Matthew - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Olivet Discourse: Matthew 24-25, Lord's Coming in Relation to the Gentile Nations, The

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(Matthew 25:31-46)

As mentioned at the beginning of the meeting, this last part of the Lord's Olivet discourse takes up His coming (the Appearing) in relation to the Gentile nations (Matt. 25:31-46).

The first thing of note here, is that the Lord is speaking of Himself as "the Son of Man" again. This tells us He is not speaking of the Church, for He never takes that title in connection with the Church. It is the remaining Gentile nations of the earth that are before us here. Furthermore, it is important to see that what happens here will take place after the Lord appears. The proper rendering of the verse should be: "When the Son of Man shall have come in His glory" (vs. 31 – J. N. Darby Trans.). This indicates that this is after the Lord has come back. The fact that He is called "the King" here, also indicates that the Lord is back on earth and the kingdom is about to be set up (vss. 34, 40).

The Sessional Judgment

The judgment that we are about to look at is the last phase of the judgment of the "quick" (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). The "quick" is an old English word for living persons. The judgment of the quick is an "umbrella term" that covers three judgments of the Lord. These are the Harvest, the Vintage (Winepress), and the Sessional judgments. The Harvest judgment, which we have already looked at, is a discriminating (or separating) judgment that will happen when the Lord first appears and dispatches His angels to take the wicked out of the kingdom of heaven—the western part of the earth (the prophetic earth). Just as a farmer in the time of harvest separates the wheat from the chaff, the Lord will use His angels to execute judgment in this way (Matt. 13:38-43, 49-50; 24:37-41). Then there is the Vintage (or Winepress) judgment, which is not mentioned in this discourse. It has to do with the Lord's judgment of the confederated armies of Gog (Ezek. 38-39; Isa. 33-34; 63:1-6; Rev. 14:17-20). There is no discrimination in this judgment, for all are judged together, just as grapes are trampled indiscriminately in a winepress. Lastly, when all hostile enemies are no longer existent on earth, the Lord will "sit upon the throne of His glory" and execute this calm and solemn Sessional judgment.

It says, "Before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (vs. 32). When the Lord says, "all nations," He is referring to all of the nations that are left on the earth after the previous judgments have been executed. Perhaps we could call them third-world nations. He could not be referring to the Christianized nations in the western part of the earth, because they have been judged already. The nations that are assembled here are far less responsible than the previous two groups because they have not had the light the others have had. However, they are still responsible and will be assembled before the Lord's "throne of His glory" for judgment.

This has often been confused with the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20. However, a closer look will show that this is not the same judgment. This is a judgment of living persons (nations); the Great White Throne is a judgment of dead persons. This takes place before the Millennium; the Great White Throne is after the Millennium. Also, this judgment has two classes of people being judged: the righteous ("the sheep") and the wicked ("the goats"); whereas the Great White Throne judgment has only one class—the wicked. There are no righteous persons raised then because all the righteous will have been raised some 1000 years before.

In this judgment, those who have been favourable toward the Jewish messengers ("My brethren") and who have preached the gospel of the kingdom in their country during the seven-year tribulation period will be permitted to enter the kingdom of Christ on earth (vs. 34). It is noteworthy that the earthly blessings for Israel, and for the Gentile nations that will populate the millennial world, are "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Acts 3:21). The blessings of the Church, however, whose destiny is heavenly, are from "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

Those who showed animosity toward the Jewish messengers will be separated out as "goats" and sent into the lake of fire (vss. 41, 46). This means that their nation will be removed entirely from the face of the earth. I used to think that one of the nations to be separated out at this time is Edom, because Scripture tells us that they will be annihilated from the face of the earth (Obad. 17-21). But Edom is a nation in the prophetic earth, which will have been judged before this. They will be gone before this judgment happens.

Three Phases of Edom's Judgment

Edom's judgment will actually take place in three phases. First, they will be deceived by their own confederacy under the King of the North and their land will be ransacked and looted; many will fall at that time (Obad. 1-14). A little later, after the Lord appears, He will go out to the land of Edom to tread the Winepress judgment (the Vintage) and will destroy the confederated armies of Gog who have converged there (Obad. 15-16; Isa. 34:1-10; 63:1-6); many more Edomites will fall at that time. Their third and final blow will come from the armies of restored Israel who will go out to that land, and the other surrounding countries, to wipe out any who remain (Obad. 17-21; Num. 24:1-19; Psa. 18:34-48; Psa. 108:7-13; Isa. 11:14; Micah 4:13; Ezek. 39:10; Zech. 10:3-5, 12:6, 14:14).

The criteria on which the nations are judged here is not whether they have received the Gospel of the Grace of God (Acts 20:24), or even if they have received Israel's Messiah in faith. They are judged merely on whether they have been favourable toward the Jewish messengers who have gone forth into every nation preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 24:14). The simple criteria of whether they were hostile or receptive toward the messengers is all that is considered at this time. Some will "yield feigned obedience" and will be allowed to enter the kingdom of Christ (Deut. 33:29; Psa. 18:44; Psa. 66:3; Psa. 81:15 – J. N. Darby Trans.). What a merciful God we have! (Hab. 3:2) King David's

mercy on Shimei is a type of this (2 Sam. 19:16-23).

After the kingdom of Christ is established there will be a continual judgment of persons “every morning” throughout the Millennium (Psa. 101:3-8; Zeph. 3:5; Zech. 5:1-4). Those who have feigned obedience will be tested during the Millennium and will manifest themselves as wicked and will be judged. The Psalmist mourns this sad result, saying, “The haters of the LORD should have yielded feigned obedience unto Him; but [and] their time would have been for ever. He would have fed them with the finest of wheat; yea, with honey out of the rock would I have satisfied thee” (Psa. 81:15-16 – margin). “Forever” is a term in the Old Testament meaning as long as time goes on; it is not eternity. Solomon’s judgment of Shimei is a type of this. After David permitted him to live in the kingdom, he was tested later under Solomon’s reign and proven to be wicked, whereupon he was judged (1 Kings 2:36-46).

A difficulty some have with this is that those who are permitted to enter the kingdom are said to be “righteous” and they go “into life eternal” (vs. 46). This sounds like they all have faith. However, eternal life in the sense that it is used here is to live on earth as long as time goes on. The Old Testament and the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) view eternal life in this way (Psa. 133:3; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 19:16, etc.). The Christian sense of eternal life, found in John’s gospel and the epistles, is entirely different (John 17:3; Rom. 6:23, etc.).

While the judgment here is the judgment of the Gentile nations, the results are individual (vss. 41, 46). Every person who passes into a lost eternity will suffer the consequences of their own sins.

Three Destinies For Mankind

There are three distinct places, or destinies, for men—each are said to be prepared of the Lord. First, the Lord has gone to “prepare” a place in the Father’s house for the heavenly saints (John 14:3); and then, the earthly saints will inherit the kingdom on earth, which has been “prepared” for them (Matt. 25:34). Lastly, there is the lake of fire that has been “prepared” for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). We see from this last reference that it is not God’s intention that any man, woman, or child should end up in the lake of fire. It was prepared for “the devil and his angels,” but sad to say, many humans will have their end there because they have refused every gesture of grace toward them.

Summary

In this Olivet discourse the Lord has given us a comprehensive outline of His coming in connection with the three responsible spheres on earth—Israel, Christendom, and the Gentile nations. After this, the Millennium will be ushered in, and the Lord Jesus Christ will reign in righteousness “over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9; Psa. 72:8).

(Adapted)

The Olivet Discourse: Matthew 24-25, Lord's Coming in Relation to Christendom, The

(Matthew 24:45-25:30)

Entering this section, we see a marked change in the Lord’s remarks regarding His coming. These changes indicate that He is not speaking of the same people as in the previous section. Mr. Darby said that this part of the discourse is actually a parenthesis. I suppose, in one sense, you could go from chapter 24:44 over to chapter 25:31, where the subject of the coming of the Son of Man is continued.

Some of the differences in this section are:

The Lord’s coming is not called the coming of the Son of Man.

The Lord’s coming (the Rapture) is mentioned three times.

No Old Testament prophecy is quoted.

No earthly signs are given.

Jerusalem and the temple are not mentioned.

The Sabbath is not mentioned.

Christ as the Messiah is not mentioned (Christ means “Messiah” – John 1:41).

These things show that the subject before us now does not have to do with the Jews, but rather, with a different group of people. A closer look will show that the Lord is speaking of His coming in relation to the part of the earth that has had the light of the gospel of the grace of God that is being preached today—the Christianized part of the earth, sometimes called Christendom. It therefore deals with Christian responsibility during this present time when Israel would be set aside in the ways of God and the Lord would be absent.

Three Parables

This section consists of three parables; the first is in Matthew 24:45-51, and the emphasis is on faithfulness in the time of the Lord’s absence. The second is in Matthew 25:1-13, and the emphasis is on watchfulness in the time of the Lord’s absence. The last one is in Matthew 25:14-30, and it emphasizes usefulness in service in the time of the Lord’s absence. We could summarize the three parables as faithfulness, watchfulness, and usefulness.

It is significant that the Lord’s coming for His saints (the Rapture) is mentioned in all three of the parables (Matt. 24:46; 25:10; 25:19), whereas it has been conspicuously absent in Part One. The Appearing of Christ is also mentioned in this section (Matt. 24:50; 25:26-30), but it’s never called the coming of the Son of Man.

PARABLE I—Faithfulness in the Time of Christ’s Absence

(Matthew 24:45–51)

Now let's focus on a few details in the first parable. It's a scene where the lord of the house is absent, and the servants are tested as to their fidelity. The parable indicates that there are two kinds of servants in the house existing at the same time—a "faithful and wise servant" and an "evil servant." In the time of the Lord's absence the house of God will be marked by this kind of a mixture—those who are real and those who are false.

What we have in the faithful "servant" is what should characterize every true believer in the house of God today (vss. 45-47). The faithful servant looks for his lord to return at any moment, and that gives him motivation to be found "doing" his lord's service faithfully. This would speak of having the imminence of the Lord's coming (the Rapture) before our hearts. If it is bright before our souls, we will be motivated to live faithfully for Him in the time of His absence.

The faithful servant rises up and gives "meat in due season" to those in the house. This would speak of being busy in the ministry of the Word of God. Dear fellow Christian, this is what God wants us to be doing in the time of the Lord's absence. But we won't be able to give people spiritual food (the truth) if we haven't first gathered it ourselves! This means that we need to be spending time in the Word gathering food for our souls so that we will be able to give it to others.

Notice also, it says that he gave food to his lord's household "in due season." This speaks of being in communion with the Lord to know when to give out what we have gathered. It's one thing to have meat, and another thing to have the wisdom to know when and how to give it out. The Lord adds that there would be a reward for such faithfulness. There are going to be places of rule given in the kingdom to those who have served in this way (Luke 19:16-19). This will happen at the Lord's Appearing.

Then the Lord Jesus speaks of the "evil servant" in the time of his lord's absence. We can see from the last verse of the chapter (vs. 51) that such a person is a mere professor and is not saved at all. He is in the house taking the place of a servant but is not a real believer. There are many like this in Christendom today who have made a profession in some way of being a Christian, but they've never been saved.

Three things characterize the evil servant. First, he says, "My lord delayeth His coming" (vs. 48). Notice, he doesn't deny the fact of his lord's coming, but rather, the nearness of it. He doesn't say, "My lord is not coming." He says, "It's a long time away!" This depicts those who hold the truth of the Lord's coming as a doctrine, but their lives show that they've given up the imminence of it. Today many evil servants have gone farther than this and have given up the doctrine of the Lord's coming (the Rapture). They will tell you plainly that the Lord is not coming—that it's a mistake to think that He is!

Secondly, the evil servant begins to "smite his fellowservants" (vs. 49). This depicts a judgmental spirit that would attack the Lord's servants, perhaps being critical of them in their work. He becomes the proverbial "arm-chair critic." This kind of a person is full of criticisms of his brethren but does little or nothing himself.

Thirdly, he would "eat and drink with the drunken" (vs. 49). This speaks of the breakdown of separation. He goes on "with" worldly people who are "drunken" with this world's pleasures.

These three things characterize the false profession in Christianity today. It is sad, but many dear Christians are marked by these same things, even though they are true believers. This shows that we can be affected by the great apostasy. Christians can never apostatise—which is to abandon the profession of Christianity altogether—but they can be affected by the current of apostasy and let go of certain doctrines and practises. For instance, many real Christians have swallowed the teaching that the Rapture is a false idea. The New Covenant theologians, for example, teach this—and most of them are true believers.

PARABLE II—Watchfulness in the Time of Christ's Absence

(Matthew 25:1–13)

In this second parable, which has to do with the "ten virgins," the Lord speaks of His coming as a "Bridegroom." It emphasizes the need for watchfulness during the time of His absence. Notice again, it does not mention His coming as the Son of Man. It's in verse 13 in the KJV, but the last six words of that verse are really not in the original MSS, as most other translations show. The aspect of the Lord's coming here, is again, the Rapture.

In this parable, the Lord mentions four distinct periods that would mark the time of His absence in this present day. These four periods span the whole period of the Church's history on earth:

They "went forth" (vs. 1). This refers to the apostles' day when the saints first went forth outside the camp of Judaism (Heb. 13:13) and from their worldly associations (1 Thess. 1:9).

