

Worshiping God

in

# Spirit and Truth

*A Magazine for Understanding God's Truth*

## What You Need to Know About Prophecy

*April – June 2015*

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## from the desk of... *The Pastor*

This issue of *Spirit and Truth* involves explaining to you some of the most basic principles of interpreting the prophecies of the Bible. I teach that the Bible is 100% prophecy because, beginning with Genesis 1 and ending with Revelation 22, it lays out God's plan and will about expanding the "God" family (see Genesis 1:26-28 and Ephesians 1:4-14). I *understand* that there is lots of history included in the Bible. There are numerous characters in the Bible's 66 books who were called upon over a period of 4,000+ years to write down all types of instruction in righteousness, holiness, and love...to advance the arguments about God's determinate will to accomplish this amazing goal and to call to mind how we all have gone astray from it by surrendering our lives to the "god" of this present world system: Satan the Devil (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4).

Nevertheless, let there be no mistake about this assertion about the *prophetic* nature of the holy writ: *It is a declaration of immense proportions that the central message of the Bible is the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the earth we inhabit* (Daniel 2:44,45; Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 25:34; Revelation 11:15). In the midst of this declaration, this holy God has placed "markers" for guiding His people through the maze and confusion of history to serve as beacons to light our path to the time when this *prophetic* gospel of the Kingdom will be fulfilled. These "markers" are also *prophecies* – some of which have already been fulfilled; some of which are waiting for the time of fulfillment designated by God. How can you know when *false prophets* appear among us to misdirect us with their sleight-of-hand messages? Prepare yourself for an informative and challenging study.

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### Interpreting Prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:14-22)

There are two basic characteristics of God's prophets to which we should pay attention. The first is that they will not speak their own words; they will speak what God has commanded them to speak. The second relates to whether or not a prophecy is fulfilled; if it is not, then it most definitely has not been spoken by God. It is important to know what has and has not been spoken by God – and, therefore, who really represents God (see Deuteronomy 18:9-22 and Matthew 24:4, 5).

With that said, I want to study through an aspect of prophecy itself that is also of great importance: correctly interpreting God's prophecies. Why should that be of any real importance to us? Surely, if we are led by the Holy Spirit into all truth (John 16:13-15), then we will have a correct understanding of God's prophetic mes-

sages. Or, our valued and trusted ministers will be able to properly explain them to us! In light of that, let's consider a warning in Matthew 24:3-5, 11, 15-28 that Jesus Christ gave about just such a thing. There are several aspects of this warning to which we must pay attention.

First, there will be those who will preach and teach *in the name of Jesus Christ*. This, at first glance, would appear to be harmless, but when Jesus adds the element of deception to the mix, then His warning takes on an entirely different character. Many will come in His name, and many will be deceived as a result of it. So, we must not take this lightly, nor should we get so wrapped up in our own ideas that we superimpose scriptures over them to make it seem as though our own ideas have the official approval of God Himself.

Second, He warns that there will be those who are specifically regarded as false prophets – the Greek term

is *pseudoprophetes*, which means that they are religious imposters. Jesus describes them in Matthew 7:15 as ravening wolves who come in sheep's clothing. How will you be able to identify them if you do not know God's truth? Lacking God's truth, against what would you be able to compare their messages? Logic? Reason? Intuition? A "gut feeling"?

Third, He also adds *false Christs* (Greek = *pseudo-christos*) to the mix. In this panorama of history about which He is prophesying, He shows the increasing difficulty even His true disciples will face in sorting out the ones who represent God and those who do not – the ultimate deception coming in the form of *great signs and wonders*. He intimates in vv. 23, 24 that the very elect will face great difficulty in discerning the validity of the imposters' prophetic claims if the very elect fall for the great deceptions (*signs and wonders*) used to validate the imposters' claims of either representing God's voice or actually being God's Christ.

Finally, when these imposters come to claim that the Christ has, indeed, come to a desert spot or a secret chamber, Jesus warns His followers: "...do not believe it or go out to see if it is true!" I suppose that this warning could include such things as the Secret Rapture concept. Why? Because His return will not be something done in secret: The entire world will be aware of it. Revelation 1:7 says that He will come in such a manner that "...every eye shall see Him." If the very elect believe this from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, then they will not be deceived!

## A Biblical Record of "Christian" Imposters

By reading the following scriptures, you should be able to understand that the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy about these imposters began very shortly after His ascension to the Father's right hand, which occurred just prior to Pentecost on June 17, A.D. 31:

1. Galatians 1:6-9: Written about A.D. 58 (about 27 years after Christ's ascension), this describes what Paul calls a *perverted gospel* (v. 7). Paul means by that term that this gospel was corrupted and distorted – being used to lead people astray from God's true gospel (see Mark 1:14, 15). Some who were considered to have been "converted" to God's truth were having difficulty staying with that truth.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:12: This was written about A.D. 59 – about 28 years after Christ's ascension. The question about the resurrection of the dead was a direct contradiction of Christ's own words in Matthew 22:23-33 – the point of which is simple: How can God be the God of the living *and* dead if there is no resurrection from the dead?

Abraham himself believed in the resurrection of the dead (see Hebrews 11:13-19). Paul explains the process in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58. Christ also said in John 5:28, 29 that there will be two types of resurrection from the dead: (a) one to life and (b) one to eternal damnation. How, then, could anyone calling himself a "Christian" not believe in the resurrection of the dead? Yet, this heresy Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 was a "Christian" heresy (see also John 11:25 and Luke 14:14).

In actual fact, that heresy is not as foreign to modern "Christianity" as it might appear. By syncretizing the doctrine of the immortality of the soul into "Christianity," the resurrection of the dead was made to serve no practical purpose because one's fate is already enforced at death.

Some accept a resurrection from the dead for the "saved" because there is a concept that includes a re-unification of a glorified body with the "saved" soul. In this way, they satisfy their inclination to accept a traditional belief and claim that it is "proved" by scripture.

John Nelson Darby, a leader among the "Plymouth Brethren" during the 1800s, believed in man's *innate* immortality (the inborn nature of man as he was created by God without an immortal soul in residence in the body)...but, he said that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul *is not* to be found in scripture. He said that the concept came directly from Plato and "...just when the second coming of Christ was denied in the Church...the doctrine of the immortality of the soul came in *to replace* that of the resurrection" (Lectures, vol. IV; emphases added). (You can engage in a more thorough study of this concept in our free, downloadable Bible Study

Course, Lesson 3: “What is Man?”)

3. 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, 13-15: This was written about A.D. 60 – about 29 years after Christ’s ascension. There were false “Christians” who went around posing as apostles and ministers (see 2 Thessalonians 2:2) and preaching another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit. Paul calls them false and deceitful masqueraders.

There are myriads of ministers today who fit into the same category without even realizing it. Why? The deceived person does not know that he is deceived. If he did, he would have an immediate obligation to come out of the deception into God’s truth.

4. Ephesians 4:11-15: Paul wrote this about A.D. 64 – about 33 years after Christ’s ascension. He says that God has specifically designed positions in His true ministry for those who will teach His people His unmitigated truth – truth that is not to be polluted or reduced by the addition of traditions of men or by mixing it with pagan concepts. Their responsibility is to educate His people in His truth and to build them up spiritually and morally in order to keep them in spiritual unity and from being led astray by specious doctrines promulgated by subtly deceitful pretenders.

5. 2 Peter 2:1-3: Peter wrote this about A.D. 66 – about 35 years after Christ’s ascension. He says that the false prophets bring in damnable heresies in order to corrupt God’s truth and to make merchandise of God’s people. Their main motivation is greed – to use whatever means possible to take advantage of you for material gain.

Such people cause true Christianity to be mocked and scorned because the unrighteous do not know how to separate the genuine from the counterfeit. If the truly converted are not careful, they, too, can be led astray by doctrines and practices that pervert God’s truth. It can be as simple as whether or not you believe that you are an immortal soul that goes directly to heaven or hell when you die. In v. 14, Peter says that these

counterfeiters “...beguile unstable people...”

6. Jude 3, 4, 16-21: The Lord’s brother Jude wrote this about A.D. 66. He is appealing to true Christians “...to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints...” He says that we must put forth the arguments for God’s truth.

We must engage in spiritual warfare against falsehoods and counterfeits. We must compete against them, as opposed to lying back and refusing to confront them. Why? Because the purveyors of these false doctrines sneak into God’s congregations and pervert His truth in order to lead people away and make merchandise of them. They pervert God’s grace and use it as an excuse for licentiousness – which, in effect, denies the message and purpose of God’s Christ and Savior.

7. 1 John 4:1: John wrote this sometime after A.D. 90. His objective is to instruct true Christians that they do not have to pay attention to everyone who comes along and professes to preach and teach in the name of Jesus Christ. He says to put them to the test. That test is more than just checking their messages against the scriptures of the Bible. How so?

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 suggests that a false prophet can come along and use prophecy to lead you astray. He can actually prophesy something that comes to pass! The key to the test is whether or not he leads you away from the true God – as Paul warned: to another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit.

Matthew 7:21-23 is Christ’s own warning that things must be done according to God’s will. All of the preaching, teaching, healing, casting out of demons, and good works done in the name of Jesus Christ are of no value unless they are done according to the will of God – which includes the idea that they will be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24; 8:31, 32).

All of these seven scriptures describe the actions of religious imposters. Paul, Peter, John, and Jude had to understand God’s truth in order to make us aware of

how God's word is to be validated by the events of history – and...each man was led to add prophetic statements about how God will lead His people to understand the increasingly difficult times ahead.

## Conclusion

Some say that the Bible is 25% prophecy; some say 33%; some say 80%. I would say that, from Genesis to Revelation, it is all prophetic. It is not prophetic just because scripture is filled with symbols and types. It is prophetic because it is a message of good things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). All of the past historical events were written as warning messages to “us” – that is, the ones who are alive during the generation in which it is all to be fulfilled (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

We have typically called it a witness (testimony and proof of its truth) and a warning. This witness and

warning are embedded in the meaning of all of God's Holy Days – including the weekly seventh-day Sabbath (compare Leviticus 23 to Hebrews 4). They are all prophetic insights into God's plan of salvation (see *Spirit and Truth* issues April – June 2014 and July – September 2014 on our website at [www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org/publications](http://www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org/publications)).

