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UNDERSTANDING APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

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BIB5773- APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

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APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE OUTSIDE WRITINGS

Apocalyptic literature historically runs the gambit in form and fashion. Many factors regarding this point are in answers to the following questions. Who were the people behind the writings? What were their purposes? What role do they play in history? In addition, what is the eschatological future of which they speak? They widely vary: from the "Q" commentaries, which appear to have hidden agendas; to the Dead Sea Scrolls, which have coinciding and complementary writings, to the Holy Bible. On the other hand, the Bible independently portrays an end-time future with a vast array of Scriptural references. The Old Testament has the book of Daniel; and the New Testament has the book of Revelation. They both speak primarily of end-time prophecies. Further, the entire Bible is divinely woven throughout with these particular truths. God has a place being prepared for the obedient. And He has a place (of torment) for those whose actions have not been pleasing to Him (Jo. 14:2, Lk 12:5).

The Theory of Q

The "Q" theory is what many have thought to be a long, lost document. The scholars who have formed this theory base it on the fact that Matthew and Luke are so much alike, yet "are not in agreement with Mark". They call this a synoptic problem: "some believe there to be an additional article from which Matthew and Luke write" (Erskine, 2016). Burton Mack, in his book *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* has defiantly accepted the notion that this Q had

been penned. He refers to it as a "sayings gospel". Whether or not it in actuality did exist, he makes statements that concur with his belief:

"Q shifts the focus of conversation about Christian origins away from fascination with the many myths condensed in the New Testament and onto the people who produced them" ;"The discovery of Q effectively challenges the privilege granted the narrative gospels as depictions of the historical Jesus"; and "The narrative gospels are also products of mythic imagination" (Mack, 1993, loc.3924 and 4038).

Mack's obstinacy has stood in the way of his receiving salvation, the way the Bible teaches it. It is sufficient to say that he represents the "blind leading the blind" by obscuring the Bible and all of its sacred contents. The problem with his conclusion, (that thwarts the salvation plan), is not that he believes the Q document to exist; it is, that he also believes that the Bible can take a back seat to Q. This is apostasy and heresy. By taking God's Word out of its original context, one is doing exactly what Jesus said not to do. Jesus said "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev 22:19). Mack, along with others of his ilk, has in essence, discounted the Bible. They have totally missed the mark, missing out on the opportunity to experience true, Biblical salvation. The Dead Sea Scrolls, on the other hand, are exciting, modern-day discoveries that work to affirm the Word, not to discredit it.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at the archeological site of the Qumran community beginning around 1947. A common thread is in the writings of the 300 plus Scrolls. This common thread is the thread of hope, as signified by the Jewish community. They found themselves segregated to the outskirts of Jerusalem. They were clinging to the promises of God from Old Testament Prophets. This is evident by the extreme measures they went to; to

document hundreds of inspired writings, many of which directly parallel Bible passages. In fact, all books of the Bible, (except Esther) are referred to in some fashion in the scrolls. Even New Testament passages are mentioned, but very little has been made available to the public. In any event, it is clear that the motives of the Qumran community were pure and sincere. By the fact that the Holy Spirit was spoken of in them, gives a clear indication that they were indeed, divinely inspired to write the Dead Sea Scrolls. References to John the Baptist affirm this conclusion:

"John the Baptist announced the coming of a "Stronger One" who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mark 1:7-8). The Qumran community had a similar expectation: They anticipated that their ritual washings would be superseded with a purification by the Holy Spirit at the end of time; then God himself will pour his spirit like water from heaven and remove the spirit of perversion from the hearts of his chosen people. Then they would receive the "knowledge of the Most High and all the glory of Adam" (Manual of Discipline 4:20-22)" (Shanks, 1993, 4505).

It is remarkable to see correlations of an outside writing to the Bible to this degree; 2,000 years since they were written.

