is called here "The Time of the End." You will notice very clearly that. It says:

Daniel 11, verse 35:

And many shall join themselves to them with flattery; and some of those who are wise shall fall, to refine them and to cleanse them and to make them white, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed.

[That is a clue that you have skipped over, as prophetic passages often do, to the time of the end, and then you read this.]

And the king shall do according to his will.

The king here, if you will permit me to just summarize, is this "Man of Sin" or his false prophet. It is a little difficult to say which one of the two is actually the personage involved, but it is clearly the one whether it is the religious ruler (which I think is the prophet) who is actually in Jerusalem, but his power and authority are derived from the Western Confederation and the Eastern Confederation, the leader of that which is the "Man of Sin." Nevertheless he is located in Jerusalem.

The king shall do according to his will; he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods.

[That accords exactly with what Paul says in II Thessalonians that he shall enter and sit in the temple and exalt himself as God.]

He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished;

[That is the time of judgment which the prophet predicts, which would be 3-1/2 years according to this prophecy]

for what is determined shall be done. He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women;

[The gods of his fathers are very likely Jewish leaders and prophets and God himself, or to the one beloved by women which commentators take to be a reference to the Messiah]

he shall not give heed to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honor the god of the north in fortresses instead of the these; a god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver and precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god.

[There are two individuals involved, one who is kind of a religious ruler who is operating in the strength and power of another ruler who, apparently, depends for his influence upon his superior military might]

those who acknowledge him he shall magnify with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price. At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him;

[The king of the south throughout this whole account is the leaders and rulers of Egypt. They shall attack him, for reason. It does not say here]

but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships; and he [the king of the north] shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through.

This is the beginning of the end, as it were. There will come the political peaceful settlement of Israel, which is broken by this religious leader declaring himself to be God. This is unacceptable both to the Muslim world and to the Jewish world. They will not put up with that, and as a result he is under attack by the king of the south and the kings of the north. Here we have Ezekiel. In the 38 and 39 chapters, we have a very vivid and detailed picture of the kings of the north who come against Jerusalem in the last days. There the identification, as I have said, is clearly that of Russia and certain allied nations. Iran would be one of them. It does not come directly down to Jerusalem but seems to come through from this area which would be Afghanistan, Iran, etc. eventually coming in from the north into Jerusalem. He shall overflow many countries and shall pass through.

Daniel 11:41:

He shall come into the glorious land. [that is Palestine] And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand. Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites.

[This is the present country of Jordan. And for some reason, either because of an alliance or because they are not considered enemies, the northern hordes pass through and do not destroy Ammon, Moab and Edom]

He shall stretch out his hand against the countries and the land of Egypt shall not escape.

[So he moves right on down through to take over Egypt. The Russians, of course, have been very upset with Egypt every since Sadat ordered them out of the land, and there has been an uneasy alliance between them that has angered the Russians very much.]

He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things and spoil in this area; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow in his train.

[as allies. This is remarkable because these two countries today and now allied with Russia. Libya, of course, has horrified the world by its wooing of the communist philosophy and the Russian camp, and Ethiopia has become dominated by Russia and Somalia. The Sudan right below has been the source of a great struggle against the communist takeover.]

But tidings from the east and the north shall alarm him,

[Follow the scenario here. The king of the north come down with an overflowing army, moves in and captures Jerusalem. This is vividly described in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the prophecy of Zechariah, where he ravages the city, takes it over, captures the city, and then through captures Egypt and while he is here tidings from the east and the north trouble him. He is down in Egypt in Africa. When he would be back in the land of Israel, he shall go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many.]

What has happened? Well, remember there is a great western confederacy of nations which is opposed to the king of the north by a political ruler who is in league with the religious ruler who is seated in the temple in Jerusalem. Now he is not in his hands while all this takes place. If you think the Cuban missile threat was a terrible crisis we passed through during this is going to be like. The whole world sees a tremendous invasion of this land and knows that the only ones who have the possibility of stopping this invasion are the west. They, therefore, act and send an army down and, according to the Revelation, the kings of east also come in.

These combined forces can only land at one major port in Israel. It is the port of Haifa which is located at the foot of Mount Lebanon where the only bay capable of handling any sizable armada of ships is located. Haifa is also the opening to a plain and runs back southeast to the Plain of Esdraelon, also called the Plain of Jezreel. In the center of it is a small hill called Megiddo. Therefore, the whole region has been given the name "Valley of Armageddon." You have all heard of Armageddon, it is the landing of the western powers in this area along with the trouble from the east coming in, "the east and the west of trouble," which provokes the Russian invader to go forth to destroy. At this point there doesn't seem to be any indication of a nuclear attack. It would appear that, up to this point, conventional weapons are used. But notice what happens next.

Daniel 11, verse 45a:

And he shall pitch his palatial tents, his headquarters, between the sea [the Mediterranean] and the glorious holy mountain; [which can be none other than Jerusalem]

The northern forces come back up and pitch their headquarters down on the mountain southwest of Jerusalem right in the area you remember is Tekoa and the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and in this area God says he summons the nations that he mentions there.

Daniel 11, verse 45:

And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.

Now turn back to Ezekiel where we get a little further detail of this in the 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> chapters. I will not read the whole thing but will summarize these for you. It begins with the word addressed through the prophet.

Ezekiel chapter 38, verse 2:

Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

The word "chief" of chief prince is the word Rosh, and many translators translate this instead of the "chief prince," "the Rosh" and Meshech and Tubal. You can read the evidence and there is documentation for that, but there is little doubt that "Rosh" is the word from which "Russia" is derived, so these are clearly identified. According to this word the Lord says

Ezekiel chapter 38, verse 3b:

Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh of Meshech and Tubal; and I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you forth [Notice who does this. God summons and bring] all your army, horses and horseman, all of them clothed in full armor, a great company, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. Pers [Iran] Cush [Ethiopia], and Put [Libya] are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer [Germany] and all his hordes. Bethogarmah from the uttermost parts of the north [those would be the satellite countries around Romania, Hungary, the Balkans, etc.] with all his hordes—many peoples are with you. Be ready and keep ready, you and all the hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them

After many days you will be mustered; in the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land where people were gathered from many nations upon the mountains of Israel, which had been continual waste;...You will advance, coming on like a storm, you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.

Well what happens. Look on:

Ezekiel chapter 38, verse 18:

But on that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord God, my wrath will be roused. For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel;

[This is a great earthquake. Remember in Revelation 6 it said there would be a great earthquake]

the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. I will summon every kind of terror against Gog, says the Lord God, every man's sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain upon him and his hordes and many people that are with him, torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone.

As I have suggested this seems to be a combination of both supernatural, or natural, forces and human forces. Without easily be a description of a nuclear attack upon this great army that is gathered here on the mountains of Israel. The using nuclear warheads against him would explain the fire and the brimstone and the sulphur, etc. that will fall upon

But you also have reference to torrential rains and hailstones. Now those hailstones are described in the book of Revelation weighing hundreds of pounds. From time to time, even here in America, there fall from the sky great ice stones weighing hundreds of pounds. For years, every time they appear, I have been clipping from newspapers little items, page after page, about the falling from the sky of a tremendous huge piece of ice usually weighing 300 or 400 pounds. Where do these come from? The best scientific guess is that somehow they are coming from debris of space, the death of a star or a planet. Scientists say the tail is made up of ice. The rings of Saturn are ice. The rings of some of the other planets that are now being discovered are made of ice. Occasionally the earth passes through where some of this debris falls upon earth. You never read about it in the news there. This would suggest, therefore, that some natural calamity occurs as well. The near approach to our solar system of a heavenly body that has in its tail great chunks of ice which will fall upon the earth in great hailstones. Torrential downpours mingled with a nuclear attack utterly destroys the northern army as this account goes on to say.

Ezekiel chapter 38, verse 23:

So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Chapter 39, verse 5:

You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, says the Lord God. I will send fire on Magog

[Where is that? That is the land from which Gog comes. That is what the opening verse of Chapter 38 say. The land of Magog is the land of Russia and this seems to suggest a nuclear attack against Russia, the very headquarters of the nation. Now we can hardly believe that this will occur without some retaliation for the west. So, here you have the coming nuclear confrontation that this book "The Fate of the Earth" is so fearful of seeing come to pass.]

and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands;

[Where that is it is hard to say. Areas around the oceans of the earth]

...and they shall know that I am the Lord.



It is a very impressive display both of divine wrath and of human wrath, and the result is a terrible time of destruction as it goes on to describe, in men having to bury the dead for months afterwards. It is a peculiar way of doing it. The when they find a body. They do not touch it. It is probably very radioactive and they simply indicate that it is there. P squads come by later and bury it. It takes months to cleanse the land.

But this ends the Russian threat. Well, then what? What about all these powers of the West and of the East that have Valley of Armageddon? Here we have to turn to Revelation for one final passage in the Revelation where we read of the coming of these great powers together, John sees a remarkable thing.

Revelation chapter 19, verse 11:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven: "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army.

The destruction, you see, of the northern forces tells the world that their battle is not against man ultimately but against the pride and arrogance of the fallen human heart they believe they have a chance to overcome the powers of God, an invasion from space, or whatever, but they think they have opportunity to destroy God himself.

And what happens:

Revelation chapter 19, verse 20:

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth;

[What is that? The Word of God] and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

I won't take time to go further now, but it is clear that the final battle is won by the coming of the Lord himself, the Christ in glory. We will get into more detail of that in subsequent lectures, but that is enough, I think, to let us see indeed coming a terrible time of trouble on the earth. There is no doubt about it. It could be now. Never has there been world conditions are as close to these events as they are now. Or it could fade back again. We must not forget that. close to the end many times before and God, in mercy, has turned off the spigots of destruction and we have faded back into a time of peace. It may happen again. No one can say. The fact that it is close now does not necessarily mean that it is also very possible that it will.

