

Part III: Part III: Who, What, When, Where

Luke 21: 29 – 31

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."

Chapter 10  
Israel  
(Lost and found)

God's covenant with Israel (through Abraham) included a promise that He would give Abraham's descendents the lands between the River of Egypt – the Nile – and the Great River – the Euphrates – (Genesis, Chapter 15, verses 18 through 21). While some have debated the exact boundaries of this piece of real estate, it most likely includes modern-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, most of Syria, much of Iraq, and part of Egypt. Referred to by some as Greater Israel, these are the lands that Israel will possess after Jesus returns and establishes His Kingdom over all the earth.

Today the Arab people possess most of this land. Though racially and historically related to the Jewish people, most Arabs are sworn enemies of Israel and seek its destruction. Indeed, both peoples share the same patriarch – Abraham – who sired the half-brothers Isaac (the founder of the Jewish people, according to the Bible) and Ishmael (the founder of some of the Arab people, according to Jewish and Arab traditions). Thus both peoples are descended from the same bloodline. Yet it seems impossible today to imagine a time when Israel and its Arab neighbors will live in peace and fellowship. Like other brothers we read about in the Bible – Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau – they are estranged, too willing to compete with each other for birthright, land, power and favor with God and, if one gains advantage over the other, too willing to attack and kill each other. From the Bible we learn that reconciliation is possible when brothers are willing to seek out peace and live side by side (Genesis, Chapter 33, verses 1 through 11). Yet in the current age this is the exception rather than the rule, and family feuds have always been and continue to be the most tragic, the most brutal, and the most long-lived of conflicts.

Today the Jewish people (descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac) possess only a small part of the land promised to the descendants of Abraham. However the Arab peoples (descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael) do possess the rest of it. As noted above, many believe that it will be the Jewish people who will, in the end, possess the whole of the land. This belief is based on the fact that, in the Bible, God favored Isaac over Ishmael as the inheritor of the covenant relationship He established with Abraham, a covenant that required Abraham and his descendants to have faith in God's promises and, by faith, obey God's commandments.

God had promised Abraham that he would have a son by his wife Sara, and that through this son Abraham would found a great nation. But Sara was barren, and after many years of waiting she and Abraham conspired to ensure Abraham would have a son and an heir by Abraham 'sleeping with' Sara's Egyptian servant, Hagar. This was an act of desperation on the part of Abraham and Sara, who seem to have lost faith that God would deliver on His promises. Thus Ishmael was conceived and born. Later God delivered on His promise and Sara bore a son, Isaac, whom God blessed, just as He said He would. And Isaac became the inheritor of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham and the ancestor of the Jewish people. Ishmael

also received God's blessing (after all, he was blameless in Abraham's weakness) and became the ancestor of the Arab people.

If only the descendants of these two brothers could now reconcile, how different would the world be today. But scripture suggests strongly that this will not happen until the end of the age. Maybe by then what some now call Greater Israel will be called something greater still. We will have to wait and see.

In the meantime, can there be a better reason for Satan to raise up his End Times antichrist in the Middle East? Where better to try and thwart God's Plans than on the very ground He promised to the descendants of Abraham? Who better to use, to try and destroy the descendants of Abraham, than the descendants of Abraham? Divide and conquer: it is a strategy made to order for the promulgation of strife and destruction. Why would Satan bother with Europe, America, Russia or any other place in the world that has been suggested as the End Times kingdom of the antichrist? Already we have seen, in the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation, how Satan has tried, and will try to the end of the age, to frustrate God's Plan for the redemption of humanity and of the earth in part by destroying, if he can, an agent of that redemption – Israel.

Since the reestablishment of Israel as an independent nation in 1948, Israel has fought many wars with its Arab brethren, who have sought to destroy the nation. Yet far from destroying Israel, in three of these wars Israel gained territory: the 1948 – 1949 war of independence increased Israel's initial territory by fifty percent and gave Israel possession of West Jerusalem; the 1967 Six Day War added to its possessions the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan; the 1973 Yom Kippur War ended with Israeli forces within sixty miles of Cairo, the capital of Egypt (on the Nile River) and within twenty-five miles of Damascus, the capital of Syria (a nation through which the Euphrates River flows), before Israel withdrew from these conquests as part of a cease fire and disengagement agreement to end hostilities.

Since Israel's creation, its Arab brethren have sought continually its destruction, only to loose territory – territory that God had promised to Abraham's descendants long ago. Yet Israel has also been willing to surrender this land in a vain attempt to secure peace with its Arab brethren. It surrendered the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt to secure a 'cold peace' with that nation. It withdrew Jewish settlements from Gaza, and continues to consider trading land for peace in the West Bank, in an attempt to secure peace with the Palestinian Arabs. And it is not too far fetched to imagine Israel's surrender of the Golan Heights for some kind of peace with Syria. How all this will play out in the end is anyone's guess, but all of it hints at the titanic battle being fought over Israel's existence between God and Satan, a struggle that tragically exploits the bad blood between the descendants of two brothers.

The question is asked: Should Israel trade land for peace?

The answer is: On the surface, Israel's forceful withdrawal of Jewish settlers from their homes and its abandonment of settlements in Gaza in 2005, more than 38 years after capturing the territory, looked reasonable. But was it?

Military experts will confirm that the few Jewish settlements in Gaza were a military liability. Withdrawal represented implementation of sound tactical doctrine, which propounds abandonment of indefensible and exposed positions and shortening of battle lines whenever possible.

Nobel Peace Prize winners will applaud the withdrawal as a real opportunity to 'give peace a chance' through Israeli concessions to the Palestinian people. Such concessions give the Palestinians a contiguous, self-governing homeland. It disengages Jews and Palestinians from sixty-plus years of confrontation.

World political and religious leaders will herald the withdrawal as a vital step to implementing any roadmap to peace in the Middle East. They will insist that it was long overdue, and that the withdrawal was absolutely essential to solving a plethora of the region's problems.

However, there are risks associated with withdrawal.

The withdrawal generated dissention and strife among Israelis. Many Israelis sincerely believe that Gaza is part of the land promised to them by God through their ancestor Isaac. Many others openly dismiss any consideration of God's will in the matters of land, of security and ultimately of peace.

The withdrawal gave radical Palestinians a much-needed victory over Israel. It rewarded terrorism with land. It validated the long, violent and bloody 'war' the Palestinians continue to wage against the Jews.

The withdrawal led Israel further down the pathway of seeking a peace on terms ultimately guaranteed by something other than a position of national unity, strength and faith in God. In fact, after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, the radical Islamic organization Hamas – which openly and violently seeks Israel's destruction – has come to power in Gaza, first by elections and then by violent overthrow of the more moderate Fatah, the organization in power at the time of the Gaza withdrawal. Far from serving any kind of peace, the withdrawal has only worsened the situation.

Still, all this was prophesied long ago. There will come a time (if it has not already come) when Israel as a nation entrusts its security to something other than God. Israel will one day believe – falsely – that it is living in peace and safety.

Ezekiel 38: 10 – 11

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On that day thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil scheme. You will say, "I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people - all of them living without walls and without gates and bars."

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."

The covenant that God established between Himself and Abraham, and through Isaac the Jewish people, has been instrumental in conveying to the world the story of God's faithfulness in all things, mankind's continual faithlessness, and God's ultimate victory over humanity's rebellion and folly. From its beginning to its end, the Old Testament chronicles this story. Time and again, from Abraham on, God called the ancestors of the Jewish people – the Hebrews – to serve and obey Him, and time and again they refused and suffered the consequences. When the Hebrews did turn to Him, He rescued them from their plights. When they obeyed Him they prospered. When they turned away from God and trusted in their own devices, they suffered. Generation after generation, for almost two thousand years, the pattern repeated, until God appeared among them in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. And even then most failed – or refused – to recognize in Jesus their God and Messiah, or rightful King.

So God consigned them to a dispersion that lasted almost two thousand years – as long a period of time as between the establishment of His covenant with Abraham to the rejection by Abraham's descendants, through Isaac, of Jesus Christ as their legitimate Messiah and King. And during this time of dispersal God established a new covenant with those who recognized, in Christ, God's Person and His Plan for the redemption of humanity (that is the Church). It is a covenant the beginning of which is chronicled in the New Testament and has continued now for almost two thousand years.

When we say that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, we must understand what the title 'Messiah' means. Among the Jewish people of the Old and New Testament periods, the Messiah was generally considered to be a descendant of David, their second and greatest king. God would raise up the Messiah, who would be identified to the people by a great prophet, and the Messiah would vanquish Israel's enemies and establish the nation as a great power – indeed, the greatest power – on earth.

During the time that Jesus walked the earth, many of the Jewish people of His day speculated if He was indeed the Messiah, or the prophesied King of the Jews, the one they hoped would lead the nation in a war to overthrow their Roman oppressors. And both the prophet John (the Baptizer) and Jesus affirmed that He was the long awaited Messiah – but not the kind of Messiah the Jewish people of His day wanted. They wanted a great warrior-king who would free the nation from Rome. Many such 'messiahs' had already led rebellions against the Romans, and each had been crushed, along with their followers. Many more would rise up after Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven, until the Romans finally destroyed the nation and dispersed the Jewish people. And this happened because the Jewish people wanted an

earthly king instead of a Good Shepherd. They wanted a warrior-king instead of a Prince of Peace.

Today the Jewish people are still looking for their messiah – at least, some of them are. Beliefs among the Jewish people regarding the Messiah vary. Some still look forward to a future king, or leader, who will defeat Israel's enemies, establish Israel as the leading nation in the world, and usher in world peace. Others believe that world peace will be achieved by progress towards social justice and dismiss the idea of a conquering king, or any other messianic figure or person. As already noted in the chapter on the Seven Year Tribulation, some Christians have similar beliefs, discounting Bible prophecies regarding the End Times and the Tribulation, believing instead that world peace will be achieved by the triumph of the Church in converting all humanity to Christianity.

Those Jewish people who are anticipating an actual messiah have beliefs and expectations similar to those of many Christians regarding this future king. However, most of them reject Jesus Christ as either the Person of God in human form or as their anticipated Messiah.

Most, but not all – some Jewish people are in fact at long last receiving the Holy Spirit into their lives and acknowledging, in the Jesus their forefathers had crucified, the promised Messiah – the promised King Who will redeem Israel. By some estimates, there are in the United States about 100,000 Jewish people in over 200 congregations that believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament [1]. In Israel their numbers are smaller – around 10,000 in about eighty congregations – but growing, despite considerable opposition and prejudice from most Israelis, including the government [2].

Perhaps it will be from among the Messianic Jewish community that the 144,000 Israelite saints will be raised to oppose the antichrist during the Seven Year Tribulation (Revelation, Chapter 7, verses 2 through 8). But here is a mystery – among the 144,000 are representatives of all the twelve tribes of Israel.

In the Book of Genesis, the line of succession for the covenant that God made with Abraham passed to Isaac, and then to Isaac's son Jacob, who had twelve sons. Each of these sons founded a tribe, and these twelve tribes eventually grew into the nation of Israel. However, during one of those times when Israel had wandered far from God, a powerful nation, the Assyrians, conquered ten of these tribes and carried them off into captivity. Some call these tribes the Lost Tribes of Israel because, unlike the two remaining tribes that were later carried off into the Babylonian captivity, the ten tribes never returned to Israel, at least not in any recognizable form with their prior tribal affiliation.

Much speculation has grown up over the centuries about what happened to these people, who were descendants of Abraham through Isaac and thus inheritors of God's covenant relationship with the Jewish people. Some have speculated that they assimilated with other peoples and eventually lost their Jewish identity and status as a covenant people. Others speculated that they continued to exist down through the centuries in obscure corners of the world, out of the mainstream of history and unnoticed until the end of the age. Some have even speculated that they migrated to the New World and were the ancestors of Native Americans.

