

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Introduction

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth as a person in the flesh through His birth to Mary. However, Christ is the very center and purpose of Scripture from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. His birth, death, ministry on earth, and resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament. Even though the people of God in the Old Testament knew and worshiped Him as the one God, Christ (in a spiritual form) was also active with them throughout the Old Testament. We know this through the letters written by the Apostle Paul.

Furthermore, the future work of Christ involving His tribulation judgments, reign as King of kings during the millennium, and the final judgment at the great white throne were prophesied in the Old and New Testaments. This study also addresses the work that Christ accomplished on the cross that was not prophesied, and God's plan through Christ that was not revealed to us until He did so through the Apostle Paul.

In this very brief overview, I'll try to support these statements through some of the key verses and passages in Scripture. There is much about Christ and His work for His people of Israel and for us that is not covered in this study. I'll leave it to you to explore Scripture to fill in the gaps.

In the beginning was the Word [*Jesus Christ*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through [by] Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)¹

Christ's Work in the Old Testament

Christ's work, as we know it, began with the creation. In Genesis 1:1 it says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In Genesis 1:26 God said "Let Us make man in Our image," which implies that God was identifying Himself as more than one being or entity (we find out later in Scripture that the Almighty God manifests Himself in three entities or persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14; Colossians 2:9). The creation account is explained in John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 where it says that all things were created by or through, and for, Christ. So, the word *Us* in Genesis 1:26 is referring to God the Father and God the Son.

He [*Christ*] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through [by] Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:15-16)

The Lord, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night, led the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22). While in the wilderness, the Israelites complained of being hungry, and the

¹ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* (KJV) or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud and the Lord spoke to Moses (Exodus 16:9-12). We find out through the Apostle Paul that it was Christ who was working for Israel in the miraculous cloud.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

There are many occasions in the Old Testament where it says that the Lord, God, or the Lord God spoke to particular people, but I can't say if or when it was God the Father or God the Son who was speaking to them. In 1 Timothy 6:13-16, God the Father is described as dwelling in unapproachable light, and someone who no man has seen or can see.² With this in mind, I believe that when the Lord God interacted with people during the Old Testament, at least in some instances (and perhaps in all instances) it was actually Christ who was doing so as God's representative. If so, that may have included the times the Lord God *spoke* to Adam and Eve and *walked* in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:8-19), when He *spoke* to Cain regarding Abel (Genesis 4:6-15), when He *appeared* to Abram (Genesis 12:7), etc. Regardless, we do know that Christ was actively working with His people during Old Testament times. They just didn't know it.

Prophecies Regarding Christ in the Old Testament

Although the people of God during Old Testament times did not understand that there was a Son of God, Christ was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. We know this for certain because Christ, after His resurrection, opened His disciples' eyes to all that had been foretold about Himself through Moses³ and the other prophets of God (Luke 24:25-27; 44-45). Also, there are many times in Matthew through John where it is said that such and such happened to fulfill a specific prophecy concerning Christ. Let's look at a couple of prophecies about Christ from the book of Genesis.

And I [the Lord God] will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel. (Genesis 3:15)

This is the second part of God's curse on Satan, who appeared and deceived Eve in the form of a serpent. Although I'm not absolutely certain, I believe (as do others) that this prophecy refers to Satan's very temporary triumph over Christ by working through man (Satan's seed—Ephesians 2:1-3) to crucify Christ (Satan will "bruise Him on the heel"), while Christ (Eve's seed—the Son of Man) will defeat Satan and cast him into the eternal lake of fire; i.e., Christ will bruise Satan "on the head" (Revelation 20:7-10). Therefore, I believe that this was the first prophecy, in veiled words, regarding Christ and His future work. No one would understand the meaning of it until Christ opened His disciples' eyes after His resurrection.

² This passage is describing God the Father and not our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father has been the King of kings and Lord of lords since the beginning, and Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords during His kingdom reign. See the section on **Christ as King** for more information about these things.

³ I believe that Jesus was referring to all of the books written by Moses, which most agree were Genesis through Deuteronomy (I believe this is true).

Now he [*Lamech*] called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed.” (Genesis 5:29)

Lamech’s proclamation at his son’s birth didn’t come to pass through Noah. I believe that Lamech unknowingly prophesied about Christ and His future kingdom of heaven on earth, and perhaps signified Noah as a type (representation or foreshadowing) of Christ. The people of God will continue to contend with the curse of the ground—toiling to grow food, contending with weeds, and returning to it upon death (Genesis 3:17-19)—until Christ’s kingdom is established on earth.

In the books Matthew through John, we see many references to Old Testament prophecies regarding Christ. Let’s look at just a few of those prophecies, some of which were fulfilled during His ministry on earth and some that are yet to be fulfilled. We will see that they are all veiled references to Christ; that is, the actual meanings of the prophecies—that they were about Christ—were not known until later.

The Birth of Christ

When Jesus was born to the virgin Mary, He left His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father in heaven and became a man among us (Philippians 2:5-8; John 1:1, 14). Indeed, He was God with us, which is what the name *Immanuel*, or *Emmanuel*, means. That Jesus would be born of a virgin (Matthew 1:23) and would come from Bethlehem of Judea (Judah in the Old Testament—Matthew 2:4-6), were prophesied.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. (Micah 5:2)

Only the first part of Micah 5:2, regarding Jesus’ future birth in Bethlehem of Judea, was fulfilled; Christ will not become ruler of Israel until He establishes His kingdom on earth after the period of the great tribulation. Also, this verse provides additional confirmation that the Lord Jesus Christ was working with God from eternity past.

There was even a prophecy about Jesus’ infancy. When Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod of Judea, and later returned to Israel after Herod’s death, it was in fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 2:13-15).⁴

When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son (Hosea 11:1).

Christ’s Ministry on Earth

Although there were only a few prophecies about His birth, there were quite a few about Jesus’ ministry on earth and His role during His future kingdom on earth. We’ll look at some prophecies about His earthly ministry first, along with their fulfillment. For example, He would:

⁴ The significance of the magi and the actions of King Herod during the infancy of Christ are addressed in Appendix A.

- Be declared by God to be His Son, which occurred at His baptism (Psalm 2:7; Matthew 3:13-17)
- Be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; John 5:45-47)
- Begin His ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:12-15)
- Teach the gospel (of the kingdom) to His people and perform miracles (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-21; Matthew 4:23)
- Speak in parables (Psalm 78:1-2; Matthew 13:34-35, and Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-15)

Furthermore, Jesus would be a stumbling stone to the people of Israel and Jerusalem (Isaiah 8:14-15; I Peter 2:7-8). That is, the people of Israel (God's chosen nation) would reject Him because He spoke the truth and represented God in the flesh (Acts 2:22-23; 7:51-53)—they would trip over the truth of God and rely on their own *truth*. Unsaved people today reject the truth of God and, unfortunately, many believers (true children of God saved by His grace) also reject many aspects of the truth of God as demonstrated through our disobedience or disregard of the word of God. It is difficult for us to handle the truth.

I [Paul] solemnly charge you [Timothy] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they [believers] will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (II Timothy 4:1-4)

The Death of Christ

Jesus was crucified by the hands of the Roman government but at the demand of His own people of Israel (Matthew 27:11-37; Acts 2:22-23; 3:11-15; 7:51-52). His death, however, was prophesied long before it happened; it was required in God's eternal plan. Furthermore, He also fulfilled prophecy by not defending Himself before the Jewish High Priest or the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate (Matthew 26:59-64; 27:11-14; Acts 8:32).

Surely our griefs He [Christ] Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions [sins], He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord [God] has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. (Isaiah 53:4-7)

We see part of the reason for Christ's death in the above passage. In speaking to the people of Israel, the prophet Isaiah said that this One would die for their sins and would heal them. Isaiah goes on to say that the Righteous One would be numbered with the transgressors (Christ would be crucified as a sinner on a cross between two thieves), that He would bare the sins of many (take the sins of His people on Himself), and would intercede for them (He would be their advocate before God). By shedding His blood, Christ would be atoning for Israel's sins, which is the reason God had required blood sacrifices under the Law of Moses (as an atonement for sin—Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). However, Israel has not been healed yet.

