

# **“End-Time Prophecies” – All Fulfilled!**

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***“May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:23).***

As a career teacher of God’s word, I had to pass over Paul’s prayer and numerous other references to the imminent coming of the Lord without explanation, for I had none. Was he praying that their bodies be kept healthy for two thousand years or more? Was he misguided in his prayer? Or, was my traditional concept of Christ’s coming misguided? The same event, *the coming of the Lord*, cannot be imminent at two different times separated by two thousand years. He did not say, “at one of the comings of the Lord,” as though there would be two. Paul expected them to live to see its fulfillment.

Perhaps, the most consistent message we are hearing these days from the various Christian groups is the supposed imminent return of Christ. From my use of *supposed* here, you may rightly discern that this writing will not promote that concept. We will look at passages indicating that all the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ have been fulfilled. That is called *preterist eschatology*, or *realized fulfillment of prophecy*.

If you have already studied this and have your ideas fixed in concrete, just skip all this for reading it will disturb you. Perhaps you have been warned about “those A.D. 70 theories.” But if you are willing to check out “A.D. 70 facts,” please stay with me. This will be more an effort to give you a concise introduction to the subject than to offer detailed and conclusive answers to all pertinent questions.

## **Mental “Formatting”**

Learning to format sixteen columns of my original mailout on this computer has been no little trick for this old dog to learn. I have found that, if I have it all laid out as I want it and then need to insert a sentence or a few words, it affects the rest of the layout. Everything shifts. So there is temptation to make no changes so as to avoid disturbing the format.

Our thinking is like that. We get doctrinal answers laid out in our minds – even with gaps here and there. Then when we change our belief on a certain point, it affects many related conclusions. So we may be tempted not to disturb our layout rather than to format it again.

I intend to introduce Biblical teachings about the coming of the Lord for you to try to insert in your mental programming. Some may be startling, even shattering, and though they are not life-or-death matters, they give new illumination to many passages like the one mentioned above. Many traditional interpretations will be given surprising meaning. It calls for a paradigm shift!

The Greek word *parousia* in the texts we will be studying means *coming*, not only *arrival*, but also *presence*. It can refer to *a point in time* or *duration of presence*. So when we read of Jesus’ coming, it may mean *the point of his arrival* or *the duration of his presence*. His presence may be detected by events such as those surrounding A.D. 70 rather than by actual sight. *Preterist* means past, completed, realized, or fulfilled. *Eschatology* is a big word meaning

a study of *end times* or *completed action*. *Preterist eschatology* and *realized eschatology* are terms sometimes applied to this study.

## **A Chosen Nation**

An important matter is commonly overlooked. Bible history is not about this universe; it is about redemptive history. The Bible does not speak of the end of time or the universe – except figuratively when depicting kingdoms, governments, rulers, etc. – but it speaks of the **end, completion, and perfection of God’s redemptive plan**. There Bible history ends with the completion of redemptive history!

The Old Testament history deals primarily with the people chosen by God through whom the Messiah would come. God dealt with them nationally. In time, many individuals accepted Christ, but as a nation they rejected Jesus and his spiritual kingdom. God no longer deals with nations but individuals. Because of their national rejection, a special dissolution of their system would come in the lifetime of many of those who heard Jesus teach. It would happen about forty years after his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This period would be the *last days*, the end of the age (sometimes erroneously translated *the end of the world*), a time of judgment, the great and terrible day of the Lord, the end of the Jewish system, and the confirmation of the spiritual kingdom. There was an over-lap of about forty years, the last days, as the nation of Israel was being phased out as the spiritual kingdom was superseding it. All the many passages indicating the imminent coming of the Lord or day of the Lord were fulfilled in this period of time. We will now identify some of these numerous references briefly for your further study.

## **A Coming With Fire and Destruction**

Let’s begin with the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was a prophet of doom who cried out against the deplorable moral and spiritual state of Israel. He warned that the Lord would come in judgment, lamenting, “***But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears?***” (3:2; 3:5; 4:1). This does not describe his coming by birth, which was a coming of “peace on earth,” nor does it refer to a judgment day in the distant future for it would be related to the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist.

Malachi also says, “*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord*” (4:5). This connects John the Baptist with “*the great and terrible day of the Lord*.” (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17; 1:76f). Because the kingdom of God was at hand, John’s converts were fleeing “*from the wrath to come*” because “*Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.*” He who was to come “*will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff will he burn with unquenchable fire*” (Matt. 3:1-12). The coming of the Judge in judgment was impending (Matt. 3:12), not hundreds of years in the future.

When John declared that “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:2), he was not saying that the Messiah was about to appear, for Jesus preached the same thing later (4:17), and so did the apostles (10:7). They pointed to something even beyond Jesus’ birth and Pentecost, as

we shall observe, but it would come upon that generation rather than in the distant future (Matt. 12:38-45; compare Luke 11:16, 24-36).

Jesus called for personal repentance of those present lest they perish, not just spiritually, but in the coming judgment/destruction of their nation (Luke 13:1-9). The parable of the barren fig tree warned of national doom of an unrepentant nation (Luke 13:6-9). The end of the age, **the last days of the Jewish system**, is depicted in the parables of the tares and the dragnet at the coming of the Lord in judgment against them (Matt. 13:36-47). This involved those present, for Jesus himself sowed the good seed in his preaching, and some of those rejected would plead that they had **eaten and drunk in his presence** as he taught in their streets. That precludes reference to a far distant time of judgment.

John the Baptist predicted an impending judgment so near that the axe was lying at the root of the tree. The catastrophic great and dreadful day of the Lord was to follow the coming of the second Elijah. It would be a time of individual judgment with the separation of the righteous and wicked and also the end of Judaism at the coming of the kingdom which was at hand.

The coming of the Son of man, the *parousia*, would definitely be in the lifetime of the apostles, for he told them, “*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes*” (Matt. 10:23).

Likewise, some of the disciples would be living when he would come in his glory with his angels to render judgment to individuals according to their works: “*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of the Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*” (Matt. 16:27-28; Mark 8:38; 9:1; Luke 9:26-27). It does not indicate that *all*, or even *many*, of his listeners would live until that time, but that some would. That keeps it in the range of events occurring about A.D. 70.

In the parable of the importunate widow, Jesus indicates that the coming of the Son of man was to be certain and speedy (Luke 18:1-8). The righteous would be avenged speedily, for it would be the “*day of vengeance*” (Luke 21:22). The reward of the disciples would be in the coming age at the *parousia* (Matt. 19:27-30; Mark 10:18-31; Luke 17:28-30).

The parable of the pounds is very significant (Luke 19:11-27). He gave this parable while on the way to Jerusalem for the final Passover before his crucifixion. He seemed more concerned about the impending destruction of the nation than for his own approaching death. Along with this parable was his lamentation over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21; Mark 11), the parable of the wicked husbandman (Matt. 21; Mark 12; Luke 20), the parable of the marriage of the king’s son (Matt. 22), the woes pronounced upon “that generation” (Matt. 23:29-36), another lamentation for the city (Matt. 23:37-38), and the extended prophecy on the Mount of Olives which includes Matthew 24 and 25. These all relate to the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of Judaism, and the dissolution of national Israel as the chosen people of God. It has been my practice through the years to try to milk present-day applications from these parables, but all the parables about the kingdom were given for that generation explaining developments of “the last days” of Israel.

## Forsaken and Desolate

Upon that generation would come the righteous blood of all of the innocent from Abel to Zechariah. Later, they would cry out to Pilate concerning Jesus, “*His blood be upon us and our children.*” So, in his sorrowful lament over Jerusalem, Jesus declared concerning the house of Israel, “*Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate*” (Matt. 23:38). The term *house* might refer to Israel and/or their temple.

The parable/allegory of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19f) adds more meaning to this. Israel had fared sumptuously on God’s special favor throughout their history. They relied on being the children of Abraham instead of living rightly individually. They disdained Gentiles, those far off and strangers to the covenant, the beggars for spiritual crumbs. But Jesus indicated a dramatic reversal in that the believing Gentile would be in Abraham’s bosom while the rejecting Jew would be separated, far off, rejected, and beyond hope of reclamation. (For more, see FR 258: “The Hope of Israel.”)

