

Part I: Looking Darkly Through the Crystal Cracked

I Corinthians 13: 12

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Chapter 1

The End of the Age (Why?)

Romans 8: 31

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

The End Times start with the beginning, and so does this book.

In the introduction to this book I identify myself as a Christian. In the preface I provide an overview of the Bible that, as a Christian, I believe is God's Plan for everything – including His Plan for the end of the age, or the End Times. Under the subheading 'The New Testament' define Christians as the followers of Jesus Christ, who have received His Holy Spirit and, with the help of His Holy Spirit, are becoming the kind of people that God has always wanted everyone to be – people who want to obey Him and eventually can and will obey Him. I also give some examples of what obeying God means, from the sayings and teachings of Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian you should already be familiar with what I am saying here. If you are unfamiliar with Christianity and skipped the introduction and preface (as I often do with the books I read), you might want to read them now, as what I cover in the rest of this book builds upon, but hopefully does not repeat too much of, what is written there.

In the beginning God created everything, including the heavens, the earth, and every living creature in the heavens and on the earth, including mankind. And everything He made was good and proper and worked as only He could determine that it should. Being God, He knew how best to make things work; nobody could ever figure out a better way than has God. He established the rules by which everything would work perfectly, and as long as everything operated by these rules, things would continue working perfectly forever.

However, God gave some of the creatures He made the ability to chose either to work by His rules or not. In the heavens these creatures are angels. On earth these creatures are us.

So long as God's creatures obeyed God's rules everything continued to work fine. But some of the angels, and the first people, chose to not obey God's rules. As a result, things started to go bad.

Genesis 3: 17 – 19

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."

Romans 5: 12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned –

Romans 8: 18 - 21

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

It is like changing the oil in our cars. As long as we put in the proper oil and use the proper filter, and change both on a regular schedule, things work out fine. But if we decide to try something else or ignore changing the oil and filter altogether – because we do not believe it is necessary to follow the manufacturer's recommendations or we think something else will work better or we want to save a few bucks, we will eventually ruin the engine.

God did not cause His heavenly and earthly creatures to go bad. They chose to go bad. He is like a parent who buys a new car and gives the keys to a son or daughter to use the car for their transportation and enjoyment, with the stipulation that they take the responsibility to keep it in proper running condition.

So what does a responsible father or mother do when they realize their son or daughter is ruining the car through abuse or neglect? They take back the keys and have the damage repaired.

That is something like what God now has to do with us. We call God our Heavenly Father. He calls us His children. He provided our ancestors with everything we need for a good and happy existence: life, health, and a beautiful world. Our ancestors, and we after them, have abused all He has given us by not following His rules for keeping things the way He designed them to be. So God has to act. He has to take steps to correct the problem.

As noted in the introduction to this book, the Bible is God's explanation to us about what He has to do to fix the problems we have caused by our irresponsibility, abuses and neglect of the lives and world He has provided us.

The question is asked: Why would God make beings (like us) who could chose to disobey His rules?

The answer is: He wanted beings with whom He could have a relationship based on their choosing such a relationship, and not based on some kind of instinct or robotic obligation. And the only way He could do this, of course, was to give these beings the ability to choose to have such a relationship or not.

When we check into a hotel or resort, the proprietors automatically call us their guests. But are we? So long as we pay them, they will provide us with clean rooms and good food and all kinds of services. They are business people, and their ultimate goal is to turn a profit. They have no choice but to serve us, if they are to turn that profit, so long as we are willing and able to pay. They are service providers. We are, in fact, their customers.

How different it is – at least for me – when I go and visit my family or friends in a distant city. They welcome me and provide me with a clean room and good food and all kinds of things that make my visit pleasant. I do the same for them when they come to visit me. No money ever changes hands. They are glad to see me and to have me in their homes, just as I am glad to see them and welcome them into mine. They do not have to let me through the door, but they choose to let me in. I do not have to let them through my door. But when I see them pulling into my driveway I come out and greet them, help them carry their luggage into the house, and make sure they have everything they need.

The difference between checking into a hotel and visiting family or friends is the difference between night and day. And it makes all the difference in the world that my family and friends choose to have me come visit them.

That is something like what God wanted when He created heaven and earth, and that is what He wants now. He wants a relationships based on choice, not obligation. He wants a loving family. He wants caring friends. And who could not use more of those?

The question is asked: What are the End Times?

The answer is: Throughout the Bible are passages telling us about God's Plan to do to fix the problems caused by humanity's continued disobedience to His rules. The passages revealing those parts of His Plan that lie in the future are called prophecy. The prophecies we focus on within this book are those that tell us something of God's Plan for the re-conquest and recreation of the earth at the end of the present age – these are the End Times prophecies. There is more to prophecy than this, but for our purposes this is where we begin.

God's Plan for getting things back right in the world involved His Old Testament relationship with the Hebrews and His New Testament life, death and resurrection in Jesus Christ and His subsequent sending into the world His Holy Spirit. All of this was foretold before it

happened and recorded by the people He told it to. These people were the prophets, and eventually everything God told them was compiled into one book, the Bible.

The prophecies we focus on from this point forward are those that concern the part of God's Plan yet to be implemented. This, too, He revealed at various times to the various prophets, and in very brief summary it says this:

Despite all that God has done to correct the problems caused by our disobedience to His rules, people will continue to disobey. Some will believe and accept His regeneration process by receiving His Holy Spirit, but most will not. Things in general will continue to go from bad to worse. People will become more and more rebellious to God's rules, hating and hurting and killing each other and deceiving themselves until, if God does not end it, none of us will survive. And the earth will continue to degrade until it is no longer a fit place in which to live.

Do you doubt this? Around the turn of the twentieth century great advances in science and technology led many people to believe and to preach the dawning of a new age of enlightenment. It would be an age where, by our own efforts, we could – and indeed would – emerge from the darkness of a past filled with ignorance, superstition, disease, poverty and warfare into a future filled with the light of peace, progress, plenty and modernism. Many said that God was dead. Many more thought it irrelevant if in fact He was or was not. Then came World War I, followed by a global influenza pandemic, followed by the Great Depression, followed by World War II, followed by the nuclear standoff between the democratic West and the communist East, followed by radical Muslim fundamentalism, suicide bombers and the threat of global terrorism with weapons of mass destruction. Add to all of this the record-breaking droughts, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes of recent years, together with global warming, rising sea levels, massive species extinction, and the impending threat of a seemingly inevitable civilization-busting asteroid strike, and it begins to look an awful lot like God knows what He is talking about.

So God one day will put an end to all of it. He will return to the earth as He left it – in the Person of Jesus Christ. Only this time He will not be killed – He will kill.

Have you or a loved one ever been really sick? So sick that you feared for your or their life? Maybe it was a life-threatening infection. Maybe it was cancer. In order to save the patient, the doctors had to kill the disease.

That is what Jesus will have to do. Having given humanity the chance to be regenerated through the renewal of their minds by His indwelling Holy Spirit, and humanity for the most part having refused this regeneration, most of humanity will have become the very disease that plagues the earth, and will have to be cut out.

That day is coming. The Bible plainly prophesies a time when men will flatly refuse God's Plan for their regeneration, no matter how bad things get.

Revelation 9: 20 – 21

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons,

and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 16: 8 - 11

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

When that day comes, when God can no longer bring men and women to their senses – and only God knows the day – then those who will not change their ways will have to be cut out, and the earth will have to be remade.