But the Lord [God] was pleased to crush Him [Christ], putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I [God] will allot Him [Christ] a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Although the death of Christ was prophesied, the full ramifications of His death (and resurrection) were not revealed until the Apostle Paul. We'll look more into that later.

The Resurrection of Christ

As we have seen, Christ's death was prophesied. Without His resurrection, however, He would have been proven to be like any other man, and His death would not have been the one-time propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins (Romans 3:21-26; 6:10). Therefore, His resurrection was also prophesied in the Old Testament. Furthermore, Jesus prophetically told his disciples, both in veiled terms and directly, that He would be put to death and then be resurrected (John 2:18-22; Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 18:31-34). They did not comprehend this until the resurrected Lord Jesus opened their eyes to understand (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

King David prophesied of Christ's resurrection in words that were not understood until after His resurrection. Most likely David himself had no idea that the words he was writing were prophetic or who they were about—that is the miracle of inspiration by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:20-21; II Timothy 3:16-17).

I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol [hell]; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psalm 16:8-11)

This prophetic passage, which Peter said was fulfilled as recorded in Acts 2:22-36, was about Christ and verifies that Christ actually descended into hell because that is the consequence of the sins that he bore for us at the cross. Therefore, Christ died a spiritual death—total separation from God—as well as a physical death. Thankfully, God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:22-24; Romans 10:8-10; I Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 1:18-21), restoring both spiritual and physical life to Christ. This victory over sin and death is explained in I Corinthians 15:54-57. See also the prophecy in Psalm 68:18 that was verified as fulfilled in Ephesians 4:8-10.

Christ as King

As mentioned earlier, Christ's post-resurrection role was also prophesied in the Old Testament. Actually, much of Old Testament prophecy concerns a future everlasting kingdom led by a savior (Messiah) king who would rescue and restore Israel (Daniel 9:25; Luke 1:67-75; John 4:25-26; Acts 1:6; 3:17-26; see also II Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 42:1-4; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Daniel 7:13-14). Recall that the magi followed the *star* to find the newborn King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1-2). When Jesus entered into

Jerusalem on a donkey it was in fulfillment of a prophecy about Him as King (Matthew 21:1-7; Zechariah 9:9). He also confirmed to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate that He was the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11). Finally, at His crucifixion, an inscription of the charge against Jesus, “The King of the Jews,” was put on the cross by Pilate (John 19:17-22).

Christ did not become King at that time, however. For now, let’s take a brief look at a couple of prophecies about him becoming King of Israel (of the Jews) and the King of kings.

For a child [*Jesus*] will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

“My [*the Lord God’s*] servant David [*Christ*] will be king over them [*redeemed Israel*], and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.” (Ezekiel 37:24-28)

Although these passages use the name *David*, they were referring to Christ who is in the royal line of David (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:31-33). Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords during His kingdom reign because the nations will be subject to Him (Revelation 19:16; 20:6; 21:22-27). He will rule from the miraculous city of New Jerusalem that will descend to earth from heaven after the end of the tribulation judgments (Revelation 21:1 – 22:15). It is important to understand that God the Father has always been the King of kings and Lord of lords because all governments are in authority according to His will (Deuteronomy 10:17; I Timothy 1:17; 6:13-16; Romans 13:1; Psalm 103:19), and that after the final judgments Christ will turn His kingdom over to God the Father (I Corinthians 15:20-28).

These and all the other prophecies about Christ’s kingdom have not been fulfilled yet. They will be, however, just as it is written. But many other prophetic events have to occur before that time—events that will occur after the rapture. Some of the events are addressed in Appendix B.

Christ as Judge

When Jesus was ministering on earth, He had not come to judge the world (John 12:47)—not yet. There was much He had to do, first, including dying for our sins. However, He will judge in several situations as we will see. In truth, the Almighty God is the judge of all things (Psalm 50:1-6; 94:1-2; Hebrews 12:22-23). However, He will not *act* as judge and execute judgment. He has given that authority to His Son Jesus Christ (Acts 10:42; 17:30-31). So, in what ways will Christ judge?

“Truly, truly, I [*Jesus*] say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so

He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.” (John 5:25-27)

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Christ will judge believers—members of the body of Christ. He will not judge our sins because they have been forgiven; instead, He will judge the motives of our heart (Romans 14:10-12; II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 3:12-15). This should remind us of the importance of our daily walk and service to God (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12). We should always endeavor to do the right thing in accordance with God’s revealed will because it is the right thing to do (Romans 12:17; Colossians 3:17, 23; I Peter 2:15, 20).⁵ This judgment may occur at the time of the rapture, or as we die, or maybe some other time—I can’t tell for certain from Scripture.

For I [Paul] am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. (I Corinthians 4:4-5)

Therefore, being always of good courage [confident], and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him [God]. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (II Corinthians 5:6-10)

Post-Rapture Judgments

Sometime after the rapture, Israel will be judged for rejecting and killing their Messiah and then cleansed—redeemed. After Satan declares war against God’s nation through his two human representatives (referred to as *the beast*—a king of the nations—and *the false prophet*), the earth will be judged including the people, living things, and even the land. This judgment will culminate in the battle of Armageddon that will be won by Christ. Finally, Christ will cast Satan into the bottomless pit (abyss) for 1,000 years and the beast and false prophet into the eternal lake of fire. These judgments are addressed further in Appendix B.

Kingdom Judgments

During His 1,000-year (millennial) kingdom reign (Revelation 20:4-6), Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords will judge the people of the nations that survived the tribulation judgments—He will rule with a *rod of iron* (Revelation 12:5; 17:14; 19:15-16). There will be peace on earth (no wars or conflicts), yet there will still be sin and judgment (Isaiah 2:1-4; Revelation 22:14-15).

⁵ See my studies **Walk Worthy, Let Us Be Humble, Christian Suffering, Are Rewards Our Goal?**, and others that address our daily walk as believers.

“But as for Me [God], I have installed my King [Christ] upon Zion, My holy mountain.” “I [Christ] will surely tell of the decree of the Lord [God]: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”
(Psalm 2:6-9)

Great White Throne Judgment

After 1,000 years, Satan will be released from the abyss and gather all the nations of the earth to destroy Christ and His city—New Jerusalem. Fire from heaven will destroy them once for all, and Satan will be cast into the eternal lake of fire. Christ will then judge all unbelievers of all ages from the throne of God and cast them all into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-15). There will not be any sin anywhere after that, and the kingdom will continue forever in some form.

Then I [John] saw a great white throne and Him [Christ] who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne,⁶ and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life;⁷ and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books,⁸ according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades [hell] gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Brethren, the book of Revelation is not in chronological order. The descension and establishment of New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 and 22 occurs 1,000 years *before* the great white throne judgment that is described in the above passage. This is not commonly taught, but please consider Revelation 21:8, 24-27 and Revelation 22:14-15 where it says that the nations will walk by the light of the city, and sin will continue outside the gates of the city. There will be no sin whatsoever after the final judgment, so the prophesied kingdom (New Jerusalem) will begin before that judgment.

Christ’s Revelations to the Apostle Paul

Prophecy and the Mystery

Of this church [the body of Christ] I [Paul] was made a minister according to the stewardship from [dispensation of] God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out [fulfil] the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints [believers], to whom God willed to make

⁶ The KJV says that the dead will “stand before God.” The throne appears to be the throne of God but, as demonstrated earlier, God gave the authority to judge the living and the dead to Christ.

⁷ The names of all believers of all ages are written in the book of life—our life is in Christ (Philippians 4:3; Romans 6:8-11; Colossians 3:1-4).

