

IT'S A GOD THING



And Other Popular
Christian Misconceptions

APPENDIXES

JIM DYET

Victor[®]

The Bible Teacher's Teacher

COOK COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRIES
Colorado Springs, Colorado • Paris, Ontario
KINGSWAY COMMUNICATIONS LTD
Eastbourne, England

Victor® is an imprint of
Cook Communications Ministries, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Cook Communications, Paris, Ontario
Kingsway Communications, Eastbourne, England

IT'S A GOD THING AND OTHER POPULAR CHRISTIAN MISCONCEPTIONS
© 2006 by Jim Dyet

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version®*. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Appendix A



DOCTRINES AND APPLICATIONS OF PAUL'S EPISTLES (SUPPLEMENT TO MISCONCEPTION THREE)

LETTER	DOCTRINES	APPLICATIONS
Romans	Universal sin (chs. 1—3) Justification (chs. 4—5)	Do not boast (3:27). Believe in Jesus and rejoice in forgiveness (4:24; 5:1–2)
1 Corinthians	The ministry of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the church (chs. 1—2) The resurrection (ch. 15)	Cooperate with one another in ministry (chs. 3—5); safeguard the church's reputation (chs. 6—7); respect one another's convictions (chs. 8—10); partake of Communion in a heartfelt, pure manner (ch. 11); use your spiritual gifts humbly and orderly in serving others (chs. 12—14) Steadfastly serve the Lord (15:58); faithfully give to the Lord (16:1–3)
2 Corinthians	Apostolic authority (throughout the letter)	Reject false teachers; support valid ministry (throughout the letter)
Galatians	The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (chs. 3—4)	Reject legalism (4:28—5:15); live by the Spirit (5:16–26); restore one another (6:1–5); support the gospel ministry (vv. 6–8); do good to all (v. 10)
Ephesians	Our position in Christ (chs. 1—3)	Reflect Christ: in the community (4:1–24), in the church (4:25—5:21), at home (5:22—6:4), in the workplace (6:5–9)
Philippians	The person and work of Christ (chs. 1—2)	Serve Christ sacrificially, humbly, harmoniously, generously, confidently (chs. 3—4)
Colossians	The preeminence of Christ (chs. 1—2)	Avoid false teachings about Christ and live for Christ in the community (3:1–11), in the church (3:12–17), at home (3:18–21), in the workplace (3:22—4:1)
1 Thessalonians	Every chapter teaches the return of Christ	Every chapter ends with a practical application
2 Thessalonians	The day of the Lord (eschatology) throughout the letter	Trust God to reward you and to punish wrongdoers (chs. 1—2); stand firm in the truth (2:15); avoid those who are idle and divisive (3:6); admonish the errant (v. 12); keep on doing what is right (v. 13)
1 Timothy	Ecclesiology: instructions on worship (ch. 2) and church leaders (ch. 3)	Conduct your ministry faithfully and teach others to know and obey the truth (chs. 3—4); build good interpersonal relationships (ch. 5); reject covetousness and materialism, but pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, and gentleness (ch. 6)
2 Timothy	The doctrines of grace, the person and work of Christ, and bibliography (Scripture); 1:8–9, 12; 2:1, 8, 11–13; 3:15–17)	Be fervent, loyal to Bible doctrine, be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus, be pure, be even tempered, be alert, be diligent (1:6, 13; 2:1, 22–24; 3:1–5; 4:1–2)
Titus	Summarizes key doctrines (2:11–14; 3:4–7)	Teach sound doctrine (2:1); educate the congregation (2:2–10); obey the authorities (3:1–2); avoid false doctrine (v. 9); warn divisive persons (v. 10)
Philemon	Oneness in Christ	Forgive and welcome Onesimus as a brother in the Lord (vv. 15–18)

Appendix B



JESUS MUST BE COMING SOON—LOOK AT ALL THE SIGNS!

An earthquake rumbles in the mountains of Iran, destroying villages and killing thousands. Famine blights North Korea and the Sudan, causing many men, women, and children to die of starvation. China suffers a devastating SARS epidemic. AIDS afflicts more than twenty-one million sufferers in Africa. The West Nile Virus sends anxious Americans to stores in search of insect repellent. Believers endure persecution around the world, and many die as martyrs. False prophets deceive thousands, even persuading many to participate in mass suicides.