What it does is raise the question for every human being on the earth who knows about this to face this question, "What treasure?" Jesus told us we were to lay up treasures not on earth where men can break in and destroy, but treasures in heaven neither moth nor rust does corrupt and thieves do not break in to steal. I am not talking about what do you do with your treasures in heaven are laid up by the evidence of faith, by the works of faith, i.e., by you being what God wants you to be in the situations in which you find yourself. It is not a question of whether you are in the ministry or not in the ministry. It is interpreted that way.

It is not a question of what kind of work are you doing. It is what kind of a person are you at that place? What kind of person are you in your family? Are you one of hope and faith and love? Or one of self-centeredness and concern for yourself only and advancement? Those are the issues of life. And if you are only concerned about amassing wealth and getting comforts and pleasures etc., we are building for ruin, for ultimate disaster. All these treasures of earth shall be wiped out in a nuclear holocaust and only that, you see, which represents the work of the Spirit in us, and the deeds and reactions of our life which are being preserved in glory and can only come, of course, from a heart that is truly God's, and through whom the Spirit is working. You cannot put this on. You cannot fool God. You cannot pretend to be godly and expect it to hold up at the end of the going to be subject to an evaluation which cannot be deceived. The question, therefore, that we are to ask in times like

asks it, if you read his second epistle. He says, "What manner, therefore, of persons ought we to be?" That is the question with you tonight.

Note: Let me outline what I am going to do in these next three studies. Next we will take "The Coming Man of Sin," that "The Coming King of kings." There I want to deal with the church and its relation to this period of trouble. The lesson on "The Coming New Earth," and what it will be like.

In answer to a question from the audience, The Jews have to get some kind of permission first before they can get up on the Temple Mount. At the present time the Temple Mount is under the control of the Arabs. Jews are not even permitted to go up there, which they bitterly resent and constantly protest. It seems very likely to me that soon they will probably obtain access to the mount. Certainly under the arrangement of the "Man of Sin" they will be given permission to rebuild the temple. The plans are being laid, the blueprints are being drawn, the site of it is being established and funds are being raised worldwide to rebuild it. So, it is on the way. There is a good deal of debate as to actually where the ancient temple was located. A very thoughtful Jewish archaeologist named Asher Kaufmann, whom we know, has explored in that area and has decided, to his own satisfaction, at least, that the temple was not built at the site of the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim mosque that is there, but rather at a site that is now that in an area that has no building on it at all at this time. So it is possible, that being accepted by the Jewish leadership, a temple could be built without destroying the Dome of the Rock. The "Western Wall" was never part of the temple building. It was part of the foundation ground upon which the temple rested, but it was never part of the building itself. "The Man of Sin."

---

# The Coming Man of Sin

Message #2 in a series of 4 on Bible Prophecy

by Ray C. Stedman

---

Last week we looked at the biblical teaching concerning the coming time of trouble we are facing in this world; various prophecies from both the Old and the New Testaments which taken together form a composite picture of what Jesus called "The Tribulation,"

"a time of trouble such as never has been in the history of the world and never will be again."

Those words are very dramatic in their possibilities and we tried to take a look at what the Scripture calls them. Jeremiah calls them, "The time of Jacob's trouble," which highlights the fact that this will be an especially serious time for the Jews for Israel as a nation. We are all aware, of course, of the terrible injustice and awful slaughter that the Jews went through in the Holocaust, the like of which has probably never been seen on earth before. Yet judging from the record of Scripture that lies ahead for Israel is even worse than that. A time anti-Semitic spirit will be manifest in the whole world. Perhaps the rising anti-Semitism of our day is indicative of the approach of this time when Jews will be hated of all nations, not themselves but because they are the chosen people of God.

In the book of Revelation this time of trouble is called "The harvest of the earth." It is the time when God is going to judge the injustices, the wickedness of men. I am often amazed at the patience of God when you think of how many times he has been blasphemed, his ideas laughed at, his own person and power scorned and mocked and set aside, his values ignored and his plans totally ignored as well. It is amazing, when you think God has been as patient as he has and has allowed human existence to continue. But the Scripture has always promised that there is coming a day of recompense; a day when God will at last avenge the injustices that man has perpetrated upon him. This is the nature of the great time of trouble that is coming.

Tonight we are going to take a look at one of the strange personages that appears on earth during this time of trouble known as the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, or the Man of Lawlessness. Actually it is strange that this individual ever got the name "The Antichrist" because there is no one place in Scripture where an individual is referred to or prophesied under that name. The use of the term is found in the epistles of John. In I & II John reference is made to "many antichrists." Nevertheless the focus is upon a very remarkable person who is to appear to whom that title has been given, and we will refer to him as the Antichrist. You know, it has been the practice of Christian believers for centuries to pick out some person in their own day they thought was the Antichrist. If you look back over the scope of almost 2,000 years of Christian history you can find a great number of people who have been proposed as the Antichrist. Early in this era Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Muhammad the prophet were all regarded as fulfilling the prophecies of the Antichrist. Later on in the Protestant churches of the Reformation it was very popular to regard the Pope as the Antichrist, and many people, still today, regard the Pope and the papacy as the fulfillment of these prophecies of the coming "Man of Sin." I remember back in World War II, it was very common to hear that Hitler was the Antichrist and that he was fulfilling the prophecies. Today you can buy a lot of books on prophecy very cheaply that picked out men like that and labeled them as definitely the Antichrist. Since that time there have been men like Kissinger and Khrushchev. I once saw a book in which Eleanor Roosevelt had been named as the Antichrist. We don't want to be sexist in these areas. All of these figures have passed away, and it should serve as a warning to us against trying to identify any one individual living today as the Antichrist. We will only contribute to the list of dead men who have passed from the scene of history.

What we do want to do tonight is take a careful look at what the Scriptures say about this amazing figure. Though we live in a world which we live, the stage where the great "end times" drama is going to be worked out is clearly in the Scriptures, and the antagonists are behind the scenes. We'll never understand the Bible, nor will we understand history, until we see the fulfillment since the very appearance of mankind on it, has been the scene of a great battle. Earth is the battlefield, and all those who live on this earth are born into battle conditions. This is the Biblical and Christian explanation for the fact that life does not go the way we would like it to go. Man has many dreams for peace on earth. Individually, collectively, as nations, there has long been in the human mind a picture of a beautiful earth filled with peace, harmony, righteousness, gladness and joy. Everybody longs for it. Everybody hopes for it. When I was just a young man a popular song of the day spoke of a young married couple building a nest. The words said something like this, "We'll build a sweet little nest, somewhere in the West, and let the rest of the world be damned." It has been the hope and dream of many people. A decade ago a whole generation of young people tried to drop out and

blissful utopia by going out into nature, into the woods, into the parks and the flower children appeared. Yet that ex-  
apart. The dream faded, disillusionment set in and today you find very few left who still hope that kind of fulfillment c-

The reason, of course, is that the earth is engaged in a battle, a tremendous conflict between cosmic powers which a-  
any human forces and which have been engaged in a life and death struggle during the whole scope and sweep of hun-  
not mean to imply by that that the Devil, who represents the evil side of those cosmic forces, is a kind of god on th-  
himself. The great personages of this drama are, on the one side, the Son of God himself, the Lord Jesus ascended int-  
seated on the throne of his Father and waiting, as the Scriptures tell us, until the earth be brought into subjection,  
he seated in the heavens but, as he himself told us, by means of the Spirit, who can be everywhere at once, he also  
among the nations, present in his church, and in this strange and mysterious way God is carrying on an eternal confl-  
Associated, of course, with the Son is the Father. The Son of God appears in many titles and descriptions in the Scrip-  
one who Daniel described as "The Son of Man" comes to the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdoms of the earth fro-  
is the one whom David described as God's Son whom he "sets as his king on his Holy Hill of Zion." All these Old Test-  
prophets spoke of him. He is the "Angel of the Lord" that Moses described in the books of Genesis and Exodus, etc. He  
whom John the Revelator saw as the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world," the only one who has authorit-  
seven sealed book of the last times and bring to pass the consummation of the history of the world.

When you read the Bible you get a look behind the scenes, and you see the explanation, very relevant, very real, of wh-  
in this life. Idealist, liberals, naive people of various sorts try to forget all that or write it off as though it does not  
harsh realities of history tell us that this is what happens. Mankind cannot work out his problems because we are en-  
battle between these opposing forces.

In the other corner is Satan, the great Dragon, in his character as a deceiver, as a destroyer. He is the one who loves  
and destroy it in any possible way. He is the one behind the widespread traffic in drugs to destroy the mind. He is the  
widespread illicit practice of sexual wrongs to destroy the body and destroy the whole beauty that God intended in se-  
one behind every murder, every accident. Every taking of human life by violent form that occurs in the world is the re-  
activity of the Great Destroyer that is loose among us. We will never understand our lives until we understand that. I  
is behind all the deceitful secular illusions of our day, the propaganda concerning how to look at yourself and how to  
is beamed at us constantly from the propaganda mills of the media around us. We must understand this if we are go-  
life at all. He is the one who Moses spoke of as the "Serpent" in the Garden of Eden, the deceiver, "more subtle than  
the field," subtly setting forth his lies before the human race. He is the one who appears in Revelation as the Great R-  
tail draws the stars, the angels, the angelic hosts into collaboration with him and whose power shakes the earth wh-  
of heaven and cast down into the earth knowing that his time is short. I just survey all this that we might catch the  
concerning the opposing forces of earth.

As we learn from Scripture, God himself exists in threefold unity. There is not just a single God, but there is one God  
threefold unity of being. I am not going to preach upon the Trinity tonight or try to explain it. It is a difficult concep-  
we know that this is the nature of God.