"They all slumbered and slept" (vs. 5). This would mark another period in the Church's history when the whole Christian profession fell asleep as to the Lord's coming. This happened shortly after the apostles' day and carried on right through the centuries into the dark ages.

"At midnight there was a cry" (vs. 6). This refers to a revival that took place in the 1800's when there was an awakening in the Christian world to the fact that the Lord Jesus was coming again.

"The Bridegroom came" (vs. 10). This is the moment that I hope we are all looking for—the Rapture! It will close the Church's history in this world, and we'll be taken home to heaven.

Let's look at the first couple of verses. There are three things here that characterized the early Church. First of all, it says that they "took their lamps." A lamp speaks of profession. It refers to the bright testimony that they had before the world in that day. There was a manifestation of their faith. Then it says that they "went forth." This speaks of separation. They went outside the camp of Judaism and out from their worldly associations (Heb. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:9). Lastly, it says, "to meet the Bridegroom." This speaks of expectation. They had the hope of the Lord's coming before their souls. There was manifestation, separation, and expectation. That's what marked the early church.

There were ten virgins, but “five of them were wise and five were foolish” (Matt. 25:2). The wise had “oil” in their lamps, but the others didn’t. This means that some were saved and sealed with the Spirit, and others were not. Again, this depicts the mixture that exists in the Christian profession today.

That happy state didn’t last long; they all “slumbered and slept” (vs. 5). The Church got tired of looking for the Lord to come and became affected by the world, and this caused it to lose sight of His coming. Note, there was first slumbering and then sleeping. This shows that it was a state that came over the Church gradually.

Then, in the 1800s, a sovereign work of God took place whereby there was a revival of the truth of the Lord’s coming and many related truths. “At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh.” People awoke to the fact that the Lord was coming! There was quite a stir among Christians, and many began to look into prophecy. As they looked into the subject of future events in the Word of God, they learned that the Church formed no part of prophecy. They learned that the Church didn’t belong to the earth but that it had a heavenly calling and destiny. They then realized that the Lord could come at any moment and take the Church to heaven, as there was nothing in prophecy that first had to be fulfilled.

The word, “cometh” is not in the earliest MSS. It has been put into the text by the KJV translators, but really, it has no business being there. It makes His coming more of an event. The thought, rather, is that a PERSON is coming—the Lord Jesus Christ! It should simply read, “Behold, the Bridegroom!” This portrays the spirit of things at that time more accurately. People were not just looking for an event to happen; they were looking for the Lord to come! The call also exhorted them, “Go ye out to meet Him.” This means that there was an exercise to revert to their original position—outside the camp and the world. They left every ecclesiastical and secular association that they had been connected with and waited for the coming of the Lord.

In the next few verses we see what happened at that time in the Christian profession at large. There was quite a stir to get ready to meet the Bridegroom. Many were discovered to have “no oil” in their lamps. The exhortation of “the wise” to “the foolish” was to go and “buy” it from “them that sell.” This refers to the great gospel effort that marked that day. The gospel was preached freely, and many were saved. Buying would speak of having a personal transaction of faith with “them” (the Father and the Son), whereby they would be saved and sealed with the indwelling Spirit of God, of which the “oil” speaks (compare Isaiah 55:1-3). The foolish were told, “Buy for yourselves.” Everyone who gets saved must have a personal transaction with the Lord Himself. It is not possible to buy it for another person.

Then came that happy but solemn moment when the Bridegroom came, and “they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (vs. 10). Those who were foolish and unprepared when the Bridegroom came missed out. Afterward they came and cried, “Lord, Lord, open to us,” but it was too late! (vs. 11) Five times we get the expression in Scripture, “Lord, Lord,” and it always refers to empty profession (Matt. 7:21; 7:22; 25:11; Luke 6:46; 13:25).

PARABLE III—Usefulness in the Time of Christ’s Absence

(Matthew 25:14–30)

We have had faithfulness in the first parable, and then we’ve had watchfulness in the second parable; now we have usefulness of service in the third parable. We want to be faithful, watchful, and useful during the time of Christ’s absence. The first parable brought before us service in the house of God; whereas this parable has to do with service outside the house.

This parable has to do with the exercise of our gift during the time of the Lord’s absence. The “man travelling into a far country” would be the Lord Himself who has departed from this scene through death and ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). In departing, the man gave to one “five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability” (vs. 15). They were to trade with these in his absence, and when he returned, he would take account of their labour.

There are two things here: “ability” and “talents.” “Ability” is our natural intellectual powers that God gives and forms in our personalities right from birth. God providentially singles out and fashions each one of us in this way long before we are even saved.

When we are saved, we are given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit so that we might be able to serve the Lord in the place in which He has put us. The “talents” speak of these spiritual gifts. It might be a gift for evangelism, shepherding, or teaching (Eph. 4:11), or perhaps something less distinctive like helps (1 Cor. 12:28) or showing mercy (Rom. 12:8).

We see the sovereign wisdom of the Master here in giving gifts that match the servant’s natural abilities. For example, someone who is naturally out-going, who likes to be with people and is talkative, could be given the gift of the evangelist. It is not likely that the Lord would give such a gift to someone who is naturally reticent and lacks communication skills.

If we turn over to 1 Peter 4:10-11, we’ll see this distinction again. “As every man hath received the [a] gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to Whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

I mention this because Christians today do not understand what gift is and confuse it with natural ability. Take for instance, someone who is able to throw a football a mile. People will tell him, “Oh, that’s your gift!” So, he gets the idea that he is called to go into professional football to serve the Lord. Perhaps some other Christian is able to sing or play music very well. People will tell him, “That’s your gift, brother!” So, he is encouraged to go into the entertainment field to pursue a career. The result is that we see Christians involved in all sorts of endeavours that I don’t believe the Lord would lead them into. We have Christians in Hollywood; we have Christians in the Super Bowl, etc. They are only helping on the world system in its purpose of keeping people distracted and entertained as they go on their way to hell!

How could a right-minded Christian musician play in a dance band that is helping people to flitter away an evening dancing merrily into hell? It’s an incredible thing; real believers are being reduced to entertain the man of the world as he steps mindlessly into a lost eternity! It reminds me of Gehazi who was found to be covetous and was dismissed from his service for the Lord (2 Kings 5:20-27). We find him later entertaining the godless king with stories of the amazing things that Elisha had done! (2 Kings 8:4-5) It’s happening today in the Christian

world, and it’s because of bad teaching, and perhaps a lot of self-will and glory seeking too.

The faithful servants went and “traded” with their talents and “gained” more (vss. 16-17). This does not mean that if we serve the Lord with our gift that we’ll get another gift, but that our gift must be cultivated. The more we exercise our gift the stronger it will grow and the more effective we will be in our service.

Then it says, “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh.” The “long time” would speak of the whole period of the Lord’s absence—the Church period of some 2000 years. The master’s coming back would, of course, speak of the Lord’s coming—the Rapture. Then, the servants were assembled and held accountable. This speaks of the judgment seat of Christ when our lives and service will pass into review, and we will be rewarded accordingly (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10). The great thing to see here is that the Lord does not reward according to gift. That wouldn’t be fair since some received more talents than others in the first place. They are rewarded according to their willingness and diligence to use what was put into their hands. If they multiplied what they received, they would be rewarded accordingly. Each one who worked according to the ability that the Lord gave received His commendation, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (vss. 21, 23).

The man who “hid” his talent in the earth answers to a mere false professor in Christianity. We can see that he was not saved because he was cast into “outer darkness” (vs. 30). A difficulty that some have with this is that he had been given a talent (a gift). But the truth is that God gives certain outward manifestations of the Spirit to all who are in the house of God, whether they are saved or not. In that sense, all in the house of God have been given a gift. Remember the Spirit of God today dwells, not only in believers, but also among them (John 14:17: Acts 2:1-4). The Spirit of God is in the house of God where there is a mixture of believers and unbelievers; and mere professors who are there partake of the Spirit of God in an outward way (Heb. 6:4).

The Lord gave an example of one who had a gift, but was not saved, in Matthew 7:21-23. Judas is an example also (Acts 1:17). He preached, cast out demons, and healed people, but was lost (John 6:70; Acts 1:25). The master of the house holds such people responsible because they have taken the ground of being a servant by their profession, and are viewed as such, even though they are not saved. The greatest judgment will belong to those who have had the greatest degree of light and privilege but have not responded to it! (Luke 12:47-48)

The Olivet Discourse: Matthew 24-25, Lord's Coming in Relation to Israel, The

(Matthew 24:4-44)

The Lord takes up His coming in relation to Israel first, because Matthew’s gospel is written particularly to the Jew. His coming in relation to Israel has to do with His Appearing after the Great Tribulation, and not the Rapture. He addresses His disciples as though they were the remnant of Jews that will be on earth in that coming day. They, therefore, morally occupy the place of the disciples of that time. Isaiah 8:15-16 says, “Many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples.” The mass of the Jews in that day will be snared by the deceptions of the Antichrist and will believe his lie, but a remnant (“My disciples”) will bow to the law and will bear witness for Him in that day.

The Appearing of the Lord will be for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant from their persecutors and for the restoration of the nation. There are, however, certain issues between the Lord and His earthly people that must be resolved first; namely, the Jew’s guilt of rejecting and crucifying Him 2000 years ago. The tribulation period that will precede the Appearing of Christ will be used of God to humble them and bring them to the point where they will own their national blood-guiltiness in His crucifixion, whereby they will receive Him as their Messiah. This, however, will be accomplished in a believing remnant of the nation only; the mass of the people (apostates) will be destroyed by their oppressors—namely, the King of the North (Dan. 11:40-45).

In this section, there are three groups of signs. The first group pertains to things that will take place in the first half of Daniel’s prophetic week of seven years. The second group of signs pertains to the onslaught and presence of the Great Tribulation, which is the latter half of Daniel’s prophetic week. The third group of signs has to do with what will happen immediately after the Great Tribulation, when the Lord appears.

Signs That Pertain to Things Before the Great Tribulation

(Matthew 24:4–14)

Before speaking of His Appearing in verses 27-28, the Lord gave the disciples various details that would mark the tribulation period in general.

There are not many passages of Scripture that speak of the first half of the prophetic week. The Lord calls this period “the beginning of sorrows” (vs. 8). There is the first book of the Psalms (1-41), these verses in Matthew 24, and also Revelation 6. While the Lord’s remarks in this section pertain predominately to the first half of the week, they are general enough in character to apply to the whole period of seven years.

A. C. Brown pointed out that the details given here by the Lord correlate to “the seals” in the sixth chapter of Revelation, which also has to do with the first half of the prophetic week. Verses 4-5 are, perhaps, an allusion to the 1st seal when there will be an effort by Papal Rome (the rider on the “white horse”) to deceive the masses into forming a western confederacy of ten nations—sometimes called the revival of the Roman Empire (Dan. 2:40-45; 7:7-8), or the Beast (Rev. 17:1-13).

Verses 6-7 refer to the 2nd seal of Revelation 6, which speaks of the time when peace will be taken from the earth, and when there will be “wars and rumours of wars.” Verse 7b correlates with the 3rd seal of Revelation 6 when there will be widespread “famines” in the earth. Verse 7c correlates with the 4th seal when there will be devastating “pestilences” (diseases) whereby many will die.

Verses 9-14 answer to the 5th seal in Revelation 6 when martyrdom will abound. The Lord says here, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name’s sake.” Among the Jews in the land of Israel in that coming day, a

remnant will distinguish itself from the mass by having real faith in God. They will fear God and tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2). The remnant will preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, first in the land of Israel, and then throughout the world. It will be a message announcing the Jewish Messiah who is coming to set the world right and to establish His kingdom. They will preach it to their fellow Jews (Psa. 95) and to the Gentiles (Psa. 96). The corrupt religious system of Rome that will control the newly formed western confederacy of nations will be incensed at this effort. They will see these Jewish evangelists as revolutionists who are trying to undermine their control of the empire by propagating doctrines of another power that is going to come and overthrow them. Persecution will result as the empire attempts to purge itself of these evangelists.

Having said this, I should mention that the godly Jewish remnant of that day will consist of two parts: the preserved portion, and the martyred portion. Many of these Jews will be miraculously preserved during the great persecution and will "endure unto the end" of the age—which will be the end of the Great Tribulation (vs. 13). Then they will enter the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth. The other portion of the remnant will be martyred for their testimony (Rev. 6:9-11). They will be raised at the end of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 14:13) to receive a better portion with the glorified saints in the heavens (Rev. 20:4).

Signs That Pertain to the Onslaught and Presence of the Great Tribulation

(Matthew 24:15–28)

As the middle of the prophetic week nears there are going to be signs that indicate the onslaught of the Great Tribulation—the latter half of Daniel's prophetic week. The Lord speaks of this group of signs next.

We learn from Revelation 12 that the first war in prophecy will be a "war in heaven." Michael and his angels will overthrow Satan and cast him and his emissaries out onto the earth (Rev. 12:7-9). Knowing that his time is short and that the sphere of his operation is restricted, Satan will energize two men in particular, who will carry out his purposes on earth. They are the "Beast" (the same name as the empire) or "the little horn" (Rev. 13:4-7; Dan. 7:8, 19-25), and the "Antichrist" or "the false prophet" – Rev. 13:11-18; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 19:20). The first beast will be involved in the political affairs of the empire, and the second will be involved with religious affairs.

