



A Layman's Guide to the End Times

Written by a layperson, for laypersons

An aid to exploration, discovery and
(more to the point)
application of what the Bible says about the End Times

by

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(~ 105,000 words)

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Introduction

In the "Back to the Future" movies the hero, Marty, goes back in time, and what he does there alters the future for good or for bad.

From time to time, most of us wish we could do the same. We wish we could change our present and future circumstances with the benefit of hindsight, saying: "If only I had it to do over again." Or: "If I knew then what I know now." Or: "I wish I could live my life over, knowing what I know now."

Of course, in the movies things did not always work out as well as Marty would have liked (at least, not until the end). But the idea of influencing our present and future circumstances by changing things in our past intrigues us.

But that is exactly what we do when we study Bible prophecy. We go back into the past to learn what the future holds for the world and for humanity – that is, for each and every one of us living on the face of the earth today. And if we study the Bible with the right attitude, and for the right reasons, and avail ourselves to the right helps, our journey into the past can change us now, and for the rest of our lives, and for eternity.

The Bible is an old, old book. The oldest parts were written maybe six thousand years ago. The newest parts were written almost two thousand years ago. Yet this old book has much to say about a future yet to be – our future. When we study Bible prophecy we are in fact going back in time to learn about, and possibly influence for good, our future.

In recent years, the future End Times prophesied in the Bible has captured public attention and imagination. Books about the End Times fill the shelves in bookstores. Educational specials and movies-made-for-television with End Times themes air regularly. Television preachers preach sermons on the topic almost every Sunday. A simple search of the Internet lists scores of End Times web pages (including my own). Even cable news has picked up on it. But much of what we read, see and hear is wildly speculative. It panders to our innate attraction to the latest doomsday scenario, ignores or sidesteps important issues with interpretive slight of hand, or dead-ends down corridors of near-sighted dogmatism. Yet all of this popular (and too often misguided) interest in the End Times was prophesied in the Bible, long ago.

So, what makes this book different from others touching on the subject of Bible prophecy? And why should anyone bother to read it?

For Christians and non-Christians alike, the End Times prophecies are the most disturbing parts of the Bible. They are also the most difficult to understand from the text. For these reasons, too many are too quick to dismiss them or let others do the thinking for them. But this is not what God wants for us. He wants each of us to learn for ourselves what the Bible has to say about His Plans for our future. And He has promised blessings for those who make the effort.

This book is a layperson's guide to the End Times. It is written by a layperson, for laypersons. It is intended to aid, but not substitute, the thoughtful and prayerful efforts of its

readers to explore, understand and (more to the point) apply what the Bible has to say about the End Times. It is a map, or guide book, of a journey I began several years ago by taking God at His word – that He will give special blessings to those who read and hear what He has to tell us regarding the ultimate future of the world and of humanity (Revelation, Chapter 1, verses 1 through 3). That is all I wanted at the time. And I am the kind of guy who takes God at His literal word. I have never been disappointed.

But God also promises His blessing on those who help and encourage others to understand the End Times. It is this blessing I seek as I write these words. I hope and pray that He has made me equal to the task. God forbid the publication of this manuscript otherwise!

The information in this book is my current and best understanding of End Times events, as I have come to understand them through prayerful and (hopefully) open-minded study. I claim no special revelation, other than that which God promises to anyone who will approach His Word with a simple and open (childlike) faith and with no predetermined agenda.

And I believe this is all that anyone who writes on the subject can claim, if they are honest. There are no Bible prophecies 'experts' – no one who can honestly claim the last word on God's Word regarding the End Times. Beware of anyone who makes such claims. This, too, was prophesied in the Bible, long ago.

If now I sound a bit conceited in my modesty, I apologize. But it is quite natural I think to want to share what one has learned about the Word of God. Indeed, those of us who claim to be Christians are instructed by God to do this very thing. And it may surprise some people (including some Christians) to learn that none of the writers of the Bible were experts on the subjects they wrote about when they first began to learn and practice the teachings of what became known as Christianity, including (and especially) those parts of Christianity that involve God's Plan for the future of humanity. It was by hearing and believing and learning and doing that any of them gained anything of worth to them and to us regarding the things God told them, and in a real sense none of them ever in their lifetimes understood fully the things of God. How could they? Is the creature greater than the Creator? Can the minds of men and women absorb the Mind of God? Yet each of us can receive and understand all God wants us to know about His Plan, if only if we are willing to receive it – and to share it.