One must closely scrutinize outside writings against the Word of God, in order to ascertain their validity. What one sees in the Dead Sea Scrolls is affirmation that Jesus Christ did indeed live. They also reveal the Old Testament as the foundation of the Jewish faith. The people of the Qumran community had no New Testament per se, for it had not yet been written as we know it today. What they wrote in the scrolls were historical narratives; revealing that God was indeed speaking during the so-called "Four hundred years of silence". His judgment, deliverance, and hope for the nation of Israel, have always been of major importance. Because they had been displaced from their homeland of Jerusalem, they were desperate to return, and rightly so (Erskine, 2016). The Dead Sea Scrolls reflect the heartbeat of the nation of Israel during this time of displacement.

BIBLICAL APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The Nation of Israel in God's Time Line

Favored People

Israel has always been God's; favored people, His called out ones. From the time of Abraham until now, they are the people that the world needs to recognize as; the chosen children of Yahweh: "And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forevermore" (Ez. 37:28). By Abraham's loyalty to Almighty God, his lineage, (by default), inherited this remarkable position. It is important to understand that although they were not ready yet to receive a Messiah (Jesus Christ), to redeem them; that does not change the fact that they have a special place in the heart of God. Wilson states: "Israel's present unbelief does not remove God's determination and faithfulness to fulfill his covenant promises (to them)" (Wilson, 2016, p. 17). Multiple prophets warned Israel of their impending doom, if they did not turn their hearts back to God. Unfortunately, due to continued disobedience, and willful acts of rebellion, they found themselves under bondage. It was the initial captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians that marked the beginning of the "Times of the Gentiles" (2 Kings 17 & 25) (Erskine, 2016).

Times of the Gentiles and the Jewish Nation

The "Times of the Gentiles" refers to the period when the Jewish nation had come under subjection to Gentile rule. It became a continued hope for the Jewish nation to be delivered from bondage. They asked Jesus before his ascension: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the

kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) If they had been seeking the God of the Old Testament, this would not have been their thinking; their question would have been more accurate.

Israel has been referred to as God's corporate son: "Israel dies, disappears as a nation, but is promised a resurrection" (Ex.37) (Wilson, 2015, p. 15). Until this resurrection, occurs, they have been and will be living under Gentile subjugation.

Pivot Point

Israel is seen to be "the pivot point upon which the Old Testament revolves" (Wilson, 2016). If the readers of the Old Testament knew that, they would have been looking for the coming Messiah, and would not have missed it the way they did. The unbelief of Israel is because of their spiritual blindness. This unbelief paved the way for the Gentiles' opportunity; to now be grafted into the spiritual vine. The Jews were the natural branch, and the Gentiles become the "wild" branch grafted. This grafting represents the future Kingdom over which Christ will reign (Ro. 11:24) (Wilson, 2016).

It is important to understand that the church is different from Israel. God is dealing with the two entities of people in different ways. Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks is speaking of Israel, "not the church" (Wilson, 2016, p. 2). Paul speaks in Romans about the Jews bringing "Gentiles to God" (Ro. 11:12,15). In addition, Gentiles are coming to God without Jewish involvement today. The church does "receive the spiritual blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament", but it "does not inherit the natural promises made to Israel" of "land, national prominence, etc.". These have yet to be "fulfilled by a restored Israel (Acts 15:16-17; Ro. 11:15, 23,25-26)" (Wilson, 2016, p. 2).

70 Weeks Determined

Israel can be seen, not only as God's chosen people but also as a historical time-piece. When examining the prophecies found in the Bible, it is evident that God used certain prophets to speak to His people regarding this method of communication. There are particular numbers and dates which make it evident that the Jewish nation is on God's time-line. These dates are found in Biblical history to be parallel with major eschatological events. The "Seventy Weeks" talked about in Daniel Chapter 7 (v.24) total 490 years, since the "Jewish calendar assigns 360 days to each year" (Johnston, 2014, p.1348).

One week is seven years, in the Hebrew dating system. Seven means the number of completion. God was very specific in the number of years that he would deal with the Israelite nation. He spoke through Daniel (Chapter 9) a pre-determined escalation of historical events: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy" (Dan. 9:24). These seventy weeks are broken up into three time periods: "seven weeks", "threescore and two weeks", and one last and final "week". This next verse attests to that: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." (Da.9:25). God, prophecy, and history of mankind come together in an intimate way, as reflected by these three time periods. This first period begins in 445BC. We can see it scripturally as: "the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem" (Wilson, 2016. p. 11).