Revelation 19: 19 – 21

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

God is good. God is great. God is merciful, not wanting any to perish, but wanting all to be saved. But it has been almost two thousand years (as men measure time) since Jesus left the earth and sent to us His Holy Spirit; plenty of time for all to come into a right relationship with God through God's Plan for regeneration. God is also patient.

But there comes a time to finish it. And that time may be soon.

Chapter 2

Ground Rules (dos and don'ts)

Rev. 1: 3

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Rev. 10: 8 – 11

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

Revelation 22: 18 – 19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Have you ever read or studied something with a preconceived notion of what you wanted to find in it? You probably found exactly what you wanted, or something close to it. Or you found something maybe not so close, but close enough to suit your purposes.

The question is asked: Is what you found the truth?

The answer is: Probably not. Or maybe just enough of the truth to make your case believable (to yourself and maybe likeminded others) but still very far from reality.

When my wife and I take a long trip by car, I have a habit of deciding beforehand how I will get us to our destination. Before I put the key in the ignition, I know what turns I will take and what roads I will drive to get from my driveway to wherever I am going. And all along my

journey, at every point, I know where I am and what direction I am going and about how long it will take me to finish my trip; until somewhere along the way my wife asks me where we are.

This is her wakeup call to me. She knows I have made a wrong turn somewhere, missed an exit, or somehow got turned around.

It usually takes me a little while to realize she is right. And it usually takes me a while longer (sometimes a whole lot longer) to admit it. But until I do, I am going the wrong way, and I will never get us to where we intended until I correct my error. Fortunately for me my wife is a gentle, patient, wise and caring woman. I have never had to eat crow under such circumstances.

We all do it. We tackle an idea, concept, question, notion or task that is new to us, or about which we have limited (and often flawed) knowledge, with the answer we want already half formed in our minds; an answer that fits into, and reinforces, the worldview we already accept as true. Under these circumstances, more often than not the 'reality' we conclude is flawed. And lots of people live out lives immersed in flawed, if not downright false, realities.

So it is with a study of Bible prophecy. If we start out with an agenda, or with some preconceived idea we want to prove, then we start off in the wrong direction right from the beginning, and we will end up somewhere other than at the truth of the matter, as God is pleased to reveal the truth to us.

I Corinthians 2: 14

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

I Corinthians 3: 18 - 20

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

A word of warning: if you insist upon finding in the Bible anything other than the truth as God is pleased to reveal it, you will. Guaranteed! If that is what you set your heart and mind to do – God will let you!

God has given us minds wonderfully made for discovering the truth. He has also given us freedom of will to decide how we use our minds. If we choose to misuse our minds in order to believe lies, we may. Indeed, we absolutely will. He also gave us hands, with which we may help our brothers and sisters onto their feet or knock them down; with a shovel we may choose to dig a well or a grave. His resources, our choices.

Choose wisely.

The question is asked: Can we know everything about everything written in the Bible?

The answer is: No. Not yet. So get over it.

The plain fact is that we cannot know everything about everything written in the Bible, and this bothers a lot of people. Rather than admit this truth and move on, some use their lack of understanding as an excuse to throw up their hands and walk away from the Bible (and from God). Others attempt to spiritualize or allegorize what they cannot understand, wrapping it in a mystery, or worse – creatively interpreting scripture to suit their purposes (rather than God's Purposes).

Refusal to accept the fact that we cannot know everything about everything written in the Bible leads to error. And it is dishonest. The Bible plainly states that we cannot understand everything written on its pages. What we need to know – in order to have a proper relationship with God and others, to cope with troubles, to live wisely, to grow spiritually – is made known to us when we need to know it. But some things we have to wait for, if ever they are to be revealed to us, until God is ready to reveal the meaning. Indeed, some things will not be made know until the end of the age or beyond.

Daniel 12: 9 – 10

He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand."

Acts 2: 17 – 18

"In the last days, God says,
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your young men will see visions,
 your old men will dream dreams.
 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.

Revelations 10: 1 – 4

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like

the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

So get over it – and get on with the task at hand. God will take care of the rest, and in His own good time. Trust Him. That is what the Bible means when we read on its pages that we must have faith.

I Corinthians 13: 9 – 12

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The following are some general guidelines many have found helpful toward understanding the Bible, and especially Bible prophecy. These guidelines are useful for both the merely curious and the spiritual student:

- All scripture should be studied within the context of the whole Bible, to avoid interpreting any scripture out of context. This is especially true when we study the End Times prophecies, which are scattered throughout the Bible and were given to men by God at various times in history.
- All scripture should be taken literally, unless a literal read conflicts with scriptural context. For instance, in the Book of Luke, Chapter 14, verse 26, when Jesus told his followers that they cannot be His disciples unless they hate their parents, a literal interpretation would conflict with other Bible teachings such as those exhorting us to honor our parents, love others as we love ourselves, love our enemies, etc. Jesus was most likely indulging in hyperbole when He said we must hate our parents, to emphasize that our first love must be to Him and above all others, including our parents. (This example also illustrates the importance of reading scripture in context.)
- All revelation recorded in the Bible is progressive. That revealed later in history builds upon, and confirms, that revealed to earlier writers.
- Often prophecies read as if they are sequential events, without times or events between. But this is not always the case. Sometimes the events in a prophetic passage are separated by years, even centuries. For instance, much of the Book of Isaiah jumps between

prophecies of how ancient Israel would soon be punished for its immediate sins and prophecies of Israel's future restoration at the end of the age, without a word of the thousands of years of history between the prophesied events. Most of Chapter 11 of the Book of Daniel prophesies the fates of ancient Israel and the surrounding nations from the time of the Persian conquest of Babylon to the time of the Greco-Syrian attempt to pervert the worship of the Jewish nation (from about 539 B. C. to about 163 B. C.); but the last few verses jump thousands of years into the future, to prophesy events of the last seven years of history at the end of the present age.

- Sometimes a prophecy has a dual fulfillment. In the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 2, verses 10 through 16, Isaiah prophesies the birth of a child as a sign that God will deliver the Israelites from their enemies in a couple of years from the time that he uttered the prophecy; his words were also a prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ, hundreds of years later (Matthew, Chapter 2, verses 21 through 23).
- Israel is at the center of prophecy, which is at the center on God's Plan for the re-conquest and recreation of the earth. Likewise Jerusalem, the city of God, is at the epicenter of End Times events, and all directions are taken from Jerusalem.

The following are some guidelines for studying the Bible, and for interpreting prophecy, for the more spiritually inclined:

- All scripture is the revealed Mind of God, as recorded by men moved by the Holy Spirit.
- Bible study should only be undertaken with the belief that God will reveal His Mind to the sincere seeker.
- The Bible is God's revelation of His Purpose and Plan for humanity and the earth. Period. Bible study should only be motivated by a desire to discover God's Purpose and Plan, as He is pleased to reveal it, and with a willingness to apply what we learn of His Purpose and Plan to our lives and to the lives of others. Bible study motivated by anything else always lead to error. Throughout the centuries, people have used the Bible to justify or excuse all kinds of behaviors, validate preconceived answers, prove pet theories, and promote predetermined agendas. In fact, you can find exactly what you want in the Bible. But in the final analysis, the only thing of real worth in the Bible is the truth.
- The Bible (as it exists today) provides all the knowledge we need to develop a proper relationship with God and others through His Son, Jesus Christ. We need not (indeed, must not) add to, or take away, from any of it. However, it should be noted that earlier writers (such as the Old Testament Prophets) were not granted complete knowledge (of

personal regeneration, the End Times, etc.) but only that which they, and God's people, needed to cope with the times in which they lived. The full revelation of God (to the extent as He, in His divine wisdom, has chosen to reveal it) was not given to them. This should be kept in mind when studying the Old Testament Prophets, with respect to the meanings of their prophecies. Just as no one can receive a complete understanding of salvation (spiritual regeneration) by grace through the atoning work of Jesus Christ by studying the Old Testament alone, so no one can have a full understanding of End Times by studying the Old Testament Prophets alone.

