

Biblical Prophecies

Twelve messages on the End-time



*A new world order under
the control of sinful people
is paving the way towards
domination by the Antichrist
as the man of sin
(2 Thess. 2:3-12)*

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Content

- 1. Appearance and Works of the Antichrist 3**
- 2. The Postmodern Deconstruction of Biblical Truths 10**
- 3. The Writing on the Wall 16**
- 4. Literal Fulfilment of Israel's Seven Feasts 21**
- 5. A Demonic Strategy for the Deceiving of Israel 29**
- 6. Uprisings and Power Shifts Amongst Israel's Enemies 35**
- 7. The Stone that will Destroy the Gentile Kingdoms 41**
- 8. Our Responsibility in Respect of Jerusalem 48**
- 9. Demands of the End-time Conflict 53**
- 10. Peter's Life Before and After Pentecost 59**
- 11. Demonic Attacks on Believers' Faith 63**
- 12. Reasons for the Rapture 69**

1. Appearance and Works of the Antichrist

The end-time appearance of the Antichrist will be the final step in a demonically inspired programme for the establishment of antichristian thinking and actions which have persisted through many centuries. The final objective with this programme is to alienate the world population spiritually, morally and intellectually from God and His Word, in order that deceived humanity may voluntarily accept full control by an antichristian world government.

The realisation of this objective is dependant on the revelation of the Antichrist as a diplomat and prince of peace who will be so successful that he will be accepted as world leader and even be honoured and worshipped as messiah. He will be the personification of satanic power on earth because the devil will give him “his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:2).

Since Lucifer’s expulsion from heaven this hostile, demonic power operated from a mystical sphere to deceive people and cause them to be untrue to God. All people are engaged in a battle against Satan and his demons: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Eph. 6:12). The devil is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) who succeeded in spiritually and morally dominating virtually the entire world (1 John 5:19).

Under the leadership of the Antichrist and the false prophet, Satan’s spiritual power will give rise to the establishment of a physical world government. That will be a renegade government which will first subject people to its authority through deception, but after 3½ years it will be transformed into a merciless military dictatorship after opposition against the Antichrist will have become widespread.

There are different aspects of the Antichrist and his future government which are described in the Bible:

Imitation of the triune God

The kingdom of Satan is engaged in a war against the kingdom of God with the firm objective of gaining control over the universe. The opposing kingdom of darkness is under the control of a satanic triumvirate which constitutes an imitation of the Triune God. The devil is the antitype of God, who aims to be worshipped as the universal god of all faiths. The Antichrist is the antitype of Christ, who is intent on presenting himself to the entire world as saviour and king. The false prophet is the antitype of the Holy Spirit and he will deceive the world through miraculous acts to accept and worship the Antichrist. He will also impart occult gifts to his victims, which will enable them to perform supernatural acts.

Spiritual deception has already progressed to the level where, on an interfaith level, almost the entire world is ready to give recognition to the universal god of all faiths. They regard him as the singular Creator-god who revealed himself to humanity through all religions and by different names. This “god” has no son – only a large number of prophets, or masters of wisdom, who acted on his behalf. Among them are Buddha, Krishna, Jesus and Mohammed. The interfaith Jesus, who also forms part of this group of co-equal prophets, is clearly “another Jesus” who is not God or the Son of God (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

The Bible describes the deceived followers of the universal god of all faiths as victims of Satan, “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:4). This false god is preparing to send a false christ to the world to replace the true Christ as king and saviour of deceived humanity. He will be known as the cosmic messiah, the world messiah, or the messiah of all faiths, and will follow an inclusive approach by claiming that he represents all religions.

The false prophet will, most likely, be the head of a multireligious organisation, and as such the spiritual leader of the world religions. He will have special satanic powers which will enable him to deceive people through spectacular signs. In his function of convicting

people of spiritual truths he will imitate the Holy Spirit but he will proclaim lies to establish the power of delusion in their hearts (2 Thess. 2:6-8). The “spirit of error” will proceed from him (1 John 4:6).

End-time revelation and condemnation

All biblical prophecies on the Antichrist clearly indicate that he will appear in the end-time, shortly before the second coming of the true Christ. He will be revealed after the church dispensation will have been concluded by way of the rapture, and will then rule the world for seven years. These seven years are also referred to as the 70th year-week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27; a year-week is a period of seven years – Lev. 25:8). At the end of the seven years of tribulation, the Antichrist will be destroyed at the second coming of Christ. Paul says:

“And now you know what is restraining, that he [the Antichrist] may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way [the rapture of the church]. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:6-8).

The Antichrist will, therefore, be a living person on earth when Christ comes again; their meeting will be brief and will end in the impostor’s condemnation to the lake of fire. John says: “And I saw the beast [the Antichrist], the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse [Christ] and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:19-20).

It is important that biblical prophecies on the end-time be interpreted futuristically and that, particularly in times such as these, we should eagerly expect their fulfilment. We must guard against the error of historical (preteristic) interpretations of prophecies on the Antichrist, thereby regarding them as irrelevant for the present time. People who follow this approach do not seriously regard the signs of the times (Luke 12:54-56) and consequently disqualify themselves to be withholders of the Antichrist who take a strong stand against his apostate ideology.

Origin

Many people try to determine the Antichrist’s place of origin. In Daniel’s discussion of the ancient world empires it is evident from which province (or country) the Antichrist will arise. Within the framework of the Roman Empire, Daniel describes him as one among ten (Dan. 7:20-26), and subsequently, in the context of the Greek Empire, as one among four (Dan. 8:8-9). In Daniel 11, the circle is narrowed down further by referring to the Antichrist as one among two within the Greek Empire: the king of the North (Syria) or the king of the South (Egypt). In the war between these two kingdoms the king of the North is victorious, and in Daniel 11:31-45 the end-time king of the North is described as the Antichrist.

The only region which fits into all these descriptions is Syria – it was one of the ten provinces of the Roman Empire, one of the four provinces of the Greek Empire, and later also the power base of the king of the North. The ancient Syrian province was much larger than modern Syria as it also included the present Iraq, Lebanon and Kuwait. In ancient times this region was also known as Assyria or Babylonia, depending on whether it was controlled from Damascus or Babilon.

According to Revelation, the Antichrist will have characteristics of all the ancient empires. In Revelation 13:1-2, John uses the same symbols for the old world empires as those used in Daniel 7:4-6. The Antichrist is presented as a composite beast with the mouth of a lion (Babylonian), the feet of a bear (Medo-Persian), the body of a leopard (Greek), and a head with ten horns (Roman). As in the Babylonian Empire, he will compel all subjects of his

empire to worship the image of an idol. As in die Medo-Persian Empire, he will order genocide of the Jews after they have fallen into disfavour with him, and he will also rule in accordance with the unchangeable laws of the Medes and Persians (i.e. by military decree). As in the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, he will establish a rapid deployment force that can be deployed anywhere on short notice to enforce his policies. As in the case of the Roman Empire, immorality, corruption and violence will occur everywhere, as well as the public execution of his empire's adversaries.

The fact that the Antichrist's world empire will represent the concurrent revival of all four these world empires, implies that he will arise from a region which can be associated with all these empires. Only the Syrian-Babylonian region complies with this demand as it was the heartland of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. That is the reason why Isaiah refers to the Antichrist as the Assyrian (Isa. 10:12-13). Furthermore, Syria was one of the four provinces of the Greek Empire in which, among others, Antiochus Epiphanes ruled, while it was also one of the provinces of the Roman Empire. The latter was a Mediterranean Empire which not only included countries in Western and Eastern Europe but also in the Middle East and North Africa. The end-time restoration of the Roman Empire strongly suggests that countries in these regions will also join the European Community.

Progressive revelation

The Antichrist's initial revelation on earth will be in the guise of a prince of peace. That will most probably coincide with a big war in the Middle East (Ezek. 38 & 39) and he will claim credit for ending this war. His plan of a new world order will also offer hope to the world on economic recovery and political stability, and because of that all nations will enter into a covenant with him. During the midpoint of the tribulation, revolts will occur against his empire and that will induce him to institute a military dictatorship in order to forcibly subject all people to his authority. In Revelation 6, the progressive revelation of the Antichrist is described in terms of the imagery of four horsemen who will appear on the world scene in quick succession:

The **white horse** and its rider depict the Antichrist as a prince of peace who will promote globalism and harmony in all spheres of life (Rev. 6:2). Political globalism will become manifest when all people are regarded to be planetary citizens who are united under the authority of a one world government with executive powers. Religious globalism will be ensured when all faiths, under the influence of ecumenical thinking, recognise and worship the coming christ of all nations as their common messiah. Economic globalism will be realised in a centrally-controlled, cashless world economy.

After 3½ years of false peace and unity brought about by antichristian globalism, uprisings will occur against the world empire of the Antichrist and an attempt will also be made on his life (Rev. 13:3, 12). He will suddenly be transformed from false prince of peace to military dictator and continues his march to world domination as the rider on the **red horse** of war (Rev. 6:4). Due to aggravating circumstances in his war economy, leading to widespread famine as well as severe shortages of various commodities, he will institute a strict system of rationing and thus become the rider on the **black horse** (Rev. 6:5). As the rider on the **pale horse** (Rev. 6:8) he will increasingly engage in devastating wars in order to take along as many people as possible on his way to perdition (Dan. 11:44).

Character of the Antichrist

The Antichrist will succeed in pretending to be what he is not. In the same way in which the devil can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the Antichrist will appear under the guise of a special representative of God who has come to bring peace and unity to the world. His pretence will be so convincing that the Jews will accept him as the promised Messiah (John 5:43). Other religions will do the same, and their acceptance will afford him further titles such as the Christ, the fifth Buddha, Krishna, and others – indeed a universal Messiah for all faiths. But in his heart he will abhor and hate all who worship the

true God or any other gods, and he will endeavour to be worshipped as God himself. He will continuously be engaged in hidden agendas, and his followers will never know exactly where they stand with him.

Halfway through the tribulation, the dark side of his character will be revealed when he declares himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4), and then order the summary execution of all who refuse to worship him as such (Rev. 13:15). He will institute a military dictatorship and become a mass murderer. It will then be obvious to all that he is the man of sin and the son of perdition (2 Thess. 2:3). He will establish a worldwide culture of sin, in which violence, corruption, fraud, lawlessness and all manner of immoral acts will be rampant. He will be the personification of sin, and because of that he will blaspheme against God, Jesus Christ, and all those who confess the Name of the Triune God (Rev. 13:5-6). He will wage war against the Christians (Rev. 13:7), and also against Jesus Christ when He comes again (Rev. 19:19-20).

His political and economic policies

The Antichrist will reject God's order of sovereign nations within their own independent territories (Acts 17:26), and merge all of them into a global state in which national boundaries will be less significant. People everywhere will be encouraged not to entertain a limited, nationalistic view but to rather see themselves as planetary citizens. All local governments will be subjected to the supreme authority of the global government, and be compelled to fully observe its policies. The Antichrist will be "given authority over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (Rev. 13:7).

In conjunction with the political globalising of the world population, the Antichrist will also gain control over the world economy: "For he says: By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs *that are* left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved *his* wing, nor opened *his* mouth with even a peep" (Isa. 10:13-14).

According to Revelation 13:16-18, a cashless world economy will be instituted during the second half of the tribulation period, in which nobody will be able to buy or sell without taking an oath of allegiance to the Antichrist, which will involve the accepting of his number. The electronic control of this system will not only enable the world government to monitor all financial transactions, but also the movements of economically active people – wherever they buy or sell.

Ideology of the Antichrist

The basic ideology of the Antichrist will be based on the concept of *monism* or *holism* – *everything is one*. In accordance with this ideology he will unite the world by promoting globalism in every sphere of life, particularly in the political, religious and economic spheres. Everything which is at variance with his monistic reforms will be regarded as detrimental and divisive, and therefore rejected. That means that all forms of nationalism which hinders the promotion of internationalism will be forbidden. In the same way, no form of religious exclusivism will be tolerated as it will impede reforms towards religious equality and ultimate religious unity in the world. In the same way, economic unity will be achieved through the institution of a single monetary system, a single controlling body for the world economy, as well as an equitable way of the redistribution of wealth. Nations will lose their sovereignty as well as economic independence.

Synthetic thinking of this nature is in conflict with biblical principles of antithetic thinking (the ability to think in opposites). To a Christian, there are two major realities which confront him (*dualism*). There is not only a singular truth but also a diversity which forces him to take decisions. He should be able to distinguish between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom, Christ and the Antichrist, light and darkness, the only true religion and all the false religions. Diversity should not be sacrificed for the sake of unity. In all the areas of

their existence, the worldview entertained by Christians is incompatible with the values, objectives and reforms of the Antichrist. There is no way in which their non-compromising lifestyle will allow them to adapt to the global empire of the Antichrist. As a result, they will be persecuted.

Final objective of the beast

The final objective of the Antichrist is to completely replace the Triune God of the Bible by the alternative concept of god in his satanic new world order. Instead of Yahweh, the god of this world should be worshipped; instead of Christ, the universal christ of all faiths should be worshipped and followed; and instead of the Holy Spirit, the interfaith prophet (the false prophet who will be the Antichrist's co-ruler) should be trusted for gifts and spiritual empowerment.

In the light of biblical prophecies, the Antichrist will know that his new world order will only last for seven years. During the first 42 months of his government the various religions will continue to function under his leadership, while the temple of the Jews will be rebuilt. During this time there will be two special witnesses of the Lord in Jerusalem, who will warn the Jews against the false messiah. Because of this, there will be rising opposition against the false messiah and his government. However, at the middle of the tribulation period the Antichrist will overpower and kill these two witnesses (Rev. 11:1-10).

The dramatic events during the middle of the tribulation period will be followed by the last 42 months of the Antichrist's military reign of terror. That will begin on the day when he desecrates the temple by declaring himself to be God, forbids any further sacrifices, and set up an image of himself in the Most Holy Place: "And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there shall be* one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed *is* he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Dan. 12:11-12).

At the end of the second half of the tribulation, after 1 260 days, the true Messiah will return and destroy the Antichrist and his followers. After 1 290 days (including 30 days of mourning – Zech. 12:10-14), Israel will be reconciled with the Messiah. After 1 335 days they will enter the Messiah's rest when the throne of David is restored and His millennial reign begins (Acts 15:16-17).

The Antichrist is aware of biblical prophecies which predict the end of his short-lived world empire, and he will do everything in his power to fight against Christ in an effort to kill Him, thereby proving the Bible to be wrong: "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Rev. 19:19). Satan and the Antichrist will also commission demons to deceived governments throughout the world to send troops to the Middle East to fight against Christ and His heavenly army (Rev. 16:13-14, 16).

The final destiny of the Antichrist and his followers

There is no uncertainty about the final destiny of the Antichrist and his deceived followers who will be as arrogant as to think that they can take up arms against the true Christ and prevail:

"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh" (Rev. 19:20-21; cf. Zech. 14:12-13).

The strongest possible warning is issued to all who give recognition to the Antichrist, accept his number and worship him, thereby taking sides with the enemies of God:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out

full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11).

A choice between two christs

We are presently in the final approach to the rapture, which will be the dividing moment between the church dispensation and the subsequent dispensation of the Antichrist's seven-year reign. This terminal period in the church age is characterised by intensive spiritual influencing aimed at preparing humanity on the appearance and acceptance of the universal messiah of all faiths. False propaganda of this nature is obviously very successful, since in the end the entire world will follow the Antichrist in amazement – they will also worship him together with the false, universal god of this age (Rev. 13:3-4). Deluded people will regard his holistic approach as the only solution to a highly divided and hostile humanity.

The campaign of unification with the depraved world coincides with blasphemous statements about the true God and His Son. Liberal theologians are deconstructing the image of Jesus by completely stripping Him of His divine attributes. Their aim is to replace Him with “another Jesus” who was not born from a virgin, is not the Son of God, is not the only Saviour of the world, does not condemn the supporters of other faiths, did not redeem people through his crucifixion, did not rise from the dead and ascended to heaven, and can therefore not return from heaven to the earth (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4). When these lies are believed, the way is clear for the Antichrist to be accepted as the messiah of all faiths.

The campaign against the true Christ occurs worldwide and is also driven by a large number of prominent Protestant theologians who have abandoned fundamental biblical truths. Postmodern South African theologians, as well as their followers, are playing a big role in deconstructing the biblical Jesus in order to render South Africa an easy target to the Antichrist. In a wide range of books which are also prescribed to theological students, Jesus is presented as a mere human being and member of a single-parent family, who was allegedly conceived out of wedlock by a sinful man (and thus not by the Holy Spirit), was executed as a criminal without any redemptive significance associated with his death, was not bodily resurrected from the dead, and was subjectively and erroneously declared to be God by his disciples (cf. *Fatherless in Galilee* by A. van Aarde, 2001).

One of these theologians has even written a book in which Jesus is described as a shaman (a traditional healer or witchdoctor) who healed the sick and practised exorcism. During the process of divination, he and his disciples allegedly entered into trances, or altered states of consciousness, during which they summoned their ancestors, who appeared to them on certain occasions (*The life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological perspective* by P.F. Craffert, 2008).

The “historical Jesus” is the product of speculative theological reasoning which is based upon fictitious premises rather than facts. According to this approach, Jesus was only a fallible man whose thinking was determined by the primitive worldview of His time. However, there is no objective historical credibility regarding the historical Jesus who was conceptualised by theologians who have no regard for the authority of Scripture. Fortunately, the liberal, *Jesus Seminar* orientated theologians clearly distinguish their Jesus from the kerygmatic Jesus, or Jesus of faith, in whom Bible believing Christians believe. It is of vital importance to be able to distinguish between these two Jesuses since we are confronted with a choice between the true Jesus and various false presentations of Jesus which are all proclaimed to establish a mindset which is conducive to accepting the Antichrist.

What does Paul say of theological deception which contradicts biblical teaching? “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to

pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-8; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-4). In a true Christian's life there is no place whatsoever for distortions of Jesus Christ and the biblical doctrine of salvation.

The blasphemous things which postmodern theologians say of the Lord Jesus emanate from the spirit of Antichrist, and indeed he himself will open his mouth to blaspheme against the Triune God (Rev. 13:5-6). The present campaign against Christ is devil-inspired and aimed at preparing the way for the revelation of the Antichrist. When the relatively small group of withholders of the Antichrist has been taken out of the way, the lawless one will be revealed to deceive the peoples of the world through great signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:6-10). The signs of his coming can already be discerned – even in the lecture halls of large theological seminaries in which the Bible is no longer honoured as the infallible norm for Christian living and thinking. In these circles there is also a notable absence of a sound faith which alone can supersede the vain arguments of scholars whose minds are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

All people on earth are either followers of the true Christ and His unique gospel of salvation, or of the false christ and his religious lies – there is no neutral middle road between the two. Jesus said to the Jews that if they did not receive Him as Messiah they will inevitably end up as followers of the false messiah (John 5:43). That also applies to all other people.

2. The Postmodern Deconstruction of Biblical Truths

We are living in a time of the most immense and relentless attacks on the Christian faith since the beginning of the church dispensation. The present onslaught does not primarily occur on the physical level in order to persecute and torture Christians, but rather on the spiritual and doctrinal level with a view to utterly deceiving them. These assaults constitute a determined and final effort by the kingdom of darkness to completely obliterate the Christian faith and replace it with the Antichrist's alliance of false world religions.

The changes brought about by this process of apostatising are so comprehensive that they are paving the way towards a completely new worldview which is known as postmodernism or globalism. What do these changes consist of? During the modern phase in history, and particularly during the great awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Christian faith exerted a great influence on the mindset and lives of people in the Western world. It formed the basis of the Christian civilisation, when respect for the Bible was demonstrated by way of Christian constitutions, Christian systems of education, Christian morality and various other institutions in society. God's supremacy was recognised by many people, even though in the majority of cases it was only nominally so.

Through postmodern globalism, a major assault is being launched on the foundations and basic principles of the Christian faith. Postmodern man is liberating himself from all faiths or ideologies which impede his freedom of belief or behaviour in any way. The right of free choice is offered to all people of all religious convictions, which gives rise to an all-inclusive form of religious globalism. All people may believe, or decide not to believe, as they please. They can also live as they please, provided they do not harm anybody.

Biblical Christianity is a stumbling block in the way of postmodern reforms since, by not accommodating other faiths and moral codes, it is non-inclusive. It therefore stands in the way of the appearance of a universal, multireligious messiah who will set out to unite the world under his banner of globalism. Because of this, the past number of years has seen a growing movement to overthrow the foundations of the Christian faith. The following five Christian foundations have specifically been targeted in the process of postmodern transformation, usually also in the order in which they are mentioned below:

1. Rejection of the literal interpretation of the Bible

The starting point for the deconstruction of biblical truths is the rejection of the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible. In this way, the first seeds of doubt are sown on clear Scriptural statements, particularly with regard to biblical prophecies. In terms of this approach, people take the liberty to reinterpret the Bible by means of spiritualising and allegorising in order to arrive at any conclusion which appeals to them. The only thing which they consistently do is to reject the literal fulfilment of biblical prophecies as that does not comply with their subjective outlook.

Theologians who spiritualise the Bible refuse to believe that the end-time will be characterised by widespread apostasy (Matt. 24:4; 1 Tim. 4:1), that there will be a great tribulation (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 6 to 19), as well as an Antichrist who will rule by means of demonic powers and enjoy a worldwide following of worshippers (Rev. 13:1-4). Neither do they believe in a literal battle of Armageddon in which Christ will destroy His enemies (Rev. 16:13-16; 19:19-21), nor in a literal millennial reign of peace after the second coming of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6).

Instead of this scenario those who deviate from the literal interpretation proclaim world peace, ecumenical unity and prosperity for all. Not only do they deny the fact of divine judgements in the end-time, but go further and even deny the existence of the devil and hell, as well as eternal condemnation in the lake of fire. Many other biblical pronouncements are also subjected to pragmatic reinterpretation. The result of this approach to the Bible is an ever-increasing doctrinal diversity in Christian churches, in which each one proclaims and follows its own teachings. To a lesser or larger degree they

all deviate from the truth, since there is only one central truth in the Bible.

The moment when biblical prophecies are shrouded in mystery and robbed of their primary meaning, the way is opened to also relegate other Scriptural teachings to different and downgraded levels of application. In this way people take the liberty of imposing their own views on the Bible in order to avoid unpleasant realities. Hence they start building another kingdom and completely lose sight of the future kingdom which will be revealed by Jesus Christ after His second coming.

2. The rejection of sanctification as a further work of grace

The biblical command on holiness is the next Christian foundation which is rejected within the process of apostatising. A life of self-mortification, filling with the Holy Spirit, and the observing of strict moral standards is not acceptable to postmodern man. By not allowing him to arbitrarily turn away from God's Word, this "restrictive" life thwarts his freedom to act according to his own will and insights. The teaching of sanctification, which was strongly proclaimed during revival times (also in South Africa under the ministry of Andrew Murray), is now commonly questioned and even outright rejected.

When the command to holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 5:18) is ignored or explained away, only repentance is proclaimed – nothing more. The consequences of such a situation are well described in 1 Corinthians 3. Although most of the members of that congregation were born again believers they were "babes in Christ" who were described as carnal – not at all spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1-4). The most important characteristics of their conduct were envy, strife and divisions, as well as changing doctrinal preferences. They were spiritually so ignorant and without depth in their religious experience that they did not even realise that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit, and that they should have lead holy lives (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

The same situation prevails today in churches where repentance is still proclaimed, but without any emphasis on sanctification or clear teachings on biblical prophecies. Such Christians do not have a definite future expectation, neither the power nor the motivation to prevail against sin, fleshliness and worldliness. No wonder that many believers, particularly the youth, are losing interest in such churches and then drift away from the truth even further.