I had no agenda at the beginning of this study, other than to receive God's blessing, and I have none other now. I condemn no one who holds different views about the End Times, but remain open to other interpretations, so long as these do not conflict with the foundational truths of the Bible. And I will pray for anyone who interprets scripture motivated by anything other than an honest desire to know, respond to, and share what they learn of God's Plan for the future of humanity. Without correction, they will always be wrong.

In my studies I have relied heavily on many helps to supplement my understanding of Bible prophecy. To paraphrase the great English scientist Sir Isaac Newton, if I (a layman) have seen the things of God, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of spiritual giants.

Sources of help for understanding and wisdom are many, and it is necessary and good that we use them to facilitate our understanding, not only of prophecy, but also the whole Word of

God. At the end of this book I list some of the resources I have found invaluable in my studies. Some of these I reference in the following chapters.

That said, anyone who studies the End Times should make sure that all their sources conform to the scriptures, in no way deviating from the ultimate source – the Bible. Weeds have grown up amid the wheat: false and erroneous doctrines share the bookshelves, airwaves, pulpits and Internet with the true. Vigilance and judgment should at all times attend our quest for correct understanding of God's Word. We are promised divine help in this if indeed we want it.

By religious training I am a layman – a teacher, web servant, deacon, and dishwasher. My spiritual gifts are helps, teaching and administration. I have been told I have some small talent for expressing myself in writing – I will let you be the judge of that. By religious background I am a Southern Baptist; however, through prayerful study and discipleship, as I continue my spiritual walk after Christ, I grow more and more merely Christian. I am completely comfortable with my membership and participation in a Southern Baptist Church. I think I could be equally comfortable joining with, and participating in, any other Church that preaches of the gospel of Christ, ' - because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes - ' (Romans 1: 16).

May God bless you in your study of His Word, and may He keep you in His care until Christ returns.

Preface

In his book "Mere Christianity", Christian apologist C. S. Lewis describes the world as 'enemy-occupied territory'. He describes Christians as the resistance, making preparations for the invasion and re-conquest of the earth by its rightful king. This is as good an explanation of the spiritual condition of the world as any I have found. And it suggests (at least to me) that the Bible is the manual, or guide, for the resistance, explaining the situation, describing the distribution and composition of friendly and enemy forces, and outlining the strategies, operational plans and tactics for achieving victory.

Many people (including many who call themselves Christians) resist the idea that the world is embroiled in a kind of spiritual warfare. It suggests that the world is not as comfortable a place as we would like it to be. It implies that we have to choose sides, and come out fighting.

I do not like it. But if it is true (as many Christian writers over the last two millennia have believed) then whether we like it or not we have to deal with it. And the best way to deal with the truth is to acknowledge it and go on from there.

From personal experience I can tell you that denial of any truth is continually frustrating. The truth has a habit of getting in the way of what I want to believe. But when all is said and done, I believe that denial of the truth is damning; it keeps us from making life choices that will guarantee our future – indeed, our eternal – safety. To take a page from popular history; too many souls aboard the Titanic discovered too late the truth that the great ocean liner really could sink.

The idea of spiritual warfare is exactly what comes across when we read the Bible. And the Bible makes clear that, in the end, the victor of this warfare is God. That is why I, and many others, have chosen His side.

Following is a very brief overview of the Bible, and of its message about how we can join the winning side – which is the only thing that the Bible is about – for those readers who are unfamiliar with the Bible or its message.

This overview by no means gives the subject the time and attention it deserves. Indeed, whole libraries are filled with books on the Bible and its message – I have, in my own modest collection of books, shelves filled with volumes about the Bible. Universities were founded to plumb its depths. Men and women of far greater talent, training, education and insight than I have labored to understand its whole meaning. And yet much of it remains a mystery, even unto the wisest.

Still, little children can learn what anyone needs to know in order obtain the full benefit of the Bible and its message. In fact the Bible declares we must become as children, at least with respect to our willingness to learn its truths – indeed, we must be born again (that is, spiritually) – before we begin to understand much of real worth from what is written on its pages.