Whoever and wherever they are, the Bible clearly proclaims they will again appear on the world stage in the End Times.

God's memory is long. His promises are sure. He always delivers, even unto the end of the age. The truth about the ten tribes is recorded in a prophecy in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter Eleven. Here we have a description of the Kingdom of God on earth after Christ has returned at the end of the Seven Year Tribulation. Verse eleven states that God will reclaim the remnant of the descendants of Abraham through Isaac from: Assyria and Hamath (modern-day Syria, Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey); Shinar (Southern Iraq); Elam (Western Iran); Pathros (Egypt); Cush (Sudan); and the islands of the sea (most likely the islands of the Mediterranean Sea, although a symbolic interpretation could suggest they will come 'from out of the sea of humanity', or from around the world).

Most of the places specifically identified in this prophecy are currently within, or in proximity to, that part of the Middle East identified as Greater Israel. This could suggest that the descendants of Abraham (through Isaac) already occupy the land God promised to Abraham's descendents – we just do not know it.

And, of course, most of these places are also currently within that part of the Middle East occupied by modern-day Arab Muslim nations. This could suggest that the descendants of Abraham (through Isaac) are commingled with the descendants of Abraham (through Ishmael).

The apple does not fall far from the tree, the saying goes, and this may be true for the supposedly Lost Tribes of Israel. They may not be lost at all, just living among their brothers.

Such an interpretation requires some distancing from conventional thinking and traditional dogmatism. The returning remnant could be those recognized Jewish people currently living in the regions described in the prophecy. But what about the ten 'lost' tribes? Clearly they will participate in the End Times events, and Isaiah's prophecy plainly states that all twelve tribes will be reunited at the end of the age. In Genesis, Chapter Fifteen, God promised the lands between the Nile and Euphrates to Abraham's descendants. Both the Jewish people (through Isaac) and the Arab people (through Ishmael) are descendants of Abraham. The occupation of this land, by both Jews and Arabs, could be seen at least in part to satisfy this prophecy. This interpretation in no way suggests that God does not continue to have a special covenant relationship with Israel (through Isaac). It merely suggests that, in the End Times, we could be in for some surprises.

Endnotes:

[1] [Religioustolerance.org](http://Religioustolerance.org)

[2] [Messianic Jews in Israel claim 10,000](#) by Larry Derfner and Ksenia Svetlova, The Jerusalem Post, 4/28/05

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Chapter 11  
Arabia  
(The anger of Ishmael)

According to Arab and Jewish traditions, the Arab people are descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael. Once a tribal society living on the Arabian Peninsula, the rise of Islam in the seventh century A. D. gave the Arabs common cause, under the banner of a new religion, and Arab armies embarked on a campaign of conquest. In less than a hundred years they forged an empire that stretched across much of North Africa, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Persia. With conquest came political infighting, and schisms over matters of leadership and religious authority gave rise to the main divisions of Islam – the Shi'ia, who held that leadership and authority should remain within the family of the prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, and the Sunni, who did not. Subsequent conquests expanded the empire and brought other ethnic groups to power; but Arabs remained instrumental in spreading and defending Islamic religion and culture throughout succeeding centuries.

In the sixteenth century, most Arabs had become subject peoples of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, the last in a succession of Islamic (Muslim) empires that grew out of, and built upon, early Arab conquests. Israel did not exist, although Jewish communities thrived alongside Arab communities throughout the Empire. Most Arabs were Sunni Muslims (although Shi'ia Muslim and Christian Arabs lived among their Sunni brethren) and most lived out their lives under Islamic laws and institutions, as had their ancestors since Islam's founding.

At their greatest extent the Ottoman Turks ruled Asia Minor, the Levant and Mesopotamia, and much of North Africa, Arabia, the Black Sea region, and Southern Europe. But from the seventeenth century onward the Ottomans confronted growing European imperialism at their borders and the rise of ethnic nationalism among their subject peoples. Slow to adapt to these challenges, the Ottomans lost much of Southern Europe and the Black Sea region to expanding European Empires and to independence movements among indigenous, non-Muslim populations. At the same time, their North African Arab subjects gained increasing autonomy, while Arabs in the Levant, Mesopotamia and Arabia grew increasingly restless under Ottoman rule.

This was a time of rapid institutional, economic and technological advancement in Europe, but relative stagnation for Islamic societies. Many leaders and scholars throughout the Middle East attributed this disparity to seeming backwardness in Islamic culture and promoted Western-style reforms in government, education and law, together with economic and military modernization, as means to reverse the trend. Others, however, with vested interests in the status quo, resisted reform and modernization, or promoted a return to Islam's founding values, reasoning these had been the catalyst for territorial expansions and cultural achievements in Islam's glorious past.

Slowly reformers throughout the Middle East made progress in areas of governance, education, military organization and rule of law, grafting Western institutions onto Islamic

culture. Often they looked to the emerging liberal democracies of Western Europe for inspiration and support in these efforts. But the reform process was derailed, and in many places dismantled, by continued incursions into Muslim lands by the very liberal, democratic powers the reformers sought to emulate. The British and the French, and later the Italians, invaded North Africa and absorbed the region as colonial possessions of their respective Empires. The British also gained footholds in Arabia, along the shores of the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, creating a number of protectorates or establishing alliances with independent tribal rulers. At the same time almost all of the remaining Ottoman possessions in Southern Europe rebelled and gained independence. Muslim societies, under siege throughout the Middle East, grew suspicious of, and hostile toward, things Western, while oppressed populations in conquered territories retreated into centuries-old Islamic traditionalism and religious fundamentalism. The great irony was that, in many instances, the very avatars of Western liberalism and democracy many in the Middle East sought to emulate became their oppressors.

When the European powers set about fighting among themselves in 1914, the Ottomans sided with Germany, hoping to improve their Empire's status among the Great Powers. As the war progressed, the British and French sought to distract the Ottoman Turks by encouraging growing nationalist sentiments among the Empire's remaining Arab subjects in the Levant, Mesopotamia and Arabia, going so far as promising them an independent Arab state or confederation of states. When Germany lost the war (called the Great War, or World War I) the Ottoman Empire declined further in power and status. In 1923 the Empire collapsed.

The Turks, who had been successful at instituting reform, survived as the modern nation of Turkey. The Arab peoples on the Arabian Peninsula who were not under British rule before the war either obtained independence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire or retained the independence they already enjoyed, absorbing former Ottoman territories into their dominions. The Arabs of the Levant and Mesopotamia, however, suffered a fate similar to that of their North African brethren. The Europeans, reneging on their promises of independence, carved the region up into semi-colonial possessions, or mandates, of the British and the French.

Eventually these European overlords tired of administering their Arab subjects and (after a second and more destructive European war in mid-century – World War II) the Arab peoples of North Africa, the Levant and Mesopotamia emerged as the modern nations of the Middle East.

Many of the Arab nations we see on a map of the Middle East today are constructs of the retreating Europeans who, fearing the prospect of a unified Arab nation in the post-colonial era, patterned the political landscape of their former possessions on the European model of many independent nation-states. However, the Europeans gave little or no concession to historic, cultural, ethnic or religious differences among the populations of the region when they drew the borders, or empowered the first leaders, of these new nations. Most of the people of the Middle East are Arab and share a common language, history and culture. But not all are Arabs. Nor are all Arabs Muslims. Nor are all Muslims identical in their beliefs, loyalties and aspirations.

Perhaps the political map the Europeans created was intentional – an European divide-and-weaken, if not conquer, strategy, one designed to thwart Arab unity and thereby ensure a fragmented Middle East under continued, though indirect, European (and later American)

influence, primarily to guarantee the uninterrupted flow of inexpensive Arab oil to the West. Whether intentional or mere incompetence, European fears of Arab unity and insensitivity to the region's diversity when carving it up contributed greatly to a marked hostility, among many Arab populations, toward the resulting political landscape.

Adding insult to injury (in the minds of most Arabs) the retreating British provided the Jews of Europe, who had suffered greatly at the hands of the Germans and their allies prior to and during the war, a homeland in Palestine. In 1948 the Jews of Palestine declared their independence and created the modern nation of Israel. As noted in the chapter on Israel, the Arabs have continually sought Israel's destruction since its creation, more often than not to their disadvantage, as Israel time and again proved victorious in battle against the attacking Arab nations.

With a long tradition of nominal governance (at least in daily affairs and at the local level) within vast empires, the Arabs struggled in the post-colonial era with a fragmented and chaotic political landscape of competing nation-states not of their making, and with which they were ill prepared to cope. On one hand, centuries of European colonial repression left a legacy among Arab populations of resentment toward Western institutions and dependence on the family, the tribe and religion (Islam) for identity and support, to whom individuals owed their first allegiance. Loyalty to a 'country' – and especially a country created by European meddling – has been less important than loyalty to family, the tribe and Islam. On the other hand Islam, at its foundation, is a religion of cultural unity, ideally recognizing no political divisions among its adherents. It also lacks a recognized top-down, centralized hierarchy, a hallmark of Christianity that facilitated the rise of the nation-state in Europe – a political institution that took centuries, not decades, to develop and mature in the West.

Despite these challenges, the nation-states the Europeans created survived, although most of the European-styled, representative governments the retreating Europeans left behind were quickly overthrown and replaced with homegrown revolutionary and reactionary regimes. The failure of the first (European-styled) governments may have been in part a result of their 'European' taint. Ethnic nationalism, inequality toward non-Muslims living in Muslim lands under the traditional Islamic (Sharia) legal code, and the strong role of religion (Islam) in society, also proved powerful hindrances to establishment of 'liberal, representative government' in the Western sense of the term.

Yet another factor that may have contributed to the demise of these early governments was the Cold War influence of Soviet-style authoritarian socialism that, for several decades in the middle of the twentieth century, was perceived by many Arabs as gaining the upper hand, both economically and militarily, over the West, and therefore an attractive alternative model of governance.

Most certainly the humiliating defeats these early governments suffered in their wars with Israel contributed to their downfall, a fate that also threatened some of the regimes that replaced them. Even in peace, the leaders of Middle Eastern nations have fared poorly as a consequence of Israel's continued existence. King Hussein of Jordan weathered several coup and assassination attempts in part because he dared make peace with Israel. Radical Muslims assassinated

President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in part as a reaction to the treaty that he signed with Israel. And a radical Israeli Jew assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, because he supported the Oslo Accords, which outlined steps for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Israel's role as a source of turmoil in the Middle East, by its mere existence, should never be discounted. Scripture plainly teaches this will be the case in the End Times.

Zechariah 12: 2 – 3

"I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves."

Today Arabs throughout North Africa, the Levant, Mesopotamia and Arabia struggle with a legacy of three centuries of European domination, oppression and meddling. They chafe at what they consider a Western incursion upon their territory (Israel). They resent continued Western influences in Middle Eastern affairs (primarily America, anxious to secure its oil supplies from and maintain its military presence in the region).

Hosea 8: 7

"They sow the wind  
and reap the whirlwind. - - -

One concept that persists as a solution to the region's problems is the idea, or dream, of the unity of all Arabs under Islamic religion and law. The ancient manifestation of such unity was the Arab Muslim Empire of the seventh century. While not embraced by all Arabs (and especially those who hold power or have vested interests in the current political landscape of the Middle East) modern manifestations of a unified Arab people find expression in popular ideologies of Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism, concepts reinforced among Arabs across the Middle East by their shared language, history, culture and religion, and further strengthened by shared animosity towards Israel and suspicion of, and frustration with, Western (currently American) meddling in Arab affairs.