3. Rejection of the command to be born again

In congregations where the prophetic word in the Bible does not carry any weight, and where the command to sanctification is not seriously considered, an ideal breeding-ground prevails for the falling of the next Christian foundation, i.e. the command to repent and be born again. That is precisely what is to a great extent happening today.

In many churches, false foundations are offered to people as a basis of salvation. These foundations range from good works to church membership and ritualising through sacraments, as well as the deceptive assumption that all who are predestined for heaven are already spiritually alive at their birth or since infant baptism, and consequently do not have to repent at all.

When this situation prevails, a congregation reduces itself to the level of an organisation devoid of any spirituality, being only nominally Christian. They are characterised by a mere form of godliness in which the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is denied (2 Tim. 3:5). Such people regard themselves as Christians, but they have no testimony of being born again at a time when the Lord has changed their hearts and lives.

In this condition of the spiritual darkening of their minds, church members are ready and also susceptible to the overturning of the two most basic foundations of the Christian faith, i.e. the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, as well as the deity and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Rejection of the Bible as the inspired Word of God

Church members who only have a form of godliness do not enjoy the benefit of the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts and giving them enlightened eyes of the mind to understand the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 1:18). Most of them are victims of the theology of spiritualising and therefore do not seriously regard biblical truths at face value. Because of their lack of rebirth and sanctification, they cannot understand biblical truths which are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

Because of this situation, the members of seriously apostatised churches do not have the knowledge to resist and refute postmodern textual criticism. They are easy victims of the New Reformation's premises that the Bible was written by people in terms of the primitive worldview of their time, that it contains many mistakes and contradictions, and is also filled with mythology and imagery which cannot be seriously regarded. To them, the Bible is on the same level as the holy books of other religions, and definitely not a unique revelation of God to humanity.

Under such circumstances there is no commitment to the authority of Scripture; consequently, postmodern Christians see themselves as completely free to determine the nature of their own lives and to observe their own moral principles. Ritualising by means of baptising is regarded to be sufficient for salvation, which leads to the disposition that everything which may be described as evangelical or fundamentalist is rejected as unacceptable narrow-mindedness.

5. The rejection of Christ's divine attributes and atonement

The fifth and most important foundation upon which the Christian faith rests is the Rock, Jesus Christ, with specific reference to His virgin birth, deity, atoning death, bodily resurrection and ascension. He is the Word that became flesh – the incarnated God who dwelt among us. When the Bible is no longer recognised as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, it is obvious that Jesus Christ will no longer be regarded as the perfect God-Man. Consequently, Christianity is no longer to be viewed as unique and therefore relegated to an equal level with the other world religions.

It is important to determine how far the deconstruction of Jesus has progressed in apostatised churches and how members are reacting to it. This practice doubtlessly constitutes treason against the true Christ, and that includes confessing Christians who continue identifying with a church in which these heresies are condoned and accepted without protest. The Lord Jesus says that if we deny Him for who He is, He will also deny us: "Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33). Nobody will remain unaffected when treason of this nature is committed as he will be responsible for the eternal damage inflicted to his own soul.

It is in the interest of all of us to determine to which degree this important foundation of the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour of the world is accepted or questioned in the circles in which we move. We are confronted by a direct choice between the Jesus of the Bible and the so-called "historical Jesus" who is presented to us by agnostic theologians. The true Jesus is the eternal, self-existent Son of God who was conceived by the Holy Spirit when He was incarnated. The "other Jesus" who is the product of speculative theological reasoning and doubtful historical interpretations, was an ordinary man who was not supernaturally conceived, was not God, did not die to atone for our sins and did not rise from the grave.

The end-time attack against the central Figure of our faith obtained considerable momentum since the *Jesus Seminar* was founded in America in 1985 by 150 critical scholars under the leadership of Robert Funk. According to their findings, the Bible is not credible as it presents to us an imaginary Jesus who is far removed from the Jesus who really existed. They maintain that the historical Jesus was not God and had no supernatural attributes. The *Jesus Seminar* does not only attack biblical views on Jesus but also entirely rejects the concept of the Trinity. What they believe in will bring about the

end of the Christian faith as expounded in the Bible. The following are a few of their statements on Christianity:

- The doctrine of the atonement – the claim that God killed his own son in order to satisfy his thirst for satisfaction – is subrational and subethical. This monstrous doctrine is the stepchild of a primitive sacrificial system in which the gods had to be appeased by offering them some special gift, such as a child or an animal.
- Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense.
- Prayer is meaningless when understood as requests addressed to an external God for favour or forgiveness since God does not interfere with the laws of nature. Prayer as praise is a remnant of the age of kingship in the ancient Near East and is beneath the dignity of deity. Prayer should be understood principally as meditation – as listening rather than talking – and as attention to the needs of one's neighbour.
- The Bible does not contain fixed, objective standards of behaviour that should govern human behaviour for all time.

(For more information on the view of the *Jesus Seminar*, visit www.patheos.com and specifically the section "Unmasking the Jesus Seminar").

Various members of the *Jesus Seminar* visited the theological faculties of South African universities, where they were received with honour and acclamation for their activities. A number of local theologians closely associate with the Seminar's work of deconstructing the biblical Jesus and constructing an alternative historical Jesus who is a false replacement of the true Jesus. South Africa has, particularly since the turn of the century, become an important arena for the promotion of the historical Jesus. This movement has not only induced the breaking away of an extreme group referring to themselves as the New Reformation, but also prompted an active debate on Jesus within mainstream reformed churches, where a growing number of pastors support the postmodern deconstruction of Jesus and the Bible.

The active phase of this debate was initiated in 2001 by the publication of the book *Fatherless in Galilee* by Prof. Andries van Aarde of the University of Pretoria. Van Aarde describes the Jesus of the Bible as the Jesus of faith, the kerygmatic Jesus (i.e. the Jesus of the gospel), and also the cultic Jesus. According to him, the disciples and apostles have subjectively decided to declare Jesus to be Messiah and God, but the historic Jesus Himself did not do that. He says that the followers of Jesus transformed the Christian faith into a cult, and that the value which they attached to the cross and the resurrection were simply their own ideas. Van Aarde describes the historical Jesus merely as the son of Mary – the same way in which the Koran also presents Him. He alleges that Jesus was an illegitimate child who grew up without a father, hence his fantasies about a heavenly Father.

The views on the unbiblical Jesus advanced by Van Aarde gained substantial support among many theologians as well as ordinary church members. Opposition against this campaign is, among others, offered by a theologically conservative group referring to themselves as *Steeds Hervormers (Still Reformed)*. On 9th March 2012 they made a statement to the press in which they take issue with Prof. Van Aarde's views in his controversial book, summarising them as follows:

"There was no virgin birth; Jesus did not rise from the grave; Jesus was not part of the Trinity and was only an ordinary human being; Jesus did not die for our sins; Jesus did not ascend to heaven; the miracles of Jesus were only metaphors and did not really happen; Jesus only saw in God a father figure because he probably did not have a father; the significance of Jesus should be reconsidered in the light of the present postmodern secular world as well as the interfaith debates; Jesus was a nobody amongst nobodies; Jesus was a mere illegitimate child and his divinity was only later conceptualised after the analogy of mythological figures in other cultures" (www.steedshervormers.co.za).

Another publication which sent shockwaves through South Africa and many other countries is a book by Prof. Pieter Craffert of the University of South Africa, titled: *The Life of a Galilean Shaman – Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological perspective*, published in 2008.

In his book, Craffert says that “the historical Jesus can be seen as a Galilean shamanic figure” (p. 420). He also identifies Moses and Elisha as earlier shamanic figures in Israel. In a review of Craffert’s book, Prof. R.J. Miller (Juniata College, Pennsylvania, USA) says, among others: “In Part Three, *Jesus and the shamanic complex*, Craffert argues that Jesus can plausibly be seen as a shamanic figure because he (and his group) often experienced altered states of consciousness, such as various visions (e.g., Jesus’ transfiguration and his walking on the sea) and his experiences at his baptism and temptation. Jesus was thought to be possessed by ancestral spirits. ... Jesus’ healings, exorcisms, nature miracles (i.e., control of the spirits of nature), and resurrections (recoveries of the spirits of the dead) can all be understood as shamanic activities and thus suggest that Jesus was a shamanic holy man” (<http://www.bookreviews.org/>).

Although Prof. Miller expresses his admiration for this book, he nevertheless says, “[Craffert’s] inability to tell historical fact from historical fiction surely reduces the power of any historical method.” This is ample proof of the speculative and unscientific nature of historical Jesus research in general. The findings of these “researchers” are not worthy of serious consideration and do not in any way present a credible alternative to the biblical account of historical events.

Reasons for the deconstruction of Jesus

What is the major reason for the postmodern deconstruction, i.e. the breaking down and rejection of the biblical Jesus? That is done with a view to selling out the world to “another Jesus” who comes from the kingdom of darkness. Paul says to a congregation of deceived Christians:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as a chaste virgin* to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it!*” (2 Cor. 11:2-4).

Under the influence of deceiving spirits, many people are becoming followers of another Jesus who is foreign to the Bible. Who is this “other Jesus”? It either refers to the Antichrist himself or to one of his forerunners. John says: “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either” (1 John 2:22-23).

We are either followers of the true Christ or of the false christ – there is no middle way between them. The Lord Jesus told spiritual leaders of the Jews who had rejected Him as Messiah: “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (John 5:43).

Take a clear stand for the truth: do not even in the smallest respect deviate from the true Jesus of the Bible, as that would amount to rejecting one of His divine attributes and denying Him in that regard. By for instance only denying that Jesus was born from a virgin, one would thereby also deny that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and consequently also the fact that He is the Son of His heavenly Father. If that was true, Jesus would only have been a sinful man who could not, as the perfect Lamb of God, pay the ransom for our sins. People who believe this, have already in their hearts become estranged from the true Christ and are therefore followers of an unbiblical Jesus.

If we do maintain a relationship with the true Christ and resist the antichristian lies, we will escape the Antichrist’s coming reign of terror. Paul says: “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:7-8).

Just as surely as the true Christ came to the world 2 000 years ago, He will return at the end of the church dispensation to take away His faithful disciples. Just as literal as that will happen, there will also be a literal Antichrist who will be revealed and institute a highly oppressive government for seven years on earth. We are now witnessing the final preparations for his revelation. That is the reason why the true Jesus is brought into disrepute and even outright denied so that the false Jesus may be presented to the world in His place.

It is evident that we are in an advanced stage of the deconstruction of biblical truths, and in that way provision is made for the establishment of the end-time’s postmodern lies. For quite some time now, our generation has experienced how the five important foundations of the Christian faith (as earlier explained), i.e.: **1.** the literal interpretation of biblical prophecies; **2.** the doctrine on sanctification; **3.** the doctrine on rebirth; **4.** recognition of the Bible as the inerrant and inspired Word of God; and **5.** faith in Jesus Christ as the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:20), are being destroyed.

What should we do in view of all the apostatising that occurs around us? King David asked the same question during a time of great resistance against the truth: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? The LORD *is* in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne *is* in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind *shall be* the portion of their cup. For the LORD *is* righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (Ps. 11:3-7).

We are now in the time of testing before the pouring out of the Lord’s judgements during the tribulation period under the rule of the Antichrist. The Lord is thoroughly purging His threshing-floor before gathering the wheat into the heavenly barn and burning the chaff with fire (Luke 3:17). Are you firmly grounded in the truth, or are you being drawn away by the strong current of deception?

One thing we should know for sure, is that the righteous will be gathered in heaven where they will see the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17), while the compromisers and wicked people are destined for the wrath of God. To those who have taken refuge with the biblical Jesus and found safety at His feet, there will be pardon and escape because He has already paid the price for our sins. They shall not come into judgement as they have passed from spiritual death into everlasting life (John 5:24).

3. The Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5 describes the highly dramatic final hours before the fall of the once mighty Babylonian Empire. King Belshazzar gave a great banquet in his palace for 1 000 of his nobles, as well as his wives and concubines, to celebrate the greatness of Babylon. At this feast he acted disdainfully towards the God of Israel and arrogantly said that Israel's God was unable to save them from the hands of the Babylonians. The king showed his contempt for the Jews and their God by having liquor served in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem when the city was captured by his forces. In his megalomania, Belshazzar honoured the mighty gods of Babylon and gloried in the invincibility of his empire.

While this celebration was under way, the Persian army was already deployed outside the city for three months. However, Belshazzar was not concerned about them as Babylon was heavily fortified with an enclosed wall which was 26 metres wide and 106 metres high, with 250 watchtowers. The Euphrates River flowed right through the city, and large sluice-gates were constructed to prohibit entrance to the city by boat. Furthermore, the inhabitants had stored up enough food in the city for 20 years.

But the Persians had dug a channel to divert the flow of the water to a nearby lake. The moment when they succeed with this plan the way was open for their enemies to enter the city from the north and the south below the sluice-gates, under the cover of darkness. In the meantime, Belshazzar's feast continued and his bravado had no limits.

Time had run out for the haughty king, and the Lord not only announced his own end but also that of the Babylonian Empire in which he gloried so much. Suddenly, a hand appeared on the plastered wall just opposite the lampstand where all could see it. The king was overcome with shock and fear, and intuitively knew that his party was over.



Confusion also reigned supreme among his counsellors and not one of them – including the most learned men in Babylon – could interpret the writing. It is significant that Daniel, who was a senior official, did not attend this pagan party. He was summoned and a great reward was offered to him, including promotion to third in rank in the empire, if he could interpret the handwriting.

Daniel reminded Belshazzar and his officials of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was punished and humbled by the Lord because of his haughtiness. At the time, Daniel counselled Nebuchadnezzar to break with his sins and pursue righteousness (Daniel 4:27). But he did not heed this advice, and afterwards his royal authority was taken away from him; he also became insane and lived with wild animals for seven years. When he subsequently repented, his sanity was restored to him and he was reinstated on his royal throne. Nebuchadnezzar abandoned all idol worship and only praised and glorified the Lord as the King of heaven who has all power in heaven and among men.

Belshazzar, his wives and his nobles did not take the lessons of history to heart and exalted themselves. Daniel confronted him in the light of Nebuchadnezzar's experience and said: "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew

all this” (Dan. 5:22). Belshazzar reverted completely to idolatry and arrogantly scoffed at the God of Israel. But the time of grace soon expired for him, as is evident from Daniel’s interpretation of the handwriting: *Mene*: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end; *tekel*: you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; *peres*: your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

During that same night Babylon was conquered by their enemies and Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. This is a terrifying account of what may happen to people who ignore God’s warnings in His Word. It certainly has a message to us also since we have even more explicit warnings about a great tribulation which will, like a thief in the night, come suddenly upon the whole world.

The Day of the Lord

According to the Bible we know that the time of grace in the New Testament will also come to an end after the whole world will have had the opportunity of accepting the gospel message (Acts 17:30), and then the judgements of the Lord will suddenly be poured out upon unrepentant humanity during the tribulation period. Isaiah says the following on the coming day of the Lord:

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. ... I will punish the world for *its* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible” (Isa. 13:9, 11).

The God-rejecting world of the end-time is in the same situation as that of Belshazzar many centuries ago. They do not only reject the God of heaven of whom they know very little, but they also reject His Son who has come to the world, as well as His Word and the gospel message which was proclaimed to the world during the past 2000 years. The end-time judgements will therefore be more severe, since the Lord Jesus said that there will be a great tribulation as there has never been, and if those days were not shortened no flesh would be saved (Matt. 24:21).

We read about the great end-time rebellion against God and His Son in Psalm 2: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.” (Ps. 2:2-3). During the past few decades, most nations in the traditional Christian world have turned their backs upon the Bible as God’s Word by abrogating Christian constitutions, discontinuing Christian education, and rejecting Christian morality. Even many of the theologians also participated in this rebellion by questioning the authenticity of the Bible as God’s Word, denying the deity of the Lord Jesus, and relegating Him to the same level as the idols of the pagans.

All that now remains is that the judgements of the Lord will suddenly be poured out upon the wicked after the Lord has taken away His children who were not party to this rebellion. There are various signs of the times which are meant to be the writing on the wall to the whole world that the dispensation of grace will soon come to an end, and will immediately be followed by the time of judgements. In the Word of God we have a much clearer exposition of what the future holds for us *and* for the whole world, than was the case during Old Testament times.

Peter says: “We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as to a light that shines in a dark place” (2 Pet. 1:19). The question is: Do we heed these prophecies or are we not concerned about the writing on the wall? Ignorance on end-time prophecies does not only cause the virgins in the kingdom of heaven to fall asleep during the midnight hour, but together with them the whole unsaved world is also in the grip of fatal ignorance.

Where are the men of God who should interpret the message on the coming judgements in such a way that all will be able to understand it? Every Spirit-filled child of God has the

obligation to proclaim this message in a pure and correct way. Or did you neglect to make a full surrender to be filled with the Holy Spirit? If that is the case, you will also be unable to interpret the writing on the wall. The Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth, and also tell us what is yet to come (John 16:13).

Joel Rosenberg

Fortunately, there are men who do not hesitate to proclaim the Lord's message on the end-time to all people – including political leaders. One of them is the prominent Messianic Jew, Joel Rosenberg. He writes books, manages websites, addresses pastors' conferences, visits Israel and conducts discussions with government officials, and visits various other countries in the Middle East to liaise with religious leaders and to organise and support gospel outreaches.

Rosenberg likens America with the severe apostasy that prevailed during the time of Belshazzar. He draws attention to the USA's national debt of \$16 trillion, while the Bible warns us not to go into debt. He also refers to the 53 million abortions in the US to date, to legalised homosexual marriage, and to a pornography industry that makes billions of dollars profit. He then asks the following question to fellow Americans:

“How much longer will the Lord wait before He lets us reap what we've sown? Is God going to give us another chance, or is He finished with us? Is America in a *Nebuchadnezzar moment* where we still have an opportunity to repent and be restored, or a *Belshazzar moment* where God removes His favour from us and turns out the lights? Honestly, I'm not certain.”

More or less the same can be said of all other countries in the world. The collapse of spiritual and moral values is worldwide, as is the current financial crisis due to overspending.

Joel Rosenberg has recently published a book titled *Implosion*. In it he discusses the impending implosion of the world economy, which will happen suddenly and be much like the demolishing of an old building with explosives. Most of the big economies in the world are threatened by a major recession or by total bankruptcy. Shares and government bonds will lose most of their value, while currencies will also lose much of their buying power. The value of property will drastically decrease, and due to the widespread poverty there will be few buyers. All these factors suggest that, politically as well as economically, a new world order will have to be established in an effort to offer chances of survival to the seven billion inhabitants of planet earth.

The threat from Iran

There is a further correlation between the present situation and that of Babylon, and that refers to the Persians who played a big role in the fall of Belshazzar. In the end-time they will again play a major role since Persia, the present Iran, is busy developing nuclear weapons and they have repeatedly threatened to destroy Israel and wipe this country off the world map. The Iranian government also entertains a strong expectation that the Imam Mahdi – that is the Islamic Messiah – will appear shortly to subject the whole world under the authority of the Koran. They see it as their prophetic calling to cause chaos in the world, as the Mahdi will allegedly only come to establish peace during a time of great calamity.

Apart from Islam's resistance against Judaism and Christianity, they also insist that all of Israel should be part of Palestine and under full control of the Palestinian people. Their final objective is to establish an Islamic world state with Jerusalem as its capital. Because of all these considerations they have often declared holy wars (jihad) against Israel and its allies. They also say that the last big war will break out when the Mahdi comes; it will be fought mainly in Israel and that Islam will be victorious.

However, their greatest stumbling-block is Israel, and this fact gives rise to the great emphasis on arming themselves in order to be able to wage a war of annihilation against

Israel. Iran's threats are clear and taken seriously by most Western powers in the light of Iran's nuclear development programme. Because of this threat, European countries have decided to stop buying crude oil from Iran as of July 2012. In reaction to this boycott action Iran is threatening to block the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, through which about a third of the world's crude oil is transported. This blockade can potentially cause a crisis in which the world economy may grind to a halt. A number of American and British warships have already been deployed in the Persian Gulf to try and avert any crisis of this nature.

In the meantime, the threats between Israel and Iran continue and increase the tension between them considerably, as well as the possibility of a war that may break out between them any time. When that happens, several of the big powers will probably become involved as their strategic interests will directly be affected by a war in the Middle East.

Iran has concluded a defence treaty with Russia, while Israel concluded a similar treaty with the United States. A war between Iran and Israel can therefore trigger off a very big global war involving many other countries. Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe and Russo-Arab invasion of Israel in which Russia (Gog in the far north) and Iran (Persia) are specifically mentioned, together with several other countries that will be drawn into the conflict. This war may precipitate a new world order in which the Antichrist will be revealed to gain control over the whole world. He will succeed in being accepted as Messiah and global Prince of Peace by all faiths, including Israel and their Muslim enemies. When that happens, the church dispensation will already have been concluded by way of the rapture, as the Antichrist cannot be revealed until he who restrains him has been taken out of the way – that is the true church of Christ as a temple of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess, 2:6-8).

The end-time writing on the wall



We are in a similar situation to that of Daniel in Babylon. While a God-rejecting world is increasingly shaken by serious signs of the times, Christians should not be present at their meetings where they drink, honour idols, and boast in their own achievements, while scoffing at the servants of God and humiliating them. Neither should we keep silent about our convictions, but always strive to shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We must take a bold stand for the authority of Scripture, particularly also for the prophetic word.

When the world unexpectedly becomes perturbed and unnerved by unprecedented signs of the end-time, agnostics should know that there are believers who are able to interpret these signs. The Bible says: "There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

Are you, like Daniel of old, able to interpret to the world the prophetic writing on the wall, and also to warn them against the impending judgements of God? Or is biblical prophecy also a closed book to you because of ignorance? We should not be guilty of remaining silent about the prophetic word and in so doing concealing it from people. In that case we will, together with the unbelieving world, unexpectedly fall victim to divine judgements.

The same rule also applies to Christian churches, fellowships, radio stations, websites and other Christian ministries. We are committed to proclaiming the whole counsel of God

(Acts 20:27) and that definitely includes the prophetic word. Believers who disregard prophecies are usually engaged in promoting a false prophetic scenario in which there is no reference to an impending great tribulation, neither to a rapture as an escape for true believers from the coming judgements (Luke 21:36). We should first get our own lives and spiritual perspective in order, then only will the Lord open our eyes to correctly understand and proclaim biblical prophecies.

Spiritual preparations

What should we as Christians do in times like these? We must be able to discern the approaching footsteps of the Messiah in these events. In His Olivet Discourse He said: "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28). The following command is added to this: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

True Christians do not have an Antichrist expectation but a Christ expectation. We are not appointed to the wrath of God during the coming day of the Lord but to obtain the salvation which the Lord Jesus has promised to His faithful disciples. In Egypt, Israel was also not destined for the plagues that came upon the unbelievers but they had to sprinkle their doorposts with the blood of the Pascal Lamb, while trusting fully in the saving grace of the Lord.

For the same reasons, Noah and his family were not destined for the Flood, neither were Lot and his family to suffer under the divine judgements that were poured out upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Only unbelievers and nominal believers who merely have an outward form of godliness will remain behind when the trumpet sounds, and they will then be faced with unprecedented tribulation. They will still be able to obtain salvation and their faith in the true Messiah will give them courage to deny the false messiah and his new world order, but that will lead to their death as martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11; 12:11).