They will cause an upheaval in the western government (Rev. 6:12-17 – the 6th seal), and the corrupt Roman Church that will have ruled over the empire during the first 3½ years will be overthrown (Rev. 17:16-18). The Beast or Little Horn will take over as a dictator. To unify the empire under his hand, he, with the help of the Antichrist, will cause a cessation of all worship in Judaism—which will be a breech of the terms of the covenant that the empire will have made with the Jews (Dan. 9:27). The practise of Christianity (corrupted by the false church) will also be prohibited (Rev. 17:16). This will make way for a new religion—the worship of the Beast and its image (Rev. 13:4, 15). The Antichrist will set up an image in the temple at Jerusalem called "the abomination that maketh desolate" (Dan. 12:11). The Lord speaks of this in the 15th verse of our chapter, calling it "the abomination of desolation." Everyone in the empire will be forced to worship the Beast and its image!

The apostate mass of the Jews will comply with the new regulations, for they will have little interest in the tedious procedures of Jewish ceremony and worship anyway. They will see the Antichrist as their long looked-for Messiah, and he will reign over them as their "king" (John 5:43; Dan. 11:36-38). At this time God will send a "strong delusion" through the propaganda of the Antichrist to deceive the western world that has rejected "the love of the truth"—the gospel of the grace of God (2 Thess. 2:8-12; Rev. 9:1-12). The apostates, both in the Christian world and in the land of Israel, will believe the lie and be damned.

The remnant, however, will see the Antichrist as he truly is—as an impostor, and will not bow to the image, nor receive its mark in their hand or forehead. This will make existence for them very difficult, for without the mark of the Beast they will not be able to buy or sell anything (Rev. 13:16-17). The authorities will implement a law for the arrest and execution of all who will not conform to the edicts of the new regime. As a result of their reluctance to go along with the corruption, the remnant will be hunted like animals, and many will be killed as the authorities attempt to purge the empire of non-conformists. This will be a far worse persecution than what Rome will inflict during the first half of the week. The Jewish remnant in the latter 3½ years of the prophetic week will be persecuted beyond measure—greater than in the days of the Holocaust!

We see here the Lord's tender care for the remnant of that day. He gives a sign that, if acted on, will preserve them in the time of the great purge. He says that when "the abomination of desolation" is set up in the temple, they are to "flee into the mountains" for safety (vss. 16-20). They are not to turn back, even to get their coats, but are to run for their lives! There are at least seven different directions they will go (Matt. 24:14; 24:16; Psa. 42:6; Rev. 12:14-17; Isa. 16:3-5; Matt. 10:23; Rev. 11:1-13).

Verses 16-26 indicate that the remnant will be subjected to a two-fold trial at that time. Firstly, they will face a physical trial of persecution. Their lives will literally be in jeopardy every day (vss. 16-21). Secondly, they will face a spiritual trial of seduction (vss. 22-26). Many "false Christs, and false prophets" will arise who will show "great signs and wonders." When they see these things, they are to be a sign to them that such things are false, and not to be believed.

This two-fold trial is also mentioned in Revelation 12. "The dragon" (Satan) will let out of his mouth "a flood" in an effort to cause the believing remnant to be "carried away" by it (Rev. 12:13-15). This is a reference to the flood of apostasy that will be propagated by the Antichrist in those days—the spiritual trial of seduction. The dragon will also "make war with the remnant" (Rev. 12:17). This answers to the physical trial of persecution.

In verses 27-28 of our chapter, the Lord goes on to say that His coming at the end of the Great Tribulation (the Appearing) will be a public manifestation. It will not be some private thing done in "secret chambers" as the deceivers of that day will claim. Notice, this is "the coming of the Son of Man." It is not the Rapture. Whenever you get the Lord's coming spoken of as the coming of the Son of Man, it is not in connection with the Church. In fact, that title is not even used in the epistles where we have the unfolding of the Christian position and practise. "The Son of Man" is a title that the Lord takes when He is rejected by His people—Israel. It is only used in Scripture in relation to Israel and the Gentile nations of the earth and refers to His coming in judgment.

The Lord adds, "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles [vultures] be gathered." In this, the Lord tells us where His coming in judgment will take place. It will be where the "carcase" is. A carcase, as you know, is a dead body—a body with no life in it. The Lord uses this as a figure to describe the apostate part of the nation who are but a lifeless body of persons in the land of Israel. They will have no spiritual

life toward God. The “vultures” are the confederated Arab nations under the King of the North that will descend upon the land and wipe out the apostate Jews (Dan. 11:40-45; Psa. 79:1-3). It will be a ten-nation confederacy of Islamic peoples (Psa. 83:5-8). This confederacy should not to be confused with the ten-nation confederacy in the west under the Beast (Rev. 13:1-2).

So, what the Lord is saying here, is that in the very place where these nations will descend upon the apostate Jews (i.e. the land of Israel) He will come back in judgment as the Son of Man. God will use these nations as His instrument to execute judgment upon the apostate mass of Jews who have rejected Christ and received the Antichrist.

Signs Pertaining to Things Immediately After the Great Tribulation

(Matthew 24:29–31)

In verses 29–44, we have the third group of signs. These pertain to things immediately after the Great Tribulation. Verse 29 describes the condition of things that will exist in the land as a result of the work of the Antichrist. The “sun,” the “moon,” and the “stars” are figures used to describe the normal sources of spiritual light. But in that day, they will not shine into the hearts of men (Rev. 6:12-13; 9:2; 16:10; Isa. 5:30; 8:22; 13:10; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15). Antichrist’s delusions will have left the people virtually without spiritual light—i.e. the knowledge of God. They will be enveloped in darkness (Isa. 8:21-22).

“Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.” The Lord is going to come out of heaven in judgment as the Son of Man. The words, “in [on] the clouds of heaven,” indicate that it will be a public manifestation. His appearing at this time will be for the restoration of Israel.

Two Phases of Israel’s Restoration

Israel’s restoration will take place in two phases:

The First Phase

First, “the tribes of the earth [land]” will “mourn” in repentance. This refers to the two tribes—the remnant of the Jews. They will repent when they see the Lord and understand that He is the One whom they, as a nation, crucified (Zech. 12:10-14; Isa. 53:1-12). They will receive Him as their Messiah (Psa. 110:3). These “tribes” are not the ten tribes that are hidden in the four corners of the earth. We know this because it’s speaking of the tribes in “the land,” and the ten tribes will not be in the land when the Lord appears.

The “earth,” here, should be translated “land.” Prophecy distinguishes three spheres of God’s dealings on this planet. First, there is “the land” which is the land of Israel, not just what they presently occupy, but what was promised to Abram. (Walter Scott said that even in the time of David and Solomon the children of Israel only occupied 10% of what God gave them! They were given approximately 300,000 square miles, but they only took about 30,000.) Then, secondly, there is “the earth.” This is sometimes called the prophetic earth, and refers to a broader sphere, taking in not only the land of Israel, but also Western Europe—perhaps even America. Then thirdly, there is “the world,” which is broader yet, and includes the area beyond the prophetic earth. An interesting reference that shows the difference between these three is Isaiah 26:9-10, “When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.” (See also Isaiah 18:2-3.)

The Second Phase

The second phase of Israel’s restoration has to do with the ten tribes. They too need to be restored to the Lord—but for different reasons. The two tribes are guilty of rejecting Christ and receiving the Antichrist; the ten tribes are guilty of neither. The ten tribes were not in the land of Israel at the time of the Lord’s first coming 2000 years ago and cannot be held responsible for His rejection. Nor will they be in the land during the Great Tribulation when the Jews receive the Antichrist. The ten tribes, however, are guilty of breaking the law, and the consequences are that they have been “removed into all the kingdoms of the earth” (Deut. 28:25). (The Jews have broken the law too, and have been scattered also, but they will return to the land at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period with the help of some sea-faring power—probably the newly revived ten-nation confederacy in the west. (See Isaiah 18.)

Verse 31 tells us that there will be “a sound of a trumpet” that will go out over the world, and the ten tribes that are now lost, or hidden, will be exercised to return to the land of Israel. It is unlikely that this will be a literal trumpet call, but that some signal will awaken the ten tribes. This will happen shortly after the Lord will have appeared. The Lord will use “His angels” to aid the ten tribes to return to their homeland. Some Gentile nations who know that Israel’s Messiah has returned in power and glory will volunteer aid for their return also (Isa. 11:12; 14:1-2; 49:9-23; 60:8-9). They will enter the land after being sifted by the Lord at the border (Ezek. 11:10; 20:34-38) and will come into the knowledge of Christ’s finished work on the cross at that time (Zech. 13:6).

The Fig Tree

(Vss. 32-35)

In verses 32-35, the Lord gives another sign having to do with the restoration of Israel in a parable of “the fig tree.” The fig tree, in Scripture, is a symbol of the nation of Israel. He says that when they see it putting forth “leaves,” then they should understand that the “summer”—the time of the bearing of fruit—is near. Through these many long years of Israel’s diaspora there has been no real fruit for God from that nation. They will bear fruit only after the Lord comes and they are restored to Him.

The Lord explains that there would first be a time of putting forth of “leaves” without fruit. In other words, the nation would make a profession of life, but there would be no fruit for God in it. This is what will go on in the early part of the tribulation period when the Jews return en masse to their homeland (Isa. 18:1-4). They will return in unbelief of the Lord Jesus Christ being their true Messiah and will build up the nation by their own means (Psa. 73:1-12). In the land today, some 4-5 million Jews have already returned; it is a precursor to the fig tree putting forth its leaves—a foreshadow, but not a fulfillment of these things

The Lord said that when “all these things” would happen (the various signs we have already looked at earlier in this chapter), they would know that the nation soon would be restored to the Lord and begin bearing fruit for Him again.

(Vss. 36-44)

Verses 36-44 fill out further details having to do with the Lord’s Appearing as the Son of Man. He says, “That day and hour knoweth no man.” This has often been mistakenly applied to the Rapture, but the Lord was referring to His Appearing—“the coming of the Son of Man.” The judgment in Noah’s day is brought in to illustrate this point. It was the wicked in that day who were taken away from the earth in judgment by the flood, while the righteous (i.e. Noah) lived on. This is what will happen when the Lord appears in judgment. The angels will go out over the prophetic earth and “sever the wicked from among the just” (Matt. 13:38-43, 49-50). The Lord said, “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” Those who are “taken” are taken out of the earth in judgment. The others are left behind to enter the kingdom. At the Rapture it will be quite the opposite; the believers will be taken away from the earth to heaven, and the unbelievers will be left behind on earth.

His Angels in a Two-Fold Work

When the Lord appears, He will dispatch His angels in a two-fold work; one will be for blessing, and the other for judgment. Some of the angels will go out over the world and gather the ten tribes back into the land of Israel to be blessed with the two tribes—the Jews (Matt. 24:31) Other angels will go out over the prophetic earth and execute this judgment of which we speak.

Those who will be “taken” out in judgment will be cast directly into the lake of fire alive (Matt. 13:42, 50-51). They will not die and go into the separate (disembodied) state and wait to be raised at the Great White Throne to be judged. At the Appearing of Christ, they will come face to face with the Judge Himself and will not need a further judgment date. The first ones to be cast into the lake of fire at this time are the Beast and the false prophet—the Antichrist (Rev. 19:20). But those in the prophetic earth who have rejected the gospel of the grace of God and received the mark of the Beast will also be cast in there! They wanted the personal Beast and the Antichrist, thinking that they were saviours (1 Thess. 5:2-3), and in the end, God orders it that they share in their judgment.

Three Classes of People Leave Earth Without Dying

Scripture indicates that there will actually be three classes of persons that will leave this world without dying! First, there are those of the Church who are “alive and remain” at the time of the Lord’s coming—the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17). Then there are those who will be cast directly into the lake of fire at the Appearing of Christ (Matt. 13:42, 50-51). And lastly, after the Millennium has run its course, there will be those who will be transferred to the “new heavens and new earth” without seeing death (1 Cor. 15:26; 2 Peter 3:13).

In verses 42-44 of Matthew 24, the disciples are told to “watch” and be “ready.” The exhortation to watch is given 18 times in the New Testament. The Jewish remnant will need to watch. You say, “Watch for what?” They are to watch for the signs that will precede the coming of “the Son of Man” and thus, to know that His coming is near. It is likened to the breaking in of a “thief” because it will be a time of judgment. Five times in the New Testament the Lord’s coming is spoken of as the coming of a thief; it always refers to His Appearing and never the Rapture (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

Outline of the Book of Revelation, Tribulation: Three Scriptures Wrongly Used

To Support The Error That The Church Will Go Through The Tribulation

In an effort to be a help to any who may have difficulty on this point, we have selected the three main Scriptures that have led some to erroneously believe the Church will go through the Tribulation. In each of these passages our desire is to show, with the Lord's help, how the error has occurred and what the true meaning of the passage is. We believe that most of the confusion on this point has arisen from Christians not carefully and prayerfully reading the Scriptures.

1) 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3

"Be not shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." This has been taken to mean that the day the Lord comes for His Church (the Rapture), will not happen until the Antichrist and the falling away in the Great Tribulation has happened.