Western interests aside, one must ask if the Arab peoples can ever again realize a politically united, trans-national and trans-continental Arab nation. Despite their shared heritage, their animosity toward Israel and their suspicion of and frustration with the West, Arabs differ greatly in their religious beliefs (most are Sunni Muslims, but many are Shi'ia Muslims and Christians, or hold to other faiths). They also differ in their political and social philosophies (ranging from secularism, modernism and reform to traditionalism). It would be a great mistake to assume that all Arabs are single-minded in matters of religion, politics or society, just as it would be a mistake to assume that all Westerners are similarly single-minded. Yet one only has to look to the European Union for a model of how unity can be achieved despite such differences, when disparate groups can find common cause.

Perhaps more importantly for the West, one must also ask if Arabs can reconcile their (justifiable) historic and cultural animosities toward Europe and America – or even choose to do so. Some have suggested that Islamic culture is at foundation incompatible with modern Western culture. If true, the best Europe and America might hope for would be to maintain whatever influence they have over the Middle East or, losing that, establish some kind of peaceful coexistence with the region. At worst, Europe and America could find themselves confronted with a resurgent Arab nation on an equal footing with the West and a new civilizational war.

Many of the cultural qualities most touted as the triumph of the West – such as tolerance, liberty, democracy and capitalism – are painfully absent in the Middle East. Oppressed peoples seldom share the values of their oppressors. However, it can be pointed out that these qualities were also absent from most of Western history, and are in fact fairly recent additions to Western civilization; the West, for much of its history, was as guilty of intolerance, suppression, autocratic rule and economic elitism as any fundamentalist Islamic regime. The Crusades of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries were European attempts to conquer (in the name of religion). The Inquisitions of the twelfth through nineteenth centuries were European attacks on religious liberty. The Spanish persecutions, massacres and expulsion of Jews in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; the European and later American conquests, enslavements, and expulsions of Native Americans from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries; and European colonialism throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries were all examples of 'Christian' and 'Western' intolerance, suppression and exploitation of non-Christian and non-Western peoples. Liberal democracy and capitalism – hallmarks of modern Western civilization – have been around for less than three hundred and four hundred years respectively. In the United States, the institution of slavery continued until 1865, women were not allowed to vote in national elections until 1920, and segregation by race continued by law until 1964 – and continues in fact to the present. In the middle of the twentieth century Europe gave us fascism, communism, and the Holocaust.

In the West tolerance, liberty, democracy and capitalism have become, after many centuries of cultural evolution, firmly entrenched – for both good and ill. With tolerance and liberty has come freedom of speech, and pornography; freedom of expression, and adolescents whose dress, language and mores would have put nineteenth century prostitutes in Brussels and Washington to shame. Western democracy has yet to ensure equality, or even equal opportunity, to all who live under its banner. Capitalism has spawned gross materialism among the Western masses, crushing personal and national debt in both advanced and emerging economies, new forms of international economic exploitation and elitism, and class-by-wealth in many societies. To condemn Islamic culture by Western standards may be to judge too quickly, and may in the end be a judgment against Western tendencies to insist that Western norms are those by which all nations, tribes, peoples and cultures are rightly judged.

Recent efforts by America to encourage Western-style democracy and freedom in the Middle East have come up against these and other challenges. American efforts are based, at least in part, on the stated premise that 'Free societies are peaceful societies, and democracies do

not attack each other' [1]. Yet elections so far have backfired, allowing anti-Western, anti-Israel radicals and Islamic fundamentalists to gain increasing power through the ballot box.

In 2005, Hizbullah won a quarter of the seats in Lebanon's parliamentary elections and Hamas won over half of the seats in the Palestinian parliamentary elections. Both organizations are listed as foreign terrorist groups by the U. S. Department of State [2]. Both have subsequently attacked Israel, and sectarian violence has broken out in Palestine between Hamas and the Fatah party, which lost its ruling majority in the election.

The Muslim Brotherhood won a fifth of the seats in Egypt's 2005 parliamentary elections, despite being outlawed in that country. One of The Muslim Brotherhood's stated objectives is 'Mastering the world with Islam' [3].

Shi'ia fundamentalist won almost half of the seats in Iraq's 2006 parliamentary elections. The resulting Sunni reaction verges on civil war.

The American experiment with promoting democracy in Iraq in particular (at the point of a gun, some have suggested) has an all too troubling parallel in the turbulent history of that nation, an examination of which may go far to explain the problems that have arisen there and suggest a possible outcome of Western efforts to democratize the Middle East. In the early twentieth century Britain ruled what was then a region of disparate and competing ethnic and religious populations – Sunni Arabs, Shi'ia Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians and Turkomans, among others – and suffered continual resistance to its occupation by the subject peoples. Eventually the British tired of administering the region and cobbled together the nation of Iraq, granting it independence in 1932, but retaining military bases and transit rights due to the strategic importance of Iraqi oil. The Iraqis elected a popular government that quickly proved to be more inclined to promote Iraq's interests over those of Britain. During the World War II Britain, fearing that Iraq might cut oil supplies to the West and ally itself with the Axis powers, reinvaded Iraq, removed the elected government, and installed a government that would do its bidding. Eventually this second British occupation ended, and within little more than a decade the British-installed government was overthrown. Eventually the Ba'athist party came to power – the political party that served as the power base of the Sunni Arabs, who for decades dominated and suppressed the nation's other ethnic populations, and also provided the power base for Saddam Hussein.

Given past experiences with a 'democratizing' Western power, we perhaps can forgive the Iraqi people their suspicions of America's motives for invading their country. America, like Britain before it, is also interested in establishing a government in Iraq friendly toward its interests, in maintaining military bases in the region, and in ensuring the flow of Iraqi oil for the benefit of American security and the American economy. That it has sought these ends by toppling a tyrant and introducing democracy may seem to Iraqis as no more than different means to similar imperialistic ends. Given the results of the 2006 elections, which brought the Shi'ias to power, we can also understand the Sunni insurgency, which is nothing more than a manifestation of the centuries-old cultural conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ias, Arabs and Persians, already discussed in the chapter on the Gog/Magog War.

Other challenges facing the Arabs of the Middle East are those shared by most non-Western societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These include the disrupting influences of globalization (which introduces foreign, Western, and often decadent ideas and temptations into what had been a largely traditional, closed and ordered society); rapid modernization and urbanization (disrupting traditional family and tribal structures as young people leave the community to find work and opportunity in the cities and in foreign countries); and the failure of governments, handicapped by a legacy of ethnic and cultural elitism, to govern effectively and fairly, or provide for the needs and aspirations of all their citizens (leaving many, and especially the huge numbers of young adults in most Middle Eastern nations, disenfranchised and poverty stricken).

Too much influence (even domination) by foreigners, challenges to and disruption of traditional social structures, and a failure of governance – it is a recipe for trouble among populations that have, until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, had a long history of relative unity and stability. And it has given rise to great dissatisfaction and unrest as people search for solutions to the problems thus created. In the twentieth century it gave rise to fascism in Germany and Italy, militarism in Japan, and communism in Russia and China. Today the Middle East simmers, and sometimes seethes, with this unrest, and the region has proven a fertile ground for the rise of religious fundamentalism, radicalism and extremism as large segments of the population – and especially uprooted and disenfranchised youth – seek answers and direction in a world unhinged.

Many have speculated about possible outcomes for the Arab people from all these troubling developments. The Bible, however, could provide the answer, one that fits a pattern often repeated in history among other peoples suffering through similar trials. The time may soon come – if it has not yet arrived – when a charismatic and insightful individual of vision and bold character will rise up and, sniffing the wind, offer a solution to the turmoil and societal decay around him, a solution that will appeal to the frustrated hopes and dreams of the Arab masses. As noted at the end of the chapter on the Gog/Magog War, the list of such past 'messiahs', in other parts of the world, is long.

How unfortunate to contemplate such a thing visited upon so great a people. How unfortunate to anticipate that, what has happened before, may happen again. The Jewish people are not alone in their rebellion against the Prince of Peace. Their Arab brethren suffer the same disorienting disease. They, too, are looking for a messiah. They, too, are looking in the wrong direction.

Three great faiths – Christianity, Judaism and Islam – share a common ancestor in Abraham and a common God. Christians are the spiritual heirs of Abraham in that, just as Abraham lived and obeyed God by faith and was counted by God as righteous (Romans, Chapter 4, verses 1 through 3), the true Church has as its foundation this same faith and obedience, and is thereby counted by God as righteous (Galatians, Chapter 6, verses 3 through 9). And just as the Jewish people are heirs of Abraham through Isaac, whom God blessed, so too are the Arab people heirs of Abraham through Ishmael, whom God also blessed. Would that all three see, in Jesus Christ, the Person of God and their Messiah.

As with the Jewish people, when we say that Jesus Christ is the Messiah we must understand what the term 'messiah' means to the Arab people. Just as there are differences regarding the Messiah and the End Times among Christians, and among the Jewish people, so too are there differences among the Arab people. Many Arabs today (that is, those who are Muslims) consider Jesus, whom they call the Son of Mary, a great prophet; not the Person of God in human form Who died on a cross and was resurrected, but a man and prophet of God who was taken into heaven while he yet lived. At some point in the future, when the world is suffering great travail because of the wickedness of men, a great leader, the Mahdi, will appear to unite all faithful Muslims. At this time Jesus, the son of Mary, will descend from heaven and destroy false Christianity. The antichrist will also appear, as a messiah to the Jewish people, and the false prophet will emerge to deceive many.

There will be war between the Muslims, led by the Mahdi, and the non-Muslims, led by the antichrist (the Jewish messiah). Jesus will kill the antichrist, and then peace will reign on earth while he lives out the rest of his physical life.

Then society will once again decay and war will return. The souls of the righteous will be taken up into heaven; unbelievers will be left on the earth, to suffer the Day of Judgment.

It is interesting to note the similarities between Muslim, Jewish and Christian beliefs about the End Times. But then, Muslims consider both the Old and New Testaments to be holy texts. The differences in beliefs lie in part in the interpretation of these scriptures, and in part that Muslims also have the Quran, or the principle holy book of Islam, and other teachings and doctrines to which they adhere. For instance, Arab Muslims believe that God's covenant with Abraham passed to Ishmael – their ancestor – and not to Isaac.

Islam developed as a faith several hundred years after Christianity on the Arabian Peninsula (Arabia), the homeland of its prophet, Muhammad. At that time Arabia had large Christian and Jewish communities, and Muhammad had extensive contact with both Christians and with Jews. Muhammad was most likely influenced by both Christian and Jewish doctrines as he formed the beliefs and tenants of Islam, which acknowledge that both Christians and Jews are 'peoples of the book'.

It is easy to see how, in the End Times, much confusion will arise about who will be the savior of the world. But Jesus warned His first disciples that, as the End Times approached, there would arise many false messiahs, and that many would be deceived.

Still, not all will be deceived; God will seal His 144,000 believers from among the twelve tribes of Israel. As noted in the chapter on Israel, some of these tribes may appear out of the Arab populations of the Middle East. Also, as noted herein, not all Arab people are Muslims. There are Arabs living in the Middle East who are Christians, recognizing in Jesus Christ, the Person of God, their Messiah. Although the numbers of Christians in most Arab countries in Mesopotamia and Arabia are small and declining, in Syria they number about ten percent of the population, and in Lebanon about thirty-nine percent [4].

Isaiah 27: 12 – 13

In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Who is a true 'Israelite'? Who is a true follower of God? As I said at the end of the chapter on Israel, we could be in for some surprises.