If that is true – and if Jesus Christ is truly concerned that we understand the nature of world events just prior to His return – then we should see what His witness is regarding it so that we will not be led astray by the deceptive notions of the pretenders. The first question we need to consider is simple: ***For what are we to be looking?***

While that might sound easy enough to figure out, let's consider three cases that miss the mark. Pay close attention to the false premises on which these cases are based. They are not unusual.

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## How to Figure out the Return of Jesus Christ

**The following elements must be considered when attempting to figure out when Jesus Christ will return. While there are instructions about His return being accompanied by “heavenly signs,” you will not be able to predict the occurrence of those “heavenly signs” any more than you will be able to predict His return. The following explains things that must be in place before His return:**

- 1. There must be a “strong man” in charge of either the European Union or Germany.**
- 2. There must be an alliance between that political unit and the Papal State – with the accompanying “signs” and “wonders” prophesied in Matthew 24:24 and Revelation 13:11-18.**
- 3. The “strong man” will probably be assassinated about 1,260 days after coming to power and subsequently miraculously raised from his death to continue another 1,260 days (see Revelation 13:1-5 and Daniel 9:27).**
- 4. Following his “resurrection” from the dead, he will be worshiped as though he is the Christ and will begin a 1,260-day “great tribulation” (Revelation 13:6-10).**
- 5. About 900 days into this “great tribulation,” Jesus Christ will appear in the earth's atmosphere to begin the “day of vengeance” (see Isaiah 61:2 and 63:4), which will last for 360 days. During that time, He will pour out seven “trumpet plagues” upon the “beast” power and systematically degrade the earth's governments pending His descent to the earth from the atmosphere to fulfill Daniel 2:44, 45, Zechariah 14:1-16, and Revelation 11:15 (see also Revelation 6:12-17, Matthew 24:29-31, and Revelation 14:14-16). The “heavenly signs” will accompany His return regardless of any naturally occurring astronomical phenomena like “blood moons.”**
- 6. His return will coincide with the seventh trumpet plague, which will occur toward the end of the 360-day period. For example, Revelation 9:5 shows that the fifth trumpet plague will last five months (150 days) of that 360-day period. When the seventh trumpet sounds, the resurrection of the dead in Christ will take place (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58). The last part of the seventh trumpet plague will be the pouring out of the seven bowl plagues after the firstfruits have been taken to the cloud (Revelation 15, 16). Once they are on the cloud with Him, the marriage feast will take place (Revelation 19:1-9) before He leads them to Jerusalem to fulfill Zechariah 14:1-16.**

**Given this instruction, if the “strong man” came to power today (February 5, 2015), Jesus Christ would not come before sometime in January of 2022. Since he is not presently in power – and we have no idea when he will be – then it is not possible to figure out when Jesus will return. We must pay close attention to Matthew 24:15-28 in this regard. We are not presently experiencing the “great tribulation” – so, do not believe those who attempt to point you to the impending return of Jesus Christ based on mathematical formulae and astronomical phenomena (see Luke 21:27, 28).**

# Case #1:

## Understanding the Fundamental Basis for Interpreting Prophecy

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In Luke 21:20-36, notice the way Jesus Christ admonishes His followers to be aware of the evidence that is around them regarding His return. Note especially vv. 20, 22, 25-28, 29-31, 36. How do you watch for something if you do not know *exactly* for what to watch? What if you see something that *appears* to be one of the signs – so much so that you are convinced that it is the fulfillment? If you cannot figure it out, to whom do you listen regarding the answer? Part of the problem involving the interpretation of prophecy centers on understanding the fundamental basis for interpreting prophecy.

Scripture provides us with that fundamental basis. Part of the problem with interpretation is that people are prone to allow “evidence” into the interpretation that does not belong there. Jesus Christ forewarned us of this in Matthew 24:23-26. One of the present trends among evangelical Christians is the astronomical phenomena of “blood moons” and “mathematical formulae” that supposedly correctly predict His return. Can you say balderdash? This is nothing more or less than the antics described in Matthew 24:23-26 being exposed during our time.

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### A Slight Miss is as Good as a Mile

In the early 1970s, I was asked if I knew how many “Miss America” contestants it would take, with outstretched arms, to span the 20-mile distance from where we were standing to the beach. I immediately began to figure the average height of the female contestants (which would give me an approximate arm-span) and to apply that measurement to the feet and inches in 20 miles. When I presented my guess to the amused man, he told me that I had not used the correct formula.

“You see,” said he, “each contestant is a ‘miss.’ If a ‘miss’ is as good as a mile, then it would take twenty of them to span the 20-mile distance.” In an encounter in my early experience in the “working world,” the man with whom I was partnered gave me a piece of sage advice: “Never bet a man at his own game.” I was glad that I had not bet anything on my brilliance in this case. Over the years since, I have come understand the value of determining the fundamental basis for solving the various problems with which we are confronted.

Note this statement by an author who considered that

he had found the keys that unveil the meaning of prophetic secrets:

Every known prophecy pertaining to the consummation of the age focuses on this twentieth century, with the present generation outstandingly marked as the generation upon which the end of the age has come (emphases added).

As you are well aware, we are now 15 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A slight miss is as good as a miss by a mile! And, by the way, close only counts in the game of “horseshoes.”

### Identifying the Proper Context

In his discussion of this statement, on what does the author base this conclusion? Daniel 9:27 (KJV). Why? By combining the term *overspreading* and the phrase “he shall make desolate,” he concludes that Daniel actually sees the bombing airplane – which has increased man’s ability to engage in war and destroy

massive territories. He subsequently bases his conclusion on the idea that *overspreading* refers to *wings*. So, to what else can *wings* refer in the 20th century except *bombing airplanes*? It was in that century that the airplane evolved into an effective machine of war.

While it is true that *overspreading* in the Hebrew language can mean *wings* of various kinds (birds, locusts, angels, ship sails, etc.), this particular reference has to do with an *extremity* – like the ends of the earth and the four corners of the earth. One expert named Meinheim reads this verse like this: “On the corner (of the altar) is a devastating abomination.” Another named Bev reads it to mean “in its place” or “instead of it.”

In the marginal references of my *King James Version* of the Bible, there are two alternate translations: “and upon the battlements shall be the idols of the desolator” and “with the abominable armies.” The idea is that the proposed one-week covenant will cease after 3½ years either because of the idols on the battlements or because of the intrusion of abominable armies within the temple area. That would constitute the “abomination of desolation” (see Matthew 24:15).

That said, it is apparent that the author took liberties to make the Bible fit his concept of *bombing airplanes*. He based his conclusion on two pieces of faulty information: (1) a faulty selection of possible definitions and (2) a faulty speculation about how *overspreading* and *making desolate* are to be understood in modern times. As a result...he slightly missed the century in which the fulfillment is to take place...this now being the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This same author interprets Joel 2:3-5 as being *bombing airplanes* and *guided missiles* – perhaps even the use of nuclear weapons. These weapons, he says, have been made possible by the Industrial Revolution, which set the stage for the mass production of goods and services – and war-making materiel.

However, you should read the entire pericope from vv. 1-11 and ask some questions:

1. What is the context of this prophecy?
2. Is this invading army “a great people and strong” the likes of which has never been encountered in warfare before – a people who will never be duplicated in history following this event? What does that mean?
3. Why will the sword have no effect on them?

4. Whose army are they?

5. Would it make sense that the *saints*, who accompany Jesus Christ in conquering the nations of the earth (see Zechariah 14:5), would not sustain injury in this fight because they will have been changed from flesh to spirit prior to this invasion (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)?

6. If so, why would you assume that the pericope is about *bombing airplanes* and *guided missiles*?

### Using Numerical Devices not Included in the Prophecy

The author’s next tool for interpreting prophecy is a numerical device supposedly derived either from the Bible or from what he calls the “symbolism of the Great Pyramid.” Based on the concept of God allowing mankind 6,000 years (each day of the week representing 1,000 years) to pursue his own agendas, he derives two periods of 6,000 years: one lunar; one solar. He calculates each and finds a difference of 180 years – to which he assigns the name the “Time of the End” and gives Daniel credit for its designation. He then calculates this Time of the End from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Here’s his explanation:

The year 1821 A.D. marked the end of 6,000 lunar years...and was, therefore, the commencement of the Time of the End. With this date the world entered upon the epoch of 180 years which will terminate in 2001 A.D., the end of 6,000 solar years from Adam’s fall.

This was written in 1959 and republished in 1968 with a few amendments to it. This quotation is from the 1968 edition. According to the math he uses, it presupposes that “Adam’s fall” took place in 4179 B.C. (6,000 – 1821 = 4179). Note that he bases “Adam’s fall” on a mathematical formula. It clearly contradicts his idea about the 20th Century as stated above.

One can be comfortable calling shots 42 years prior to an event. It would take him and his 1959 readers that long to find out that he was wrong! At the same time, it is also easy to sit in judgment 14 years after his timetable has been shown to be wrong. But...the question

that would loom large in the face of that error is this: What now?

He goes on to conclude that the Soviet Union is Gog and Magog – the Antichrist and Beast. With that in hand, he declares that the Soviets will invade Israel sometime before 2001 in fulfillment of Ezekiel 38, 39 – which, if you understand Revelation 20:7-9 correctly, will not occur until *after* the 1,000-year reconciliation period of the Kingdom has ended – not shortly before the return of Jesus Christ.

### God’s So-called “6,000-year Plan”

An interesting side issue emerges from this discussion – an issue to which we should pay close attention. It involves the so-called 6,000-year plan of God mentioned above. Since about A.D. 1656, much of the “Christian” world has used the “biblical chronology” proposed by the Irish Archbishop James Ussher in which 4004 B.C. is taken as the date of the creation of the world discussed in Genesis 1. If the 6,000-year concept is supposed to use that chronology as its base line, then A.D. 1996 should have marked the end of the 6,000 years, and we should be gleefully 19 years (as of February, 2015) into the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ firmly in control of dispensing the Law of God from Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:1-5)!

According to the Jewish (A.M.) chronology, we will enter year 5776 on September 14, 2015. It will be another 224 years from that date before we can ascertain if the 6,000-year plan is correct according to their dating – or...if their dating is correct according to the 6,000-year plan. Of course, scientists have already figured out that the earth is around 4.5+ billion years old and the universe is around 13.5+ billion years old. Evolutionists have recently stated that *homo sapien*, as we know it today, appeared about 5,800+ years ago, and all other

similar hominids died out (see Sharon Begley’s article “Beyond Stones and Bones” in Newsweek, March 19, 2007, pp. 53-58)

Even then, we’re left clueless as to how long it took Adam and Eve to sin against God after their creation and, therefore, precisely when the 6,000-year countdown should have begun. There is no scripture that specifically states that God has such a plan. I also am not convinced that, as some claim, the Lord God created mankind at some point during the sixth day, fellowshiped with them on the seventh-day Sabbath, and allowed them to become the victims of an adversarial *coup d’etat* on the following first day of the week.