This is in error for two reasons: first, it is a mistake to suppose that "the day of the Lord" is the Rapture. Scripture does not say so. There are about 20 references to "the day of the Lord" in the Word of God. Some of them refer to its commencement at the appearing of Christ (2 Thess. 2:2, 2 Peter 3:10, 1 Thess. 5:2, etc.). Other references are a warning of it being "at hand," signaled by the attack of the King of the North, which will take place just prior to its commencement (Joel 1:15; 2:11; Zeph. 1:7-20; Zech. 14:1-2, etc.). But there are none that refer to "the day of the Lord" as the Rapture! It is an assumption to say so, and it stems from not carefully searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

"The day of the Lord" is a day of judgment that begins at the Appearing of Christ (2 Peter 3:4, 8-10); it does not begin at the Rapture. The Tribulation begins after the Rapture, but the day of the Lord begins after the Appearing of Christ, which is some seven years later than the Rapture. "The day of the Lord" is the time when Christ will publicly intervene upon the ways of man on earth in judgment, asserting His universal power and authority over all the earth. It will extend for 1000 years (2 Peter 3:8-10), which will be the Millennium. The Rapture is never looked at as a day of judgment for this world, but rather, a time when the Bridegroom and the bride are joyfully united.

Understanding these simple and basic things about "the day of the Lord," we can see at once that Paul was not even speaking about the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3. He was showing the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord" and its attending judgments could not be presently upon them, for the Antichrist and the great falling away of professing Christendom had to happen first. Sad to say, false teachers are still propounding the same error that was bothering the Thessalonians. They are upsetting Christians by telling them that they must

prepare for the Tribulation, because the Church is going to go through it. And, ironically, they are using the same three methods to propound their error as the false teachers were doing in Paul's day!

- First, "by spirit" (vs. 2)—the false teachers claimed they had received it through a spiritual revelation given to them.
- Secondly, "by word" (vs. 2)—the false teachers were misapplying Old Testament Scriptures to support their erroneous teaching.
- Then lastly, "by letter as from us" (vs. 2)—they actually had gone so far as to produce an epistle with their erroneous ideas in it, and claimed it was from Paul.

So it is today, those who teach this erroneous doctrine often claim that they have received it through some special revelation from God, and they are also trying to use the Scriptures to support it—they are even taking Paul's ministry (such as this passage) and teaching that Paul taught that the Church must go through the Tribulation.

Another reason why this application is in error is that it destroys the imminence of the Lord's coming. The Lord's coming (the Rapture) is always presented in Scripture as something that could take place at any moment. Those who think the Church must go through the Tribulation scoff at the idea that He could come today, because they think it is direct violation of their interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3. However, Paul and the other apostles laboured to put the nearness of the Lord's coming before the Church so that it would be a present hope. Are these people saying that the apostles were wrong in doing that? Paul said, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21). He also said, "For yet a very little while and He that shall come will come and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37). And, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom. 13:11-12). And again, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). In this last verse, Paul put himself among the number who were looking for the Lord to come, saying, "we." (See also 1 Cor. 15:51-52 — "we") It was something he hoped for even back in those early days of the Church. James too, said, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:7). Peter said, "The end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). John said, "Little children, it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). This shows that the apostles ministered in such a way as to set the Lord's coming before the saints as a present hope.

To teach that certain events must take place before the Lord will come, such as, the rise of Antichrist and the Tribulation horrors, would be a direct contradiction to the teaching of the apostles, and it destroys the imminence of the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

Taking this "blessed hope" away from the Church is to cause it to settle down in this world—and this is just what has happened to a large extent. It is essentially saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Matt. 24:48). For this very reason, the Lord Jesus Himself never told us when He would return. But He did say, "Surely, I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20).

2) Revelation 11:15

Another Scripture adduced to prove the Church must pass through the Tribulation is Revelation 11:15. "The seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." This verse shows that when the seventh and last trumpet is blown at the end of the Great Tribulation, the Lord will appear and take possession of the kingdoms of this world through judgment. It has been supposed that this is "the last trump" spoken of at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). Therefore, the Church will be on earth to pass through that hour of trial as described in Revelation 6-11 which precede the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15. It is taught that the Church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, just as He comes out of heaven to judge the world.

This interpretation is very problematic, because the Word of God teaches that a number of things must happen between the time the Church is taken up to heaven to when the Lord comes back out of heaven to judge the world, as Revelation 11:15 shows. It would be impossible for all those things to happen in that short moment of time that this interpretation allows. After taking His people into heaven at the Rapture, the Lord will cause them to sit down at His table where He will serve them heavenly happiness and joy unspeakable (Luke 12:37). Then, the judgment seat of Christ will be set and the believers' lives will pass into review and be rewarded accordingly (2 Cor. 5:10, etc.). The saints will also have a time of praising God and the Lord Jesus Christ around the throne in heaven. At that time they will cast their crowns at His feet in humble adoration of Him (Rev. 4-5). Then, the marriage of the Lamb will take place in heaven, which will be followed by the marriage supper and the many guests of heaven (the friends of the Bridegroom) attending it (Rev. 19:7-8). These things all must take place after the Lord takes His people to heaven at the Rapture, and before He returns at His Appearing. These things could not possibly happen if the saints were taken up in the air and then immediately brought back down again with the Lord at His Appearing.

3) Matthew 24:29-31

Another Scripture that is used is Matthew 24:29-31. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of the trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds." It is thought that the coming of the Lord in this passage refers to the Rapture. Consequently, they mistakenly fix the time of the Rapture as being "immediately after the tribulation." They conclude that the Church, therefore, will go through the Tribulation.

The problem here is that people are confusing the Rapture and the Appearing. Some of the main differences are:

- The coming of the Son of Man is never referred to as the Rapture. The Rapture is the Lord's coming for His own: the coming of the Son of Man is the Lord's coming with His own at His appearing. The rapture is a mystery not made known until it was revealed through the apostle Paul. (1 Cor. 15:51-52) The coming of the Son of man is something that was known by the Old Testament saints because the prophets spoke of it. (Dan. 7:13-14) The Son of man is a title that the Lord takes when He comes to judge the world. At the rapture the Lord is not coming to judge the world, but to take His bride to heaven. The fact that the title of the Son of Man is used in Matthew 24:29-31 ought to show us that His coming there is not the rapture.

- At the Rapture, the Lord does not send His angels to gather His saints [the bride] as these verses speak; He comes to take her Himself! (1 Thess. 4:16, 2 The s. 2:1).

- The trumpet sounded here is not the trump of God that takes place at the rapture, but that of Isaiah 27:13, Psalm 81:3, etc.

- The elect here are not the church, but the elect of Israel. (Mt. 24:24, Isa. 45:4, 65:9, Rev. 7:1-8, Rom. 11:28, etc.)

The Partial Rapture Idea

Although some Christians believe in the idea of a partial rapture, it is so absurd that it is not necessary that we comment on it. Could we imagine the Lord taking only part of His bride to heaven? What would He do in heaven with half a bride? How could the marriage of the Lamb take place with only half the bride present? Anyway, what Scripture is there for it?

Let us “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

Questions Young People Ask Regarding The True Ground Of Gathering: Good Questions That Deserve Good Answers, Chapter Three: Why Are Those Gathered to the Lord's Name Such a Small Testimony?

QUESTION:

Matthew 18:20 and Luke 22:7-10 indicate that the Spirit of God is the divine Gatherer; He leads Christians to the place of God’s appointment. If the position of the so-called “gathered saints” is that ground, why are there so few there? Either there is a problem with the Spirit’s power to gather, or, maybe this is not the place to which He is leading people.

The problem here is that we have made the numerical size of a company of Christians the measure of their ecclesiological correctness. That is, if there are a lot of people in a certain Christian fellowship, then that must be a place to which the Spirit of God is leading people. This, however, is a wrong criterion on which to judge the true ground of gathering. Wherever did we get the idea that big was right? It is a worldly principle; we see it in every sphere of life in the world—in business, in sports, etc. However, it shouldn't have any place in the Church of God.

We do not read in Scripture that there would be large groups of faithful believers in the last days. The Bible indicates quite the opposite. In the last days of the Christian testimony we are told that evil men will increase in number—not faithful men (2 Tim. 3:13). This is the main difference between the two epistles written to Timothy. In 1 Timothy the mass in the Christian profession is seen going on well, but there were a few individuals who had turned aside into error. But in 2 Timothy (which describes the last days) it is just the reverse; the mass is seen as having gone bad and there are relatively few individuals going on faithfully. In fact, in Scripture, the only groups that are said to be large in the last days are heretical movements! For instance, 2 Peter 2:1-2 says, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways.” I am not saying that all large groups of Christians today in evangelical Christendom are evil and that they teach damnable doctrines. We are simply pointing out that if large numbers are the sign of being right, then the Catholic Church would be the right place that God approves of—they have more people than any other denomination! Surely, we can’t be so naive as to think that having large numbers equates having to God's approval.

God is not as occupied with the increase of numbers as we are. Have you noticed in Scripture that when numbers are mentioned that it always says, “About three thousand,” or “about five thousand”? (Acts 2:41; 4:4) Even when counting a small number, it says, “About twelve” (Acts 19:7). God is showing us that we shouldn’t be occupied with the number of people involved in His testimony—which, by the way, was David’s sin (2 Sam. 24:1).

The often-heard remark is, “Our church is growing.” What is meant is that the number of people in that particular group is getting larger. Now, we all want to see this, but in Scripture, growth is used to denote spiritual development in the soul, not the numerical size of a group of Christians. Suppose I went to a gathering that had 50 believers who came together regularly for worship and ministry, and I saw that there was not much interest there. They were more interested in sports and their houses, etc. While I’m thankful that they were coming together, I go away saying to myself, “I wish there was a little more devotion there.” Then, after a year I come back to the same company of 50 believers, and immediately I see a marked change. They are really keen about the things of God. They are full of questions and stay around after the meetings for fellowship. Their understanding and maturity in the truth has definitely progressed. Though they have not added one person to their number, I could say that they have really grown! This is the way in which growth is spoken of in Scripture.

When we get occupied with numbers, there is always a temptation to compromise principles to bring people in. For instance, we could get more people into our meetings if we advertised that there was going to be a rock band here. But we are not going to do that because we must serve according to the principles of God’s Word if we want the Lord’s approval (2 Tim. 2:5).

I realize that I haven’t answered the question, so let’s look at some Scriptures that will do that.

Answer:

There are many thousands of people who are gathered to the Lord’s name today, but relatively speaking, they are only a few in comparison to the great mass of believers all over the world. This, however, does not mean that they are not meeting on right principles. I believe that there are at least three reasons for the smallness of this testimony.

It is a Remnant Testimony

The first reason why the “gathered saints” are relatively few in number is that it is a day of small things. Zechariah 4:9-10 says, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things?” The times in which Zechariah was called to live were remnant testimony days. At that time, the Lord had allowed His people to be carried away to Assyria (2 Kings 17:6) and to Babylon (2 Kings 24-25), and only a remnant of

them had returned to the divine center in Jerusalem. One of the characteristic features of a remnant testimony is that it is “small”—most of God’s people are viewed as not being among them. We live in remnant testimony days in the Church’s history, and we cannot expect that there will be large numbers gathered to the Lord’s name in the way in which God originally intended before ruin had come in.

I believe that it is extremely important that we understand what is meant by “a remnant testimony”—so let me explain this more thoroughly. A great principle on which God acts, when that which He has committed into the hands of men in testimony fails, is that He reduces its size, strength, glory, and numbers, and carries it on thereafter in a remnant form. He does not identify Himself with that testimony in power and glory as He once did when it was first established. If He were to do that, it would appear before the world as though He condoned its fallen and corrupted state. Instead, He falls back upon His sovereign power and grace to maintain His testimony—but in a remnant form. The word “remnant” means a small part of the whole. Hence, the very nature of such a testimony is smallness in size. If all His people were there to participate in it, it wouldn’t be a remnant. God has acted on this principle in Israel in the past; He will do it again with the Jewish remnant in a coming day; and He is doing it today in the Christian testimony.

To see this principle in God’s Word more clearly, let’s turn to Deuteronomy 12:5-7; “The place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come. And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: and there ye shall eat before the Lord your God.” This clearly shows that God’s original desire for His people Israel was to gather them together for worship at this one place of His choosing, which was Jerusalem.

Now let’s turn to 1 Kings 11:9-13, “And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David My servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen.”

Then, in verses 29-36 it says, “And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (but he shall have one tribe for My servant David’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) because that they have forsaken Me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways, to do that which is right in Mine eyes, and to keep My statutes and My judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David My servant’s sake, whom I chose, because he kept My commandments and My statutes: but I will take the kingdom out of his son’s hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a light alway before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there.”

Then in chapter 12:22-24 it says, “The word of the Lord came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from Me.”