If it is the nature of God, it makes sense that Satan in his attempt to deceive the race, as Jesus said "a murderer, a li-  
would also try to appear historically in a triune form. This is what you have in the book of Revelation with the appea-  
Great Red Dragon who is specifically called "Satan" that old serpent the devil, who raises into being two remarkable b-  
beasts constitute, with the Great Red Dragon, a satanic trinity. Satan in the counterpart of the Father. Just as the F-  
of all good, the source of love, the source of life, so the Great Dragon becomes the power behind all evil in the univer-  
source of all lies and deceits and delusions among men. The Son is the visible focus of the life and the truth of God. V-  
among us John declares "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." Th-  
God. As the Son is the visible focus of all that is in the fullness of the Godhead so the Beast out of the Sea which w-  
Revelation 13 becomes the focus and center of all the power of evil in the earth. Just as the Holy Spirit becomes th-  
history to the reality of the Father and the Son, making these two invisible personages (to us now) visible, real, not  
eyesight, of course, but visible to our inner eye. So, there is a second beast in Revelation 13 who is called The False  
witness to the reality of the great Red Dragon and of the first beast that rises from the sea.

The question that many have ask in reading the book of Revelation is "Which of these two beasts described in Revela-  
Antichrist?" Some say that the first beast that seems to exercise political power over a great part of the earth, the g-  
of the western world, the one who rules over the nations and seems to be able to consolidate the nations into one c-  
their power to him, some say he is the Antichrist. You can read commentators that take that position. There are oth-  
is the second beast that is the Antichrist." This is the religious ruler. This is the one who is concerned about religiou-  
propagates a false faith throughout the world. He enthrones himself, at last, in the temple to be worshipped as God.  
the Antichrist.

In viewing the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of John and the first intimation you have in the gospels of the coming of an Antichrist from Lord Jesus, one might judge that perhaps the second personage is the Antichrist. Remember Jesus said to the Pharisees in John Chapter 5, verse 43, "I have come in my Father's name and you received me not. Another will come in his own name whom you will receive." That has often been taken to refer to that religious person who seems to confuse and deceive all the earth and especially the Jews as to who he is, what his role is in history. Yet from Paul's letter in II Thessalonians, we also look at tonight in more detail, one would judge that perhaps the Antichrist is the political ruler whom Paul calls "the Lawless One," who opposes and exalts himself and who causes people to believe a great delusion. One would think that we refer then to the first beast who rises from the sea, the political leader of the last days.

You have the same problem in the Old Testament when you read the vision of Daniel, for instance, with those strange beasts that he sees. Isn't it interesting that when you get the Divine viewpoint of "nations" they are always called "beasts"? Nebuchadnezzar had a great dream in which he saw the nations of the world, including his own, and he saw it as a great image with several divisions made of different metals, gold and silver and brass, etc. That is man's view of man, but when God shows him he sees snarling, angry, fighting, rapacious beasts who are ready to leap at one another's throats. I leave it to you, judge for yourself, which view is right. When you read the papers you can see this is the way the nations appear.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Daniel, you have a vision of a great kingdom, the fourth kingdom on earth, which seems to begin in Daniel's day. It is identified clearly as the Roman empire that is to come into existence and into world supremacy in the first or just a little before that time. It will rule the earth in the first and second century and into the fourth and fifth centuries. The fourth beast would be, in some sense, the last great world kingdom to appear on earth. A little horn would arise on the fourth beast and would exercise tremendous political power. Many have read that, and identified that, as the Antichrist. On the other hand, in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Daniel, there is another figure called the "Willful King" who exalts himself against God and claims to take to himself the titles of God. This seems to be a religious figure and many identify him as the Antichrist.

I think the best answer to the question is given by John in his epistle. If you will look with me at chapter 1, verse 2 of the use of the term antichrist as it appears first in the Scriptures.

I John, chapter 2, verse 18:

"Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour."

This is one of several verses indicating we have been living in what might be called "the last hour," (it is called that hour at the first coming of our Lord, that indeed all of history in these 2,000 years of the church age is part of that last hour, we are told, there have been many antichrists. Many had already come when John wrote these words about the first century, and he says still there is coming "an antichrist."

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of John he refers to this again in verse 7.

II John, verse 7:

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

"Many deceivers have gone out," so there is a spirit of antichrist which appears throughout the whole of this age and will culminate in at least one, or more, personages who properly can be called Antichrist.

When you look at the Greek language in that term "antichrist," you discover that the prefix anti means both against and instead of, i.e., anyone who is against Christ is an antichrist. Also Jesus spoke himself of certain false prophets and christs who were pseudo-christs. Those are coming not against Christ so much as instead of Christ, so the idea contains clearly those who believe, therefore, that we can call either of the two beasts of Revelation 13 the Antichrist. The Scriptures tell us that they are together. One gives its power to the other. They are in cahoots to accomplish their purposes. I believe, therefore, that we refer to either of them as the Antichrist. They combine to be both against and instead of Christ. The political ruler is against Christ. The religious ruler is instead of Christ.

Now let's turn to Revelation 13 and see if we can trace through some of these patterns. As I said, I have chosen this book because it comes at the end of Scripture and gathers together many themes which appear in Daniel, in the Minor Prophets, Zechariah, and the words of Jesus in Matthew, etc. They all come together here in the great Union Station, the book of Revelation. Dr. Scofield often called this the "Union Station" because it is like a station in which trains from all parts of the country come together. I think of it as a great airport, if you like, where all these planes of thought fly in and come together in this closing book.

Now let's look at chapter 13 where we see John, after having seen in chapter 12 the Great Red Dragon who is identified as the Antichrist, who pursues and persecutes the man child who is born of the woman who is clearly Israel in this passage [chapter 12, verse 17].

caught up to God. It is clearly a picture of the Lord Jesus as he was caught up to God, and the woman is then pursued by a serpent and she hides herself in the wilderness.

Revelation, chapter 13, verse 1:

"And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads."

In chapter 12 the Great Red Dragon is described in verse three as having seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems. It is almost the same beast. The only difference is there are seven crowns in chapter 12 and ten crowns in chapter 13. Commentators, who take this in any literal sense whatsoever, agree that the dragon, who is clearly named to be Satan (a seven-headed beast with ten horns), gives his power to an earthly kingdom, the beast that rises out of the sea. (If you have not read out yourself), which corresponds very carefully with the fourth beast of Daniel's seventh chapter. The final beast, which begins with the Roman Empire of history, and in some remarkable way vanishes for awhile and then reappears in history.

You have this figured here in Revelation chapter 13, verse 2 which says

"And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth."

And comparing the beasts which Daniel saw; The first three beasts were, a leopard, a lion and a bear, and all of them were the last strange indescribable beast that Daniel saw, so you have an identification with it here.

Revelation 13, verse 2b:

"And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder."

The wounding of the head and the healing again has been taken by some commentators to mean that some great power will actually be put to death and then come to life again. However, I do not think it is necessary at all to read this that was here was in Daniel's chapter clearly an empire, and I think it is still an empire as it raises here. The figure of a wound and healing is the figurative way of describing what has happened to the Roman Empire. One of the remarkable things about that the Roman Empire has persisted in the history of the western nations in a very remarkable way. When we think of a nation, for instance, we have to face the very clear fact that America is very Roman. We have a Senate, just like the Roman. We got the very name from the Roman Empire. We have laws that are derived from the laws of Rome, which were produced in the days of the power of the Roman Empire. Our court system is Roman. Our very national emblem is Roman. The Roman eagle is known all over the world of that day, and the American eagle is similarly known in our world today. Not only is the United States Roman in many ways, just a few of which I have just traced, but every single nation in the western hemisphere includes a Roman strain, derived from nations which were part of the Roman Empire. That is a most remarkable phenomenon. There is no other nation of the world with that kind of record. Ordinarily the native peoples of this hemisphere would have formed their own kingdoms or empires of their own that persisted to the present day, and if you read back in ancient American history you know there were some remarkable empires here. The Aztec empire in Mexico, the Inca empire in Peru, the Mayan empire in Central America were all remarkable civilizations with advanced technology and every reason and right to survive into modern times, but none of them has survived. Everyone of them has disappeared. In their place has come an invasion from the west of Europe that has been reproduced in the Western Hemisphere. So, we have clearly a Roman strain running through all the western world.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Revelation, you find a little further information about this beast, and in verse 8, after the woman, who represents false religions, seated upon this beast, the beast is described further.

Revelation chapter 17, verse 8:

"The beast that you saw was, in John's day, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This is the beast that identifies it with the city of Rome, historically known as the seven hills or seven kings [or kingdoms], five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while."

I think this is a very significant statement. Here we learn about this strange beast consisting of these seven kings, or empires. Historically this seems to be not just a certain kingdom but a form of government that is in view. It is most interesting when John wrote this book at the close of the first century, around 100 AD, the nation of Rome had already passed from a republic to a form of government. I won't list them for you, but the republic was one, the principate was another, etc., five distinct forms

"one is, five had passed away," John is told. "One is," another form of government existed which at that time was the the emperors of Rome. Then there was yet one more which was to come, and, when it came, it would last only a lit question then is raised, "When did the Roman Empire, the imperial form of Roman government, end?" And the amazing 1917. The proof of that is in the world "Caesar." Caesar was the name of the Roman emperors. So, when did the Ca according to history, they maintained themselves in power in the city of Rome<sup>th</sup> until about the 5<sup>th</sup> center of empire shifted from Rome to Constantinople, what we now call Istanbul, on the Bosphorus between the Black Sea and the Ae

land for a price, etc. He appears in many Scriptures in this way, he takes all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. He works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all. What does that sound like? Nuclear warfare, fire descending from the heavens, the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was slain by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

There is a strange image which seems to accord with the words of both Daniel and Jesus himself when they speak of "the image of desolation." An abomination is an image worshipped as God. That was always the case throughout the Old Testament. The Israelites worshipped images they were called abominations, and this is an abomination which when it is worshipped makes the land desolate, a destroying image. Our Lord spoke of this as the indication of the beginning of the Great Tribulation. "When the Lord says, 'the abomination which makes desolate standing in the Holy Place,' in the temple in Jerusalem, the rebuilt temple, 'shall be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, no, nor ever shall be.'"

Here we come back to it. Revelation, chapter 13, verse 16:

"Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom. We are warned several times to think penetratingly and carefully about what is being said here, that he who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six."