#### Endnotes:

- [1] The White House Fact Sheet: Rebuilding Iraq, December 2005, [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051207.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051207.html) (accessed 7/20/06)
- [2] <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm> (accessed 7/20/06)
- [3] <http://www.ummah.net/ikhwan/> (accessed 7/20/06)
- [4] CIA Word Factbook, [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov), (accessed 7/19/06)

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Chapter 12  
Europe  
(Bits and pieces)

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 13, verses 31 and 32, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed – the smallest of seeds – which, when planted, grows into the largest of shrubs, then into a tree wherein birds can roost. This passage, together with the Great Commission (recorded in Matthew, Chapter 28, verses 18 through 20) are quoted by some Christians as part of the basis for a belief that the spread of the Church throughout the world will one day usher in an age of peace after all people convert to Christianity, without the world having to suffer the trials and tribulations of the End Times.

It is an attractive idea – that through the work of the Church, empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, God's Plan for the redemption of humanity and the earth can be accomplished peacefully and progressively. And it is a worthy goal to seek peace and brotherhood between all peoples, and to spread worldwide the message of salvation of all souls through the power of God's Grace and Mercy.

This spreading of the message of salvation by God's Grace – through the redeeming work of His Son, Jesus Christ and the renewing of minds by His indwelling Holy Spirit – is a cornerstone of the Southern Baptist Church, of which I am a member. It is a goal I wholeheartedly support with my time, my money and my prayers.

However, to believe as some Christians do, that the re-conquest of the earth will occur without the horrors of the End Times, requires one to discount the prophecies in the Bible – even prophecies uttered by Jesus Christ – that such success will elude the Church. And that might be what some Christians do. They interpret the End Times prophecies (which are found throughout the Bible, from beginning to end) as allegories, or stories that are symbolic of the struggle between good and evil, and not to be taken as literal future events.

Such interpretation contradicts not only much of the Bible but also historic trends, and especially those of the last hundred years, which are propelling humanity, at ever increasing speeds, toward the End Times events detailed in the Bible, not away from them. And while the Church has, for almost two thousand years, spread the good news of salvation by grace and regeneration around the world, humanity continues to rebel against God's authority and commandments.

One compelling argument against such interpretation is the fact that, in those parts of the world where the Church has been present the longest, it seems there to be least effective in its role as messenger of God's grace through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Person of God in human form. The Church began in the city of Jerusalem, in ancient Israel, where Jesus' first followers received the indwelling Holy Spirit and began to boldly proclaim that this gracious gift of God was freely available to all who would receive it. From Jerusalem the Church spread throughout Judea and Samaria, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Central Asia, North Africa and Europe. In Europe Christianity eventually became the 'official religion' of the Roman Empire. After the

fall of the Empire, it was the religion of the kingdoms, empires and nation-states that rose up in Rome's place. Then, from Europe, Christianity and the Church spread around the world – to Sub-Saharan Africa, India, Asia, Australia, and North and South America.

Unfortunately, Christianity was often exploited to promote political and social agendas that conflicted with its primary role as messenger of God's Grace. Non-European peoples and whole civilizations were conquered and enslaved in the name of the Church, and the name of Jesus was invoked to justify all manner of intrigues, persecutions and wars. This often gave the Church (and Jesus) a bad reputation. Yet despite these abuses, the Church prevailed, and it has indeed spread the Christian faith and message throughout the world.

Like a mustard seed, it began small, with one Man, Jesus Christ, who was killed and buried but then rose up out of the ground and, through His followers, encompassed the globe with the message of God's Grace.

However, in those parts of the world where Christ's Church began and first grew and spread – in Palestine, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Central Asia and North Africa – the Church was eventually supplanted by Islam, and is now represented by a dwindling minority of the population. In some places it is nonexistent. Growing hostilities between Islam and the West over the last few decades has given rise to persecution of Arab Christians by their Muslim brethren, causing many Arab Christians to leave the region. During an interview in 2003, the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem expressed deep concern that the trend in the Christian West of equating Muslims with terrorists has deepened the rift between Christianity and Islam, to the point where the Christian presence in the Middle East is now jeopardized [1].

And in Europe, where the Church shaped history for almost fifteen hundred years, it has in large part ceased to be relevant in the lives of many people. Britain has experienced decreases in church attendance of over thirty percent since 1980; on the continent denominational membership has fallen by twenty percent in Belgium, eighteen percent in the Netherlands and sixteen percent in France [2]. 'Christian Europe' today, in the minds of large and growing numbers of Europeans, appears to be little more than a cultural label. References to Christianity are banned or outlawed in official circles and the public arena. Immigrant adherents to Islam build mosques in European cities, while churches close.

The mustard tree has rotted out at its core – a hollow tree – and some of its oldest branches are dying. This is far from the image of a Church triumphant progressing ever onward toward a global age of peace. It is quite the opposite.

As Europe grows politically, economically and socially into an ever more perfect union, it dies spiritually. As Europeans seek peace and security by human means, they increasingly ignore God's Plan for personal and social peace and security, if ever many of them paid serious attention to God's Plan to begin with.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Church did provide a sort of glue to hold western civilization together during the tumult of the next thousand years of political, economic and social transformation. As European society rose again from the rubble of Roman Imperium, the Church grew in influence and power, and it did much to preserve the knowledge of the past

and mitigate much of the cruelty and abuses of competing powers seeking to gain dominance over the continent.

Unfortunately, the Church also at times succumbed to that same lust for power and inflicted its share of cruelty and abuse. It may be an indictment against the Church in Europe that it failed to unite the continent during the long centuries it held spiritual, political and economic power and influence over barons, princes, kings, emperors and parliaments. As Europe evolved into the constellation of nation-states that finally emerged in the aftermath of two horrific wars of the last century, the Church proved itself wholly ineffective – some would say irrelevant – to the task of unifying the continent, and the task fell to secular visionaries, bureaucrats and politicians.

But this was not supposed to be the Church's principal task to begin with. The Great Commission was (and is) its purpose, and any good it accomplishes lies in its role as the means by which God works out His Plan for redemption through the regeneration of the minds and souls of individual men and women. So the Church was bound to fail in any scheme it set itself for accomplishing peace and unity on the continent by political, social or economic means. This is the way of man's religion, not God's.

In the preceding centuries the European continent had its share of (false) messiahs, who either mounted or eviscerated the Church as they rose to power and killed their millions. Perhaps for this reason Europe has chosen another path. Whatever the reasons, today Europe is nominally a Christian society, and growing increasingly apostate.

As the Church struggles to maintain its relevance in the lives of Europeans, its successes can only be measured in the redemption of humanity one soul at a time. To this purpose (its only God-given purpose) it has in recent decades had some success. But as the end of the age draws close, it is the Church in Europe that is fragmented, even as European society grows ever more united under the banner of the European Union.

A secular, largely apostate Europe, one that grows in solidarity and in union with its Muslim neighbors, is a good description of the End Times empire of iron and clay described by the prophet Daniel. As with all human efforts toward universal unity, it will have its limited success, then fail.

Without the Hand of God guiding it, this End Times Empire of the Willing is not looking for a messiah – much less the Messiah it has known (or should have known) for centuries.

But all this will change. The continent is not yet done with (false) messiahs. History repeats, and Europe today is setting itself up to play its part in the final rebellion of humanity.

End notes:

- [1] Steven Gertz, 'Christian History Corner: Palestinian Christians, Strangers in a Familiar Land' Christianity Today, Week of August 4, posted 08/08/2003  
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- [2] Jeff Chu, 'O Father Where Art Thou?' Time Europe, June 8, 2003  
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Chapter 13  
Antichrist's Kingdom  
(Here there be dragons)

2 Thessalonians 2: 3-12

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

I 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.

Much is prophesied in the Bible about the End Times antichrist, and much of what is prophesied about him has already been covered in previous chapters of this book. In the chapters entitled 'Israel', 'Arabia' and 'Europe' I suggested how the spiritual condition of these peoples might make them susceptible to his influence once he appears on the world scene. And if, as you read these chapters, some of my sadness over their condition was evident in my words, I do not apologize. If I have been correct in my interpretations of both history and prophecy, then anyone with a sense of destiny and possessed of compassion should feel the same. It is sadder still to realize that the spiritual condition of Israel, Arabia and Europe is one they share with most of humanity, including much (if not most) of America.

Yet are my interpretations correct? As a student of Bible prophecy, history and current events, I cannot think otherwise. The world is rushing toward its destiny with its Maker, and

historic and current events conspire to ensure that the end of the age will unfold exactly as prophesied in scripture.

Throughout the Bible are references to the last, and greatest, End Times antichrist. In the New Testament he is called the man of lawlessness or the man of sin, who denies the divinity of Jesus Christ and claims the divinity of God for himself. The clearest passages concerning him and his End Times career are found in the Book of Revelation.

In Revelation, Chapter 13, verses 1 through 10, we see a vision of a beast rising out of a sea. This is the antichrist, the End Times king whom Satan will use to oppose God's fulfillment of His promises to Israel, His Plan for the redemption of mankind, and His intention to renew the earth. This beast is described as having ten horns, ten crowns, and seven heads.

The ten horns and crowns suggest that his power will come from ten kings, or leaders of ten nations, who will ally themselves with the antichrist. This is confirmed in Revelation, Chapter 17, verses 12 through 14.

The seven heads represent seven empires that have attempted to destroy Israel while it was a nation in possession of the land that God had given the descendants of Abraham through Isaac (the Jewish people). This, too, is confirmed in Revelation, Chapter 17. In verses 9 through 11, the prophet John is told that five of these empires had already passed into history, that the sixth is in power at the time of his vision, and that the seventh would rise to power at the end of the age. He is further told the antichrist is an eighth empire, and that he will arise out of the seven and his time will be short.

The five empires that had already passed into history when John received his vision were: Egypt, which had enslaved the Hebrews and later tried to dominate the nation of Israel; Assyria, which invaded Israel, conquered the northernmost ten tribes, and carried these tribes off into captivity; Babylon, which conquered the remaining two tribes and carried them off into captivity; Persia, which came close to destroying the Babylonian captives before allowing them to return to their homeland; and the Seleucid (Greek) empire which, during the rule of Antiochus IV, attempted to forcefully convert the Hebrews from their worship of God to idolatry. The empire that was in power at the time John received his vision was of course Rome, which eventually destroyed the nation and scattered the Jewish people. The empire that will succeed Rome is most likely the European Union, which increasingly favors the Palestinian Arabs over Israel, and perhaps the Arab League, which in fact seeks Israel's destruction. The antichrist will be the eighth in this line of empires seeking Israel's destruction, and John is told that the antichrist will come out of the seven. This could mean that he will be of the same mind or spirit as the seven by seeking Israel's destruction, or that he arises in that part of the world over which all seven in their day held power (Mesopotamia), or both.

As already noted elsewhere in this book, the reference in Revelation, Chapter 13, verse 2, to the leopard, the bear and the lion reinforces the interpretation that the antichrist will arise out of that part of the world where Greece, Persia and Babylon ruled, each in their turn. This would be the Levant and Mesopotamia, or that part of the Middle East today occupied by Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.

Much has been speculated about the fatal wound mentioned in verse 3, none of it very convincing to me. It may be one of those mysteries that will not be made known until it happens.

Verses 4 through 8 chronicles how men will worship the antichrist and, by extension, the dragon (that is, Satan), because Satan will be the power behind the antichrist. The antichrist will be allowed (given authority) to oppose God, and to persecute those who worship God, for three and a half years (the second half of the Tribulation), during which all of mankind who do not have the Holy Spirit within them will be deceived into worshiping the antichrist.

When the Bible says that Satan will be the power behind the antichrist, it means just that. Satan has exercised power on the earth ever since the first people (Adam and Eve) listened to him and rebelled against God:

Ephesians 2: 1 – 3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

I Thessalonians 2: 17 - 18

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you - certainly I, Paul, did, again and again - but Satan stopped us.