There are plenty of excellent resources available for those requiring or desiring more information about the Bible and its message. There is, of course, the Bible itself. And the best resource I can recommend are those Churches that teach and practice the Bible's message of

redemption and of a right relationship with God through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. I recommend that you search one out. If you are not ready to do that, then I suggest you read the book "Mere Christianity", by C. S. Lewis. I have found it to be one of the best works on the subject.

II Timothy 3: 16 –17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The question is asked: What is the Bible?

The answer is: The Bible is the Word of God. That means the things written in it are the things He wants us to know about Him, the world and His Plan for the world. In fact, it is about us – as we are part of His world, created by His Hand for His Good Purposes.

If you cannot believe that, or at least be open minded about it, none of this might be making any sense to you right now. You might be tempted to stop reading this book, put it back on the shelf, and select something else. But having gotten this far, I encourage you to go on. Not everything we choose to believe in true. Not everything we choose to disbelieve is false. And understanding comes when we make the effort to learn.

The Old Testament

The Bible consists primarily of two parts. These are what many call the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is a history of the Hebrew ancestors of the Jewish people. It primarily concerns God's dealings with the Hebrews, a tribe that once lived in what is today the Middle East.

God chose the Hebrews long ago as His special representatives to the nations of the world. In preparing the Hebrews for this work, He spoke to them through prophets. These prophets wrote down what God had to say about Himself, the world and His plans for humanity. And what He had to say, basically, is this:

In the beginning God created the heavens, the earth, and every living creature in the heavens and on the earth. He created creatures to populate the heavens, called angels. On earth He created people – our ancestors – to whom He gave possession of and, under His authority, dominion over the earth. To both the angels and the people He gave His very nature – that is, He created them in His image, making them spiritual beings, and thus creatures capable of recognizing Him for Who He is and communicating and interacting with Him in rational,

thinking, feeling ways that no other of God's creatures are capable. He quite literally hard wired into the people He created a sense of, and capacity for, communion with the Divine (that is, with God). They were – and we after them are – so like Him, and He is so ever present in His creation, that we cannot help it. It is a part of what we are and what defines us as human beings.

God also gave both the angels and the people He created free will, or the ability to decide for themselves just how they would interact with Him.

Now, the Bible does not provide much information about how and why God created the physical universe, including the earth, life on the earth, and humanity. In fact, what the Bible has to say about all of it fits on less than one page in most English language translations of the Bible. Then there is the whole matter of the other part of creation, the part that is spiritual and not physical, which is hinted at throughout the Bible, but about which we have no other evidence except what people in every culture of every civilization in every century of recorded history have speculated. And this lack of details and answers to questions about both the physical and the spiritual universe, which quite naturally arise in the minds of curious and thoughtful people, bothers a lot of them. Indeed, some discount the Bible because, in their minds, what little it does say about the created universe (both physical and spiritual) appears to conflict with what they perceive as common sense, or the observed universe, or scientific discovery.

But when we look at the whole matter of God and His creation this way, we miss the one important thing I think God wants to get across to us when we read the Bible – that God did indeed create the universe, both physical and spiritual, and that He did it for His own good purposes and for the benefit of the things He created. And that is all I think we can get of any real importance from the information the Bible provides – that, and how we as individuals can avail ourselves to the benefits of what God created – because at foundation this is all the Bible is really about. I do not think arguments about the Bible versus common sense, personal observation, or science do us any good, and I say this to both sides of any debate – to those who want to discount the Bible and to those who want to defend it. If we cannot get past this first lesson of the Bible – that God created the universe, and that He did it for His own good purposes and for the benefit of the things He created – then nothing else about the Bible really matters. And if we can get that far, does anything else really matter?

I am not in the least saying I think common sense, observation or science are unimportant. I am in fact a big fan of all three. But if I want to know something about God's purposes and plan I do not study a book on physics or plumbing. I study the Bible. By the same token, if I want to fix my leaky kitchen sink, I do not study the Bible. I pull out my handyman's guide to home plumbing repairs, or something very like it.

When God created the heavens and the earth, He also established the laws, or rules, whereby everything in the heavens and on the earth would work perfectly. But because He gave both the angels and the people free will, these had the ability to choose either to obey His rules for living correctly or to go their own way.