Those parables and prophecies were about things to happen to that generation, not to people hundreds of years later. The people thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. The parable of the pounds gives corrective illustration they could understand. It was like a man who was to be king but his kingly office was not yet recognized. He made a journey to the emperor to receive the authority, instructing his servants, “*Occupy till I come.*” He receives confirmation of authority, returns, consummates his reign, and then deals judgment and vengeance on the rebellious citizens. So Jesus came to be king but did not fill that capacity immediately. He went to the far country, leaving his servants to “*occupy till I come,*” and having his authority assured by the Father, returned for the confirmation of his kingdom and to render vengeance on the rejecting nation of the Jews. Some who heard him would live to see it and that destruction was verified by history.

Matthew 24 is devoted to Jesus’ prophecy given on the Mount of Olives. Most interpreters present it as a mixture of prophecies concerning the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of the universe, a universal judgment, and a final dissolution of all things. They mix things thought to be immediate with those thought to be distant future, things that related to Jerusalem and the world at large, and to Israel and the human race. Some give double meanings to certain prophetic statements.

Many assume that the disciples asked Jesus questions about three different events with “*When shall these things be?*” referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and “*What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?*” pointing to the end of the universe. However, the word translated *world* here means *a period of time, age, or epoch*. The *end of the age* referred to the end of the Jewish age or dispensation which was drawing close. The entire chapter deals with it. So do the *judgment parables* of Chapter 25.

Parallel accounts are given in Mark 13 and Luke 21. John covers the same thing more in detail in the entire book of *Revelation*. Space here will not allow a commentary on these words of Jesus, but we will note that Jesus did state clearly, “***Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place***” (v. 34). Was it “truly” or “falsely?”

The coming of the Lord (*parousia*), that great and terrible day, was to be a time of judgment described in the three parables of Matthew 25. Only two days after giving those parables, Jesus assured the High Priest who judged him, ***“But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”*** (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). The High Priest did not have to wait for centuries to see that coming in judgment.

## **Resurrection and Judgment at the Last Day**

Jesus, as reported by John, unsettles our format by relating the **resurrection** with his soon coming at the last day. He declared, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”* (John 5:25). Consider these other similar statements. *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day”* (John 6:39-40; also 44). *“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (John 11:24-27. Note in vs. 27, *“he who is coming into the world.”* He had already come into the world but was to be coming again. Then Jesus adds the judgment to that setting, *“The word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day”* (12:48).

These promises were made to the listeners present rather than to indefinite people in the distant future. *“And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (14:3). *“I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also”* 14:18-19). *“I go away, and I will come to you”* (14:28). *“A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me”* (16:16; also 22). Again, these promises were made to those present. Jesus intimated that the apostle John might live until his return (21:22).

For those addressed, to live until the *parousia* would exempt them from death. Paul revealed this mystery, ***“We shall not all sleep*** (in death like their ancestors awaiting resurrection), ***but we shall all be changed...***” (1 Cor. 15:51). Paul included himself with that group (**we**, not **they** living centuries later) and with Thessalonian disciples as ***“we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord.”*** (1 Thes. 4:15).

You may be objecting that, if the resurrection was on the last day and the last day was at the return of Jesus, then the resurrection is past since the end of the last days! You got it! Does that leave us hopeless? Resurrection was the hope of Israel. All in the tomb, whether patriarchs, Israel, or early disciples waited in the unseen world until Jesus opened the way into heaven by taking his offering into the Holy of Holy there. Thus the hope of Israel was realized! The promise of resurrection was fulfilled!

What about us living now? Do we not hope for resurrection? No, for we will need none. Conversing with Martha at the death of Lazarus, *“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She*

said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, **he who is coming into the world**’” (John 11:23-27). Do **you** believe this? Lazarus died before the way into heaven was opened. Now believers, though dying physically are endowed with immortality and need no resurrection! We have already been raised with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 3:1).

You may reply that the bones are still in the tombs, hence, there has been no raising of the dead. The restoration of the physical body was not what they were taught to expect. Paul warned Timothy of two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, “*who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already*” (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Why did not Paul instruct Timothy, or why did not Timothy think on his own, to take those two fellows to the tombs and prove them to be fools by showing them the bones of their ancestors? The answer is simple and beyond debate: They had not been taught to expect a physical resurrection! Flesh cannot be immortalized so that flesh and blood can enter the kingdom of heaven. God is Spirit, having no flesh or bones, and when we die, our spirit returns to God, not the grave. Paul labored to convince us of this in 1 Corinthians 15. If there has been no resurrection of the dead, then heaven is still vacant!

## Acts and the Epistles

We have noted in Malachi and the Gospels many references to the soon return of the Lord to be fulfilled in the lifetime of some of Jesus’ listeners. Now we will extend our look through Acts and the Epistles. We will note that terms and expressions like ***day of the Lord, coming*** (*parousia – either arrival or continuing presence*) ***of the Lord, the great and terrible day, the day approaching, the day of his coming, the day of his appearing*** (*his being revealed, the revelation / apocalypse*), ***coming in the clouds, end of the world-age, last days, last time, last hour, end of all things, day of vengeance, coming in his glory, and coming in his kingdom*** all spoke of something seemingly imminent and within the lifetime of many of those addressed.

Further confirming Jesus’ promise to come to his disciples, two men present as Jesus ascended assured them, “*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you saw him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11).

On Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy worded in the cataclysmic style of the Hebrew writers, and declared that the present happenings were fulfilling the prophecies of the **last days and the coming of the day of the Lord** (2:17-21). He concluded his discourse with the exhortation to “*Save yourselves from this crooked generation*” (v. 40) in order that they be spared when Jesus came in vengeance upon the nation. Peter had not enumerated all sorts of sins that they should repent of, but he convicted them of killing the Christ. Their repentance of that sin was more than for forgiveness; it was to save their lives when Jesus returned. Again, this judgment is connected with the *parousia*. Later, Paul would declare, “*He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.*” (17:31).

The coming and vengeance is mentioned again in Paul’s first epistle. Those early converts were “*...to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*” (1 Thes. 1:9-10). For those who had killed Jesus, “*God’s wrath has come upon them at last!*” (2:14-16). “*For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?*” (3:19). To disciples living then,

Paul's desire was "...that he may establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (3:11-13). This was not about us! It was a time of judgment and vengeance at Christ's coming for persons living when Paul wrote.

In perhaps the most widely used passage of Paul concerning the *parousia*, he consistently includes himself (**we, not they**) with those addressed in all the events to occur (4:13-17). He identifies himself with "**we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord**" and "**we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.**" Continuing his remarks in Chapter 5, he told them the Lord will come as a thief but that the day should not take them by surprise because of their watchfulness. Are they still watching?! Then he gives his benediction for them: "**May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and **body** be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it**" (5:23-24). Do you accept that?

To the Thessalonians who were already suffering persecutions and afflictions arising from the disturbing times being caused by unbelieving Jews, Paul encourages his current readers, "...since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you (rejecting Jews), and 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 ...To this end we always pray for you..." (2 Thes. 1:5-12). Continuing in Chapter 2, he assured them that the current distresses were not evidence that Jesus had already come but that further developments of "*the mystery of lawlessness*" already at work but still restrained would bring a falling away of many, even as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24, and the revealing of the "man of sin." Paul was writing to disciples living then, not to us in 2005.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were enriched "*so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 1:7). Are they still waiting? Their work would be tested in judgment, "*for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done*" (3:10-15). In further reference to that time of judgment, Paul urges, "*Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things that are now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God*" and "*...that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (4:5; 5:5).

### **The End of the Ages Has Come**

The immediacy of these things is emphasized: "*I mean, brethren, the appointed **time has grown very short**; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none... For **the form of this world is passing away.***" Also, "*Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom **the end of the ages has come.***" (7:29-31; 10:11).). The end of the ages had come upon those addressed, not us. In the communion they were to "*proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (11:26). Are they still doing that?