That is probably the most famous number in the world. Everybody is guessing what it means. Today you hear many of us are already various systems, economic supply systems, banking cards, etc., that incorporate the number 666, and one of us are going to be branded either on the forehead or on the back of the hand with an invisible number. You simply hold up a light which will read it and thus you are given the privilege of either buying food or not. That may be true. I don't know, but certainly is an indication of some strange economic control in the last days, and it may take this form. It is difficult to say we have not come to that yet, and every time you see 666, do not jump to the conclusion that the Antichrist is here. The number seems to indicate the quintessence of humanity. Six is the number of man. Just as seven is the number of God.

manifestation. Here 3 individuals here making a trinity of evil indicates man in his first test of manifestation. I don't want to go that far at this point.



What I want you to see is in verses 11 & 12 where we are told that because of the revelation of the Man of Sin and deceive, God sends upon men a "strong delusion," literally "the working of delusion." It suggests a continual barrage of that widely misleads people on the earth and causes them to believe THE lie. Now what lie? What is the falsehood that is perpetuated on this earth century after century after century. It began in the very Garden of Eden and has been THE lie. You will find a reference to it in the book of Romans, chapter 1, where Paul speaks of the wrath of God being revealed from the reaction of certain individuals. In verse 24 he says:

Romans, chapter 1, verse 24:

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. If you lie, as mine does, "a lie," that is wrong. There is a definite article there. It is the lie. What is it? It is the lie that man worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

That is the lie, to worship and serve creatures, namely man himself, rather than the Creator. This clearly indicates, in I Thessalonians, that the religion of the Antichrist is Humanism, the worship of man, the exaltation of man.

Now, let me gather up the characteristics of Humanism as it appears in various prophetic Scriptures. Humanism, of course, is self-sufficient. He does not need God. He has no room for him. Therefore, man himself is his only hope for deliverance from trouble that he may encounter. In many, many books and on every side today, you will find this lie. Take classes in a school such as Stanford, or any great university today. You will find the idea that man is his own god and adequate and sufficient to solve all his problems as the most widespread underlying philosophy taught today. Man is deserving of the very best and is able to achieve it on his own efforts. This is the lie of Humanism. You find it coming at you continually all day long, as I have often pointed out on television commercials you are fed this, aren't you? You deserve the best. You ought to buy this product or get this trip because you deserve it. You've got it coming to you. The one thing that philosophy will do is totally eliminate gratitude. You are only getting what you deserve, you can't be grateful for it, can you? You are only angry because you didn't get it. Gratitude and thankfulness are the only proper stance of a dependent creature before a gracious Creator. Everything is a gift from God. This is why everywhere in Scripture the counterpart to Humanism is the development of a thankful spirit, every blessing is from God's hands. The more you give thanks, the more you glorify God. That is what he tells us. The counterpart to Humanism is to assume that because you are such a wonderful creature, you deserve the best, and the best is none too good.

Humanism, therefore, treats God as irrelevant. In the book I referred to last week, "The Fate of the Earth," which deals with the problem of the nuclear threat in our day, it is very evident to anyone who reads it that God is expected to play no part in the unfolding events of our day. If he exists at all, which the writer never fully concedes, he is a distant God, sitting on distant Mt. Olympus hardly caring what goes on with poor struggling mortals down here, playing no part whatsoever in the lives of men and with no control over human history. That is the religion of Humanism and one that you are going to hear more of as the darkness of our age deepens. Furthermore, according to this, Humanism relies upon force and upon power to accomplish its ends. The net result of that is persecution of all who do not conform, unto death if need be. Force becomes the process of Humanism. Humanism involves, therefore, economic control of all of life. Today we are seeing a rapidly increasing thrust toward totalitarian national sovereignties and the rise of a world government including pressure to drop our national distinctives, even in the area of language and of measurements. We must all adopt the metric system. There is no room for differences of money systems or measurement systems. Languages are beginning to disappear. More and more a few languages are taking over the communications of earth. There is an increasing pressure for an international banking system to control the monetary funds of all nations upon the earth. This is what is in our day and will increase.

Humanism, of course, points to man and describes him as loving, kind, considerate and desiring the benefit and welfare of all. In practice, however, he becomes cruel, heartless and vicious, carrying out his judgments regardless of what any individual or individuals, may feel.

Of course, the supreme manifestation of the humanistic spirit is to despise the message of the cross, to hate the person of Jesus, and especially the message of his death. Jesus himself said to the Jews, remember, "The world cannot love me because you are of the world, but the world hates me because I testify of it that its deeds are evil." The message of the cross is a universal declaration of the worthlessness of fallen man. He cannot be bettered. He cannot be redeemed. He cannot be educated into value or worth. He must be eliminated, which is what the cross does, without destroying the world. In its place appears a new man, a new creature. That message is increasingly going to be hated. You will find it infiltrating many so-called Christian messages today. If you want to be alert for the infiltration of a humanistic message into preaching, listen for the message that does not bother to deal with, or to present the dealing of God with, the reality of human sin. The cross, invites people to believe in themselves, and to believe that God loves them without any conversion or any effort on their part. It invites them to trust in the goodness of God and to accept themselves before God without ever passing through the judgment of the cross. That is the mark of the humanist faith.

I believe we are getting very close to that. I have to tell you that, as I view our age and the deepening darkness around us, it is very difficult for me to conceive that we can make it to the end of this century without the appearance of Jesus Christ. I hasten to add I may be wrong. No one ever can say when Jesus Christ is coming until he comes. It may be God, in his mercy, will yet cause all this tremendous upsurge, seeming to coalesce so remarkably, to fade back again and allow a new age of peace and exploration, etc., to again develop on earth. I don't know. It seems impossible to me, but it could happen. But, in the meantime, the age, as it certainly could be and increasingly appears to be, then the great question for each of us is again what is important to you? "Where is your treasure? What is important to you?" James 4:4 says, "If any man loves the world, he makes himself an enemy of God." and if you are going to have an enemy, for goodness sakes don't let it be God, because he cannot be thwarted.

What a basis this gives us to speak of the gospel to men and women everywhere. As fear increasingly grips human hearts, as it spreads widely at the failure of man to accomplish the great dreams that he is continually having, as the terrible weapons increase in the arsenals of the nations, as pollution and corruption spread widely around the earth and people's hearts are trembling with fear in looking at the things coming on earth, what an hour this is to declare the mercy and the grace of Jesus Christ there is a new humanity being formed.

Well, that is it. You have been very patient and I appreciate it. We will close in prayer.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this look at the remarkable events of history predicted by this book so long ago. It is hard for us to believe, Lord, the accuracy with which these ancient prophets saw into the future and saw the events that seem to be taking place now. Lord, we thank you that we know you. What a sanctuary you are for your people. What a refuge in time of trouble, and we see these things coming to pass that we may lift up our heads and rejoice for our redemption draws nigh, but more than that, if we share it with those who are troubled and hopeless and distressed in the earth today, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

---

# The Coming King of Kings

Message #3 in a series of 4 on Bible Prophecy

by Ray C. Stedman

---

Last week we looked at a great group of passages that set forth the coming of what the apostle Paul calls "The Man of Sin." He is the epitome of all the wide spread philosophy of a lost humanity that man is his own god and capable of working out the problems of earth. I want to spend our time this evening on a discussion and a look together at that set forth the answer to the man of sin, the "Son of man" who is coming again to earth.

I would like to begin by reading to you a couple of brief paragraphs from a little book I ran across the other day. It dealt with the subject of the last days, and in it is found this paragraph:

It is not only the Marxists who think man needs remaking, but also the scientists of the West who propose to turn man into a being with an unpredictable will and an unmanageable conscience into a robot or a marionette, a compliant human vegetable. The course of these trends is completely predictable. Without realizing it, and certainly without desiring it, man in his incredible blindness has begun to tip the delicate balance of life. Like a drunk in a canoe, he has thrown his weight around with gay abandon and, in a drunken joy, he cannot see how much water has already been shipped, and that one more violent lurch is sufficient to take him to the bottom.

The apostle Peter tells us that once before in the history of the world this has happened. There was a time when man, in his pride, boasting of the civilization which he had built, quite unwittingly tripped the lever which held the world of his day in balance. Before he knew what had happened, the clouds began to gather, the sky to darken, the heavens poured down floods, the earth heaved, the seas raised and swept across the mountain tops in monstrous waves, and all the world of man perished except the souls who were safely preserved in an ark.

Once again, Jesus suggests, man in his clever insanity will go too far. The sign of it will be a world gone mad with self confidence, permitting and even encouraging its leaders to state publicly what almost everyone secretly believes; that there is no real god but his own god and he does not need any other. Then the deadly lever will be tripped by man's own hand, the dark forces of nature will be released, the seals of nuclear power will be removed, the trumpets of human cruelty will sound out, and the vials of a demonic wrath will be poured out upon the earth. It is all described in detail in the book of Revelation.

I'm reading from a little book called "What on Earth's Going to Happen" by an unknown writer [ed: Ray Stedman], and I'll read it to you for your further reading.

Now, let's go back to the section of Scripture that we were concerned about a bit last week, the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. In the second chapter of the second letter, the apostle is dealing with a misconception which these Thessalonians held about how they were related to the coming time of trouble on the earth, the predicted "Day of the Lord," which is described in terrible terminology. Certain false teachers evidently had come among them and had taught them that that was the midst of that tribulation. They were going through persecution, as Paul himself and his companions had experienced in the city. These believers, too, were being hounded and driven about and persecuted by Roman authorities. Evidently someone coming to them had told them this was the fulfillment of "The Day of the Lord." So they had written to the Apostle Paul and he is writing this letter now to correct that misapprehension. We read some of this chapter last week. I am only going to read a few verses within the chapter which deal specifically with how the "Man of Sin," the predicted Anti-Christ, described in Matthew 24, will finally meet his end. This is Paul's word about it in verse 7.

II Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 7:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe [THEY] what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It is clear from this brief reference that the answer to the "Man of Sin" and the coming reign of lawless terror culminated in Jesus described as "The great tribulation which shall be a time of trouble such as never has been seen on earth before again" is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The hope of earth is in the return of Jesus Christ.