Rather settle your case with the Lord now. When the trumpet sounds and the call is heard to go out and meet the Bridegroom it will be too late to quickly get the oil of the Holy Spirit, without which nobody is worthy to appear before the Messiah. He has done a complete work of redemption to prepare us for this meeting.

Paul says: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her ... that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). After we were purged from our old sins we should be sanctified completely in our spirit, soul and body to be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

It is the responsibility of each of us to make very sure about our spiritual standing before the Lord. Some church members are unsaved and only have the name that they are Christians, but in reality they are spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1). Others are saved but they are fleshly and carnal, full of envy, strife, and divisions, and are consequently tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Eph. 4:14; Gal. 5:17). Only a relatively small group can testify about sanctification and victory in their spiritual lives. A characteristic of their lives is that they do works which are worthy of repentance – that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit which the Lord wishes to see in the lives of all His children. They are the ones who do not hide their talents but use them in the service of the Lord.

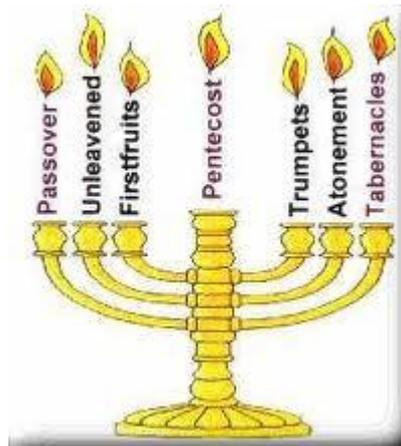
Dark clouds of wars and rumours of wars are gathering over the Middle East and the whole world, attended by spiritual and moral decline which is unprecedented in the entire history of humanity, as well as an economic crisis of apocalyptic proportions which is gaining a firm grip on all countries, the rich and the poor. In times like these we can expect the imminent appearing of the bright morning star above a dark horizon. Are you ready for this? During His secret coming before the tribulation period, He will only come for those who eagerly wait for Him (Heb. 9:28).

4. The Literal Fulfilment of Israel's Seven Feasts

There is a growing interest among Christians worldwide in the fulfilment of Israel's seven major feasts, and that is the reason why thousands of them annually attend the Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Many people now investigate the deeper significance and prophetic application of these feasts, and are gaining new insight into biblical truths.

The cycle of the seven major religious feasts which are, according to Leviticus 23, annually celebrated by Israel, clearly reflects the Lord's plan for the salvation and spiritual destiny of Israel and the nations. In them, we can discern the way of salvation for humanity which starts at the cross and the first purging of our sins, proceeds to the resurrection life and the filling of the Holy Spirit, then leads to the long period of world evangelisation which proceeds right down to the end of the church dispensation. Subsequently, the rapture of the church will occur, then the destruction of the wicked kingdoms during the seven years of tribulation, followed by the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom of peace and righteousness on earth.

The Lord confirms in His Word that the feasts of Israel were not initiated by men, but were instituted by Him to reveal His plan of salvation for lost humanity. With a view to the future fulfilment of the feasts they should be celebrated in the correct chronological order every year: "The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts ... which you shall proclaim at their appointed times" (Lev. 23:2,4). The systematic order of the seven feasts reflects a clear prophetic programme.



Because these feasts all point to a future fulfilment in the Messiah they are in their original form described as "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). This statement by Paul literally means: "The feasts are prophetic indications of future events that will be fulfilled during the time of the Messiah." All seven are Messianic feasts; the first group of four were all fulfilled during events related to the first coming of Christ, ending with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, while the last three refer to events associated with His second coming. The long period between the two groups of feasts prophetically refers to the church dispensation which elapses between the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus.

A very important aspect of these feasts that should always be remembered is that, in their original shadowy form, they were given to Israel to observe in order to prepare them on the coming of the Messiah. However, in the fulfilled, New Testament form of the feasts they are relevant to all people on earth as they contain a blueprint of God's plan of salvation for all of humanity. On the moment when the first of the seven feasts was fulfilled, the perspective shifted from Israel to the entire world. The Lord commanded His disciples that the Gospel message should be proclaimed to all people as it was equally meant for them – nobody was to be excluded. The seven feasts and their New Testament fulfilment are as follows:

The Passover

Passover is celebrated in Nisan, which is the first month on Israel's religious calendar. That is the spring month in northern hemisphere – usually March on the Gregorian calendar. Israel has a lunar calendar in which every month starts with the new moon. However, apart from their religious calendar they also have a civil calendar which starts six months later in the autumn on 1 Tishri (usually in September). That day is referred to as the *Rosh Hashanah*, or New Year. On the religious calendar, Tishri is the seventh month. According to Exodus 12:2, the Lord changed the order of the months on Israel's calendar during their exodus from Egypt, resulting in Nisan becoming the first month. The spring month symbolises the beginning of a new life after Israel's deliverance from four centuries of Egyptian exile and bondage to sin. However, Israel did not relinquish their civil calendar which begins on *Rosh Hashanah*, and still uses both calendars.

The first of the annual feasts begins with the full moon in Nisan (two weeks after the new moon it is always full moon): "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover" (Lev. 23:5). The establishment of the Passover was the first guideline for God's plan of salvation that would be fulfilled 1 500 years later when the Messiah was crucified for the sins of the world: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. ... Now you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. They shall take *some* of the blood, and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. ... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and will strike all the first-born. ... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you" (Ex. 12:5-7,12-13).



The seven feasts begin with the slaying of a lamb. The fulfilment of the Passover was the crucifixion of the spotless Lamb of God who was incarnated in the fullness of time to lay down His life for us. Peter referred to the priceless sacrifice of the Lamb when he said: "...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Paul added to this: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Jesus was crucified on Friday, the 14th day of Nisan (in April 32), on the day of that year's Passover celebrations. He died at three in the afternoon (Mark 15:34-37), on exactly the same hour when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in Egypt. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, and granted permission that He could be buried (Mark 15:42-45). He was buried before the evening and the onset of the Sabbath when nobody could be buried (Luke 23:52- 54; John 19:31). According to the Jews' system of inclusive reckoning, a part of a day is also described as a full day, and for that reason it is not inevitable that 72 hours should elapse between Christ's crucifixion on a Friday afternoon and His resurrection early on a Sunday morning.

Since the moment when Christ paid the ransom for our sins, the fulfilment of the seven

festivals is of significance to all people on earth. Even before the crucifixion of Jesus, John the Baptist pointed at Him and said: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). He would not only die for Israel's sins but for the sins of the whole world. After His atoning death He would further reveal Himself by means of the remaining six feasts.

The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

The second feast follows without interruption on the first one and is a direct consequence of it: "And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread" (Lev. 23:6-7).

According to John 19:31, the Sabbath directly after the crucifixion of Jesus was an important day. That was because it was not only the weekly Sabbath, but also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For the Jews this was a feast of soul-searching and cleansing. As leaven is a symbol of sin, eating unleavened bread would mean that the believer was honestly committed to live a holy life. Therefore, they had to remove all the leaven from their houses for the duration of the feast. This rule was to be applied so stringently that they even had to sweep out crumbs of leavened bread and burn it outside (Ex. 12:15). Followers of the Messiah are likewise expected to cleanse themselves spiritually from the leaven of sin and unrighteousness.

We should also identify with Christ as the unleavened bread of life in such a way that we will abandon all the leaven of sin. Paul says: "Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

The Jews had to search their houses on their knees for traces of yeast. In the same way we must search our lives in the light of God's Word, and when sin is discovered it should be confessed and forsaken (Prov. 28:13). David said, "Search me, o God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

The Feast of the Firstfruits

The subsequent feasts of Israel are all associated with different phases of the annual gathering of the harvest, and in each case a deep spiritual application is made. The third one is known as the Feast of Firstfruits: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Lev. 23:10-11).



Because Israel is a winter rainfall area, the first sheaf of grain was given to the Lord as a sacrifice in the spring. This sheaf was to be offered on a Sunday, and it was a very important event since this celebration had significance far beyond the physical act of

gathering the harvest – it was conducted to render the people of Israel acceptable to the Lord.

The Feast of the Firstfruits was usually celebrated close to the time of the Passover. The grain was nearly ready to be harvested when the Jews left Egypt (Ex. 9:31). This act adds to the meaning of the spring month of Nissan as the beginning of a new life. Not only did Jesus rise from the grave in that month, but the Jews were also led out of Egypt in Nissan. In the year 32, the ceremony was conducted on Sunday morning – the day on which Jesus rose from the grave. It was the day after the Sabbath: “Now when *He* rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene” (Mark 16:9).

The seed that had fallen in the ground (the death and burial of Jesus) yielded its first fruit on that Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the grave. It also indicated the beginning of the harvest of souls, for the whole harvest that would be gathered after that, would be acceptable to God by virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, it signalled the transition from the old covenant to the new. That is why it strictly had to be conducted on a Sunday, the first day of the week and symbolically the beginning of a new dispensation. That is why the celebration of the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week in the new dispensation of grace. Because of the finished work of the Messiah, we can celebrate resurrection day every Sunday. We have entered into the new covenant with God through Him, and are therefore active partakers in the resurrection life of Jesus our Lord: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ... But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:17,20).

Pentecost

“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: Seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your habitations two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD” (Lev. 23:15-17).

Only the first and the fiftieth days of the Feast of the Firstfruits were celebrated. On the fiftieth day, a Sunday, two leavened loaves had to be given to God as a wave offering. Remember that leaven is the symbol of sin, therefore these two loaves do not point to the Messiah. They must be seen as prophetic symbols of two groups of believers – those in Israel and in the Gentile world. The believers from Israel and the nations are despite their salvation not sinless and perfect, and must be consecrated to the Lord. That is the meaning of this ceremony.

The Jews celebrate the onset of the dispensation of the law at *Pentecost* (derived from the Greek word *pentecostos*, meaning *fiftieth*). They believe that the people of Israel arrived at Sinai fifty days after their departure from Egypt. It was there that God gave Moses the law (Ex. 19:1-3). It was for the celebration of this feast that the Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem on the day when the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2). They did not realise that the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread *and* the Feast of the Firstfruits had already been fulfilled through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus; therefore, they did not realise that the dispensation of the law had been consummated. The new dispensation of grace, ministered by the Holy Spirit, was a further progression from the dispensation of the law, “for the code of the law kills, but the Holy Spirit makes alive” (2 Cor. 3:6). 3 000 people died at Sinai because they were punished under the law for worshipping an idol (Ex. 32:28). On the day of Pentecost, of which we read in the New Testament, 3 000 people were saved when the new dispensation was introduced by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41).

The beginning of the dispensation of the church at Pentecost indicates that it fulfils, ends and replaces the dispensation of the law. This was another example of God’s perfect

timing, since 40 days passed between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and another ten days while the disciples were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. This total of 50 days is exactly the same as the time that expired between the two wave offerings of the Feast of the Firstfruits. We still recognise this chronology, as we celebrate the resurrection on the Sunday after Good Friday, the ascension 40 days later on a Thursday, and Pentecost ten days later, again on a Sunday.

It is also interesting that Pentecost is not celebrated in isolation. It forms part of the preceding feasts and is intimately linked to the Passover festival 50 days earlier. For this reason the outpouring of the Holy Spirit must always be seen in its close association with the whole series of events that include the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out, the disciples spoke in various tongues which were understood by people who came from fifteen different countries or linguistic groups, despite the fact that the disciples themselves did not know these languages or dialects (Acts 2:6-12). This was clearly a special gift that functioned during the important transition from an Israel oriented gospel to a gospel message aimed at the spiritual needs of all nations and peoples on earth. The fulfilment of the seven feasts is closely associated with the salvation of all people, and with this end in view it is imperative that all of them should be informed in their own language on the salvation of lost humanity.

Gathering the harvest

After the Feast of the Firstfruits a period of four months follows, during which the harvest is gathered. The last three feasts are then celebrated after the harvest, in the seventh month. The long time-span between these two groups of feasts has prophetic significance. It refers to the dispensation of the church, as in that time the harvest of the kingdom of heaven is to be gathered. Those working for God must give all they have to complete their task within the available time: "Do you not say: There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35). On another occasion Jesus said: "The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Jesus said to agnostic Jews who rejected Him at His first coming: "You shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who come in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 23:39). The conjunction "till" means "up to the time when...", and therefore clearly implies an end to the long period of Israel's national unbelief. When Christ returns He will set foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4-5), and that clearly suggests that the biblical inhabitants of Jerusalem (the Jews) will be back in their land. During this second meeting they will not reject Him again but fully accept Him. They will look on Him whom they have pierced and bitterly grieve for Him (Zech. 12:10). The entire remnant of Israel will then be reconciled with Him.

The Lord Jesus again used the conjunction "till" when He said to the Jewish leaders: "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The restoration of Israel and Jerusalem will reach its final stage when the Messiah appears on the Mount of Olives at the end of the tribulation period, after the dispensation of world evangelisation. He will pass through the Valley of Kidron and the eastern gate which is still closed, and enter the Temple Mount where He will restore the fallen kingdom of David (Luke 1:32; Acts 15:16-17). On that day the trampling of Jerusalem will finally come to an end, including the prevailing Muslim control over the Temple Mount.

Paul also referred to this long period of Israel's spiritual hardening, and indicated that it would coincide with the dispensation of world evangelisation after which Israel, as a nation, will be saved. He said that "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25-26).

Israel's progressive end-time restoration is a clear indication to us that the times of the Gentiles, when the entire non-Jewish world is evangelised, is nearing its end. After that, the last three festivals will be fulfilled, after which the kingdom of God will be physically established on earth.

The Feast of Trumpets

The seventh month marks the end of the harvest, or virtually the end of it, as only the aftercrop will then be reaped: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a Sabbath-*rest*, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:24). At different times of this day, as well as the 2nd day of Tishri, orthodox Jews blow rams' horns (*shofars*) in their synagogues. On the second day, at dusk, the final trumpet is blown to announce the ingathering of the harvest. This is not the last of all soundings of the trumpet but the final trumpet of the harvest festival.

The Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ gathers the heavenly harvest among all nations. Paul says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

In Israel's programme, the first two days of the seventh month are followed by the seven awesome days when religious Jews humble themselves through fasting, confession of their sins, and doing good to others, thereby trying to secure the blessings of God. These acts are performed as preparation for the Day of Atonement which is celebrated on the 10th day of Tishri, in the hope that the Lord will not reject and judge them but declare them acceptable to Him.

These seven days prophetically refer to the seven years of the tribulation period, which will be Daniel's 70th year-week. During times of great affliction and trouble, Israel and the nations will either seek and accept the true Messiah or, to their own downfall and ruin, they will conclude a covenant with the false messiah.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement is the most important religious feast in Israel. It was also the only day of the year during which the High Priest was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the nation: "Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD" (Lev. 23:27).

This day will prophetically be fulfilled when the Messiah comes again to bring an end to all sins and establish eternal righteousness in Israel (Dan. 9:24). On this very dramatic day after the great tribulation, a remnant of the nations will also be reconciled with Christ. According to Matthew 24:29-30, all the tribes of the earth will mourn for their sins when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.

Jesus will return on the last day of the seven years of tribulation, and set foot on the Mount of Olives. All eyes will see Him, including those who pierced Him (Rev. 1:7). In Israel it will be a day of repentance and conversion: "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

To us as Christians the crucifixion was our Day of Atonement, but the multitude of unsaved people in Israel and the nations will only accept Jesus' atoning sacrifice during His second coming and grieve for their sins. Their biggest sin will be that of rejecting Him as the Saviour of the world.

The Feast of Tabernacles

“The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. ... You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God” (Lev. 23:34,42-43).

This is a joyous feast that is celebrated after the harvest to thank the Lord for all His goodness. He is also praised for leading His people through the dangers of the wilderness, and setting them free from the Egyptian bondage. The feast has a definite future perspective, as it clearly reflects the coming of the Messiah. When He comes, the final harvest of the kingdom of heaven will have been gathered.

On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the rabbis read Zechariah 14 in the synagogues. This chapter deals with the following themes:

- the coming of the Messiah and all His saints (verses 4, 5);
- the kingship of the Messiah (verse 9);
- the exaltation of Jerusalem (verses 8-11);
- the destruction of Israel’s enemies (verses 12-15); and
- the compulsory participation of the other nations in the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem during the Messiah’s reign of peace (verses 16-18).

The return of Jesus will be the final fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. Then we will all praise God for having saved us from the bondage of sin, and for protecting us in this dangerous and evil world. We will thank and praise Him for the great harvest of believers that has been gathered into the kingdom of heaven. Great joy will prevail when the Messiah’s millennial reign is instituted with Jerusalem as the capital city of the world!

Satan will be bound and sin and iniquity will no longer dominate the lives of people. In Jeremiah 3:17 the Lord says, “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.”

“Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:22-23).

Personal experience

How do you experience the fulfilment of the feasts in the Messiah? Every saved person begins his or her pilgrimage at the foot of the cross, where the blood of the Lamb was shed for sinners like you and me. When we take our refuge in Him, our sins are forgiven and we are clothed with the garments of righteousness that only Jesus can give us. From there we progress to the experience of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit endows us with His power to become harvesters for the kingdom of heaven. When the Lord returns with the sounding of a trumpet to gather the final harvest for the glorious revelation of His kingdom, He wants to find us out there in the fields, busy inviting people into His kingdom.

Those who remain behind when the Lord takes away His children will face the greatest tribulation of all time under the tyranny of the Antichrist. When the saints return with Christ after seven years, the empire of the false messiah will be destroyed during the battle of Armageddon. That judgement will be followed by the establishment of the Messiah’s kingdom on earth. If we wish to share in the final triumph of the Messiah, we have to follow Him all the way and also experience rejection and persecution by the world. It is only after we have suffered with Christ that we will also be glorified with Him and reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:28-29; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10).

This is not an easy journey, and some people turn back along the way. They simply cannot bear to carry the weight of the cross all the way to the end of the narrow road and rather opt for an easy way out, by claiming the benefits and trouble-free life of experiencing the Millennium right now. In so doing, they follow the teachings of the prosperity gospel and kingdom now theology. They are those who are not prepared to be crucified to the world, or to let go of their worldliness and let it be crucified to them. They are not spiritually strong enough to bear the loneliness and sacrifices that may be required of them during their walk in the service of the Lord. They find it hard to accept the fact that true believers are strangers and pilgrims in a world which lies in the power of the evil one (Heb. 11:13; 1 John 5:19). Will their faith prevail under circumstances of persecution?

In Egypt, salvation was only granted to those who had the faith to seek protection under the blood of the lamb. They embarked on a journey that, although dangerous and fraught with trials and tribulations, led to the Promised Land. Are you also on this journey and are you making progress in your spiritual life? The annual feasts, as expressions of our faith in the Messiah, are meant to be times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). It strengthens your vision and commitment, while you are once again endued with power from on high to fulfil your calling as a follower of the Messiah in an evil world.

5. A Demonic Strategy for the Deceiving of Israel

Introduction

We are in various ways indebted to Israel, but mostly for their facilitating role in receiving and recording the Word of God, which was made available to us through the ministry of first generation Jewish evangelists. But the covenant people, like the Gentiles, are exposed to intensive, demonically-inspired deception in order to deprive us all from our spiritual heritage in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. All the followers of the Messiah should accept it as their highest calling: (a) to proclaim the true Gospel message with its liberating power to all nations, starting with the Jews; and (b) to warn all people, but particularly Israel, against the devastating effects of spiritual deception. In this article, the devil's strategy for the spiritual blinding of Israel is exposed. Only the light of the true Gospel can dispel the darkness of delusion. The Messiah is full of grace and truth (John 1:14) and His Word is the only timeless standard for divine truth.

The aim with deception

Spiritual deception is, during the last days of the church dispensation, a very common characteristic. One of the important reasons for this phenomenon is that, through strong delusion, the world is rapidly being prepared to accept the false Messiah in stead of the true Messiah, thereby inadvertently subjecting themselves to the false theology of the renegade kingdom of "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). Deception of this nature is proclaimed among all nations, but specifically also among the people of Israel. Erroneous thinking with regard to the person and identity of the Messiah has proved to be very popular among gullible, postmodern societies in which people have become estranged from God's Word. All indications are that religious deception will ultimately give rise to a global movement in which virtually the whole world will follow the Antichrist in amazement and also worship him as the "saviour" of the world (Rev. 13:3-4).

Demonically-inspired deception of Jewish people is particularly intense in view of the fact that, according to the Bible, a faithful remnant of them is destined to be reconciled with the true Messiah and will subsequently play an important role as the people of God during His millennial reign of peace. The sinister purpose with this campaign of deception is that Jews should continue to reject the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, and obstinately proceed to expect another Messiah, who is Satan's impostor.

The Lord Jesus reminded Israel of the serious implications of rejecting Him as Messiah and Saviour. Should they do so they would spiritually embark on a wrong journey which will lead to becoming followers of false prophets and false Christs, and ultimately also of the false Messiah: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43).

The devil's objective is to influence the entire Christian church to defect from the true Christ in order that, together with Israel, he may subject the whole deceived world to the authority of his false Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-4). However, in this article we will specifically investigate the deception imposed upon Israel as this nation, according to a large body of biblical promises, will play a major role in the revelation and functioning of God's kingdom on earth. The following are the four most significant promises which will be fulfilled in the end-time with regard to Israel:

- The entire remnant of Israel will be saved when Christ returns to Jerusalem at the end of the tribulation period and set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5; Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:10; 13:9; Jer. 31:31-34).
- The saved Israel will all be restored to their own land and dwell safely in it (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:6; 31:7-8; Ezek. 39:25-29).
- Israel will be the Lord's special witnesses among the nations and fill the world with fruit for God's kingdom (Isa. 27:6; Rom. 11:12).

- The throne of David will be restored in Jerusalem, the Messiah will reign from it and the nations will go up to Jerusalem to be instructed by the Lord (Acts 15:16-17; Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:22-23; 14:16).

These are all important characteristics of God's revealed kingdom on earth, and it is evident that Israel will play a central role in it. This kingdom will replace the Antichrist's false kingdom which will have been established on earth during the preceding seven years of the tribulation period, and that is the big reason why the devil will do everything in his power to prevent the fulfilment of promises on the restoration of Israel and the second coming of Christ. He fully realises that if he can bring to naught Israel's physical and spiritual restoration in their land, and also conquer and kill the Messiah when He comes (Rev. 19:19), he will have proved the Bible to be wrong and will then be able to perpetuate the Antichrist's satanic kingdom. We are now approaching a very intensive and decisive phase in Satan's rebellion against the kingdom of God.

A dual strategy

It is obvious that two different strategies are applied in the struggle against Israel. The first one is aimed at destroying them, and with a view to this end the devil instigates Israel's enemies to arm themselves in order to utterly destroy Israel as a people. We read about this evil objective in Psalm 83:4: "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more." Israel is continuously involved in hostilities and wars with the nations around them. They are indeed engaged in a battle for survival, and because of these threats they have a pronounced expectation on the coming of the Messiah to finally save them.