- While the full revelation of God for salvation and relationships was completely satisfied with the completion of the New Testament, I believe that the full revelation of God in all things future has not yet been given. The Scriptures plainly teach that a fuller knowledge of the End Times will be poured out as the End Times approach, to equip God's people living at that time to meet the challenges of the end of the age. That said, a careful study of what the Bible says about the End Times is absolutely necessary in interpreting any additional revelations, which must agree with, build upon, support, and fulfill what is already recorded in Holy Scripture. Only those revelations that agree with and build upon the revealed Word of God are from God. All others are from other sources, and are lies.

With respect to a literal interpretation of prophecy

History validates a literal interpretation of scripture. The curse of death as a consequence of sin recorded in Genesis, the fate of Israel based on that nation's keeping (or failing to keep) its covenant relationship with God, the coming of Jesus Christ as a Suffering Servant and a sacrifice for the sins of the world, God's offering of a covenant relationship to the Gentile nations, the reestablishment of Israel at the beginning of the end of the age – all these prophecies and many more have literally come to pass. This should give doubters and naysayers good reason to wonder if all the rest of prophecy – including the Tribulation, the Rapture, Second Coming of Christ, and the Millennial Kingdom – will likewise be literally fulfilled. (More about these as we continue through this book).

The purpose of Bible prophecy

John 13: 19

"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He."

In his book "End-Time Prophecies of the Bible" (Penguin Putnam Inc., New York, 2000), David Haggith quotes this verse to support his premise that the End Times prophecies recorded in the Bible are not intended to help us predict the future, but are intended to help us recognize the truth behind these events when we see them unfolding. Realizing that God knows beforehand

what will happen, and recognizing that He is in control of events even in times of great trial for his followers and great tribulation for the earth, will give believers confidence and hope to persevere, and will help many others to believe. I recommend Mr. Haggith's book to anyone who wishes to supplement his or her study of Bible prophecy.

The blessings that come with studying Bible prophecy

Rev. 1: 1 – 3

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw -- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

The proper attitude

James 1: 5 – 8

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

2 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.

Warnings about motives in interpreting prophetic scripture

II Peter 1: 19 - 21

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

James 4: 2 – 3

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

I Corinthians 1: 25

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

I Corinthians 2: 13 – 14

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The question is asked: Can we know when the End Times are near?

The answer is: Yes. We can know when the End Times are near; but only as God is pleased to reveal it.

Acts 2: 17 – 21

" In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.' "

I Thessalonians. 5: 1 – 4

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

The question is asked: Can we ascribe dates to the End Times events?

The answer is: Well, it has been done before – often – and so far every time it's been done, it's been wrong.

The desire to see the terrible and blessed End Times events unfolding before our eyes has been part of the Church's psyche since the beginning of the Church Age (that is, from the found of Christianity almost two thousand years ago). In fact, the earliest believers, including those who knew Jesus Christ in the flesh (the apostles), hoped that Christ would return soon after His ascension and during their lifetimes.

Acts 1: 6 - 11

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Of course the apostles, like the Old Testament prophets, had only partial knowledge of the future; after all, they had yet to write what we now call the New Testament. Israel was still a nation – occupied by the Romans, rebellious, threatened within and without, and soon to be scattered – but still a people dwelling in the land the Lord had given them. The coming Diaspora (the scattering of the Jewish people) was not anticipated. The Church Age had only just begun to

unfold. And Christ himself had warned his disciples that only the Father in Heaven knew exactly when He would return.

Even though these things and more were prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures, the meanings of these prophecies could only be guessed at in the decades following Christ's ascension. In the years, decades and centuries that followed, the (perceived) delay of Christ's Second Coming gave rise to all kinds of doctrine to explain (or explain away) what God had given the Prophets. The speculators ignored the basic fact of faith that men's plans must wait upon, and conform to, God's Plan.

And God's Plan does seem to be unfolding before our eyes today. From the breakup of empires at the beginning of the twentieth century to the emerging alliances, unions and leagues evolving around the Mediterranean Basin, and in the Middle East, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. From the increases in knowledge and travel that grow exponentially from decade to decade to the global destructiveness of weapons of mass destruction to possible (indeed, seemingly inevitable) earth-busting asteroid strikes. From Israel back within her ancient borders to increases in population and industrialization that allow mobilization of armies of 200,000,000+ soldiers. All of this was prophesied long ago as signs of the end of the age.

So much prophecy is unfolding before our eyes. Many pieces are already in place – or are falling into place – and there's good reason to speculate that, quite possibly, the last pieces could position themselves within the next couple of decades. Say, by 2033 or 2035? (Give or take a decade or two, for God reasons time differently than does man.) two thousand or so years after Pentecost – from the birth of the Church and beginning of the present Age of Grace – seems as logical a date as any other for the terminus of the present age.

But then, the wisdom of men is foolishness to God - - -

For the present, it is all speculation. I have no special revelation, no clever means of calculating prophetic years. I believe that no one has such knowledge. Still, isn't it fascinating to think that many who read these words might be alive to see Christ coming in the air? And hasn't that been the true desire of every true believer of every generation since Christ's ascension?

Acts 1: 9 – 11

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

God bless us in our hope, and lead us not into temptation – for His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever.

Even so, Lord, come.

Soon.

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Chapter 3

An American Prophecy (How prophetic language works)

A brief history of the United States of America: past, present and future. Do not bother trying to look this up in your Bible. I wrote it, using prophetic imagery.

And now, in my vision, as I stood beside the Eastern Sea, I saw a strange beast rising out of the sea, and out of the restless sea. The beast looked like a lion, and it had iron teeth and brass claws. This lion stood up like a man, and like a proud man spoke boastfully with a voice of thunder, and flaming sulfur and smoke spewed from its mouth. Many were killed with the plague of the flaming sulfur and smoke that spewed from the lion's mouth, and the lion had the power to smite with horrible sores, and many more were killed with the plague of the sores. And the lion trampled upon all who were not killed, and none were found who could stand against the lion.

After this, in my vision, an eagle rose up from the land and fought the lion, and after one week the eagle triumphed over the lion, and drove the lion into the sea.

The eagle grasped a bundle of arrows in one talon, and an olive branch in the other, and it grew exceedingly strong toward the west and toward the south. It spread its wings and encompassed the world in them. No other beast could overpower the eagle, though some tried. With the arrows and the olive branch the eagle triumphed unto the ends of the earth, until the times of the eagle were accomplished.

Imagine a prophet from ancient Israel having a vision of the future history of America. He might have seen the English arrive in the New World as a lion (a national symbol of Britain) seeming to rise out of the Atlantic Ocean along the eastern coastline of North America.

In Bible prophecy, the sea can represent a literal sea (usually the Mediterranean Sea). It can also represent humanity; a restless sea can represent troubling times for humanity, and in the sixteenth and seventh centuries, as English adventurers and settlers explored the New World, the Old World was in the throes of great social, political and religious turmoil.

The prophet would not have been familiar with gunpowder, or with the iron and brass cannon and firearms the English used against the Native Americans, but could have described their effects if he saw them (fire, smoke and thunder). And of course diseases, such as small

pox, which the English carried in their bodies and against which the Native Americans had no natural immunity, did in fact kill many more of them than the English killed with their weapons.