North Korea and Iran pursue a dangerous course of developing nuclear capability. Iraq and Afghanistan reel from the aftereffects of war. Terrorists threaten further attacks on the United States similar to 9/11. Religious apostasy, crime, and immorality run rampant like a three-headed monster. Devastating tornadoes rip the midwestern United States. Floods sweep away homes in the Southland. Hail the size of baseballs slam into cars and houses in the Rocky Mountain region. Weird weather patterns puzzle meteorologists. Forest fires char forests and grasslands in parts of the West. Troubled teenagers shoot and kill fellow students in Columbine High School and other high schools. Meteorite showers streak through the sky.

Are these alarming events signs that we are living in the last days? Do they signal the rapture? Is Jesus poised in heaven, ready to come in the clouds and snatch Christians from the earth?

Let's put our newspapers aside for a few minutes, turn off the television news, and pick up our Bibles. If we want answers to questions about Jesus' coming, we will find them only in the Bible.

Are we living in the last days?

Yes!

Are we living near the end of the last days?

Maybe, yes. Maybe, no.

Let me explain.

Writing in the first century, the apostles pointed to events in and characteristics of the first century and beyond as peculiar to "last days" or "last times" or "last hour." They observed:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Heb. 1:1–2)

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (1 Peter 1:20)

Dear children, this is the last hour.... This is how we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the men who divide you. (Jude vv. 17–19)

Christians from the first century to the present have lived in the last days. We are certainly closer to the rapture now than first-century Christians were, but we cannot assert dogmatically that the end of the last days is upon us.

But what about the signs of the times?

Let's look at the signs given in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Where do they belong in what might be called a prophetic jigsaw puzzle?

Jesus provided a list of signs to the disciples in response to their questions about the temple's destruction and the timing of Jesus' coming and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7). As we cull the signs from Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, passages giving what has been called the Olivet Discourse, here's what we find:

✘ False messiahs

✘ Wars and rumors of wars

APPENDIX B

- ✘ International strife
- ✘ Famines
- ✘ Earthquakes
- ✘ Persecution and martyrdoms
- ✘ Apostasy
- ✘ Religious deception
- ✘ Increase in wickedness
- ✘ Gospel of the kingdom to be preached worldwide
- ✘ Abomination of desolation
- ✘ Counterfeit signs and miracles
- ✘ Solar and lunar eclipses
- ✘ Stellar disturbances
- ✘ Pestilences
- ✘ Jerusalem surrounded by armies
- ✘ Oceanic upheaval
- ✘ Panic

According to Jesus, the generation that witnesses these signs will also see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). Matthew 25: 31–45 expands on this glorious appearance by describing the Judgment of the Nations that follows it immediately on earth. The judgment separates sheep (righteous Gentiles) from goats (unrighteous Gentiles). The sheep receive an inheritance in the Messiah’s kingdom (v. 34), whereas the unrighteous are consigned to eternal fire “prepared for the devil and his angels” (v. 41).

We should notice, too, that the King presides at this judgment (vv. 34, 40).

Several aspects of this event distinguish it from the rapture.