We see from this, that although it was God’s original desire to have all His people gather at Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices (Deut. 12), since failure had come in, He would no longer continue His testimony at His divine center in the power and glory that it once had. Solomon and the children of Israel had failed and had turned from the Lord to idolatry (1 Kings 11:10-11, 33), and this led the Lord to change His ways in regard to them. He would reduce the size, power, and glory of His testimony in Israel and carry it on thereafter in a “remnant.” This is the first time in Scripture that that word is used in connection with the public testimony of God’s people. The “first-time rule” in Bible interpretation is important to observe. That is, when something is first used in Scripture, it usually gives the sense of how it will be used thereafter in other passages. Hence, we do well to pay attention to what is said here. The principle of a remnant testimony is developed in more detail in Ezra and Nehemiah, and in the writings of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; however, I have turned you to this passage in 1 Kings because it sets forth the principle clearly and simply.

The important thing to see here is that there was a marked change in God’s ways when failure came in. He removed ten of the tribes from the divine center and kept only “one tribe” there—a remnant. This is not a contradiction of God’s principles, but a change in His ways when wholesale failure had come in.

Now you might say, “I can see this principle in God’s dealings with Israel in the Old Testament, but can it be applied to those who live in New Testament times? Is there really such a thing as a remnant testimony in the Church?” The answer, unequivocally, is yes. You see it in the passage that we looked at in 2 Timothy 2:19-22. There, God encourages exercised believers to separate from the mixture in the house of God and to retreat to a remnant position “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

But to see this more clearly, turn now to Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. These chapters outline the prophetic history of the Church from its early days, just after the apostles, right down to its last days. If we follow the course of things as depicted in these addresses to the seven churches, we will see a downward course in the Christian testimony, until finally, a point of no recovery is reached, and thereafter, the Lord acts on the principle of a remnant testimony.

In Ephesus, we learn that “the angel of the church” (the responsible leaders) rightly judged all that was inconsistent with the Lord. It says that they would not “bear them which are evil.” But sadly, their heart was not with Him in it (Rev. 2:2-4). In Smyrna, any further slide downward was temporarily stayed by the great persecutions that came upon the Church. The severity of the trial cast them back on the Lord. But in Pergamos, when the times of great persecution were ended, “the angel of the church” began tolerating some who held “the doctrine of Balaam,” which is worldliness and idolatry. The angel was not charged with holding these doctrines, but the Lord found fault with them because they did not denounce the evil, as did the angel at Ephesus.

In Thyatira, a worse condition prevailed; “the angel of the church” allowed the same evil doctrine and practice that was held by some in Pergamos to be taught! (Compare Rev. 2:14 with 2:20) What started out as some holding evil doctrine resulted in many teaching the evil doctrine. This shows that if the holding of evil is not judged, it will lead to the propounding of it. In Thyatira, the teaching of this evil had developed into a system of things called “Jezebel,” which surely answers to Catholicism. In the Middle Ages, that wicked system had such a tyrannical grip on the Church at large, with its strength and organization, that it controlled the angel! Those who were in the place of responsibility had failed to deal with it when they could have, and now it had grown into a monster that controlled them! (Compare Acts 27:14-15. The “Euroclydon”—a great Mediterranean wind—swept over the sailing ship, and the sailors could do nothing but “let her drive.”) The figure of “Jezebel” is aptly used here because that woman not only brought idolatry into Israel formally, but she also controlled and manipulated her husband, king Ahab.

Such being the case of the public state of the Church, where there remained no power to deal with evil, the Lord separated a remnant, saying, “But unto you I say, the rest [remnant]...” He let the mass go (Rev. 2:24). Thereafter, He worked with a remnant that would hear what the Spirit was saying to the churches. Here, we have the word “remnant” used in connection with the Christian testimony. It is significant that the Lord did not put on them “the burden” of setting right the confusion in the Christian testimony in an effort to bring the Church back to where it once was. Instead, He turned their focus forward to His coming, saying, “Hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25).

From that point forward, a marked change in the Lord’s ways with the church is seen. Up to this point, the voice of the Spirit was to the whole Church. “What the Spirit saith unto the churches” preceded the promise to the overcomer in the first three churches. This indicates that the reward to the overcomer was set before the whole Church because the Lord was still dealing with it at large. But now at this point, that order is reversed. The call to “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” follows the promise to the overcomer. This is the order in the latter four churches. What the Spirit has to say in regard to Church order is no longer given to the mass—only to the overcomer. This is because it is assumed that only the overcomer will hear what the Spirit is saying—the mass is not expected to hear and repent. Paul’s prediction to Timothy that the masses would “turn away their ears from the truth” has come to pass (2 Tim. 4:2-3), and therefore, the Spirit is no longer speaking to the body at large.

Remarking on this change, J. N. Darby said that the body at large is “dropped” from this point onward, because the public mass in the Christian profession is treated as being incapable of hearing and repenting. W. Kelly said, “The Lord thenceforth puts the promise [to the overcomer] first, and this is because it is vain to expect the Church as a whole to receive it ...a remnant only, overcome, and the promise is for them; as for the others, it is all over.” As a result, the Lord no longer expected the mass of the Christian profession to hear and return to the point from which it had departed. All thought of recovering the Church at large is abandoned because it has reached a point of no recovery. This is why I do not believe that the Spirit is necessarily speaking to every person in Christendom today in regard to the truth of gathering. With most, He is letting them go their own way in regard to their ecclesiastical affiliations.

Working with a remnant testimony since that time, it has pleased the Lord to recover the truth that was lost through the church’s carelessness in the centuries before. However, He has not seen fit to recover all the truth at once. The remnant referred to in Revelation 2:24-29 refers to the Waldenses, the Albigenses, and others like them who separated from the evil of “Jezebel” in Medieval times. They were told to “hold fast” to what little truth they did have. Sometime later, leading up to the Reformation, the Lord allowed a little more truth to be recovered—such as the supremacy of the Bible and faith in Christ alone for salvation. But that movement of the Spirit was impeded by the Reformers turning to certain national governments for help against the persecutions of the church of Rome. This was tantamount to turning to the flesh for help instead of relying on the Lord (Jer. 17:5; Psa. 118:8-9; Isa. 31:1). The result was the forming of the great national churches in Christendom, and the deadness of Protestantism began, as depicted in the church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6).

It was not until the early 1800s that the Lord gave a full recovery of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). It happened when men stepped away from all formal, man-made organization in the Church. This is depicted in the Lord's address to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13). At this time, God established a corporate testimony to the truth of the one body. Prior to this time, the remnant had been made up of individuals who sought to go on faithfully in separation from the corruption of the Roman church. We are now in days when every man is doing that which is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25), and most are complacent in their low state. This is depicted in the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22).

The point for us to see here is that the Christian testimony has reached a point of irremediable ruin, and this has called for a change in the Lord’s ways with it. He has let go of any attempt to restore the public state of the Church and is now working in a remnant testimony.

Just as it was with Israel, to maintain a remnant testimony today to the truth of the one body, the Lord does not need to have every last Christian in the world to be gathered to His name, though it is His desire for them. As mentioned, the very meaning of the word remnant implies that not all are there. In divine prerogative and grace, God is taking one here and one there, and He is gathering them unto the Lord’s name so that this remnant testimony may be carried on. The maintaining of it is a sovereign work. This is seen in the Lord’s remark to Philadelphia; “He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Rev. 3:7). No man or devil can hinder its continuance, though it might appear to carry on in much feebleness. Humbling as it may be, He does not need any one of those whom He has gathered, regardless of how gifted or spiritual they might be. If we don’t want to be there and we go away, the Lord will gather someone else so that this remnant testimony will be carried on until His coming. The fact that any are gathered in the first place is wholly a work of God; the grace that saves a soul is the same grace that gathers them unto the Lord’s name. If any of us have heard “what the Spirit saith unto the churches” and sees the truth of gathering, it is only because He has opened our ears (Prov. 20:12).

The “Brethren” Are Not God’s Remnant in Christianity

Now this might seem like I'm saying that the brethren gathered to the Lord's name are God’s remnant today—His faithful few—and all other Christians are just the failing mass. But this is a misunderstanding.

I recall brother C. E. Lunden saying that, properly speaking, all true believers among the mass of mere professors in Christendom are God's remnant in Christianity. He also said that, ecclesiastically, the gathered saints simply occupy a remnant position, in testimony, and are where all the remnant (every true believer) should be, as gathered to the Lord’s name. The gathered saints, therefore, at best, are only part of God’s remnant; they make no claim to be the remnant. They may be accused of believing that they are God’s chosen few, but these accusations are bogus.

It may be that people have thought that brethren are saying that there is ruin out there in the church denominations, but not among them, because they are doing things right. This too, is a misunderstanding. Brethren do not see themselves apart from the ruin; they fully own their part in it. They often refer to Daniel's prayer as an example—where he owns his part in the failure in Israel (Dan. 9). The fact that we have people among us that don't believe the very principles of our existence ecclesiastically ought to be proof enough that the brethren are in a weakened state. There is such a thing as being in a right position ecclesiastically but be in a wrong condition spiritually. This is generally the case among brethren.

The gathered saints have been set in a very privileged position in the Christian testimony, but sad to say, as a whole, they have not been faithful—and they will freely own it. So, this idea of the brethren thinking that they are God's only faithful ones is pure fiction. They see themselves as being quite unfaithful, though extremely privileged.

Practicing Some Aspects of the Truth is Unpopular

A second reason why the "gathered saints" are relatively small in number is that they seek to practice all of the truth of God—and some of these things are not popular. Things such as worshipping in spirit and in truth without musical instrumentation (John 4:23-24; Acts 17:24-25); the sister's place in the Church (1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:34-40; 1 Tim. 2:9-15); corporate judgment—excommunication (1 Cor. 5:1-13), and other such truths, are not popular. Most Christians today don't want to be connected with something that curtails their lifestyle.

God's Hand in Governmental Dealing Has Been on Us

The third reason for the smallness of numbers among those who are gathered to the Lord's name is that we have failed in our responsibility as gathered to the Lord's name, and the hand of God has been upon us in a governmental way. Consequently, He has reduced us numerically in order to humble us. This, again, is to our shame. Realizing this will not make a person proud.

We have been proud that we are the ones that the Lord has gathered to His name, even though it was really the work of sovereign grace that has brought us there. This, of course, is not the spirit to have when the Christian testimony is in ruins. If we have been gathered as such, we have nothing to boast in, for it has been His grace alone that has granted such a privilege. If those whom He has gathered to His name are a testimony, they are a testimony to the fact that there is a ruin in the Christian testimony; it is certainly nothing to be proud about. As a result of our poor state, the Lord has had His hand on us, and has reduced the numbers among the gathered saints from what it once was. Let us "hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it" (Mic. 6:9).

Zephaniah 3:11-12 gives us the principle of the Lord's governmental action. It says, "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against Me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of My holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD."

Summary:

The simple answer as to why the numbers are relatively small among the "gathered saints" is:

Being that it is a remnant testimony, it is supposed to be small—it's "the nature of the beast." The Spirit of God is not necessarily gathering every last Christian on the earth to the Lord's name to maintain this testimony. Through sovereign grace, He is keeping a "light" (1 Kings 11:36) on earth as to the truth of the one body in practice until the Lord comes.

Those gathered to the Lord's name seek to practice all of the truth of God in connection with gathering together for worship and ministry, and some of those things, as we have noted, are not popular. Therefore, most Christians are not interested in identifying with this movement.

Those gathered to the Lord's name have failed, and the hand of God has been upon them governmentally. He has reduced the numerical size of this remnant testimony to humble those connected with it.

Purchase and Redemption: The Difference Between Bought and Redeemed, Purchase (Bought)

Let's turn first of all to Matthew 13:44: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." This parable speaks of the universal results of the great purchase that Christ made on the cross. The "man" is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are told in verse 38 that "the field is the world." The "treasure" in the field refers to believers upon whom the Lord places a great value, and for which He was willing to pay a great price to have. The buying of the "field" with the "treasure" in it refers to Christ's purchase of the world, and every thing and person in it. This is the twofold circle of Christ's belongings—all persons and all things.

Purchase (bought) is the broadest aspect of Christ's work on the cross. Hebrews 2:9 confirms this, stating, "So that by the grace of God He should taste death for every thing" (J. N. Darby Translation). Note: it shouldn't be translated, "For every man" (as in the KJV), which makes this aspect of Christ's work narrower than it really is. It should be rendered: "For every thing" which covers all persons and things.

Firstly, Christ's purchase involves all persons. Hence, He now has title and right over all flesh. John 17:2 refers to the effect of this great purchase. It says, "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh." (Some might object to the use of this verse because it was uttered by the Lord before He went to the cross. However, John's gospel, which emphasizes Christ as God the Son, views Him as dwelling in the eternal present, outside of time. Thus, He speaks as though the work He was about to do on the cross was already done—i.e. verse 4.) "All flesh" is extensive—covering all men, saved and lost. This means that every person, whether they own the purchase or not, has been "bought" by the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, belongs to Him.

Secondly, His purchase was for all things. Ephesians 1:14 says, " ... the purchased possession." The context of this verse indicates that the "purchased possession" is the inheritance, which is every created thing. Christ has purchased the title and right to that as well. Hence, the

effect of Christ's purchase gives Him title to all things, as well as to all flesh. Thus, His purchase is universal.

A type from the book of Ruth illustrates this two-fold circle of Christ's belongings. Naomi sold a parcel of land that belonged to her husband Elimelech who had passed away (Ruth 4:3). Since Boaz (who is a type of Christ), desired to have Ruth as his wife, he had to buy that portion of the inheritance which would give him all in it, including Ruth. "Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife" (Ruth 4:9-10). He bought the parcel of land, which included a person—Ruth. The land he bought is typical of the things involved in Christ's purchase, and Ruth illustrates the purchase of persons.