The eagle is the national symbol of the United States of America. If you have a one dollar bill handy, look on the right side of the back of the bill, and you will see this symbol, just as my 'prophet' saw it in his vision. The arrows and the olive branch that the eagle grasps in its talons would have been recognizable to the 'prophet'.

America (the eagle) won its independence after a seven-year war with the British army. Often in prophecy 'days' represent 'years', as do 'times'. Seven days, or one week, equals seven years. After defeating the British, America went on to conquer the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific (growing strong toward the west) and completed its acquisition and sovereign control of its continental territories in wars against Mexico and the Confederacy (growing strong toward the south).

The rest of the 'prophecy' chronicles America's rise to become the premier world power that it is today and beyond, until the times (years) of God's plans for America are finished (accomplished).

Lion – Great Britain

Sea – the Atlantic Ocean

Note: In Bible prophecy the sea usually represents the Mediterranean Sea

Restless Sea – the nations of Europe

Note: In Bible prophecy the restless sea usually represents the turmoil of the nations of the world

Stood up like a man and spoke boastfully – Kings of England

Flaming sulfur, smoke, thunder – the canon and firearms the English used against the Native Americans

Horrible sores – the diseases the English brought to North American, against which the Native Americans had no natural immunity

Eagle grasping arrows and an olive branch – U.S.A (from the seal of the United States)

One week (or 7 days) – Seven years (1776 to 1783: the duration of the American Revolution)

Note: days often (but not always) equal years in Bible prophecy

Grow exceedingly strong toward the west – conquest of Native Americans

Grow exceedingly strong toward the south – conquest of Mexico/defeat of the Confederacy

Note: all directions in my prophecy are taken from Washington D.C.; in Bible prophecy all directions are taken from Jerusalem

Other beasts – nations of the world

Times – years

Other imagery in the Bible used to convey meaning include:

Eyes – knowledge or knowing

Horns – power

Sea of glass – nations of the world at peace

Flames or fire – the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit)

Hills – nations or empires

Mountain – Kingdom of God on earth

Dragon – Satan

Sword – Power of God; Word of God

Lamp stand – the Church

Stars – angels

Waters – nations, tribes and ethnic groups

Rivers – nations, especially those geographically associated with a particular river (Nile River/Egypt; Euphrates River/Assyria)

Numbers also seem to have special meaning in prophecy, although there is nothing in the Bible that specifically says this. They can, of course be literal, but they seem also to be used by God to symbolize something more. Following is a brief survey of the meanings that have been ascribed to certain numbers used in prophecy:

Three – God (the three manifestations in which God has been pleased to reveal Himself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

Four – Completeness or totality, especially regarding the earth (four winds, four corners of the earth)

Six – Man, and possibly angels (created just a little lower than God)

Seven – Completeness or totality, especially that associated with God (God created the earth in six days, and rested on the seventh; seven churches of the Book of Revelation; the seven years of the Tribulation of the End Times)

Ten – Completeness or totality, especially regarding earthly things (four – earth, plus six – man, equals ten)

Twelve – Completeness or totality, especially regarding God's interaction with the earth and mankind (twelve months of the year; twelve sons of Jacob, the Hebrew patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel; twelve apostles, or the first twelve men Christ called to follow Him)

Multiples and fractions of numbers, or numbers in combination, seem also at times to have more than literal meaning:

144,000 – The number of the Israelites, from the twelve tribes of Israel, that God selects as His special representatives on earth in the last days of the End Times (twelve times twelve times ten times ten times ten)

666 – The number of the antichrist, the last world leader at the end of the age (three sixes, or a man – six – claiming to be God – three – three sixes)

Note: Some have suggested that 666 represents the unholy trinity of the antichrist (6), the false prophet (6) and Satan (6), who will appear at the end of the age to lead rebellious humanity and oppose the Second Coming of Christ.)

1/3 – A large percentage

The question is asked: Why does so much of Bible prophecy use such confusing, symbolic language?

The answer is: Ambiguous at best. The scriptures say little about why prophecy is written in images and numbers, other than to suggest in some places that the full meaning of a prophecy is not to be understood until much later in time after its utterance.

Perhaps such imagery is the only way we can receive God's Word from the eternal, spiritual realm regarding the things that have not yet happened in this time-bound, earthly realm. In other areas of our experience with God's Word, we do not have this problem. He plainly teaches us throughout the scriptures what we ought to believe now and how we ought to live our daily lives on this earth.

Mathew 5: 27 – 28

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5: 38 - 42

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, 'Do not resist an evil person'. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Matthew 5: 43 - 47

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

We may not always want to believe God when He speaks to us about how we ought to live our lives, but we cannot accuse Him of being unclear on the subject. It is when the writers of the Bible try to project the implications of these teachings beyond day-to-day living, and into the future or spiritual realms, that they, and we, begin to have problems.

I Corinthians 13: 9 – 12

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

(Note: in ancient times, mirrors were made of polished bronze, which provided a poor reflection. Glass mirrors were not invented until centuries later.)

Perhaps the prophets used colorful imagery to get and keep their reader's attention. After all, who can ignore a good animal story? Or better yet, one with monsters? The ancients created plenty of legends and stories, almost all of which illustrate a moral or praise a virtue, that they populated with fantastic creatures; centaurs (half man, half horse) fauns (half man, half goat); the Minotaur (a man's body with the head of a bull) – the list goes on and on.

The use of animals (or beasts) to represent nations was as common in ancient times as it is today. The lion today represents Great Britain; in ancient times it represented the Hebrew tribe of Judah. A lion with wings was a motif of ancient Babylonian art and was referenced by the prophets as a symbol of the Babylonian Empire. Today many nations, such as America and Germany, have some manifestation of an eagle as their national symbols. Russia has a two-headed eagle in its national emblem. The Romans also used an eagle (as well as a she-wolf) to represent their empire. Not so long ago a bear symbolically represented the Soviet Union. In ancient prophecy the bear, as well as the ram, symbolized the Persian Empire. Greece, and its Asian empire founded by Alexander the Great, was represented in the prophet Daniel's vision as a shaggy goat, and also as a leopard, one with four wings to represent the swiftness of Alexander's conquests, and with four heads no less, representing the four generals who divided up Alexander's empire after his death.

Daniel 8: 3 – 8

I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him,

and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power. The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

In this vision, the prophet Daniel sees the rise of the Persian Empire, symbolized as a ram with two horns, one larger than the other. Horns in prophecy can represent power, and they can also represent those who wield power.

The Persian Empire grew out of an alliance between two powerful peoples – the Persians and the Medes, represented by the two horns. At first the Medes were the stronger of the two, but later the Persians dominated the empire; hence the reference to the growth of the smaller horn. The Persian Empire originated in the geography of modern-day Iran and conquered the lands to the west, north and south, overpowering the Babylonian Empire that dominated the geography of what is today Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Israel (all of which are situated to the west, north and south of Iran).

Eventually the Persians ran up against the Macedonians and Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, symbolized in the prophecy as a goat with one big horn between its eyes. This one big horn, of course, represented Alexander himself. Alexander completely conquered the Persian Empire and went on to conquer Egypt, Central Asia, and even parts of India. But at the height of his power he died and his empire was divided between four of his generals. That is the meaning of the reference to the large horn broken off and four others growing up to replace it.

All of this came about just as God told Daniel it would. God even explained it to Daniel, just to make sure that the prophet understood.

Daniel 8: 19 – 22

He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power."