I Peter 5: 7 - 9

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

To properly understand how Satan and the antichrist could possibly exercise such influence over mankind requires an examination of what we mean by authority and worship.

The question is asked: What is authority?

The answer is: Most dictionaries define authority as the right or power to command, enforce rules upon, or give orders to others. Usually, such right or power is obtained from, or is back up by, a higher source of authority.

Scriptures teach that the End Times antichrist will be given authority once the one who holds him back (the Holy Spirit) is taken out of the way. This means that the antichrist will have the power to act upon, or enforce his will upon, the world (II Thessalonians, Chapter 2, verses 1 through 12). With the Holy Spirit is out of the way, Satan will be unrestrained upon the earth, and he will be the power behind the antichrist's authority.

This granting of authority does not mean that the antichrist's rule will go unchallenged. Authority does not automatically translate into absolute control. A police officer has authority to enforce the law, but still there are law-breakers. Jesus gave His earliest followers, and the Church by extension, authority to spread the word of God's grace throughout the world (Matthew, Chapter 28, verses 18 through 20). But not everyone accepted the authority of His followers, nor does everyone today recognize the Church's authority.

There will be those who oppose the antichrist's authority, just as there are those who oppose police authority and the authority of the Church. Authority does not translate into unquestioning obedience or timid submission by everyone. However, the antichrist will for a time be allowed, and be given the power (granted authority) to deal with opposition as he pleases.

Some people will remain faithful to God throughout the Tribulation, and these will oppose the antichrist. And not all kings will voluntarily follow the antichrist. Some will resist his rule, even though their resistance may prove futile. Certain world leaders with their own agendas will provoke the antichrist to attack them. He will attack with an army of 200,000,000 soldiers, starting a war that kills one-third of mankind during the second half of the Tribulation (Revelation, Chapter 9, verses 13 through 19).

However some kings (at least ten) will wholly ally themselves with Antichrist.

Revelation 17: 12 – 14

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The question is asked: What is worship?

The answer is: Most dictionaries define worship as treating someone or something as if they were divine, or godlike, and to show them respect by acts of prayer and devotion. Worship can also mean to love, admire or respect somebody or something greatly, perhaps excessively or unquestioningly.

As noted above, during the second half of the Tribulation Satan will be unrestrained, and the antichrist will be able to fool (or coerce) all but the saints (those sealed with the Holy Spirit) into worshipping him. He will be aided in his campaign of deception by a false prophet.

Revelation 13: 5 – 12

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

He who has an ear, let him hear.

If anyone is to go into captivity,  
into captivity he will go.

If anyone is to be killed with the sword,  
with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient  
endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.

Worship of the antichrist should not be confused with the worship of God by true believers who are born into the family of God. True worship is voluntary and motivated by love. Those who love God love Him because He first loved them, and because He gave Himself (through His Son, Jesus Christ) as a sacrifice for them, while they were yet sinners.

I John 4: 7 – 21

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen

God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

While the worship of the antichrist by many may be motivated by fanciful or delusional belief that he is god or messiah, the worship of others could be more pragmatic. It could be no more than a token worship, either coerced by threat of harm or solicited by promise of reward. Many may simply go through the motions of worship because it is fashionable (a popular novelty), or because it is expected of them (socially acceptable behavior), or even exciting and fun (dabbling in the occult).

Not all who worship do so in spirit and truth. Unfortunately this is true within the Church today. Why should it be any different in the End Times?

The antichrist will also gain control of some commodity that everyone needs or wants. He will use this control to reinforce his authority to rule and to exact worship.

Revelation 13: 16 - 18

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

Since the end of World War Two, the world has experienced a rapid integration of communication, technology, capital, goods, services and people, all of which has produced a global economy and, at some levels, something akin to a global culture – what some have termed

'globalization'. Revelation, Chapter 13, verses 16 through 18 suggests that the globalization process, which some predict may soon end, will instead continue to expand until the whole world is indeed globalized, at least economically. This interpretation would be reinforced if what is bought and sold includes everything – food, clothing, homes, manufactured goods, vehicles, etc. Some have suggested that such control is now technically feasible, and could be accomplished through implementation of a cashless, global digital transaction system. He who controls the system would control the buying and the selling.

A less literal interpretation might suggest that the antichrist will control some resource everyone needs or wants. Since the scriptures do not say what will be bought or sold, it could be everything, or it could simply be one essential thing – such as oil.

Modern civilization is addicted to oil. It simply cannot exist without it. And despite claims that the world can wean itself off oil, the world each year consumes more and more of this finite resource, a trend that is anticipated to continue for at least the next half century. If the antichrist arises and establishes his power base in the Middle East, he might indeed one day be in a position to control most of the world's oil production, and therefore the End Times global economy.

By the third decade of the twenty-first century, the Middle East could supply almost half of the oil available on global markets and possess almost half the world's oil reserves [1]. The world's addiction to oil could therefore give the antichrist control over the earth.

And there are many in the world today that seem ready to sell, if not their blood, then their souls, for a tank of gas.

Matthew 16: 24 – 26

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In the end, therein may lie the secret to both the antichrist's authority and worship.

The question is asked: Could Saddam Hussein have been the antichrist?

The answer is: Probably not. Still, consider the possibilities.

In 2006 the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, was tried in Iraq, accused of crimes against the people he once ruled, and brutally hanged. While I felt pretty sure then that it is highly unlikely that Saddam Hussein could have ever been the great End Times antichrist

prophesied in scripture, some lessons about this future antichrist can be gleaned from Saddam's career. In particular, what if Saddam had been a different sort of man?

If the antichrist arises as the leader of a ten-nation confederation in the Middle East (the Levant, Mesopotamia and Arabia), Iraq is as good a candidate for his origins as any other nation in the region. In the Book of Daniel we read that the antichrist will begin his career by subduing three kings. Today Iraq is a fractured nation, divided between three 'kingdoms' – the Shi'ia Arab south, the Sunni Arab west, and the Kurdish north. In Iraq this prophecy could be fulfilled if the antichrist manages to reunite these kingdoms, then goes on to conquer the rest of the region, which is something that Saddam clumsily and miserably tried but failed to do.

Many Arabs yearn for the revival of the great Muslim unity of the past (the Caliphate), a vast Arab-Muslim Empire that, from 632 A.D. to 750 A.D., spread Arab language and culture, as well as the Islamic religion, from Spain in the West to what is modern-day Pakistan in the East, under the rule of the Caliph, the term or title for the Islamic leader of the Ummah, or community of Islam. Should someone of great charismatic talent ever manage to once again unite these nations (something that many Muslims believe is prophesied), the stage would indeed be set for the end of the age.

Given these factors, it is intriguing to speculate what could have happened if Saddam Hussein had been a different sort of man – a man of cunning vision rather than of blind ambition. Decades of intrigue and cronyism brought Saddam to power as the supreme leader of arguably the most powerful nation in the Middle East (Iraq). Years of self-aggrandizement, paranoia, cruelty, miscalculation and self-delusion bought him to trial for crimes against his own people in his own country. Still, consider the possibilities – of a different kind of Saddam rising to power along a different path, one that appealed to the great yearning among many Arabs for the lost Caliphate and the reincarnation of the great Arab-Muslim Empire of the past. What if Saddam had managed to inspire Arab unity across international boundaries, instead of only the loyalty of the Sunni Arabs of his tribal homeland? What if he had inspired the loyalty of the Kurds and Shi'ia Muslims that comprise the (formerly) disenfranchised majority of Iraqis, rather than suppressing them with murder, mayhem and mustard gas? And what if he had not squandered his nation's oil wealth on a fruitless war with Iran?

Under different circumstances, Saddam might have used Iraq's vast oil wealth to complete the modernization of his country and successfully complete his ambitious weapons programs. He might have ridden into Kuwait as a liberator (rather than as a brutish robber). He might have then gone on to sweep the Arabian Peninsula, including Saudi Arabia and its vast oil reserves, into his pocket like so much change. And he might have done it before the West, including America, could have done anything about it. Indeed, scripture suggests that, if Saddam had been a different sort of man, he would have had the blessing and support of the West in all these endeavors (as he had during his ill-fated war with Iran, and until his ill-fated invasion of Kuwait).

And what does all of this have to do with the great End Times antichrist? Nothing. And everything.

Consider the lost possibilities. They may not be lost at all – just waiting for the right man.

Endnotes:

- [1] Energy Information Administration, U. S. Department of Energy, International Energy Outlook 2006, Chapter 3, World Oil Markets  
[http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo/pdf/0484\(2006\).pdf](http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo/pdf/0484(2006).pdf) (accessed 9/26/06)

Chapter 14  
The False Prophet  
(Wolf in sheep's clothing)

Matthew 7: 15

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible warn of false prophets. Ancient Israel had its share of those who falsely claimed to be spokespersons for God, as did the early Church. Such are common in every age – that is, those who get what they want from people (power, money, influence, fame) by telling people what they want to hear rather than what they ought to hear, or by doing the thinking for those who do not want to think, or by misleading those who are too willing to be led. It is an indictment against humanity that such prophets have been, and will continue to be, effective pawns in Satan's opposition to God's Plan for the redemption and renewal of the earth.

As the end of the age approaches, there will be many false prophets plying their lying wares (Matthew, Chapter 24, verses 23 through 25), and there will be many who will believe them (Matthew, Chapter 24, verses 10 and 11). And in the End Times, a false prophet will arise who will deceive most of humanity into worshiping the antichrist as a god.

The principal passage in the Bible regarding this false prophet is found in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 13, verses 11 through 17. Here we see a companion to the antichrist appearing. But while scripture describes the antichrist as coming out of the sea (of humanity), the false prophet comes out of the earth.

Some have suggested that his coming out of the earth may mean that he arises out of 'the land', or Israel [1]. If this is a correct interpretation, then one of his roles may be to 'sell' the antichrist to the Jewish people as their long-anticipated messiah. As we have already seen, ancient Israel had a weakness for following false messiahs. It also had a weakness for listening to false prophets. And many Jewish people today are looking for the appearing of a messiah, but other than the One that God has promised. Many Muslims are also looking for their messiah, as are many Christians. This End Times false prophet has his work cut out for him. But behind him is the power of Satan, the same power behind the antichrist.

In John's vision, the false prophet is described as having two horns like a lamb, perhaps suggesting that he offers the Jewish people, and Muslims and Christians as well, a hope for peace. But he speaks like a dragon, and in scripture the dragon represents Satan (Revelation, Chapter 12, verses 7 through 9), and Satan is a liar (John, Chapter 8, verse 44). The false prophet's 'good news' about peace for Israel and, by extension, peace for the Middle East and the world is, of course, a lie.

Satan will use the antichrist/false prophet partnership to try and corrupt the worship of God at the end of the age, presenting the antichrist to the world as god. It is disheartening to note

the similarities between the antichrist/false prophet partnership recorded in Revelation and some of the Jewish and Muslim End Times beliefs already briefly outlined in the chapters on Israel and Arabia. Arab Muslims will be as susceptible to Satan's lies as the Jewish people, and perhaps some unwary Christians will be deceived as well.

If the interpretations regarding the End Times outlined in this book are correct, some of the proof will be in the success Satan achieves in producing some kind reconciliation between Jews and Arabs. This would be the peace treaty that signals the beginning of the Seven Year Tribulation.

This is not to suggest that peace in the Middle East is not a worthy goal. Peace is a cornerstone of true religion and should be pursued with vigor. But peace at any price is an illusion, and peace founded on lies and deceptions is no peace at all.