Now let's turn to Revelation 5:9: "And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast bought to God by Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (W. Kelly's translation). We learn from this verse that the purchase was made by the "blood" of Christ. Not to digress from our subject here, but in this chapter the elders (the heavenly saints) are observing God's ways in grace with men on earth from above, and they are praising Him for it. They are not singing about themselves, but of those on earth. This is why the word "us" in the KJV should not be in the text, as J. N. Darby's translation indicates. Verse 10 should say, " ... and made them (not "us") to our God king's and priests." It also says, "And they (not "we") shall reign over the earth." It is referring to the martyred Tribulation saints who will one day reign with Christ "over" the earth in heaven. It is not referring to the Church in heaven reigning over the earth, as commonly thought. It is true the Church will reign over the earth with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 21:9–22:5), but that is not the subject of this verse. At any rate, the point I want to make here is that the purchase is by the "blood" of Christ. It refers to the price He paid.

Now let's turn to 2 Peter 2:1: "But there were false prophets also among the people, as there shall be also among you false teachers, who shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies, and deny the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (J. N. Darby Translation). Peter warned the saints of the rise of false teachers in the Christian profession. He said that just as there were false prophets in Old Testament times, there would be false teachers in the professing Church. They would bring in "damnable heresies" and attract large followings, and "many" would "follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:2). A heresy is a visible, outward split among the people of God. It is to make a party among the saints that splits off from the rest. Most people think that heresy is bad doctrine, and thus, the term is often used in that way conventionally, but really it is divisive party-making. A "damnable" heresy is even worse; it is a party that rallies around soul-damning doctrines.

The point I want you to see here is that these people were "bought," yet they ended up in a lost eternity! This shows that being "bought" does not mean that they were saved. These false teachers (mere professing believers) denied "the Lord" or the "Master" that "bought" them, and thus, brought upon themselves "destruction." They masqueraded as Christian teachers, but they didn't have any real Godward faith. As a result of their denial of Christ's purchase, they have passed on into everlasting judgment. We see this same class of persons in Jude 4: "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God ("Master" – J. N. Darby Trans.), and our Lord Jesus Christ." If "bought" means to be saved, as some think, then these teachers in 2 Peter 2:1 lost their salvation! We know that that could not be so because it would deny a cardinal truth concerning Christ's work—the believer's eternal security. The truth is that they were bought but they never were saved. This is an example of why we need to understand the distinction between bought and redeemed, for without it we could get into bad doctrine.

We learn from these verses that as a result of Christ's purchase, there has been a change of masters. All persons now belong to the Lord on the grounds of His purchase. He is their "Master." Hence, purchase (bought) involves a change of ownership—a change of masters. But Christ being their Master, by virtue of His purchase, does not mean that they have received Him as their Saviour!

There is a danger of slipping into using the term "bought" synonymously with being "saved." We've often heard a well-meaning Christian ask a stranger, "Do you belong to the Lord Jesus?" The Scriptural answer (whether they are saved or not) is "Yes!" Saved or lost, all persons belong to the Lord Jesus. Of course, we know what is meant; they are asking if the person has, in faith, owned the purchase that Christ has made on the cross. We've also heard people say, "I met a man the other day who was the Lord's. ... " What do they mean? According to this truth every man that you meet is the Lord's! They are all His by the right of the purchase that He made on the cross.

I remember a brother who spoke up in a meeting and made the comment: "We've all been "purchased" by the blood, haven't we?" He said that because he thought that everyone present was saved. But he didn't know that someone had brought an unsaved person along to the meeting that day. If he had known that, he probably wouldn't have said it. I leaned over to my wife and said, "Little does that man know how right his statement is." Even that unbeliever in the room was "purchased" by the Lord Jesus! I mention these things, not to find fault with well-meaning Christians, but to show how we can so easily slip into the misuse of Scriptural terms.

Now let's turn to Ephesians 1, and verses 13-14: "In Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which [Who] is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." The Apostle Paul is speaking here about a two-fold work of the Spirit—the seal and the earnest. Both things are ours when the Spirit comes to dwell in us, which happens when we believe the gospel of our salvation. The seal gives us to know that we are His property; the earnest gives us to know that we have property (the inheritance) and to help us to enjoy our portion in Christ.

He goes on to say, "Until the redemption of the purchased possession." From this phrase, we see that purchase and redemption are not the same thing—even though he is referring to things rather than persons. Note: he is referring something that has been purchased, but that has not yet been redeemed! This clearly shows that the two things are not synonymous. Now you might ask, "What is this 'purchased possession?'" It is not, as many think, the Church, though the Church surely has been purchased. This is clearly seen in what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "Shepherd the assembly of God, which He has purchased with the blood of His own [Son]." — J. N. Darby Trans.) The "possession" mentioned in Ephesians 1:14 is something that has been purchased but is waiting to be redeemed. This couldn't be referring to Christians because the Church has already been redeemed! (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

A careful look at the context of Ephesians 1:14 shows that the thing purchased is the inheritance—which is every created thing. While all things have been purchased, all things have not been redeemed. The point in the verse is that there will be a time when the inheritance will be set free from sin, Satan, and the world so that it can be used for the Lord's glory. This happens at the Lord's second coming—the

Appearing of Christ. In Scripture, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9), which is the Church, is not viewed on the same ground as the inheritance. Similarly, we don’t speak of our wives as part and parcel with our possessions. For instance, a man doesn’t say, “I have a house, a car, a boat, a dog, and a wife!” Our wives don’t want to be considered chattel. Similarly, the Church, the Lamb’s wife, is not the inheritance; she is a joint-heir with Christ over the inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

The Right to All Persons & Things by Creation and by Purchase

Christ has title and right to His belongings (every thing and every person) on two accounts:

He is the Creator of all things and persons. Scripture says, “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof”—this refers to all things (Psa. 24:1; Rev. 4:11). And again, “Behold, all souls are Mine”—this refers to all persons (Ezek. 18:4).

He made a purchase of all persons and things. Scripture says, “That He by the grace of God should taste death for every thing” (Heb. 2:9).

by creation

by purchase.

made

bought

creation

purchase

Dispensations and Ages: With a Chart Demonstrating the Change of Dispensations in the Way, Ages

Ages are sometimes confused with dispensations, but they are different. An age is an epoch or period of time that has run, or is running, or will run, its course on earth. Such periods are called “the ages of time” (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2). A dispensation, as we have already noted, is a public ordering of God in the administration of His ways pertaining to certain moral and spiritual requirements of those in His house. These administrations may change during an age, but they are not an age. Some have homogenized ages and dispensations and made them into the same thing. For instance, Unger’s Bible Dictionary says, “A dispensation is an era of time during which man is tested.” C. I. Scofield's scheme of “Seven Dispensations” is another example of this mixture. However, Scripture distinguishes these two things, as we have noted.

The Lord Spoke of Two Ages

The Lord spoke of two ages in particular in His ministry:

“This age” and “the age to come” (Matt. 12:32). “This age” is the Mosaic age, which began at Sinai and was in progress at the time of the Lord’s first coming. When He was rejected and cast out of this world, “this age” became “the present evil age,” in that the “princes of this age” committed the greatest sin of crucifying the Lord of glory (Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8).

Some have thought that the present calling of God by the gospel has put the Mosaic age in abeyance, and it will not begin again until some future day. But this is not true; the Mosaic age is still running its course on earth today. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the introduction of Christianity did not bring it to an end. Nor did it begin a new age; the age that was in progress when the Lord was here is still in progress now. However, while the Mosaic age is not suspended, God’s connection with Israel as a nation is in abeyance. Those who believe the gospel are called out of the Jews and the Gentiles to be part of the Church; they are delivered “out of this present evil age,” and are no longer part of it, as far as their position is concerned (Gal. 1:4). The Church, therefore, has no connection with the earth and the periods of time. Hence, to speak of this present period as “the Church age” is not doctrinally accurate.

The Church is on earth at this present time as a sojourner on its way to its heavenly home; its calling, character, and destiny are all heavenly (2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 1:3; 2:6; 6:12; Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:5; Heb. 3:1; 11:16; 12:22; 13:14; 1 Peter 1:4). Since the Church is still on earth and passing through “this age” which is marked by evil, the exhortations of the Apostle are to keep ourselves separate from its character and ways. We are to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, is this present age” (Titus 2:12). Believers are to reject the wisdom of this age, because “God has made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 1:20). Also, Christians who are “rich in the present age” materially are warned to not “trust in uncertain riches” (1 Tim. 6:17). They are to distribute their possessions, and thereby lay “up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come” (1 Tim. 6:18-19). Sad to report, some Christians today are turning from their steadfastness, and are loving “this present age,” and are settling down in the world as a result. Demas is an example (2 Tim. 4:10).

We know from the prophetic Scriptures that this present age has at least 7 more years remaining to it, which will run their course after the Church is called to heaven. These years will be fulfilled in the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27). This age is presently under the control of Satan who is its god and prince (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), and it is going on to judgment. It will close at the Appearing of Christ in what is called, “the completion of the age” (Matt. 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20). At that time, the Lord will bring in “the age to come,” which is the Millennium (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5; 6:5). When the Millennium has run its course of 1000 years, the Eternal State will be ushered in. Scripture calls this, “The ages of ages” (Gal. 1:5; Eph. 2:7; 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Peter 5:11; Rev. 5:13; 22:5). Properly speaking, it is not really an age, because ages have to do with time, and there is no time in eternity.

Summary of an Age

In summary, an “age” is a period of time, and a “dispensation” is a moral and spiritual ordering of God during a period of time in relation to some specific revelation of truth He has given to His house. In accord with this, J. N. Darby spoke of being “in” an age, but “under” a dispensation (Collected Writings, vol. 10, p. 12).

CHART 2

Dispensations and Ages: With a Chart Demonstrating the Change of Dispensations in the Way, Dispensations

All Christians need to have a basic understanding of dispensational truth. Without it we will be hopelessly adrift in the sea of bad doctrine that is prevalent in the Christian profession. The ramifications of not seeing the distinction between God's dealings with Israel and God's dealings with the Church in view of the coming millennial kingdom of Christ, lead to all sorts of error—ranging from a faulty eschatology (future events) to faulty ecclesiology (Church doctrine and practice). It will also affect our objectives in practical living and service.

What Is a Dispensation?

The word "dispensation" means "the administration of a house," "the management of a household," "a house-law," or "an economy." In the sense that it is used in Scripture, it is a publicly ordered dealing of God with men in the administration of His ways in His house during various ages.

Three Main Dispensations

There are three main dispensations in the ways of God (See the Concise Bible Dictionary — pp. 216-217). Some may see more than three dispensations, but all agree that these are the main ones, and are those wherein the controversy of dispensational teaching lies. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to understand God's ways in connection with them.

The First Dispensation

Since God's house on earth was not established in any real sense until He formally took up relations with Israel on the ground of redemption and built the tabernacle wherein He could meet with them (Exodus 25-40), we begin with the Dispensation of the Law. (Prior to that, men walked with God as individuals, but there was no publicly ordered system of God's dealing with men collectively in relation to His house.)

The Dispensation of the Law was an ordered dealing of God with men (the nation of Israel) whereby the legal obligations and requirements of the Law were to be fulfilled by the people in order for them to walk in fellowship with God. This administration passed through three phases:

About 400 years under the Judges (from Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan to the end of the Judges — Acts 13:19-20).

About 500 years of kingship (from Saul to the Babylonian captivity).

About 600 years of prophetic testimony during the Times of the Gentiles (from the captivity to John the Baptist (Luke 16:16).

The Second Dispensation

The second dispensation is the present Dispensation of the Mystery. This is an administration for the governing of a heavenly people, saved and sealed with the Holy Spirit—the Church. The Apostle Paul was commissioned to "enlighten all as to what is the administration [dispensation] of the Mystery" (Eph. 3:9 — W. Kelly Translation footnote; "Bible Treasury," vol. 13, p. 379). Hence, he was to teach those things unfolded in the Mystery that were "hidden throughout the ages"—which is the truth of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). The ministry of grace commenced with the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:17), but when His earthly people rejected Him, God opened the present dispensation of the Mystery in the heavenly calling of the Church with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; 11:15). Believers today are being called out of the Jews and Gentiles to be part of a new heavenly thing—the Church of God, the body and bride of Christ (Acts 15:14; 26:17). The burden of true Christian ministry is to "further God's dispensation" by helping the saints understand their heavenly calling in Christ and to live their lives in accord with the administration of His house (1 Tim. 1:4). The Church is not a dispensation but is governed by a dispensation or house-law of God in relation to the truth disclosed in the Mystery.

The Third Dispensation

The third dispensation is yet to come—"the dispensation of the fulness of times" (Eph. 1:10). This will be a special ordering of God with men during the public reign of Christ in the Millennium. The restored remnant of Israel and the Gentile nations will enjoy an earthly portion of blessing under the administration of Christ and the Church, who will reign over the universe from the heavens (Psa. 103:19; Rev. 21:10).