Seven Weeks

The first period stated was "Seven Weeks". And because every year equates to seven in the Hebrew dating system, this was seven times seven, or forty-nine years. From the time the command to go and rebuild went forth, until the actual time of rebuilding Jerusalem was forty-nine years (Daniel 9:24), bringing the date up to 396 BC.

Threescore and Two Weeks

The next period referred to is a period of three score and two weeks. It was (434 years) "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven and threescore and two weeks" (Dan 9:25). This verse is referring to the birth of Jesus Christ, which brings one up to the beginning of the calendar, around the time when it went from BC (before Christ) to AD ("Anno-Domini, In the Year of the Lord") (online def.). It is interesting to note that the rebuilding of the tabernacle, (with the Holy of Holies) correlates to the period of the birth of Jesus Christ (V.25).

One Final Week

From the crucifixion until the end of life as we presently know it, is, this time, period of the one final week: "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off". This is a direct correlation to the death of the Messiah. It is a total of sixty-two weeks, or 434 years since the command to go and rebuild Jerusalem. This happens in 34AD, where Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (Jo 3:16). He is "killed for the transgression of (others)" (Johnson, 2014) (Dan 9:26).

God "confirms the covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:27). It is during this time when there will be a gathering in of many souls before judgment is brought in the world. This week includes the "sacrifice and oblation" ceasing; desolation will come for the "overspreading of abomination"; and a final consummation; which shall be his wrath upon those who were the partakers in abominations (Dan. 9:27). These verses parallel Revelation chapters 20-21.

END OF TIME

Before all of God's judgments come to pass, there will be some events as described by John the Revelator in the book of Revelation: Jesus returns for those who have made themselves ready; Tribulation period; Battle of Armageddon; 1000 year Millennial reign and a Great White Throne Judgment. This paper will briefly discuss each of these events as the Bible has referenced in the Old and New Testaments.

Catching Away of the Church

Numerous verses in the Bible speak of a "Catching Away". Typically this is in reference to the idea of Jesus coming for a people who have made themselves ready; to be his spiritual "bride". God in Revelation speaks of Church and churches numerous times. They are seen eighteen times and then once again in the very last chapter of the book. This is significant, for it demonstrates the fact that the church age has ended after Chapter three. It began on the day of Pentecost, and closes with the catching away of the church (1 Thess. 4:14-18, Rev. 4:1) (Wilson, 2016, p. 5). The "church" is "comprised of all who respond in faith to the Gospel message given on the birthday of the church (Acts 2:38) (Wilson, 2016, p. 6). Several themes surround this concept of the church going to "be with the Lord" forever: salvation; being blameless; Jesus coming in the

clouds; and end-time parables about being ready (1 Thess. 4:17). It is important to know what the salvation message entails.

Salvation

Initial Experience

The term salvation has several different meanings depending on its context. There is an initial salvation experience as outlined in Matthew 16 when Peter is given "the keys to the kingdom" by Jesus (v. 18-19). Peter then gives these keys to the whole world; in essence, when he preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-38). This includes; repenting of one's sins, being baptized (immersed) in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of one's sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Receiving the gift is evidenced by one speaking in other tongues, just like they did in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4). It is important to continue in this state of being saved, to be included in the "catching away of the church".

As Deliverance

The Dictionary of Bible Imagery defines salvation as one who; "is saved from bondage and brought to a state of well-being or blessedness". Salvation is; the act of being delivered, from being in captivity to the sinful nature with which one was born. It is this power, generated by the Holy Ghost living inside, which will keep one saved. For there is; "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1Pet 1:4,5). It is God's

grace that is responsible for allowing us the opportunity to have salvation. But once one has been saved, one has a responsibility to hold up to, on one's end, as well:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."
(Titus 2:13)

The book of Revelation shows the events of these end-times, as God's way of warning the world to get ready and to stay ready for the catching away:

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:19-22).