1. The rapture occurs in the air. Jesus does not return to the earth to gather the righteous from the nations but catches Christians up and away from the earth. The apostle Paul wrote, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16–17).
2. The rapture features Jesus’ arrival in the air as the Bridegroom who takes his bride from the earth to his Father’s house. He promised in John 14:2–3: “In my Father’s house are many rooms.... I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” When he takes his bride to heaven, he will “present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27). At the end of the tribulation, he will return to the earth in a blaze of glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and will execute judgment on his enemies (Rev. 19:11–16).
3. The title “Son of Man” used eighty-one times in the Gospels, is a messianic term, relating Jesus to Israel. Jews would have associated the term with the picture in Daniel 7:13–14 of a heavenly end-times figure who comes with the clouds of heaven and is vested with authority, glory, sovereign power, and an everlasting dominion and invincible kingdom. At his second coming, not at the rapture, Jesus, the Son of Man, will seize the reins of government from the nations and establish his kingdom rule.
4. New Testament writers treated the rapture as an imminent event. They believed it could take place at any time, and they longed for it to happen in their lifetime. They did not teach that a series of signs would have to be fulfilled before the rapture could occur. Paul wrote: “The Lord is near” (Phil. 4:4). James advised, “The Lord’s coming is near” (James 5:8) and “the Judge is standing at the door” (v. 9). Further, in Revelation 22:20 the apostle John recorded Jesus’ promise, “Yes, I am coming soon.”
5. One sign of Jesus’ coming involves the worldwide proclaiming of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14). Some zealous Christian leaders have suggested that Christians must proclaim the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth in order to hasten the coming of Christ. Their zeal is admirable, but our commission to preach the gospel to all nations issues from Matthew 28:18–20, not Matthew 24:14. The gospel of the kingdom was never committed to the Christians. We find many references in the Epistles to preaching the gospel, but none involve the gospel of the kingdom. (See, for example, “the gospel of his Son” [Rom. 1:9]; “the

gospel” [v. 16; 11:28; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:16; 15:1; Gal. 2:2; Phil. 1:5; Col. 1:5]; “my gospel” [Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 2:8]; “the gospel of God” [Rom. 15:16; 1 Thess. 2:9]; “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” [1 Tim. 1:11]; “our gospel” [2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:14]; “the gospel of the glory of Christ” [2 Cor. 4:4]; “the gospel of Christ” [Gal. 1:7; 1 Thess. 3:2]; and “the gospel of your salvation” [Eph. 1:13].)

John the Baptist preached the gospel of the kingdom, the good news about the kingdom. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near,” he told his fellow Jews (Matt. 3:2). Indeed the kingdom was near, because Jesus, the Messiah who held the title deed to the throne of Israel, had been born and was about to begin His ministry.

Jesus, too, preached the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew 4:23 reports that “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their [the Jews’] synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.” Mark 1:15 states that he said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” On one occasion Jesus announced, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), meaning it was present in the person of the King. Jesus formally presented the kingdom to Israel, but as we know, Israel rejected her King and his kingdom.

Jesus’ disciples preached the gospel of the kingdom. Responding to his command to do so (Luke 9:2), “they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel [of the kingdom, see v. 2] and healing people everywhere” (v. 6). Their message, like the message John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed, was intended to persuade Israel to repent and receive her King.

The message about the Messiah’s kingdom was appropriate primarily for the Jews. It struck a responsive chord in the hearts of faithful Jews who anticipated the arrival of their Messiah. They believed the Old Testament promises about an earthly theocratic kingdom of peace and prosperity and waited “for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). This hope of a kingdom was running high in the hearts of Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection. They asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

The gospel of the kingdom, then, is a Jewish message about an imminent messianic kingdom. Christians have not been commissioned to proclaim this gospel, because the messianic kingdom is not imminent. The King is absent, and we do not know when he will return to earth to establish his kingdom.

But the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world in fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction in Matthew 24:14. It will happen after the rapture, when the kingdom is imminent; and saved Jews of the tribulation period will be the preachers. Indeed all the signs given in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 will be fulfilled in the tribulation.

The book of Revelation unfolds three series of judgments that God rains down upon the earth before Christ returns and establishes his kingdom. They are the Seal Judgments, the Trumpet Judgments, and the Bowl Judgments, described in Revelation 6—18. These judgments fulfill the signs given in the Olivet Discourse, but before we identify them, we need to see what takes place before they begin.

The first chapter of Revelation depicts Jesus as the risen, eternal Son of Man who holds the keys of death and hades. Jesus appears to the apostle John and instructs him to write letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

Chapters 2 and 3 record these seven letters. Each letter focuses on the receiving church’s distinct characteristics and ministry track record. Many Bible teachers point to parallels between the characteristics of the seven churches and the characteristics of periods of church history. They suggest the church at Ephesus, the first church addressed, prefigures the first-century church, and the seventh church, Laodicea, prefigures the final period of church history.