The association Paul makes of the coming and the resurrection deserves much explanation but we shall only note that connection here. *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then **at his coming** those who belong to Christ (the righteous dead). Then comes the end, **when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father** after destroying every rule and every authority and power”* (15:22-24). Still including himself with the Corinthian disciples whom he addressed, he declared, *“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed”* (15:51-52). Though the ancients and some disciples who had died were “asleep,” Paul said that all of those addressed would not sleep, but that instead they (“we”) would be changed instantly in their transition.

In 2 Corinthians he still includes himself with the disciples addressed: *“that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus”* and *“knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence”* (1:14; 4:14). *“Though our outer nature is wasting away...”* applied to him and those addressed (4:16). He wrote of what awaited if, not when, their present earthly tent were destroyed. God would not leave them naked but would clothe them with immortality prepared for the accompanying judgment (5:1-10).

In Galatians we see only an indirect allusion to the subject: *“...who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age...”* (1:4).

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul makes use of some of the terminology that we are making note of, such as *“But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the **day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.** Etc.”* (2:6-16). He encouraged disciples with, *“Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand”* (13:11-12). Also, *“...the God of peace will **soon crush Satan under your feet**”* (16:20). Jewish adversaries would be crushed!

The Colossians were assured, *“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory”* (3:4), and *“On account of these the wrath of God is coming”* (4:6)

The Ephesians *“were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance **until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory**”* (1:13-14) and *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were **sealed for the day of redemption**”* (4:30). Paul spoke of their present age and the one which was to come (1:21; 2:7).

Paul is more specific in the Philippian epistle. He assured them, *“And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to **completion at the day of Jesus Christ**”* ... *“so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for **the day of Christ**”* (1:6, 10). He adds, *“But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it **we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself**”* (3:20-21). Paul included himself with those addressed, and reminded them, *“The Lord is at hand”* (4:5). Could “at hand” mean hundreds or thousands of years in the future?



Much in the first epistle to Timothy relates to the parousia though it is more involved, like this prediction of an apostasy, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits, etc.*” (4:1f). “*I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this will be made manifest at the proper time...*” (6:14) is another assurance of the immediacy of his coming. In 2 Timothy are references to that **Day** looming before them. “...*he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me*” (1:12), “...*may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day...*” (1:18), and “*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day...*” (Read 4:1-8). Stressful times of the last days were approaching (3:1-9).

To Titus, Paul wrote encouraging those then “*awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...*” (2:13).

### **The Day Approaching**

As the Day was approaching, Hebrew disciples were already being tested by persecutions. An unidentified writer wrote a letter, or treatise, to them to confirm their faith and further convince unbelieving Jews because the great change was at hand. The spiritual kingdom inaugurated about forty years earlier on Pentecost would be fully confirmed by the destruction of the Jewish system. That which was established at the shaking of Sinai would be supplanted in another shaking by a spiritual kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12). We will list here some of the terms used.

- 1:1-2 - *in these last days, ...through whom he created the worlds (ages).*
- 2:5 - *the world (age) to come.*
- 3:14 - *if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.*
- 6:11 - *the full assurance of hope until the end.*
- 9:26 - **he has appeared once for all at the end of the age.**

Please look at this passage for richer meanings. “*But as it is, he has **appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**” (v. 26-28). Here is the noted “second coming” of Christ though that term is not used in the Scriptures! He came the first time to put away sin by his sacrifice. Like the High Priest under the Law, he took his sacrifice into the Holy of Holies to present it to God at his ascension. The people awaited the priest’s return from the Holy of Holies for indication that it was accepted. So Jesus took his sacrifice, and the disciples awaited his second appearance which would indicate that it was acceptable. Because it was accepted, he did not appear a second time **to deal with sin but to save those eagerly awaiting.** This would include all from Adam till Christ and the believers who had died. The way into heaven was now opened for them. The living believers who were eagerly waiting for him would be free from death so that, when they died, there would be no detainment in Hades or by judgment.*

Man faced two appointments, death and judgment. For us who believe, Jesus met both appointments!!! We will not die or come into judgment (John 11:26; 5:24-29). As an advocate-

counselor-attorney stands in court for the defendant, Jesus took our place in judgment. He paid the penalty for us. We are no longer accounted guilty. The judgment is fulfilled – past! Read that wonderful passages above again.

If you contend that the judgment scene depicted in Matthew 25:31-46 is in the future for us, you are depending on salvation by works instead of by grace through faith! Israel was being judged based upon a system of works.

Jesus redeemed those of Israel under the Law (Gal.4:4-5), but it was not realized until the revelation of his return when they would be delivered up to God. Please relate this lengthy passage:

*“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (He is not teaching universal salvation for he lists who **all** includes.) But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, (Christ fell asleep in death but God restored his life.) then at his coming (the *parousia*) **those who belong to Christ.** (The righteous of Israel are those whom God gave to him at his coming.) Then comes **the end, (The end-completion-perfection of redemptive history!)** when he **delivers** (yet to be done when Paul was writing) **the kingdom** (the righteous of Israel?) to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power (of a spiritual nature). For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **The last enemy to be destroyed is death.** (This was demonstrated by his being raised but was not completed-finalized-perfected until he raised all the ones he had redeemed at his coming-*parousia*.) ‘For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection under him,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor. 15:20-28). (So Jesus, having accomplished God’s will by the authority given him, with death being subjected to him, has returned that authority to him who is the source of life, that God may be Lord of Lord and King of Kings.) Now, let’s continue with notations from Hebrews:*

10:25, 37 - *encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

... *For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry.*

12:18-29 speaks of the nearness of final consummation.

13:14 - *we seek the city which is to come.*

From the doomed city, James writes to the scattered Jews concerning the *parousia*. Note the following:

5:1, 3 - *miserics that are coming upon you ... for the last days.*

5:7 - *be patient until the coming of the Lord.*

5:8 - *the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

5:9 - *behold, the Judge is standing at the doors.*

These references speak of the immediacy of the coming in judgment of the Lord **for those addressed then.**

Peter, in his two epistles, also writes to the dispersed disciples who were already suffering from the tumults of the time. Employing the Hebrew literary style, he writes using

their literal, cosmic cataclysmic descriptions of the overthrow and change of religious, social, and national systems. With any degree of scholarly integrity, can we apply all of Peter's quotations listed here to be pointing to the distant future? They were not addressed to you and me but to people living at that time. What sense would it make if we add "**two thousand years from now**" to each of the lines below?

1 Peter 1:5 - *for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

1:7 - *at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

1:13 - *the grace that is **coming to you** at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

4:5 - *who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

4:7 - *The end of all things is at hand; keep sober and sane*

4:12-13 - *...rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

4:17-19 - *...the time **has come** for judgment to begin.*

5:1 - *...a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.*

5:4 - *And when the chief Shepherd is manifested.*

5:10 - *And after **you have suffered** a little while.*

2 Peter 3:3-4 - *...scoffers will come in the last days...where is the promise of his coming?*

3:7, 10f - *being kept until the day of judgment and destruction ...the day of the Lord will come like a thief... **waiting** for and **hastening the coming of the day of God.***

3:14 - *...since **you** wait for these...*

## The Last Hour

John adds his assurances, "*And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 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*** (1 John 2:17-18). "*And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at this coming*" (2:28). "*...we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (3:2). Earlier writers spoke of the last days, then the last day, and now John says it is the last hour. It was imminent! Could it have been the last hour many centuries ago?

To the seven churches of Asia, John related a message given to him by the Spirit. It was "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his servants **what must soon take place. ... for the time is near***" (Rev, 1:1, 3). "*He is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him*" (1:7). It would be in the lifetime of those who put him to death and in retribution for their deed. The *parousia* would be a judgment against the evils in the seven churches of Asia. If it referred to things hundreds of years in the future, it would have been meaningless to them for those churches are no longer in existence. "*I will come to you soon...*", "*...hold fast what you have, until I come*", and "*I will come like a thief...*" (2:16, 25; 3:4).