The second strategy is more subtle but equally devastating to the continued existence of the nation. This strategy refers to spiritual deception and is aimed at preventing Israel's spiritual revival and salvation, in order that they should not be able to fulfil their calling as God's people. In this context, the devil does not approach Israel as a vindictive enemy but he comes as an angel of light to offer them a (false) messiah, as well as the repetitive practising of obsolete religious institutions. In this way he hopes that they will accept and worship his false messiah, thereby completely alienating themselves from the true God. A comprehensive programme has been devised for the spiritual deception of Israel. It entails the full revival of their Old Testament, legalistic religion, as that would ensure that the majority of Jews will not accept Jesus Christ's gospel of grace which has replaced the law. The following are aspects of Israel's traditional faith, in which Christ is not at all recognised as the fulfilment of Messianic prophecies:

The temple service

Israel's traditional religion revolves around the temple service and cannot be properly expressed without a fully functioning temple in Jerusalem. Modern Israel is on the threshold of the revival of their Old Testament temple culture and the reverting to these practices will have far-reaching consequences for the entire Jewish nation – including their form of government. The following reforms are contemplated by the leaders of the temple project:

- According to religious leaders, the roots of the Jewish culture should be derived from the temple service, which demands the building of a temple in the prescribed place on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The end-time restoration of Israel in their own land is not seen to be complete before a temple as the highest expression of Israel's political and religious life, as well as a cultural centre, has been put into operation. The temple is regarded to be the heart of biblical Jerusalem *and* the entire nation. This sentiment is shared by many Jews as evidenced by the large number of entries on Jewish Facebook pages.
- According to the orthodox Jewish faith there can be no reconciliation between God and man without regular sacrifices in the temple for the remission of the people's sins: "... without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11). Orthodox

Jews who do not accept the final sacrifice of the Messiah as the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; Heb. 10:1-18) allow themselves no alternative but to revert to the Old Testament's sacrificial service. Jews who do not share this conviction with them are despised as apostates and even enemies of Israel. This group includes all the Messianic fellowships in which Jesus Christ is proclaimed as Messiah and Saviour, and they experience strong opposition from orthodox Jews.

- A new basis for international relations is envisaged through the temple service and its associated form of government. Isaiah 2:2-4 is often quoted in support of their vision since this scripture describes Jerusalem as the world capital where a government of righteousness for all nations will be established. God will rule and His reign will bring about the end of all hostilities among nations. The building of the so-called "third temple" is associated with the coming of the Messiah. Under His rule Israel will be a blessing to the whole world. However, orthodox Jews deny that Jesus is the Messiah, so they are inevitably waiting for a false Messiah.

Preparations for the rebuilding of the temple are in an advanced stage, giving rise to great expectation for the soon coming of the Messiah – the one who will, according to orthodox Jews, restore the temple service and the Torah. Various religious bodies that became redundant during Israel's Diaspora are now revived to assist in restoring the temple culture.

The new Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin is a traditional Jewish council of religious leaders which was, during biblical times in Israel, the highest judiciary body within the framework of the Torah. On 13th October, 2004, after almost two millennia, a Sanhedrin was again instituted in modern Israel. This body, however, does not enjoy official status in Israel and is only recognised by orthodox Jews. The new Sanhedrin is composed of 71 prominent rabbis and other Jewish scholars.

The founders of the modern Sanhedrin say they only do their duty in constituting such a council. During the time of the second temple (the Temple of Herod during the first century) there was a Sanhedrin which was the supreme body responsible for the administration of justice from a religious point of view. The 71 members of the Council were seated in a semi-circle in a special room on the Temple Mount.

At meetings of the present Sanhedrin the possibility of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is a major subject for discussion. Rabbi Chaim Richman, one of the executive members of the Council, said it is most fitting that the new Sanhedrin should contemplate the building of the temple since it is of great significance for the cultural and religious identity of the Jewish nation. He expressed his disappointment at the withdrawal from certain parts of Israel's territory by their government, thereby relinquishing Israel's dream of full restoration. The Sanhedrin seeks ways to strengthen the roots of the Jewish faith by again uniting Israel as the Chosen People around the temple service and the Torah.

The members of the Sanhedrin do not recognise the present democratic government of Israel and committed themselves to electing a king for the land. This is a dangerous course upon which orthodox leaders have embarked since the false messiah will pretend to be a descendant of David and lay claim to the royal throne of Israel.

In an effort to honour the demands of the Torah the Council has written to all governments early in 2007, impressing it upon them that the world is on a disastrous course. In terms of Isaiah 2:2-4 they proposed that the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem in order to again experience the presence of God in the pursuance of peace on earth.

For obvious reasons, the Sanhedrin will welcome the false messiah when he appears on the scene since he will pretend to be the true Messiah who will speak to their hearts by allowing Israel to rebuild the temple. Great disillusionment will soon follow his coming.

The Temple Institute

Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Sanhedrin is also CEO of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem. This Institute collects and manufactures furniture, altars, special equipment, and robes for priests, which are all needed to resume the temple service. They have already made golden lampstands, a bronze laver as well as a golden crown for the High Priest. The robe of the High Priest is ready, as well as garments for 120 priests. All these items still need to be purified by sprinkling them with specially prepared purification water (cf. Num. 19:1-9). To be able to prepare this water they first need to find a red heifer with no hair on it of any other colour. The heifer must then be slaughtered and burnt, after which a small amount of its ash can be used to prepare holy water. The problem is that, for the sake of continuity, the remains of the previous red heifer's ash must first be found and placed on top of the present heifer when it is ritually burnt.

Archaeologists are still searching for a container with ash that was used during the time of the second temple, as well as the Ark of the Covenant, both which were hidden in an unknown place. Should the ash of the previous red heifer not be found in time, and no heifer which complies with all the demands of the Torah is available in Israel, the temple equipment cannot be purified.

Chaim Richman says: "The temple equipment has been made in a state of impurity since all of us are presently impure. And we will remain impure until we find a red heifer of which the ashes can be used for purification ceremonies in the way prescribed by the Torah. Should no red heifer be found the High Priest will enter the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement in a state of impurity."

What great advantage do we enjoy in the New Testament to be purified by the blood of the Lamb when we approach the Lord's throne of grace through the torn veil! We do not need earthly priests as mediators as we have a great High Priest who has prepared the way for us (Heb. 10:19-22). By their own making, orthodox Jews are forfeiting the privilege of being purified through sprinkling by the blood of the Lamb.

Schools for priests

Various Jews from the tribe of Levi are trained as priests in special schools in Jerusalem and New York. There are 613 Old Testament laws with which they have to acquaint themselves. In July 2007, a big conference for priests and Levites was held in Jerusalem. Jews with the surname of Cohen are descended from the first priest, Aaron, and may be trained as priests.

A new altar for burnt sacrifices

The modern Sanhedrin is so strongly committed to reconciliation with God by way of Israel's Old Testament sacrificial service that they started building an altar in November 2009 according to biblical instructions. After completion of the altar, invitations were extended to Jews all over the world to attend the Passover in Jerusalem on 29 and 30 March 2010 (rabbinical date) when Paschal lambs would be slaughtered and sacrifices made on the new altar. Enough lambs would be made available to Jews to conduct the sacrifice as described in Exodus 12.

However, the Israeli government did not give permission for the planned sacrifices as they feared that such an act would lead to renewed uprisings among the Palestinians, who already have control over the Temple Mount and strongly resist the idea of rebuilding the Jewish temple.

A new approach

The sensational news from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem is that the third temple will be a house of prayer for all monotheistic faiths, of which Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the most important. The Lord's words in Isaiah 56:7 are quoted as justification for this announcement: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." This statement is wrongly interpreted in a multireligious way in order to also give recognition to

non-Biblical faiths such as Islam.

A Jewish website, www.godsholymountain.org/ promotes the idea of “God’s holy mountain” as being open to all faiths. According to present planning the religious activities in nearby Islamic mosques as well as Roman Catholic sanctuaries will be integrated with the temple service. The executive director of the Temple Institute, Jehuda Glick, says that they are waiting on the coming of the Messiah as only He can authorise the building of the temple.

The multireligious thinking which is foundational to the campaign for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is exactly in accordance with the biblical account of the temple for the coming tribulation period. John says that in the end-time a false messiah will appear on the scene and that he will be followed and worshipped by the members of all religions: “And all the world marvelled and followed the beast ... and they worshiped the beast, saying, who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? ... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev. 13:2-7).

The promise in Haggai 2:9 is also quoted with regard to the rebuilt temple: “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former. ... And in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts.” This promise is extended by the Sanhedrin to all nations without any demand that they should abolish their own form of faith. Leading orthodox Jews have embraced the multireligious idea of a temple for all faiths, and it is quite evident that the false Messiah will sooner or later show up to give permission for the building of the third temple.

Government of the Antichrist

The Antichrist will not only be recognized by Israel as their Messiah-King (cf. John 5:43) but also by all nations of the world. This false prince of peace will be globally accepted and recognized as religious and political leader by way of formal treaties. The covenant with him will be in force for seven years, which is known in Israel as a year-week: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate” (Dan. 9:27).

The tribulation of seven years is clearly divided into two halves. The first half is characterised by a false peace when all deceived faiths will recognise the Antichrist as their mutual messiah. The second half of the tribulation is characterised by a military dictatorship as well as the forced worship of the Antichrist as the god of this world. At the beginning of the year-week all nations will be allowed to continue with their own religion on condition that all of them recognize, worship and follow the new world leader as their mutual messiah. The Antichrist will be Messiah to the Jews, Christ to the deceived Christians, Krishna to the Hindus, the fifth Buddha to the Buddhists, and the Imam Mahdi to the Muslims.

All the major religions will fully support this self-declared God-man – including deceived Christian churches which will still be functioning virtually full strength after the rapture. These will be the churches that had previously rejected the virgin birth, deity and resurrection of the true Christ, together with various other fundamental Christian doctrines. Because of their spiritual treason against evangelical Christianity they will be committed followers of the false Christ of all religions and fully express themselves in his global culture of sin. The Bible describes this false Christ in terms of his true character as the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18) and “the man of sin” (2 Thess. 2:3).

The building of the third temple in Jerusalem will fit in 100% with the Antichrist and his plans as he will, in this way, realise two major objectives: Firstly, through the reinstatement of animal sacrifices he will ensure that orthodox Jews refrain from taking refuge in Christ and be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. Secondly, he will plan to use the Most Holy Place in the temple to declare himself to be God during the middle of the tribulation period, thereby entering the final phase of his rebellion against God.

So strongly will the Antichrist be motivated by his inclination of self-deification that he will eventually exalt himself above all religions by raising his position from messiah to that of God. Paul describes him as the one “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. 2:4).

On this occasion, after 3½ years of tribulation, the Antichrist will not only order the termination of the daily sacrifices and offerings in the rebuilt temple, but also abolish other religions and have their places of worship demolished or burnt. The beast (i.e. Antichrist) and the kings who rule with him “will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:16).

The revival of Israel’s orthodox faith during the building of the third temple will, therefore, only last for 3½ years and end in a great tragedy for them. The Lord Jesus gave clear counsel to Israel on what to do on that ominous day when the Antichrist will declare himself to be God and also defile the temple by setting up an image of himself in the Holy of Holies. Israel will immediately realise that he is a false messiah and then revoke their covenant with him. They will then have to flee from Jerusalem and surrounding areas in great haste since the Antichrist will try to annihilate all people who reject him as God and Messiah (Dan. 11:44-45). The true Messiah described their flight as follows:

“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation [the image of the Antichrist], spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved” (Matt. 24:15-22).

Long ago, Daniel referred to this end-time dictator and said: “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation (the image of the beast). ... Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god. ... He shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Dan. 11:31, 36, 44).

Israel’s continued national rejection of the deity and Messiahship of Jesus is paving the way for them to wrongfully enter into a covenant with the Antichrist. They will only at a very late stage discover that, because of their own leaders’ wrong choice and deceptive counsel, they have made a very costly mistake. Erroneous religious perceptions always, in the first instance, come from the father of lies (John 8:44), but people who unwittingly accept these lies will have to bear the consequences themselves. Deceived Israelis are heading for the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7) when their self-appointed Messiah will confront them with the impossible demand of worshipping him as God.

The true Messiah will only at the end of this time of great anxiety return and set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5). On that dramatic day, Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced and bitterly grieve for the sins which they committed through many generations of rejecting Jesus (Zech. 12:10). He warned them that their house (Jerusalem) would be left desolate until, at His second coming, they will say to Him: “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!” (Matt. 23:39; cf. Ps. 118:26). Only then, the names of the idols and false prophets will be cut off from the land of Israel and only the true Messiah will be served (Zech. 13:2).

6. Uprisings and Power Shifts Amongst Israel's Enemies

Uprisings and major power shifts in Muslim countries of the Middle East, against which not even the strongest governments are able to stand, are rife and serious. Conflicting objectives are pursued by discontented crowds, giving rise to a situation in which they often become victims of their own revolution. On the one hand they demand more rights and a bigger share in the country's wealth, but at the same time they demonstrate in favour of reverting to fundamental Islamic principles, through which human rights will be severely restricted. Their final objective is the establishment of an Islamic world order which will rule over all its adversaries.

However, there are major differences between Islamic factions in these countries, particularly between the Shias (or Shiites) and Sunnis. These differences, together with widespread grievances against oppressive governments, in many cases give rise to bloody civil wars. Syria is the most recent victim of such a civil war, which has already claimed about 60 000 lives, while large numbers of Syrians are refugees in neighbouring countries.

There nevertheless are also unifying factors in these mutually divided Muslim countries, although the rest of the world experience them as negative factors which pertain to the planned downfall of Judaism and the Christian civilisation, as well as the rise of Islam to become the dominant world power. The big question is: how will this conflict develop from here, which methods will Islam use to achieve their purpose, and what will they do to bridge their internal differences? The following are the most important characteristics of the present conflict, as well as the final objectives of the Islamic revolution:

Fundamental Islamisation

Arabian Muslim countries in the Middle East, as well as neighbouring Muslim countries such as Turkey and Iran, are under strong pressure by radical fundamentalist groups which committed themselves to subject the entire society and all its institutions to the authority and dictates of Islam's shariah laws. In 1979, radical Islam gained full control over Iran in a bloody revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Since that time, Iran exerted themselves towards the fundamental Islamisation of Arab countries, and widely propagated holy wars (jihad) as prescribed by Mohammed and the Koran. Radical groups that are extensively supported and instigated by Iran are Hizbollah in Lebanon, as well as Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. Al Qaeda is a well known radical group which functions independently from Iran.

Outside the Muslim world, Jihadists are described as terrorist groups who wage their holy wars on the following two fronts: Firstly, they wage an internal war with a view to subjecting the government, the judicial system and all other institutions of society to the control of radical Islamic leaders and shariah law. Secondly, they fight against all Islam's external foes and their non-Islamic ideologies. In the Middle East, Israel is mostly singled out for attacks, but the jihadists also attack targets everywhere in the world in countries that are regarded as enemies of Islam.

In terms of numerical strength, the largest radical Islamic movement in the Middle East is the Muslim Brotherhood that was founded in Egypt in 1928. They are largely responsible for toppling Egypt's previous government under Hosni Mubarak, and are also the largest opposition group in various other Arab countries. In an article, Wikipedia says: "*The Brotherhood's credo is: Allah is our objective; the Quran is our law, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations. Its most famous slogan, used worldwide, is Islam is the solution. ... In the group's belief, the Quran and Sunnah constitute a perfect way of life and social and political organization that God has set out for man. Islamic governments must be based on this system and eventually unified in a Caliphate. The Muslim Brotherhood's goal, as stated by Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, was to reclaim Islam's manifest destiny, an empire, stretching from Spain to Indonesia. ... The Brotherhood strongly opposes Western*

colonialism, and helped overthrow the pro-western monarchies in Egypt and other Muslim countries” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood).

The Shia and Sunni power struggle

The Shias and Sunnis are the two most important religious factions in Islam. The vast majority of all Muslims are Sunnis. *Sunnah* means *Tradition* and refers to the fact that this group observes a collection of traditions (the *hadiths*) which enjoy full recognition on the same level as the Quran. They recognise all the caliphs who are honoured as descendants of Mohammed and served as rulers in the Muslim world, while the Shias regard the lineage of Sunni caliphs as intruders who illegally appropriated their positions, and whose teachings are also rejected.

After Mohammed’s death in 632 AD, leadership of the Islamic community passed to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, one of Mohammed’s closest companions. Some in the community felt that this succession was not legitimate, and that the title of caliph really belonged to Ali ibn Abi Talib. Both sides believe that Mohammed specifically designated their leader as his successor: supporters of Abu became the Sunnis, those of Ali the Shias.

Among the Sunnis there were various successors of Mohammed who were known as caliphs. Among the Shias, the successors of Ali held the position of Imam. This dynasty of religious leaders ended with the twelfth Imam who disappeared in 940 AD when he allegedly went into hiding at the well of Jamkaran in the present Iran. Shias believe that in the end-time he will re-emerge as the Imam Mahdi who will work together with Isa (Jesus Christ) in order to fulfil their mission of bringing peace and justice to the world. In the meantime, ayatollahs are elected to act as custodians of the Islamic faith. Bitter rivalry between Sunnis and Shias over the question of spiritual leadership in the Muslim world is widespread, and in countries such as Iraq and Syria they often engage in violent clashes in which thousands of people are dying.

There are large groups of Shia Muslims in Iran and Iraq, and Iran is the most important stronghold of this group. There is also strong representation of this faction (although still a minority group) in Syria, as well as Gaza in Palestine (particularly the Hamas movement). The other important Arab states are completely Sunni dominated – most notably Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. There are also large groups of Sunnis in Syria and Iraq, and that has considerably increased the potential for civil war in those countries.

According to Daniel 11:31-45, there will be a major power struggle among Israel’s enemies in the end-time. Daniel describes the one faction as the king of the North and the other one as the king of the South. In ancient times the northern kingdom was Assyria or Babylonia, and Egypt the southern one. The present countries to the north and northeast of Israel are Iran, Iraq and Syria, and together they form a powerful stronghold of the Shia Muslims. The end-time king of the South does not only refer to Egypt, but also to other Sunni oriented countries. This battle will eventually be won by the king of the North, which is an indication that the Antichrist will arise from this region (Isaiah 10:12-14 also refers to the Antichrist as the Assyrian).

The present war in Syria may be an important prelude to the final battle between the two major power-blocks in Islam. The conflict between them has already been internationalised since the Shia alliance between the governments of Syria, Iraq and Iran enjoy the support of Russia and China. The Sunni opposition in Syria do not only enjoy the support of most of the Arab countries but also of the largest part of the Western world. In spite of this extensive backing they are heading for defeat against the northern alliance. The opposition forces in Syria are largely controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood, which is Egyptian in origin. It can reasonably be expected that Egypt (the king of the South) will play a major role in the expansion of fundamentalist, Sunni oriented Islamism, but that they will eventually have to bow the knee before the northern alliance.

Israel has all reason to be concerned about the polarisation between the Shia and Sunni

factions of Islam since both of them are highly hostile towards Zionism. Israel is situated between these two “kings” and will often suffer as a result of wars between the northern and southern power blocks. According to Daniel 11:41, many of the Jews will flee to Jordan (which, in ancient times, was known as Edom, Moab and Ammon) as the aggression of the king of the North will not be directed against this country. Within Israel itself, some of the deceived and compromising Jews will recognise the false messiah from the north and collaborate with him, but the rest of the Jews will have to flee from him (Dan. 11:32-33).

The establishment of a Muslim caliphate in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, and specifically the Temple Mount, is to Islam the third holiest place on earth after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. There is general consensus among them that Jerusalem should be the capital of a Muslim caliphate, over which a descendant of Mohammed should rule. It is contemplated that such a state will play a unifying role to consolidate all Muslim factions into an undivided religious body.

During the general elections in Egypt, a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood said: “Our capital shall not be Cairo, Mecca or Medina. It shall be Jerusalem, please Allah.” They see Jerusalem as the future capital of a united Arab state. That is the reason why the Palestinian problem, and particularly their claim on Jerusalem as capital, enjoys so much prominence. Their objective is not only an independent Palestine, but the complete eradication of Israel and the establishment of a seat for Islam’s expected world messiah.

There is also a strong movement among Muslim Palestinians aimed at driving Israelites from their land and capital city in order to incorporate it into Palestine. Sheikh Riyad Salah, head of the Islamic Movement in Israel, has been actively teaching the tenets of Islamic revolution. “We are at the gates of the Islamic revolution,” he proclaims in his sermons to Arab citizens of Israel. “The global forces of evil will be eliminated from the world and the Islamic nation will remain in place in order to bring about the world Islamic revolution, with its capital, Jerusalem.” Salah’s organization contributed to efforts to repair Arab mosques on the Temple Mount, and also attempts to erase the remains of Jewish antiquities on the Mount. Thousands of young Arabs living in the Palestinian territories have been participating in the party’s youth movement under the slogan, *Campaigning to Preach Revolution*. They have displayed a banner at the Dome of the Rock, proclaiming: *Revolution is a Command of Allah*. The youth were greeted by party members who shouted: *Next year in Jerusalem, under the rule of the Islamic revolution*.

The planned destruction of Israel

Israel’s Arab neighbours (moderate as well as radical states) are forming a united front against them as they are all committed to the total destruction of the Jewish state. Various wars were fought between Israel and their Muslim-inspired Arab neighbours since Israel’s independence in 1948. These nations have not yet reached their sinister goal, as the Lord has helped Israel in their struggle for survival. The enemies’ successive defeats have radicalised them even more, and their hatred for the Jews will continue until they will single-mindedly conspire together to annihilate Israel from the face of the earth:

“Oh God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, o God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult, and those who hate you have lifted up their head. They take crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more. For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against you: the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagarites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot” (Psalm 83:1-8).

In this section, the ancient peoples are mentioned from which the modern Arabic peoples are descended. The northern Arabs, among whom were also Mohammed and his followers, descended from Ishmael and regard themselves as Ishmaelites. According to

them, the promises to Abraham were inherited by Mohammed and his successors through Abraham's eldest son, Ishmael. The southern Arabs (Egypt and surrounding nations) state that they are descended from Kachtan, which probably refers to Joktan (Gen. 10:25-30). All the Arabs, like the Jews, are descended from Shem and are therefore Semitic peoples.

Large-scale Arabisation occurred in the 7th and 8th centuries during the conquests of the Islamic Arabs. Linguistic and cultural assimilation took place, which caused many peoples from other nations to also regard themselves as Arabs. There are currently about 286 million Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa, and another 14 million dispersed throughout the world – a total of 300 million.

Preparing the way for the Imam Mahdi

President Ahmadinejad of Iran, in conjunction with his country's religious leaders, says the main objective with their Islamic revolution is to prepare the way for the reappearance of the 12th Imam, the Mahdi. Iran's government even convened a cabinet meeting at which they decided to conclude a covenant with the 12th Imam when he shows up. A large number of Ahmadinejad's close friends and political associates openly speak about preparations for the reappearance of the hidden Imam, and also link these preparations to Iran's nuclear programme. Their argument is that wickedness, tyranny and oppression should be promoted in order to hasten the coming of the 12th Imam.



Iran contemplates extremely evil plans in support of its plan to fight Israel, the United States and other Western powers, and with this end in view their nuclear development programme enjoys high priority. It will enable them to fire long-range missiles with nuclear warheads to any country. They are not deterred by sanctions or even the possibility of a military attack on Iran, but threaten to retaliate with great force and to also block the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to oil tankers. 35% of the world's petroleum is transported through this strategically important sea strait.

In this way, according to Iran's radical Muslim leaders, chaos will be caused which will precipitate the Imam's coming. They are even prepared to sacrifice Iran if only Israel and the West can be crippled so Islam can ultimately prevail over them.