Such a scheme might be good propaganda for trying to influence people to beware of those who worship on the first day of the week, but scripture does not really and factually explain exactly on which day of the week or during which month or year after their creation that the situation in Genesis 3 occurred. It’s a crapshoot to figure it out scripturally. There simply is not enough evidence.

The alternative to all of this dating stuff is quite simple: What if there is no such thing as a 6,000-year plan based on the days of the week? What if such a concept is as badly conceived as the prophetic interpretations that are based on such a plan? Whether or not that is the case, we should focus our attention on being the kind of people God wants us to be (2 Peter 3:11), instead of trying to figure out a date that even Jesus Christ and the angels do not know – a date known only to God the Father (see Matthew 24:36). It is apparent that God is not likely to give up that secret anytime soon. However, if there is such a plan, has God intentionally concealed the time at which it began? We make too many unwarranted assumptions about prophecies as it is. Beware of those who do not understand the fundamental basis of interpreting prophecy.

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# Prophecy

“A prediction of some future event, as if by divine guidance.”  
God’s faithfulness to His own word in Law and Prophecy undergirds the sanctity and the certainty of His promise and oath (John 17:17).

# Case #2:

## Misinterpreting Extraordinary Events

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Another problem with correctly interpreting prophecy stems from misinterpreting *extraordinary events* in isolation from other connected events. What do I mean by that? Let's note how our next author discusses the "signs of the times" in a book published between 1941 and 1950. Using Matthew 16:1-4 in conjunction with other scriptures, he stresses upon the reader that "signs" are, indeed, important – and God has generously provided them for us. In Matthew 24:3, the disciples ask Jesus what will be the *sign* of His coming and the end of this present age. The rest of the chapter is a discourse on the various historical markers they need to watch. The author also points to Luke 21:25, 26 as Jesus' answer to their question. He bounces back to Matthew 24:29 in order to define the "signs" in the sun, moon, and stars. He uses Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15; and Amos 8:9 to give Old Testament references for earlier inspired prophecies concerning them.

Our task is to figure out if he has used them correctly or skewed them to fit his particular paradigm. You must not shrink back from understanding this problem. God has not left us without proper guidance to detect bogus interpretations. Follow the explanations of how scripture refutes the author's proposed fulfillment of the prophecies involved. With the present-day onslaught of interpretations of prophecies by "blood moons" and "mathematical formulae," you would do well to arm yourself with knowledge of God's truth.

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### The Extraordinary Events

On May 19, 1780, an incredible non-eclipse related darkness began about 10 a.m. and lasted until the middle of the next night. It was strange because there were no *natural* conditions that would have caused an eclipse – the positions of the sun and moon were not right.

All animals went into their nighttime mode. During the nighttime portion, you could have put a white sheet of paper next to a piece of black velvet and not been able to tell the difference between them. No one then or now can explain why it happened. It was perceived that the *Day of Judgment* was at hand!

On November 13, 1833 – a mere 53 years later – there was another remarkable display: an unprecedented meteor shower (erroneously called "falling stars" by most people) was witnessed all over the world. The famous slave Frederick Douglas wrote in his book *My Bondage and My Freedom*:

It was about daybreak when I saw this sublime scene. It was not without the suggestion at that moment that it might be the harbinger of the

coming of the Son of man; and in my state of mind I was prepared to hail Him as my friend and deliverer. I had read that the stars shall fall from heaven, and they were now falling.

What was the author's conclusion to this matter?  
Note this:

It will be seen that these signs produced *the very impression that God evidently intended* that they should – that the day of judgment, Christ's coming, and the end of the world are near at hand. (emphases added)

The term *sign* (Greek = *semeion*) in the context of Matthew 16:1-4 and 24:3 means "the distinguishing mark by which something is known." The difference between the two scriptures is this: Matthew 16:3 refers to a *warning sign* – Jesus told them that He, like Jonah, was the warning sign. The Ninevites responded to Jonah's message – they had no idea that he had been swallowed by a great fish. In Matthew 24:3, the term has to do with things that *indicate* something. What Jesus de-

scribed as history subsequent to their time are the things by which the answers to their questions are to be *indicated*. There is a difference between *warning* and *indication*.

Take note of this comment by this same author between 1941 and 1950:

Every one [sic] familiar with present-day conditions knows that [men's hearts are now "failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:25, 26)]...Great tidal waves and storms at sea, with cyclones and tornadoes on land, have become fearfully frequent of late years, making men apprehensive of still greater calamities to come.

Does that sound familiar? Over 60 years later, the same extreme weather and climate conditions persist and are used in attempts to impress upon people the idea that the return of Jesus Christ is *imminent*.

How long can this go on before people raise the question about whether or not Jesus Christ has either delayed His return or that it was never even a possibility that He would come (see Matthew 24:48 and 2 Peter 3:3, 4)? I well remember the Pastor General of the church that my wife and I attended at the time tell the worldwide membership that Christ had delayed His coming because we were not supporting the work of getting out the gospel of the Kingdom of God as we should be doing. Does God's prophetic timetable get *delayed* for such reasons (Luke 12:35-48)?

Note the context in Matthew 24:29-31 by which the heavenly signs are to be manifested:

(a) after the distress/persecution/tribulation of those days (see vv. 15-22);

(b) the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven (v. 30) – the Greek term is *ouranus*: "the place in the atmosphere where the clouds hover; a great height that extends over the entire earth"; and

(c) angels will be sent out to gather God's elect from one end of heaven to another (v. 31; Revelation 14:14-20 – note where the Son of Man is relative to this event).

So, these prophesied historical and heavenly signs

did not occur May 19, 1780 or November 13, 1833. Taking these events out of the context in which they are prophesied does great damage to the correct interpretation. The wrong interpretation makes it difficult for the correct interpretation to be believed. The more wrong interpretations we encounter, the more suspicious we become. The suspicion and doubt place us in a very precarious position relative to understanding God's *truth*. What happens to true faith when people become suspicious of both the message and the messengers (Luke 18:8)?

According to Matthew 24:48 and 2 Peter 3:3, 4, then, is it any wonder that mankind would question the promise of the return of Jesus Christ? Since the expulsion from Eden, the anticipation of the Delivering Seed has been tied to the conditions in which men have found themselves. John the Baptist's father Zacharias was inspired to proclaim that God has spoken by the mouths of His prophets since the world began (Luke 1:70). If there are *false prophets* and *false interpreters* putting out *false information* that is too quickly seized upon by gullible mankind, what else would we expect when they are wrong time after time?

## **"Blood Moons"**

In our own day and time, there has emerged what is called the "Blood Moon Prophecy." It is taught by Christian ministers such as John Hagee and Mark Biltz. This "prophecy" is based on astronomical phenomena that began with a lunar eclipse in April of 2014. However, the phenomena were anticipated around 2008 when Mark Biltz predicted that the return of Jesus Christ will occur in the fall of 2015 – probably coincidental with *Sukkoth*, a fall holy day period on the Jewish holy day calendar. The Seventh Day Christian Assembly and others of our tradition observe this holy day period as the *Feast of Tabernacles* (see Leviticus 23:23-43). There is no scriptural indication that Jesus Christ will return relative to any of those holy days – not even Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, or Sukkoth (Matthew 24:36-39).

What does this have to do with the "Blood Moon Prophecy"? Between April 2014 and the September 28, 2015, they claim that there will occur four consecutive total lunar eclipses (called a *tetrad*), with six full moons in between, and no intervening partial lunar eclipses. In 2008, Biltz claimed that he had discovered an *astrominical pattern* in this occurrence that predicts that the

next tetrad will coincide with the “end times.” Biltz apparently believes in the “rapture” theory because he concluded that a seven-year “tribulation” would occur between the fall of 2008 and the fall of 2015. The fall of 2008 came and went with no “tribulation” – and none has occurred in the intervening years since. Biltz, therefore, joins the ranks of those who falsely declare: “Here is Christ! And There is Christ!” (Matthew 24:23-26).

The first total lunar eclipse occurred on April 15, 2014, with the second one following on October 8, 2014. The next two will occur on April 4, 2015 and September 28, 2015. The April 15, 2014 lunar eclipse made the moon look red – a color that can be caused by *rayleigh scattering*, which is produced by particles small enough that light waves are deflected at different angles and cause different colors to occur as the light is scattered through the earth’s atmosphere. Does any of this, in and of itself, portend the “end times”? No.

Here’s the problem. First, the April 4<sup>th</sup> eclipse will be visible in the *western states* and *provinces in North America*, not in the eastern regions. The September 27<sup>th</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> eclipse will be visible from the *eastern half of North America*. ***The majority of the rest of the world will not see them.*** That is not the case with the “heavenly signs” that will accompany the return of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 1:6, 7; 6:12-14). “Every eye shall see [it]...” Second, I’m not sure what significance there is with the “*six* full moons in between” part of this so-called *prophecy*. Even the “blood moon” is a full moon – and a full moon occurs pretty much 12 times a year. How many full moons would occur between April 2014 and October 2015? There will be **10** between January and September 28<sup>th</sup> 2015. So, that information about *six* is pretty much insignificant to me.

Hagee used Biltz’s prediction to write his best-selling book *Four Blood Moons*, which is no more useful for understanding the “end times” than the *Left Behind* series of books and movies is. They are, by no means, the only ones who have taken up the hue and cry about this. Even though Hagee never proclaimed any specific date for Christ’s return, he, nevertheless, attached *prophetic significance* to the fact that every tetrad of the last 500 years was connected to some tragic, but triumphant event in Jewish and Israeli history. Such an admission does not, in and of itself, have prophetic significance or involve *prophetic fulfillment* of anything – especially not with regard to the return of Jesus Christ. ***But***...Hagee’s work (along with many others’) is what is known as a ***tacit*** admission that Biltz was on to something, even

though he was found to be wrong about part of it. This appears to be one of those cases in which a “miss” is as good as a “miss” by a mile. It doesn’t pass the “smell” test.