Both Testaments confirm this very strongly. There are very few truths which are strongly emphasized in both the Old and the New Testament. Only those that are basic to the very program of God and fundamental to the understanding of the Bible are clearly emphasized in both Testaments, but this is one of them.

If you are familiar with the book of Daniel, you will remember Daniel had a great vision in which he saw the Ancient of Days on his throne in the heavens and hundreds of thousands of angels gathered before him. It is very much like John saw in the book of Revelation and as Ezekiel describes in some of his great visions and as Isaiah saw when he saw the Lord "up and his train filled the whole temple." In the great vision of Daniel's he saw one whom he calls "The Son of man" who is the Ancient of Days and was given all the kingdoms of the earth to be his possessions. So there in the prophet Daniel is the promise of the time when Jesus Christ, the Son of man, the prophesied Messiah, will claim the kingdoms of earth to be his.

Then David, remember, in the Psalm speaks of God saying how the nations rage and the peoples imagine a vain thing and the kings of the earth take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, but he who sits in the heavens shall laugh at their derision and shall laugh at them for their feeble efforts to withstand the program of God. The word of God comes in the Psalm "Behold I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill," and he urges the nations, "Kiss the Son lest he be angry and you perish." There again is a clear definition of the coming of the promised Messiah to claim the earth as his rightful inheritance from his Father.

Zechariah, almost the last prophet of the Old Testament, in the last chapter describes how "his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives...," a very literal place, a literal spot on earth, "and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west and it shall be removed to the north and part of it to the south. Then he will fulfill the promises of the prophets concerning the coming of his kingdom among men. Israel shall be gathered and mourn for him as one mourns for his only son.

Our Lord Jesus himself in that well known passage in Matthew 24, along with the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21, says that the whole earth shall see the "sign of the Son of man in the heaven," and then they shall see him "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." In the Revelation, John the apostle tells us that every eye shall see him. So Scripture is full of many passages that describe the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In II Thessalonians you have a very vivid description of this in the first chapter of this same letter, verse 7.

In I Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 7, the apostle says the Lord is coming,

To grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

I merely mention these in order to show you how widespread is the hope in Scripture of the coming of Christ again. This is what we pray for when we pray in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that God himself will dwell among men, and mankind itself will be his dwelling place. He "shall wipe away all tears from

signs on the earth, distress among nations, terrible events in the political and economic world, and at the same time coming "like a thief in the night" with nobody anticipating him. How could that be? Surely after the fulfillment of visible signs anybody who has ever had a Bible at all, or known anything about it, would be expecting Christ's return. It could then, as an unexpected event, coming as a "thief in the night." This raises some questions.

Another question concerns the passage we are looking at here in II Thessalonians. It speaks of someone or something appearing, the appearance of the Man of Sin. What is holding him back? Why did he not come during the days of the Holocaust? Or during some of the great times of trouble that the earth has gone through?

With lives of false prophets and false teachers in the past, why didn't Christ return then? Why didn't he come in the past when the church was obviously expecting him, when the City of Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple torn down and scattered among the nations of the earth which seemed to fulfill so exactly our Lord's words as described by Luke in the Gospels? Why didn't he come then? What is it that restrains his coming? This and other questions like this make people wonder why the return of Christ can be so simplified as to be just a single event suddenly occurring since it does not explain some of these things.

A closer study, therefore, of all the prophetic passages has given rise to the hope of what has been called a "Pre-tribulation rapture." I want you to get familiar, if you are not already, with several different terms. There is a term called "pre-millennialism." The terms tribulation and breakers are simply terms that are derived from certain words in Scripture. You will recognize the word "millennial" here. The Millennium is, of course, the predicted thousand year reign of Jesus Christ upon this earth before the final destruction of the earth and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. We will look at that next week. Then there are the beliefs or teachings that are called "post-millennialism." "Pre," of course, means before. "Post" means afterward. This concerns the return of Christ. Is it before the Millennium, before the thousand year reign? Or does it come after the thousand year reign? There is still a third division called "a-millennialism," which prefixes the word the millennium with the little prefix "a" which means against the millennium, and there are many Bible teachers and Christians today who claim to be amillennialists, i.e., they do not believe in a millennium at all. They believe it is now being fulfilled by the church. All those are general divisions of the subject of the return of Christ, "the subject of the last days. You will hear those terms thrown around, so that is why I give them to you.

However, I want to look at another two terms which are part of the first one. Pre-millennialism divides itself into two parts, called "Pre-tribulationism." [Forgive me for this kind of donkey work we are doing here, but I am not sure everyone knows these terms.] The other is "Post-tribulationism." These are both a division of premillennialism. They mean does Jesus come before the Tribulation? Or does he come after the Tribulation? That is essentially the question we are going to discuss tonight. If he comes after the tribulation, then the world is looking forward to the "Time of Trouble." That is the next event in the history of earth, and we cannot expect Jesus Christ to return until the end. He comes, then, to end the tribulation. This is as described here. There is some warrant for this view because it does speak of the coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation, he answers and destroys the Man of Sin. But there is also arisen this other view called "Pre-tribulationism" that says that one aspect of his coming that is before the tribulation.

I think it is very important to understand these terms, and we want to begin our answer to this issue tonight by viewing the word "parousia" here. It is the word "parousia" which is translated in most English versions as "the coming" of Christ. You have it here in chapter II Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 1, "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the word "parousia" that appears in verse 8, and also in connection with the Antichrist in verse 9, "the coming of the lawless one," ---parousia. When we think of coming, we always think of a person walking into a room. That is his "coming." He enters, and we think of it as an entrance, but this is an interesting word. The prefix "par" which is short for "para" in Greek means "alongside of" or "with." The rest of the word, is the Greek word for "being." Therefore, it means being with someone, or I think the best word that translates this word is the word "presence." Someone who is with us is present. This is the basic thought of this word. If you will get in the habit of reading your New Testament translating every occurrence of this word with the word "presence" you will get much more of the meaning. You see presence is not just a sharply defined point of time. It is rather a beginning and a continuation, or a duration, in between, and the whole thing is labeled the parousia, the presence. Now that is important about with regard to the Lord Jesus. He will come, but come to be present for awhile. Then at the end there will be the "epiphaneia" of his "parousia." Now, those two words are found together in this very chapter.

II Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 8:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and will destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

Notice how that is translated, "by his appearing and his coming." That sounds like it is two separate things, his appearing and his coming. Yet those are obviously so closely connected that it could be that it is one event described with two terms, his appearing and his coming.

But why would Paul describe the same event with two synonyms? The answer is that this is a rather poor translation of things at all, or if it is they are very closely related in a different way than what I have just outlined. The word "epiphaneia" which is translated "his appearing" is "epi" which means "out" and "phaneia" which means "to shine." It comes from the Greek "phaino" to shine. The idea here is the "out-shining" or, as some have translated it in English, "the unveiling." It is "the manifestation, the out-shining" of something. The term is really the "out-shining of his presence." So, taken in that light, of the fact that parousia means a presence, a duration of time, it is an event which is simply the open visible manifestation of a presence that has been here for sometime before. If you understand that phrase very clearly, I think you will have a key to understanding together all the passages of Scripture that deal with the second coming of our Lord. It is not just one single event at a certain time, but it is a series of events in which our Lord is present on earth during a definite period of time, finally making himself visible by a sudden appearing "in power and in glory," a shining out, which would fit all these descriptions of him coming in flaming fire, in power and great glory, etc. That gives you a clear clue, I think, to how to understand the coming of Christ as coming with a "presence."

The question that comes now is, "When does the parousia begin?" When can we expect this presence of the Lord in a hidden way that will ultimately be revealed by the out-shining of his glory at the end of the tribulation? And to answer that we go back to our Lord's own words found in Matthew 24. This is the teaching of Jesus himself on that dramatic occasion with the disciples on the Mount of Olive before he was betrayed and answered some of their questions. In Matthew 24 we have the questions the disciples asked him.

Matthew 24, verse 3:

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be?"

Judea flee to the mountains, let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; that you flight may not be in the winter...For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved."

He speaks of days when the entire extermination of the race was possible, but those days are to be shortened for the righteous. He goes on to warn about being deceived about these events, and his word continues through verse 28. This is the sign that answers the question, "What will be the sign of the close of the age?" The sign is the same sign that Paul speaks of in 1 Thessalonians, the Man of Sin seated in the temple proclaiming himself to be God. That is the "desolating sacrilege" which was also predicted. That is the sign indicating the age has reached its close. It is not the beginning of that close. It occurs in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week which is seven years long. A sign in Scripture does not necessarily mark the beginning or ending of anything but the character of it. This sign will be that which marks the close of the age.

Then beginning with Matthew 24, verse 29 through verse 31, Jesus answers question number two, "What will be the sign of his coming, the parousia, your presence?" And he answers this very clearly in these verses. They are short enough I can repeat them.

Matthew, chapter 24, verse 29:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days [This follows the great tribulation] the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. [Above] what is that sign? Well, it is not the coming of Jesus because he goes on to say they will see the Son of man coming. [If it is not the coming, then what is it?]

Well, all through Scripture there has been a special, peculiar, particular sign of the presence of God. Can you guess what it is? A shining cloud of glory called the Shekinah which hovered over the tribes of Israel as they passed through the desert and by day and by night. When the temple was dedicated by King Solomon, at the moment of dedication the cloud of glory came down to the temple and rested upon the Ark of the Covenant as a sign that God was dwelling in the midst of his people. Now it is predicted that when the disciples were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives at the time of his ascension, it says, "They saw him ascend into heaven until a cloud received him out of their sight." And when he comes again, he will come it says, "in the clouds." So have in this very passage that he will be, Matthew, chapter 24, verse 30b:

...coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

So the sign of his coming which is the end of the parousia, the final event of it, the out-shining of his presence is the coming of glory.

Then he speaks of the signs we can look for to know this day is drawing nigh, the fig tree, etc., but beginning at verse 32. The disciples had not ask for this. They did not know about it, but he goes on to give them some information they would know.