The false prophet will deceive many into accepting peace on the antichrist's terms. He will achieve this by performing miracles, including signs and wonders such as bringing fire down from heaven (Revelation, Chapter 13, verse 13). Miracles are usually associated with the power and presence of God, and bringing fire down from heaven is something God on occasion does. God rained down fire from heaven on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment for the unrepentant sinfulness of the inhabitants (Genesis, Chapter 19, verses 23 through 25). And God rained down fire from heaven to reinforce the prophet Elijah's condemnation of Israel's idol worship (I Kings, Chapter 18, verses 36 through 39). It is doubtful that the false prophet will be given anything like the power to draw fire from heaven where God reigns supreme. Perhaps here heaven means the sky above the earth, which is sometimes referred to as the heavens in scripture (Psalms, Chapter 19, verses 1 through 6).

Then again, in scripture fire from heaven is a symbol or a sign of God's Wrath (Revelation, Chapter 8, verse 5). Perhaps the false prophet can draw fire (God's Wrath) from heaven – but only as God allows him. This sign could therefore serve a dual purpose – to fool those willing to believe the false prophet's lies and to warn those who should know better.

In any event, miracles can be as highly overrated as words, and as deceptive to those seeking validation of a lie in place of the truth. One must always look beyond both to determine their meaning and value. Satan can present himself as an angel of light in order to deceive those looking for something other than – or an alternative to – God (II Corinthians, Chapter 11, verses 13 through 15). Pharaoh's magicians could produce miracles almost as well as Moses (Exodus, Chapter 7, verse 14 through Chapter 8, verse 7). And Jesus discounted the value of miracles as arguments for proof of divinity or of conformity to the Will of God (Matthew, Chapter 7, verses 21 through 23, and Chapter 24, verse 24). Indeed, He values something as simple as giving a cup of water to the thirsty much more highly than any miracle one can perform (Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 31 through 46).

The false prophet compliments the antichrist; the antichrist represents political, civil and military authority while the false prophet represents the religious authority that validates, at least in the minds of the willing, anything the antichrist chooses to do. This includes enforcing obedience to and worship of the antichrist as god, persecuting and killing those who refuse, and controlling the lives of people to the degree that they cannot conduct business nor even acquire

the necessities of life unless they swear allegiance to the new world order. In the final analysis we have here revealed, in the antichrist and his false prophet, the last manifestation of the age-old formula for the downfall of empires, nations and peoples – demagoguery and demon worship. Let them who have ears to hear, hear the truth and not the lies (Matthew, Chapter 11, verse 15).

Endnotes:

[1] M.R. De Haan, M.D., Revelation, Zondervan Publishing House, 1961 p. 186

Chapter 15  
Mystery Babylon  
(Jacob's sorrow)

Jeremiah 3: 6 – 11, 14

During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense," declares the LORD.

"Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you – one from a town and two from a clan – and bring you to Zion."

Jeremiah 7: 34

I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.

Hosea 1: 2

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

If the Church has a relationship with Jesus likened unto that of a bride to a bridegroom, Israel has a relationship with God likened unto that of a wife to a husband. And time and again, Israel proved unfaithful to God, as a wayward wife is unfaithful to her husband.

The Book of Hosea illustrates this quite graphically. Its theme is that of God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. With no other nation does God describe His relationship as likened unto that of a wife to a husband. No other nation does He accuse of adultery and whoredom. No other nation does He accuse of unfaithfulness. Israel is the only nation with

whom He has ever established a covenant relationship, and from whom He thereby demands the faithfulness of the nation.

Some have suggested that the description of the great whore in the Book of Revelation, Chapters 17 and 18, is that of a faithless, apostate, worldwide Church at the end of the age. Some have gone so far as to identify her with the Roman Catholic Church specifically. Perhaps those who suggest such interpretations believe also that God has abandoned Israel and substituted the Church as His covenant people. But we have already determined in this book that such belief is in error, for God has never abandoned Israel, despite that nation's unfaithfulness toward Him. Others have suggested that the great whore is modern-day Iraq after it recovers from Saddam Hussein's brutal rule and the subsequent Sunni-Arab insurgency. Others still have suggested that the great whore is America.

Perhaps some of these interpretations are precipitated by agendas or prejudices that blind their adherents to the truth. Most certainly they all cannot be right.

The great whore is in fact a city – one that rules over the kings of the earth (Revelation, Chapter 17, verse 18), and which sits upon peoples, multitudes, nations and languages (Revelation, Chapter 17, verse 15). Jerusalem today is a city at the center of world affairs, demanding the attention and dictating the policies of every nation in the Middle East, the member states of the European Union, the Muslim nations of Central Asia and North Africa, and even Russia and America. The city is sacred to three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the faiths of over half the people on the planet. The modern inhabitants of the city trace their origins from around the world. In scripture, Jerusalem in the End Times is described as a cup of poison to the nations and a burden to the whole world (Zechariah, Chapter 12, verses 2 and 3). And in 1947, on the eve of Israeli independence, the United Nations tried to internationalize the city:

The City of Jerusalem shall be established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime and shall be administered by the United Nations. The Trusteeship Council shall be designated to discharge the responsibilities of the Administering Authority on behalf of the United Nations.  
(United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 188 (II), Future government of Palestine, Part III A. November 29, 1947)

What other city could better fit the description of the great whore found in Revelation? That description is strikingly similar to God's description of unfaithful Israel (represented by Jerusalem) recorded in the Book of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God at a time when Israel tried to secure its safety through alliances with other nations and by worshiping the gods of these nations instead of trusting in Him, called Israel a harlot. He accused the Israelites of fornicating with the Egyptians and the Assyrians, and He warned the Israelites that these very nations would, in the end, turn on them. They would strip the nation naked, strike it with stones and run it through with swords (Ezekiel, chapter 16). In Revelation, Chapter 17, the prophet John witnesses this same scenario played out in the End Times. Here the whore, who has fornicated

with the kings of the earth, is in the end stripped naked by these kings, who then consume her and burn her with fire. And as we have already determined, these kings are none other than the antichrist and the leaders of the ten-nation confederation he assembles as his power base. It is a confederation that literally will surround Israel, comprised of the Middle Eastern nations of modern-day Levant, Mesopotamia and Arabia.

Today these nations seek Israel's destruction. In the End Times, under the leadership of the antichrist, they will offer Israel peace and safety. Israel will trust in its treaty with the antichrist rather than trusting in God. But in the end, the antichrist will turn of Israel and attempt to destroy the Jewish nation. It is significant that they will destroy Jerusalem with 'fire' (the modern medium of warfare, in the form of propellants and explosives) instead of stones and swords (the ancient medium of warfare). History repeats, even unto the end of the age.

Other clues to the harlot's identity are found in other books of the Bible. In the Book of Lamentations, Chapter 1, verse 1, Israel is likened unto a widow who was once a queen but who is reduced to slavery. In the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 1, verse 21, Jerusalem is accused of becoming a harlot. In the Book of Zechariah, Chapter 5, unfaithful Israel is described as a wicked woman who is carried off to Babylon in a basket (the Babylonian captivity). All of these images are recounted in the description of the great whore in Revelation, Chapters 17 and 18.

Even the words of Jesus identify the great whore as Jerusalem. In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 23, verses 29 through 39, He accuses the Jewish nation of killing the prophets and of stoning the saintly messengers of God sent to warn and to teach. And, of course, it was the Jewish leaders of first century Jerusalem who had Him crucified and who persecuted the leaders of the early Church, killing some of them. These crimes are also recounted in Revelation, Chapters 17 and 18, and are laid at the feet of the great whore.

The question is asked: What are we to make of the reference in Revelation, Chapter 17, verse 5, to the name written on the forehead of the great whore – 'Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth'?

The answer is: This is a clear reference to the spiritual character or quality of the great whore.

We have already determined that Christians who worship God in spirit and in truth are sealed in their foreheads with the seal of God – that is, with His Holy Spirit (Ephesians, Chapter 4, verse 30). The 144,000 faithful Israelites of the Seven Year Tribulation are also thus sealed (Revelation, Chapter 7, verses 3 through 8). And those who worship the antichrist are sealed with a different seal – the mark of the beast on their right hands or their foreheads (Revelation, Chapter 13, verses 16 through 18). Those sealed with the Holy Spirit are worshipers of God who put their trust in, and serve only, Him. Those who carry the mark of the beast are worshipers of the antichrist who have chosen to oppose God. The great whore – unfaithful Israel – are those Jewish people whose worship is perverted from the worship of God to the worship of 'idols' (that is, anything other than God) and who put their trust in and serve anything other than Him.

The reference to Babylon is significant. It was in the region of what would become the Babylonian Empire that mankind, after the great flood, sought to ascend to heaven without first submitting to the Purposes and Plan of God (Genesis, Chapter 11, verses 1 through 9). It was from the city of Ur, in the same region, that God called Abraham out of polytheism to worship and serve the One True God – Himself (Genesis, Chapter 11, verses 26 through Chapter 12, verse 6). When Abraham's son, Isaac, needed a wife, it was from Abraham's homeland that Rebekah was brought to be his wife (Genesis, Chapter 24). And when Isaac's son Jacob in his turn needed a wife, it was again in Abraham's homeland that Jacob found Rachel to be his wife, who brought with her the household idols of her father, Laban (Genesis, Chapter 31, verse 34).

The Babylonian spirit of idol worship seems to be one to which Israel was susceptible from its origins. Ancient Israel time and again returned to it, continually forsaking the nation's exclusive relationship with God to chase after the false gods of the surrounding nations. And it is for this tendency in part that God accused Israel of unfaithfulness. Indeed, so close was Israel's association with Babylonian idol worship that, at one time, God found no other fit place on earth for the nation (Zechariah, Chapter 5, verses 1 through 11).

It is this spirit of idolatry in all its manifestations – that is, putting one's trust in and serving anything in lieu of, or in addition to, God – that Israel, as well as most of humanity, will be guilty of in the End Times and which will precipitate the great destruction chronicled in the Book of Revelation. And because of Israel's unfaithfulness, the nation will suffer the consequences that were visited upon the land of its idolatrous origins. In the Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 51, is recorded the fate of the ancient city of Babylon, the capital of an empire notorious for its idol worship. Much of the language is seemingly lifted from its passages and inserted into Revelation, so similar will be the fate of idolatrous Jerusalem.

Israel today is a largely apostate nation seeking peace on any terms other than by trusting in God. The nation has again gone a-whoring.

Yet God is ever faithful. The remnant of those in Israel who will return His faithfulness with faithfulness of their own will be called out of Jerusalem even as the great city is destroyed (Revelation, Chapter 18, verse 4). And this, too, echoes the words of Jesus, who warned His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the "abomination that causes desolation" standing in the Temple.

What was true in the first century of the present age will also be true in the last.

Chapter 16  
Abomination of Desolation  
(To hell in a hand basket)

"Abomination that causes desolation" – the phrase is used only five times in the New International Version of the Bible.

In the Book of Daniel, Chapter 11, verse 31, the phrase describes a prophesied attempt by the second century B. C. Seleucid (Greco-Syrian) king, Antiochus Epiphanes, to forcefully convert the Israelites from their worship of God to the idol worship of the Greeks and Syrians. This was an attempt by Antiochus to integrate (Hellenize) the Jewish people into his empire. As part of this effort, he set up an idol in the Temple in Jerusalem. Some in Israel submitted to this new arrangement, abandoning God and adopting the Greco-Syrian religion and culture. Others resisted, and suffered persecutions and death rather than abandoning God. Eventually the faithful triumphed, drove out the Syrians, cleansed the Temple of idols, and rededicated the nation to the worship of and service to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In the Book of Daniel, Chapter 9, verse 27, and Chapter 12, verse 11, the phrase describes a similar attempt to pervert the worship of the Jewish people. But in both verses and the surrounding passages it is plain that this attempt is prophesied to occur at the end of the age, when the false prophet will set up an image of the antichrist in Jerusalem, perhaps in the rebuilt Temple, and require everyone in the world to worship it.