According to biblical prophecies in Ezekiel 38 and 39, there will indeed be an attempted war of annihilation against Israel in the end-time. Russia (Gog, in the far north) and Persia (modern Iran) will play a leading role in this war. It may just be that the Antichrist (Islam's false messiah) will emerge from the global chaos and instability that will be caused by this multinational invading force in Israel. Because of the Antichrist's exceptional ability to deceive, he will offer himself as the universal messiah of all faiths and promise to bring unity and peace to a highly divided world which will be on the brink of a third world war.

Domination of the world trade

Revelation 18 refers to the ancient city of Babylon, which will again be restored in the end-time to become an international economic centre which will be the Mecca of world trade. Babylon was the capital of the once mighty Babylonian Empire which was situated in the Middle East between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. This city was built on the banks of the Euphrates River in the present Iraq, and is presently being rebuilt after

having been destroyed during historical times.

It is conspicuous that it is in the region of the ancient Babylonian Empire where the modern oil-producing states of the Middle East are situated, and that great wealth is currently being accumulated here. The seven Persian Gulf states, i.e. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran, control 60% of the world's oil reserves, and currently produce 30% of the oil which is daily consumed in the world. They therefore have a vast capacity to produce more oil, thus obtaining a larger share of the oil market. The wealth which they achieved in a short period of time through oil trade has enabled them to build spectacular new world cities – particularly Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Kuwait City and Doha.

These developments are transforming the Middle East into an important trade centre. It is not impossible that Babylon itself may be rebuilt to again play a leading role in the end-time. Economic controlling bodies such as major stock markets, the IMF and the World Bank can easily be relocated to such a centre. Experts say that Iraq has a tremendous growth potential and that this country may even have bigger unexploited oil reserves than Saudi Arabia. Whatever may happen in the Gulf States, which constitute a revival of the ancient Babylonian Empire, will have a major influence in the future world economy.

It is a most disturbing fact that oil-rich Muslim states have an obsession to use their wealth, pomp and glory to promote international prestige for the Islamic culture and religion, with an aim to eventually gain control over all nations in a world empire. In the realisation of this objective they see a close relationship between the religious, political and economic control of the world – everything should be organised in accordance with the dictates of the Quran and ultimately be under the control of Islam's expected world messiah.

The great deception

The world is subjected to deception in various spheres, aimed at establishing a Middle Eastern dominated new world order in which Islam will play a leading and even a dominating role. But the campaign of deception among other religions is equally as strong as is the case in Islam:

The **Shias** expect the Imam Mahdi who, according to them, will outlaw and destroy all other religions while subjecting the whole world to the authority of Allah and the Quran. According to them, the Sunnis will also accept the Shia Imam as a descendant and legitimate successor to Mohammed's position. One of the associates of the Imam will be an Islamic Jesus (Isa) who will assist him in Islamising the world.

The **Sunnis** also expect an end-time descendant of Mohammed in the lineage of the caliphs. Together with his appearance they expect the second coming of Jesus (Isa in the Quran) who is not God but only a human prophet who serves the singular God (Allah). Isa allegedly prepared the way for Mohammed, who is seen as God's final revelation to humanity.

Many of the **Jews** are open to the idea that their Messiah will also be linked to other faiths, and that the rebuilt temple on the Temple Mount should function alongside Islamic and Christian sanctuaries as a place of worship for all faiths (www.godsholymountain.org/).

Deceived **Christians** also subscribe to the multireligious idea that a universal Christ for all faiths will appear on the scene. He will teach that all faiths have a God-given right of existence and that they are all different paths to the same Creator-God of all religions. Such believers will fully embrace the Islamic Isa.

In the **Buddhist** world there are also multireligious convictions which allow for the appearance of a so-called "Fifth Buddha" who will also accept titles from other religions. He will introduce a period of harmony and peace in the entire world.

The **Hindus** do not lag behind as far as these new ideas are concerned. According to them, a new Avatar will make his appearance that will be a new incarnation of both Krishna and Jesus. Everybody will be able to identify with him and also worship him.

Growing pains

The disruptive conditions which presently prevail in the Middle East and, to a lesser or greater degree also in the rest of the world, are growing pains of an emerging new world order which is completely hostile towards the kingdom of God. Because there are so many antichristian powers at work, no agreement which will guarantee durable peace will be reached by them. What they are busy doing, will rather be a way towards more animosity and warfare. "For when they say, Peace and safety! then sudden destruction comes upon them" (1 Thess. 5:3).

The expected Islamic messiah in his role as Antichrist, will "confirm a covenant with many for one week [of seven years]; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate" (Dan. 9:27). During his reign there will only be a false peace lasting for 3½ years, after which he will prohibit freedom of religion and force all people to worship him as God (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). The alliance of false world religions will then lose all rights to observe their own form of religion, and their places of worship will be destroyed (Rev. 17:16).

Islam is already busy propagating this form of religious intolerance, which gives us an idea of what will happen under the rule of a future Muslim dictator. Early in 2012, the following report was widely published by news agencies, also by the television service Russia Today on 16th March 2012: "The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia has said that all churches in the Arabian Peninsula must be destroyed. The statement prompted anger and dismay from Christians throughout the Middle East. ... The Grand Mufti, who is the highest official of religious law in Saudi Arabia, as well as the head of the Supreme Council of Islamic Scholars, cited the Prophet Mohammed, who said the Arabian Peninsula is to exist under only one religion" (<http://rt.com/news/peninsula-saudi-grand-mufti-701/>). No churches or places of worship for any other religion are allowed to be erected in the territory of Saudi Arabia.

The persecution of Christians will be a characteristic of the Antichrist's government, and he will succeed with this policy for a certain length of time: "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God. ... It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (Rev. 13:6-7). There will, therefore, be a short-lived empire during which Islam's dream of world domination will be fulfilled, but that is bad news for all people on earth – also for the Muslims themselves. One only needs to consider how bad they are treating fellow Muslims right now in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

According to the Bible, peace will only prevail on earth after the true Christ has come and destroyed the powers of the Antichrist (Rev. 19:19-21). When that happens, not only the remnant of Israel will be reconciled with Him (Zech. 12:10–13:1), but also members of all other nations who survived the Lord's judgements during the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29-30). Only then will there be true peace on earth, also in the Arab world:

"And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal *it*; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria; a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *is* Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance" (Isa. 19:22-25).

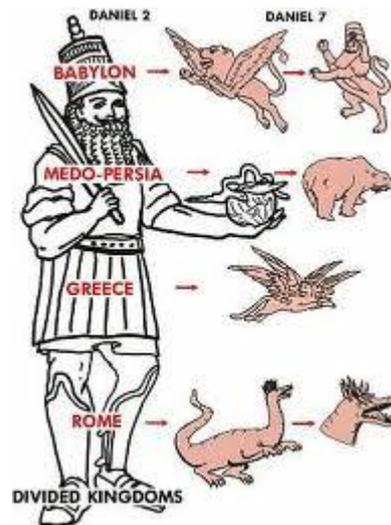
There is only one solution for world peace, also for the deceived, militant Muslims, and that is to be reconciled with the true Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God who is one with the Father (John 10:30), and can therefore not be equated with Isa of the Koran who is merely described as the son of Mary. The Lord Jesus, the crucified and risen Saviour, is also exceedingly more than only the Holy One of Israel – He is King and Saviour of the entire world.

7. The Stone that will Destroy the Gentile Kingdoms

Through a dream, the Lord revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the nature and succession of Gentile kingdoms, from the destruction of Israel's kingdom by the Babylonian Empire until the end of the times of the Gentiles when the Antichrist's global empire will be destroyed by Christ (Rev. 19:19-21). Directly afterwards, the throne of David will be restored in Jerusalem by the Messiah Himself (Acts 15:16-17). This prophetic scenario is uninterrupted and extends right through the church dispensation while Jerusalem will continue to be trodden down by Gentile rulers: "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The sudden termination and destruction of Gentile rule in the world will occur at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 11:15). He is the stone that will destroy the image (Dan. 2:34-35).

Nebuchadnezzar did not understand his prophetic dream, but Daniel had divine insight and was able to describe and interpret the dream to him:

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendour was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:31-35).



The following interpretation of the dream by Daniel was accurately fulfilled during the subsequent course of world history. We are now on the threshold of its final fulfilment:

"You, O king of kings ... *are* this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be

left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Dan. 2:37-45).

Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream revealed a succession of pagan empires that would rule over the known world of ancient times, and therefore also over Israel. The Babylonian Empire was the head of gold. The Lord appointed Nebuchadnezzar in order to execute His plan for the nations. All the people were subjected to his authority, even the animals and birds. The Babylonian Empire ruled from 626 to 539 B.C.

The second part of the image was the chest and arms of silver. That represented the Medo-Persian Empire (the two arms of the image) which conquered and subjected the Babylonians in 539 B.C. Although the Medo-Persian Empire reigned for more than 200 years, from 539 to 330 B.C., which was much longer than the 87 years of the Babylonian Empire, it was inferior to the Babylonian Empire, like silver which is worth less than gold.

The belly and thighs of bronze represent the third kingdom, i.e. the Greek Empire. Alexander the Great conquered the Medo-Persian Empire in 330 B.C. and subsequently controlled their entire territory. He expanded the Greek Empire further east as far as India.

The legs of iron represent the Roman Empire. They conquered the Greek Empire in 63 B.C. Although the Roman Empire was divided into two parts in accordance with the two legs of the image, and finally ends into ten toes which will be a mixture of iron and clay, it was nevertheless one empire. This empire was exceedingly strong, as indicated by the fact that iron is stronger than bronze, silver and gold. The Roman Empire acted in a vicious and merciless way during their conquests and incorporated countries that belonged to the preceding three empires into their own empire. During the course of time the Roman Empire lost its solidarity and in 476 it disintegrated and ceased to exist as a centralised political unity. Subsequently, however, various countries of the former Roman Empire became very strong in their own right and exerted a marked influence on the political, economic and cultural landscape of the rest of the world. A European language, English, became the major language for communication throughout the world.

Perpetuation of the two legs

The Roman Empire was never conquered and replaced by another world empire, and in a concealed form it continued to exert its influence in all spheres of life over the entire world. In spite of its political fragmentation as a coherent world empire, its constituent countries continued to develop and produce new knowledge in the fields of literacy, science, technology, medicine, religion, philosophy and politics. Two important growing-points were established with a view to exploring and developing the outside world – the one in Western and the other one in Eastern Europe. In this way, the two legs of the image continued throughout the centuries to exert their influence on the rest of the world. The dynamics of European culture were the impetus for a new civilisation in the world.

The western part of the Roman Empire which was controlled from Rome was an important growing-point for the Western civilisation and its capitalistic free market system, which is characteristic of the first world. West European cultures, Roman law and the Christian faith (Catholicism and Protestantism) spread from here – also to other parts of the world which, through colonisation, came under the control of West European countries. The impact of West European culture was phenomenal, and at a certain stage the British Empire had colonies around the globe – from America in the west to India and beyond in the east. This fact gave rise to the expression: “The sun never sets over the British Empire.”

The eastern part of the Roman Empire, which was controlled from Constantinople, expanded further into Russia and other parts of Asia. This movement facilitated the expansion of the Greek Orthodox Church, which eventually resulted in the formation of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this way, Eastern Europe became a growing-point for the

second world, which later became under the control of communism. The revolutionary ideology of communism was also exported from Europe. Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German philosopher who subsequently moved to Paris, Brussels and London. He and his friend Engels published the Communist Manifesto in 1847, and in its preamble they say: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism." However, communism was not accepted and implemented in Europe. The subsequent acceptance of communism by Russia, China and various other countries resulted in about a third of the world population being subjected to communism at one stage or another.

The ideological, economic and religious division of the world between a first and second world, manifested particularly strong as an ideological divide between capitalist and communist states. After World War II, Europe was graphically cut in two by the iron curtain (another clear manifestation of the two legs of the image). For many years, reference was made to the rigid distinction between the west and the east, caused by the two worlds of capitalistic freedom on the one hand, and restrictive, atheistic communism on the other hand. Both of them, in their own right, tried to control the world but none of them could entirely succeed in doing so. The two legs of Daniel's image continued to be seen in the world, while the influence of each of them continued to increase – capitalism to a much larger degree than communism.

During the course of time a so-called third world was added to the international community, originating from the discovery and colonisation of unknown territories far from Europe. However, the third world does not have a distinct ideological identity of its own as it mainly came under the control of the first world. Colonial powers such as Britain, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands strongly imposed their views, practices and institutions on these countries, even determining their boundaries and names, thereby rendering an even wider application to the two legs of the Roman Empire.

In due course communism, except in China, succumbed before economic realities and was abandoned in Russia, the great protagonist of this radical ideology. In consequence, communist regimes in the entire Union of Socialistic Soviet Republics (USSR) were rejected in order to embrace western-style capitalistic free markets, free, democratic elections, as well as allowing much greater liberties in general. Even in China, a transition was made to a capitalistic economy but without abandoning their authoritarian communist regime.

Capitalism, together with all its liberties in society, gradually became a dominant power in the world, giving rise to a situation in which economic power also determines the political and military power and strength of a state. The god of money, Mammon, gained a strong grip on all societies, thereby bringing about the end of the Roman Empire's east-west-division in the world. A new development was set in motion in favour of the establishment of independent, geo-political power blocks in the world.

The ten toes of the image

It is highly significant that the two legs of the image as seen by Nebuchadnezzar, finally subdivide into the toes. They are like iron and clay that cannot bond firmly to form a strong unit, which implies that there is a large measure of ideological, cultural and religious diversity among them. Neither are they equal in strength or level of development, as some of them are brittle as clay while others are strong as iron (Dan. 2:42).

Prophetically, the ten toes definitely refer to the end-time as the destruction of the image in the end-time is associated with the destruction of the ten toes. Daniel says: "...a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces" (Dan. 2:34). These ten toes therefore do not refer to the ten historical provinces of the ancient Roman Empire, but to ten end-time regions in the entire world which largely derived their economic and political character from Europe.

The emerging new world order is an effort towards unifying the first and second worlds which evolved from the two legs of the Roman Empire, including all the subdivisions which

subsequently occurred. The purpose with these reforms is that the political structure of Gentile (pagan, humanistic) rule will again, as in ancient times, manifest as a single world government which has the power to enforce a uniform political, economic and religious policy on all its subjects.



In modern times, the world has become fragmented into a large number of independent countries. However, serious economic problems due to overspending by governments as well as individuals, has prompted countries, e.g. in Europe, to form larger economic units on a regional basis in order to promote development and maximise their chances on survival. There are also other considerations for the forming of such alliances e.g. to defend themselves against wars and terrorist attacks. In course of time, every regions develops a stronger political identity as can be observed in Europe, the Arab world in the Middle East, North America, etc.

It is interesting that the entire world is presently subdivided into ten economic power blocks or growing-points. Because of internal competition as well as ideological and religious differences among countries, the delimitation of some of these regions are still disputed; nevertheless, the process is irreversible. When conducting a Google search under "Ten economic regions of the world", various sources are offered in which reference is made to these ten regions. Not all of them are in agreement on exactly how these regions should be demarcated, but they all agree to the fact that there are ten such regions. The following are the most likely delimitations:

- 1.** The European Union;
- 2.** North America (USA & Canada);
- 3.** South America;
- 4.** Australia and adjacent island states in the Southern Pacific;
- 5.** Russia and various countries in its sphere of influence;
- 6.** China and bordering countries;
- 7.** India and states in its proximity;
- 8.** a South-eastern Asiatic block with Japan as leading country;
- 9.** the Middle East; and
- 10.** Africa, as represented by the African Union.

It is for other reasons also obvious that the ten toes of the image do not refer to ten provinces in the ancient Roman Empire. The restored Roman Empire as represented by the European Union, already has 27 member states and it is very unlikely that they will be reduced to ten. Neither are there any indications that the end-time group of ten will be controlled from Rome.

The ten toes are economic and geo-political regions in the world which were either under direct European rule at on or other stage, or have to attribute their economic development to the Western civilisation in various other ways. The USA and Canada are former British colonies and are therefore effectively part of the West European leg of the ancient Roman Empire. The ten toes are indeed representative of the whole world; hence it is unnecessary to ask questions such as: "Why is the United States not mentioned in biblical prophecies?" America is an important part of the end-time world which was established as a result of European expansion, and will continue to play an important role.

In the emerging new world order, the ten economic regions in the world are each forging

closer political ties with their allies in order to be better able to advance the interests of their own region within a future world government. In the same way in which the European Union has a leader, as have the Arab League in the Middle East and the African Union, other regions will also be united under an appropriate form of political leadership. In some cases, the head of state of the most prominent country in the region will take the lead, e.g. in the cases of Russia, China and India.

It is interesting that the question of leadership in the ten regions will only be finally determined when the Antichrist has appeared on the scene. That is an indication that he will appoint leaders of his own choice. In Revelation 13 and 17, the ten toes of the image are represented by ten horns on the head of the beast (the Antichrist). John says: "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (Rev. 17:12-13).

These ten kings (leaders of the ten regions) will join the rest of the world in following the beast in amazement. They will be so enchanted by him that they will even worship him as world messiah (Rev. 13:3-4). John says: "And he was given authority over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (Rev. 13:7). He will not only be a Middle Eastern or European leader – he will also be a fully-fledged world leader. In his rise to world supremacy he will significantly expand his own power-base, causing the 10 toes (or regions) to be reduced to eight.

Government of the Antichrist

In later chapters of the book of Daniel, further reference is made to these ten offshoots of the Roman Empire, but then as ten horns upon the head of a vicious animal (Dan. 7:7-8, 20-28). This is the same beast with the ten horns also referred to by John (Rev. 13:1; 17:3, 12, 16). In a historical application, the horns may refer to ten provinces of the ancient Roman Empire but in its end-time application, when the Antichrist appears, they definitely refer in a broader context to ten economic regions which will exist among the Gentiles. Three of the ten horns will be uprooted by the end-time leader (the Antichrist) and joined together under his personal control. According to Daniel 11:31-45, one of the Antichrist's titles will be "the king of the North" (north as seen from Israel). During different times this kingdom referred to Syria, Assyria or Babylonia (cf. Isa. 10:12-14). This connotation implies that the Antichrist will arise from the Middle East. Syria was one of the provinces of the ancient Roman Empire, and is destined to play an important role in end-time events.

Within the larger scenario of the ten economic power blocks of the world, the Antichrist will emerge from the Middle East, and will then proceed to merge this region with two other power blocks within a reduced group of eight regions. The Bible does not indicate which three of the regions will be merged by him, but that will become evident when the time draws nigh. It may be that he will merge the Middle East, Europe and North America. The USA is already involved with European and Middle Eastern affairs through NATO, and they are the strongest and biggest representative of the Western, European culture outside Europe.

It is quite evident that a new world order will be instituted, and that will lead to the establishment of a world government with executive powers. The Antichrist will gain control over it, while the leaders of the ten regions will voluntarily transfer their powers to him. After the example of the Antichrist (Rev. 13:5-7), this empire will be fanatically opposed to the kingdom of God and the true Christ. "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev. 17:14).

The global government of the Antichrist will constitute the resumption and continuation of a long tradition of world governments that acted in association with false religions – but on a much bigger scale than in the past. This end-time government will use all its means to fight against Christ and His heavenly army when He comes again. Extensive use will even be made of demonic deception to mobilise military powers around the globe to participate in

this war (Rev. 16:13-16).

Present developments in the Middle East are very significant with a view to the establishment of a future world government which will gain control over the political power and economic assets of all nations. Oil rich Arab states will play a key role in the emerging new world order, since the economic future of the world depends largely upon the uninterrupted supply of oil which is produced by them. The involvement of various world powers in the Syrian war is an indication that a solution to world peace must be found here. Russia, China and Iran are supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad, while virtually the entire rest of the world supports the opposition powers. This is an important focal point for conflict which even has the potential for giving rise to a world war. However, if proactive steps are taken, effective global structures may be put in place to promote unity and peace and avert a full-scale war.

However, the peace which the Antichrist will succeed in bringing about will be short-lived as he will be the special representative of the kingdom of darkness, who will only use peace and unity as a smokescreen to hide his evil objectives. John says: "And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority" (Rev. 13:2). The Antichrist will rule in association with an alliance of false world religions and do everything in his power to obliterate the worshipping of the true Christ on earth (Rev. 13:7; 17:3-6). Divine judgements will be poured out upon his empire, which will lead to its sudden end.

Destruction of the image

A clear description is given of the destruction of the image of Gentile rule on earth. A stone will be cut out without hands, which will strike the image on its feet of iron and clay and break them in pieces. When the kingdoms of the Gentiles are finally destroyed, it will be done without human involvement. The stone which will descend and strike them refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ, who is also Israel's Messiah. He is often likened to a stone in the Bible (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). This stone will increase in size and fill the whole earth. The coming of Christ, and His destruction of the earthly powers that will be deployed in Israel under the leadership of the Antichrist, is described as follows:

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. ... And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:11-15, 19-20; cf. Zech. 14:12-13).

This is a concise and dramatic description of the battle of Armageddon, which forms part of the judgements of the day of the Lord. Isaiah says: "Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. ... I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. ... It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up; every man will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his own land" (Isa. 13:9-14). The judgements of the Lord will not only terminate evil human governments, but also stop the chaos and loss of cultural identity caused by the large-scale intermingling of nations due to uncontrolled immigration.

After Christ has destroyed the earthly kingdoms He will establish His eternal kingdom in their place. That will be the fulfilment of Revelation 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world

have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!" It is evident from this scripture that at Christ's second coming He will bring an end to all earthly kingdoms so as to rule in their place – this does not only refer to European governments in the region of the ancient Roman Empire. Daniel says: "And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). A Christian new world order will be instituted on earth, which will ensure continuous peace on earth:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:2-4).

Jeremiah also confirms this prophecy: "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts" (Jer. 3:17).

The throne of the Messiah will be in Jerusalem where He will restore the Davidic kingdom. That will be the fulfilment of a prophecy given two thousand years ago to Mary by the angel Gabriel: "He [Jesus] will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). When Christ rules from this throne, the dispensation of power-hungry Gentile governments permeated by selfish motives and evil institutions that rendered them hostile towards Israel and the kingdom of God will be something of the past.

Each of us also has the responsibility of making a personal decision with regard to Jesus Christ. If He is the rock and foundation upon which our lives are built, we will not fall down during the storms of life (Matt. 7:24-27). But if we reject the Lord Jesus as Saviour, we are building our lives upon the sand of self-deception and will find ourselves among the enemies of Christ to whom He will be a stone of stumbling in the coming final judgement (1 Pet. 2:4-8).

8. Our Responsibility in Respect of Jerusalem

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you” (Ps. 122:6).

“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6-7).

Why has only one city in the entire world been singled out, for which Christians everywhere should earnestly intercede until the glory of the Lord descends upon this city, so that everybody from the ends of the earth would see it and also share in the joy of Jerusalem?

The fact that Jerusalem was chosen for this honour places a responsibility on all Christians to be fully aware of the deep spiritual significance of this city, as that alone explains the fact why Jerusalem, particularly during this end-time situation, is in the forefront of the battle between light and darkness. Without this knowledge we will not be able to meaningfully pray for Jerusalem or to clearly enough warn the enemies of Jerusalem; neither will we have enough prophetic insight in the wonderful future of the city of the Great King!

According to the Bible, Jerusalem will pass through the following ten phases before the Lord’s final purpose with this city will be achieved. We are presently in the fifth phase of this remarkable city’s divine history. The Lord expects of us to be worthy supporters of Jerusalem and to always take to heart the spiritual interests of this city and its inhabitants.