Most certainly the prophets used imagery to describe something they saw that was beyond their experience or beyond their capacity to adequately express in words. As noted in my American Prophecy, the ancient prophets knew nothing of modern weaponry and had no technical frame of reference for describing such devices. But if, in their visions, they saw such weapons fired off in volleys, they could have described the fire, smoke, odor and noise of the modern battlefield, if not the weapons themselves. Had my 'prophet' been a Native American, he would have been unfamiliar with the African Lion, the symbol of England. Perhaps he would have described the beast he saw rising out of the sea as a 'cougar, one with a shaggy mane like that of a buffalo'.

And, of course, sometimes we as humans, possessing the very nature of God but limited in our experience to this earthly realm, cannot adequately describe the things we see and feel, touch and taste and hear – and imagine – with literal words; sometimes such things require imagery: "Sweet as honey." "Pretty as a picture." "Stubborn as a mule." "Stars that twinkle like diamonds on velvet." "A sunset that enflames the world." That's why we invented similes and metaphors, and poetry, and song lyrics (which are poetry set to music).

Black Saturn, sitting on the parking lot
 Soft raindrops, beading on the polished paint
 Like diamonds, gleaming points of sparkling light
 Diamond crusted car

Such language is not limited to prophecy, but can be found throughout the bible.

Numbers 14: 8

"If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us."

Luke 13: 34

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

And who can describe God except in symbolic language?

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.

The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.

And if we really want to wax poetic, try the good old King James Version:

Psalm 29

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength.

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.

The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.

The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

(King James Version)

The psalmist could have simply said that God is stronger than anything on the earth and that He is worthy of worship and that He is glorious. But would that have sufficed? Do such words do God justice? Of course not; something more is needed. Something more than mere, dry words. Something with the power to stir our hearts, and pierce our innermost parts.

Revelation 21: 1 – 7

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

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

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (King James Version)

Back to work.

The prophets also, on occasion, may have had to speak in a kind of code, to hide the meaning of their prophecies from their oppressors.

The prophet Daniel was a captive of the Babylonians, and by the time he wrote down his visions he had already run afoul of the Babylonian authorities (remember the lion's den?). The prophecies he received from God foretold the conquest of the Babylonians by the Persians, and later the conquest of the Persians by the Greeks. This would have been ill received by his Babylonian captors, and later by his Persian overlords, if they had understood them.

The prophet John had a similar problem when he recorded his prophecies in the Book of Revelation. He was a prisoner of the Romans because of his Christian faith (which the Romans were trying to suppress) and because his people, the Jews, were a source of constant political unrest and occasional bloody revolt. Just a few decades before John received his visions, the Jews had revolted against Rome and were put down with great loss of life, property and tax revenue, including the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple. And in a few decades after John's visioning it would all happen again, resulting in the destruction of the nation of Israel and the scattering of the Jewish people among the Gentile (non-Jewish) nations, not to have their

own homeland again for almost two thousand years. The prophecies that John received regarding the ultimate triumph of the Church and of Israel over their enemies would have been interpreted by his Roman guards as rebellious propaganda designed to stir up further trouble for the Empire.

The scriptures also make it plain that sometimes God Himself wants to hide the full meaning of a prophecy, even from the prophet, to be fully understood in His own good time and for His own good purposes.

Daniel 12: 9 – 10

He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand."

Perhaps God wants to hide His plans from His enemies, like Satan and some prophecy speculators, who would use them for their own purposes. Remember how Herod the Great, upon hearing of the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah, tried to kill the baby Jesus? And what would Satan have done differently, to try and thwart God's plans for the redemption of the world through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, if he fully understood the redemption prophecies? What would he do differently now if he fully understood the End Times prophecies?

Matthew 11: 25 – 27

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Perhaps, rather than just telling us things plainly, God may choose to speak to us in mysteries as a way to draw us out of ourselves so that we may recognize, in what we do not understand in our own wisdom, our need to lean on God for illumination.

Proverbs 3: 5 – 7

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;

fear the LORD and shun evil.

Perhaps also God wants us to truly study our Bibles, ponder His Word, and dwell on eternal things, as a means to encourage us to set aside our daily troubles and the temptations of the flesh. I know from personal experience that much time spent with God's Word does in fact strengthen the regenerated soul (the new man) and weaken the 'natural man', and this in turn is a great help in coping with earthly things. And learning things for ourselves, rather than having them handed to us on a silver platter, makes us appreciate, remember, and value what we learn, as any parent knows who tries to teach their child the value of a dollar. Such study and effort provide perspective, and we can all use more of that.

Romans 11: 33 – 36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Finally, as noted herein, prophecy is not intended to entertain us, satisfy our mere curiosity, or allow us to predict the future, but is intended to help us believe and trust in God's Providence and Power when we see the great and terrible End Times events unfold in accordance with His Will. When the time is right (as God determines the seasons and the times) the full meaning of prophecy will be made known to us.

Matthew 24: 36 – 44

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and

would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Acts 2: 17 – 21

"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

I Thessalonians 5: 1 – 5

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

And today (right now, in fact, as you read this) the times and the seasons might possibly be right.

The question is asked: Is America mentioned in the End Times prophecies of the Bible?

The answer is: No, America is not mentioned in the Bible – but it may play a role in the End Times together with every nation, tribe and people present on the face of the earth in those troubling times.

That America is not mentioned is a good thing. Maybe.

The End Times prophesies are overwhelmingly about Israel and its future relations with the nations. Even the Church (meaning Christians) is hardly mentioned, and primarily in warnings to the faithful to remain faithful in the hard times to come and to guard against falling away or chasing after false teachers and false doctrine. Indeed, by the middle of the Seven Year Tribulation, the Church may be removed from the earth altogether.

Of the nations that are mentioned in the prophecies, most if not all will seek Israel's destruction and thereby incur God's Wrath. Of the nations not mentioned, their fates can be inferred by whether they are friend or foe to Israel and God. Prophecy suggests that most, if not all, will choose the losing side in that contest.

The question is asked: Does God bless America?

The answer is: Yes. In fact, the Bible plainly states that God controls the destinies of all nations, and He blesses them or curses them according to His Purposes.

Psalms 33: 10 – 19

The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
 he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
 the purposes of his heart through all generations.
 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
 the people he chose for his inheritance.
 From heaven the LORD looks down
 and sees all mankind;
 from his dwelling place he watches
 all who live on earth-
 he who forms the hearts of all,
 who considers everything they do.
 No king is saved by the size of his army;
 no warrior escapes by his great strength.
 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
 despite all its great strength it cannot save.
 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
 on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
 to deliver them from death
 and keep them alive in famine.

God wants to bless the nations with peace and prosperity. He allows them to destroy themselves from within, or be destroyed from without, when they too long defy His Good Will

(Jeremiah, Chapter 12, verses 14 through 17; Chapter 18, verses 1 through 10). Throughout its very brief history (as compared with the history of many other nations) and up to the present, God has greatly blessed America with peace, land, natural resources, prosperity, strength, great wealth, and freedom.

The question is asked: Does this mean that God has always approved of America's actions?

The answer is: God has blessed America, as He blessed ancient Israel and the other nations and empires mentioned in the Bible, despite their moral failings. God was patient with Israel and its contemporaries. He was patient with the Amorites, a nation living in the land of Canaan (Palestine) at the time of Abraham, giving them 400 years to change their ways before allowing the Hebrews to conquer them and possess their land (Genesis, Chapter 15, verse 16). God has been patient with America.

However, as with ancient Israel and its contemporaries, God will allow America only so much time to grow out of its imperfections, and only until it becomes obvious to God that America, as a nation, will refuse God's perfecting hand. If, like ancient Israel and its contemporaries, America rejects God's purposes, then He will, as He did with ancient Israel and its contemporaries, reject America.