⁸ I believe that the word *books* refers to the books of the Law of Moses because the Law condemned all people in their sin (Galatians 3:10-14; II Corinthians 3:4-9; Colossians 2:13-14), a condemnation that is removed when we believe the gospel of salvation (Romans 3:21-26; 8:1-4).

known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27)

We have taken a glance at prophecies—fulfilled and still waiting to be fulfilled—regarding Christ’s initial ministry on earth and events still to come. There is another aspect of Scripture that is not well known and absent from most Christian teaching today. It is called *the mystery*⁹ in Scripture. The mystery truly ties the entire Bible together; through it, God revealed His manifold wisdom to us. It is about God’s eternal plan that had been hidden in Himself since before the world began until it was revealed by the resurrected and ascended (glorified) Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle Paul, and it is centered on Christ and His completed work at the cross. Therefore, Christ is the center of the Bible—the word of God—as this study is intended to illustrate.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship [dispensation] of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints [*believers*], this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable [unsearchable¹⁰] riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration [fellowship] of the mystery which for ages [from the beginning of the world] has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [*the body of Christ*] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. (Ephesians 3:1-12)

Think about what we have seen so far about the prophecies concerning Christ. It has been nearly 2,000 years since His ascension into heaven and yet He has not returned as King. As prophesied, Israel rejected Christ and demanded that He be put to death. As prophesied, He rose from the dead. Israel continued to reject Christ after His resurrection by rejecting the testimony of His apostles and disciples, which would have been the precursor to its judgment by God (Acts 2:14-21; 4:15-18; 5:27-40; 7:51-60). So, why didn’t Israel’s prophesied judgment and the tribulation judgments occur?

Instead of judgment, this was the time in God’s eternal plan to reveal the mystery and offer salvation to the Gentiles apart from Christ’s kingdom (Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:23-28). This was the

⁹ See my studies **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** that discuss the mystery in more detail and how the gospel of the grace of God, which is part of the revelation of the mystery, differs from the gospel of the kingdom.

¹⁰ I believe that the KJV use of the word *unsearchable* is more applicable in this context because the revelation of the mystery included things about Christ that were not foretold in any way and, therefore, could not be found in the Old Testament prophecies or in the gospel accounts of Matthew through John.

time to reveal exactly what God accomplished through Christ at the cross. God interrupted His prophetic plan and will not resume it until after the rapture—all according to His eternal purpose and plan.

The Bible as we know it is divided as the Old Testament and the New Testament. Another good way would be to divide it as prophecy and the mystery. Prophecy concerns the things of God that have been spoken since the world began (Luke 1:68-70; Acts 3:19-21), while the mystery is about the things that God had hidden in Himself since before the world began (I Corinthians 2:6-8; Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:25-27).

Prophecy, beginning with Genesis 1:1 and ending at Revelation 22:21, is about God's plan for the earth and principally through His chosen nation of Israel. The mystery, described as such only by the Apostle Paul within his letters (Romans through Philemon), is about God's heavenly plan for the people saved during this dispensation¹¹ of grace where there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles (nor are there national distinctions). How did Paul learn about the mystery and what does it entail?

Revelations and Aspects of the Mystery

Christ revealed the mystery and its various aspects to the Apostle Paul through multiple revelations, starting at his salvation on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-16). It should be remembered that when the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ first spoke to Paul, he was known as Saul of Tarsus. He was a Pharisee and leader amongst the Jewish religion, and was God's leading enemy because of his vigorous attempts to destroy the church of God consisting of believing Jews; i.e., disciples of Jesus (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; I Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13-14; Philipians 3:4-6; I Timothy 1:12-17).

The following passages mention the revelations by Christ to Paul. Please note that Christ spoke directly to Paul, whereas He communicated the details about the prophetic last days to John through an angel (Revelation 1:1-2); therefore, Paul was the last person with whom Christ personally communicated (Acts 22:14; I Corinthians 15:5-8). We also need to understand that what Paul preached was not a continuation of the what the twelve apostles taught; otherwise, he would have learned what to teach from them.

- Recalling his encounter with Christ near Damascus to Judea's King Agrippa, Paul said he was told by Christ that he would be a witness to the things he had seen and things that Christ would reveal to him (Acts 26:12-18).
- Paul told the Corinthian believers how he was caught up into both the third heaven (the domain of God and Christ?) and into Paradise (also referred to as Abraham's bosom—Luke 16:19-31; 23:39-43) where he received revelations of the Lord (II Corinthians 12:1-4).
- He wrote to the Roman and Ephesian believers of the revelation of the mystery he had received (Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-3).
- Paul emphasized to the Galatian brethren that he did not receive his message from men (including the apostles) but from Christ Himself (Galatians 1:11-17).

¹¹ The word *dispensation* is not a theological term applied by Bible scholars, it's just an old English word used in the KJV and used only in Paul's letters (I Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; and Colossians 1:25). I still use it because it is a good descriptive word for me. Other versions translate the Greek word as *stewardship*, *administration*, *trust* or *trusteeship*, and *commission*. In simple terms, a dispensation covers a time period during which God is administering His plan in a particular way.

The Apostle Paul referred to *the mystery* as a general (or comprehensive) term in the following verses: Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3, 9; and Colossians 1:26. Specific aspects of the mystery—truths of God and His eternal plan that were never revealed or prophesied about until Paul—include the following designations or descriptions:

- *The mystery of the church*, which is the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles (without distinction) and who are saved by believing (apart from any works of righteousness) that Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:22-32; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28). Paul referred to this as a great mystery, perhaps meaning that it is the greatest aspect of the overall revelation of the mystery (Ephesians 5:32).
- *The mystery of the wisdom of God* that He had kept hidden in Himself until revealing His eternal purpose (manifold wisdom), based on the work of Christ at the cross, through Paul (I Corinthians 2:6-8; Ephesians 3:8-11).
- *The mystery of the gospel* referring to the gospel of the grace of God that fulfilled or completed the word of God (Ephesians 6:18-20; Acts 20:24; Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:25-27). It appears that another name for this aspect of the mystery is *the mystery of the faith* (I Timothy 3:8-9) because the gospel of the grace of God encompasses what Paul refers to as *the faith* (Romans 1:5; 10:8-10; Galatians 1:22-23; 6:10; Ephesians 4:5, 13; I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 4:7).
- *The mystery of Israel's blindness* that explains how God has temporarily set aside His chosen nation and His promises to it during this dispensation of His grace (Romans 11:25).
- *The mystery of being caught up and changed* from physical to spiritual bodies (I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:13-17). This event is usually referred to as *the rapture* by believers, which is addressed in the next section.
- *The mystery of lawlessness* about the subtle work of Satan in the world and against believers during this time (II Thessalonians 2:7; II Corinthians 11:12-15).¹²
- *The mystery of godliness* that explains how Christ is working through believers today (I Timothy 3:15-16; Romans 8:9-11; Titus 2:11-12).
- *The mystery of God's will* regarding the dispensation of the fullness of times (Ephesians 1:9-10). This mystery will be addressed in the next section.

There are also two references to *the mystery of Christ* (Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:3). This designation might be another name for *the mystery of the church* based on the reference to the body of Christ in Ephesians 3:6. However, more likely it is another name for the comprehensive term *the mystery* because the context of Ephesians 3:1-10 and Colossians 4:3-4 appears to be referring to the overall message that Paul received from Christ. Regardless, we know that Christ revealed the mystery to the Apostle Paul (and through him to us).

The Prophecies of Paul

The Apostle Paul was a prophet in the same sense as Moses and the other prophets of the Old Testament. Although most of the content of Paul's letters pertain to what we have in Christ and how we

¹² Satan's work will be more obvious after the rapture (I Peter 5:8; Revelation 13:1-4).

are to live in Christ as children of God each day (i.e., walking worthy of our salvation—Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; I Thessalonians 2:9-12), there are some prophecies involving Christ in his message.

The Rapture

The word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible (i.e., there is no Greek word that translates to *rapture*), but it is a good descriptive word referring to a future event revealed only by Paul. It is about the time in which the dead in Christ and those still alive will be caught up to meet Him *in the air* (*in the clouds*). The dead will be raised up with imperishable spiritual bodies and living believers will be transformed from perishable physical bodies to imperishable spiritual bodies—we will have bodies that are somehow like the body of Christ’s glory that He currently has. This event is also referred to as our *blessed hope* (Titus 2:11-13)—something all believers today can look forward to with certainty and comfort (I Thessalonians 4:18). The rapture is addressed further in Appendix B.