1. The city where the Lord has chosen to reveal Himself

Jerusalem’s divine history began when the Lord took a decision to put His name in this city forever. After Solomon had built the first temple in Jerusalem, the Lord said to him: “I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there forever” (1 Kings 9:3). In a wider context He also referred to the city itself: “Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there” (1 Kings 11:36).

God’s name is forever linked to Jerusalem. Little did Israel realise that, during the centuries to come, God would reveal Himself in great and wonderful ways in Jerusalem. The many long interruptions in the execution of His plan were caused by Israel’s unbelief, but in spite of that, the Lord never abandoned His initial intention with Jerusalem – neither will He ever do so. During Old Testament times He often revealed Himself to Israel through the temple service in Jerusalem, but it did not lead to a permanent change of heart among His Chosen People.

2. The city of Christ’s revelations to humanity

The greatest revelation of God to Israel and all people on earth occurred with the coming of His Son, Jesus, to the world. In a Messianic prophecy on Jesus, God said: “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). John the Baptist pointed at Him and said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

God revealed Himself through His Son to the inhabitants of Jerusalem but, in spite of all the clear Messianic prophecies, they did not recognise Him and consequently rejected Him. As part of a planned conspiracy Jesus was arrested, tried in the city and convicted although innocent. The Lord Jesus was crucified just outside Jerusalem at Golgotha in the quarry of Solomon. Here, the great sacrifice for the atoning of lost humanity’s sins was paid to God. Golgotha will forever stand out as the expression of the love and forgiveness of God, and as the only door to eternal life. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved – only Jesus and Him crucified.

Jesus was buried just outside the city of Jerusalem, and three days later He rose from the dead. On the Sunday of His resurrection He delivered the first sermon of the Christian

dispensation to His disciples in Jerusalem, and a week later the second one (John 20:19-29). Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Immediately prior to His ascension, He gave the Great Commission to His disciples. But before they would start with evangelistic outreaches another important divine event had to occur in Jerusalem.

3. The city where the worldwide ministry of the Holy Spirit was initiated

The Christian church originated in Jerusalem where the Holy Spirit was poured out upon 120 faithful disciples on the day of Pentecost. They had a clear command to wait for this blessing because, without the power of the Holy Spirit they would be unable to be witnesses of the rejected Christ in a hostile world:

“Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

That was the promise of the Holy Spirit: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, the process of world evangelism began. On that day, three thousand souls were saved and the church of Christ was born in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, the gospel message would be proclaimed everywhere, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

4. The downtrodden city during Israel’s unbelief and the evangelisation of the world

Why was Jerusalem a downtrodden city throughout the New Testament dispensation, and in this lamentable state very far from fulfilling its calling as the city of God? Because Israel did not accept their Messiah, and therefore could not live up to their calling as God’s people to proclaim the Message of the Messiah’s saving grace from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The Lord Jesus condemned Jerusalem and its inhabitants for their unbelief:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matt. 23:37-39). On a question about this prophecy the Lord Jesus said that in Jerusalem not one stone would be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down (Matt. 24:2).

Israel were driven from their city and the dispensation of world evangelism began – a task that was predominantly fulfilled by Gentile believers. The Lord Jesus said in His Olivet Discourse: “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). From the formulation of this statement it is very obvious that God’s plan for Israel and Jerusalem was not abandoned, since Jerusalem would only be trodden down *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The times of the Gentiles refer to the time of world evangelism. At the end of the church dispensation Israel and Jerusalem have to be restored in order to realise their important future destiny.

Paul also adds to this prophecy when he says: “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:25-26).

As indicated above, Jesus told the Jews in Jerusalem that they would see Him no more *till* they say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” When He comes again,

Israel will certainly accept Him as their Messiah-King!

Nobody can deny the truth that Israel's spiritual hardening and physical dispersion were only temporary, since recent history renders ample proof of the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem. The people were restored to their land after virtually two millennia of dispersion among the nations. The old part of Jerusalem was recaptured from Jordan in 1967, and since that time it was once more under Jewish control. In 1980, Jerusalem was declared to be the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, and for the first time since the Babylonian exile it was the capital of an independent state of Israel. During the first coming of the Lord Jesus the city was under the control of the Romans. At present the city is fully under Jewish control, but its final political and spiritual restoration will only occur when the Messiah has come and has restored the throne of David.

5. The city in which Israel is restored in the midst of great hostility

At present Israel is only partially restored, and the great majority of the nation is still spiritually dead. There are two reasons why the Lord allows hostilities against Israel and Jerusalem:

The first reason is to bring distress upon His people in order to test and refine them with a view to saving a remnant. In a prophecy on their end-time testing He says: "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As *men* gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt *it*; so I will gather *you* in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave *you there* and melt you" (Ezek. 22:19-20). Israel's present problems will intensify considerably while they are heading for the time of Jacob's trouble, out of which only a remnant will be saved (Jer. 30:7). In Hosea 5:15 the Messiah says: "In their affliction they will diligently seek Me."

The second reason why hostilities against Jerusalem are escalating is because the Lord will gather all nations in Israel to enter into judgement with them at the battle of Armageddon because of their sins, which includes hatred of the Jews. In Zechariah 12:3 and 14:2 the Lord says that the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem and that He will judge them there. According to Zechariah 14:12-13 it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Joel 3:2 also confirms the fact that the Lord will judge the nations for having dispersed Israel and dividing up the land.

6. The city of the Antichrist's seven-year reign

The very dark period of the Antichrist's seven-year reign is awaiting Jerusalem and the whole world. According to John 5:43 Israel will accept the Antichrist as Messiah, and according to Daniel 9:27 the Gentile nations will make the same mistake. That will open the way for the Antichrist to use Jerusalem as one of the headquarters for his apostate world government during the seven years of the tribulation period.

With his approval the temple will be rebuilt here, but he will also desecrate it by declaring himself to be God in the temple. Paul refers to the Antichrist as "the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God ... so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). Only then the Jews will realise that they have been worshipping the wrong person as Messiah, and then revoke their covenant with him. In reaction to this, the Antichrist will order genocide of the Jews, forcing them to flee as quickly as possible to a place of refuge somewhere in the mountains. The Lord Jesus prepared them for this coming crisis:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matt. 24:15-16, 21-22).

A Messianic Jew, Arthur Katz, also warns his fellow-Jews on the great assault which the

false messiah and his power will make on them. He says: "I would rather be proven false, but I believe that this present generation of Jews is going to suffer devastation on a world scale that will eclipse the Nazi era. We are going to be viciously hated and pursued, suddenly uprooted, losing everything in a day, having to flee with only what is on our back and in panic not knowing where we are going. ... We are going to suffer double for our sins but our God has said, I will restore." (*The Holocaust – Where was God?*). At the end of this dark tunnel of the great tribulation, the light of the Messiah's coming will shine on the remnant of Israel.

7. The city where Christ will reveal Himself in glory

Jerusalem is without any doubt the scene for Christ's second coming: "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley. ... Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley. ... Thus the LORD my God will come, *and* all the saints with You" (Zech. 14:4-5). On this occasion the Messiah will save the remnant of Israel, but judge their enemies. The Lord says the following on the national salvation of Israel:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. ... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. ... They will call on My name and I will answer them. I will say, This is My people, and each one will say, The LORD is my God" (Zech. 12:10; 13:1, 9).

After the nation will have been reconciled with the Lord Jesus He will also restore the throne of David in Jerusalem. Then the promise will be fulfilled which the angel of the Lord made to Mary before the birth of Jesus: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). The Lord Jesus never reigned from the throne of David, but after His second coming He will indeed do so: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-17).

8. The city of the great King during His reign of peace

A wonderful future awaits Jerusalem when the city will be the capital of the world during the millennial reign of Christ: "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Ps. 48:2). Everybody will rejoice about Jerusalem and Zion:

"Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:3-4).

"At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts" (Jer. 3:17). The devil will be bound in a bottomless pit from where he will not be able to deceive the nations.

Israel will be highly regarded during this time: "Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard *that* God *is* with

you” (Zech. 8:22-23).

9. The city on which Satan’s last rebellion will be focussed

After the Messiah’s reign of peace there will be one big, final attack against Jerusalem when the devil is released from his prison. His renewed spiritual presence on earth will clearly reveal who will at that stage be truly saved and who not. Despite the positive conditions on earth, there will evidently be a large number of people at the end of the Millennium who will only have a form of godliness. The devil will find it easy to deceive them into participating in his last big rebellion:

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:7-10).

That will be the end of satanically-inspired assaults against Jerusalem and the kingdom of God. The devil and all his followers will subsequently spend eternity in the lake of fire.

10. The city which is the only gateway to the New Jerusalem

The work of redemption which the Lord Jesus has done in earthly Jerusalem is the only gateway to heavenly Jerusalem, that wonderful city which the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare for us as our eternal home (John 14:2-3). When the new earth has been created, the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven upon the earth. John says:

“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:2-5).

Before the glory of eternity will dawn in the New Jerusalem, there is still a battle to be fought in this dark world, and victory to be gained. There are important aspects of Jerusalem’s world-reforming role which have not yet been fulfilled.

To what extent are you and I engaged in the battle in support of Jerusalem? Do we fully realise the severity of Satanically-driven war against Jerusalem and do we take a clear stand against it? Are we aware of the great and wonderful revelations of God that will still occur in this city? So much more than the Jewish exiles in Babylon, we all have reason to remember Jerusalem and to pray that the peace of God will descend in a new way upon this city which was in the past so often besieged, destroyed, trodden down and deserted because of the unbelief of its inhabitants. Israel’s exiles sang the following song of Zion:

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *its skill!* If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps. 137:5-6).

At the moment Jerusalem is a city in which large-scale unbelief in the true Messiah prevails, and also a city which is threatened by physical, religious and political division because of the enemies of Israel. To us who are so intimately linked to Jerusalem’s past, present and future, this is an unacceptable situation and an incentive to fervent prayer until the Lord establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

9. Demands of the End-time Conflict

The end of the church dispensation is a particularly demanding, disorderly and uncertain period in world history. All people on earth are subjected to the pressure of a transition to a new world order in which nations will lose their sovereignty. This transition is precipitated by global problems such as wars and uprisings, terrorism, difficult economic conditions caused by overpopulation, unproductiveness, overspending, unemployment, pollution and the over-exploitation of natural resources, as well as the licentiousness and anarchy which are typical of postmodern societies.

Apart from these factors, evangelical Christians are subjected to various forms of spiritual, moral and ideological pressure aimed at destroying their identity as Bible-believing Christians. It is against this comprehensive attack that the Bible warns us. We must not become part of the problem by compromising with evil; but, through faith in Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit and prophetic warnings against increased evil in the end-time, we should resolutely run the race that is set before us. Honour your irrevocable commitment to Christ by persevering single-mindedly on the narrow way without deviating from it, nor by yielding to demonic temptations to abandon the race. We are called upon to prevail against evil by not walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of mockers (Ps. 1:1).

There are seven distinct aspects of the struggle against Christianity, and we should accept the challenge to be more than conquerors in all seven of these areas. Christians have always had a battle against evil, but in the end-time the struggle intensifies. Together with all the opportunities to work for the Lord, the spiritual war is deepening. The devil offers increased resistance in areas where his interests are threatened. Paul said: "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). He guarded against the possibility of being deceived by Satan, and added: "... for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

We must be mindful of Satan's plans which are aimed at making us lose our spiritual direction in life and by robbing us of our motivation to follow and serve the Lord. Evaluate yourself in the following seven areas in which end-time Christianity is involved in a fierce battle:

1. The pressure of globalism and multireligious thinking

The new world order is rapidly manifesting in the early stages of this millennium and constitutes one of the biggest threats to evangelical Christianity. The purpose with the new world order is to establish a new, united world in which all people can live together in harmony. Its building blocks are: (a) political globalism aimed at founding a world government that treats all its citizens equally; (b) economic globalism which is committed to instituting centralised control over the world economy with a view to eradicating the difference between rich and poor; and (c) religious globalism as a spiritual driving force to promote the formation of an alliance of world religions in which all participants should collaborate as equal partners to ensure harmony and world peace.

The idea of a multireligious orientation is completely unacceptable to evangelical Christians. It amounts to treason against the Triune God if the interfaith premise is accepted that all faiths worship the same God. Evangelical Christians do not believe in a universal Creator-God who revealed Himself to some people through Jesus Christ, and to others through Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha or the ancestral spirits. Jesus was not merely one of many mediators between God and man – He is the unique Son of God and nobody can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

Evangelical Christianity, therefore, excludes all other religions while the new world order follows an inclusive approach in terms of which all religions are recognised and associated with one another. This new approach has already been adopted by most countries, and that explains why there are no longer Christian constitutions and public institutions such as

Christian education in most countries. Interfaith curricula are offered in which something good is identified in every religion, thereby offering common ground for interfaith dialogue and collaboration.

Christians who refuse to accept this new approach, and who maintain that only they are right and all other religions are wrong, are branded as fundamentalists who are negative and condemnatory, and therefore a hindrance in the realisation of religious globalism. Young people are intensively subjected to brainwashing of this nature.

One of the consequences of multireligious thinking is that the Bible is no longer taken seriously – neither is Jesus Christ who is the incarnate Word. Such people do not show much interest in preaching on the second coming as that forms part of biblical revelations to which they no longer attach any significance. They would rather consider the views and theories of other faiths, including the virtually extinct Maya Indians of Central America. The Maya's theory of the end of the world that was expected to occur on December 21, 2012, was even the subject of a Hollywood movie which was everywhere viewed with great interest. The truth of the Bible is increasingly suppressed by multireligious lies.

Evangelical Christians elicit sceptical reactions when they point out that the end of the world will only occur after Christ's thousand-year reign of peace. Before the millennial kingdom, which will directly follow the second coming of Christ, there will be a seven-year tribulation period accompanied by unprecedented divine judgements, but that will not bring about the end of all life on earth.

2. Spiritual deception

More than ever before, the end-time is characterised by a tremendous increase in spiritual deception. Paul says: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). This is a common tendency of our time. In all possible ways, efforts are made to undermine the gospel of Jesus Christ since it stands in the way of the new world order. The following basic aspects of our faith are substantially changed in order to use them as a foundation for false doctrines:

- The image of the God of the Bible is changed to make Him conformable to the universal god of all faiths.
- Jesus Christ is deprived of His uniqueness and Deity, and His image changed to bear likeness to that of the universally acceptable messiah of all faiths.
- The Holy Spirit is reduced to an impersonal supernatural power which empowers people to do signs and wonders and also to receive ecstatic extra-Biblical revelations of God's will through dreams, visions, audible voices, etc.
- The Bible is reduced to the level of a human book containing many mistakes and contradictions, and which does not apply to all people of all times. It has allegedly been written in terms of a primitive and unscientific worldview and is therefore not regarded as the timeless and exalted Word of God. Because of these perceptions, the Bible is either spiritualised or interpreted historically (preterism) and therefore loses its relevance to postmodern humanity.
- Because of all these factors, the Christian faith is relegated to a position wherein it is equally treated with the other world religions. It ceases to be of unique significance, and due to people's unbelief it no longer has the power to save. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is only a power of salvation to people who fully believe it (Rom. 1:16). Those who refuse to believe biblical promises are hardening their hearts against the gospel and therefore remain unsaved (Heb. 4:7).

Evangelical Christians should resist this spirit of agnosticism and antichristian reforms, however strong the pressure for change may be. If we change the biblical concept of God,

equate Jesus Christ with the idols, no longer honour the Word of God, open up ourselves to the manifestation of foreign spirits, and wilfully embrace the decadent, end-time world order, then we have been led away with the error of false prophets and fell from our own steadfastness in Christ (2 Pet. 2:1-2; 3:17). There are unfortunately many Christians who grow cold in their zeal, falter in their faith and fall short of the grace of God.

3. Moral decline

Postmodern man of the end-time accepts no rigid rules which restrict his freedom – not in the political, religious or the moral spheres. He insists on the liberty to commit corruption, pay bribes, blackmail people, gamble, drink, engage in extra-marital relations, and also to openly follow a homosexual lifestyle if it suits him. It is ironical that the churches who should have resisted the strong movement towards immorality are themselves often protagonists for greater moral freedom, including the right to chose one's own sexual orientation.

In 2012, a new Bible was published for gays from which all references to homosexuality were removed. On their website <http://queenjamesbible.com/> the editors of the new Bible say: "It was commonly known that King James I was bisexual. Though he did marry a woman, his many gay relationships were so well-known that amongst some of his friends and court, he was known as 'Queen James.' It is in his great debt and honour that we name *The Queen James Bible* so." It is further emphasised that the word "homosexuality" was first mentioned in an English Bible in 1946, as if to say that this concept was altogether foreign to the Bible in the original languages.

However, before 1946 other words were used, e.g. sodomites, which have exactly the same meaning. The first reference to this sin appears in the Torah which was received from the Lord at Sinai in 1312 BC. Leviticus 20:13 says: "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death." This form of sexual perversion is contrary to the basic nature of human beings, who were created as males or females, and will therefore always be regarded as an abomination by God. Paul writes to the church in Rome about the evil deeds which are committed by such people:

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due" (Rom. 1:26-27). For a further discussion of what the Bible says on gays, see <http://apprising.org/2012/12/15/%D1%8F-u-ready-4-the-queen-james-bible/>.

An immoral life also has various other distorted characteristics which are typical of the devil and his evil kingdom. Paul refers to immoral acts as "the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11), "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21), or merely as "sin" (Heb. 12:1). Evangelical Christians should be able to testify to the fact that the Lord Jesus has saved them from their sin. After that, they are commanded to grow in holiness, which will counter the possibility of again becoming entangled by sin: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom. 6:12).

While sin and licentiousness increase in the end-time, and truth is replaced by lies, we must persevere on the narrow way and never deviate from it. We should stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and not be entangled again by a yoke of bondage to sin.

4. Materialism

Christians are also confronted by a big challenge to remain steadfast in their faith against the strong influence of materialism and secular humanism. The achievements of modern science, and particularly the high level of technological sophistication that has been achieved, enable many people to be successful, become wealthy and to boast in their own

abilities.

When wealth increases, a person's dependence on outside assistance is reduced, including spiritual support, and that leads to a situation in which the successful person becomes the master of his own destiny. In practice he becomes his own god. In his self-reliant position he is not conscious of his spiritual poverty and dependence upon God. The Lord Jesus says the following about such people: "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:16-17).

When a person is drawn away by wealth or the desire to be rich, he grows cold towards the Lord and eventually loses his way spiritually. Paul says: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

That doesn't mean that the believer is encouraged to be economically inactive or academically exempted from excellence. Paul says: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). A Christian should always be hard-working, proving himself as a person with unquestioned integrity, who also cares for other people. However, there are limits to these aspirations: money and the desire for riches should not become an obsession to him, as he would then become a follower of the god of money, the unrighteous Mammon. We cannot serve God and Mammon (Matt. 6:24), and should ensure that our spiritual priorities are always sound. Many Christians become overly materialistic, and that renders them spiritually lukewarm, or even cold, and disinterested in the things of the Lord.

5. Depression

Emotional depression is the opposite of pride and self-esteem. Such people do not trust the Lord, have no confidence in themselves, show no interest in life, distrust everybody, and usually prefer death to life. Their faith is so weakened that they cannot and will not accept the promises of the Bible, and for that reason they are even reluctant to accept the salvation which is freely offered to them. Their difficult circumstances pull them down into a pit of dark thoughts, and their faith has changed into doubt or even utter disbelief.

We are warned against a mental and spiritual disposition of this nature: "But take heed of yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with ... cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34). Believers who do not look forward to the Lord's return have all reason to be concerned about the sincerity of their relationship with Him. A weak faith and poor spiritual commitment often lead to moral laxity. To such a person the day of Christ's return may suddenly dawn and find him unprepared for it. The Lord Jesus said that we should watch and pray to be worthy to escape the coming tribulation period and to stand before Him in glory (Luke 21:36). We must not lapse into prayerlessness, unbelief and self-pity as that would be contrary to our obligation to be vigilant and ready for the Lord's sudden coming to take away His sanctified bride.

The difficult conditions of the last days may induce many Christians to become depressed and to withdraw from their many responsibilities in life. However, they will then become spiritually even weaker instead of stronger. We should fully realise that even harder times are lying ahead, and should prepare ourselves to face them without abandoning the struggle, accepting defeat and surrendering ourselves to self-pity. Paul says: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). The world will become more evil and the economic situation tougher, while violence, crime, and lawlessness will exponentially increase. We need to be spiritually strong to find our way through the troubled waters of the end-time's apostatising, and to persevere to the end.

The Bible gives clear counsel on how to be spiritually sound: "Be strong in the Lord and in

the power of His might ... that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11). That demands that we are cleansed from all sins and evil thoughts by the blood of the Lamb (1 John 1:7). We should also have a new filling with the Holy Spirit to be endued with power from on high. We will only then be spiritually strong and also in a position to assist doubting and faltering believers: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

6. Passivity and indifference

There are various warnings in the Bible against end-time Christians who become uninvolved with the work of the Lord because of having failed to watch, pray, and serve the Lord as they should. Consequently, they do not only slumber spiritually but also start doing wrong things which cause them to backslide from the Lord.

We read in the parable of the ten virgins that all ten of them represent the kingdom of heaven and that they all went out to meet the bridegroom. Only five of them were wise in the sense that they took extra oil with them. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which is an indication that they have fully surrendered themselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The five foolish virgins did have lamps as well as oil, but not enough oil. At midnight their lamps went out. Their foolishness relates to the fact that they were not filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:17; Eph. 5:18).

There were two serious problems that were experienced by this group of ten. The fleshly ones were not yet endued with the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49), and for that reason they could not do works worthy of repentance. No wonder that the light of their witness dwindled when circumstances became difficult. Furthermore, there was a problem of which all ten of the virgins were guilty, i.e. a reduced expectation on the coming of the bridegroom when he tarried longer than expected. They did not watch and pray, but lapsed into passivity and fell asleep spiritually. Even Spirit-filled children of the Lord can lose their vision, become lax in their commitment, and fail to observe an active expectation on the second coming. They still love the Lord and live for Him, but there are reasons for concern in their spiritual lives.

The danger is that such people who do not entertain an active expectation of the Bridegroom's sudden coming, are inclined to pursue other objectives and to forget that they must give account of their lives before the judgement seat of Christ. Because of this, they become worldly-minded seekers of their own interests, who backslide from the Lord and become guilty of sinning: "But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites" (Matt. 24:48-51).

Are you also one of the sleeping virgins who no longer fix your eyes on Jesus Christ and live close to Him? If so, then you have fallen victim to the spirit of passivity and indifference towards the work of the Lord, and you will certainly suffer loss when the Lord rewards His servants for their labour of faith. We are called upon to be wise virgins whose lives bear witness of Spirit-inspired works: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods" (Matt. 24:45-47).

7. Compromisers

One of the big dangers against which Christians should guard in the end-time is compromising with apostates and worldly-minded people. In these postmodern times it is common practice to give full recognition to all faiths, traditions and ideologies, and to openly compromise with them. The result of this approach is a large measure of tolerance

towards ideas which are at variance with the Christian faith. Ultimately, all sorts of sin and false religious views are condoned and even adopted. We are warned against compromise of this nature:

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

We cannot serve two masters, we cannot love God and the world, and we cannot build a bridge between the narrow way and the broad way in an attempt to enjoy the best from two worlds. In fact, we cannot in any way compromise with something which only in the smallest way deviates from the truth of God’s Word. If there are believers who deny certain biblical doctrines, or who practice a compromising form of religion in which for instance the Old Testament Law is mixed with the New Testament message of grace, then we should stay clear of it and have no part in it. Remember that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

How can we keep our way pure? By diligently walking in accordance with God’s Word. We must be able to join the psalmist in saying: “Your Word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).