God told the people that, so long as they chose to do things the way He had established when he created the heavens and the earth, things would go well. But He also warned the people that if they chose not to do things the way He had established, then things would start to go wrong and eventually they would die. They would die physically – their bodies would grow old and weak and stop working, then decay and return to the earth from which they were made. They would also die spiritually – that is, they would lose their souls, or life-force, and their spirits would be forever separated from God and all the good things He had created, both in heaven and on the earth.

Now, when God created the heavens, the earth, the angels and the people, everything was perfect and good and worked as He had determined it should. There was no sickness, no anguish, no suffering and no death. The earth was a garden, created for the enjoyment of the people and to sustain their physical lives. There were, of course, rules to follow that would ensure everything continued to work out well – things like 'do not jump off cliffs or bite down on rocks' (to do so would cause pain and injury, just as it does today) and 'obey God in all things' (to do otherwise would be to assert the self over God and others, with the results we see around us in human affairs today). And so long as the people chose to obey God's rules in all things, everything in their lives was fine.

But some of the angels chose to not obey God. In the Bible these rebellious angels are called devils or demons. And the first people allowed themselves to be convinced by the chief of these demons to do the same, choosing instead to do things their own way. And because the people chose to do things their way instead of God's way, they became rebels to God's authority and everything started to go wrong. The perfect earth, which had been a garden to them, started to become what it is today – a place of toil, hardship and suffering. The people began to hurt each other, exploit each other, and kill each other. And sure enough their bodies began to grow old and die. And they fell more and more under the influence of the rebellious angels, who wanted to control them and, through this control, assume dominion over the earth.

The end results of all this is a world today filled with dangers. Things like violent storms, droughts, earthquakes and diseases, and maybe even global warming, are most likely the results of humanity – that is, you and me and all mankind – losing some of our dominion over the earth and over our own bodies. Add to this dangerous world the hatreds, fears, abuses, unfairness, wars and death that have plagued us throughout our existence, and you have most of what is written in our history books and aired around-the-clock on cable news. And add to all this your own inner turmoil, loneliness, desperation, helplessness and aching desire for something better in life – something you cannot provide for yourself no matter how hard you try and no matter what you do and no matter how much you possess – and you have the whole thing summed up in a single paragraph.

It is all because people abandoned their proper relationship of obedience to God that they have lost their fellowship with God and each other, their dominion over the earth, and eventually life itself. And try as they might to regain it all back by their own efforts and by their own rules, they have always failed, even as we fail today.

But God had a Plan to fix things – a Plan to repair all the damage done to the earth. He chose a man to whom He gave the name Abram, or Abraham, and He offered this man a promise (or covenant). If Abraham would obey God, then God would protect and prosper him and after him his descendants, and through his descendants begin a process whereby every nation and tribe, and the earth itself, would be repaired and made perfect again.

Abraham accepted God's covenant, and after several generations his descendants grew into twelve tribes, called in the Bible the Hebrews or Israelites. But the Hebrews could not keep their part of the covenant. They continually failed to obey God.

God knew that the Hebrews would fail. He knows everything. He made His covenant with the Hebrews (through their ancestor Abraham) to illustrate to people that they would not and, indeed, could not obey Him. They no longer had it in them to do so. Going their own way had gotten people into trouble to begin with, and they no longer had the ability to do differently, or even want to do differently. It was this fact that God wanted the Hebrews to realize when He covenanted with them in the first place.

The idea of accountability always comes to mind when we study the Bible, and this causes us problems. The Bible teaches that humanity is responsible for the sad state of affairs we are in and are accountable for the consequences. Yet if we cannot obey God's rules, then how can we be held accountable? Perhaps an explanation can be found (at least partially) in medicine – perhaps humanity's chronic inability to obey God's rules is something like an inherited disease.

I have a friend who has coped with diabetes since childhood. She is not responsible for having the disease; she inherited it from her parents. But she is responsible for how she deals with her condition. There is no cure for diabetes (at least, not yet) but there is treatment, and there is hope for a cure in the future. So she does what she must to minimize the damage the disease can do to her body. She monitors her blood sugar, watches her diet, exercises, takes insulin injections (daily), has regular checkups, avoids alcohol, maintains a healthy weight, and in general keeps her condition under control.