## “Divine Signs”?

These “blood moons” are to Hagee and company “celestial signals” from God that something of major prophetic proportions is about to happen relative to Israel and the Middle East. They are part of God’s “supernatural communication” with mankind. I could just as easily tell you that the burning to death of the Jordanian pilot by ISIS was a dramatic event that will change the course of history in the Middle East. Jordan’s King Abdullah II vows to wipe out ISIS for this breach of Muslim religion. Whatever happens one way or another in that situation will eventually affect the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Do we call that any kind of “divine sign”?

What is the logic behind this approach to prophecy? It is similar to the above-cited “extraordinary events.” The logic goes as follows:

1. Genesis 1:14 shows that God uses the sun, moon, and stars for *signs* and *seasons*. Therefore, any ***unusual*** astronomical occurrence is “fair game” for prophetic fulfillment.

If you read outside of the *King James* and *Revised Standard* versions of the Bible, that part of v. 14 is translated “...let them indicate *festivals*, days and years...” (*The Jerusalem Bible*), “...*markers* for seasons, days and years...” (*The Modern Language Bible*), and “to mark out the *sacred seasons*, the days and the years...” (Moffatt’s *The Bible: A New Translation*). Read Leviticus 23:4, and you will find *festivals*, *sacred seasons*, and *appointed times* that fulfill God’s purpose for the sun, moon, and stars.

2. It is a stretch of biblical genius to relate Genesis 1:14 to the star that led the wise men to Jesus or to the day that the sun stood still in order for Joshua to complete the warfare in which he was engaged. It is equally a stretch of biblical genius to relate the “blood moons” to Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:30, 31.

3. Even if there have been *few* occasions in the last 500 years when such a series of “blood moons” have occurred, that is not warrant enough to proclaim that such an occurrence between 2014 and 2015 signals the imminent return of Jesus Christ! There is so much more involved in the fulfillment of the “end time” prophecies relative to the return of Jesus Christ than an uninformed and ill-advised assignment of “divine sign” to such an astronomical event provides (see p. 5 above).

The same is true of assigning prophetic significance to historical events that have affected Israel and the Jewish people. Let’s look at three examples given by Hagee.

First, Spain expelled the Jews from Spain in 1492. Coincidentally, Columbus discovered America that same year. America later became a safe haven for the Jewish people. This is not a *proof* that validates Hagee’s claim; it is a *correlate* – that is, something that happens in a *mutual relationship* to something else (similar to a *coincidence*).

Your first question should be: What happened relative to *all Jews*? Next, for how many *Christians* and others did America become a safe haven? Finally, how many “blood moons” appeared during the years that the Nazis murdered over 6,000,000 Jews in various death camps in Europe during WWII? Or, was that merely a tragedy that did not end in triumph? The next so-called “proof” might be the triumph part.

Second, Israel was restored as a nation in 1948. Ethnic Jews from over 66 countries were allowed to emigrate to a thin strip of Canaan in order to give them a national homeland. Many evangelicals and mainstream Christians call this the *prophetic rebirth* of Israel based on several Old Testament prophecies. Here, again, there is a problem in the logic.

I recently heard a famous radio talk show host refer to the exodus of Israel out of Egypt as being God’s deliverance of the *Jews*. This is a great problem. This, along with mainstream Christian references made to the *Jewish Law* of the Old Testament, exposes a scriptural ignorance beyond belief. Why? Because, for all of the so-called scriptural and prophetic knowledge among them, mainstream Christianity *does not know who Israel is*. Let me give you some obvious examples.

First, they take scriptures like Jeremiah 16:14, 15 and claim that the 1948 action is the fulfillment. What

they ignore is the information in Jeremiah 3:14-18 where Jeremiah shows that “...the House of *Judah* will walk with the House of *Israel*...” (v. 18). They do not understand the difference between the *House of Judah* and the *House of Israel*. The same distinction is made in Ezekiel 37:11-23 where Ezekiel refers to both of them as being “...the *whole House* of Israel...” (v. 11) made up of two separate nations (vv. 22, 23): the House of Israel and the House of Judah (vv. 16-21).

Second Samuel 2:4 shows that David was made king of the *House of Judah* first. Second Samuel 5:1-5 shows that *seven years later* David was also made king over the *House of Israel*, a move that re-united the whole nation of Israel under one king. The *whole nation of Israel* had become *dis-united* after their exodus from Egypt. The Lord God led the *whole nation of Israel* out of Egypt.

When Solomon succeeded David as king, he committed grievous sins against the Lord God. This is described in 1 Kings 11:1-8. God’s solution is described in 1 Kings 11:9-13. The one tribe of *Israel* that Solomon would have left was *Benjamin*, the smallest of all the tribes of Israel (see Genesis 48, 49 and 1 Chronicles 2:1 through 8:1 for the names of all of the 12 tribes of Israel – that is, the 12 sons born to *Jacob*). That means that the *House of Judah* would be comprised of *Judah*, *Benjamin*, and some portions of *Levi* (the tribe to which Moses and Aaron belonged – Exodus 2:1-10). The *House of Israel* was to be ruled over by Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:28-39; 12:16-24). He would control 10 tribes.

Kings and Chronicles are the histories of the kings of the House of Israel and the House of Judah. First Kings 12:26-33 shows that Jeroboam took over the leadership of the priests and replaced the Levites with: “...the lowest of the people...” (v. 31). So, the Levites in Samaria left to join the House of Judah. You can read 1 Kings 17 to see how the House of Israel was eventually expelled from their land into Assyrian captivity *from which they have never returned*. Connect this information to Matthew 10:5, 6, 15:22-24, and 1 Peter 1:1, 2. The House of Israel remains in a scattered state, but the House of Judah is known around the world.

What this means is simple: The modern nation of *Israel* is not the *whole nation of Israel*; it is the *House of Judah* mingled with the tribes of Benjamin and Levi. They are ethnic Jews. See Romans 11:1 where Paul, largely considered to be a *Jew*, says he is from the tribe of *Benjamin*, not *Judah*. He was an *ethnic Jew*.

The 1948 construction of a nation called *Israel* in-

habited by the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi does not constitute the ***whole nation of Israel***. While its existence as a nation is certainly remarkable and significant in history, it is by no means the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the return of the ***whole nation of Israel*** to the land the Lord God promised Abraham in Genesis 15 – *the entirety of which the whole nation of Israel has never occupied* - even under David and Solomon (see the borders in Genesis 15:18-21). Modern Israel’s existence correlative to a “blood moon” has no prophetic significance at all.

Third, if the Six-day War in 1967 was coincidental with a “blood moon,” was the later “Yom Kippur” war coincidental with a “blood moon”? If not, which war was more significant to Israel’s continued existence? How about any other war involving Israel in its history since 1948 during which there were no “blood moons”?

The 1967 event was a *correlative event*, not a *proof* of prophetic significance – especially not relative to the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

The conclusion to this lesson is simple: There is no scriptural warrant to *automatically* relate extraordinary astronomical or other events to prophetic fulfillment. You have to interpret any extraordinary events within the context of any given prophecy. What I have shown are examples of those who have not used the context of prophecies wisely or correctly...and have led people astray from God’s truth. Don’t you think that it is time to pay closer attention to the deceivers...closer attention to God’s revealed truth?

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# Barriers to Practicing the Truth

Jesus often confronted the barriers to worshiping God in spirit and truth. In Matthew 15, the Pharisees questioned Him about why His disciples were breaking the traditions of the Fathers by not washing their hands before eating. Jesus’ reply was: “Why do you ***break the command of God*** for the sake of your tradition?” (v. 3; emphases added). He followed up by saying: “You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’” (vv. 8, 9). You could add to that “...as though they were the commandment of God.”

How many traditions of men do you obey as though they were the commandment of God? How many of them cause you to break the commandment of God? Many of you are probably sifting things through your mind and coming up with something like Hallowe’en. You smile and say: “Yes, that is one tradition that is pagan to the core. God does not want us to worship the devil or the dead by observing it.” What about other pagan observances like Valentine’s Day? How about Mardi Gras? Christmas? Easter? They all came from the same pagan, Babylonian source. Which of these could you give up for the sake of ***God’s truth***? How many family or religious traditions that are *not* rooted in God’s truth are you willing to forsake so that you can worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24)? (Excerpt from *Meat in Due Season*; pp. 3, 4)

It’s worth your time to find out. Download our free, Bible Study Course, and...visit our “Publications” page. There’s more to God’s truth than a “pretty face.”

# Case #3:

## Knowing When and How to use So-called Codes, Symbols, and Formulae

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A third problem encountered in correctly interpreting prophecy is knowing *when* and *how* to use so-called codes, symbols, and formulae. I understand full well that the faith revealed in scripture is a mystery. Paul writes of this mystery in numerous places in his letters. In particular, he writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

...We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory....As it is written, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.” (emphases added)

He also writes in Ephesians 1:9, 10 that:

...[God has] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him.... (emphasis added)

So, it is evident that there are some things that God wants His true people to understand to which others outside of that group will not be made privy. Our objective in this study is to learn when and how we are to properly use God’s revelation of His *mysteries*. Such ability is certainly not self-guided.

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### Understanding the Problem

God makes it possible for His true people to understand the mystery (Greek = *musterion*: something unexplained or secret) through His Holy Spirit (see John 14:26; 16:13). Without that Holy Spirit, it will be impossible for anyone to be privy to God’s mystery (see Romans 8:9). All New Testament references to *mystery* are from the same Greek term *musterion*.

In the four Gospels, the signature *musterion* that needs to be explained is the parable (see Matthew 13:10-17). Paul uses the term 21 times in his writings. This *mystery* is something that is too profound for human ingenuity, on any level – small or great – to figure

out. However, even all Christians do not understand the fullness of God’s mystery because they are at different levels of growth and development (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 and Hebrews 5:12-14).

A few examples of mysteries revealed by Paul are:

- (a) God the Father and Christ (Colossians 1:25-2:3; 4:3);
- (b) the gospel (Ephesians 6:19);
- (c) Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33);
- (d) God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in the plan of

salvation (Ephesians 3:1-11; Galatians 3:8, 9); and

(e) the faith required by God (1 Timothy 3:9).

It should be readily apparent that God does not dispense this understanding in a willy-nilly fashion.

I prefaced Case #3 with these remarks because I want to draw attention to how some have used the idea of God's *mystery* to push the concepts of *coded messages*, *special symbolic language*, and *special formulae* to validate their interpretations of prophecy. I will use Daniel 5 to point out the fallacies inherent in some of the misinterpretations.