Steadfastly resist any inclination towards compromise as that is inherently part of our commitment towards sanctification. If we wish to be blameless in our spirit, soul and body on the day of Jesus Christ, we should pursue complete sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23-24). Sanctification demands that we should turn away from every form of evil and be cleansed from it by the blood of the Lamb (1 John 1:7). We should also be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to have the power and motivation to proceed serving the Lord under all circumstance (Acts 1:8). That is the secret of wholehearted commitment to the Lord without any compromise.

The final objective

The final purpose of our faith should be that, in spite of all the conflict and attacks against us, we should steadfastly continue to serve the Lord, even under the most difficult circumstances. If we wish to prevail, one of the conditions is that we must always examine ourselves to make sure that there is nothing between the Lord and us that can harm or impede our spiritual progress:

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, ... looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:1-2, 15).

Wonderful blessings are in store for the overcomers – i.e. those who do not find themselves among the carnal, despondent and compromising believers: “But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:25-26).

Everyone of us should dedicate ourselves completely to the calling to finish the race in the company of the overcomers. It will be to the glory of the Lord to be found before His throne as a conqueror in the big struggle against the kingdom of darkness, and also as a faithful worker who will not appear before Him empty-handed.

10. Peter's Life Before and After Pentecost

In messages on the end-time it is imperative that the high spiritual standard is emphasised which the Lord Himself has set for us to be ready and worthy for His second coming. How will we remain standing in a deteriorating, spiritually deceived and morally depraved world if we are not mature Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit? Every believer should have an experience which can be described as sanctification, filling of the Holy Spirit, or spiritual empowering. This experience is not associated with ecstatic signs but with the cleansing of your heart and the strengthening of your faith.

Through sanctification we are established on a path of spiritual progress on which we can grow up "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:13-14). If we fail to make a full surrender, we will continue with our tottering and fleshly lives which are characterised by worldliness, envy, strife and divisions (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:17).

In this message we will review the two distinct phases in Peter's life, during which he was first a carnal or fleshly believer and later a spiritual believer. We should learn from his example and become motivated to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3). The Lord Jesus did not only command Peter and the other disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), but also all of us.

There are two distinct phases in Peter's spiritual life – i.e. the phase between his repentance and filling with the Holy Spirit, followed by the phase which started on the day of Pentecost. During the first phase he was a carnal Christian who was still full of himself and his own ideas, despite the fact that he had already received important revelations on Jesus as Saviour and Messiah. Because of fleshliness his life was characterised by failure, defeat and spiritual deception. But at the onset of the second phase he had the experience of sanctification and thereafter went from strength to strength in his spiritual life. These two phases are typical of all Christians' way of spiritual development after repentance.

Before Pentecost Peter was already a saved follower and disciple of Jesus. As far as his knowledge on the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God and promised Messiah of Israel is concerned he was far ahead of his fellow-countrymen. Matthew says the following in this regard:

"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:13-19).

Peter is praised for his insight. The Lord Jesus said to Him: "You are Petros [a small rock] and on this Petra [a large rock] I will build My church. On the rock of Peter's testimony of Jesus as the Son of God the church of Christ would be built. By proclaiming the Word of God the church would open heaven to many people, while the unbelief of many others would cause the gates of heaven to be shut to them. It is clear that Peter was not the first pope who had control over the keys of the kingdom of heaven – the Lord Jesus is the Rock upon whom the church is built, and only He has the keys to open or close doors to people.

Spiritual deception

Shortly after Peter gave the great testimony on Jesus as Messiah, his fleshliness and lack of spiritual knowledge on the full counsel of God caused him to seriously deviate from the truth. The devil exploited his ignorance and made him say things that were contrary to the

gospel of salvation:

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You! But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:21-23).

Within a few moments Peter proclaimed a great truth as well as a great lie. He could not understand the necessity of Jesus’ suffering and death, and expressed himself against this idea. He did this in spite of the many Old Testament prophecies on the suffering Messiah who had to pay the ransom for our sins. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 clearly reflect this message, but Peter did not yet understand that Jesus had to follow the way of shedding His blood for the salvation of sinners. Did Peter only believe in the generic benevolence of God to forgive people without demanding a sacrifice for their sins? Or did he think that the sacrificial service of the Old Testament was sufficient?

The lack of spiritual discernment on the gospel is characteristic of carnal Christians who do not speak and act under the anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit. They may correctly understand certain things, but in other respects they reveal great ignorance – to such an extent that they render themselves of no use in the service of the Lord. The Lord Jesus knows the origin of spiritual deception, and rebukes Satan who spoke through Peter. It is ironical that Peter was sometimes a mouthpiece for the Lord but at other times a mouthpiece for the devil.

This situation is typical of carnal Christians who do not have sufficient knowledge and discernment. They do not have enlightened eyes of the mind to correctly comprehend the mysteries of the gospel of justifications and sanctification in every respect. Some of them do not properly understand Christ’s deity, attributes and work of grace. Carnal Christians also have a serious lack of knowledge on the necessity of sanctification as a second work of grace. They are not spiritual people in the true sense of the word, who can understand the deeper things of God’s Word. Paul addressed such carnal believers when he said to the Corinthians:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The problem of these Christians is very obvious – they do not realise that they are a temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16) as they are still full of themselves. That is the reason why they could not be fed with solid food from the Word. They were simply not able to grasp these truths as the experience of sanctification was still lacking in their lives.

The Hebrew believers suffered from the same problem, and therefore did not experience any spiritual growth: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection” (Heb. 5:12–6:1).

How does one grow up to the mature man or woman in Christ, and develop spiritual gifts to correctly discern all the Biblical doctrines? The process of growth towards spiritual maturity after repentance does not automatically follow. Because of the time that has passed since their conversion Hebrew believers should already have made the surrender which is needed to start growing but instead they have stagnated spiritually. They could not be

used in the service of the Lord and were often not even sure of their own salvation. The message of certainty of faith had to be proclaimed to them over and over again.

The progress to perfection which lacked among them does not allude to a situation of sinless perfection but to a life of holiness, overcoming and being filled with the Holy Spirit. No person grows into a state of sanctification without fully committing himself to it. A surrender of this nature demands a time of soul searching and crucifying of the flesh and its lusts, followed by the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Arrogance

In Peter's life there was a second characteristic of his carnality and that was arrogance and self-centredness. Even after he realised that Jesus was destined to suffer and die he said in his own power that he would stand by Jesus and even die with Him: "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death. Then He said, I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:33-34). Peter was of the opinion that he himself, without the power of the Holy Spirit, could walk on this way and follow Jesus to the end.

He seriously misjudged himself. He could not follow Christ all the way – neither can any Christian in the world do it. Despite this fact, many carnal Christians try in their own strength to keep their way pure and remain true to Jesus at all times. That is the reason why they continue to stumble and lead inconsistent lives. They are unsuccessful Christians who compromise, fail to fulfil their objectives, do not prevail when they are tested, and generally move from one defeat to another and from one failure to another.

Such people are full of themselves and their own abilities. Like Peter they say, "Leave this matter in my good hands and I will bring it to pass – I will not fail you." But such people cannot even testify before a lowly servant of the Lord Jesus when conditions are difficult and persecution is threatening. The reason for this problem is that such Christians have not been empowered and motivated by the Holy Spirit.

Abandoning of your calling

A carnal life so often leads to failed efforts that such a person easily backslides, even to the point of abandoning the struggle and deciding not to follow Jesus any longer. At a certain stage this was also Peter's reaction since he gave up to be a follower of Jesus and decided to return to his former occupation as a fisherman. After the crucifixion and burial of Jesus he thought it was the end of the road for the followers of Jesus, and said to some of his fellow disciples: "I am going fishing. They said to him, We are going with you also. They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing" (John 21:3).

The Lord Jesus understood their lack of knowledge and spiritual motivation, and clearly showed them that they would not be happy if they returned to the world. He gave them a big catch, thereby demonstrating to them that He could make them fishers of men. Jesus afforded Peter the opportunity to confirm three times that he truly loved Him. In this way Peter made good for the three times that he denied Jesus. He was then commissioned to tend His sheep.

There are many carnal believers who, after a time, decide not to follow and serve Jesus any longer. They return to the world and fully immerse themselves in its evil practices. One of Paul's companions did the same: "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). The lost son was in a similar situation. Such people will never find happiness. To them, there is only one way and that is back to the Lord Jesus, to renewed cleansing by His blood and the filling of His Holy Spirit. Backsliders should read Psalm 51 and again surrender themselves to the Lord.

The experience of Pentecost

Consider the big difference which the experience of Pentecost brought about in the lives of

Peter and the other disciples. They were transformed from powerless, prayerless, doubting and faltering witnesses of Christ into bold and effective servants in His kingdom. What was responsible for this change? The endowment with power from on high:

“Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

In acts 1:8 He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Peter, who was at an earlier stage not even able to admit to a lowly servant that he was a follower of Jesus, humbled himself with the other disciples for ten days to confess his sinfulness and fleshliness, to put his trust completely in Jesus Christ and to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit and Peter proclaimed the gospel with great boldness to an agnostic Jewish nation. He brought a powerful message and in one day moved 3000 people to accept Christ as their Saviour. That was the early beginnings of the Christian church on earth.

Subsequently, the early church often suffered from fleshliness and a lack of knowledge, which underscores the fact that all of us need the filling of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace. Without this experience we will not achieve anything in the service of the Lord.

Peter was so completely filled with the Holy Spirit and divine wisdom that the Spirit led him to write two epistles which later became part of the Bible. He exhorted Messianic congregations to set their hope fully upon the grace that will be bestowed on them when Jesus Christ returns, since they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:13-19). He insisted that they should proclaim the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

The young congregations were also reminded that they are sojourners and pilgrims in an evil and perishing world in which they would experience much tribulation (1 Pet. 2:11; 4:1-19). He devoted an entire chapter to the tragic phenomenon of backsliders who deviated from the way of the Lord and returned to a sinful life in the world. But he encouraged Christians to remain spiritually standing in this godless and transient world: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, , what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

This is the language of a man who walked in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and looked far beyond earthly riches to our eternal home in heaven. He knew what it was to be a carnal Christian who disappointed Jesus in many ways and even denied Him, but he graciously reacted to the command to wait on the Lord until he was endued with power from on high. After that, he never again looked back or hesitated, not even at the end of his life when he has confronted with a martyr’s death by crucifixion.

Do you also walk in fullness of the Holy Spirit? You will then received the power to be a witness for Christ and to remain standing in the midst of the most testing circumstances, without becoming despondent and turning back to the world. You will also become strong in the Lord to successfully resist the attacks of the devil. Furthermore, your knowledge of the Lord and His Word will increase until you will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth of the love of Christ, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

11. Demonic Attacks on Believers' Faith

Due to the nature of the bond of faith which exists between God and true Christians, it will be attacked by the enemy of our souls, whose intent it is to weaken or even destroy it, and ultimately to replace it with unbelief, a false faith or superstition. Faith should, therefore, be clearly defined to enable us to successfully defend it against all threats. It is evident from the history of humanity up to the present, that the great majority of all people have completely underestimated the severity of this battle.

Biblical faith refers to the essential spiritual bond or relationship between a saved person and God: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). If we truly believe in God we should recognise and accept Him for who He is, i.e. the Almighty, Triune God who created everything and who, in His omnipotence, sustains His creation. We should also accept the fact that we are sinful beings who can only be forgiven and renewed by His grace through faith. We must have a saving faith in God, as eternal life is only imparted to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins. Having accepted Christ as Saviour, our faith in the Lord must be strengthened daily by abiding in Him, walking in the Spirit and prayerfully studying His Word.

Simply believing, intellectually, that God exists and that His Son, Christ Jesus, is the Saviour of the world, will be of no avail if our acceptance of this fact neither affects us spiritually nor changes our lives. The devils also believe in the existence of God and they tremble (Jas. 2:19). We must have a living faith through which we accept, honour and serve Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Through our faith in Him we commit ourselves to honour and serve God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. That is true faith. All those who do not practise faith in this manner are described as unbelievers whose minds have been blinded by the false god of this age – Satan (2 Cor. 4:4). Even those who believe in idols are, from God's point of view, regarded as infidels because they do not believe in the true God and are therefore deceived.

Unbelief is depicted by the rejection of the Triune God's position as Supreme Ruler and Saviour. God's biggest adversary is Satan, who originally, as the beautiful angel Lucifer, held an illustrious position in heaven. He became arrogant and tried to exalt himself above God in order to become the ruler of the universe in God's stead. In so doing his faith in God as the Supreme Ruler was destroyed and he became God's enemy. Through his actions the faith of a third of the angels in heaven was also destroyed, thereby transforming them into blasphemers and adversaries of God. They became part of Lucifer's renegade kingdom and wilfully participated in his rebellion against God. The same happens to all people who wilfully reject God.

With all his might, Satan strives to prevent fallen humanity from restoring their broken relationship with God through repentance and faith. Wherever relationships established in faith exist between God and His people he relentlessly attacks the faith of these believers. Satan primarily makes use of spiritual deception as well as negative experiences aimed at undermining, weakening and even destroying people's faith in God. He has achieved such astounding success with these efforts that all dispensations in human history have ended in large-scale apostasy. These rebellious situations gave rise to dramatic interventions by the Lord, during which the followers of Satan were judged, while new phases were introduced in the progressive unfolding of God's plan for humanity.

According to biblical prophecies, future dispensations will also end in apostasy or unbelief among the majority of mankind, due to the actions of Satan. The seven dispensations are the following, which offer a clear dispensational framework for the understanding of God's actions towards man, as well as explanation for the periods of intensified actions by the devil:

1. The dispensation of innocence in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had no knowledge of good and evil. They walked in the garden, had a trusting and personal

relationship with God and believed what He had told them. With great cunning Satan deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God by disobeying Him. He disguised himself as a snake and sowed the seeds of unbelief in their hearts. God had commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning them that they would surely die if they did (Gen. 2:17). Satan deceived Eve by alleging that she and Adam would not die if they ate of the fruit but instead would become all-knowing and immortal like God (Gen. 3:4-5). These are the same lies still being proclaimed today by the New Age Movement: that humans can discover their own divinity, and that through reincarnation they will become immortal and always return to the land of the living.

Satan's lies had far-reaching consequences when Adam and Eve's relationship of faith in God, who is the giver of life, was broken. They immediately died spiritually and physically they became mere mortal beings. Instead of being obedient to God they became subservient to a foreign god – the devil. By these means they acquired a fallen nature which was also inherited by all their descendants (Rom. 5:12). This original sin accounts for the fact that all people are born as sinners. If they are not regenerated by Christ they remain under the control of the god of this age, thereby heading for eternal death (Rom. 5:13-19). In their fallen condition the unregenerate remain under the judgement of God.

Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their unbelief, and the dispensation of innocence ended in a great tragedy for all of humanity.

2. The dispensation of conscience. God enabled fallen humanity to distinguish between good and evil through their conscience. They could communicate with God through prayers and sacrifices, thereby establishing a relationship with Him. They had the ability to make moral choices between good and evil lifestyles. The Lord said to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7).

However, the inclination to sin got the upper hand. All people, with the exception of Noah and his family, being the one and only exception, degenerated into a lifestyle of total infidelity and apostasy: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). People were so utterly corrupt that they became perpetual enemies of God, evoking His anger. Scoffing at prophetic warnings through Noah's preaching they hardened their evil hearts even further.

The unbelief and moral depravity with which this dispensation ended under the direct influence of Satan, gave rise to a major intervention by God in which He poured out His wrath upon the wicked and destroyed all of them: "And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark" (Gen. 6:13-14). Even at this early stage of human history it became obvious that God does not judge the righteous with the wicked, as Noah and his family escaped the judgements.

3. The dispensation of human government after the Flood. This stage of human history was characterised by the forming of peoples with independent rulers. They had the choice whether to serve God or not. By the wrong exercising of that choice they all developed into pagan nations who worshipped idols, which served as evidence that they were all deceived by Satan. By building the tower of Babel they endeavoured to establish a heathen world government under the leadership of a king who deified himself. God defeated their effort by introducing the confusion of languages. Nevertheless, after this event the different peoples (or nations) continued with their idolatry and unbelief in the true God.

The Lord revealed Himself amidst this spiritually dark situation by calling a special people out from among the heathen nations or Himself, who were to be a holy and separated people. They were called *Israel*. Unfortunately they did not live up to their spiritual calling. During a severe drought they were forced to move to Egypt where they apostatised and

became the slaves of the heathen Egyptians. There remained not a single group of people anywhere on earth who still believed in God and served Him – they were all followers of the god of this world.

4. The dispensation of the law. The Lord introduced a new dispensation by delivering Israel from Egypt so that they could serve Him as a holy and independent people in the Promised Land. He gave them His law and also guided, strengthened and blessed them through the priestly service in the tabernacle. He gave clear instructions to Israel not to associate with heathen nations considering that they would spiritually defile themselves with the idolatry of those nations.

Tragically, Israel's long history in the Old Testament was characterised mainly by apostasy, disobedience to the law, unbelief in the true God, and the worshipping of idols. God often surrendered them to their enemies, and at one stage allowed them to be taken captive by the Babylonians for 70 years. Despite all the chastising, Israel often backslid into sin and unbelief; consequently they rejected and even killed some of God's prophets. Because of their hardened hearts God sent no further prophets to them during the long period of 400 years after Malachi. The Chosen People of God had lapsed into spiritual darkness and unbelief, and together with all the inhabitants of the rest of the world they were victims of "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

5. The dispensation of the church. With the birth of the Messiah a great light came to shine upon a people who walked in darkness. "That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:9-11). With the coming of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament a major revelation of God and His kingdom occurred. Many people came to faith in Christ through the preaching of the gospel and the Holy Spirit's work of convicting people of their sin. Because of Israel's unbelief in the Messiah, the great commission was given to the apostles and believers who followed them, to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. In this way the worldwide church of Christ was established.

The extended revelation of God's kingdom in the New Testament coincided with increased knowledge of Satan and his kingdom. The struggle between these two kingdoms took on a new dimension as the devil strives with every effort to prevent people from having faith in Christ as their Saviour. The faith of those who have already accepted Christ is severely attacked in an effort to corrupt, weaken or even destroy it. Because of this intensified battle, active resistance against Satan and his subversive works is called for.

Many of the early believers did not guard against deception as they should have done, and paid the price for their indiscretion. Paul said to the Corinthians, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you put up with it well" (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

The Galatians also deviated from true faith by trying to combine law and grace. Besides having faith in Christ they also subjected themselves to the law by continuing to observe the Jewish Sabbath and by having themselves circumcised. Paul said, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). He strongly denounced all efforts aimed at proclaiming false gospels, declaring those who did so as being accursed (Gal. 1:8).

Believers know from their own experience that the Christian faith is relentlessly attacked by Satan. If they don't resist the devil these demonic attacks can have devastating effects on their spiritual lives. Paul admonished Timothy to have "faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:19).

Because of large-scale deception the early Christian church became unfaithful to the Lord,

adhering to various false doctrines (cf. Rev. 2 & 3). The light of the gospel was extinguished and spiritual darkness set in, resulting in the thousand year period known as the Dark Ages. This period (the 6th to the 16th centuries) is often referred to as “Satan’s millennium” as it was characterised by the widespread spiritual deception perpetuated by the Vatican. During this time there were only small groups of persecuted evangelical Christians, e.g. the Waldenses in Italy, who took refuge in caves high up in the mountains from the so-called ‘holy armies’ of the pope.

After the Church Reformation in the 16th century many of the Protestant churches continued to follow the Roman Catholic idea of a state church with powers to persecute and even execute heretics. The true Christians (e.g. the Anabaptists) also suffered as a result of this persecution. It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that great revivals took place in which missionaries came forward to preach the gospel throughout the world. The 20th century was once again a time of widespread falling away in the world – not only because of materialism and the human-centred ideologies of socialism and humanism, but also due to the proclaiming of false religious doctrines. The falling away gained momentum and today, early in the 21st century, it is taking on unprecedented proportions. Some of the false teachings, such as those promoted by the Word of Faith Movement, are done in the name of the Holy Spirit but are accompanied by strange manifestations falsely ascribed to the Holy Spirit. It is in view of this kind of deception that the Holy Spirit Himself warns against end-time falling away as being part of the devil’s programme to gain full control over people: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

Doctrinal errors inevitably give rise to apostatising due to their giving rise to doubts about the gospel message, and the result of this phenomenon is reversion to a life of sin. Paul sternly confronted backslidden “brethren” among first century Messianic Jews concerning this problem: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13). Such people do not “hold the beginning of [their] confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:14).

When members of a congregation backslide for whatever reason, they become estranged from Jesus Christ and His love. To such congregations He says, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent” (Rev. 2:4-5). The Lord Jesus also warned His first disciples against backsliding: “Abide in Me, and I in you... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4, 6).

In light of the widespread falling away which the Bible predicts for the last days it is obvious that the world is heading for a situation similar to those which occurred at the end of previous dispensations. The Lord Jesus warned that the time shortly before His second coming would be like the times of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-30). During those times the true believers were such a small minority that they could not exert any influence on the character of society and were unable to curb the proliferation of evil. The Lord then intervened and removed the believers to a place of safety before judging the wicked.

We are in a similar situation today as the dwindling number of evangelical believers can no longer ensure the observance of Christian principles by society. Christian constitutions, Christian education, Christian morality, and the biblical administration of justice with relevant penalties for criminals, are all institutions which are disappearing from our society. These are replaced by immoral, lawless, corrupt, violent and utterly depraved institutions and lifestyles which, being worse than even those in the times of Noah and Lot, are the worst in human history. In this instance the Lord will once again remove the small group of true believers, this time by way of the rapture, and then pour out His wrath upon the wicked during the ensuing tribulation period.

6. The dispensation of the Antichrist's rule. The Antichrist will be revealed directly after the rapture, when the dispensation of his seven-year long reign on earth will begin. At the onset of this period there will be no believers on earth, which accounts for the fact that the whole world will follow the Antichrist in amazement and also worship him (Rev. 13:3-4). Soon after his revelation though, 144 000 Jews will be saved, and through their testimony many other people from all nations will believe in Christ as their Saviour (Rev. 7). The Antichrist will be empowered by Satan to impose the kingdom of darkness upon all people. Halfway through the tribulation he will declare himself to be God and order the execution of all who refuse to accept his number and to worship him (Rev. 13:15; 20:4). According to Revelation 6:9-11, Christians will die as martyrs during this time. It was in reference to this situation that the Lord Jesus asked: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Not only will this dispensation end in world-wide apostasy, but also in a demonic effort to kill the true Christ at His second coming. Satan knows that Christ will return to earth after the seven year tribulation when He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives. Demons will be sent out to mobilise all nations for this confrontation (Rev. 16:13-16). Their main objective with the mustering of these forces will be to fight against Christ and His heavenly army, but these rebels will all be destroyed (Rev. 19:19-20).

7. Dispensation of the Millennium. Jesus Christ will return to the earth to judge His enemies who will be gathered against Him under the leadership of the Antichrist and the false prophet, and also to bind Satan and throw him into a bottomless pit where he will remain for 1 000 years (Rev. 19:19–20:3). At that time He will save the remnant of Israel and the nations as they will have bitter remorse for their sins of not having believed in Him as the Saviour of the world: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29-30; cf. Zech. 12:10-11).