Behold, I [Paul] tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep [physically die], but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable [incorruptible], and we will be changed. (I Corinthians 15:51-52)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [physically dead], so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

In his specific references to the rapture noted above, Paul said that we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air—he did not say or imply that we will immediately return to earth and enter into the millennial kingdom as is often taught. This is an important distinction between the gospel of the grace of God revealed to and preached by the Apostle Paul, and the gospel of the kingdom preached by Christ during His earthly ministry and by His twelve apostles. From Moses onward, the believers of Israel were to look forward to being resurrected into their promised kingdom on earth with physical bodies, and that the survivors of the tribulation period would physically enter into the kingdom.¹³

The Last Days of the Dispensation of Grace

Paul not only revealed the event of the rapture, but he told us the conditions believers will be facing and enduring prior to the rapture. He referred to this future time as *the last days*. The last days he was

¹³ Israel’s kingdom hope is briefly addressed in Appendix B, but is discussed in more detail (as is our heavenly hope) in my studies **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** and **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)**.

speaking of, however, had nothing to do with the last days of prophecy concerning Christ and His kingdom that is spoken about in the rest of Scripture. Instead, Paul was telling us what to expect as this dispensation of grace comes to a close.

Our indication that we are approaching the time of the rapture will include such things as people becoming exceedingly arrogant, treacherous, and faking godliness (e.g., falsely doing things in the name of God or Jesus), and believers falling for false teaching to satisfy their own desires (I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 4:3-4). Please note that these conditions refer to the character of mankind—attributes that were prevalent in Paul’s day but would get worse. Paul doesn’t mention any specific signs to watch for such as changes in governments, Israel’s reestablishment as God’s nation, catastrophic events, etc. We see the things that Paul described happening today, but they certainly could get even worse. Regardless, from our perspective, the rapture could happen any day because there are no prophesied events to signal that it is imminent.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money [covetous], boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving [without natural affection], irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.
(II Timothy 3:1-5)

The Judgment Seat of Christ

This is the judgment of believers regarding our motives in our service to God and Christ as previously discussed. Only Paul wrote of this judgment; it only applies to believers, and apparently only to members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace (i.e., not the kingdom brethren). Is it our motive to serve our own purposes or to impress others, or is it our desire to do all things for the Lord? Our actions, whether good or bad, ultimately bear witness to our motives.

The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times

The particular time we are living in now would fall under the dispensation of the grace of God that began with Paul—it is the integral part of the revelation of the mystery to Paul (Ephesians 3:1-3; Acts 20:24). It is the time when God is dealing with Jews and Gentiles without distinction, and salvation is by grace through faith apart from works of righteousness. Applying the same principle, the time immediately prior to this dispensation could be called the dispensation of the Law that would have begun with Moses (Galatians 4:4-5;¹⁴ Matthew 23:1-3). I think the time between the rapture and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom could be described as the dispensation of the fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11:25). That will be a time when the nations and individuals will seem to be less constrained in their sin, will rise up against God, and will be judged accordingly.

Regarding the dispensation of the fullness of times, referenced as the mystery of God’s will in Ephesians 1:9-10, there are no prophecies or mention of this specific time other than in Paul’s letters. The last event prophesied in the book of Revelation is the judgment at the great white throne at the

¹⁴ Galatians 4:4 includes the phrase *the fullness of the time*. This is establishing the fact that, in God’s prophetic plan, it was time for Christ to appear on earth; His birth signaled the beginning of the prophesied last days. This verse, therefore, is not referring to the dispensation of the fullness of times.

close of the 1,000-year reign of Christ in His earthly kingdom. I believe that the fullness of times covers all time *after* the final judgment. The only thing we definitely know about it is that it is a time when all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, are one.

He [God] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [Himself] with a view to an administration [dispensation] suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His [God's] purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His [God's] glory. (Ephesians 1:9-12)

I believe that the words *all things in Christ* refer to both all believers who died (or were caught up in the rapture) with a heavenly hope—members of the body of Christ—and all believers who will be in Christ's kingdom on earth.¹⁵ Therefore, all believers from all of God's dispensations will be summed up or brought together as one in Christ. Because the Old Testament prophecies describe Israel's kingdom as everlasting (not just 1,000 years—Ezekiel 37:24-28; Daniel 7:27), it appears that the believers of the promises of prophecy and the mystery will be brought together on earth in New Jerusalem after the great white throne judgment. It doesn't say this directly in Scripture, however, so I'm not certain. Whatever happens will be to God's glory.

One more aspect of this last dispensation of God was prophesied by Paul. Old Testament prophecies spoke of an everlasting kingdom, but the descriptions of the kingdom in the Old and New Testaments are specific to only the first 1,000 years: Christ's millennial reign. We learn through Paul, however, that Christ will turn His kingdom over to God once sin and death have been completely destroyed, which will occur at the great white throne judgment. Therefore, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, everyone will be subject to God, and He will be all in all.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep [*physically dead*]. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One [God the Father] who subjected all things to Him [Christ], so that God may be all in all. (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

¹⁵ The promised kingdom—New Jerusalem—will be occupied (during its first 1,000 years) by all believers other than those who are saved during this dispensation of grace. All of those believers who had died with a kingdom hope (promise), beginning with Adam (the garden of Eden was a type of the kingdom), will be resurrected to join with the believers who will survive the great tribulation (Ezekiel 37:11-14; Daniel 12:1-2; John 6:39-44; 11:17-27; Revelation 20:4-6; Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13). Additionally, new believers will be born (from among the Jewish brethren who survived the great tribulation) during the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:21-23; Jeremiah 32:38-39; Ezekiel 37:24-25), and apparently some Gentiles from the nations outside of New Jerusalem will be saved during that time (Isaiah 2:1-4; Revelation 22:14).

Salvation Today

According to God's eternal plan, the specific things that a person has been required to believe and/or do to be saved has changed through the ages. However, anyone who has ever been saved or will be saved—that is, saved from the consequences of our sins (i.e., spiritual death and eternal separation from God)—is saved based on what Christ accomplished at the cross. Nobody knew that was the case, however, until it was revealed to and through Paul.

From the beginning it has been sin that has separated all people from God. Because of sin, which is anything contrary to the righteousness of God, we cannot approach God in our natural condition. Until the gospel of salvation proclaimed by the Apostle Paul, God required animal sacrifices—the shedding of blood—as an atonement for sins. Through Paul we find out that God made His Son Jesus Christ, who was sinless, to be sin on our behalf. Through His death on the cross (and the power of His subsequent resurrection by God), Christ became the propitiation, or atoning sacrifice, for our sins. His death, therefore, enabled us to become the righteousness of God in Him through faith.

He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:21)

But now apart from the Law [of Moses] the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

In this dispensation (administration) of God's grace, the *only* way for a person to be saved is to believe that Christ died for our sins (this is an acknowledgment that we are sinners and need salvation), was buried, and was raised from the dead. Paul refers to this as the gospel (good news) by which we are saved. There are many verses in Paul's letters that mention or explain the gospel of salvation (e.g., Romans 3:21-26; 4:23-25; Ephesians 1:7, 13-14; I Thessalonians 4:14), but the following passage is the most concise:

Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.¹⁶ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

Salvation is by believing this from our heart (i.e., we truly believe it and not just acknowledge the facts—Romans 10:8-10). There are absolutely no works of righteousness required by God—it is His gift to us (Romans 4:4-5). At the instant of our belief in the gospel we become a child of God and a member

¹⁶ With the phrase *believed in vain*, Paul apparently was referring to those in the Corinthian church who may have professed to be saved but didn't actually believe that Christ died for their sins. Therefore, their faith was meaningless. I'm afraid that many people who profess to be Christians today believe in vain.

of the body of Christ, with the certain hope of eternal life in Christ (Romans 6:22-23; 8:14-17; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5, 22-23). Because Paul was the first person to be saved apart from believing the gospel of the kingdom (nor does Scripture say that he repented of his sins and was baptized for the remission of sins) and was the first to reveal this gospel of salvation, I believe that he was the first member of the body of Christ (I Timothy 1:15-16).

In Him [Christ], you [brethren] also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His [God’s] glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His [God’s] grace we could be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

Prior to the revelation about salvation by grace through faith apart from works, salvation was a combination of faith plus works. Faith is the operating word, however; without faith in what God was revealing at the time, no one would be saved. Works of righteousness without faith were worthless—they were actually self-righteous works such as those that Jesus accused the Jewish religious leaders of performing (Matthew 23:13-33).