Daniel 5 presents the problem of understanding some strange writing that appeared on the wall of King Belshazzar's palace as he and his 1,000 lords drank their party wine from the gold and silver vessels that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from God's temple in Jerusalem. Daniel was called in to interpret the writing.

As a prelude to that interpretation, Daniel gave the King words of correction about his arrogance and despicable use of God's holy vessels in relationship to his praise of man-made gods. The King was about to learn of God's sure and unwavering judgment against him.

Daniel said that there were four words written on the wall: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. It is here that men's attempts to add to God's word is apparent. How so? Well, the author of the book in which this explanation is found cites the *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* as saying: "...a *double interpretation* is apparently given throughout" (emphases added). Read carefully vv. 25-31, and see if you can detect any *apparent* double explanation.

Verse 26 says: "This is the interpretation of the thing...." Does that wording in any way suggest that there is "...a deeper 'long term' interpretation'..." that can be applied to the Babylonian succession of empires pictured in Daniel 2 and 7? It is very deeply concealed ...if it exists at all! So, the author launches into a discussion of the four words and proclaims that it is a "word-cipher" – that is, a secret message based on a word code. If you can figure out the key to the code, then the true, deeper meaning of this writing will be revealed. He asserts that the key is a *monetary* key.

The four words are supposedly based on Hebrew and Aramaic monetary weights used at that time in Babylonia: the *mina* and the *shekel*. But, what do we do with

this key once we have discovered it? Look at the words again: "A mina, a mina, a shekel, and half a mina." Now what?

There are 50 shekels in a mina. There are 20 *gerahs* (a word not written on the wall) in a shekel. If you use the weight units based on the words, then the phrase can be interpreted: "1,000 [50 x 20], 1,000 [50 x 20], 20 [the *gerah*], and 500 [25 x 20]." Added together, they total 2,520 – a number significant to Bible students (for example: Daniel's 70th week = 7days = 7 x 360 days in a year = 2,520 days long). Now, you must be aware of even more: (a) There is a short-term understanding, and (b) there is also long-term understanding. In other words, there was, supposedly, a fulfillment for Belshazzar's time, as well as a fulfillment for a later time – essentially, the last days.

The author claims that there are formulae revealed in scripture that enable us to understand the deeper, long-term implications of numerous prophecies. He "proves" this by citing Adam Clarke's opinion about the formulae revealed in scripture:

As Bible students are aware, "days" of prophecy must usually be read as years, e.g. "I have appointed thee each day for a year" (Ezek. iv.). Then three and a half "times" [360 days per year x 3.5] = 1260 "days" = 1260 years. Therefore, one "time" = 360 years and seven "times" = 2520 years (vide Adam Clarke's Commentary on Rev. xii. 14 appended).

Others insist that Numbers 14:34 also supports the idea of a "year-for-a-day" formula. The obvious question, then, is this: When do you apply such formulae and when do you refrain from applying them?

In the so-called 6,000-year plan, the concept in 2 Peter 3:8 is used (that is, one day = 1,000 years and 1,000 years = one day). Why not use this formula in interpreting various other prophecies? Why is it reserved only for explaining the prophetic significance of the seven-day week (that is, 6,000 years for man to pursue his own agenda and 1,000 years for Jesus Christ to rule on the earth as a "Sabbath rest" for creation – from the ruin and destruction of man's ways)?

With that wisdom firmly in hand, we can now understand, supposedly, the "longer-term" fulfillment beyond Belshazzar's day. The author says: "This cycle of 2,520 years was thus the time-charter allowed to the succession of Gentile empires ["Times of the Gentiles"] which

commenced with Babylon.” Now, do you figure that from Nebuchadnezzar’s accession to power in 603 B.C. or from the date the handwriting was interpreted – 1st day, seventh month, 539 B.C.? Here’s the difference it would make: 2,520 – 603 B.C. = A.D. 1917; 2,520 – 539 B.C. = A.D. 1981. The author says 603 B.C. So, are we to understand that the “Times of the Gentiles” ended in A.D. 1917? Why not 64 years later in A.D. 1981?

It would be very difficult to accept either date if you understand that the Gentile Roman Empire will be a key player in the days just prior to the return of Jesus Christ (read Daniel 7 in its entirety – the fourth “beast” is the Roman Empire).

What is implicit in the year-for-a-day formula used in Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:5, 6, and Daniel 9:24-27 is that each situation has the formula cited for *each* prophecy, not as a general, *automatic* application to any other prophecy that contains a certain number of days in it. Daniel 9:24-27, for example, is predicated on a *built-in formula* called a *hebdomad* (a group of seven), not upon the importation of a “formula” from Numbers and Ezekiel.

The *Revised Standard Version* says: “*Seventy weeks of years* are decreed concerning your people and your holy city...” (70 x 7 = 490 years; emphasis added). The *New International Version* says: “*Seventy sevens* are decreed for your people and your holy city...” (70 x 7 = 490 years; emphasis added). Others say: “The Lord has commanded *490 years* of further punishment upon Jerusalem and your people...” (*Living Bible*; emphasis added). From this we should be able to understand that the formula is built into Daniel’s prophecy, not imported from Numbers 14 or Ezekiel 4.

The only warranted conclusion found in Daniel 5, then, is the interpretation God gave to it through Daniel:

***This is the interpretation*** of the thing: *Mene*: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. *Peres*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians....In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom.... (emphases added)

Each word had a particular meaning that was executed that very night. To attempt to apply its meaning to some

double, long-term application is *adding to* God’s word (see Deuteronomy 4:1, 2; 12:32 and Proverbs 30:5, 6).

## Four Lessons Learned

So, we have learned four means by which we can more properly interpret prophecy:

1. We must have the correct paradigm on which to base our interpretation – not getting locked in to devices like dates, charts, formulae, and secret knowledge.
2. We must not attempt to interpret the prophecies by extraordinary events that occur in isolation from the content of the prophecies themselves.
3. Each prophecy will have whatever “formula” it needs for its intended, individual interpretation. There is no need to import meaning into the prophecy from somewhere else. The Lord God assigned the intended interpretation to the 40 days the scouts spied out the Promised Land in Numbers 14. He assigned the intended interpretation to Ezekiel’s task of lying on his sides as symbols for Israel’s and Judah’s punishments in Ezekiel 4. He did the same thing for Daniel’s 70 Weeks prophecy in Daniel 9. No other action is necessary on our part to force meaning where there is none intended.
4. We must “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Attempting to make scripture fit our own concepts is an absolute formula for failure. Do not be too quick to draw conclusions just because you can make the Bible fit your own concept.

## A Noteworthy Example

When I was a college student during the late 1960s, I volunteered for a 10-week summer missionary program and was sent to Indiana to conduct neighborhood religious surveys, Vacation Bible Schools, and summer camps for boys. My mission partner had an odd way of looking at clouds and sunlight – scenes that were similar to some old paintings of peaceful, rustic settings with

sunshine bursting through various types of clouds – and declaring: “Man! It looks like Jesus is about to return!” I never really knew how serious he was about how such things as sunlight shining through a storm cloud about sundown could possibly indicate the return of Jesus Christ. Whatever his real feelings were, he should have known that such things are far from being the kinds of signs for which we should look.

In closing, we must remember one of God’s most remarkable comments in the prophecy uttered by Amos (3:7): “Surely the Lord God will do nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.” You must develop the spiritual eyes and ears to understand who truly represents God and is telling you His truth.

You must pray for understanding. You must learn to

yield to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You must invest time in developing the attitude of the Bereans by studying God’s word daily so that you have a working knowledge of His truth. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19-21 that God’s people have a more sure word of prophecy to which we must pay close attention. The prophecy God gives is not subject to an individual’s private interpretation – or their supposed codes, symbols, or formulae. It is the product of the power of God’s Holy Spirit influencing the minds of those who bring it and those who receive it. Otherwise, you open yourself up to that deception about which Jesus Christ warned the very elect in Matthew 24:24. To use a typical modern quip: That is a very slippery slope to be on.

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# The Wisdom of the World

## (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

**W**e are now at the point where the idea of same-sex marriage is widely accepted – even in “Christian” circles. Now, looming on the horizon is the push by the *polyamory* advocates that “marriage” of any kind not be limited to just two people of any gender. Their essential belief is that mankind has the potential for loving more than one person at a time. They do not want the “marriage” relationship to be limited to two people – they want the right to form “marriages” with three, four, five, six or more people. This is not a push for *polygamy* where one man marries several wives; these “marriages” would consist of a group of people of both genders who “love” one another. In such a “marriage,” it would be permissible for there to be homosexual relationships, as well as bisexual and heterosexual relationships.

Once you have accepted one part of this world’s philosophy, it is not long before it will begin to make sense to you that accepting other parts is just as valid. With that “proof” looming before you, you will be moved along very easily in conformity with the world (see Romans 12:1, 2). The next step would be a push to legalize polygamy. Watch the arguments that are presently circulating about legalizing the sale and consumption of marijuana so that various government agencies can take advantage of the *billions in taxes* it would generate. What then – legalize prostitution for the taxes? Methamphetamine? Crack? Heroin? Just how far will the government go for the taxes? If it becomes *legal* in the government’s sight, will that make it *right in God’s sight*? How far will man go just to have his own way without regard to God’s will? (Excerpt from the Bible Study Course, Test 2, p. 2)

# “One Shall be Taken, and the Other Left.”

(Matthew 24:40, 41)

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Ignorance does not amount to the *inability* to know something. It simply means that, regardless of one’s education and/or experience, s/he is unaware of or lacking in knowledge about that something, and, therefore, s/he is unable to grasp its existence and meaning. As the saying goes: “You do not know what you do not know.” *Ignorant* people are not necessarily *stupid* people.

*Stupidity* generally describes slow-minded people who are given to unintelligent decisions and/or acts. They are not generally *willful* in such decisions and acts. Because of that, they are euphemistically called *numb-skulls* because they do not have the capacity to get beyond such a mental state. *Stupidity* is a degree of *mental retardation* marked by a low intelligence quotient (IQ)... even though Forest Gump’s Mama was correct, on some level, in saying that “Stupid is as stupid does.” One can act stupidly without actually being *stupid*. It is sometimes difficult to discern the difference between *willful ignorance* and *gross stupidity*.

When it comes to questions about why certain theological paradigms exist, it is difficult, *due to mitigating circumstances*, to attribute their existence to either *ignorance* or *stupidity*. In the *Rapture* concept, it is very tempting to attribute the perpetrators’ explanation of Matthew 24:40, 41 to either or both of the terms. Is there any other explanation for the aberration of their conclusions? Perhaps this study will make the answer very clear.