She is truly amazing, and to know her casually one would think she is the epitome of good health and healthful living. Indeed, in most ways she is quite healthy – healthier than people I know who indulge too much in sugary foods and alcohol, do not exercise, and tend to carry around too many pounds.

It is not pleasant to realize that humanity (meaning each and every one of us) has a spiritual condition akin to a physical disease. Yet that is the situation if what we read in the Bible is true. And we are responsible, if not for the disease, then for recognizing that we have it and for doing something about it. We need to seek good counsel and follow it. We need a good physician. And the Bible teaches us that God is just the physician we need.

Realizing that we have a problem is the first step to fixing the problem. This is what God wanted the Hebrews to do when He covenanted with them. Who seeks a cure if they do not believe they are sick? And God is the cure.

What God planned all along was to come down from Heaven and become a human being – God in human form – and fix things Himself. It was people who caused the problem in the

beginning. It would take a person to fix it. Someone who could keep God's rules – God Himself.

But God knew that the fix he had planned would not be well received by humanity. People were too long used to doing things their own way, and not God's way. He knew that, when He came down to the earth in the form of a man, something would have to give. If humanity would not come to obey Him, then He would have to start over again.

It had to be God's way or no way. There is no other way. Things could not continue as they had forever. Eventually things would have to be fixed – or else. Drastic measures were called for, and sacrifice beyond human imagining.

The Old Testament ends with promises that God would indeed eventually make things right again.

The New Testament

The New Testament was written primarily by Jewish people (the descendants of the Hebrews, or Israelites) who had personally witnessed, or knew those who had witnessed, God's implementation of His plan to make things right again between Himself, humanity and the world. They wrote down what they had seen and heard or were told, and recorded everything that God Himself told them about what would happen and what they should do about all of it. And what the New Testament says is this:

God became a man and lived among mankind, trying to convince them that they needed a change of attitude – indeed, a change of heart – in order to get back into a right relationship with God, with each other, and with the earth. Christians call this needed change 'salvation', or 'the new birth' or 'being born again', so fundamental is the change required to get back into a right relationship with God, with others, and with all creation – the kind of relationship that God intended for us when He created humanity in the first place.

This man's name is Jesus Christ, the Person of God in the form of a human being. Jesus was born into the world, grew up, and never once disobeyed God's rules (after all, He is God). His whole life on earth was devoted to living life in accordance with God's rules, and when He grew into manhood He tried to teach others to do the same. He was a living example of how we all should live.

To illustrate what people needed to do to live in accordance with God's rules, He said they would have to do things like: love God above everything and everyone else and with your whole being; be concerned for, and kind, giving, forgiving and helpful to, other people to the same degree that you are concerned for, and kind, giving, forgiving and helpful to, yourself; in all your dealings with others – and that means everyone – do as you want to be done by; of all the things in life that you need and want and strive to get, strive above all else to find a right relationship with God.

He also said that hating another person is equal to murdering that person, as far as God is concerned, and just looking at or thinking about another person with lustful desires is equal to

committing adultery, as far as God is concerned (and oh – by the way – adultery is against God's rules too). He said the we should do not seek revenge against those who do us wrong, but instead pray for them; be slow to get angry with others and quick to forgive them; and it would do you no good at all if you owned the whole world but did not have a proper relationship with God, a relationship based on at least all of the above.

He said a lot of other things in addition to this, but doing all this would have been an excellent start for anyone who wanted to take His advice. But no one who heard him say these things could honestly say that they could do any of it, or that they even really wanted to. Indeed, some people were honest enough to say outright that what He said was too hard, and most agreed with them and walked away.

However, some people were attracted to Jesus and His teachings, and a few became His followers. But even His followers, who were in all ways as flawed as the rest of humanity, had trouble understanding, accepting, and doing what He said.

Eventually many people came to hate Jesus even though they knew in their hearts that He was right. Eventually some of them decided to kill Him because they wanted to keep doing things their way rather than God's way. So they went about trying to find some excuse to have Him put to death.

Because Jesus had never once disobeyed God's rules, they could not find anything to accuse Him of to justify their intended action, no matter how hard they tried. So they made up lies about Him and accused Him falsely and had Him convicted on trumped-up charges. In other words, they sought to kill an innocent man – indeed, the only truly innocent Man who has ever lived.