Before this time of grace, though, works were required by God as a demonstration of faith. For example, from the ministry of John the Baptist through a portion of the time covered by the book of Acts, people had to sincerely believe the gospel that their promised kingdom was at hand (imminent) and, later, that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17, 23; 16:13-17; Mark 1:14-15; John 3:16-18, 36; 20:30-31; Acts 3:17-26). Furthermore, as proof of their faith, they then had to repent of their sins and be baptized for remission of their sins (Mark 1:4-5; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-38). If they considered that baptism wasn’t necessary as preached to them, then their faith was worthless; on the other hand, if they were baptized without sincere repentance, their baptism was worthless (Mark 16:15-16). Belief in an imminent kingdom (a kingdom hope), water baptism, obedience to the Law of Moses, and other requirements (Matthew 19:16-26; 23:1-3; 28:20; Luke 12:33; Acts 2:43-45) are not a part of the gospel of the grace of God or our gospel of salvation today.

Again, it is important to point out that all who have ever been or will be saved—from Adam through the future—are saved on the basis of Christ’s accomplishment at the cross. He died for sin, once for all, and for all sins past, present, and future (Romans 6:10). Because Christ was sinless and took our sins upon Himself, His death was the one sacrifice that met God’s requirement for forgiveness (Romans 3:23-26; II Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7; 5:1-2). His victory over sin and death, demonstrated by the power of His resurrection by God, ensured our salvation; nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-23). Do you believe that Christ died for you?

For I [Paul] am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Blessings of Salvation

I will close this study on Christ with a reminder of some of the blessings each and every person receives when we believe the gospel of salvation. I like to refer to it as our benefits package, and it includes the following gifts of God through the work of Christ:

- We have forgiveness of our sins (Romans 3:23-25; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32).
- We have inherited eternal life (Romans 5:21; 6:22-23; Titus 3:4-7).
- We are at peace with God—He has reconciled us to Himself (Romans 5:1, 10-11).
- We are chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4; II Thessalonians 2:13-14).
- We are in Christ and He is in us (Romans 8:1, 9-11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:27).
- We were called by God to salvation according to His purpose (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 2:13).
- We have been adopted as children of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5).
- We are members of the true church, which is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23).
- We are members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19-22).
- We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit—we have eternal security and cannot lose our salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:38-39).
- We have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; 8:11).
- We are alive in Christ instead of dead in sin (Romans 6:7-11; Ephesians 2:5).
- We have been regenerated (made into a new creation)—we are born again, washed, made new (Titus 3:5; I Corinthians 6:11; II Corinthians 5:17).
- We are spiritually seated with Christ in His current position in heaven—we are citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20).
- We are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10).
- We have been justified—we are declared not guilty, just as if we had never sinned (Romans 3:26; 4:25; 5:1, 9; 8:30; Titus 3:7).
- We have been sanctified—we are set apart by God as sacred to Himself (Romans 6:22; I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).
- We have been glorified—we have been exalted or elevated to a position of honor by God because we are in Christ (Romans 8:30).
- We are considered (reckoned) by God to be holy and blameless in Christ despite our continuing sinfulness (Ephesians 1:4); we are considered righteous by God (Romans 4:5, 22-25; 5:17).
- We have inherited the riches of God's grace and glory (Ephesians 1:7, 18).
- We are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10); He is working through us according to His will (Philippians 2:12-13).
- Nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:31-39).

Praise God for everything He has done for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! May we often remember and reflect on these things, with humility and thanksgiving.

Therefore if [because] you [believers] have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

Summary

As stated in the beginning of this study, it only briefly covers what has been revealed to us about Christ through the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible itself only includes a small portion of what Christ did while He ministered on earth (John 21:25), and certainly what He has done and is doing for us from His heavenly position is far more what has been revealed to us and is beyond our comprehension. With that in mind, here is a summary of what has been addressed in this study.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God the Father, and the universe was created by Him and for Him. Although the people of God (beginning with Adam) didn't know it, Christ was working for them throughout the Old Testament times. When He came to earth as a man, He served the people of Israel and proclaimed the imminent establishment of His heavenly kingdom on earth. Our Lord's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection were all prophesied in the Old Testament. His future activities for Israel, as well as His judgments against sin, were also prophesied in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Consequently, Christ is the main subject of the entire Bible.

Although Christ's death and resurrection were prophesied, the full ramifications of His work at the cross for us were not revealed until Christ Himself revealed it to His Apostle Paul. Through multiple revelations to Paul, Christ revealed God's manifold wisdom: his eternal purpose through Christ. Paul referred to this multi-component revelation as the mystery, but not because it was mysterious. Instead, it described what God had hidden in Himself since before the world began, whereas prophecy had been proclaimed since the world began.

It has been nearly 2,000 years since God interrupted His prophetic earth-based plan and introduced His heavenly plan through Paul. This time, that Paul called the dispensation of the grace of God, will end at the rapture. There are no prophetic events—signs of the times—that have to be fulfilled to signal the imminence of the rapture. Brethren, the rapture could still be many years in the future, but truly it could occur any day and we should live our lives accordingly.

Whether at the time of the rapture or some other day, all believers (members of the body of Christ) will stand before the judgment seat of Christ where our motives in our service to our Lord will be judged. Therefore, today and every day is the right time to examine ourselves and our service to God as ambassadors for Christ. Are we walking worthy of our salvation?

Therefore, we [believers] are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5:20)

Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you [brethren] to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

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Appendix A

The Significance of the Magi

The magi followed a miraculous *star* to Jerusalem and inquired as to the whereabouts of the newborn King of the Jews so that they could worship him (Matthew 2:1-12). Herod was King of Judea (King of the Jews) at that time. As said in Matthew 2:3, King Herod was troubled when he heard about their quest, for a rival to his authority and power was on the scene—a rival he was determined to destroy (Matthew 2:13). We don't know how many men followed the miraculous *star*, but I believe they were a representation of Christ's future kingdom on earth. These men weren't saved, as they were from a Gentile nation (or nations), but they were used by God for His purposes nevertheless, as He often does. Also, they came to worship the newborn king. We are not to worship the baby Jesus, nor are we to worship Jesus at all. We are to worship God the Father, which we are able to do because of what Christ did for us at the cross.¹⁷

It is possible that the magi were rulers because what they did was a foretaste of what the kings and rulers of the Gentile nations will do during the millennial kingdom. Christ will be reigning as King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11, 37) from the miraculous city of New Jerusalem that is described in Revelation 21 and 22. Furthermore, He will be King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16; see also Ezekiel 37:24-28; Psalm 2:7-9; Revelation 12:5) because, for the first 1,000 years of the kingdom, Gentile nations—survivors of the great tribulation judgments yet still entirely composed of unbelievers (Revelation 22:15)¹⁸—will be residing outside of New Jerusalem but under the authority of Christ (like the Roman, Spanish, British, and other similar empires through the ages). The kings and rulers of those nations will go to New Jerusalem to pay homage to Christ the King, just as the magi did sometime after Jesus' birth. Paying homage will not be in response to faith, however, and the ultimate fate of those nations, and all unbelievers, is judgment (Revelation 20:7-15).

I [John] saw no temple in it [New Jerusalem], for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb [Christ] are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations¹⁹ will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-27)

¹⁷ See my study **Who Do We Worship?** that provides a scriptural explanation of why we are to worship God the Father rather than Jesus.

¹⁸ Apparently, people living outside New Jerusalem will have the opportunity to repent and be saved so that they can enter into and reside in the city (Isaiah 2:1-4; Revelation 22:14). I'm not aware of Scripture that demonstrates that believers will reside among the nations during the millennial kingdom—their promise is to reside in the city with Christ (John 14:1-3). Also, Christ and His apostles will reign and judge from New Jerusalem (Matthew 19:28).

¹⁹ The KJV says “the nations of them which are saved” will walk in the light of the city. I am convinced that this refers to the nations that survive the great tribulation judgments (they will be spared by God for His purposes and not because of their righteousness) and has nothing to do with spiritual salvation. Furthermore, at the close of the millennial reign by Christ, Satan will be loosed from the abyss and will deceive and gather *all* of the nations for one final battle against Christ and New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:7-10).