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## *Mitigating Circumstances*

*Mitigate* means to do something that makes the subsequence or consequence of an action become less severe, less painful, et cetera. Without the *mitigation*, the subsequence or consequence could have been far worse. Our first question, therefore, must inquire about the existence of any *mitigating circumstances* that could prevent the *ignorance* or *stupidity* of aberrant theological paradigms from being worse than they are. Are there *mitigating circumstances* that could temper God’s judgment of those who teach false doctrines based on the Bible...even though they lead people astray and suppress God’s truth among mankind (Romans 1:18)?

Isaiah 6:8-13 is a sobering example because it describes the Lord God’s personal commitment to cause Israel to be *spiritually deficient* in their ability to understand what He had revealed to them about Himself and His plan for mankind. Both spiritual sight and sound

would be taken from them. They were to be, in effect, *ignorant* of God’s thoughts and ways – even though they might otherwise be religious people in His name. For how long (v. 11)?

The Lord God speaks of a very long time and numerous desolations that will take place. The people will be scattered far and wide until only about a tenth of them ultimately remain to serve as a *holy root*. This idea is foreshadowed in Isaiah 1:1-9 – the consequences of His actions leaving only a *very small elect remnant*. Several other prophecies announce the same consequences that do not get resolved until the “last days.” The *very small remnant* and the *holy root* are the Lord God’s *mitigation* of the consequences.

Notice also Isaiah 1:10-20. It is apparent that only a small group actually worshiped the Lord God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). When the majority mixed and mingled the evil they adopted from the pagans into the religious rites and observances the Lord God had

given them (Leviticus 23), they caused His holiness to become unclean (see Haggai 2:11-14). He would not accept such tainted worship (read Deuteronomy 18:9-14) – even if vestiges of His revelation were included in it. Hosea 2:11 says that He would cause her observance of His holy days to cease – which would indicate that the Temple itself would eventually disappear (see Jeremiah 7:4-15).

The Apostle Paul takes up this commentary in 2 Corinthians 3:11-18. He demonstrates how Israel was prevented from understanding the contents of the Old Testament and the fact that the Old Testament would eventually be superseded by a more glorious covenant. He says that the veil cannot be taken away except by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In effect, then, no one can truly understand God's thoughts and ways without being in Christ and being made privy to them through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Paul also shows in Romans 11:5-29 that God did, indeed, blind most of Israel and leave for Himself a remnant according to the election of grace. Jesus had already confirmed this in Matthew 13:10-17. What does this mean? It means that the consequences of the faulty theological paradigms are mitigated by God's refusal to allow just anybody and everybody who calls himself a "Christian" to truly understand – that is, He imposes ignorance upon them for His own purposes. It appears to be for their ultimate benefit.

### ***Militating Circumstances***

*Militate* means to do something that causes the subsequence or consequence of an action to become *more severe* than it otherwise might have been. It works in opposition to mitigating circumstances. In making this distinction clear, we need to consider 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; Revelation 12:9; and 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

Satan, the god of this world, uses *deception* as a *militating* device against God and His truth. It, too, has a veiling effect that can intrude even into the minds of those who already have had the veil taken away (Matthew 24:23, 24; Hebrews 6:4-8). This is the case with those whom we might call the *incorrigibly wicked* – people who refuse to acknowledge God's truth after it has been made plain to them. This *willful ignorance* also causes God to do something that militates against them (see Hebrews 6:4-8).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12, Paul demonstrates this

idea. He describes these people in v. 10 as those who "...love not the truth, that they might be saved." What does God do in response? Paul answers in vv. 11, 12: "...God sends them *strong delusion*, that they might believe a lie: that they all might be *damned* who believe not in the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

What Paul is describing here is willful ignorance. This *delusion* seals them in the spiritual error into which they have fallen and prevents them from ever again escaping its grip. Given an opportunity to understand, they have counted it as nothing and have been content to pursue their own thoughts and ways. They have despised what God has freely given. Only God and Jesus Christ have the power to judge men in this manner.

### **The Return of Jesus Christ**

Matthew 24:40, 41 describes the return of Jesus Christ. The entire discussion from Matthew 24:24-31 involves this coming event. It is described in v. 29 as occurring "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." mentioned in vv. 14-26. The picture given by Jesus Christ is very similar to that given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We see no secret return mentioned in any verses between v. 13 and v. 20 – that is, *prior to the Tribulation* mentioned in vv. 21-26.

I should mention that vv. 32-34 are not a prophecy about the restoration of Israel in the present location. The parable of the fig tree has nothing to do with Israel's national flag symbol. It is a parable about people who should be able to recognize the coming event when its imminence is manifested by the heavenly signs that begin to unfold.

Verse 34 states that the generation alive at that time – the ones who have the greatest advantage of personally witnessing them – will not pass away before the fulfillment of the signs is reached. This has nothing to do with the intervening history from the establishment of the Jewish nation in 1948 to this occurrence. That Jewish nation is not the entirety of Israel. It is only the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin.

Verses 36-39 reveal the ignorance of that generation about the "signs of the times." Part of that ignorance is imposed upon them by God; part of it is imposed upon them by Satan, and part of it is self-imposed.

Let's consider Matthew 24:22 in this explanation.

Jesus says that if this Tribulation is not *shortened*, no flesh will be saved alive. Why should He be concerned about the survival of human beings? The Rapturists would say that it is because some are going to be saved out of the great Tribulation (Revelation 7 and 12) even though Jesus supposedly will have already taken out the Christians *seven years* before the end of this 3½-year tribulation. Based on that assumption, they say that vv. 40, 41 reveal that the ones *left behind* will be the ones most likely to come to salvation *during* the Tribulation.

This, say the Rapturists, necessitates the *public* return of Jesus Christ to claim these *new* converts. With that accomplished, the door to salvation will be closed forever. In making this claim, the Rapturists posit a *secret* and a *public* return of Jesus Christ seven years (2,520 days) apart – with one being taken and one being left behind in the *secret return of Jesus Christ*.

Is this spiritual *ignorance*, or...is it spiritual *stupidity*? Do they think this way because of *mitigating circumstances* or because of *mental deficiency*? Or... because of *self-will*? Sometimes there is a fine line of difference among these conditions. Let's hope that it is because of *mitigating circumstances*.

## The Solution to the Puzzle

There is no such pending “rapture” scheduled by Jesus Christ. Reading such a concept into Matthew 24:14-41 is a product of *spiritual ignorance* – both *imposed* and *willful*. So, what is the solution to the puzzle?

James 1:18 refers to Christians as *firstfruits*. That means that they are the *first* to be “harvested” from among mankind at the return of Jesus Christ. *First* implies *second*...and potentially more after that. You can see in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 Paul's discussion about Jesus Christ being the first of the firstfruits to be raised from the dead. Notice Paul's comment in v. 23 about there being an *order* in which resurrections will take place. The ones raised from the dead at His coming will be the *firstfruits* spoken of by James. You can see a similar comment in Revelation 14:1-5. Revelation 20:5, 6 demonstrates that there will be more than one resurrection from the dead.

But, Zechariah 14:16-19 and Isaiah 2:1-5 demonstrate that, during the 1,000-year completion of the ministry of reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth to God the Father, there will be *secondfruits* who will come to salvation. There will be *thirdfruits* from

the resurrection at the end of that 1,000 years. By necessity of the language used, *some* must be *taken* and *some* must be *left behind* at the return of Jesus Christ...but not for the reasons presented by the Rapturists.

The *destruction of all flesh* (Matthew 24:22) would be a gross contradiction of numerous prophecies about the survival of a *remnant according to the election of grace* and the *holy root* because Jesus Christ will not intervene in the Tribulation until after 900 of those 1,260 days have passed. His intervention over the final 360 days will *cut short* any ability of the Beast powers and Satan to *destroy all flesh*. That is not to say that His intervention will reduce the prophesied 1,260 days to 900 – as some claim is the point of Hosea 6:1, 2.

During that last 360 days, Jesus Christ will be pouring out *Seven Trumpet Plagues* – one of which will last at least five months (about 150 days; see Revelation 9:10). The Tribulation will not have ceased at that time. It will not be until the *Seventh Trumpet Plague* that the resurrection from the dead will take place – which, according to 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, will include the living and dead Christians. Hebrews 11:39, 40 tells us that the faithful *of all ages* will receive this blessing *together*. The Rapturists do not explain why the *dead* in Christ need to be protected from the Tribulation.

Revelation 15 and 16 explain that there will also be *Seven Bowl Plagues* involved in the *Seventh Trumpet Plague*. Those *Bowl Plagues* will not be poured out until Jesus Christ has harvested out the *firstfruits* and transported them to the cloud from which He is executing His warfare. Read Revelation 16:12-21 to understand the contents of the *Sixth and Seventh Bowl Plagues*. All of the nations are to be gathered to the battle of *Armageddon* just outside of Jerusalem for the conflict described in Zechariah 14 (see also Revelation 19:7-21).

It should be patently clear, because of this information, that *some* will be taken by Jesus Christ at a given point in time and *some* will be left behind. It's obvious that, if Jesus Christ does not take *all* of them, *some* are going to be *left behind!* It is easy to believe that even *blind ignorance* should be able to grasp that concept. No, the *veil* has not been lifted yet.

Zechariah 14:16 is a prophetic statement that is part and parcel to Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:22. The idea there is that the *survivors* are flesh-and-blood humans who did not perish from the earth. While it would be possible for Jesus to resurrect to flesh-and-blood

composition all of the dead in order to have someone over whom He and the saints could rule, that would contradict another prophecy in Revelation 20:5 that says that "...the rest of the dead will not live again until the 1,000 years are finished." The rest of the dead must be included in those who will be left behind (Matthew 24:40, 41).

### Conclusion

Here are the main points of this lesson:

1. Those of us to whom God has revealed His mysteries should not be overly critical of those who have not yet been chosen to have that experience.

2. At present, even we ourselves know only in part (1 Corinthians 13:9-12) – which implies that we, too, have a certain level of ignorance with which to deal.

3. Our own veil is being slowly lifted as we surrender our hearts and minds to God through Jesus Christ so that we can receive more and more Holy Spirit.

4. As the "time of the end" approaches, we must be more determined to fight the good fight of faith and hold the ground God has put under our control. The symbolism of the Holy Days provides valuable understanding if used properly.