Matthew chapter 24, verse 36:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not the Father, not the Son, nor the angels, nor anyone else. [Now, if you have any tendency to set dates or to believe people who set dates, open and underline this verse] even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, nor the Father, alone the prognosticators of earth. Isn't that amazing? In the days of his flesh our Lord himself did not know the time of his coming. He was limited in his humanity. He knew nothing that we do not know, but he did not know the Father only.

There is a warning here not to set dates. It precedes the revelation he is going to give that this event he now is going to describe is an imminent event, i.e., could come at any time, but no one knows when and cannot know. He describes it.

Matthew, chapter 24, verse 37:

As were the days of Noah, so will be the parousia of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the parousia of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have wakened and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

My question now is, "Could this possibly, by any stretch of the imagination, be the same coming that is described just a few verses earlier as the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory preceded by a terrible time of tribulation with terrible signs in the heavens and on the earth?" Could it be the same? I don't see how anybody could say this is the same coming described here. Our Lord begins by likening it to the days of Noah. He says, "In the days of Noah before the flood life

usual." That is the meaning of this paragraph. In Luke's account you will find that Luke adds the days of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah. In the same way, he says. Lot and the people of Sodom did not know any judgment was intended. They were doing what comes naturally, and that is what our Lord describes here. Before the flood, although it was a time of violence and war widespread throughout the earth and a time of a troubled civilization, nevertheless people were doing the usual things of getting married and eating and drinking, etc. That is a vivid description of life going on as usual. Nothing unusual occurred that had not been occurring for centuries in the history of man. But suddenly, when they did not know, a flood came and took them all away. So, he says, in like manner will be the parousia of the Son of man.

So, we have here in this one discourse both the ending and the beginning of our Lord's parousia, his presence on earth. It begins with the Lord out-shining, the manifestation of power and glory. It begins with a secret coming seen only by the believers who hear the Lord, the command of the Lord, the archangel's cry and the trump of God and suddenly disappear to be with the Lord, in the air, as Paul says. Remember how he also amplifies that in I Corinthians 15, verse 51. He says,

"Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, by the Lord's coming, a word to believers.]</sup>  
"We shall not all die, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

It is the event called the "rapture" or the snatching away, the departure of the church. And, as our Lord tells us, it will be



Sermon on the Mount those amazing words, "You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth." Light dispels darkness. God's people in any age or time or clime are the light of the world. Jesus said later, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," but when he left physically, the continuous light would be manifested through his people, "You are the light of the world."

Now salt is a different ministry. What does salt do? It arrests corruption. It restrains decay, moral decay. We put salt on things to preserve them from corruption and decay. The ancients knew that very well. Every bit of fish that was sent from Galilee to Jerusalem was packed in salt to preserve it during the long journey down to its marketplace. They knew this well. That is what it meant, "You are the salt of the earth." It is the Spirit working in us and through us that is the restraint against the power of evil.

You and I often sing the blues about what is going on in our world. We listen to the 6 o'clock "Blues" every night, and it is in our own feelings, "How terrible things are getting." Oftentimes I think we are tempted to think that evil is in control. It really is not. It never has been. There has never been a time on earth when evil was in control. Do you know why? Because to this very day evil has to disguise itself as good in order to be accepted. Is that not true? Politicians can tell outright lies. They have to appear to be good. They have to sound like they are telling the truth. Prostitutes want to be called "ladies." Evil cannot manifest itself widely. Desperadoes and gangsters and others have to appear as good well-meaning citizens of the earth. Evil has to disguise itself because good is in control. That may sound rather amazing, but it is true. I know like the little rhyme that says:

Our race had a splendid beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning.  
We hope that the story will end in God's glory,  
But at present the other side's winning.

But it really is not. Much more true are the words of the poet James Russell Lowell when he said:

Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet 'tis truth alone that's strong.  
Truth forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the throne.  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God within the shadows  
Keeping watch above his own

You see there is a restraining force on earth. It is the presence of the church, the Spirit of God in his people, and God's promise about the terrible judgments of the tribulation until that force is taken out of the way. When it is the Man of Sin who is in control, that is why there has been born, supported by other passages I do not have time to go into here, the hope within the tribulation. We will be spared the judgment of the great tribulation, not spared tribulation because we all have that in various degrees. Generations of Christians have gone through terrible tribulation, but as to the great tribulation, there is the promise that we shall not be part of it.

I Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 9:

For God has not destined us for wrath, ~~that is what the great tribulation is, the wrath of God,~~ but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might be together with him.

That is the hope he holds out in this whole section. Well, my time is gone but I want to point this out. We are not, we are waiting for tribulation. What are we waiting for? We are waiting for the Lord Jesus. I want to close with reading a beautiful poem in a rhyme by Annie Johnson Flint.

It is not for a sign we are watching,  
For wonders above and below,  
The pouring of vials of judgments,  
The sounding of trumpets of woe.  
It is not for a day we are looking,  
Not even the time yet to be,  
When the earth shall be filled with God's glory,  
As the waters cover the sea.  
  
It is not for a king we are longing,  
To make the world kingdoms his own.

It is not for a judge who will summon  
The nations of earth to his throne.  
Not for these, though we know they are coming,  
For they are but adjuncts of him,  
Before whom all glory is clouded,  
Beside whom all splendor grows dim.  
We wait for the Lord, our beloved,  
Our comforter, Master and friend,  
The substance of all that we hope for,  
Beginning of faith and its end.  
We watch for our Saviour and Bridegroom,  
Who loved us and made us his own.  
For him we are looking and longing,  
For Jesus and Jesus alone.

Well, what are we to do while we wait? Our Lord tells us. In one of his parables he says he gave certain talents to va and said to them, "Occupy until I come." Keep busy. Get to work. Live as he told you to live with the power that he Utilize what he has given you, the gifts of the Spirit that are yours, the opportunities that are found around you. "Oc come." That is the hope of the church.

Next week we want to look at the coming time of peace, the Millenium and beyond it to the new heavens and the ne

### Prayer

We thank you, our Father, for the blessed hope that burns in our hearts as we read these Scriptures that our Lord is going own. We understand, Lord, that he knows the hearts. We cannot fool him. We cannot hide behind pretensions and spaciou religious possession or knowledge which we do not really have. When he comes to claim his own, he will know exactly wh Lord, how this makes us take a look at ourselves and like those disciples in the upper room confronted with the possibili to you Lord Jesus, "Is it I?" Grant, Lord, that we might be true and sure and real and genuine in our faith and living it day-by may stand before the Lord of Glory when he comes. We thank you for that promise and hope is Jesus' name. Amen.

---

# The New Earth

Message #4 in a series of 4 on Bible Prophecy

by Ray C. Stedman

January 30, 1983

---

Tonight we want to look at the coming New Heavens and New Earth. I am also including in that a look at the millennium which is not part of the new heavens and new earth but leads to it. Therefore, it is a part of the prophetic picture.

I hope most of you have noticed in your reading, in your exposure to life, in listening to people, that there lies very deep in our heart a longing for a golden age on earth. You will find it expressed in the promises of politicians. Every election year we hear from us, often in eloquent terms, that they have been called of God to bring this nation into the golden era of prosperity. This promise has appeal to us because it strikes at this deep cord of hope that lies in human beings everywhere. You can find the dreams of poets and of authors of literature.

Many books have been written depicting a utopia, a time of freedom from struggle, from famine, from death and hurt. Many groups have, from time to time, actually tried to produce this utopia. If you have read the writings of the Russian, Tolstoy, you will remember he tried to organize a utopian colony in Southern Russia. Others have tried this too. David Thoreau advocated that kind of thing in the woods of New England. Many have sought to do this. This is what lies behind the dreams of Communism and the writings of Lenin. He captured the imagination of many with the hope that Communism was the means of producing a worker's paradise, a utopia upon the earth. These longings are evident in just the expressions of the people's heart and the speculations of philosophers. All through the history of our race this hope has blazed forth from the imagination with the anticipation, born of a deep inherited hunger within us, of a time when earth would be at peace and at rest. This, of course, is exactly what our Lord himself taught us to pray for. When you pray the "Lord's Prayer" and say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That is what you are praying for, that the conditions of heaven would last on earth. This is the proper expectation of the people of God as they are taught of the Spirit through the Word.

This dream finds its expression in many beautiful passages of Scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testaments. It is prominent in certain of the prophets, largely, for instance, in the prophet Isaiah. He with his glib and eloquent tongue described in many passages the beauties of that time when a golden age will come to earth at last. Let me read some of those passages.

Let me begin with the 11th chapter of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 11, verse 1:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,

[Jesse, you know, was the father of David, and "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" is a reference to the Lord Jesus who was born of David.]

and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

[Zechariah calls Jesus "the branch." Jeremiah does as well, so many of the prophets combine in this]

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

[This is clearly a reference to that time of trouble which we looked at last Sunday night where the Lord himself shall at last slay the wicked, those who have opposed and turned away from the truth of God. shall be put to death. This prophecy goes on.]

Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

[What a beautiful picture. Enmity is taken away from the animal creation. The ferocity of the beasts, of the carnivores, even the beasts lying down together, and a little child leading them]

The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

[The lion even changes his food style. He no longer eats meat but eats straw.]

The sucking child shall play over the hole of the viper, [The poisonous snake will not bite.] the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

You cannot read a passage like that without it awakening a sense of longing in your heart for this beautiful time when righteousness shall cover the earth.

Isaiah had spoken of this earlier, too. If you go back to chapter 2. The first four verses of this chapter have a word a

Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 1:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Those words have fascinated people for centuries. Men have tried desperately in many ways to bring those conditions to earth, but they have never, never once been remotely achieved in human history.

Look on to chapter 4 in Isaiah, beginning with verse 2, and you get another view of this.

Isaiah, chapter 4, verse 2:

In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the praise and glory of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a pavilion by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night;

[Remember this was the condition that prevailed in the wilderness during the journey of Israel when the tabernacle moved over the people. In this day, this shall be restored, Isaiah says.]

...for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion. It will be for a shade by day from the heat and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

There are many other passages in the prophets. Isaiah 35 is a beautiful chapter, almost entirely descriptive of this day. It comes in again so strongly in the prophet's message that in the close of his book, in the last two chapters, you see it at the end of his message.