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city [New Jerusalem]. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Revelation 22:14-15)

There is something more about King Herod that we can learn from. Recall that Herod inquired of his chief priests and scribes where the Christ would be born (Matthew 2:1-6). This confirms that Herod was familiar enough with prophecy, as most Israelites were, to know that there would be a Christ or Messiah to restore and lead Israel. By wanting the information so that he could kill the infant demonstrates that Herod was making a conscious effort to thwart God's plan. What he didn't realize was that his decisions and actions were also in accordance with prophecy (Matthew 2:13-18). Every prophecy in Scripture has either already been fulfilled, has been partially fulfilled, or is yet to be fulfilled. Everything that God has planned has occurred or will occur as He planned it.²⁰ We need to remember that it is rather presumptuous for anyone to think that we can change God's plans, or even to try to figure out a way to help Him fulfill His plans (Numbers 23:19; Job 23:13; Isaiah 14:27; etc.). He will work through us according to His will (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13).

Let all the earth fear the Lord [God]; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. (Psalm 33:8-11)

"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" (Isaiah 46:9-10)

So will My [the Lord God's] word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

²⁰ See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** that describes God's nature and will, and how we should respond to His sovereignty.

Appendix B Tribulation Judgments

In Christian denominations and churches, and in Christian media, we often hear about *the signs of the times* and how prophecies related to the second coming of Christ are being fulfilled today. I am certain, however, that no prophetic events are being fulfilled today. That is because we are still in the dispensation of the grace God. I am convinced from Scripture that God's prophetic plan will not resume until after the close of this dispensation, which will occur at the rapture. Furthermore, there are no prophetic events that need to be fulfilled prior to the rapture.

The title of this appendix is used because of a general understanding of the tribulation period among many brethren, but it is misleading in this instance. The seven-year period that encompasses the judgments that are familiar to many believers is at the end of an unknown period of time between the rapture and the physical return of Christ. The purposes of this appendix, therefore, are to try to address some of the judgments that will occur after the rapture and briefly convey that much has to occur, over an extended period of time (i.e., more than seven years), between the rapture and the victorious return of Christ to establish His long-promised kingdom on earth.

A note on prophecies is warranted. In most prophecies in Scripture, many details are kept hidden in God. We are often unable to decipher from Scripture the specifics about timing or duration of events or how events interact. God has revealed what He wants us to know about future events, but He used veiled language, often through metaphors, for a purpose known only to Himself. Perhaps He did so to keep us from thinking too highly of ourselves—that we are capable of figuring everything out (Proverbs 21:30; Isaiah 40:13-14; 55:8-9).

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

With this in mind, I don't think that anyone can conclusively determine and adequately explain all the events that will precede the second coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth. However, Scripture does reveal that certain events will happen. I want to provide some information for your consideration. I'll leave it to you to search Scripture to check them out and to reach your own conclusions.

I must convey a word of caution, however. I believe that far too much time is spent researching and teaching about prophecy and prophetic events that have yet to occur. Even this appendix addresses things that I believe are beyond our understanding and take our attention away from things that we should know and understand to live for God today as His children and as ambassadors for our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:1-3; 5:1-2; Colossians 3:1-11; II Corinthians 5:20).

The Rapture

But first, I will try to briefly explain some aspects of the rapture that I did not present in the main text of this study. It is important for believers to understand what Scripture says about this subject, far

more so than for events that will follow it. The churches I attended in my youth taught that an event commonly referred to as *the rapture* (this is not a scriptural term but is a good descriptive term) would occur before the time of tribulation. Some of those same or similar churches later revised their teaching to say that the rapture might occur during the tribulation (commonly referred to as *the mid-trib rapture*), while others taught that it might occur at the end of the tribulation (i.e., *the post-trib rapture*). Some Christian churches today teach that there will be no rapture at all. I'm convinced that the earlier teaching was correct, although I have learned that some of the details and some of the reasons for believing in what became known as *the pre-trib rapture* were not doctrinally sound. Additionally, I'm not surprised about the confusion over the timing of the rapture or even the teaching that there will be no rapture.

When I first learned of the rapture, the pastors and teachers based their teaching on I Thessalonians 4:13-17 and I Corinthians 15:51-52; passages that are addressed in the main text of this study and that directly describe the rapture. However, they also used Matthew 24:36-41 to explain the rapture, which describes the outcome of two people: one being taken and one being left. Instead of the rapture, that passage refers to God's judgment of Israel (through Christ), where the one taken is actually taken to judgment (apparently through death) while the one remaining will enter the kingdom. Because of this, it is not difficult to understand how the teaching about the rapture changed over time.

Brethren, the Apostle Paul was the only one to write about the rapture because it was part of the mystery revealed to Him by our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it was written to members of the body of Christ, which is mentioned and described only by Paul in his letters. I can't stress enough the importance of recognizing the distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message, and the distinction between prophecy and the mystery. Without this understanding, it is easy to dismiss the concept of the rapture entirely—many important aspects of Paul's message are ignored or altered in Christian teaching today because they don't seem to fit the rest of Scripture (i.e., the prophetic aspects of Scripture). I know in my heart that there will be an event that we call *the rapture* and that it will occur before God fulfills His prophecies regarding the events and judgments preceding Christ's physical return to earth.

One more point needs to be made: the rapture and the prophesied second coming of Christ are two different events. The rapture will be the time when Christ comes to receive members of His body (the body of Christ) to Himself. Those who have already physically died will be raised up in a spiritual body, and those who are still alive at the time will be changed to a spiritual body. We will meet Christ *in the air* (or, *in the clouds*); that is, He will not set foot on earth at that time. Please contrast this event with the prophesied second coming of Christ where He will come to destroy His enemies, will set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12), and will establish His kingdom on earth. The people who enter into and live in the kingdom (New Jerusalem) will have perfect physical bodies—there will be no sin or death in New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:4, 27).²¹ We must be careful not to confuse the rapture with the second coming of Christ.

²¹ Although the Gentile nations (which will be outside of New Jerusalem) will be blessed during Christ's millennial reign in accordance with God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:16-18; Galatians 3:16), such as prolonged life and no war, there will be sin and death among them during that time (Isaiah 2:4; 65:20; Revelation 22:15).

Post-Rapture Judgments

Because of the preponderance of prophetic teaching today, I think there is some benefit to providing more information about the prophesied judgments that will occur after the rapture, if for no other reason than to provide peace of mind. I sincerely believe and want to emphasize that members of the body of Christ—believers in this dispensation of grace—will not be around to endure them; we are not destined for wrath because the rapture will have already occurred (I Thessalonians 5:9-10). Therefore, this information is for understanding what will happen, and covers things that we are *not* to be on the lookout for as fulfilled prophecy as many Christian leaders try to convey every time there is a new political alliance, war, hurricane, earthquake, volcanic eruption, etc. Paul had to reassure and redirect the Thessalonian believers who were being falsely taught, just like today, that prophecies were being fulfilled in their day (II Thessalonians 2:1-15). The false teaching included the position that the rapture had already occurred and that they were living during the prophetic *day of the Lord* (II Thessalonians 2:1-2).²²

Israel

It appears that Scripture describes a specific seven-year period immediately prior to Christ's appearance at Armageddon as is commonly taught. This seven-year period, first mentioned in the book of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27) and often referred to as the tribulation period (from Matthew 24:21-22), will start after an unknown period of time after the rapture. Most teach that this period starts immediately after the rapture, but the rapture was only spoken of by Paul (it is not part of God's prophetic plan) and too much prophecy has to be fulfilled before the seven-year period starts.

Between the rapture and the seven-year period, God will restore and reestablish Israel as His chosen nation in their former promised land (Ezekiel 36:22-36; 37:15-23; Hosea 3:1-5; Micah 2:12-13) and eventually cleanse Israel of its sin (by severely judging the nation—Amos 9:7-10; Micah 1:1-7; Zechariah 13:8-9). It is that nation with which *the beast* (a mighty king) will make a covenant (or treaty) of peace²³ that will last three and a half years, followed by his persecution of Israel during the next three and a half years (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-28; Revelation 13:1-8).

Many Christian theologians, pastors, teachers, and writers point to the establishment of Israel in 1948 as fulfillment of prophecy. I don't believe this is the case for the following reasons (and more, based on the distinctions between prophecy and the mystery):

- The current nation of Israel occupies only a portion of its historical promised land that God gave to the people of Israel after Moses took them out of Egypt (Ezekiel 37:24-25).

²² The phrase *the day of the Lord* refers to God's time of judgment in this context. It is also referred to as *the day of His wrath* or *the day of wrath* (Psalms 110:5; Romans 2:5).