22:6 - *...what must soon take place.*

22:7 - *...And behold, I am coming soon.*

22:12 - *Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.*

22:20 - *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

Here I have scanned references in the epistles regarding the immediacy of the return of Christ as set forth by James Stuart Russell in his book, *The Parousia*. I have inserted some comments and variations.

Even if we conclude that some of the many references in this over-view may refer to other comings, intellectual honesty forces us to admit that most of them definitely and unquestionably speak of the imminence, immediacy, and expectancy of his coming in the generation of both the writers and those addressed. And even though we make no attempt to explain each detail of the prophetic statements, we can trust that they were fulfilled in the time of some of the writers and those they addressed. Otherwise, **the very last words** of Divine Inspiration in the history of the redemption of man are deceptive – *"Surely I am coming soon. Amen."* That would also leave the history of redemption incomplete!

Were Jesus and the writers deceived, or deceiving? Were Jesus' plans thwarted by some circumstance? If so, can we believe anything else he taught and promised us? Where did he tell of a delay of two millennia or more in fulfilling his plans?

What, other than our pride, can be lost by a restudy of these matters? From this preterist viewpoint, the whole scene shifts and all of my previous formatting of understanding has had to be revised. But fortunately, many of the stumps that I ploughed around most of my life have been grubbed up. Now, I can hardly read a page of the Scriptures without seeing points that are made clearer than I ever thought possible. I want you to enjoy a similar experience.

The first reaction to the claims of fulfilled prophecies seem natural. Every eye has not seen him return as he promised. The graves and tombs of the dead are still intact. We have not been called to a great scene of universal judgment. Evidently, the saints have not been caught up to meet the Lord for they are still here. The sun has not darkened, the stars have not all fallen from heaven, the heavens have not passed away, the elements have not been dissolved by fire, the earth and its works have not been burned up, and the new heaven and earth have not appeared. It is as simple as that! Or, is it?

Because we are earthly and have to interpret through physical senses, God has accommodated his messages to our ability to comprehend. We cannot comprehend an immortalized being, or a spirit, either ours or God who is Spirit, so we develop our own imagery, giving physical characteristics or forms. Much, though not all, communication from God is through imagery. Many literary enhancements are employed. Hebrew writers sometimes described God's dealings with man in exaggerated cataclysmic physical descriptions. We may miss the meaning when we interpret all these things literally in physical imagery.

### **"Every Eye Shall See Him"**

Questioning the literal concept about every eye seeing him when he returns, have you ever considered what that would require? Allowing that he would come within one-half mile of each person, traveling 1000 miles per hour, it would take a full day (half of which would be in the dark of night) to circle the earth near the equator, and he would have to circle the earth about

7000 times, taking maybe 10 years. Allow for my inaccurate geography and math. We would hardly be able to see the nail-scars in his hands literally!

Consider, too, the literary style. *“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”* (Rev. 1:7). By apposition, those **who pierced him, the tribes**, would be those who would see him. Those who would see him are those who crucified him, and his coming would be to avenge the tribes of Israel. Matthew 24:30-34 identifies this as the time of Jesus’ coming on the clouds which that generation would live to see. Zechariah 12:10-14 adds verification. So that has already happened! There is actual, literal verification of some of it in written history of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Have the stars all fallen, has heaven been destroyed, have the sun and moon been darkened, and has the Lord come on the clouds? Yes! But not literally. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, those things occurred!

Isaiah warned Babylon in dramatic imagery of God’s dealing with them. *“Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ... therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place...etc.”* (Isa. 13). In God’s fury against the nations, *“Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. ... And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever”* (Isa. 34; Read other declarations in Ezek. 32:1-7; Isa. 7, 18, 19 against Egypt, Damascus, and Ethiopia). Isaiah further warns, *“An oracle concerning Egypt, Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt”* (Isa. 19:1).

These things were fulfilled thousands of years ago when God overthrew orders, systems, and nations and those rulers and dignitaries associated with them. Were they literal? Do we even need to argue that point? Was Jesus to come in a literal body riding on a literal cloud, on a horse, with angels, in flaming fire? Or must we allow for some imagery?

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his disciples of his coming and the close of the age. In dramatic imagery like that used by Isaiah and other Hebrew writers, he told them, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all **the tribes of the earth will mourn**, and they **will see the Son of man coming on the clouds** of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”* (Matt. 24: 1-3, 29-31; Compare Luke 21:22-27; 2 Peter 3:7-12; and the visionary, exaggerated depictions throughout Revelation).

Have those predictions been fulfilled? Unquestionably! – unless you doubt Jesus or the accuracy of the Scriptures! After presenting that cataclysmic picture, he declared, *“Truly, I say to you, **this generation will not pass away till all these things take place**. Heaven and earth will*

*pass away, but my words will not pass away*” (v. 34-35). Luke identifies Jesus’ predictions with the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies and the destruction of the city, declaring that it would be the time of the redemption of the disciples happening in the lifetime of that generation (Luke 21:20-33).

The Jewish listeners as *insiders* understood the highly dramatic veiled language, veiled from their enemies. The symbolic language was not just to appeal to our curiosity! They looked for the end of the earthly order of the chosen people in an earthly kingdom. Their system would fall with all the dignitaries and rulers who supported it. The spiritual kingdom would succeed it. It would be the last days of Judaism with no promise of reinstatement. It would be the *parousia*, the coming of Christ in his enduring presence with his disciples. It would confirm the new heaven and new earth which is God’s new and spiritual rule through Christ, the kingdom which cannot be shaken. Disciples are now in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the temple in which God dwells described in Revelation 21-22. They have eternal life with the Father and only await the discarding of the earthly body.

### “True Literalism”

True literalism is a fantasy. (An oxymoron?) Can a literal body ride a literal cloud, a cold, tumultuous vapor which can toss an airplane about? To where and in what direction would the billions of immense stars fall? If the heavens pass away, what is left? A vacuum? Outer space is already a vacuum strewn with elements forming celestial bodies. Can the elements be obliterated by fire (2 Peter 3:7-12)? And where would **we** be during the annihilation of the universe?

Is there to be no end to this physical earth and the universe? Despite the propensity in all generations to think that the destruction of the material universe has been imminent in their times, there is no support in the Scriptures for it. All the excited expectancy expressed as we entered the new millennium proved to be baseless babble.

If these things have transpired, how do we explain the “rapture,” (a term not in the Scriptures!), the judgment, and the resurrection? We have already dealt with that but will add more here.

This would be an immediate transition. Previously, all who died were “asleep,” awaiting the conquest of death by Jesus. Paul wrote that “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all **be changed**, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the **dead will be raised imperishable**, and we shall be changed*” (1 Cor. 15:51f). After this transpired at the *parousia*, as time goes on, the person-by-person resurrection will be the raising up, lifting up, catching up, “the rapture” of the saints as each one dies.

“*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Cor. 5:1). The lifting up (rapture) is not physical levitation. This earthly temporary house-tabernacle-tent is the outward man. The inward man is the kernel planted to receive the new body or immortal covering so it will not be “naked” (1 Cor. 15:37). “*Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked*” (2 Cor. 5:2-3). As the outward man of the disciple is perishing, the inward man is being renewed (2 Cor. 4:16). The faithful never die

(sleep) (John 11:26). Mortality is swallowed up by life; death is swallowed up in victory (2 Cor. 5:4; 1 Cor. 15:54).

Contrary to common belief, man is not born immortal, having unending existence. That nature belongs to God. *“To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”* ... *“...the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see”* (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). We must seek it: *“Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuing in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life”* (Rom. 2:6-7). These are only suggestions with which you are free to disagree.

### **Immortality Is Given**

That gift of immortality comes in the resurrection. *“... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When this perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”* (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

When we begin to question how literal and physical the resurrection body will be, we are treading on holy ground. This mortal will put on immortality and this perishable will put on the imperishable, but in putting on the one, the other is discarded. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. However, that does not say we will have a “spiritual physical” body! That is an oxymoron. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Jesus said a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). There is no such thing as immortalized flesh, blood, and bones – immortalized, spiritual minerals and earthly elements which we ate on earth from garden or animal. We will have no digestive system, for need for food would indicate depletion of body cells and energy, hence a perishable nature. No flesh needing sustenance, no blood needing a heart and arterial system, no bones needing minerals, no depletion needing food and oxygen from lungs, no marriage or procreation needing sexuality. From our earthly viewpoint we cannot picture such a spiritual being.