For the sake of the faithful of Israel, God preserved ancient Israel. For the sake of the faithful in America, God preserves America. Yet there came a time in Israel's history when the faithful were reduced to a small portion of the nation – a remnant – and God withdrew His protecting Hand and allowed Israel fall victim to the self-destructive tendencies that, as history has consistently proven, will always culminate in the decline and fall of nations, empires, cultures and peoples.

So it could be with America. Unlike Israel, whom God promised to restore as a nation, God has made no promise to restore America. To honor His covenant with Israel, God preserved the remnant despite that nation's failings and eventually restored the nation (in 1948). America, as a nation, could cease to exist, just as the nations and empires of antiquity, with the exception of Israel, ceased to exist.

And what of the faithful remnant of America? These hold a dual citizenship – they are citizens of this world (as Americans) and citizens of God's heavenly kingdom (as Christians). America can cease to exist and, with America's demise, American citizenship would be no more.

But God has promised that none who possess a heavenly citizenship can lose it.

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Chapter 4

Apocalypse Now?
(A time for everything)

Matthew 24: 32 – 35

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Famine, earthquakes, plagues, astronomical signs, lawlessness, violence, immorality, greed, selfishness, hedonism, rebellion, despair, war, civil and ethnic unrest, false prophets, apostasy, heresy, one-world government, one-world religion, one-world economy, persecution of Jews and Christians, occult and demonic activity, increases in knowledge and travel – all of these have been catalogued by Bible scholars as signs of the approaching end of the age, and of the beginning of the trials and tribulations that will precede the Second Coming of Christ.

Trouble is, while all of these terrible events and trends will indeed increase in frequency and scale as the end of the age approaches, all have been around in one form or another, and to greater or lesser degrees, for thousands of years. Even Christ suggested to His disciples a dual meaning to the signs He mentioned – that they would occur within the lifetime of the generation of Jews living at the time of His crucifixion, which occurred with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and within the lifetime of the generation that would be alive at His Second coming.

Over the almost two thousand years since Christ's ascension, periods of calamity and of social and political unrest have caused many to wonder if the time of the end was near. Yet the fall of the Roman Empire, the rise of the Holy Roman Empire, the Islamic conquests of North Africa and Spain, the fall of Byzantium, the Black Death, the Inquisition, the Protestant Reformation, the Napoleonic Wars, and World Wars I and II (just to name a few) did not herald the onset of the end of the age, though many speculated during these times that the end of the age was near.

So how can we know for sure that the end of the age is near? That we can know, Christ taught His disciples. We can know the season, if not the day or hour, of His Second Coming. When the days grow longer and the air warmer, when trees put forth their leaves and flowers bloom, we know that springtime is about to arrive. In much the same way, when certain events recorded in scripture do occur, we can know that the end of the present age, or what some Christians call the End Times, is near.

In order to know the season, we must look for specific signs – signs recorded in Bible prophecy, but of such specificity that they cannot be easily mistaken as more of the

same old misery that humanity has known for millennia. A careful study of prophecy suggests that three distinct signs are required for the onset of the End Times – events that are unique in history, and that stand out as necessary for the coming of the End of the Age.

Israel revived
(center stage)
www.mfa.gov.il/MFA
The Israeli government's official web page

Throughout its history, ancient Israel was a troubled land. Lying at the crossroads of three continents – Africa, Asia and Europe – it had its share of invasions and wars with the empires of the ancient world. Egypt and Assyria, Babylon and Persia, Greece and Rome; all sought to control its territory, rule its people and exploit its strategic position and wealth.

As long as the Israelites obeyed God, He protected them as His covenant people. That had been His agreement with them when he chose them as His special representatives to the nations. But when they continually disobeyed Him (sometimes even killing the prophets He sent to warn them) and went their own way, He allowed the stronger nations surrounding Israel to possess them and their land.

This situation continued until the second century A.D., when God allowed the Romans to destroy the nation and disperse the Israelites, or Jewish people, to the far reaches of the Rome's empire. According to Bible prophecy, He allowed this to happen because the Jewish people had grown so rebellious that they refused to recognize God Himself when He came to them in the Person of Jesus Christ, but had Him killed.

Mark 12: 1 – 9

He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

"But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

During His time on earth, Jesus often used parables to try and get His point across regarding the need for people to change their ways and return to a proper relationship of obedience to God. Parables are simply stories about common, everyday occurrences that illustrate the truths that God wanted people to learn.

In this parable, Jesus used the vineyard to represent the land of Israel. The 'man' who built the vineyard and who owned it represents God. The tenants represent certain of the Israelites – those who would reject God in the Person of Jesus Christ. God had provided the Israelites with a good land and everything they needed to prosper and produce good fruit, or a proper relationship of obedience to Him. And He had provided them with His protection, represented in the parable by the wall and watchtower.

The Israelites possessed the land but they did not own it. God's covenant with them specified that they could possess it only so long as they produced the fruit of obedience and service to God. However, most of the Israelites, and especially those who enjoyed privilege and power (that is, most of the priests, the wealthy, the kings and the kings' advisors) continually failed to keep their part of the covenant. So God sent His servants, the prophets, to warn them and to collect from them His portion of the fruit, or their obedience and service to God. But the Israelites continually rejected the prophets, mistreating them and sometimes even killing them. So God finally sent his Son in the Person of Jesus Christ – God Himself in human form – to call the Israelites back into their proper relationship with God.

And the Israelites had no excuse if they chose not to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Throughout the Old Testament of the Bible are prophecies of His coming, and of His rejection by most of the Israelites. They chose to ignore these prophecies, or to twist them into something that served their purposes.

In this parable Jesus prophesied His rejection by the Israelites and His death. In other of His sayings and teachings He even prophesied how He would die – by crucifixion. And He also prophesied in this parable that, because the Israelites' continued hard-heartedness and disobedience, God would have to kill them (at least the worst of them) and give the land to others.

And that is exactly what happened. The Israelites at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry were subjects of the Romans, but they still possessed the land. They were looking for someone, promised by God in prophecy, who would free them from their oppressors – but they were not willing to fulfill their part of the covenant. They relied on God to protect them and give them what they wanted based on their ancestry (as descendants of Abraham), but ignored their obligation to Him to obey His commandments and His Person (in Jesus Christ). And so they rejected Jesus as the Son of God and had Him crucified by the Romans. Within a few decades after this horrible act, the Israelites rebelled against Roman domination, a rebellion that the Romans put down with great destruction and loss of life. This, too, Jesus prophesied in His sayings and teachings. And the Israelites continued to rebel until, in the middle of the second

century A.D., Romans destroyed the nation and dispersed the Israelites to the far reaches of the Rome's empire.

For almost two thousand years after the Roman destruction of the nation of Israel, the Israelites (who are know today as the Jewish people) continued as a distinct people but without a homeland. They remained distinct and separate from all other peoples and nations that came into existence, rose to power, declined, and disappeared into the dust of history. Unlike so many other conquered and scattered peoples, they held on to their traditions, their customs, their God, and even their racial identity. Separate, distinct and recognizable are words that describe them down through the turmoil of the centuries. Scattered, weak and persecuted are words that describe their condition throughout most of those times. They remained outsiders to history, a unique people, seemingly 'on hold' and waiting for something to happen that would change their circumstances for the better; bench-warmers, held back for the last inning of the game of history.

And the reason they continued so is that God had not forgotten His covenant with them – and amazingly they never forgot their covenant with Him.