Blameless

Innocence is essential in the preparation for heaven. We come in a guilty state to Jesus, but the blood He shed washes us to where we are now blameless (figuratively speaking). The Bible speaks numerous times of this state of being blameless:

"...I pray your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless (I Thess 5:23).", "...that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ (Phil 1:10).", "...that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:8)", "to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...I Thess. 3:12), "I charge you to keep this command without spot or blameless until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Tim 6:14)", "Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure (Phil. 2:14)", "...be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Pet. 3:14)".

Jesus Coming in the Clouds

The angels, who were present at Jesus' ascension said he would return the same way He left (Acts 1: 10-11). One must be looking for His appearing for:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). In the clouds He shall return for those who are adamantly expecting his return. Many verses attest to this fact: "Behold He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him..." (Rev 1: 7); "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead shall rise first: then we which remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16-17); "Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.(Mt. 26:64)"; "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven..." (Da. 7:13).

Jesus has informed the world on numerous occasions to be ready for his return!

End-time Parables

Jesus spoke to his disciples on numerous occasions of the catching away of the church through parables. One can learn from them the necessity of being ready at a moment's notice. Klaus Wengst, in his article "Aspects of the Last Judgment in the Gospel According to Matthew" says that the parables indicate Jesus' admonition; to have an "alert readiness to do what is right at all times". Jesus requires a "demand for readiness" (Wengst, 1997, p. 237).

One Taken, the Other Left

Hear the talent of the one taken, the other left: "Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come (Mt. 24:40-42)"

The Unprofitable Servant

Hear the talent of the unprofitable servant: "The kingdom of God is like a man traveling into a far country" (Mt. 25:14). He gave his servants talents and expected them to invest them. To those who did wisely with their talents, he said "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of the Lord" (Mt 25:23). But to the one who was given only one talent and failed to invest it he said: "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed", "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"(Mt. 25:30).

Five Foolish, Five Wise Virgins

Hear the talent of the virgins: "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Mt 25:3-4). The foolish "went to buy" (v.10), while they were gone, "the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Mt 25:10).

Paul Hartwig, in his article "The obedience of the church as a prelude to the Parousia: Ecclesial and temporal factors in New Testament eschatology" states that the parables "explicate the dynamic between the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God" (Hartwig, 2005, p. 387). For this paper, it is the future aspects of which one needs to grab hold. Hartwig further states that "the world will be 'Christianized' with the gospel (Hartwig, 2005, p.388). A world-wide revival must be of utmost importance to a child of God working to save souls for the Kingdom.

WORLD-WIDE REVIVAL

Before Jesus returns to take His church out of the world, there will be several significant events. One of these is a world-wide revival. Granted, there will be a falling away of a significant amount of believers, but there is also to be expected a great revival (1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Thess. 2:3a). Are we living in the days of this world-wide revival? Several noted events have happened of late that influences one to think yes to this question. The United Nations has opened its doors to ministers of truth this past year. Many ambassadors from all over the world have been exposed to the Acts 2:38 message of salvation. And many have received it wholeheartedly. What this means is that the Word's influence is reaching to all over the world. It has been the divine hand of God, fulfilling scripture: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Mt. 24:14). Other verses proclaim the fact that every one shall declare Jesus to be Lord: "As surely as I live, says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God' (Ro. 14:11); and "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Ph. 2:10). Whether one proclaims Jesus as Lord of all before Judgment Day, or on Judgment day, is one's own decision. But it would be in one's best interest to make that declaration before that day comes.

Know also, as God is desirous that many souls make it into heaven, our adversary will also be working hard to prevent that from happening. The falling away mentioned in the previous section will be the result of Satan's influence. A spirit of anti-Christ is what he will use to sway others into his pernicious ways. He is subtle and conniving; and the weak and vulnerable will succumb to his advances. One must be on guard at all times. Jesus admonishes the churches

about these tactics in Revelation (2,3). He warns us of an alluring spirit of Jezebel as an attack on His church.