Isaiah, chapter 65, verse 17:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into your mind.

Now, because of that little introduction many Bible scholars have gone on to read the next verses, through to the end, as a description of the new heavens and the new earth. However, as you will see in a moment, because of certain things in this is not a description of the eternal state of the new heavens and the new earth, but rather a millennial condition. It is found among the prophets. Isaiah looks forward clear to the end and sees the establishment of a new heavens and a new earth. He describes, without any sign of this leap of time, the conditions that will obtain during the Millennium when Christ's kingdom on the earth and before the new heavens and the new earth. The reason I say that will be evident as I read.

Isaiah, chapter 65, verse 18:

But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, nor shall there be eliminated. What a blessing that will be! [Cried babies will be eliminated.] What a blessing that will be! [Cried babies will be eliminated.] old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, [now the presence of death indicates that this is not the eternal state. Other Scriptures tells us that in the eternal state there shall be no more death. So here is a child dying, but death has been drastically changed. Life expectancy is increased, and a person dying at 100 years old is still a child according to this picture.]

...and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

[Go up in the Santa Cruz mountains a look at those beautiful redwood trees. How old are they? Some of them go clear back to our Lord, 2,000 years old, and according to this, "like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be."]

...and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them. Before I call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Just a quick look at a couple of the other prophets just to show you that Isaiah is not alone in this. Turn to the little book of Joel, just before Amos.

Joel, chapter 3, verse 18:

And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk. ~~This is not literal. These are figurative terms. You won't find rivers of milk running down the mountainside. That just means there will be abundant produce great quantities of milk. The earth shall enter into a period of fecundity and fruitfulness such as it has never experienced and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, looking back now to the end of the period of tribulation.]~~ violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood and I will not clear the guilty, for the Lord dwells in Zion.

And one quick look at Amos, the very next book. ~~Chapter 9~~, Amos the bitter old prophet from Tekoa who denounces so much of the social injustice of his day, nevertheless ends his prophecy with these beautiful words.

Amos, chapter 9, verse 13:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them, says the Lord your God.

You can see from just this cursory selection of certain passages that these predictions about the coming of a golden age are widespread in the Old Testament. There are equally full predictions of this in the New Testament, and there is no way in human history since the beginning of time has ever remotely approached the fulfillment of these predictions. As you look at passages that predict the future, it is clearly evident that the only possible time this kind of situation and circumstances on earth is after the return of Jesus Christ to establish his kingdom.

I want to take you now to Revelation 20 where in the New Testament you have a gathering up of these great promises given as to when they will be fulfilled.

Remember chapter 19 of Revelation, which we touched on briefly last week, pictures for us the return of our Lord, the white horse whose eyes are like a flame of fire and on whose head are many crowns. He has a name inscribed which no man knows but himself. Out of his mouth goes forth a sharp sword. He captures the beast and the false prophet, and they are thrown into a bottomless pit. Then we read in the opening of chapter 20 the following.

Revelation, chapter 20, verse 1:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a golden chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. [That is where we get the word millennium. Millennium is simply the Latin for a thousand years. This number is repeated several times in this chapter, but here it specifically says, "he shall be bound for a thousand years."] into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. [We are not through with the Devil just because he is bound during the first millennium.] I saw thrones and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed.

[Remember, Paul tells us that judgment is committed to the church. "We shall judge angels; we shall judge the saints," he says. We shall share in the judging ministry of the Lord himself, so that this is a picture of that.]

Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life...

[The resurrection. This is at the beginning of the millennium, after the tribulation. When the Lord comes for his church, there is the resurrection of the dead in Christ then, but that is before the days of the tribulation. This, now, is the resurrection at the end of the millennium. The Lord has returned.]

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over. [The dead still another phase of the resurrection that will not come until the end of the millennium.] The first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

John goes on to describe at the end of that time Satan being loosed from his prison and deceiving the nations again attempting to overthrow the work of God. Then again he is cast into the lake of fire and will be tormented day and night forever.

From this I would like to return to the prophet Zechariah in the Old Testament. Zechariah gives us the clearest picture of the period is initiated. We will pick it up where we left off last week with the return in glory and flaming fire of our Lord and his enemies of God and to establish his kingdom upon earth. The chapter of the book of Zechariah the prophet describes this time.

Zechariah, chapter 14, verse 1:

Behold, a day of the Lord is coming, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in the midst of you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. [Here is the great attack upon the city of Jerusalem by the assembled armies of the nations who come against to do battle.] Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle; that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east.

Isn't that amazing? Remember in the book of Acts, we are told, that as the disciples were standing with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, suddenly he was taken up from them. They watched him disappearing into the heavens and he was received out of the cloud. The angels standing there said to them, "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into the heavens." I remember years ago Dr. Vernon McGee describing this and he said it was his belief that when the Lord returns he will have missed a step, that if his left foot was the last of his body to leave the mountain, his right foot would be the first to come back. I don't know that there is too much evidence for that, but it is clear that his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives and an amazing thing will happen.

Zechariah, chapter 14, verse 4b:

...and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley. [They just had an earthquake two days ago in Jerusalem, one of many they have had there. There is a well known earthquake fault that runs through the Mount of Olives. Geologists know about it, and this, of course, is but setting the stage for the fulfillment of this prophetic passage.] And a great earthquake shall be such that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. The Lord your God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

This is a very vivid picture. It depicts a very strange phenomenon. Some cataclysmic disaster strikes at the same time as the earthquake. Now, if you are familiar with prophetic passages, you know that a great earthquake is central in many passages of Scripture. Beginning in the chapter of Revelation where you have the vision of things to come in the last days, you see seven seals that are opened by the Lamb and then seven trumpets and then seven bowls of wrath being poured out, and these series of seven ends with a great earthquake. Great hail stones, hundreds of pounds in weight, fall from the sky and the mountains are shaken so people hide themselves in the caves of the earth and cry out in fear and terror to the land to escape the wrath of the Lamb which has come in that hour. The earthquake is the terminal point of these series of judgments upon the earth. That is one way you can guide your way through the book of Revelation. There is a reference to it in the book of Zechariah. There are others, which I won't take time to read, but notice verse 6. It is a very remarkable verse.

Zechariah, chapter 14, verse 6:

On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord) and not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.

A couple of days ago I picked up a book that is a collection of scientific reports on strange forces affecting this earth. To read there an account of what scientists feel could be happening right now in the build up of ice and snow on the

continent. Some of you may know that the snow level is increasing every year in Antarctica, the south pole. The ice land is now some 2-1/2 miles thick. The tremendous weight of that has depressed the land. It has dropped some several feet from levels measured in the past. Still the ice and snow builds up every winter. In 1929 when Admiral Richard Byrd sailed alone at the south pole he erected two 70' steel radio towers. He buried their foundations 10 feet into the ice, so that they would be at the then level of the ice and snow. Because of the build up of snow and ice, the towers have risen less and less in height. Eventually they were covered. Then a great iceberg, including these towers, broke off and drifted into the sea. But it is graphically how the weight of this ice and snow has been increasing. It is around the south pole but is not evenly distributed. There is a big chunk spread out to one side. The result is it is beginning to affect the rotation of the earth.

Many of your ladies who have washed clothes know that if one big part of the clothes, during the spin dry cycle, gets out of balance you have witnessed what happens to an eccentric distribution of weight when something is rotating rapidly. Now, the earth is rotating rapidly, and that huge growing pile of weight is imparting a certain wobble to the rotation of the earth. In the book I mentioned, there are serious minded scientists who are saying that this may be one of the causes for the strange climate and atmospheric conditions that we are now experiencing. There may be other causes as well, but this wobble to the earth's rotation may be one of them. Furthermore, this study says that this pile up of ice and snow takes about 6,000 years to accumulate, and the record of the rocks, etc. tell scientists that about 6,000 years ago the Antarctic continent was covered with all the ice and snow. Scientists have conjectured that what happened was it built itself up to a great volume of weight. When it reached a certain level it affected the rotation of the earth to such a degree that it was flung out and slid off into the ocean and the force of it sped up toward the Equator (this is the direction the centrifugal force of the earth would take). It caused great tidal waves and huge mountains of water splashing up over the land areas and changed the configuration of the continents. 6,000 years ago would just about put it back, according to some estimates, to the time of the flood, and there is a suggestion at least that perhaps this may be part of the forces involved in the great flood that destroyed the earth.

I also have other portents of what it might do, what it can do and what it probably has done in the past is by the tremors of the earth it has caused the earth to shift on its axis, getting a pole shift where the poles run straight through it, but are now inclined at an angle of 23 degrees. If you get a sudden shift of that pole, it can even reverse entirely. Scientists are saying this, and there are indications in the earth in many places where the polarity of the earth was totally reversed and the climate was changed. This is one suggestion as to what happened to the Mammoth up in the arctic who are found buried in snow and ice with their stomachs and in their mouths, who suddenly died and were plunged into a deep freeze. You also get the sun appearing to go down, so it may well be that this is the description here of just such a phenomenon; that it is building up to that point when a sudden release of this eccentric weight will create a pole shift that will bring about the conditions described.

Furthermore, the prophet goes on, it will affect the level of the land.

Zechariah, chapter 14, verse 9:

And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one. The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft upon its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. And it shall be inhabited, for there shall be no more curse; Jerusalem shall dwell in security.

Strange passage, is it not? Remember, in one passage I read to you from Isaiah, he says, "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be lifted up as the highest of all the mountains." It is clear from several passages like this that we can look forward to topographical changes in the land.