He is the One who preserved them, even though He had allowed them to be ejected from the land. God always keeps His promises. Throughout the Bible are prophecies that affirm God will always preserve the Jewish people because of His covenant with them, and prophecies that affirm He will one day restore them to the lands He had given them so long a time ago.

Isaiah 11: 11 – 12

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.

He will raise a banner for the nations
and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth.

The first time 'the Lord reached out His hand and reclaimed the remnant' was at the end of the Babylonian captivity in the fifth century B. C. Because the Hebrews continually failed to obey God's rules (after several centuries of His trying to convince them by less drastic means), He allowed the Babylonians to conquer the nation and carry the people into exile. After seventy years of exile, God allowed the Persians to conquer the Babylonians and the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Hebrews to return to their land.

Prophecy clearly suggests that something like this would one day happen again. As noted in the scripture above, 'the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the remnant'.

Isaiah 66: 8

Who has ever heard of such a thing?

Who has ever seen such things?
 Can a country be born in a day
 or a nation be brought forth in a moment?
 Yet no sooner is Zion in labor
 than she gives birth to her children.

In the Bible, Zion represents Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. As already noted, a great deal of the Bible is about God's covenant relationship with Israel, a covenant which continues in full force and effect unto the Jewish people of modern times.

And all of the End Times prophecies in the Bible revolve, swirl, and move around Israel. That is, all the End Times prophecies have the Jewish people, and the nation of Israel, at center stage. Israel has been, and always will be, on God's mind and at the center of His Plans.

Prophecy clearly indicates that, prior to the onset of the End Times, Israel (the Jewish people) must once again occupy the lands promised by God to Abraham (the founder of the Israelites, or Jewish people), and that they will once again possess the holy city of Jerusalem, just as they did in ancient times. All past speculations of the end of the age, prior to Israel's resurrection, were flawed in this one respect – the End Times simply could not begin prior to Israel's rebirth.

Earlier in this book I warned about the temptation to devise creative interpretations of scripture in order to prove a pet theory or validate a preconceived notion. Yet throughout history interpreters of prophecy have tried to get around the issue of Israel's necessary restoration prior to the end of the age.

Perhaps some interpreters were motivated by a hatred of the Jewish people, or by jealousy of God's covenant with them, or by contempt of their downtrodden status, or by the temptation to marginalize, ignore or exploit a weak and helpless people. Certainly the Jews suffered all of this and worse throughout the centuries.

Perhaps some interpreters merely wanted to see the end of the age and the Second Coming of Christ in their time, and therefore had get the question of Israel's restoration out of the way so they could convince themselves (and others) that they were living in the End Times.

To these ends, some invented clever theories and developed elaborate interpretations of prophecy to suggest that the church had supplanted Israel in God's favor, and that the promises God made to the ancestors of the Jews no longer applied. Others sought to prove that Israel's prophesied restoration would occur after the End Times, and not before. Whatever their motivation, they were all dead wrong.

Israel was recreated with great suddenness in 1948, after almost two thousand years of dispersion among the nations. And the Jewish people have had exclusive control over all of Jerusalem since 1967, something that had not happened in over two thousand years. Israel today is at center-stage in world events and uniquely positioned to play an important role in the unfolding of End Times events, just as foretold in the Bible so long ago.

Rome revived
(stage left)

Daniel 2: 41 – 43

"Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay."

In the Book of Daniel the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, dreamed of a great statue that represented the empires around the Mediterranean Sea in existence at the same time that Israel occupied the lands promised by God to the descendants of Abraham – empires from the time of Babylon to the End Times. Most interpretations of scripture suggest that the last (End Times) empire would be a reunification of the fragments of the Roman Empire, which come together to form an imperfect union (the statue's feet of iron mixed with clay). The European Union, together with the Arab League, seem to fit this prophecy as no other political constellation since the fall of the Western Roman Empire (in the fifth century A.D.). This is especially true as the destruction of Israel, in the second century A.D., precluded the possibility of any empire after Rome existing in conjunction with Israel, until Israel's reestablishment in 1948.

European Union
(One foot of iron mixed with clay)
www.europa.eu/
The European Union's official web page

The history of Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire has been one of fragmentation and conflict, of strong nations and weak, and of near continuous political, economic and territorial competition and warfare up to, and through, the middle of the twentieth century. And in the first half of that century alone two wars of unprecedented destructiveness – wars fought on a near global scale – originated from this competition between Europe's major powers and ended with Europe in shambles, weakened, threatened by a great power that had risen in the east (Russia, and its Soviet Union imperial manifestation), and dependent upon the protection of a great power that had risen in the west (the United States of America).

By the middle of the century Europe's leaders were convinced that, in order to secure lasting peace, Europe had to unite into a single political and economic entity. They began a process that, by the end of the century, had created the European Union.

Today the European Union includes most of the nations of Europe under a structure of political, social, economic and military institutions that unite them in ways unprecedented since the end of the Roman Empire, and by means unprecedented since beginning of the age of empires. At no time since Babel (the world's first empire at the beginning of the age of empires) has an empire formed through a voluntary union of peoples (Genesis, Chapter 11, verses 1 through 9). All subsequent empires formed primarily through military conquests. The European Union has become a modern-day 'empire of the willing' – the first since Babel.

The League of Arab States
(The other foot of iron mixed with clay)
www.arableagueonline.org/
The League of Arab States official web page

The history of the Arabs is the history of Islam, a religion founded by Muhammad in Arabia in the seventh century A. D. Over the succeeding centuries the Arabs, united by their new religion, swept across Arabia, North Africa, the Levant, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Central Asia, and into Southern Europe, creating a series of empires (or Caliphates) that persisted, in one form or another, into the twentieth century. Sometimes the Arabs ruled these empires. Sometimes they were subjects. But the religion they founded was the glue that held these empires together.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire (ruled by the Turks) after World War I, the Arabs by-and-large became the colonial subjects and/or clients of the European nations. During the following decades the Europeans created the modern map of Arabia, the Levant, Mesopotamia and North Africa, a region of many independent, largely Arab, nations.

Still the dream of empire is strong among the Arabs, and many of them yearn for the reunification of all Arab lands, and possibly all Islamic (Muslim) lands, into the super-state they once possessed – the Caliphate – which at its height stood on equal footing with any other empire then in existence.

Such a super-state would be huge as well as powerful. It would extend from the Atlantic, across North Africa, throughout the Middle East and into Central Asia, right up to the borders of India. And it would possess and control much of the world's oil production and most of the world's estimated oil reserves at a time of rapidly increasing global demand and declining production in many parts of the world.

Today the Arabs and their Muslim brethren are still divided politically, racially, and culturally, and even by differences within their religion. Yet since the middle of the twentieth century there have been stirrings of unity among the Arabs, and between the Arabs and other Muslim peoples.

At the end of World War II, the League of Arab States formed to provide a common forum through which the Arab nations can resolve differences, settle disputes, economically integrate and provide a united Arab front to the world's great powers. Although experiencing limited success to date in any of these endeavors, the League of Arab States (the Arab League)

does represent a beginning of union among the Arab nations and might yet set a precedent for greater unity in the near future.

Eurabia
(Both feet)

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/

"Eurabia represents a geo-political reality envisaged in 1973 through a system of informal alliances between, on the one hand, the nine countries of the European Community (EC) which, enlarged, became the European Union (EU) in 1992 and on the other hand, the Mediterranean Arab countries." *Exerpt from Eurabia by Jamie Glazov, FrontPageMagazine.com | September 21, 2004 (Interview with Bat Ye'or, author of Where Civilizations Collide and Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis).*

A glance at a map of the nations and alliances surrounding and in proximity to the Mediterranean Sea (the sea of prophecy) reveals the emergence of two great blocks of nations – the European Union and the Arab League. Lay across this map another of the Roman Empire at the height of its power and extent, and one will see that the European Union, together with the Arab League, encompass all the territory ancient Rome ever possessed and more.