Spirit of Jezebel

One particular contention Jesus has, is with the Church of Thyatira. Some have consented to the Spirit of Jezebel, which has been around ever since the creation of man (Rev. 2:20-24). She acts as a seducing spirit and works to teach the servants of God to "commit fornication" with the world, thereby disabling them spiritually (Rev. 2:20). She tempts them to sin, and entraps them with her lies and deception. But children of God must learn to put on spiritual armor and remember that we do not wrestle "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). The Spirit of Jezebel is fought when one puts one's life under Godly spiritual authority, and learns to walk a path of submission; to God, the Word, and to one's Pastor.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Earlier in this article, extensive explanations were made regarding the importance of one receiving salvation. When Jesus comes in the clouds to take his church away it will be for those who are spiritually ready. It will be a momentous occasion. Verses that speak to this coming day are:

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as that day of Christ is at hand" (2 Thes 2:2); "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thes. 5:2); "Being confident

of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil 1:10).

The spirit of God will leave this earth, and He will be pouring out his wrath on those who are left. The church leaving the earth will usher in the Great Tribulation period.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The great tribulation spoken of in Revelation lasts seven years but is broken up into two time periods, three and a half years each. The first half consists of; the revealing of the anti-Christ, the Beast, war and catastrophe like the world has never seen. Twenty-five percent of the world's population will die. The second half consists of; a one-world government, the mark of the Beast, and souls will be beheaded, for not serving it or taking its mark. One-third of the world's population will die during this period. The army's of the world will decide that it is time to wage war on Israel, and the Battle of Armageddon will take place. The anti-Christ's goal is to deceive as many as he can to thinking they do not need Jesus and His salvation plan. These facts can be seen in a thorough study of Daniel and Revelation.

The Anti-Christ

As Jesus Christ represents the glory of Almighty God; the diametrically opposed figure, to all that is good, is Satan. Satan's figurehead to the world will be the anti-Christ with many titles: "man of sin", "son of perdition", "the wicked" and "the beast" (2 Thess. 2, Rev. 20). He will be seen in the "temple of God, showing himself that he is God", seeking to have souls to worship

him instead of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:3; Rev 13, 20). This anti-Christ will be the one to lead the war against the saints, "especially in Israel" (Mt. 24:15-22; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 12:13-17;13:6,7) (MacArthur, 1997, p. 1240). The Spirit of anti-Christ is already in the world actively working to secure souls. But at some point an individual will be in the actual position of the carrying this as their major role. The wicked one shall be revealed as being of the work of Satan "with all power and signs and lying wonders; and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:9-12). The significance of this individual is that he will; "oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:2-4). Might this be the abomination of desolation of which Matthew and Daniel speak? (Daniel 9, Matt. 24). The warning is: "When ye therefore see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (Mt. 24:15). This could be very likely be when the anti-Christ sits in the temple declaring himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:4). Then the tribulation will follow.

Persecution of the Saints has been going on from the time of Christ, but the Great Tribulation that will be poured out in the last days will escalate astronomically. One must be patient when waiting for God's deliverance (2 Thess. 1:4-10). Numerous crises will be in the world as spoken in Matthew 24: false Christs; false prophets; and great signs and wonders. He states that this great tribulation will be more than has ever been before, "nor ever shall be" (Mt. 24:21).

The Battle of Armageddon and Revealing of Jesus

Jude states that the Lord would be returning with "ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 13-15). Could this be the time, when every eye "shall see him" (Rev.1:7)? Jesus is "revealed" to the world at this time. Is this also when his glory is revealed? (1 Pet. 4:13). He came in the clouds to receive his Bride. But this time, He comes in the clouds with a mission to do battle. He returns to the same mountain he prophesied the tribulation from, Mount of Olives.

Zechariah prophesied: "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north and half of it toward the south" (Zech. 14:4). And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth" (Zech. 14:12)

The Battle of Armageddon is the war fought with Jesus and the saints he brings with him. The result of this battle will be to destroy the armies of the world that have gathered themselves against Jerusalem. Zechariah prophesies this climactic event:

"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness" (Zech. 12:2-4).

Once this battle is over, the millennial reign with Jesus will begin.

THE BEGINNING OF THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST

The souls who have stood strong and overcome, will rule and reign with Jesus Christ for one thousand years:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4)

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thess. 2:2-4)

As has been stated before, persecution of the Saints has been happening for hundreds of years.