Summary of The Three Main Dispensations

The great thing to see in these dispensations (or administrations) of God's house is that there is a vast difference in the Dispensation of the Mystery from the other two dispensations on either side of it. The Dispensation of the Law and the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times are administrations having to do with earthly people, whereas the Dispensation of the Mystery, sandwiched between the other two, is an administration involving heavenly people. Perhaps we could call it, "the Oreo Cookie Image." The two outer dispensations (like the two chocolate biscuits of the cookie) are administrations in connection with the earth, but the middle dispensation (like the white icing in the center of the cookie) pertains to heavenly people. The more we study these dispensations, the more we will see how different they are.

The Dispensation of the Mystery is an interposed heavenly calling having to do with the Church. Presently, God's dealings with the nation of Israel have been suspended, and He is calling out those who compose the Church by the gospel of His grace. Thereafter, He will resume His dealings with Israel and will bring a remnant of all 12 tribes into blessing, with the Gentile nations being blessed under them in Christ's Millennial kingdom reign. Hence, there has been a change in the dispensational ways of God from the Law to grace, administered in the Mystery, and then there will be another change from the administration of the Mystery to the Kingdom in manifestation.

We learn from this that God has purposed to not only have a people on earth blessed with Christ in that coming day of kingdom glory, but also a people in heaven

CHART 1

YP Address—B. Anstey

By. The way. I have many friends. And great for the rain. Let's turn to Matthew Chapter 11, the 11TH chapter of Matthews Gospel. And verse 28. Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Now in Matthew chapter 16. Verse 24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me? Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. I've read 2 verses here this afternoon. You're young people, and these two verses bring before us two calls of our Lord Jesus. A call first of all to come unto him for salvation, and then secondly, in this 16th chapter of Matthew, a call to come after him in the pathway. And it is my purpose here this afternoon to speak on the subject of. Of following Christ in the pathway, perhaps we could say the path of discipleship.

And more particularly, the terms or conditions of discipleship. But it's nice to see just at the opening of this meeting here, these two verses put side by side a call, first of all, to come unto the Lord Jesus Christ, to know him as Savior, to have our burden of our sins taken away. And we hope that that's the case for each one of us here, both young and old, that we know of the Lord Jesus as our Savior. We've received that joy of forgiveness, and we know what it is to have our sins put away, and we're putting our faith and trust in the finished work of our Lord Jesus. But the second call is the burden of the address this afternoon, and we want to speak more specifically of it. And that is the call that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples, that they would come after him, not unto him now, but after him, that is, after him in the pathway. And this is where the joy of the Christian life can be experienced. And following Christ in the pathway. There's an initial joy in knowing the Lord is our savior, to know your sins are gone, that you're not going to end in a lost eternity. Of course there's a great joy. But to have lasting, constant joy in our pathway, we need to be following the Lord Jesus in a daily way to come after Him as these words are given to us. And so let's turn over to the 14th chapter of Luke's Gospel. And look at some of the conditions of discipleship and see how they apply. To our lives. Luke's Gospel, chapter 14. And let's begin reading at verse 25. There went great multitudes with him. That's the Lord Jesus. And he turned and said unto them, If any man come after me, or come to me? And hate not his father and his mother and his wife and children and brethren and sisters. Yeah, his own life also. He cannot be my disciple. Whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple, For which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down 1St, and count of the cost whether he has sufficient to finish it. Less happily, after he had laid the foundation, he is not able to finish it, and all but behold, it begin to mock him saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Well, what king going to make war against another king sitteth not down 1St and consult us whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him that cometh against him with 20,000 or else, while in the other well, the other is yet in a great way off he sends an ambassador. And desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good. But if the salt is lost, his savior, wherewith shall he be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill. But then cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear Later We have some conditions that the Lord Jesus laid down for the disciples. There was a great multitude that were following him that day and listening to his teachings, and he turned to them, and he gave these words that we've just read, if any man come to me and hate not his father, and so on. And what we have here are the conditions of discipleship, and it's our desire here this afternoon, dear young people, that your life would have the commitment of wanting to have Christ in the first place in your life. And that involves, of course, discipleship, as we have here in this chapter. There are four conditions particularly that I'd like to bring out here that are necessary if we're going to take the path. I've said this before and I've got it from older brethren, but it bears repeating here this afternoon. And that is that all Christians will have a happy ending because all Christians are going to end in the glory someday. But while all Christians have an happy ending, not all Christians have a happy life, and that is because they are not willing to take up with the following Christ in the pathway. They are content, shall we say, to know that their sins are forgiven and that they are on the road to heaven. But to take up with following Christ, and to applying the principles of Scripture in their life, and to live that life, that would be the happy, flowing, fruitful Christian life they know nothing of, and they of course lose the joy. Now we don't want anyone to want to make a beginning and then not carry on the Lord here in the same chapter where he lays out the subject of the Great Supper, which is a picture of the Gospel going out both to the Jew and to the Gentile.

He also brings up the conditions of discipleship because it's connected. It's in the mind of God that he should have not only those who are saved for glory, but he might have them happy and fruitful in their lives. And this is what we want to see in each one of us, beginning with the speaker and applied to all of us here. Well, the Lord Jesus first of all brings out the first principle, and that is that there needs to be supreme love and devotion to the master. Above all other loves or interests in this world. In fact, all other interests or loves are looked at in contrast to the love that we should have for the Lord Jesus as being hatred. Now he's not speaking literally that we should hate one another, because the teachings of our Lord Jesus are very clear elsewhere that we're not to hate our fellow man, much less our brother or sister than the Lord. But yet he uses that word here, but more in the way of contrast and in comparison to the love and devotion that we should have to the Lord Jesus. There is to be for all other loves or relationships that we may have or interests in this world. It should be looked upon as hatred. So he says, and hate not his father and his mother and his wife and children and brothers and sisters and so on. In his own life. He cannot be my disciple. Now the subject here is not salvation. The subject is discipleship. He's not saying you cannot be saved, but he's saying you cannot be my disciple, that is a disciple, indeed one in heart and in practice. And as I've already said, the joy in the Christian pathway is in the discipleship. And so we need to have supreme love for our Lord Jesus and devotion to Him. That would come above in priority over all other connections that we may have in life, whether it's the parents, brothers or sisters or ever any interest that we may have in our life. Now let me ask this question, young people here Is this something that characterizes your life. Is your life characterized by having one sole object that is Christ and his interest in this world? You know, if you're going to come after him in the past, that's what is required. These things were laid out to the multitude at the very beginning, and we need to understand this right at the beginning of our Christian life. That is going to require Christ being first in everything, and it says here also His own life also. His own life also. It's not so much here, the hating the old sins of the life before we're saved. Well, it might take that in, but it's more of a thought of our own life. Our life in this world is going to be sacrificed if we're going to have Christ in that first place. And nothing could illustrate this more clearly than what we see in the athletes that are getting ready for the Olympic Games that are supposed to be coming on shortly. You see these athletes that have devoted their lives to. Attaining some glory in this world, and it's something that they have really, in a sense, as it says in Matthew's Gospel, that he must lose his life. That is, all other interests that he may have have to be set aside if he's going to get this goal, and it may take years of sacrifice. What they eat, what they do, they're not allowed to play in the other sports because they might get injured or muscles may be turned in a different way and that could be very careful to go to bed so early. Some of them are incredible what sacrifices they have to make in order to reach this earthly goal

that is only to do with the glory that this world can offer. Is incredible. But it it does illustrate to us, and I think the Apostle Paul uses the Olympic Games in a verse in Timothy as an illustration of the sacrifice that is really needed to lose our lives. The interest that we may have naturally speaking, are going to have to be set aside if Christ is going to have that first place. We're going to have to lose our life in that sense. I'm not saying that we cannot enjoy the things of life. We're not saying that young people have to. Give up that some recreation you may enjoy. Whatever. But if the point is in comparison to these things that may be an interest to us, They have to be looked at and on the level and on the plane of hatred in comparison to the love and the devotion that there needs to be to the Lord Jesus. Now are we up to this? Are we prepared to not allow any pursuit or interest that we may have in our life to come in the way of Christ and his claims? Oh dear young people, it's the only way.

To have a happy, fruitful Christian life. And so it's not just the connections that we have in life naturally, but even our own life also. We cannot be a disciple. Let's look at another. In verse 27, And whatsoever or whatsoever does not bear his cross, and come after me cannot be my disciple. Here we have another condition, and that is the acceptance of the cross and the bearing of the cross, which means in my mind. The necessity of identifying ourselves with Christ, the one who is rejected. You see, this world gave Christ a cross, didn't want him, and the cross stands for the rejection of this world. And so the person that takes up with a path, a following Christ must at the outset understand that it's a rejected Savior that we're following, and we must accept the fact that we are identifying ourselves with one who is rejected. The verse is not saying that we are to bear His cross, that sometimes we hear hymns being put that way, that we we bear His cross. No. We're not called to bear the cross of Christ, but here it says bear his cross is referring to the disciples cross. Each one of us have a cross to bear because if we identify ourselves with Christ, we are too are going to get the rejection. And the treatment that this world. Would put upon Christ, and in that sense we are going to have a cross too. And what he's saying here is that we need to understand that that is normal to following Christ in the pathway. We cannot sidestep rejection. It is part of following Christ in the pathway and we need to be prepared at the outset to accept the path of rejection. So it's not popular to be a Christian. I'm trying to say, if you think that you can maintain connections with the worldly people that you may go to school with or have a job with or whatever, and to be looked upon and well thought of, and we all like to be well thought of, don't we? With people like that, you better get it in your mind very clearly here that you cannot be on good terms, so to speak, or to be well thought of or to be accepted. With persons that have no love for the Lord Jesus and still. Be a disciple indeed. The two just don't go together, and so we need to be careful that this is preached in the Gospel too. Wayne and I have been speaking about this recently that sometimes the Gospel meetings are presented like a fire escape from a burning building, and so a person's glad to take the fire escape to get out of the burning building. But the conditions of receiving Christ. That is repentance and conversion. Are not emphasized as they once were, and consequently there are many Christians that take up with Christ, receive Him as Savior. And really repentance with regard to the old wife has not been worked out, and by and by creates difficulty and problems in the pathway later. And so it needs to be emphasized in the gospel. We need to realize right at the beginning that repentance which means to have a changed mind. And a passing of judgment upon all that we have done and what we are is necessary in the path. And it's an exercise that carries on through the Christian life. You know, it says there in the 15th chapter that there's joy in the presence of the angels over 1 Sinner. That is, repenting should be translated repenting as an ongoing exercise because repentance. We should always have a changed mind towards sin and a life that was once lived. If a person stops repenting, he's going to go back into that. And so it's often been said that confession is an act, but repentance is a process that goes on through the life, and we should never cease to repent. Getting away from my subject here a little bit, but repentance is different than from conversion. To conversion is to have the heart turned around to God, but repentance is to have the life turned away from sin. They go together. We can't separate them. And it's necessary that these things are laid down in the gospel. That people understand that to receive Christ does not mean that we're going to be popular in this world, and so we need to realize that we're going to have a cross to bear. Are we ready for it, Young people? You're not going to be popular. If you thought that you were going to be popular and still go with Christ and be popular, I'm speaking with the world.

The two just don't go together and if you can in some way maintain popularity with the world as a Christian, you've compromised somewhere along the line because it is normal to Christianity to have a cross to bear. And again it's to do with discipleship, not salvation, the next condition. In verse 28 he speaks about building a tower and that the importance of sitting down 1St and counting the cost. That we'd be able to finish the tower. And so here he brings in an illustration and speaks about the Christian testimony in life. Life is likened unto building a tower in this world. And when we get saved, it's like laying the foundation. And when we finish our Christian life, the whole course is like completing the tower. And the importance that is emphasized here in this condition that the Lord lays down is that there needs to be commitment that's going to go the distance. Of our life. There are many people that take up with following Christ, but fall by the way, so to speak. Because they did not sit down 1St and count the cost. Commitment was there, perhaps, but it wasn't commitment that was ready to go the distance, so to speak. And we need to sit down and count the cost, because it's going to cost us everything to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. That is a disciple indeed. And so you and I are building a testimony in this world, just like the building of a tower here, so to speak. But what happens if we have not counted the cost and we leave off building it? We turn aside, shall we say in some way or another? And I'm not saying that every Christian that ceases to walk on the path of being gathered to the Lord's name and so on, goes off into debauchery or something. But still the idea is that if we leave off with the fallen Christ in the pathway. We are going to receive, we're going to have a poor testimony rendered to the world. And so that next verse goes on and speaks about those that begin to they behold him. And believe me, the world is watching. You may not think that you're so important that the world would want you, but they watch, at least out of the corner of their eye. And but it says they that all that behold it begin to mock. Then they begin to say, yeah, he started but he cannot finish. He was carrying a Bible, but I don't see that anymore. So we need to be careful that when we begin the Christian pathway that there is commitment. That will go all the distance of our life, and for that we need to cast ourselves wholly on the Lord Jesus. For without him we cannot go. There's a hymn that we sing like that. And so we need to count the cost. Count the cost. So if we could just look at this now in summary of the first three that we've looked at so far, there needs to be supreme love. For the master beyond all other loves. And then the acceptance of the path of rejection, and then thirdly. The. Need to. Have commitment that is not just for a beginning but to carry on through the life. You know, there are many people I've already mentioned this, that begin well in the Bible. I'm speaking now. They begin well but don't end very well. And there are some that didn't begin very well, but they ended quite well. Well, in one sense I suppose we could say we don't want to be either. We want to begin well and end well, don't we? But nevertheless. It's the continuance in the pathway and I think there was a verse that was quoted here in the the Bible. Reading this morning, I think it went like this impatient continuance of well doing that is part of the terms of discipleship that we might continue in the path. There was a young brother that was gathered recently, not too long ago anyway, in the assembly where I came from and I was so excited I was ready to set off. Fireworks, so to speak. You know, he's going on very well. He's taking up with written ministry and really doing well. And so I said that to one of my older brothers there that I've been around so much longer than I have and far more experienced in the past. I said to the brother, isn't it nice that brother so and so is going on so well? It just makes me

rejoice. And he said wisely. Yes, he's made a good beginning. He's made a good start.