In the Books of Matthew and Mark, we have the prophesy of Jesus Christ who warns His End Times followers to flee this future abomination, as it will signal the onset of the last half of the Tribulation, Satan's final attempt to destroy Israel, and the impending destruction by God of idolatrous Jerusalem (Matthew, Chapter 24, verse 15; Mark, Chapter 13, verse 14).

The question is asked: What is an abomination?

The answer is: Anything hateful and detestable to God and, by extension, to His faithful servants.

The New International Version of the Bible (as well as other modern versions) substitutes in many verses other terms for abomination – impurity, lying, perversions, insincerity in ones worship of God, loyalties divided between God and anything else, those who belong to Satan, and the persecution of the saints, among others. One must go to the King James Version of the Bible to find the term used freely. But it is all the same, and the message is clear. The term includes anything that men and women value more highly than a right relationship to God (Luke, Chapter 16, verse 15). God calls all false teachers and false prophets, including those who claim to be Christians but speaking (falsely) for God, an abomination (Titus, Chapter 1, verses 10 through 16). And God especially applies the term to idol worship, or the worship of anything one

anyone other than – or in addition to – God (Deuteronomy, Chapter 7, verses 25 and 26; II Kings, Chapter 23, verse 13; Isaiah, Chapter 44, verses 9 through 20; I Peter, Chapter 4, verse 3).

In the Old Testament, God called the worship of idols in Jerusalem an abomination (Ezekiel, Chapters 5 and 16). He declared Israel an abomination when the nation went a-whoring after false Gods (Ezekiel, Chapters 6 and 7).

In Revelation, Chapter 17, verses 4 and 5, His Wrath is kindled against the great whore of abominations because of the false worship and persecution of the saints of which she is guilty. And in Revelation, Chapter 21, verse 27, He affirms that none who practice abominations will enter into the heavenly kingdom that He will establish at the end of the age.

God has declared Himself a Jealous God with respect to those who are His by covenant – both Israel (Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 1 through 6), and Christians (II Corinthians Chapter 11, verses 1 through 3). He is jealous in that His is firm in His intolerance of disloyalty or infidelity; at the same time He is jealous in that He is vigilant to care for and protect His faithful servants. This is the meaning of jealousy when applied to God. He reserves for Himself exclusively all praise, worship, devotion, service and obedience.

In the End Times, men's and women's hearts will turn from God, and they will give themselves over to every detestable thing they can imagine – to every perversion, to fierce pride and selfishness, to false doctrines (II Timothy, Chapter 3, verses 1 through 5). They will claim that they are doing the will of god. But they will not be doing the Will of God; they will have become an abomination.

Throughout history men and women have sought to go their own way. From Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the end of the age, men and women in every generation have rebelled against God's Purposes and Plans. And in the End Times this rebellious attitude will consume them, until God finally puts an end to it and consumes them (Revelation, Chapter 20, verses 11 through 15).

The false worship of the antichrist will be the last and greatest manifestation of mankind's rebellion against God. It will be centered in Jerusalem, a city that God has reserved especially for His Worship. Throughout history Satan has attempted to pervert this city to his purposes, just as he has tried to pervert Israel, a nation that God has reserved for His special care as a servant-nation and a witness to His Faithfulness.

Today Israel, and especially Jerusalem, is ground zero for the battle of the ages. There the battle lines are drawn. Now is the time to choose sides. Soon is coming the day when all will be known by whom they worship. And to choose anything other than – or in addition to – God is utter folly. It is an abomination that indeed causes desolation.

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Chapter 17  
Next Year in Jerusalem  
(Ground zero for the future – and beyond)

Psalms 137: 5 - 6

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
    may my right hand forget its skill .  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
    if I do not remember you,  
    if I do not consider Jerusalem  
    my highest joy.

Thus the psalmist wrote, expressing the sorrows of the Israelites for their lost city and their ruined Temple. One can only imagine the shock and distress that overwhelmed the Israelites when the Babylonians attacked the city, breached its walls, burned its palaces and its Temple, slaughtered its people, and dragged many of the survivors off into captivity in a foreign land. They were God's chosen people. Jerusalem was the Holy City of God. The Temple was His House. How could He have allowed this to happen? Had He not defeated the Assyrians when they threatened the city? Had He not sent an angel to strike the Assyrians, killing vast numbers of them in a single night and sending the rest retreating back to Nineveh? (II Kings, Chapter 19, verses 35 and 36)

Yet the Israelites had forgotten an important lesson from the time of the Assyrian invasion. Before God struck the Assyrians, He allowed the Assyrians to destroy Northern Kingdom and carry off into captivity the ten northernmost tribes of Israel. He allowed this because the Northern Kingdom had forsaken their God and violated their covenant with Him. He had sent them prophets to warn that this would happen if they did not stop worshiping idols and return to their proper relationship to Him. But the Northern Kingdom would not listen (II Kings, Chapter 17, verses 3 through 18).

And despite this warning, the Southern Kingdom in its turn forsook their exclusive relationship with God, worshiped idols, broke His laws, and trusted in foreign alliances rather than God. They trusted also the words of false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear – that because God's Temple was in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was in the Southern Kingdom, He would never allow Jerusalem or the Kingdom to be taken or destroyed (Jeremiah, Chapter 7, verses 1 through 11). Yet God sent prophets of His own, who made it abundantly clear that this was all a lie (Ezekiel, Chapter 5, verses 5 through 17). Indeed, He had given warning to King Solomon shortly after the Temple was built:

I Kings: 9: 1 – 9

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and  
the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the

LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him:

"I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

"As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

"But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.' "

Thus the Southern Kingdom, in its turn, fell, and Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed (II Kings, Chapter 25, verses 1 through 21).

Still, God did not forget the exiled Israelites. Nor did He forget His holy city, Jerusalem, nor His Temple. After an exile of seventy years He allowed the Medes and the Persians to destroy the Babylonian Empire, and He moved the heart of the Persian King, Cyrus, to release the Israelites from their exile. And the Israelites (at least some of them) had not forgotten Jerusalem, and these returned to rebuild the city and its Temple to the Living God (Ezra, Chapter 1, verses 1 through 8).

Throughout the history of Ancient Israel, Jerusalem was the center of the nation – the economic center, the political center and the center for the worship of God. He had made it thus, commanding the Israelites to build His Temple in Jerusalem, and there to worship Him. When the Israelites obeyed God, both they and Jerusalem prospered. When they disobeyed God they, and Jerusalem, suffered.

In the first century A. D., during Jesus' earthly ministry, Jerusalem and the Second Temple (the one the returning Israelites built after the end of the Babylonian captivity) were still at the center of Jewish economic, political and religious life. As a boy Jesus' parents (Mary and Joseph) brought Him to Jerusalem and to the Temple every year to celebrate the Feast of the

Passover (Luke, Chapter 2, verse 41), something that every devout Jewish person would do if they possibly could. And when, as a man, Jesus began His redemptive ministry, it was in Jerusalem and at the Temple that He confronted the religious leaders who had led the nation astray. He predicted His own rejection and crucifixion in Jerusalem (Luke, Chapter 18, verses 31 through 33). And He predicted yet another destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as a consequence of Israel's continued rebellion against God (Matthew, Chapter 23, verses 37 and 38; Luke, Chapter 21, verses 20 through 24). Indeed, He predicted that a time would come when men and women would no longer worship God in Jerusalem (John, Chapter 4, verses 21 through 24).

So the prophecies of Jesus were fulfilled. In Jerusalem He was rejected as the Messiah, convicted of crimes He did not commit, given over to the Romans, and crucified. And after His resurrection, He commanded His followers to bear witnesses of God's message of salvation by grace through His atoning work, and of the renewing of minds through the indwelling Holy Spirit, first in Jerusalem, and then in Judea and Samaria (Israel), and then to the ends of the earth (Acts, Chapter 1, verses 8 and 9).

The Church grew out of this witness, and it spread throughout the world. Jerusalem was left to its fate. In 70 A. D. the Romans destroyed the city, burned the Second Temple, and rebuilt the city as a pagan, idolatrous Roman city. It was Jerusalem's fate from that time forward to continue as a Gentile city 'until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke, Chapter 21, verse 24).

The New Testament of the Bible generally ignores (Gentile) Jerusalem and the (destroyed) Temple. It references instead a New Jerusalem, one that is spiritual rather than physical (Galatians, Chapter 4, verses 21 through 31; Hebrews, Chapter 12, verses 22 through 24). And over the centuries that Israel was scattered among the Gentile nations and the Church spread Christ's message of redemption and regeneration, the physical city of Jerusalem languished as a religious backwater – sacred still to Judaism, and later to Christianity, and later still to Islam – but eclipsed by other cities dedicated to the worship of God – Rome, Byzantium, Mecca and Medina.

Only the Jewish people (that is, some of them) longed for Jerusalem, and for the restoration its Temple. During their centuries-long exile they dreamed of once again possessing the city, as they dreamed of once again possessing the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. In the meantime they adapted their system of worship to center on the rabbinic synagogue; but some still dreamed of one day restoring the Temple as the center of Judaic worship. 'Next year in Jerusalem' was their prayer and their longing, and as their long centuries of exile drew to a close, they began to hope once more of possessing the land of their ancestors and its Holy City – Jerusalem.

Just as God has never forsaken Israel, He has never forsaken Jerusalem. The Bible is filled with prophecies that affirm Jerusalem, like Israel, will at the end of the age be at the center of God's Plan for the re-conquest and renewal of the earth (Isaiah, Chapter 2, verses 1 through 5; Isaiah, Chapter 62, verses 1 through 12; Jeremiah, Chapter 33, verses 14 through 16; Micah, Chapter 4, verses 1 through 5; Revelation, Chapter 21).

A hundred years ago Jerusalem was a backwater of the Ottoman Empire, a dusty little city in a barren and sparsely populated land, a place of shrines and of history, but of little else. No kings or presidents visited its gates. No armies fought to possess its walls. And no one thought it would ever again be at the center of world events – except, perhaps, a few students of Bible prophecy, who knew better. Those who thought that Jerusalem or the Temple would never again be at the center of God's Plan have either ignored or allegorized the scriptures that plainly state the case for both Jerusalem and the Temple. It is the same mistake they made when they substituted the Church for Israel and thought that Israel would never be restored.

The evidence of God's faithfulness to Israel we have already discussed – how Israel as a nation was raised again out of the dust of Palestine to become the reality it is today, a nation continually at or near the center of world affairs. The evidence of God's faithfulness to Jerusalem is also plain from the fact that restored Israel now possesses again the city of their ancestors and it, too, is once again at or near the center of world affairs. Both Israel and Jerusalem are stumbling blocks on the road to any man-made peace in the Middle East. Israel's Arab brethren lay claim to the land and the city; the Jewish nation is continually threatened with extinction, even as it defends its right to possess the land and holds firm to Jerusalem. Some in Israel are even talking about the possibility of building a third Temple on the site of the first and the second.

This site is the Temple Mount, which is now occupied by important Muslim shrines the removal of which, to make room for the Third Temple, would no doubt precipitate all-out war. Yet some have suggested that there is room on the Mount for the Third Temple, alongside these Muslim shrines, and this possibility might lie behind the meaning of a scripture recorded in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 11: 1 – 2

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

In the End Times, the antichrist will make his peace treaty with restored Israel, and part of this treaty may be an agreement that will allow the Jewish people to rebuild the Temple alongside the Muslim shrines standing today on the Temple Mount. It could be this arrangement that precipitates the Gog/Magog war, or the attack of the Muslim nations north, south, east and west of the antichrist's core ten-nation confederation, a war that propels the antichrist to world power.