There have been numerous martyrs through the centuries fulfilling Scripture of the end-times in which we are living.

GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGEMENT

The parables in Matthew are direct warnings as to what God expects of us, if we are to make it into His Kingdom. He also warns of those who will be cursed of him and thrown into everlasting fire, if one who declares himself to be righteous fails to: give food to the hungry; take in strangers; cloth the naked; or give water to the thirsty (Mt. 25:34-46). We shall be judged by

our works of righteousness at the Great White Throne Judgment. Those who have allowed God to work righteousness in them are considered the children of the light:

"You are children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thess. 5:5-9).

Satan and Hell

Revelation, chapter 20, speaks of the "bottomless pit": Satan is cast into the pit on this Day of Judgment. He will be bound here for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3). When Satan has been loosed, he will have another opportunity to "deceive the nations". He along with those who have been deceived will be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever" (Rev. 20:7-10).

The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" will be experienced by the souls that reside in hell (Mt. 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Lk. 13:28). It will be a horrendous place of eternal torment. Those who go there will be the: "fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars". These are they which "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8). This judgment day awaits everyone who has ever lived.

Judgment Day and the Book of Life

One needs to be prepared to meet the Lord on the Day of Judgment. This will be the day Jesus separates the goats from the sheep; the obstinate and unbelieving from those who have been obedient. (Mt. 25:32). Those who are prepared will have their names written "in the Book of Life". All others will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). On Judgment day, a book will be opened, called the Book of Life and the dead will be "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). Several other verses speak of this Book of Life, which helps to capitalize on God's message of judgment: (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). It is the message to avoid Hell at all costs. The Great White Throne Judgment may be the grand finale of the millennium, but it is not the end of God's world. Once the thousand years come to a close, the Bible predicts that there will be a new heaven and a new earth; in a "final state of perfection" (Wilson, 2016, p. 17).

New Heaven and New Earth

Christ consummates "his covenant by inaugurating the New Jerusalem (Rev 20-22), the story of the future" (DuRand& Song, 2003, p. 378). Chapter nine of the book of Revelation gives a beautiful description of heaven. John writes of this new covenant: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Rev. 21:1). He goes on to describe the most beautiful place that one can not imagine: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto stone most precious, even like jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21: 10, 11). Old Testament verses also describe this

place of beauty: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind (Is. 65:17)”; “For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain (Is. 66:22). Other passages which speak of the glorious place are: Is. 60:1, 2, 19-20; Rev. 21:23-26, and Rev. 22:5).

God identifies himself as Jesus in the last two chapters of Revelation. He does this to declare His identity as the Almighty, the: “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”. He goes on to say that whoever overcomes shall; “inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”. The identity clarification being summed up in the last two chapters of the Bible is significant. For if one knows where one came from, one will then have a much clearer indication of where one is going (Erskine, 2016). One must take opportunity to identify oneself with the God of the universe. This will help one to be in right-standing with Him, so that on the day of Judgment He will be able to say: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of the lord” (Mt. 25:21).

CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation is God’s way of concluding his communication with humanity. He used multiple images and symbolism to display his power and majesty. John wrote the book of Revelation as a response to the visions and encounters with angels from on high. The first three chapters of the book are directed toward the church age. Once the church is taken out, then God proceeds to deal with the nation of Israel. What was horrible for the nation of Israel in terms of the Great Tribulation becomes a restoration of the nation in the end. Jesus’ mercy gives the nation a second time to acknowledge the gospel message before wrapping up His Kingdom.

One must be continually mindful of the fact that Jesus could return at any time to take his bride away. Whether He comes tomorrow, next week, next month or next year, one must be ready. With the image of the church being the spotless bride of Christ, one has a “controlling metaphor that provides direction and motivation for Paul’s apostolic and pastoral labors” ((Batey 1971; Sampley 1971) Hartwig, 2005, p. 388). This timepiece in future eschatology can be used to warn others that the “end is near” to “convert unbelievers before it is too late”, and to admonish those “within the fellowship to be sure they are right with the Lord” (Gowan, 2000, p. 123).

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