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# The Gospel of the Kingdom

## (Mark 1:14, 15)

**T**he gospel which Jesus Christ taught was not the good news that the Christian will die and go to heaven. From Genesis to Revelation, there is not a single line of scripture that says that the reward of the "saved" is to go to heaven. Indeed, the gospel that Jesus Christ preached and charged His Church to preach was that of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. There is no difference between Matthew's use of the term Kingdom of heaven and Mark's use of the term Kingdom of God. Both mean the same thing.

John Bright, formerly the Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and the Interpretation of the Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, wrote this in his book *The Kingdom of God*:

...The concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, *the total message of the Bible....To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the very heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press; 1953; p. 7; emphasis added)

He continues in the development of this idea throughout the book to demonstrate that this was not a theological concept that gradually developed in Israel's religion...but was there from the very beginning.

Indeed, the patriarch Abraham, who was the grandfather of the man Israel (from whom the 12 tribes of Israel came), looked forward to the coming of that Kingdom. It is this hope and expectation upon which the *promises of God* are based and considered to be the great *Christian* hope (Hebrews 6:13-20). (Excerpt from *A Statement of Beliefs*; pp. 45, 46)

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# “Standing on the Promises”

(Hebrews 6:13-20)

What, exactly, do Christians *mean* when they sing the old hymn “Standing on the Promises” (R. Kelso Carter, 1849-1928)? Does it express their faith in the *unchanging nature* of God? In the verses part of the hymn, they praise *Jesus Christ* as the one who made the promises, but in the stanza part of the hymn, they sing “standing on the promises of *God*.” So, both are credited with having made the “promises” – promises that cannot fail...promises that are bound to Christ and the Father by love’s strong cord...and promises that are supported by the Holy Spirit to keep the believer from falling away. Why has mainstream Christianity, in fact, *changed* the truth of God into a lie (see Romans 1:25)? Why is it important to the true believer that God should have an *unchanging nature with regard to His promises*?

In this study, you are going to be shown scriptural *proof* that God remains faithful to His covenants and promises (which include *prophecies*) despite what men do or say (supposedly in His name) to the contrary. The description of the *unchanging God* will leave you to wonder why mainstream Christianity has taken upon itself the authority to make drastic changes in God’s plan and will for humanity. The change of His seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday is only one such change.

## God’s Knowledge Prior to Creation

Let’s begin by getting an idea of God’s purpose and will prior to the creation. It should be realized that John 1:1-2 precedes Genesis 1:1 (John 1:3 provides the necessary clue). We also see the advancement of that clue in Colossians 1:16. Genesis 1:1-2:4 uses the Hebrew term *elohim* where it is translated “God.” We have shown in many of our publications that such a term is *plural* – which is supported by John 1:1, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:19, and Hebrews 1. Any mention of Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God (the Father) also supports it (Hebrews 1:8, 13).

Therefore, when you read Ephesians 1:1-14, you are reading about a plan constructed by God and the Word whereby they would create humans and ultimately bring them into the *elohim family* through Jesus Christ. As v. 14 points out, the final step in that process (*redemption*) will be to change the human body of flesh into a spirit composition that is sinless and free of the limitations of the flesh (see John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:9; and 1 John 3:1-3). You also see this intent expressed in Genesis 1:26-28.

In conjunction with that plan, *Elohim* understood that they had to have a *place* to put these humans. Isaiah



A *Plan* Presupposes a Prior Purpose and Will.  
Has God Scrapped His Original, Pre-Creation  
Purpose and Will for Something New and Better?

45:18 explains the rationale for the creation of the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1). It was to be a stable environment that could be safely inhabited. So, the Word created the earth to be an orderly environment. The Hebrew word translated as *established* (KJV) is *kuwn*, which means that it is “firmly fixed” in the heavens. You can see this application in the following scriptures: Job 38:4-7 (which shows that the earth has *permanent*, invisible *foundations*); Jeremiah 33:19-26 and Psalm 89:20-37 (which show the Lord God’s *eternal covenant* with David:); and Isaiah 66:22, 23 and Revelation 21 (which show that the present heavens and earth will be *renewed*, not *replaced*, after the completion of the 1,000-year ministry of reconciliation). You can also see Abraham’s expectations in Hebrews 11:8-10.

All of this is part and parcel to *Elohim*’s plan to establish *on the earth* a Kingdom of God (see Matthew 25:34, where it is shown that this plan was conceived *before* the creation of the orderly universe). There is no indication in *Elohim*’s character that they would change their minds about such a great plan (James 1:17). There was *never* in their minds a plan by which humans would ever go to *heaven* as a result of their salvation.

Zechariah 14:9, Revelation 5:10, and Revelation 11:15 make it abundantly clear that God (*Elohim*) knew, before they ever set about the creation process, that the *earth* would eventually be the place where *Elohim* will set their thrones (Revelation 21:1-5). This is what they *knew*. Where in the history of mankind has there ever been produced sufficient *necessity* for them to *change their minds*? Was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ sufficient *necessity* for that change to have been made? No. They *knew* before the creation that a sacrifice for potential sins by mankind would be necessary (see Hebrews 10:1-10, Ephesians 1:4, and 1 Peter 1:18-21). There is no scriptural evidence that they had in mind any divergence from their original plan after that sacrifice was made. ***That is what they knew!***

One of the most blatant pieces of theological misunderstanding is the idea that God has changed to such an extent that He would erase His laws, the consequences for breaking those laws, and the promises He made before the “Christian” era. Much of this change came, according to many Christian theologians and ministers, as a result of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – John 14:1-3 (largely misinterpreted as a promise to take Christians to *heaven*) and Colossians 2:9-14 (largely misinterpreted to mean that the “old law” was nailed to the cross and done away with). Ask yourself this question: If it was

known, at least from the Garden of Eden, that Jesus Christ was coming to deal with sin, why did God (in this case, the Lord God – who became Jesus Christ) command so much that would have to be *changed* once Jesus Christ came? Couldn’t He plan any better than that? This, too, has to do with the things you should know about *prophecy*.

## A Scriptural Baseline for Understanding

We need to be wiser about God’s word and what it teaches – rather than acting upon an emotional bandwagon that greatly contradicts what He has revealed. So, let’s set a baseline (the most important element or principle upon which something is based) from which our faith in God’s truth can be validated. We find the primary ingredient of that baseline in Matthew 22:34-40. It concerns the *greatest command of God*.

In v. 37, Jesus answered the lawyer’s question by citing Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your [spiritual capacity], and with all your might.” This one, great command is the basis for the first four of the 10 Commandments. But...Jesus does not stop there. In v. 39, He also cites Leviticus 19:18 – which Jesus says is like the first and great command. Read 1 John 2:7-11; 4:18-21. This shows that the two commands are *irrevocably intertwined*. I know of no mainstream Christian group that would disagree with that assessment.

But, what does Jesus say in Matthew 22:40? He says this: “On these two commandments hang *all of the Law, and* [all of] *the prophets*” (emphases added). So, the most important element or principle upon which all of the Law and all of the prophets depend is found in these two great commands of God.

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus would have said in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to *abolish either the Law or the prophets*? What must we think if someone comes along later and declares that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the means by which the Law and the prophets were nailed to the cross – that they were, indeed, *abolished* by the action Jesus took on the cross? Oh, they will couch it in the idea that they were *fulfilled...and thereafter became unnecessary for Spirit-led Christians*. Such a claim has the same effect as an abolishment because they are deemed no longer necessary for one’s ongoing relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Notice the concept expressed by Jesus in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In vv. 29 and 31, Jesus says in the character of Abraham: “They have Moses [the Law] and the prophets” from whom to get their understanding about life and death.

The same idea is implicit in James’ judgment of the problem presented at the Jerusalem conference about whether or not Gentile converts needed to be circumcised for salvation. His judgment is found in Acts 15:19-21. In addition to the instructions the Gentiles were to be given, James said: “For Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (emphases added). This is confirmation that the Law had not been abolished, and... there were too many prophecies of the Old Testament that had not yet been fulfilled (see Luke 24:44 where the resurrected Jesus Christ says: “...All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (emphases added).

Finally, you should read Matthew 17:1-12. This is the account of Christ’s transfiguration on a mountain outside of Jerusalem prior to His crucifixion. Verse 3 says that the vision (v. 9) included Moses and Elijah – representative figures of the Law and the Prophets. One might legitimately wonder why these two spiritual giants would have appeared with the Christ in that vision. Based on the baseline we have seen above, it is a testimony that the two great commands that give the legal and spiritual basis for His covenant with Israel, as well as the prophecies that determine both the ongoing and future relationship of Israel and the Lord God, have significance in the benefits of God’s immutability – especially when we consider Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17...which is based only on the Old Testament because that was all the scripture Paul had available at the time.

### Scriptural Claims of Immutability

Immutability not only means that something will not change; it means that it cannot change. There are at least four major scriptural references to the unchanging nature of God. We will take a look at them in order to understand what this means to modern Christianity if they want to teach and preach God’s truth (see John 4:23, 24). One is from the Old Testament and three are from the New Testament. Pay very close attention to

how they are interrelated.

Malachi 3:6 says: “I am the Lord, I do not change.” This is rather straightforward, wouldn’t you say? His reason for making that statement has to do with holding the people of all ages accountable for their sins. Will they be judged by the same standard? Yes. Why? Because whatever constituted sin in past ages is still considered sin in the present age. The Lord God commanded Israel to use one law for native Israelites and foreigners within their gates (Exodus 12:49). This demonstrates that He is not interested in judging different ages or people by different standards.

The Hebrew word from which change is translated is shanah. This word has as much to do with duplicity as it does with diversity (like changing shadows or seasons). Regarding duplicity, God does not say one thing, then do another. This is the point of Isaiah 55:10, 11 relative to law and prophecy:

“...So shall my word be that goes out of my mouth: it shall not return unto to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.”

In case you might be missing the point, read Matthew 4:4 where Jesus Christ cites Deuteronomy 8:3. How could you live by every word out of the mouth of God if He was constantly saying one thing but doing another? You would become confused and frustrated – maybe even eventually refusing to pay any attention at all to Him.

James 1:16, 17 demonstrates that God also is not like the kind of change that occurs with shadows or seasons. Many find no problem with God having nuances of change – slight changes or variations on a theme. What James asserts is interesting because he uses an astronomical analogy to make his point: The heavenly bodies change and vary, but the God who created them does not. If there is no shadow of change, then there is not a slight variance or nuance of change.