²³ Why will a covenant be needed? Also, how will the king receive a mortal wound from which he will be healed through the power of Satan (Revelation 13:1-3, 11-14)? It is possible that the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 describes a battle between the nations and Israel that will occur *before* the seven-year period starts (please consider Ezekiel 39:9-10)—a battle that will be miraculously won by God (Ezekiel 38:17 – 39:9). Perhaps the king will be wounded during this battle (Ezekiel 38:21; Revelation 13:14) but, because of his miraculous recovery, he will build a world-wide alliance and conclude a covenant with Israel that will signal the start of the prophesied seven-year period. This is just something to consider as I confess to not knowing the answers to these questions. Although I don't think so, it is possible that the wound is merely symbolic as some believe; nevertheless, something miraculous will happen that will cause the world to worship this mighty king (Revelation 13:4, 12-15).

- God has not gathered His people to the land of Israel as prophesied, for there are millions of Jews living in nations other than Israel (Ezekiel 36:24).
- Israel is a political nation and, as such, is no different than any other nation today. It does not consider itself to be God’s chosen nation and it does not worship God in any manner that resembles its historical establishment by God in the Old Testament nor as prophesied for the future (Ezekiel 36:25-27).
- The current nation does not and cannot define itself according to twelve tribes, which will be the case when God restores Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-23; Matthew 19:27-28; Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-3). The people as a whole consider themselves to be Israelis with no direct connection to the Israelites of the Bible.²⁴
- Israel has not known peace as described in Scripture, as it has experienced conflicts throughout its history and has depended on a strong military instead of the power of God for its national security (Isaiah 26:12; Jeremiah 33:6-7; Ezekiel 37:26).

One might say that these reasons could just be considered as circumstantial. Despite the explanations of Christians who say otherwise, however, nothing that is happening in Israel (or in the world) is actually in fulfillment of prophecy. They try to fit current situations and events into prophetic passages in Scripture but in so doing they overlook or disregard the specific information contained in those passages. It has been more than 70 years since Israel was established as a sovereign nation—through their own political and military revolution—and yet nothing has changed. A lot should have happened by now if that event was in fulfillment of prophecy.

Brethren, it comes back to understanding the difference between God’s prophetic program (that encompasses most of the Bible) and the revelation of His mystery through the Apostle Paul. One aspect of the mystery concerns Israel’s blindness—by God. He interrupted His prophetic program involving Israel and its promised kingdom and won’t resume and fulfill it until after the current dispensation of His grace is completed.

For I [Paul] do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening [blindness] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so [at such time] all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer [Christ] will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” “This is My [the Lord God’s] covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
(Romans 11:25-29)

God will restore and bless Israel, for the sake of His promise to their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Genesis 12:1-3; 22:1-18; 26:1-5; 28:14-15), just as He said He would. In the meantime, we can be thankful for Israel’s disobedience and that God has temporarily set the nation aside. Why is this?

²⁴ I learned this from the son of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with whom I attended graduate school in Colorado in the late 1970s.

Because through this God revealed His mystery regarding His grace, and Gentiles have been blessed apart from Israel's redemption. In fact, we are blessed today *because* of Israel's disobedience.²⁵

I [Paul] say then, they [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall [permanently], did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them [Israel] jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! (Romans 11:11-12)

The Nations and the Earth

As previously mentioned, the beast will make a covenant of peace with Israel and the kingdoms of the world; it is this covenant that begins the last seven-year period mentioned by Daniel. Peace will be in name only because there will continue to be wars among the kingdoms of the beast, as well as famines and earthquakes, just as it has always been through the ages (Matthew 24:6-8). Three and a half years into the covenant (if we understand the timing correctly), however, the beast will begin his persecution of Israel and will occupy Jerusalem and the temple (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:9-16). This persecution is what Jesus referred to as a time of tribulation for Israel and a time when Satan actively tries to deceive the people of Israel through false prophets—antichrists (Matthew 24:10-11, 15-26). When Jesus was referring to a time of great tribulation in Matthew 24:9-28, therefore, He was referring to the persecution of the people of Israel by the beast.

To end this time of tribulation against His people, God through Christ will begin judging the nations and the earth. This will be a time of terrible judgments that will eventually culminate in Armageddon, and is referred to as the day of wrath—the wrath of God against sin and against the nations for their treatment of His people Israel (Ezekiel 7:1-19; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Matthew 24:29-31). I won't attempt to describe all the judgments associated with the seals, trumpets, and bowls described in Revelation 6 – 16 (seven judgments each, apparently overlapping in time), but the judgments of God through Christ and His heavenly host will include:

- A third of the earth (including trees and grass) will be burned up, a third of the sea creatures will be destroyed, and a third of the rivers and springs will be made bitter (Revelation 8:6-11).
- A third of the sun, moon, and stars will be darkened (Revelation 8:12; Matthew 24:29-30).
- A great earthquake (or earthquakes) will occur, destroying cities and moving every mountain and island out of their places, but the people will continue to blaspheme God (Revelation 6:12-17; 16:17-21). The earth will actually be reconfigured to prepare it for New Jerusalem (see its dimensions in Revelation 21:15-16).
- A third of mankind will be destroyed, but the survivors still will not repent (Revelation 9:13-21).
- Christ and His heavenly army will destroy the army of the beast when he is in process of trying to destroy Jerusalem and Israel. This event is usually referred to as the battle of Armageddon (Daniel 7:22, 26; Revelation 16:13-16; 19:11-21).
- The beast and false prophet will be cast into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

²⁵ We must *never* boast that we are better than Israel. As believers—children of God—we are just as susceptible to disobedience as Israel was (Romans 11:17-24). We should humbly learn from Israel's disobedience so that we do not do the same things (I Corinthians 10:1-13). Unfortunately, our history as the church—the body of Christ—has shown that we are as disobedient as Israel was and that God has been very gracious and longsuffering with us (I Corinthians 3:1-3; Galatians 3:1-3).

- Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit (the abyss) for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

Brethren, all of these judgments are miraculous occurrences. No processes of nature will be able to explain them—the people of the earth will know that God is judging them and yet they still won't repent and turn to God (that is the nature of man).²⁶ Furthermore, in no instance are the tools of man referenced. None of the judgments can be tied to the use of nuclear weapons, missiles, aircraft, or any other armaments of man (Daniel 8:23-26). We must not think in terms of what we are familiar with today because God works in ways that are beyond our comprehension (Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 55:8-9; Daniel 4:35).

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). With the tribulation judgments that will rework the surface of the earth and will somehow change the planets and stars in the heavens, God will have configured a new earth and new heaven in preparation for the descension and establishment of New Jerusalem on the earth.²⁷ The surviving nations (two thirds of mankind will not be destroyed), even though unbelieving, will live by the permanent light of New Jerusalem and will be blessed through Christ's reign (Revelation 21:22-27). Despite their blessings, they will rise up against New Jerusalem under the leadership of Satan and will be judged at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:7-15).

Then I [John] saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2)

The above passage refers to *a bride*, and I think it is important to discuss what this is referring to in the context of our hope in Christ. Brethren, believers today are not the bride of Christ as is so often taught. The subject of Revelation 21 and 22 is the *city* New Jerusalem, and it is called *the bride*—the *wife*—of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-11). It will be a miraculous city and will be occupied, *after* descending to earth, by the believers who survived the tribulation persecutions by the beast (Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13) and by believers who died with the kingdom hope (beginning with Adam) and who will be raised from the dead at that time (Revelation 20:4-6; Ezekiel 37:11-14; John 6:39-44; 11:24). Those believers are currently residing in Abraham's bosom, which is also called Paradise (Luke 16:22-23; 23:42-43).

Believers of this dispensation of grace, however, have a heavenly hope; we reside in the heavens in Christ at the right hand of God (Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 3:1-3). Consider also that the church is the body of Christ, who is masculine. It is not logical that Christ's body would be His bride.²⁸ Paul never says that our souls will reside in Abraham's bosom or that we will return to earth during Christ's millennial reign. However, as addressed regarding the dispensation of the fullness of times in the main text of this study (page 13), we may join the kingdom brethren on earth after the great white throne judgment.

²⁶ Despite all of the miraculous and devastating plagues that God poured on Egypt through Moses, the Pharaoh and people of Egypt did not repent and worship God.