Could these nations and alliances ever form again into a political, economic and military entity that echoes Rome? This may in fact be happening, even as I write these words.

Today the European Union and the Arab League are moving ever closer to such a union. Institutions have been created to encourage economic, cultural, technological and security integration between them, just as each have created institutions within itself to bring their member nations and peoples into ever strengthening union.

Still, today the nations of the European Union and the Arab League are sovereign. Some are weak. Some are strong. Some are more committed to union than are others. It is now an imperfect union at best, cracked along national boundaries and fragmented along the European and Arab historic and cultural divide; yet the movement toward union is discernable, and day-by-day grows stronger. And it was all prophesied by Daniel long ago in scripture, who also prophesied its ultimate fate. If I had to describe this proto-empire rising out of the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, I could find no better description than that found in the Book of Daniel, of the two feet of iron mixed with clay striving for unity but never quite achieving it.

With the rise of Eurabia at the same time as the resurrection of Israel, another sign of the approach of the End Times is met.

The Antichrist cometh
(stage right)

1 John 2: 18

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

1 John 2: 22

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son.

2 John 1:7

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Revelation 6: 1 & 2

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

Much is written in the Bible of the Beast – the Man of Sin – the great End Times antichrist. He will be someone of great power and influence who, in the End Times, will organize most of humanity to oppose Jesus Christ when He returns to reclaim and remake the earth. Scripture suggests he will be a man greatly influenced by Satan, a man of great cunning and persuasiveness, arising as the leader of a ten-nation confederation, a confederation which some have suggested may arise out of the Arab lands in the Middle East. He will make a seven-year peace treaty with Israel, setting off the events of the Seven-year Tribulation and the run-up to the Second Coming of Christ.

Having now said all this (where the antichrist will arise), it should be pointed out that over the centuries many theories and interpretations have been put forth regarding who the antichrist will be and where he will establish his kingdom. Perhaps God has hidden the details, if not the substance, of these things from us, to reveal them in His own good time and for His own good purpose. After all, as already noted in the chapter on Ground Rules, prophecy is not intended to entertain us, satisfy our curiosity or allow us to predict the future, but is intended to help us believe and trust in God's providence when we see the great and terrible End Times

events unfold in accordance with His Word. Still, a study of scripture does allow us to speculate, if not exactly know, much of End Times events.

With respect to antichrist's kingdom, many have speculated that he will arise out of the European Union, which many have also interpreted as the revived Roman Empire, represented as the feet of iron mixed with clay in King Nebuchadnezzar's statue vision recorded in the Book of Daniel. This, taken together with the beast visions the prophet Daniel experienced later in his life (recorded in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 7), has suggested to many such an interpretation. However, the error (if indeed there is error in this interpretation) lies in taking the two visions as versions of the same End Times event.

Daniel 2: 31 – 45

"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

"This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

"After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything – and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain,

but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

"The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."

In King Nebuchadnezzar's statue vision, the head of gold represented Babylon, the chest and arms of silver represented Persia (which would conquer Babylon), the loins and thighs of brass represented Greece (which would conquer Persia) and the legs of iron represented Rome (which would conquer Greece). These were the empires that had direct relations with Israel while Israel occupied the Promised Land, from the time of Daniel, in the fifth century B.C., to the Diaspora, when Rome destroyed the nation and scattered the Jews throughout the world in the middle of the second century A. D.

The feet of iron mixed with clay represent a jump in time to the empire that would once again have direct relations with Israel, which could not have begun until the reestablishment of the Jewish nation in 1948. Many interpret this last empire as the European Union, which in fact has extensive relations with modern day Israel, both good and bad.

This vision was and is intended to remind us all (especially King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, and the captive Israelites) that God is King of kings and Lord of lords. As such, He will one day overcome all worldly kingdoms and establish His Heavenly Kingdom on the earth, a Kingdom in which Israel will play a prominent role.

I have already suggested in this chapter that the statue's toes of iron and clay may represent not only the European Union, but an alliance of some kind between the European Union and the Arab League.

Daniel's later vision describes something different.

Daniel 7: 2 – 8

Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

"The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it.

"And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

"After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

"After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot

whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

"While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully."

In Daniel's beast vision, the first beast (the lion with wings of an eagle) represented Babylon, the second beast (the bear) represented Persia, and the third beast (the leopard with four wings and four heads) represented Greece. Up to this point, the two visions seem to run parallel, and perhaps for this reason many have assumed that the fourth beast (the one with iron teeth, ten horns, and different from all the former beasts) represented Rome, or Rome's End Times manifestation which, as noted above, many interpret as the European Union. But this vision had a different purpose. This vision was, and is, intended to teach us something about the End Times antichrist, who will oppose God's Plan to reclaim the earth.

So, will the End Times antichrist rise out of Rome's End Times manifestation? In Nebuchadnezzar's dream this empire is clearly depicted as a fragmented empire – not a likely candidate for the power base of 'the' End Times antichrist. The answer may be found in the book of Revelation, Chapter 13, where John the Revelator describes the End Times antichrist in a vision as a beast rising out of the sea.

Revelation 13: 1 – 4

And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

A beast, rising out of the sea – one with the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. Sound familiar? The beast described in Revelation is, in fact, a composite of the first three beasts in Daniel's beast vision. No wonder Daniel had such a hard time describing the fourth beast in his vision!

If this is a correct understanding of Daniel's and John's visions, then the antichrist will arise out of the geography that once was dominated by Babylon, Persia and Greece. This would be the Levant and Mesopotamia, or that portion of the Middle East occupied today by the

predominantly Sunni Arab nations of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, by Palestine, and perhaps including kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, etc.).

Other clues supporting this interpretation are found in the Books of Genesis and Daniel. In Daniel Chapter 7, verse 27, an angel of the Lord suggests to the prophet that the descendants of Abraham will be given the antichrist's kingdom once he is defeated. In Genesis Chapter 15, verses 18 through 21, God promises Abraham that his descendants will one day occupy the lands from the Nile River in the west to the Euphrates River in the east. A glance at a map of the Middle East reveals that the lands between the Nile and the Euphrates include the Arab nations of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, Palestine, with a significant portion of Egypt thrown in for good measure.

The Middle East today is a region of predominantly Sunni-Muslim Arab nations squabbling among themselves and with others (especially America), while yearning for the revival of the great Muslim unity of the past (the Caliphate). Should someone of great charismatic and diabolical talent ever manage to unite these nations, the stage would indeed be set for the end of the age.

Still, we must not get too dogmatic about such things. God will reveal the antichrist in His own good time. Until then, and after, we who are His must be about Our Heavenly Father's work.

Even so, we have no excuse to claim total ignorance of such things.

I Thessalonians 5: 3 – 4

While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

Two of the very specific and necessary signs for the on-set of the End Times have come into existence since the middle of the twentieth century. Today Israel is back within her ancient borders and in sole possession of Jerusalem, a set of conditions that last existed well over two thousand years ago. The Revived Roman Empire is a geo-political reality (one that had not – and could not have – existed prior to Israel's rebirth) exactly as prophesied by Daniel.

Now all we need is the conquering rider on the white horse with the bow and the crown (the first Seal Judgment of Revelation – the antichrist). And given what we see happening in the Middle East on cable news each night, can he really be very far away?