Such an arrangement would, of course, be a compromise, one that might not please God at all. Israel's history of compromising with other peoples and their religions was at the heart of God's anger with the nation in ancient times and led to the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians. Indeed, by the time of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem, the Israelites had gone so far as to practice Babylonian idol worship in the very Temple of their God (Ezekiel, Chapter

8). And Israel's rebellion against God's Plan for the redemption of the world through His Son, Jesus Christ, led to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans.

A combination of compromise and rebellion lies at the heart of the great whore who will, at the end of the age, rise up only to be destroyed by the antichrist and his ten kings (Revelation, Chapter 17). Jerusalem will indeed be at the center of the tribulations of the End Times. In Revelation, Chapter 11, verse 8, Jerusalem is called by God Sodom and Egypt, a reference to the sinfulness of its End Times inhabitants. This label echoes one given the city by God in ancient times when its inhabitants sinned (Jeremiah, Chapter 23, verse 14).

At the end of the Seven Year Tribulation Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet will lead an attack on Jerusalem, killing many of its inhabitants (Zechariah, Chapter 14, verses 1 through 5; Revelation, Chapter 18). And God will allow this to happen, as He had in the past, because of the sinfulness of its inhabitants.

Still, God will not abandon His Holy City, Jerusalem. Jesus, when He returns, will descend to the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, from where He ascended almost two thousand years ago, and from there He will rescue His faithful remnant. And once He has finished with rebellious humanity, Jerusalem will be transformed. It will again become the center of worship of the One True God (Revelation, Chapter 21).

Revelation 21: 1 – 5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Yes, write it all down, for His Words have been, and always will be, trustworthy and true. In the meantime, let us pray for the ultimate peace of Jerusalem.

Psalms 122: 6 – 7

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.

May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."

Chapter 18  
The Master Speaks  
(Here Him now)

No guide to the End Times is complete without an examination of what Jesus Christ has to say about the end of the age. After all, He is the Person at the center of the maelstrom that will engulf the earth.

In John's visions recorded in the Book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to the prophet from heaven, and much of what He has to say from that lofty position has already been recounted in the preceding chapters of this book. All of it confirms what He said to His first followers about the end of the age while He yet walked the earth almost two thousand years ago. In the Books of Matthew, Mark and Luke we have a wonderfully clear and concise summary of the End Times, recorded in the very words He spoke concerning it.

Mathew, Chapter 24, Mark, Chapter 13, and Luke, Chapter 21, begin with a question put to Jesus by some of His followers:

When will be the end of the age, and what will be the signs of its approach?

To understand Jesus' answer, we must realize that His first followers were confused on matters about when the end of the age would occur and about what kind of Messiah Jesus would prove Himself to be. In general, it seems that they thought Jesus was the anticipated Jewish Messiah warrior-king who would soon declare Himself and lead a rebellion to free Israel from its Roman oppressors.

Jesus had already warned His followers many times that, while He was indeed the Messiah, He is not going to lead any rebellions or establish any independent Jewish kingdoms anytime soon – he had already warned them that most of the Jewish people would reject Him as Messiah and cause Him to be crucified, as part of God's plan for the redemption not only of Israel, but of all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike (John, Chapter 12, verses 23 through 33). Even after His death on the cross and His resurrection, some of His followers still seemed to be confused on the matter (Acts, Chapter 1, verses 1 through 9). And as the Church grew and spread, this confusion continued, at least in the minds of some (II Thessalonians, Chapter 2, verses 1 thorough 4; James, Chapter 5, verses 7 through 9; I John, Chapter 2, verse 18). Even the prophet John, at the beginning of Revelation, suggested that the events he witnessed in his vision of the End Times would happen soon (Revelation, Chapter 1, verses 1 and 3).

As noted earlier in this book, the Church Age (that is, from the time of Pentecost, or the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Christ's ascension, to the Rapture, when the Church will rise to meet the returning Conquering Christ in the air) was hidden from the Old Testament prophets and was not fully understood until several decades after Jesus Christ ascended into heaven with a promise to return at the end of the age (II Peter, Chapter 3, verses 1 through 10). By then the Church knew its mission. It was to persevere in the faith. That is, it was to spread

the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and the regeneration of minds through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, until His appearing in the heavens to claim His bride and reclaim the earth.

What Jesus' first followers needed to know, when they asked their questions about the end of the age, consisted of two things: what would happen to His first followers after His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven (at the beginning of the Church Age), and then what would happen to His last followers in the End Times (at the end of the Church Age). To this end, His answer is a dual answer, and this has caused much confusion over the centuries about what, exactly, is the meaning of the answer He gave. This confusion has most likely been the result of people either taking what He said out of context with the rest of the Bible (and more particularly out of context with Bible prophecy), or reading into His words what they want Him to say, to validate some preconceived notion or theory they might favor about the End Times.

In all three accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke) Jesus begins his answer by warning His followers that there would be deceivers, false messiahs and false prophets arising after His earthly ministry was done, and also at the end of the age, and that these charlatans would mislead many. In fact, the warning has proved accurate in every century, and always there have been those who claim divinity, or access to divinity, to further an agenda not in keeping with God's Purposes and Plan. It is a warning to all people, in every century, to be wary.

Jesus also warns that nations will rise against nations, and there will be wars, rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes. But He warns that these will only be harbingers of the future End Times, as birth pangs warn of the anticipated birth of a child. Such pangs may begin days, or even weeks (and sometimes months) before the onset of the contractions that result in delivery. So it would be regarding the troubles He knew would come over the next twenty centuries. Not every war has been an Armageddon. Not every natural or man-made disaster has been the end of the world. But all wars and all disasters have been, and remain, symptoms of the disease of human rebellion. And these have increased, and will further increase in intensity and frequency, as the end approaches, just as birth pangs increase in intensity and frequency as the hour of delivery approaches. And this increasing of intensity and frequency of wars, and of natural and man-made disasters, we have seen occurring over the last century especially.

Indeed, in the first half of the twentieth century alone two wars of unprecedented scale and destructiveness originated in Europe and spread around the world as the empires of Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, Italy and the Ottoman Turks competed for dominance. The end result of these wars was the collapse of all but one of these empires (Russia, which evolved into the Soviet Union) and the explosive increase in the number of new nation states. The process of nation building continued throughout the last half of the century with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It continues into the twenty-first century as many racial, ethnic, cultural and religious populations within nations seek sovereign states of their own. This trend has led to many (smaller) wars that are continually fought around the globe today.

Some Christians believe that some or all of Jesus' End Time prophecies recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke were fulfilled in the first century after His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and with the

Jewish Diaspora. However, Bible prophecy suggests that many of the events prophesied by Jesus would occur on a global scale. As terrible as the first century destruction of the nation of Israel was, this was a regional event, not a global event (although what happened to Israel did have and continues to have global ramifications down to the present). None of it can be compared to the horrific wars, slaughters and destruction of the first half of the twentieth century with respect to scale and scope. World Wars One and Two were the first wars in history about which it can literally (not allegorically) be said that there was ' – distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world – ' on a truly global scale. Yet even this cannot compare to the distress that the Bible prophesies will occur at the end of the age, which will ' – never be equalled again' (Mark, Chapter 13, verse 19).

Continuing increases in the world's population, together with the global community's inability, or unwillingness, to curb the increasing availability of ever more destructive weapons – and especially of weapons of mass destruction – virtually guarantees that the carnage of the last century will continue, and increase in frequency and intensity, well into the twenty-first century. So great will be the bloodshed and destruction that, unless God interferes to end it, humanity could literally destroy itself (Matthew, Chapter 24, verse 22).

We are seeing it played out on cable news every night, and we will continue to see it happening unto the end of the age. It is a warning that the end is approaching, just as Jesus said would happen.

Jesus then warns His followers that they will be persecuted and that some will be thrown into prisons and even killed. And because of these persecutions, the faith of many will fail and wickedness will increase. Persecutions have certainly plagued the Church from its inception. In the weeks, months, years and decades following Christ's ascension into heaven, the Jewish authorities attempted to stamp out the 'new religion' of Christianity by disowning the Jewish followers of Christ (making them outcasts from their communities and even their families), imprisoning some, and stoning others to death. Persecutions continued into the first and second centuries A. D., when the Romans periodically attempted to eradicate the growing, spreading Church.

Persecutions have always bedeviled the spread of the Christian faith, and martyrs are born and die in every generation. We can expect such trials to increase as the end of the age dawns. But Christ promised His First followers that the Person and Power of His Holy Spirit would sustain His Church and, far from rescuing them, His Holy spirit would empower them to preach boldly even in the face of death. This was certainly true in the beginning of the Church Age, as recorded in the New Testament and more particularly in the Book of Acts. And Jesus promised that this same Holy Spirit would sustain and empower His followers into the End Times. In Matthew and Mark, He went so far as to declare that His message of salvation by grace and regeneration (the Gospel) would be preached in the whole world, and only then would the end of the age arrive.

In Matthew and Mark, and immediately after Jesus declares that the end of the age would only occur after the Gospel has been preached globally, He warned His disciples of the 'abomination that causes desolation' standing in the holy place, as prophesied by the prophet

Daniel. This is commonly thought to be the image of the antichrist, which the false prophet will set up in the rebuilt Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, at the mid-point of the Seven Year Tribulation. Shortly after this occurs, the antichrist will attempt to once and for all wipe out those who refuse to worship his image. If the Church is raptured in the middle of the Tribulation, then this warning must be for the Jewish believers that are sealed with the Holy Spirit and who will serve as witnesses to God's Power and Glory during the last half of the Tribulation.

Some have suggested that this prophecy was fulfilled when the Romans attacked Jerusalem and burned the Temple, around 70 A. D. This act may have indeed fulfilled the prophecy for Jesus' first century followers. But as already noted herein, Jesus is warning both His first and last followers of the trials they must suffer, and so it must be that the prophecy has a dual meaning. The prophecy will again be fulfilled at the end of the age when the antichrist attempts to rule the earth from Jerusalem through his false religion.

Again Jesus warns His followers about those who will come claiming to be the Messiah, or claiming that the Messiah has come. This occurred in the first century A.D., when the Jewish people rebelled against the Romans and precipitated the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. And prophecy makes plain that, at the end of the age, a false messiah, in the form of the antichrist, will also appear.

The parallel passage in the Book of Luke curiously omits reference to the "abomination that cause desolation". Instead Jesus here focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem, the distress of the Jewish nation, the deaths of many by the sword (an allusion to ancient warfare), the enslavement of many others who will be carried off to many nations, and the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles (non-Jewish peoples) until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. This is plainly a warning to Jesus' first followers about what would happen during the war the rebellious Jews brought upon the nation beginning in 66 A. D. (about 30 years after Jesus made this prophecy and issued this warning). By the end of this war in 73 A. D. all of the prophecy had been fulfilled. The Romans had destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, killed many of the Jewish people, and carried many more off as slaves. And from that time forward, Jerusalem became a city controlled by one Gentile power or another, a condition that persisted until 1967 A. D., when the Israelis (the Jewish people) once again gained complete control of the city.

At this point in Jesus' prophecy, all three – Matthew, Mark and Luke – converge once again and recount the events that will occur just prior to His return to the earth: darkness in the sky, stars falling from heaven, the heavenly bodies shaken, the nations in anguish and perplexed, and men fainting from the coming terror. All three accounts agree that these are signs of the Second Coming. And all three plainly record the words of prophesy of Jesus Christ, that at this point He will in no uncertain terms return to reclaim the earth.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all end with words of encouragement and warning, so that those who eagerly await His appearing will watch pray, and keep themselves ready to receive their Savior and Lord in that great and terrible day.