And God knew this would happen – as I have already said, He knows everything. He came to earth as a man to do three things: to demonstrate how people should live (by God's rules); to show them by His words and deeds, and especially by His death, that they would not and could not live that way; and to provide them with the help they needed not only to do it, but to even want to do it.

So God allowed these people to kill Him in His human form. They beat Him, cursed Him, spat upon Him and eventually nailed His living body upon a cross, one made of two wooden beams, there to hang and die a slow and agonizing death. This was a common form of execution at the time – things had gotten that bad, gone so wrong, and deviated so far from God's original plans.

What more could God have done to convince people of their sad condition? What else would have convinced them of their spiritual sickness and need for a spiritual cure?

Yet God is God, even in human form. Because Jesus had lived always in obedience to God (remember, He is God), He could not stay dead. After He was dead and buried He came alive again, and appeared to His followers.

In this way Jesus proved to His followers that He was indeed God. He also satisfied God's rule of justice – the rule God established by which those who chose to go their own way would eventually die – by taking on Himself the death (that is, the spiritual death) that people had brought upon the human race by doing things the wrong way rather than God's way.

Because He is God, His death satisfied this rule of justice for everyone – all who ever lived or ever will live – thus clearing the way for people to once again enter into a relationship of obedience to God, if they wanted such a relationship.

Here I have tried to give as simple an explanation as I can of God's Plan to make things right again between Himself and each of us. I freely admit that my explanation is both simple and abbreviated. I also freely admit that I do not fully understand all the mechanics of God's Plan – all the 'whys' and 'hows' that naturally arise in our minds when we first learn of it. In truth, no one has all the answers – most of it remains a mystery even to the best minds that have ever studied it. But to use the example of a disease and cure once more, I do not have to earn a medical degree and understand all the details of a cure to benefit from it. All I have to do is acknowledge that I am ill, trust my physician, and take the cure he offers. It is the same way with God's Plan – He offers it and I accept it and take it. This is in part what Christians call 'faith'.

After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers that He would go back to heaven and send His spirit – His Holy Spirit – to help them begin the process of becoming the kind of people God wanted them to be in the first place – people who both wanted to obey God's rules and who eventually could and would obey God's rules.

In other words, by His life He gave people all the evidence they needed to realize just how far they had drifted from the pathway of obedience to God. By His death He showed how far God was willing to go to convince them of their deplorable condition, and He also satisfied God's rule of justice – spiritual death (that is, separation from God) need no longer be the ultimate fate that people faced because of their rebellion against God's rules. By His resurrection He proved to them just Whom they had killed – God Himself, in the form of a man, who was willing to suffer and die to help them – and He also proved that, in the same way He died and came alive again, so now all people when they died could also live again. And by sending His Holy Spirit He proved just how much God loved all people. Instead of taking revenge for what they had done, He was willing to continue helping them become people who could, and would, have a right relationship with God, with the world, and with each other. And He was willing to do this in the most personal of ways – by coming to each one of them Himself in the form of His own Holy Spirit to Personally help each one of them become someone who could, and would, have a right relationship with God, with the world, and with other people.

Going back yet again to my earlier example of an inherited disease, what God has now done is provided a cure. It takes time – the rest of our lives on earth – for the cure to fully work; but to take the cure we need to recognize that we have this disease (that is, we must believe God's diagnosis), trust that our physician can and will cure us (have faith that He can and will deliver on His promises) and do what our physician advises us to do in anticipation that, in the end, we will be cured (the very definition of what Christians mean when they speak of 'faith' and 'hope').

The cure is available to all who want it. It is our choice, our responsibility, and our accountability to choose rightly. And accountability trumps everything.

Most of the rest of the New Testament records the beginning of this process. It tells how Jesus' followers received His Holy Spirit, Who then empowered them to begin the regeneration process. It tells how they began to spread the word that this spiritual regeneration was available to all people who wanted it; how some believed and accepted this regeneration; how these struggled within themselves and, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, became more and more the kinds of people God wanted them to be; how many refused His Holy Spirit and persecuted those who had received Him; and how, with God's help, those who received His Holy Spirit (and who were eventually called Christians) were able to persevere.