²⁷ Please refer to the main text (page 8) about the chronology of events in the book of Revelation.

²⁸ I believe that the KJV is correct in referring to the church as the word *it* in Ephesians 5:25-27. Translators and editors of Bible versions that use the word *her* in this passage were biased by the predominant, but erroneous, teaching that the church is the bride of Christ.

Time

As previously mentioned, there are too many things that have to occur before *the beast* makes his covenant with Israel for the period between the rapture and the second coming of Christ to be seven years as is traditionally taught. We know that the beast, a mighty king, will be in control over all the nations during an apparent seven-year period²⁹ before the second coming of Christ (Daniel 7:7; 8:23-26; 9:24-27; Revelation 13:1-8). Some of the things that must happen before the beast assumes power and makes his covenant with Israel include the following events or occurrences. I readily admit that I don't understand the timing, duration, or details of these events; some of them will likely overlap in time.

- The seven churches described in the first three chapters of Revelation will be established. These churches will be composed of believing and unbelieving Jews, and the letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude, as well as the books of Hebrews and Revelation, will apply directly to them³⁰ (just as Paul's letters—Romans through Philemon—apply directly to us). Although church scholars and historians have attempted to assign these churches to various times or Christian institutions over the past 2,000 years, the descriptions in Revelation don't directly fit anything we have seen so far.
- The people of Israel will be gathered into its promised land as God's chosen nation. The twelve tribes that were split after King Solomon's reign will be restored as one nation (Ezekiel 37:15-23; Micah 2:12-13). We don't know the time or manner in which God will accomplish this gathering. However, the nation initially will be composed of believing and unbelieving Jews as in the past.
- The people of Israel will be judged by God through Christ for their disobedience to God, and the nation will be redeemed (Hosea 3:1-5; Amos 9:7-10; Micah 1:1-7). This cleansing will be severe, because God will destroy two thirds of the people of Israel (Zechariah 13:8-9).
- The believing remnant of Israel will mourn over killing their Messiah and will repent. They will be changed to have hearts of flesh (as opposed to having sinful hearts of stone) and will automatically obey the Law of Moses because it will be written on their hearts (Zechariah 12:10-14; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- God will raise up 144,000 virgin Jewish men (12,000 from each of twelve tribes of Israel) apparently to be the witnesses of Christ to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nations (Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-5; Matthew 24:14). If this is the case, then their ministry will be in accordance with, and fulfill, the commission that Jesus gave to His disciples prior to His ascension (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:6-8).

Brethren, consider the time that it will take for these events to occur. First of all, nothing of this nature has taken place so far. We don't know how long the churches of Revelation will exist before the people are restored to their promised land. We don't know how much time God will take to cleanse His people. For God to raise up 144,000 men to fulfill His purpose does not seem likely until God restores His nation, and it will take at least a generation (maybe more) after He has restored the nation.

²⁹ The seven-year period is based on the assumption that the seventy *weeks* of Daniel's dream represent 70 seven-year periods, which seems to be correct based on the following passages: Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5.

³⁰ The believing Jews, those who recognize that Israel killed its Messiah (Christ) and believe that He is the Son of God, will be perfect, while the unbelieving Jews, or false brethren, will be distinguished by their sin (1 John 2:1-6; 2:28-29; 3:4-10, 23-24; 4:7-8; 5:18; Ezekiel 36:22-38).

Some interpret Matthew 24:34 to mean that the generation listening to Jesus (which also witnessed His crucifixion) would see the fulfillment of all the events described in Matthew 24:4-31,³¹ while others have taught that the generation that saw the establishment of Israel in 1948 would see these events occur. Neither generational scenario has happened because Jesus was saying that all of the events He was talking about would occur within one generation and not the generation He was talking to. That is, the generation that witnesses the false Christs and experiences the relative peace will also suffer through the time of tribulation and will witness the judgments that follow and the return of Christ to establish His kingdom. Consequently, *this generation* of Matthew 24:34 has not been born yet.

Remember that Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, or about two generations, before entering into their promised land. In the meantime, only two men over the age of 20 who left Egypt entered into the promised land (Joshua and Caleb—Numbers 14:22-30; 26:63-65). All of the others died because of their disobedience and rebellion against God (e.g., Exodus 32:19-28; Numbers 25:1-9), and only their children and grandchildren born in the wilderness entered the promised land (Numbers 14:31-33; 26:1-62).³² Even Moses could not enter because of his one display of arrogance (Numbers 20:8-13; Deuteronomy 3:23-27). With this example in mind, it could easily be two or more generations between the rapture and the appearance of the beast, but this is useless speculation; it does demonstrate, however, that it will be more than seven years between the rapture and the prophesied second coming of Christ. We must also remember that the time of the return of Christ is known only to the Father (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6-7); therefore, it is futile for us to try to figure out all the timing (and all of the details) involved in these prophetic events.

Besides all the events involving Israel, the establishment of the beast's authority and power (including the reason for his covenant with Israel) will take time before the seven-year period starts. Such activities that are described primarily in the books of Daniel and Revelation are beyond the scope of this study and don't directly pertain to us in this dispensation of the grace of God.

Summary

This study addresses only a few of the events and actions of God (through Christ) that will occur after the rapture and before the prophesied second coming of Christ. I admit without hesitation that I don't understand all the things that will happen, how God will accomplish them, or how long it will take for them to be accomplished. This does not worry me, though, because trying to understand the future, a future that will unfold exactly as God has planned, is not as important as endeavoring to understand what Christ did for us at the cross and how God expects us to live each day.

Again, believers in this dispensation of the grace God will not be around to endure these judgments. During this dispensation, I am convinced that we will not be involved in the restoration of Israel (which hasn't occurred in accordance with prophecy), we are not to be on the lookout for the appearance of the beast or his identifying number (666 or whatever the actual number will be—Revelation 13:18), nor are catastrophic natural events or other *signs of the times* happening in fulfillment of prophecy. Nor will we face Christ at the great white throne judgment.

³¹ This thinking implies that Jesus was unaware of what would happen. However, Jesus knew this wouldn't have been truthful and wouldn't have deceived His disciples.

³² Women aren't mentioned in these passages. Presumably, at least some of the wives and mothers who escaped Egypt also entered into the promised land.

I hope this helps provide some understanding of what will occur. It goes far beyond what Paul summarized in II Thessalonians 2:1-15 in his letter to the Thessalonian believers; we don't know what he told them in person, though. Teaching regarding the signs of the times and seemingly fulfilled prophecy is so prevalent today, however, that I think it is helpful to provide scriptural evidence to respond to that teaching as the occasion arises. It is also intended to remove anxiety or fear that often arises when people are always trying to fit circumstances and events of today into Scripture. We should be comforted by the knowledge that we will be caught up to be with our Lord and are not destined to endure the time of the wrath of God.

There is one more thing I ask my fellow brethren to consider. Paul told the Corinthian believers that "now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:1-2). It was the day of salvation at that time, and it is still the day of salvation. Brethren, no one has been saved because they understand or fear the events of the prophetic last days that lie ahead.³³ Although humble discussion of prophecy among brethren can be beneficial (e.g., when done in the context of God's sovereignty or to demonstrate that it does not directly apply to us), to argue over the meaning of this or that word (or name) of prophecy or when and how those events will unfold amounts to striving over words and reveals our pride. Such endeavors are not honoring to God or our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that God will reveal the true meaning to His people when He is fulfilling the prophecies about the last days just as He did with Christ's apostles (Acts 2:14-36; 3:17-26).

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle [strive] about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [rightly dividing] the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:14-15)

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. (II Timothy 2:23)

³³ There is no record of the Apostle Paul preaching *hellfire and brimstone* to scare people into salvation, which is a self-serving tactic used by some preachers and evangelists. This approach is not necessary to understand that we are sinners who need salvation. Instead, Paul preached the *good news* of the grace of God and the *good news* that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (Acts 20:24; I Corinthians 1:18-21; 2:1-5; 15:1-4; Romans 10:8-10; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-9). Only after we are saved, when we have the Holy Spirit within us, are we able to understand the things of God (including future events) and how and why we should walk worthy of our salvation (I Corinthians 2:10-16; Ephesians 1:15-21; 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; II Timothy 3:16-17).