We must also look at the matter of the predicted judgment. Jesus declared, *“For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom”* (Matt. 16:27-27). He reasserted this prophecy in Matthew 24:29-34. In the next chapter he describes the judgment scene when he was to come in glory with his angels (25:31-46). Only two days after revealing that, Jesus assured the High Priest who judged him, *“You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matt. 26:64). Was Jesus giving a false promise, or did the High Priest live to see that event of his coming and judgment?

The Scriptures do not describe that procedure except in the parable of the sheep and goats. My imagery of a person-by-person sort of trial before God on “judgment day” would be amiss, however. If five billion persons were raised and brought before him and each was given

only one minute of hearing, it would require more than 9,000 years to judge them. We can believe, however, that those in the first resurrection were judged because of the promise and because of the physical evidence in the destroying of Jerusalem.

## The Falling Away

While clearing out a thick underbrush, I noticed that I had lost my wristwatch. So I searched for a long time for it. Finally, in the very last place I looked, I found it! Even a listening child would probably respond, “Why would you look further after you found it?”

After we have found “the answer” to a Biblical question, why look further? Too often, I have learned to my dismay that I had “found” the answer in the last place I searched, but I should have searched further! That is true concerning my conclusions about “the falling away” mentioned in the Scriptures. Many times I have taught lessons on “The Church: The Falling Away and Restoration.” I would chart out on the blackboard, indicating the beginning church, the falling away through the development of Catholicism, the Reformation bringing denominations, and the “Restoration Movement” in which we presumably restored the original church. Because reformers pointed to the Catholic religion as the apostasy and the pioneers of our movement were so confident of that also, I needed to look no further. Who was I to question the historical answers!

I had two dependable proof-texts. The first: “*Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that as God he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Etc.*” (2 Thes. 2:1-12 - KJV).

Adding to my “proof” was: “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their consciences seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth*” (1 Tim. 4:1-3 -KJV). Since the popes claim to be vicars of Christ, are called *Holy Father*, require celibacy of those in holy orders, have restrictive regulations about foods, and have offered signs and wonders supporting their claims, why look further for fulfillment of Paul’s predictions? The search stops when you find the answer!

After the Lord’s patience with me for decades, however, with some surprise I recognized that **Jesus himself had spoken of this falling away**. Reluctantly admitting that his explanations were more accurate than the spin we had put on the subject, I began to see that I should have looked further in my search.

For sake of brevity and emphasis, Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 (RSV) will be abridged and highlighted... “*Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? And Jesus answered them, ‘Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ (Messiah), and they will lead many astray.*



*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but **the end is not yet** ... And then **many will fall away** ... And many false prophets will arise and **lead many astray** ... most men's love will grow cold. But he who **endures to the end will be saved**.... And then **the end will come**. ... For **false Christs (Messiahs) and false prophets** will arise and show great **signs and wonders, so as to lead astray**, if possible, even the elect. ... Immediately after **the tribulation** of those days **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken**; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see **the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory**; and he will send out his angels with a **loud trumpet call**, and they will **gather his elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ... So also, when you see all these things, you **know that he is near, at the very gates**. **TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, THIS GENERATION WILL NOT PASS AWAY TILL ALL THESE THINGS TAKE PLACE. HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY.**" (Please read v. 1-35 with special attention to the parts I have highlighted.)*

WOW!! How could I have been so blind? All along Jesus has been telling me that the falling away would take place before the generation of his listeners passed away! I had his word for it but did not comprehend it. I had chosen to listen to the spin of commentators instead of him!

What was this "falling away"? It is the *apostasia*, meaning **revolt** or **rebellion**, from which we get the word apostasy. Look into your more recent translations of the Bible. The word is translated **the rebellion** in the RSV, NIV, and The Living Bible. The TEV has **final rebellion**. The Phillips' Version renders it **a definite rejection of God**. In the NEB it is **the final rebellion against God**.

Long before Paul wrote concerning that falling away or rebellion, Jesus had warned, "*They will lead many astray,*" "*Many will fall away,*" and "*false prophets...will lead many astray*" ... "*so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*"

Jesus was asked about "*the sign of your coming and of the close of the age.*" He used terms like, "*but the end is not yet,*" "*He who endures to the end,*" and "*then the end will come,*" accompanied with "*a loud trumpet call.*"

Later, Paul referred to it as "*the coming of our Lord,*" "*our gathering together unto him,*" "*that day,*" "*the day of Christ,*" and "*the latter (later) times*" in symbolic terms like Isaiah described the destruction of Babylon, Damascus, Ethiopia, and Egypt.

In these happenings they would see the sign of his coming. They would "see" (discern) the happenings indicating his visitation according to his promise in the Olivet Discourse quoted above. (Relate these passages also: Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; Acts 1:10-11; Matt. 10:23; 16:27-28; Mark 8:38, 9:1; Luke 9:26-27; 21:12; Rev. 1:7.).

What is the time setting for all these dramatic events? The end of time? The Bible does not indicate that time will ever end, as though that were possible! Is it the dissolution and end of this physical universe? The Bible does not speak of such! Jesus stated plainly when it would happen: "**Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till ALL these things take**

**place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**” “Heaven and earth” would pass away at that time, but he was not speaking of the physical universe, but of the then-present system through which God had dealt with Israel. The nationalistic status of Israel, ruled by their luminaries in high places in the political kingdom and their religious system, would reach its end. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus made it clear that this upheaval would occur in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the texts cited above Jesus repeatedly informed his listeners that these things would take place in the life-time of some of them.

Do we have to verify the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions historically, that is, by identifying names, places, and events involved. Absolutely not! We have his word which will not pass away. Shall we trust uninspired historians more than Jesus’ own words?

It is true that Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived at the time, verifies many things by supplying specific names, places, and events, but my trust is in Jesus’ own words rather than the respected historian. Historians can be inaccurate, and we tend to pick and choose from ancient records, accepting that which substantiates our own notions.

### **The Man of Sin**

The rebellion of the Jews against God was not altogether new, but rather it was climactic and final in that generation. God-defying men displaced the priesthood and took over the temple and instigated revolt against Roman rule at the same time. In that time of terrible upheaval in their nation **many Jews abandoned their faith, as did many disciples of Jesus** also. The passages under study do not indicate that there was ever to be a total abandonment of the faith by disciples. None of these passages indicate that the church would disappear or be obliterated. The kingdom of the Messiah is eternal and indestructible. It would never need **restoration!** There would always be saved people – those who constitute the church. The church is not an organization that can be traced historically. However, since the church is erring people saved by grace, it will always be in need of **reformation.**

Must we identify those who would forbid marriage and require abstinence from meat? Certainly the Catholic church does not forbid all marriage or command total abstinence from meat. Some of those restrictions were a part of the Law of Moses and also a thorny problem of early Christians. In the first century, the Essenes, as an example, were ascetic, promoting celibacy over marriage and were very restrictive of diet. This is not to say they are the ones Paul referred to necessarily, but it indicates that we do not have to wait hundreds of years to find people who would fit Paul’s description. The Gnostics, or some similar philosophical sect, might be considered. Unless Jesus and Paul were predicting two different “rebellions” or “fallings away” (and there is no evidence to that effect), we will have to take Jesus’ word that this development was in the life-time of some of his listeners.

We have all felt that we have to get the papacy in this, so we have pointed to the pope as the man of sin. In so doing, we tricked ourselves into getting the pope in our group. The man of sin would sit in the **temple of God.** We identify the church as God’s temple and that is us! So we unwittingly placed him in the Church of Christ! The man of sin took over the Jewish temple.

Paul had written, “*Let no one deceive you in any way; for that **day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness/sin is revealed**, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is **restraining him** now so that he may be revealed in his time. 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**.* (2 Thes. 2:1-9).