Now, if everything ended here, I would not have written this book. There is more to God's Plan for the redemption of the world, and this part of His Plan is scattered through the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments.

God knew from the beginning of time that many people would eventually accept His Plan for redemption and join His side in the great spiritual warfare. He also knew that many more never would. And He knew that eventually He would have to fix the problem once and for all. He would have to re-conquer and recreate the earth.

I have already asked what more could God have done to convince people of their sad condition and of their need for spiritual regeneration. The answer is: nothing more. God clearly states in His Bible that He has already done everything that anyone requires in order to be convinced of his or her need for regeneration through the Holy Spirit. And it further states that He has done everything necessary to satisfy His justice, and to make available this regeneration to anyone who wants it. There is no Plan B, or Plan C, or Plan D. There is no appendix to what God has already done and says He will do.

Many people have tried to come up with such alternatives and additions. Many have claimed success. But the Bible warns that this would happen, and it further warns that such alternatives and additions are lies.

At some point in the future, which only God knows, He will complete His Plan for the redemption of the world, as He has revealed this Plan in His Bible. He will invade, re-conquer and recreate the earth. But that means the old earth, with all the flaws inflicted upon it by people going their own way instead of God's way, will have to end. And the people living at that time who will not change will have to end also; otherwise the old problems will just repeat.

It is that part of God's Plan that this book will explore.

Special note about angels and demons:

At the beginning of this overview I mentioned the spirit beings God created, called angels. Some of these angels, the ones who chose not to follow His rules, became what the Bible calls demons or devils, the chief of whom is Satan (sometimes called Lucifer). I have chosen to say little about them until now, as too often the subject of angels and demons becomes a

powerful distraction from more important things, such as God's Plan for the redemption of humanity and the earth. Still, one cannot go far in reading the Bible without encountering references to these spirit beings, and so a few words about them is necessary.

Angels are portrayed throughout the Bible as servants and messengers of God and helpers of men. Demons, or devils, are portrayed as enemies of God and man who oppose God's Plan for redeeming humanity and reclaiming the earth. Satan, the chief of these demons, is the spirit being who convinced the first people to disobey God's rules. Later he tried to convince Jesus to abandon God's Plan for the redemption of humanity. And Satan and his demons, as well as the angels of heaven, will play important roles in the End Times.

Still, the Bible provides less information about these beings (angels and demons) than we might wish; therefore, much about them is a mystery to us, and much erroneous speculation about them has been circulated.

The lack of information in the Bible about angels and demons is probably a good thing. Our whole task regarding spiritual things is to conform ourselves to God's Plan with the help of His Holy Spirit, and too much attention paid to either angels or demons can be dangerous.

With respect to angels, too much attention paid to them may tempt us to rely on them for help more than we should and distract us from giving our whole attention to the One that God has said we should listen to, directly petition, love above all others, trust exclusively, and obey only – Himself. God alone is our Heavenly Father, our Savior and Lord in Jesus Christ, and our Comforter, Guide and Spiritual Life-giver in the Holy Spirit. We should let Him decide if, when and how His angels will help us. They do not need our recognition or our invocation, as they serve Him directly and take their orders from Him alone – a wise choice they made, from the beginning of time, which has served them extremely well ever since.

With respect to demons, the Bible warns us that they have power to influence us if (and only if) we let them, that once they gain a foothold in us they are extremely difficult to eject, and that we must always remember their whole purpose is to control us and thereby usurp our God-given authority over our minds, our bodies and over the earth. The Bible instructs us in no uncertain terms that we must resist their efforts at all times and on all points, to have nothing at all to do with them if we can, and to seek only God's help at all times to overcome their influence in our lives.

It is something like poison ivy, a plant that can give us a rash if we touch it. We need to know where it grows and what it looks like so we can avoid it (leaves of three, leave it be), and what to do if we accidentally touch it (immediately wash the spot with warm water and soap). Otherwise, this noxious weed is of no consequence in our normal daily lives.

But unlike poison ivy, demons are ever ready to influence the affairs of individuals and of mankind. In scripture some are portrayed as having power to control nations. In the End Times, when God is close to completing His Plan for the redemption of humanity and the earth, they will increase their activity and their influence upon the world.

Because of this, we do need to be aware of them and of their potential to influence us. But we do not need to know much else about them.

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