I went away thinking about that. It wasn't that he was not happy about that, but he knew that the path is not a Sprint race, but it's an endurance race. We learn from Hebrews 12 That we need to continue in the pathway, Paul told Timothy continues. All and the things which thou hast learned, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And so let me emphasize this, young people, you may have made a good start. We thank God for it. Thank the Lord for that, but cast yourself upon him. That you may finish well. That you might finish what you set out to build because you don't want to bring any. Bad testimony upon the Lord Jesus in this world. It says in Romans chapter 2 That the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. And so we don't want to bring any dishonor upon the Lord Jesus if we have a life that only goes part way. Now let's look at another condition. Here in verses 31 and 32, the Lord brings up another illustration and he says it's like a king going to make war with another king. He sits down 1St and he consults with, I guess his generals or whatever, and he consults and realizes that he has 10,000 and the other king has 20,000. I believe it is. The point here is that we need to have a true estimate of the power of the enemy to which we. Are going against. In conflict, the Christian needs to, at the very outset of the pathway, have a true estimate of the enemy's power and to realize and conclude that we are no match for the enemy if we can, if we think that we are able for the enemy and self-confidence, we're going to fight the Christian fight and so on. We're going to find out, like many have found out, that you can't do it on your own. The enemy is more powerful than we are and we need to realize this at the very beginning. Christian life that we're in an enemy's land and the conflict is greater than we can handle. And the enemy is stronger than we can handle. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. We have the Lord who is stronger than the enemy, and we need to cast ourselves upon him that he would keep us and give us to be able to be victorious in the Christian life. And so we need to really understand this. You know, there are many Christians that just don't get a hold of this as they are, and I suppose perhaps maybe all of us don't just realize how powerful the enemy is. How subtle he is, and particularly young people who may not just realize that the enemy is so much more wiser than we are. And so to realize this at the beginning of the pathway is of utmost importance, that we're going against an enemy that is more powerful than we are, but we are ready and we are able, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Now notice what happens here in verse 32. If we haven't really sat down and realized this, what happens? Well, it says, while the other is yet great way off, he sends us an ambassador. Desiring conditions of peace, in other words, gets into the conflict and realize this is a little bit stronger than I thought. And what happens is it begins to compromise to the enemy. You might say he sells out to the enemy. And how many Christians? Having one way or another compromised with the enemy have sold out, so to speak, to the enemy and their lives are lived under the power of the enemy as it says here to make peace with the enemy. Oh what a sad thing that a Christian would want to make peace with the enemy of their soul. But there are many that have done this very thing. We need to have this set out before us. At the beginning, we're in an enemy's land and it is not easy. And there are so many Christians that have compromised with the enemy, with the world and live their lives in compromise. And it would be a sorrow to our hearts here as any of the young people would turn that way. But, you know, statistically speaking. Many go that way. This is a very sorrowful thing to build for me to report if we were to wind the clock back maybe 10 or 20 years, let's say. Many of the young people that made a good start, we wonder where they are today. Could it be that some of these conditions were not?

Not considered in the presence of God. You know, there's a question that was raised this morning in the Bible reading, well, what's wrong with conformity with the world? Remember that comment, I think, Brother Ron, what's wrong with conformity to the world? I jotted down a few things. First of all, you can't enjoy fellowship with the world and with the Father at the same time. That's what's wrong with the world. You cannot. First, John 215 tells us that you cannot enjoy a fellowship with the Father and at the same time have fellowship with the world. The two don't get together. You're either going to have fellowship with the world or with the Father and the Son. But you can't have them go on at the same time. That's one reason. Here's another one. Your heart's affection for Christ is going to be become restricted. Second Corinthians 611 to 14. You know he speaks about the Corinthians who had a difficulty with separation from the world, conforming to the world, and he speaks about how that their hearts were being restricted. And he speaks about the hearts needing to be enlarged. Then he goes on to say, but be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, because it's connected, you see. It's going to restrict our affections for Christ. Thirdly, the world and fellowship with the world are enjoying its entertainments and pleasures and so on. Withers are appetite for the word of God. That's numbers 11, verse six. You can look them up at some other time. We don't have the time to look at each of these. Fourthly, the world and fellowship with the world has an effect of desensitizing our morals. That was touched on this morning a bit I believe Genesis 19, verse 8. Simply, the Spirit of God is hindered in our lives. Ephesians 5 and 18. And then 6th we lose our discernment. Hosea 7 verses 8 through 10. And then last the 7th. There's probably more, but we lose our power and testimony with the world like Genesis 19 and verse 14 two. So there's at least seven different reasons why we don't want to be conformed to this world. Do you want to lose fellowship with the Father and the Son? Do you want to lose discernment or affection for Christ? We have our appetite for the Word of God become dried up. Or many of these other things I have mentioned. Of course we don't. But yet many there are whose lives are ending up in compromise with the world. Young people. It's going to take all of your commitment and energy and seeking grace from the help of the Lord. If you're going to come through to the other side, you know there's a verse there and that second Peter chapter one that we might make an abundant entrance into the Kingdom. Everlasting Kingdom. You've probably heard the story of the illustration of that it's like 2 battleships that have been out at sea for a long time and they're they come back in they've been beaten a little bit in the battle but they've won the war and they're coming back into the port and one of the captains is just glad to get in he flies he comes in half limping so to speak and but the other captain because he knows that there's many of the people in the town that are waiting and. Flying flags and all of that. He tells the men to patch up the ship as best you can, and to paint up the ship. So they'd get out a bucket of paint and they'd paint up the ship. They'd get the deck as best as they can and make it look somewhat presentable as they came into port. And here we have these two ships in a contrast, and it's been likened unto the Christian making an abundant entrance, coming in under full sail as ones who have fought and have won. Now some have looked at the abundant entrances, the idea of being. Having an abundant entrance into heaven. That's not the thought. That's a misunderstanding of the verse. It's not an abundant entrance into the heaven, but rather the abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom. That's when Christ comes back. And all the Saints with him and glory, he's going to make it. We're going to make an abundant entrance into the Kingdom. As he comes to display his people before this world and will be admired and all them that believe, we want to have an abundant entrance into that Kingdom. But our entrance into the Kingdom in that day is reflected on how we're going to go on today here in this world. And so that begins with discipleship. Well, there's a number of people in the Bible who don't have time to look at them. Now we only have about 5 minutes, but there's a number of people that came to the Lord Jesus in the past and he called them to follow him in the past. But in each one of them, you'll notice that they were tested one way or the other and would be very nice for us to be able to take them up here. But I'll just kind of go over them very quickly here, a few of them anyway. And this tells us something, and that is that.

Every person that takes the path of faith is going to be tested. Underline that every one of us that takes the path of faith are going to be tested on that very thing because God wants and will have reality. Psalm 51 and verse six says that he desires truth on the inward part. He wants a life that is real, not outwardly only, but inwardly as well. And so we find for instance, if you turn back to Luke chapter 5. You'll see there, Peters called, I think, and James. And so on too. But they're called in the pathway and the Lord turns to them and says, follow me. But you know the context of the story in First and the shift of Luke. It's when Peter was out to sailing and they were fishing. They toiled all night. They couldn't get any fish. When they came to shore in the morning, the Lord Jesus was there. He asked Lone of the boat. He preached from the boat that day. And after the preaching was over, he told Peter to go for the launch force into the deep. And you know what happened? He caught a great multitude of fish. You know he lacked faith there. You probably noticed that the Lord said, Let down your Nets, plural. Let down your neck. Peter let down his net, singular. And he he got the net, but it broke, you know, the fish were everywhere. Killed their boats. The boat was sinking with so many fish and they got to land. They had the biggest day in business they ever had. And the Lord right at that time says, follow me, follow me. There's the test. The test is on. He had an opportunity to make a lot of money, and that's exactly when the Lord called him. You know, I've often thought of this story. If the Lord had called him after the night where he had toiled and taken nothing, they would have been glad to let go of their Nets and go. They hadn't got any fish. They had a bad day at business, shall we say. They probably saying to one another a better profession than this. If there's something else I could get into, I'd be glad to take it. And so if the Lord had come, then it would have been easy to get a side, set aside the fishing. But that would have been a what do we speak of as a dead sacrifice? And I think it's in the Old Testament there. A sacrifice has really died of itself. But the Lord waited until Peter had the best day of business that he ever had. And then he says, follow me. It's a test. The test was on and thankfully there rose above the situation forsook all as it says and they followed him. And so the the point here is, am I willing to put the Lord Jesus? Before making money and my job in this world. You're going to be tested on it, young people. You're going to be tested on it because this world and the enemy of your soul is interested, of course, and not making a fall of Christ. And he might just allow you to be so absorbed in in business and in money and and your job and so on, that you may be distracted from hearing the claims and following and surrendering your life to the claims of our Lord Jesus. And so here's one that was tested. We have a couple more minutes. There's Matthew later in the 5th chapter, the Lord Jesus sees him taking money at the at the seat of custom there, and he had a very high position and he says to him, follow me. And now the test was on, was he ready to give up a high position in this world where people looked at him and he was something that's true, that the Pharisees didn't like this, but he had a position. Was he willing to give that up? For Christ, and again he rises above the test, and passes it, so to speak, and follows him. And you can go through your Bible. I think there's seven or ten different ones that were called to follow him. And in each one of them you'll see this is a little study for you to look at afterwards. You'll see that there was a test connected with each one. And you know, as I've already said, that each one of us to take the path of faith are going to be tested. The Lord is going to see whether there's reality to our confession of our faith. And all I can say is May God give us the grace. To come through and to give him that rightful place, you know, the 18th chapter. Give you another one Here. We've got one more minute.

The 18th chapter there. Remember that young man? He was wealthy. He had lots of possessions. And you'll find there that he comes. What much did I do to inherit eternal life? He wasn't thinking of eternal life in the sense that John puts it or Paul puts it. He was thinking of living forever in this world because he had all this possessions, he had money and everything. He figured I could just live forever in this. This would be great. So that's kind of like the thoughts of many young believers. They just think would be just great if my life could just carry on the way it is. I'm healthy. I'm strong. I'm not sick and. And the Lord Jesus quoted the commandments to him, but he didn't quote the mall. You've probably noticed that Luke 18, There's two. Stones, shall we say there were certain commandments that were to do with man's responsibility to God. I think it's the first four of the 10 commandments, and then the last six are to do with man's responsibility toward his fellow man. So the Lord didn't quote those ones toward God. He quoted his responsibilities toward his fellow man. And you'll notice he goes down the list quoting five of the six. Five of the six commandments are quoted, and he leaves off. A certain one, which every Jew, of course, would have committed to memory the the commandments. And the one he left off was, Thou shalt not covet. And so the young man says, well, all these things are kept from my youth up. And so the Lord says well. Go and sell all that you have, take up the cross and follow me. But the point is the Lord did not say to him you haven't kept the commandments. Because his difficulty, you know, was that he coveted what he had and when the test was on with him, the poor man failed and he said he went away sorrowful because he had a lot of possession. And so we don't let our possessions get in the way of pleasing the Lord Jesus, do we? Now that's not difficult when you're a young believer because you don't have many possessions, But the older you get work for a while, you've got you can able to acquire things. It becomes more of a danger. But the point I'm trying to get at least one of the points here is it is interesting the way in which the Lord ministered to that dear soul. He didn't say Thou shalt not covet. He left the young man to conclude that on his own, because everyone, every Jew would have those things committed to memory, just like we know our ABC's. But I said you ABCD, you know what comes after that. And so as the Lord quoted each of the commandments and then he stopped, he left. For the young man to bring the conclusion home that covers this was his problem. And so we need to be careful, don't we? May the Lord give us His grace to do so, if I could just stand closing young people. Give him the blossom of your life, not the fallen leaf. I said that before I know, given the blossom of your life, not the fallen leaves. Don't wait until you get older and then say, well, then I'll turn my life over to him. No, the time is now. And may I put it this way, the test is on. The test is on for all of us. Are we going to put Christ 1St? And our life is going to show when I stand at the judgment seat of Christ and He shows me His plan for me. The plan of my life as it has been, as it might have been had he had his way. And I see how I blocked him here and checked him there, and I would not yield my will. Will there be grief in my saviors eyes? Grief, though he loves me still. He would have me rich, but I stand there poor, robbed of all but his grace, while my memory runs like a haunted thing down the path. I cannot retrace Lord of the years that are left to me. I give them to thy hand, take me, break me, mold me to the pattern that Dallas plant. Let's pray.

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