**Who was** (not “is” or “will be”) **that man of sin** and perdition (doomed to destruction-NIV) who incited the ultimate rebellion against Rome resulting in the destruction of their nation? Admittedly, we are butting our head against a stone wall of fantastic suppositions built by futurists of today. If you have read our writings you may be ready for a more sober interpretation which sees all these events fulfilled in “the last days” of Judaism. So, we can look for some person, type of person, or office that would fit the role of this character which we have mystified.

The “mystery of iniquity” (Doesn’t that term excite the imagination?) was already at work. This is translated “secret power of lawlessness” in the NIV. The rebellion was not an instant eruption, but greedy ambitions were motivating deceitful men. For years there had been unrest and resistance by the Jews that brought Roman repression throughout the empire. John Bray has written, “As we have discussed previously, the nation of Israel and Jerusalem were certainly falling away, or revolting, or rebelling, against Rome at this time. This was the apostasy. The rebellion was growing stronger, conflict and confrontation were the order of the day, and war was inevitable. Rome would not allow this province to be separate from its empire. As the war developed between the Jewish zealots and Rome, a strong leader would soon appear on the scene who would fulfill the prophecy made by Paul. He would be revealed after the one who hindered was taken out of the way.”

Josephus, a Jewish military officer spared by the Romans and enlisted to record the current happenings for the Romans, tells about a certain Jew, John Levi of Gischala who came upon the scene. He was a selfish, unscrupulous man with persuasive powers who convinced many that he was sent by God to liberate them. He disregarded the laws of God, desecrated the temple, melted down many of the sacred vessels of the temple, plundered the people, and committed all sorts of unscrupulous atrocities described in detail by Josephus. In a passion of tyranny he convinced the Jews that they should go to war against the Romans.

**John Levi had over-riden all restraints except that of the high priest, Ananus.** But John enlisted aid from the Idumeans who killed 8,500 of the people including the high priests and Ananus in particular. Josephus recognized the great significance of this, recording, “I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of the city, and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs” (*Josephus*, p. 313).

That which restrained was taken out of the way just as Paul had told them. This unbelieving Jewish historian points to this most sinful / lawless character as the one most

responsible for inciting the rebellion which ultimately brought the vengeance of God against Israel and their city – **the great tribulation** – a horrendous siege of their city.

Of course, we cannot be dogmatic in pointing out John Levi, but since Jesus and inspired writers definitely taught that all this would happen in their generation, we certainly cannot point to the emperors, the papacy, Hitler, Osama bin Laden, or other favorite candidates of later history. If it was not John Levi, it was some other person or group of that generation – deflating as that might be to modern fantastic speculative theories. Much of this is borrowed from a booklet, *The Man of Sin of II Thessalonians 2*, by John Bray.

In passing, here is another note of interest. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus declared: “...*then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*” That would be experienced by some of that generation. Many years later, John repeats Jesus’ prophecy, saying, “*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him*” (Rev. 1:7). This destructive visitation upon the Jews (tribes) came upon that generation. This is a clear indication that John wrote Revelation before the occurrence of the things Jesus predicted for his generation. It is unthinkable that he wrote after the destruction without mentioning it.

If the falling away/rebellion occurred in the first century as this treatise proposes, how can we defend our claim of being a “restoration of the New Testament church”? If it was not obliterated – a time when there were no saved people on earth – restoration of the church is a mistaken concept. It is usually based upon the concept of an organized system of religion. No group of disciples can trace itself historically to the apostles.

It is difficult to accept that the falling away occurred during the lifetime of Jesus’ listeners. That is not due to lack of clarity of the statements of Jesus and Paul. It is difficult because we have built so many wrong ideas around our traditional misconceptions.

When the gospel is preached, believed, and obeyed, the church is being produced, for the church is the saved people. The Lord does not form an organization but creates a fellowship of those reconciled. It is a “here and now” relationship in any age or nation without dependence upon any historical connection.

## **The Battle of Armageddon**

Jerry Wayne Bernard tells of being excited by all the discussions among his Baptist people about the great battle of Armageddon. Then he decided to study more about it. He writes, “I did not want to foolishly believe something for my generation that was not going to happen. So, I started my private study of the subject. First of all, did the Bible teach that a battle would occur in the valley of Megiddo? I looked through my notes on the subject. The most quoted and famous passage was Revelation 16:14-16. John described it graphically. “*They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*”

“I discovered in the foot-notes in my Bible the fact that Armageddon should be translated “mount of Megiddo.” That would not be a valley as I had been told. I also noticed that the kings of the earth would assemble at Armageddon, the mount. However, they would not fight there. They assembled at (H)armageddon to make war on Jerusalem (16:16), many miles away.

“The book of Revelation makes no mention of a war in the valley of Megiddo. In fact, I could never find the words, “Battle of Armageddon” in my Bible. Zechariah 14:2 was another verse that speakers used: “*I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it.*” All of this seemed to have a familiar ring to it. However, none of the verses fit conference speakers’ conclusions.

“It was later that I read the account of Josephus, the first-century historian who told of ‘a great day of God Almighty’ (16:14) in 70 AD, when the Roman forces from all nations assembled at Har-megedon to make war on Jerusalem (16:16).

“Neither the Bible nor Josephus described a battle taking place at Har-megedon, the mount, or the valley adjoining it. Both accounts say that the armies assembled there to fight against Jerusalem, many miles away. Josephus was a Jewish General who was defeated in the first battle of the Jewish-Roman war in 67 AD. Because of many good things about Josephus, the Ruler of Rome commissioned him to become a historian for the Roman Empire and to give detailed information on the activities of Titus and his Roman Army as they waged war against the rebellious Jews. This account covered three and one-half years of battle, until Jerusalem was completely destroyed to the ground. Not one stone of the Temple sat upon another stone.

“Josephus had recorded how Titus, the Roman General and son of the Emperor, led his troops out of Egypt, north along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, bypassing the region of Jerusalem, and how he came to the vicinity of Caesarea, bordering Mount Megiddo. Titus and his famous Roman tenth legion waited there for other troops to arrive from beyond the Euphrates River to the northeast and from Rome to the northwest. Once the troops were assembled at Har-megedon, Titus gave instructions and they marched against the city of Jerusalem.

“Just like the prophecies foretold, the battle happened at Jerusalem, not Har-megedon. The kings of the earth (made up of nations with Titus) assembled at Mount Megiddo and made plans for a swift and brief battle against Jerusalem. Between Vespasian and his son, Titus, it took three and one-half years to complete this end to Jerusalem. This agreed with the prophecies of Zechariah 14, Revelation 16, Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13. The prophecies were fulfilled. Should we look for another fulfillment of judgment on Israel?

“The Battle of Armageddon is not something for us to look for in our future. It belongs to the past with all the other events that brought an end to Judaism, Jerusalem, and all related prophecies.” (Jerry Wayne Bernard, P.O. Box 202, Montrose, CA 91921-0101. Web site: <jerrybernard.com>.)

### ***HEBREWS: God’s Last Appeal To Israel***

The great treatise of *Hebrews* was God’s final appeal to his fleshly chosen people, Israel. At the same time, it was written to prepare Hebrew disciples for the “day approaching” of the Lord’s return in vengeance against his rejecting people. About forty years earlier, Jesus had told

disciples that their generation would not pass until the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem (Matt. 24:34). That fulfillment was looming less than a decade in the future.

Incidents of rebellion / falling away against Rome among the Jews were already bringing persecution of the Jews and Jewish disciples when Hebrews was written sometime about 61-63 A.D. This was about the time James was killed in Jerusalem.

God's inspired messengers knew the finality of the "last days" was near. "*In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,*" the message begins (Heb. 1:2). This was in fulfillment of what Isaiah had written, that the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem in the latter days (Isa. 2:1f). After Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, he enabled inspired men to declare his gospel message on Pentecost. This was in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of what would transpire in the last days (Acts 2:15-21). God was speaking to "us" – that is, Judah and Jerusalem, Hebrew people, with whom the writer identified himself (Isa. 2:1f).