The Lord Jesus will rule the world from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17; Rev. 19:15). His saints will share in His government by ruling as kings with Him (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4). The saved Israel will be the Lord's special witnesses who will evangelise the world during this dispensation (Isa. 27:6). They will be highly regarded by all nations (Zech. 8:23). Although the first generation of people after Christ's return will all be saved, their children will still be born with sinful natures and will therefore have to hear the gospel in order to be saved.

As incredible and unlikely as it may seem, in course of time a mere form of godliness will set in during the Millennium, once again giving rise to widespread unbelief. This will be the direct consequence of people not being truly born again and not having crucifying their old sinful nature. The devil as the deceiver of the world (cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:3), together with all his evil spirits will not be there to actively deceive people into committing active deeds of rebellion against God. Everyone will enjoy the advantages and benefits of that special time in world history. Nevertheless they will still be potential victims of the devil when he is unbound and is given the opportunity to deceive them.

When Satan is released from the pit after 1 000 years to once more tempt humanity into revealing the hidden thoughts and desires in their hearts, the majority will immediately become victims of his deceit and wilfully participate in the last big rebellion against God and His kingdom: "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the

beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:7-10).

Only a minority

All the examples of apostatising during the different dispensations throughout the ages provide clear evidence that true believers have always been a small minority. Even today there are also many people who desire to be on the narrow way but who simply do not succeed to enter through the narrow gate. The Lord Jesus said, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). So many people who wish to become Christians are not really prepared to repent and break with their sins. It is impossible to enter through the narrow gate with a baggage of unconfessed sins.

Confess and forsake all your sins, for then you will be able to enter through the gate of true repentance. After having done so you must also trust the Lord for a further work of grace, which is sanctification. This will enable you to persevere on the way of the Lord to the end and to be of service in His kingdom. The Lord does not only want to make us believers with a testimony of salvation, but also to be effective disciples in His kingdom. To this end you need to be built up in your most holy faith (Jude v.20). Then and then alone will you remain standing and be victorious while fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12).

In Jude 1:3 we are exhorted “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The saints are those people who turn from the depraved world to God, enter into a relationship of faith with Him, accept His forgiveness and deliverance, and from then on walk in His way of righteousness. Satan fiercely attacks all believers – not only in their personal lives but also in their efforts to convince others to come over from the kingdom of darkness to the Lord’s miraculous light. These attacks have continued throughout the ages and are intensified in the end-time because the devil knows that only true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will keep people from accepting and worshipping the Antichrist as universal messiah. We must resist these attacks while earnestly contending for a biblical faith in the midst of the great falling away. Read the account of Old Testament heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, who achieved great things for God’s kingdom because they stood firm in their convictions and were also prepared to suffer for the truth. Never even consider joining the ranks of the deceived compromisers of our time by abandoning the struggle and departing from the faith.

Stand firm in the Lord in an apostate, God-rejecting world where we are called to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Do not focus on the troubled waters through which you have to navigate your way, but keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). We should be motivated and encouraged in our faith by the sure promise of our eternal destiny.

The end-time appearance of the Antichrist as the foremost infidel and man of sin, and the total control which will be exercised by him, will make it impossible for true Christians to peacefully co-exist with him on earth during his reign. At that time we will be taken away by the Lord, only to return again later with Christ when the Antichrist and his powers will be destroyed in the battle of Armageddon. Satan will then be deprived of his position of power and authority on earth, and for the first time in the history of humanity there will be peace on earth.

12. Reasons for the Rapture

In a growing number of churches, the promise on the rapture is denied, ignored or poorly presented in preaching on the end-time. However, this is an important promise which has, for very good reasons, been included in end-time prophecies. It gives Christians a positive and indisputable future expectation – a substantial hope of divine intervention and blessing to look forward to in an otherwise dark scenario of impending judgements upon a wicked world. The following reasons for the rapture are mentioned in the Bible:

1. It is a meeting with Jesus Christ

The rapture is an extremely important promise in the chronology of end-time events. We need to properly understand it if we wish to be ready and worthy to escape the coming tribulation period. During the rapture, true Christians will disappear from the earth in the twinkling of an eye:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

The first and foremost expectation which we should entertain with regard to the rapture is not merely to get away from the sin-drenched world in which we are living as sojourners and pilgrims, but rather the exalted prospect of arriving at our final destination in heaven! The longing bride eagerly looks forward to be united with her heavenly Bridegroom. On that day He will come “to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe” (2 Thess. 1:10). They will look to Him with radiant faces.

People who reject the idea of a rapture, or catching away, should ask themselves how else they intend to be removed from earth and taken away to the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus in heaven? The Bible says that Christians will be “caught up” to heaven (1 Thess. 4:17). After His earthly ministry, Jesus was bodily “caught up” to heaven (Rev. 12:5). Paul was “caught up” to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). In all these cases the same verb, i.e. “catch up” (Gr. *harpazo*) is used, which means “rapture” or “sudden snatching away”.

On this occasion the heavenly Bridegroom will come secretly like thief in the night (Rev. 16:15). He will only appear publicly, when every eye shall see Him, at the end of the seven-year tribulation period which will follow the rapture (Rev. 1:7). At the rapture He will not set foot on earth but meet His bride in the air and take her with Him to heaven. Those who remain behind will discover with a shock that all true Christians have suddenly vanished without a trace! The saints will then be in heaven, in the divine presence of the King of kings, and only return with Him after the dark days of the tribulation (Zech. 14:4-5).

2. It fosters a Christ expectation

It is important to note that a pretribulation rapture fosters a Christ-expectation – not an Antichrist expectation. We are waiting for the heavenly Bridegroom, not for the man of sin. The entire 70th year-week of Daniel 9 is part of Israel’s divine history, and will be initiated by a covenant which Israel and the nations will conclude with the false messiah. Christians who wrongly believe in a mid-tribulation rapture are diverting their attention from Christ as the central focus and often spend large amounts of money, time and energy in putting strategies in place to survive during the coming tribulation of seven years. Some of them even prepare places of refuge away from big cities because they do not expect the rapture before the outpouring of divine wrath. However, the Bible says that we should expect the Son of God from heaven, “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

The promise of the rapture fixes our attention on the sudden and unexpected coming of Christ for His bride. There are no explicit signs preceding this event – least of all the appearing of the Antichrist. We should engage in preparations aimed at leading a life of holiness unto the Lord, while inviting everyone to accept the long-standing invitation to the

marriage feast of the Lamb. When the house of the Lord is filled He will descend from heaven with the sounding of God's trumpet. After that, all the signs of the times which herald Christ's public appearance at the end of the tribulation will finally be fulfilled. It will be a time of wars, pestilences and natural disasters as never before (Matt. 24:6-7).

3. It is a direct intervention by God

The supernatural nature of the rapture, in which millions of Christians will be caught up in the air, will so clearly be an intervention by God that no scientific explanation will be found to account for this astounding phenomenon. There might be a few absurd explanations – as in the case of the evolution theory by which agnostics try to explain away God's works of creation – but these theories will only be accepted by those whose minds have been blinded by the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). The Almighty God can indeed resurrect and change millions of Christians in the twinkling of an eye and catch them away from planet earth. He will take away His own and leave the others behind:

"I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two *women* will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:34-36). The "taking" of certain people will occur at the rapture. The "leaving" of others is an indication that unbelievers and deceived people will be left behind on earth to face the dark days of the Antichrist's reign of terror during the great tribulation.

The hand of the Lord will also unmistakably be seen in the devastating judgements that will be poured out over a degenerate humanity after the rapture (Rev. 6:12-17). The dramatic effect of the rapture, as well as the severity of the apocalyptic judgements that will follow in its wake, will be a clear message to an agnostic, multireligious and apostate humanity that their only hope is in returning to the Triune God and His inerrant Word. The rapture will also utterly refute allegoric interpretations of the Bible, in terms of which literal and logical statements in Scripture are spiritualised and thereby deprived of their meaning. In this way, liberal theologians have nullified many of the precious promises and dire warnings in the Bible by alleging that they are merely to be understood in a metaphorical sense.

After the rapture, millions of people will continue to harden their hearts. As a result of this attitude they will receive a spirit of delusion which will induce them to believe the lies of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:11-12). However, there will also be many people who will show new appreciation for the Word of God. They will seek the Lord and call upon His Name, regardless of the consequences which their Christian testimony will elicit in the midst of a Christ-rejecting new world order.

4. It is associated with the first resurrection

The rapture is directly related to the first resurrection when all believers will receive glorified resurrection bodies. Millions of those who will be caught away are already dead; consequently, they must first be raised from the dead in incorruptible, glorified bodies, which are conformed to Christ's glorious body. At the same moment, the mortal bodies of the living believers will be miraculously transformed into glorified bodies while they pass from mortality to immortality without dying. Paul explains this promise to fellow-believers:

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

To the Philippians he said: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21; cf. 1 John 3:2).

The first resurrection is also referred to as "the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14), as well as "the resurrection of life" (John 5:29). These people are indeed blessed to be partakers of the first resurrection: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first

resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

The godless will have no part in the first resurrection, the rapture, or the millennial reign of Christ. That is why John says: “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:5). They will be raised at the second resurrection which is also described as “the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29), and be judged before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

5. It separates true and nominal Christians

Apart from the separation which the rapture will bring about between saved and unsaved people in the world, it will also separate true believers from nominal Christians within the church. Those who only have a form of godliness will be left behind. This fate will befall them despite the fact that they may have regarded themselves as members of the church of Christ – that is much the same mistake as the one made by the foolish virgins (Matt. 25:6-10). Many of them will only make an honest assessment of their spiritual status after the rapture and then discover that there is no evidence of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Although they can still surrender themselves to the Lord during the tribulation period, the Bridegroom will not open the door to them by way of a second rapture, much as they may desire it and pray for it. They will have to remain outside in the cold, face the dark days of the tribulation and be prepared to die as martyrs for their faith – all because of their own negligence.

Millions of “Christians” indeed find themselves in this category of self-deceived and unsaved church members who only have a dead form of godliness! They argue that since they are baptised and confirmed in the church, they have entered into an eternal and irrevocable covenant relationship with God. In the light of this deceptive idea they feel quite comfortable about eternity despite the fact that they don’t have a clear testimony of being saved and born again. The Lord Jesus said to such a nominal believer: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). It is only the regenerating power of the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, that can change your heart and save your soul!

Make very sure that you are not a victim of a dead form of godliness at the time of the rapture, because such people are without a testimony of rebirth. You will then be left behind when the Lord Jesus suddenly comes to catch away His bride (Matt. 25:10-13; John 14:2-3). A condition for salvation is an honest confession of your sins, together with faith in Jesus Christ as your Saviour (1 John 1:9; Acts 16:31).

6. It marks the end of the church age

The rapture formally ends the dispensation of the church on earth since the members of the true church will then be removed from earth and taken to heaven. Only the backsliders, nominal believers, members of deceived and spiritually dead ‘Christian’ churches, as well as all the followers of false [non-Christian] religions will remain behind on earth. Those who do not subsequently turn to Christ to be saved, will join the deceived masses who will enter into a covenant with the false messiah to worship and follow him. The signs of the times indicate that we are at present very close to the end of the church dispensation. The Bible describes this time as a period of great falling away from the truth, and also of intensified demonic activities. Satan is lulling certain churches into a deep spiritual sleep, while occupying the attention of others with deceptive signs and wonders performed by false prophets.

At the same time, the coming antichristian dispensation’s inclusive ideology of universal or cosmic unity (holism) is actively propagated. Global structures are established for the world government, world religion, and world economy of the Antichrist. Ultimately, a false Christ will also be offered to the world. It was with a view to exposing this intense, end-time deception that the first warning in the Olivet Discourse of the Lord Jesus was devoted to a description of the satanic delusion which will culminate in the appearance of a false world

leader: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:4-5). Do not be swept away by the strong current of postmodern thinking, by which the perverted principles of an antichristian new world order are promoted.

It is important to consider the rapture in its dispensational context – i.e. at the end of the church age and just before the beginning of the tribulation period. Within this perspective, we should resist the moral collapse and spiritual falling away that are typical of the last days of the church dispensation. We should also oppose the reforms aimed at promoting the global governance and ecumenical alliance of world religions that will allow the Antichrist and false prophet the opportunity to gain control over the world and to institute their new world order. We are dispensationally in a terminal situation in which most people sadly grow cold in their love towards Christ while unrighteousness is increasing due to an emerging international culture of sin. We should actively denounce this trend, as well as the globalising reforms aimed at ushering in the next dispensation.

In times like these, preaching about the promised rapture is critically important. We are like long distance runners who have heard the bell ringing to announce the last round of the race. This situation should motivate us not to relax in our efforts but to persevere to the end. Peter says: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Pet. 3:11-12). We should not lose perspective and start compromising under the pressure of a rapidly changing world, but keep on fighting the good fight of faith while resisting all forms of evil.

7. It affords the Antichrist the opportunity to be revealed

The rapture is directly related to the revelation of the Antichrist: "And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:6-10).

The true church of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is withholding the Antichrist who can only be revealed after the church has been taken out of the way. The Holy Spirit in the church is stronger than the spirit of error that is operating in the evil world to deceive people (1 John 4:4). When evangelical Christians are suddenly taken away, the light of the world will disappear and the hour of complete spiritual darkness take effect. Under these circumstances, the man of sin will be able to reveal himself without any opposition. The rapture *has* to occur before he can be revealed!

To prepare people to be ready for the rapture calls for a spiritual disposition of absolute loyalty to the true Christ and also the unqualified rejection of the false cosmic Christ of all faiths. You should be a withholder who can take a bold stand against antichristian ideologies and humanistic structures.

8. It is a strong motivation for steadfastness in a time of backsliding

The coming of the heavenly Bridegroom will occur during a time of religious compromise and worldliness. There will be a great falling away from the truth of God's Word. A relatively small group of evangelical Christians will shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). As in the times of Noah and Lot, the earth will be filled with violence, materialism and sexual perversion.

Unfortunately, the spirit of unrighteousness and immorality will also take its toll among Christians. They will relax their vigilance by continuously lowering spiritual standards: "And because lawlessness [*sin*] will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12).

Many Christians will keep such a low profile that they ultimately lapse into complete passivity (spiritual sleep). Jesus warned His followers against this phenomenon and emphasised that the expectation of His sudden coming is a strong motivation for steadfastness: "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning – lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:35-37).

Inactive Christians are obviously not strongly dedicated to the Lord and display a tendency to grow cold in their love towards Him. The process of growing cold manifests in two ways: firstly, they develop a love for the world and worldly parties where they eat and drink to excess; secondly, anxiety and depression take root in their minds and also weaken them spiritually. The Lord Jesus warned His disciples against this kind of waywardness by offering the rapture as a positive motivation to remain steadfast to the end:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come upon you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

Do not leave your first love by backsliding from Jesus Christ – it will cost you dearly! The Lord withdrew His Spirit from the apostatised church in Ephesus; as a result, the congregation pined away and ultimately closed their doors.

9. It is an escape from the disaster area of divine judgements

The rapture also constitutes a dramatic rescue operation in which true believers will be removed from the scene of divine judgements. Although the rapture will be a unique occurrence, there are examples in the Bible of occasions when God poured out His wrath but provided an escape route to true believers since they were not the objects of His wrath (cf. Gen. 18:23). During the time of Noah, God announced His judgements upon a wicked and perverted generation: "And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark" (Gen. 6:13-14). Shortly before the beginning of judgements, eight believers escaped the disaster area by entering the ark. God Himself closed the door behind them before judging the sinners (Gen. 6:16-23).

During the time of Lot, believers were also rescued shortly before the impending judgements. The night before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah they were commanded to leave the city and flee to the mountains. The angels clearly stated that they could do nothing as long as Lot and his family were still among the wicked. Fire and brimstone rained down from the heavens directly after their departure. The wicked cities and all their inhabitants were destroyed (Gen. 19:13-25). The Bible says that there is a clear correlation between these historic events and God's end-time dealing with believers *and* unbelievers (Luke 17:26-30; also read Gen. 6 and 19).

People who are cynical about the promise of the rapture reveal a very irresponsible attitude as they are not inclined to heed the admonition to be prepared to escape the coming tribulation period. What do you think would have happened to the believers (and the entire human race) if Noah argued as follows: "God is a God of love and I don't really believe that He will send a flood to destroy all people; therefore, I am not going to build an ark to escape this so-called judgement"? Or what would have happened to Lot and his family had he taken the following stand: "I think the prophesied judgement over Sodom and Gomorrah should be interpreted metaphorically. I don't have to escape to save my life. Even if disaster does occur I believe that God will protect us against His wrath right here in this place"?

The coming judgements during the tribulation period are irrefutable biblical facts which will be literally fulfilled, and there will equally literally be an escape from wrath for the children

of God. The tribulation period of seven years should not be equated with the tribulation which Christians always experienced in a wicked world because of their faith. The end-time tribulation will be God's judgements upon a Christ-rejecting world. True believers are not destined for these judgements: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9; cf. John 5:24; Rev. 3:10).

10. It is a summons to appear before the judgement seat of Christ

The need to be well prepared for the rapture arises from the fixed appointment which all believers have to give account of their lives before the judgement seat of Christ (the Bema). This will take place directly after reaching our destination in heaven. The reality of the rapture clearly confronts believers with the responsibility to appear before the same Lord who has commissioned His disciples to proclaim the gospel of salvation, and thereby fulfil their obligation to be the light of a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth. Our Saviour is also our King and Judge.

One of the explicit reasons for the rapture will therefore be a summons to appear before the judgement seat in heaven. Paul says: "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). To the church in Rome he said: "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10). The Lord Jesus said: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12).

The Bema judgement is not aimed at pronouncing the eternal destiny of believers and unbelievers. On this occasion Christ will assess the lives of believers with reference to the works which they have done after salvation, thereby revealing the quality of their faith and service to Him. Successful disciples will be rewarded while the lazy and carnal servants will be rebuked (Luke 19:20-23).

In view of the important appointment before the judgement seat we should never think about the rapture in a narrow way as merely a wonderful journey to heaven, without considering what is waiting for us at the end of the journey. An inherent part of the whole experience of the rapture is our obligation to give account of our earthly lives to Jesus Christ. To basically qualify for the rapture demands a clear testimony of rebirth. However, to be fully ready for the rapture in terms of what is expected of us in heaven, we must also be able to testify about sanctification and dedication to the service of the Lord.

Since only Christians will be caught away during the rapture, they will be the only group to appear before the judgement seat where their works will be tested during the presentation of rewards of grace: "...each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour. ... For we are God's fellow workers. ... But let each one take heed how he builds on [the foundation]. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:8-15).

We are not saved by works but by faith. However, faith without works is dead. In the lives of Christians, a true faith will produce works that are worthy of repentance. For these works of dedication which are done through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, rewards of grace will be given at the judgement seat of Christ. On that day it will be evident that some Christians were much more productive in the work of the Lord, having used their talents to their full potential. Others will be found to having been less productive, and yet others will stand there empty-handed – saved as through fire. The following five crowns will be awarded to Spirit-filled Christians for their service to the Lord:

- The *imperishable crown* for a holy life, dedicated to service (1 Cor. 9:24-25).
- The *crown of rejoicing* for people who lead others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19).

- The *crown of glory* for faithful pastors who were not motivated by pride and greed (1 Pet. 5:2-4).
- The *crown of life* for Christian martyrs and all who suffered severely during their earthly lives (Rev. 2:10; Jas. 1:12).
- The *crown of righteousness* for believers who loved the coming of Christ, eagerly expected it and refrained from pursuing a manmade kingdom of humanistic dominionism (2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 11:10).

11. It is a journey to the marriage of the Lamb

After appearing before the judgement seat of Christ the bride will be united with her heavenly Bridegroom, never again to be separated from Him. The eager expectation of the rapture therefore expresses a desire to be part of the marriage feast of the Lamb in His ivory palace, and to be led to the King in a spotless garment woven with gold (Ps. 45:9, 13-15), “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

Jesus Christ is not only our redemption but also our sanctification: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). Have you also trusted Christ for sanctification? The bride of the Lamb is “granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8).

12. It is a journey to our eternal home

The Lord Jesus promised that He would return to take His bride to her heavenly abode. Before He ascended to heaven He said: “In My Father’s house are many mansions. ... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

This mansion in heaven is so beautiful that it cannot even be imagined by mortal man. Paul says: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). John says that the mansions and streets of the new Jerusalem are built with pure gold, like transparent glass. Each of its gates is a large, magnificent pearl. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with all sorts of precious stones, and its light is like a crystal clear stone (Rev. 21:9-21).

This description conveys the idea of heaven being a quite superlative environment of dazzling beauty, magnificence, radiance and glory beyond anything we can imagine at present. To be caught up to such a place is indeed a most desirable thought and something to earnestly look forward to! “As the Scripture says, In Thy presence is fullness of joy; and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

13. It leads to the acceptance of our judicial and royal position

After the rapture, the glorified Christians will judge the world together with Christ in righteousness (1 Cor. 6:2), and subsequently reign with Him as kings on earth. In Revelation 4 and 5, the glorified church is represented by the 24 elders: “And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

14. It is a firm assurance of blessing before judgement

A final argument in favour of a pretribulation rapture is the fact that the book of Revelation is written in a dispensational and chronological way. First, the church dispensation is reviewed in Revelation 2 and 3, followed in Revelation 4 and 5 by a description of the glorified church in heaven after the rapture – the church is depicted as 24 elders who

represent saints from all nations. The seven year-long tribulation is described in Revelation 6 through 19, which will be ended by the visible coming of Christ. Revelation 20 describes Christ's thousand-year reign of peace, and Revelation 21 and 22 elaborate on the new heaven and earth which will be created after the final judgement at the end of the millennium.

At present we are in Revelation 3, in the seventh and last church period shortly before the end of the church dispensation. The spiritually lukewarm, apostate and materialistic church of Laodicea is dominant in the end-time world. Shortly, the true church will be called to heaven with the sound of a trumpet. Only the true disciples of the Lord Jesus have received the promise that He would return to take them away after He has prepared a place for them in heaven (John 14:2-3). Not all people who regard themselves as Christians are truly saved.

This sequence of end-time events, in which believers are first safeguarded and blessed before the wicked are judged, is also confirmed by Christ in a parable. In Luke 19:11-27, He says that when He returns as King he will first call His servants together to reward them for their service. When that is done, He will turn to His enemies and judge them for refusing to recognise and accept Him as King and Saviour.

A promise to lift up your spirit!

Do you realise how extremely important the rapture is to every Christian, how highly dramatic the events are that are associated with it, and how exceedingly worthwhile it is to be ready for it? Christianity and the church stand to be spiritually deprived and impoverished if this promise, as well as all the obligations emanating from it, are not earnestly proclaimed. Without the Bible's prophetic perspective on the end-time we will be uncertain about the future, grope in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, and never correctly determine our priorities.

While we are discerning the approaching footsteps of the Lord Jesus in the signs of the times, we must be very sure that we really belong to Him and comply with His standard of holiness. Unsaved, nominal Christians who have never had a personal encounter with the Lord will in vain plead for mercy before the great white throne of the final judgement. The Lord will declare to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:23).

There is no need whatsoever to be heading towards a tragic end of disillusionment and ultimate rejection. If we have truly repented, trusted the Lord Jesus to cleanse us from all sin, and surrendered ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we will have sanctified hearts and lives, worthy to meet the heavenly Bridegroom when He comes at the end of the church dispensation.

The Saviour, who is also the heavenly Bridegroom, said to His disciples: "Let your waists be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master. ... Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:35-40).