This will effect the earth in many ways. I do not have time here to go into all the ways it will effect it, but you can see from those puzzling passages in the prophet Ezekiel beginning with chapter 40 and running through to the end of the book that it has been a conundrum to many Bible scholars. He describes a wholly different land from what we call Palestine today. It is a lifting up of certain levels of the plains to high points and a subsidence of the earth at other points, the break out of the earth from underneath the steps of the temple that will be built in that area. It is not, however, at Jerusalem but north of it or 30 miles at the old site of the tabernacle in the city of Shiloh. This will be lifted up to a high plain and from it will flow a river. Ezekiel describes it in detail. It will flow down into the present location of Jerusalem and there divide into two rivers, one flowing into the Dead Sea and one flowing into the Mediterranean Sea. Of course, no such river now exists, but it will exist in the future. tremendous topographical changes come about. Imagine what this will do to cities, villages, habitations, etc. located near earthquake faults that produce these vast changes in just a short period of time.

There, according to Ezekiel, will be built the millennial temple. The Lord himself will dwell there, and during that time, David apparently will be raised from the dead to be the King of Israel again. Offerings will be established and offered again. There will be no sin. This is a picture of conditions on earth during the millennium when Christ shall rule, according to the Scriptures. Isaiah says, "He shall rule the nations with the rod of his staff." Psalm 89 says that. Righteousness shall be the dominant theme of the millennium.

and crime will still be present but subdued and not visible, quickly judged. Death will occur, but it is limited and life will be prolonged. Apparently there will exist together a strange combination of living persons of flesh of blood who, like our Lord, have been born through the natural process of birth, human beings, mingled with them will be redeemed resurrected Old Testament saints of the church, plus the Lord himself, and as I have already suggested, Old Testament saints, including David and Solomon.

Now, what does this mean? Could it really be? Well, the Gospels record for us just exactly that kind of a condition prevailed on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, remember? Jesus glorified, his garments glistening and white, brilliant and shining. Who gathered with him are Peter, James and John, three normal ordinary human beings, a transfigured Lord, who has been resurrected, passing through death and with him appearing two resurrected saints of the Old Testament, Elijah and Moses. Years ago Paul writes his second epistle, he says, "We have a more sure word of prophecy for we were with him on the mount and saw his glory coming when we were with him," and he labels it a kind of prefiguring of the coming of the Lord. So, this is not something absolutely new in human history. There was a brief time and place where this kind of condition prevailed.

I do not have time to go on with a further description of the millennium. It will be a time when the nations do not make war. War will not be possible. They will be prevented from making war. Nevertheless, there will be children born in that period who still inherit Adam's fallen nature. They will not be able to express it very much. As they grow there will be evil desires immediately prevented from being expressed. It is exactly the reverse of what we find today. Here we find righteousness oppressed, opposed and evil allowed to reign triumphant in many ways. Then it will be evil that is oppressed and put to live sub rosa underground as it were. Righteousness will be allowed public and full expression.

Then at the end of that thousand years comes a final outbreak. We will return now to Revelation 20, and after we read it we will go on to the new heavens and the new earth.

Revelation, chapter 20, verse 7:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; the number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Why is the devil allowed loose again? This, of course, is conjecture. The Bible never tells us specifically, but most Bible students believe that this is the final proof to mankind of the reality of the truth he finds the hardest to believe, the truth that he himself is a depraved creature, that the nature we inherited from Adam is thoroughly and utterly evil. Our tendency, even today, when we find something wrong is to blame someone else. Remember how Adam started it? When God said to Adam, "Did you eat of the forbidden fruit?" Remember what Adam did? He took it like a man. He blamed it on his wife. And then she blamed it on the serpent. They have nobody to blame it on. He was judged for it. But this has been characteristic of fallen man ever since. He blames someone else. Today we can blame the IRS, the government, the Republicans, the Democrats, the Communists, the elected officials, the media, the community, our children, our parents, whoever, whatever. The one thing we do not want to blame is us. Only those who are redeemed in life and given a new basis from which to live can face the terribly humiliating fact that they have been perverted by evil. Even then we struggle with it, don't we? It grows upon us through a whole lifetime.

This is why one mark of true maturity is an increasing awareness of our sinfulness and the degree to which we are aware of what we once thought was love was really selfishness in disguise. Of course, the final one to blame it all on is the devil. He made me do it! God's answer to that is a thousand years without the devil, with the presence of the Lord himself among men, redeemed, cleansed, purified and in close fellowship and communication with human beings, with sons and daughters of men on the face of the earth and conditions tremendously blessed, prosperity abounding on every side, with peace and no more war. After 1,000 blessed years, he turns the devil loose who immediately finds ripe ground for his temptations. It is the demons of the world, the truth that God has been trying to impress upon the human race ever since the fall; our problem is us and this is the nature of it.

Now, once that occurs John, after the description of the great white throne judgment, beautifully describes the new heaven and the new earth beginning in Revelation chapter 21.

Revelation, chapter 21, verse 1:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

That is a very remarkable statement. There is no more sea in the new heaven and the new earth. Now if you have been on a beach and have a little cozy cottage on the seaside during eternity, forget it. There will be no sea. There is much speculation as to what it means and we are not sure at all as to what it means. But in some way I think it reflects the fact that actually physically there



world are salt to prevent the spread of decay and corruption that would centuries ago have eliminated the human race were it not for the purifying quality of the sea. There is no need for that in the new heavens and the new earth. There are bodies of water. There is a river that flows through it and makes glad the tabernacle of God. It does not mean that there are bodies of water necessarily. There may be lakes and rivers, etc. but no sea.

Revelation, chapter 21, verse 2:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;

Remember, in Hebrews 11 we are told that Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. That is what he was looking for, an eternal city, the new Jerusalem, not built by man. Man has nothing to do with it. It is a great city coming down from heaven. The question, of course, is, "Is this literal or is it figurative?" I am convinced it is both. It is a literal city having the characteristics described here, but it is also figurative. It is a picture. God loves to do this. He loves to illustrate spiritual truth with pictures. I think that is the case here. The city, as John will identify it for us later, is the church, the bride. We are told. "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

And later on you find a further description of this in verse 10.

Revelation, chapter 21, verse 10:

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

What is this? Well, it is the church, the saints of God; both the saints of Israel and those of the church living together in harmony and symbolized here by the twelve gates which are the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve foundations which are the twelve apostles.

As an aside, that establishes the fact that Matthias, who was chosen in the first chapter of Acts to take Judas' place because he makes up the twelve. Many people have felt it was Paul who was to make the twelve, but Matthias took the place of the apostle to the Gentiles, as he himself tells us, and, therefore, he is not part of this group here, but he is part of the foundation of the church. I do not have time tonight to read this whole passage. It is beautiful, and you will want to read it for yourself.

Now let us look at just another brief passage in chapter 22.

Revelation, chapter 22, verse 1:

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life...

The tree of life is used throughout Scripture as a picture of the Lord Jesus himself. He is the true tree of life. Here are the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, the tree of life which began in the Garden of Eden. John saw it.

Revelation, chapter 22, verse 26:

...with us twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations.

Some have said, "Well, that means there must be sickness there." No, this word "healing" is not sickness. It is the tree of life, feeding on himself, it brings health to life spirits, health to spirits and health to bodies. John saw it.

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall sit on it, and they shall eat and drink, and shall be glad, and shall praise him forever and ever. Amen.

symbolized by Adam and all his descendants, so there is a new man, the true Adam, symbolized or figured in Jesus Christ and his spiritual sons and daughters. That is the new creation.

Just as the old creation, humanity itself, is made up of body, soul and spirit, so in the new heavens and the new earth we have a new humanity to inhabit, develop and fulfill it, body, soul and spirit. This seems to be, then, the place where we can see the apparent conflicting destinies of Israel as a nation and the church as the bride of Christ. In our human bodies we have the physical part of our life, i.e., the body.

That seems to be the place that Israel occupies in the new man, the new humanity. Israel's destiny is earthly. It will be the place that will govern the earth. It will be involved with the blessing and the fruitfulness of the earth as Paul so beautifully describes in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans. But linked with the body very closely in our humanity is the soul, our inner life, our minds, our emotions, our wills, this inner functioning of which we are so aware and which links us to so much of the universe of God in terms of feeling and thinking, etc. Now, that is the church. The special dwelling place of God is in the soul of man, and the church is the body of Christ, that, linked together with Israel as the soul in our humanity is linked with the body. And the spirit, which is the third element necessary to his existence is, of course, God himself. God is a spirit, and in the new humanity, God fulfills that central role. So, you have a whole new creation in a whole new world operating on totally different principles which probably are totally different from the principles on which the world functions today.

One of the great principles with which science has to deal is the so called second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, that everything is running down, that no matter how good things are they do not eventually get better. They get worse. They phase out. They lose energy. That law is universal. In the new heavens and the new earth, it will be exactly the opposite. Things will start and you will not be able to stop them from developing. They get better and better, and richer and sweeter and more exciting. We are awed when we look at the vastness of the cosmos in which we now live, but everywhere we see evidence of sin and decay, the futility that is present in the universe today. But according to the promises of Scripture there will be a new heaven and a new earth. This is why for believers the apostles and the prophets try to describe what lies beyond. We can only talk about what is not going to be there, no sorrow, no tears, no separations, no weakness, no fear, no war, no death. It implies the opposite. This is the fulfillment of the dreams and hopes of mankind.

I don't think there is anything more beautiful in all the Scripture than these words.

Revelation, chapter 21, verse 3b:

Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

What a beautiful hope. Only those who have come to know the Redeemer, the Savior, have any possibility of experiencing it. That is why we must be eternally grateful to God for salvation, for redemption, and eternally hopeful that others like us will share this magnificent promise.

Well, our time is gone.

Father, thank you for this evening. Thank you for the glimpse that we have had and for the great hope that lies before us. Thank you that through the blood of Jesus you have made us part of that redeemed humanity. We are not afraid to return to the Father. We are confident that you are totally in control of the future, ours personally and all the universe. Thank you for that certainly. Help us by your Spirit in our hearts. Thank you for the Word that has been taught us tonight. Go with us now we pray. Dismiss us in peace. Amen.

---

Copyright © 1996 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Emeryville, CA. 94605. Telephone: 415-655-1200. Fax: 415-655-1201. Web Pages: <http://www.pbc.org/>. With special thanks to Helen DeCoursey for transcribing, typing, and editing the original audio tape.