In this effort, no commentary will be made of the arguments the writer lays out in favor of their listening to and adhering to Christ instead of Moses. My aim is to note how the message relates to the consummation of the age. I will only highlight connecting points hoping that interested students will read the entire context in the Hebrews text.

In Chapter 1, attention is called to Christ's throne which "*is for ever and ever.*" That could not refer to an **everlasting earthly rule**. In symbolic language the writer indicates that their **present system would be changed**, but Christ would still reign. This would refer to his **spiritual kingdom – "the world to come"** (2:5) – inaugurated on Pentecost. One more enemy, death, would be destroyed before the perfection of his reign would be seen. Even though Jesus had been raised in victory over death, God's people had not been raised before atonement was taken into the Holy Place. At his imminent return, righteous Israel would be released (Ch. 2).

The spiritual house of God is cautioned against such rebellion as brought the fleshly house into disfavor (Ch.3-5). Here the writer draws a parallel between the forty years Israel was in the wilderness while the nation was forming to a similar period of maturing, or perfecting, of the spiritual nation with a kingly high priest in their "last days" situation.

To turn back to Judaism would be to choose destruction with the rebellious fleshly nation who "*bears thorns and thistles*" and "*is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned*" (6:1- 8). "*And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end*" (6:11). The old system had a passing priesthood which would soon be dispersed, but Jesus would be a priest forever (Ch. 7). **The perfecting of the new, spiritual arrangement was near because the old system was obsolete and ready to vanish away** (Ch. 8).

The new would soon replace the old. Jesus had gone into the Holy Place in preparing a new and spiritual way. "**By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).**" The tent (old system) was still standing, but "the time of reformation" was at hand when Christ would return to do away with the vestiges of the old system (9:1-10). In the meantime, Christ had gone into the holy of holies "*now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*" "Our" in this passage specifically refers to Israel "*since a death has occurred which redeems them from*

the transgressions under the first covenant” (Ch. 9). This appearance was “at the end of the age.” He had taken their appointment with death and judgment so that at his soon return he could save those eagerly waiting for him (v. 26-28).

The first system which was “*nigh unto vanishing away*” could not perfect. So, “*He abolishes the first in order to establish the second*” which establishment had not been fully accomplished. “*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet.*” Not until he raised righteous Israel had this enemy, death, been fully conquered. **Resurrection was “the hope of Israel”** (Read more in *Free To Change*, Chapter 30). “*For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*” If none have been raised, then none are in heaven yet!

Death has been conquered so that those who are sanctified will never die. This being true, they should serve together in building each other up, “*and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*” That would be **the great and dreadful Day** for any who turned back, for “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,*” whose punishment would be administered by the Roman army on Jerusalem. So they should endure the present afflictions in confidence, “*For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry*” (Ch. 10). Less than a decade more to endure!

The heroes of faith paraded in Chapter 11 looked for a city whose builder and maker is God which was coming into view in *Hebrews*. “*And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us (those being addressed) they should not be made perfect*” (11:39f). The disciples who died in those latter days were raised with those heroes when he returned (See 2 Thes. 1:5-12). Those who were alive and remained would be “caught up” to be together with them as “the trumpet of God” sounded for each of them summoning them into the eternal assembly (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

With their ancient heroes cheering them on as spectators in the stadium, as it were, they should press on with joy even though there were persecutions. Those persecutions were to be counted as chastening of the Lord who **disciplines his sons**, especially **his son, Israel**, at that time. They were anticipating seeing the Lord (12:14).

The last half of Chapter 12 presents an awesome scene of **the consummation of the age**. Those called out of Egypt had been summoned to God’s Presence at a fiery, quaking Mount Horeb to hear his voice and receive his covenant of law. At the time of the writing, those called out by Jesus were summoned, as it were, “*to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to the judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood (the atoning sacrifice that Jesus had taken into the Holy of Holies) that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel*” (12:18-24).

This was the mountain foreseen by Isaiah (Isa. 2:1-4). (See *Freedom’s Ring*, #55, “Viewing the Holy City.”) It was the new Jerusalem related to **the new heavens and new earth**

of Isaiah 65:17-15. It was the last days upheaval predicted by Joel as beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:15-21). It was **the new heavens and earth** resulting from the cataclysm described by Peter (2 Peter 3). It was the **holy city, the new Jerusalem** that John saw coming down out of heaven at the appearance of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-4). The voice from the throne was heard saying, “*Behold, the dwelling of God is with man.*” This was the fulfilling of the words of the prophets, **the completion and perfecting of God’s plans.**

Moses had spoken from the mountain; Jesus had spoken from heaven. “*His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates **the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.** Therefore let us (them) be grateful for **receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire**” (12:26-29).*

**This all was soon to be accomplished when Jesus would return in vengeance upon Israel and to fulfill all that had been prophesied in the events transpiring in or about 70 A.D.**

From that time of change from the literal kingdom of Israel to the spiritual kingdom, throughout the succeeding ages, all disciples will be in that kingdom which cannot be shaken. It will never pass away for our High Priest and King lives eternally. We have eternal life in restored fellowship with Him who is eternal. Eventually, for each of us, the earthly, fleshly state will give way to our spiritual and eternal identity in the Eternal One, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Now instead of singing, “We’re marching to Zion,” should it not be, “We are living in Zion!” And instead of praying, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” we should sing, “Joy to the world; the Lord has come!” – not just as an infant but also in fulfillment of all prophecies and completing-perfecting-finalizing what redemptive history is all about.

To look for a restoration of the nation of Israel would be expectation of a reversal of the very things Jesus returned to earth to accomplish. Please study the *Hebrews* discourse with these considerations in mind. No claim is being made here of having all the dogmatic answers. None of us can explain each prophetic figure or utterance, but that is not necessary. The overwhelming evidence is that Jesus fulfilled all that he promised that some of his listeners would live to see.

### **Purpose of Empowering Gifts Fulfilled**

Like the Spirit nurtured Israel in their forty years of transition from the Red Sea into Canaan while developing from a slave tribe to a nation, so the Holy Spirit was sent to sponsor this forty year development from fleshly Israel to spiritual Israel.

Special visible and demonstrable gifts empowered certain persons. Holy Spirit baptism attested God’s approval of the beginning on Pentecost, of the acceptance of proselyte believers, of the acceptance of the mixed breed Samaritan believers, of Saul as an apostle to the Gentiles, and of Cornelius and his Gentile family.

Men and women could preach the prophecies of the old covenant Scripture but needed further gifts of inspiration and revelation in order to fully proclaim the gospel of the Messiah.



The purpose and duration of those gifts were mentioned to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4-8): *“I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which is given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with **all speech and all knowledge** – even as the **testimony to Christ was confirmed** among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you **wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, faultless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”* They exercised those gifts as they awaited the imminent return of Christ.

In his farewell discourses, Jesus was preparing his apostles for his leaving. He assured them that they would not be left as helpless orphans, ignorant and powerless. He promised to send the Spirit to sustain them. He would **bear witness** of him, **refresh their memories of his teaching, guide them into all truth, convict the world, and declare things to come.** Read John 14, 15, and 16 with special attention to 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13-14. Those promises were not made to you and me. They were made to the apostles. The indwelling of the Spirit was given to all as they were baptized, and that still prevails.

Adding to their knowledge of what was already written in old covenant Scriptures, God revealed special messages through both male and female prophets. Paul explained, *“**For we know in part and we prophecy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears**”* (1 Cor. 13:9 NIV). The dual source of truth was temporary in the infancy and maturing of the church: *“...for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, etc.”* (Eph. 4:11f). Unless the body of Christ was to remain in infancy perpetually, there would be no continued need for those special gifts. Unless revelation would always be fragmentary, endowed spokesmen would no longer fill a need. If God’s plan to bring all flesh together in one body was completed, perfected, confirmed, and consummated in maturity, no more predictive utterances would be expected. All would have been fulfilled.