The writer of Hebrews captures the sense of this when he says that Jesus Christ is “...the same yesterday, today, and for ever...” (Hebrews 13:8). This describes the very broad stretch of eternity during which Elohim conceived their plan for a Kingdom on the earth that would necessitate the relocation of their thrones and the creation of a being that could be added to their kind (Genesis 1:26).

Finally, Paul demonstrates the same characteristic in

Philippians 2:6, 7 when he used four words to describe the pre-incarnate, incarnate, and post-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ: *being, form, likeness, and fashion*. *Being* is from the Greek word *huparchein*, which means “innate, unchangeable, unalterable characteristics and abilities.” Notice v. 6 where it says: “...being in the form of God...equal with God...” (emphases added). This should be compared to John 1:1: He was *God* and He was *with God* – that is, before the Word became flesh, the Word and God were two separate, divine Beings who accompanied with one another as *equals*. Philippians 2:7 shows that He *voluntarily* took upon Himself the body of human flesh.

Form in v. 6 is translated from the Greek term *morphe*. This word means “the essential form that never alters.” Whether He was in spirit or in flesh, He was still God and servant (see Matthew 1:23). That did not change. It was His *essential nature*. Likeness and fashion are from the Greek word *schema*, which means “the essential form that continually alters.” Here is a manner in which God did change: The Word became flesh (see also Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15) and went through the continual stages of growth and development of the human being, and...then He became God again (John 17:5). There is no *duplicity* or *variance in character* in this. Note in Philippians 2:7, 8 that the discussion turns on His experience *in the flesh*; therefore, He would have to undergo the continual processes of the growth and development of the human: embryo, fetus, infant, child, adult.

So, we have scriptural witnesses that “God” does not change in His essential nature, ethics, righteousness, purpose, and will. The only “change” we can see in scripture has to do with the changes that occur in the *schema* of the human growth and development. Paul’s use of *morphe* (form in vv. 6, 7) makes it plain that Jesus Christ, who in His pre-incarnate, incarnate, and post-incarnate form as “God,” did not change this essential nature.

How does this information help us to understand more fully Matthew 5:17-19? Notice especially the words jot and tittle in v. 18...along with the idea that the Law and the prophets would be in force well beyond Jesus’ lifetime in the flesh (“...til heaven and earth pass...”). All of the spiritual intents of the Law and Prophets have not yet been fulfilled! There is much more to come! You can understand the truth of this by the fact that He has not returned as He prophesied He will do. Nor has the Kingdom of God been established

on the earth. The resurrections have not yet occurred.

## The Coup de Maitre

The *coup de maitre* is the *masterstroke* – the point at which a *master* of something executes a highly successful stroke, action, plan, or stratagem that is the embodiment (that is, the *epitome*) of His will and purpose. The Christian who is aware of God’s promises to Abraham must know the purpose of those promises, as well as His will in making them. Absent that understanding, it is very difficult to understand major portions of scripture that reveal God’s will and purpose for the creation.

Of major importance to Christian understanding is the action that took place in Genesis 15. There are several pieces of this action that should be remarkable to the true Christian: (a) the Lord God promised Abraham a descendant from his own body (v. 4); (b) He promised him an innumerable number of descendants (v. 5); (c) He counted Abraham’s faith in those promises as being *righteousness* (that is, upright, just, trustworthy). In other words, read what Paul said about him in Romans 4:13-25 – not staggered, not wavering in his confidence in the Lord God’s word. Notice especially the promise of a land inheritance in Genesis 15:7, 8. Abraham asks: “How shall I know that I shall inherit it?”

The ceremony that took place in Genesis 15:9-21 is most important to your understanding. This is the Lord God’s explanation about how Abraham would know that the Lord God is also righteous in His dealings with His people. The concept behind this ceremony is simple: If either of the participants violates the terms of the agreement, then they are pledged to die like the animals that were sacrificed.

If you notice the action in vv. 12-17, Abraham went to sleep and did not participate in the part where the participants were supposed to walk among the pieces in order to seal the covenant agreement. Only the Lord God walked among them – therefore, only the Lord God was pledged by this oath. This ceremony had nothing to do with the prediction of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Finally, notice that the Lord God’s promise was supported by His oath. What was the promise relative to the land inheritance? Verses 18-21 describe the boundaries of the land inheritance: “...from the river of Egypt [the Nile], unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” Never in the history of the whole nation of Israel or otherwise was this territory ever occupied – not even

in the greatest periods under David and Solomon. You can verify that claim in Hebrews 11:13, 39.

You can also see that the time for the fulfillment of this promise and oath is yet future. Read Hebrews 4 and consider the *rest* (Sabbath) that remains for God's people. If you read Hebrews 3 and 4 closely, you will be able to understand that the *rest* is not only a state-of-being, *it is also a place where that Sabbath will occur: the land of Promise*. Canaan was a mere type of that larger place of rest.

Now comes the *coup de maitre* – the embodiment of the Lord God's will and purpose (the epitome). We find that in Hebrews 6:13-20. Here is where we encounter again the value of God's *immutability*. This revelation has extraordinarily high value to the true Christian – who truly does “stand” on the promises of God. Here is the upshot of this piece of scripture: God made promises to Abraham in which the *New Testament Christian* can and must put his absolute faith and trust. Most Christians will say that they do that. Well, let's see.

What we have seen is this: *inheriting the Promised Land (and, eventually the earth) is God's very central promise* (see Romans 4:13-30 and Galatians 3:8-29). Hebrews 6:17, 18 refer to the *promise* and *oath* we read about in Genesis 15. While they are Old Covenant concepts, they will be realized in the fulfillment of the New Covenant actualization. They are part of the *Law and Prophets that have not yet been fulfilled*, but will be in Jesus Christ. Before you disregard this revelation, make note of the word *immutable* (KJV) used in vv. 17, 18. The Greek term is *ametathetos*, which means that something not only *will not change, it cannot change*. And... v. 18 says that the promise and the oath are two *immutable* things by which it is *impossible* for God to lie!

There is, therefore, no possibility at all for God to be *duplicitous* in this matter. He cannot say one thing, then do something totally different. Yet, mainstream Christianity has done exactly what Paul accused the ungodly of doing as part of their suppression of God's truth: *They have changed God's truth into a lie. God did not make the changes; mankind did* (see Romans 1:18-25). You might ask: “How did they do that?”

In one very specific case, they changed the reward of the saved from inheriting the Promised Land and the earth to *going to heaven*. God never promised Abraham that he or any other person of the true faith would go to *heaven*. To do so later would have been an act of *duplicitous*. *You cannot test the truth of God's word or God's faithfulness to His word if He and it are subject to be-*

*ing changed from one age to another!*

Here's another example: Read Deuteronomy 12:29-32 to see what the Lord God revealed about His attitude toward the pagans and their idolatry. This Being called “the Lord God” is the one who came into the flesh as Jesus Christ. *Now, ask yourself if you think that He has changed His mind about this pagan idolatry*. What do you think He means when He says that you should not inquire after them and use elements of their practices in your worship of Him. What do you think He means when He says, in essence, “Do not do that!”? What does He mean when he says: “Whatever I command you to do, be sure that you do it: do not add to it or take away from it”?

Are you at all familiar with the fact that mainstream Christianity has, in fact, adopted pagan religious traditions and idolatry – “dry cleaning” them by saying that they have a “Christian” application, and hugging them to its breast as though God Himself commanded it... thus, *adding* it to God's instruction? Are you equally aware that they have also done away with God's Law – actually *taking away from* His instruction (see Romans 7:12-14; 3:31)?

Changing the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday is a major man-made change. In the history since the change, you can find many quotes from the Roman Catholic Church and others that claim they did it aside from any scriptural warrant or instruction. The same is true of their abandonment of God's holy days as given in Leviticus 23 – in favor of Christmas and Easter. There is absolutely no scriptural justification for those changes...which mainstream Christianity practices as human traditions, not as God's commandments (read Matthew 7:21-23; 15:1-9).

Note this statement from a denominational handbook about their doctrines regarding Sunday: “There is no specific command in the New Testament to change from the seventh to the first day” (Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Nashville: Convention Press; 1971; p. 94). Yet, many will use three New Testament scriptures to try to force a change where there is no specific command from the Father or Son to do so (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; Acts 20:7-11; and Revelation 1:10). You can read the explanation of these three scriptures in Lesson 12 of our free, downloadable Bible Study Course.

Is such a change *really* reflective of “standing on the promises of God”? This is tantamount to saying that you put your unwavering faith and practice in the charge

of the great God and His Savior who made the promises and offer the benefit of *immutability* regarding them. If you do not live by that great demonstration of holy fidelity, then you have failed in your “standing.” What *necessitated* the change?

You can also throw in beliefs like the immortality of the soul, Trinitarianism, going to heaven or hell immediately upon one’s death, and much, much more. You need to *know* whom you have believed (2 Timothy 1:12), instead of being carried about by the traditions of men and the emotional attachments you have to them.

So, if there have been any changes made, they have been made by *men*, not *God*. They have worshiped the creation of their own hands, not God’s (Romans 1:18-32). They have done it by using His name deceitfully

(Matthew 24:4, 5). They have done it in contradiction to the will of God (Matthew 7:21-23). They have done it under the direction of Satan the Devil (2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; 4:4). They have done it by perverting the gospel of truth (Galatians 1:6-10). And...they have done it by changing God’s truth into a lie (Romans 1:25). Yes, there have been changes made, but they were made by men who have had a *form* (2 Timothy 3:5 – Greek = *morphosis*: “a semblance or outward appearance”) of godliness – men who have lacked the knowledge and understanding of His truth to grasp its *true power!*

There are great benefits in God’s *immutability*. *The God of the Bible is an unchanging God! From age to age, He is the same! That knowledge is valuable!*

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# What is Salvation?

**S**alvation does not result merely from a simple confession of faith in Jesus Christ! I know that statement flies in the face of much of what is taught about salvation in mainstream Christianity. But, contrary to popular belief, *salvation* itself comes at a future moment in time as the result of a *process* of education in righteousness. Is it the result of your *religious works*? No, it is the result of God’s grace and mercy because an individual has shown himself/herself to be a good and faithful servant by *enduring* in his/her faith in Jesus Christ to the end. *Faith in Jesus Christ* is a *way of life*, not a simple confession of faith made at some moment in time. Let’s understand this correctly! (Excerpt from *There’s More to Salvation Than Meets the Eye*; introductory remarks)

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