With emphasis upon the functioning of the body, Paul elaborated further on the gifts and functions facilitated by the Spirit, but he would show *“a still more excellent way”* (1 Cor 12). That more excellent way was to be “love-driven” rather than “Spirit-driven!” Spiritual gifts were temporary; love never ends. *“**For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away**”* (Ch. 13). The stage of imperfection would give way to maturity. The grown man does not require childish things.

What is “the perfect” or “that which is perfect?” In defining “perfect” Vine says *“**teleios**”* signifies having reached its end (*telos*), **finished, complete, perfect.** It is used of persons primarily of physical development, then with ethical import, **fully grown, mature.** What was coming to completion, maturity, etc. in those “last days”?

All Bible history focuses on this point in time and events. God had called Abraham through whom to bless all nations. He had selected a nation through whom the Savior would come. His Son had come and inaugurated his spiritual kingdom, open to all peoples. Ascended into the Holy of Holies to present his sacrifice of atonement, awaiting a return after a period of

transition from national Israel to spiritual Israel. He had sent his Spirit to instruct and guide it, which gifts would no longer be essential to the mature church.

When he returned in judgment against Jerusalem and all it represented, God took up his dwelling with man in his new Temple perfected by the atonement of Christ. **Thus the special mission of the Holy Spirit in the “last days” would be fulfilled. That which is perfect would have come. Those “childhood” gifts ceased.**

That may well explain why no inspired historian reported the destruction of their nation. (For a fuller discussion read FR 206).

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

Now, let us review briefly the thrust of this booklet. Malachi warned of the “great and terrible day of the Lord.” John, Jesus, and the apostles repeated that message and John’s hearers were fleeing the imminent coming of wrath. It was at hand for them, not for us 2000 years later. Jesus’ “coming” – *parousia* – coming in demonstration rather than in bodily form, would be in the lifetime of some who heard them. It would be *the last days*, not of the universe, but of the old covenant with its religious and civil law in the Law of Moses, and national Israel which it had produced. The “kingdom parables” detailed things they would live to see. Jesus would be rejected and crucified. He would take his sacrifice into the Holy of Holies in heaven while the gospel was being preached in their world and among the Gentiles. Then he would return, redeeming and immortalizing the righteous of ages past and the first fruits of Christ who slept awaiting that spiritual resurrection which was the hope of Israel. At the same time, the Roman legions had surrounded Jerusalem, besieging the city for three years in that great and terrible day of tribulation bringing total destruction of their city, the temple and the religious system it represented, and national Israel. As those events approached, they were variously described in terms like the *coming of the Lord*, *the last days*, *the day*, *the last day*, *the last hour*, and *the end*. This was the judgment of Israel and the culmination of redemptive history.

Jesus had told Martha that her brother would rise in the resurrection at the last day but that those who lived and believed in Jesus would never die. They would need no resurrection. It is evident that Jesus was not speaking of physical death and resurrection. Thereafter, believers would die physically, but at that time they would be given immortality. So when we today die physically, our spirit is not sent to hades to await resurrection and judgment, but we continue to live with God forever. It was appointed for man once to die and then be judged for his sins, but Jesus took our appointments and died and was judged in our place so that we neither die nor must be judged.

If we are forgiven our sins, why would we have to be judged for them after death? If we are saved by faith, why would we be judged by our works? The Jews, being under law, were judged by works, but not us. If we are truly reconciled to God, why should we pray through a mediator as though we are still alienated? If we are reconciled to God with his Spirit living in us, would he leave us at death allowing us to be alienated again and making it necessary for us to be consigned to Hades to await judgment and salvation? If there has been no conquest of death and a resurrection, none are in heaven yet! Futurist interpretations cloud the truth about

reconciliation. All prophetic promises have been fulfilled. Redemptive history, which is the theme of the Bible, has been completed.

Fulfilled prophecy confirms the integrity of Jesus and inspired writers who repeatedly declared their imminent fulfillment. We no longer must be so presumptuous as to conclude that Jesus had to change his plans because of rejection and that the apostles were mistaken. []

If reading this has created interest but you are still skeptical, please read it again examining all references in context. More of my writings may be accessed at <[freedomring.org](http://freedomring.org)> by clicking on NEWSLETTERS & ARTICLES. Then scroll down to the INDEX, and choose *Coming of the Lord*.

Many books on this subject are available. You may find many at [www.preterist.org](http://www.preterist.org), [www.eschatology.org](http://www.eschatology.org), and [www.eschatology.com](http://www.eschatology.com).

In this discourse I have borrowed heavily from *THE PAROUSIA*, a phenomenal book written by James Stuart Russell and published in England in 1878. I do not claim to have expressed his thoughts with accuracy. This book was almost like a new revelation to me. I highly recommend it to you.

### **“In Like Manner”**

Acts 1:11 says that “*this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*”

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” would “*in the likeness of his death*” in Romans 6:5 mean that we have died in exactly the same way Jesus died?

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” how then does Jesus come from heaven riding a white horse (Rev. 19:11)?

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” how then does the Lord come “*with ten thousands of his saints*” (Jude 14)?

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” how then does Jesus come “*as lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west*” (Matthew 24:27)?

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” how then does Jesus come “*with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)?

If “*in like manner*” means “*in exactly the same way,*” how then does Jesus come “*in flaming fire*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8)?

Just something to think about!

(John L. Bray, PO Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804)

**Roadblocks to Understanding of Prophecies**

**Mistaking redemptive history as world history.**

**Thinking we are still living in “the last days.”**

**Thinking *Revelation* was written after A.D.70.**

**Thinking Babylon is Rome instead of Jerusalem.**

**Identifying the man of sin as coming after A.D. 70.**

**Mistaking Jewish rebellion as apostasy of church.**

**Interpreting veiled language literally.**

**Believing the anti-Christ is yet to come.**

**Thinking the “great tribulation” is yet to come.**

**Looking for a non-Biblical “Battle of Armageddon.”**

## Some Questions for Group Discussion

1. Which holds the greater risk: holding on to traditional teachings that you question or exploring new possibilities that you question?
2. After resisting restudy, have you ever eventually learned something new that really excited and enlightened you?
3. Do you consider the Scriptures to be a history of the world and what will happen to it or to the developing of the redemptive plan?
4. If God is Love, why would he send his Son as an avenger?
5. Why did Jesus speak in parables and puzzling symbols (Mt. 13:10f)?
6. What was the main lesson taught in the “kingdom” parables?
7. Many Scriptures may be someone else’s mail you are reading. Right?
8. Will we be reunited with God in flesh or in spirit (1 Cor. 15:35-58)?
9. When Paul explained what would be happening to the Thessalonians and Corinthians saying “we,” was he including you and me?
10. After Christ delivered the kingdom to the Father, is he still king (1 Cor. 15:20-28)? What is meant by “*that God may be everything to everyone*”?
11. What were the “new and living way” and the “Day approaching” of Hebrews 10:19-25?
12. Is Heb. 9:23-28 a warning of death and judgment or an assurance?
13. Will we stand in judgment if we are accounted righteous by grace?
14. What are your major problems in believing that Jesus has returned?
15. If Jesus has not returned, how do you explain all the passages that seemingly indicate that his return was to be in their time?
16. Do you have problems with the dramatic, catastrophic language? Was it designed to intrigue the curious and to baffle us? Why did they not call names and designate places that were involved?
17. If there has been no resurrection, is heaven still unoccupied?
18. Are we born with a “never-dying soul,” that is, are we born immortal?
19. Did not Jesus come to destroy what futurists expect to be restored?
20. Who was the chief adversary of the disciples, Rome or the Jews?
21. Was the destruction of the nation of Israel brought on by Roman hatred or by Jews rebelling against Rome?
22. Do you think “that which is perfect” has come?
23. Do you think the Holy Spirit no longer works in our lives?
24. Are the new heaven and new earth physical or spiritual?
25. Will heaven be on this earth after it is supposedly perfected?
26. Where will people be while this earth and heaven are being destroyed-obliterated-annihilated? How will they survive?
27. Because God is Spirit, no one has seen him or can see him. Does his Son who has returned to him have a physical, visible body?

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