Chapter 4 begins, “After this” (v. 1), and indicates that the writing of the seven letters is concluded. However, if we see the seven churches prefiguring periods of church history from Pentecost to the rapture, we can take “after this” to mean after *the entire church age*. Subsequent events, then, occur after the church age.

The first event to follow the church age is the rapture, pictured by what happened to the apostle John. According to Revelation 4:1–2, he looked up, saw a door standing open in heaven, heard a voice like a

APPENDIX B

trumpet summoning him to “come up here” and promising to show him “what must take place after this.” Immediately, John found himself in heaven.

Chapter 5 reports that John saw a Lamb (Jesus) in heaven receive a scroll with seven seals from the occupant of heaven’s throne (presumably God the Father). This transaction elicits from heaven’s population “praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever” to the Lamb.

What follows in chapters 6 through 18 is the unleashing of tribulation judgments upon the earth, which John witnesses from his vantage point in heaven. If we see in John’s “rapture” (Rev. 4:1–2) a picture of the church’s rapture, we can anticipate that Christians will be in heaven when the tribulation rages on earth.

The similarities between John’s “rapture” and the church’s rapture are clear.

JOHN’S RAPTURE (REV. 4:1–2)	THE CHURCH’S RAPTURE (1 THESS. 4:16–17)
Hears a voice like a trumpet	Voice and trumpet
Caught up to heaven	Caught up to heaven

Now, we return to our discussion about the timing of the signs given in the Olivet Discourse. The judgments that unfold in Revelation 6 to 18, after the rapture but before the glorious return of Christ to earth to set up his kingdom, fulfill those prophesied signs.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

PROPHESIED IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE	FULFILLED IN THE TRIBULATION
False messiahs (Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8)	Rev. 6:2; 13:11–15
Famine, pestilences, earthquakes (Matt. 24:6, 7; Mark 13:7–8; Luke 21:11)	Rev. 6:5–6; 8:5; 16:18–20
Wars (Matt. 24:6–7; Mark 13:7–8; Luke 21:9)	Rev. 6:6–8; 16:12–14
Persecution of the righteous (Matt. 24:9; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12–19)	Rev. 6:9; 12:13–17; 13:15
Worldwide preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10)	Rev. 7:1–10; 14:1–6
Abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14)	Rev. 13:14–15
Religious deception (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; Luke 21:8)	Rev. 13:11–14
Solar and lunar blackouts, stellar disturbances (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:25–26)	Rev. 6:12–14; 8:12

Just a few concluding comments about “signs.” Although no signs have to be fulfilled before Jesus raptures his church, we cannot say dogmatically that the current phenomena some Christians identify as signs are not stage dressing for the drama that will unfold in the tribulation. We simply don’t have biblical authority to say that they are.

Further, some students of eschatology (the study of last things) do not identify two phases of Jesus’ second coming. They believe he will rapture the church and immediately return to earth with his church.

These Bible teachers believe that Christians will live during the tribulation.

Still other Bible teachers insist that the church will experience the first half of the tribulation and be raptured before the second half (the great tribulation) begins.

My position expresses the view of pretribulational dispensationalism that God will remove the church from the earth before the tribulation and then resume his prophetic program for Israel (see Rom. 11:25–27). The tribulation will serve as a purging force for Israel.

Many Jews will repent and believe in their Messiah during that period. After the tribulation, they will enter the long-awaited messianic kingdom. The 144,000 servants of God mentioned in Revelation 7:4 compose a core group of Jews who believe in Jesus as their Messiah in the tribulation. While respecting other views, I believe the dispensational view honors the distinction drawn in 1 Corinthians 10:32 between Jews, Greeks (Gentiles), and the church.

Israel can expect dreadful persecution in the tribulation, but also it can anticipate spiritual cleansing and deliverance. The prophet Zechariah forecast these occurrences. Zechariah 12:10 promises, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."

Zechariah 13:1 predicts: "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Verses 8 and 9 state: "In the whole land,' declares the LORD, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will

answer them; I will say, "They are my people," and they will say, "The LORD is our God."'"

Speaking to Jews in Matthew 24, Jesus offered hope to the generation that would witness the signs of the times. It cannot know the day of the Lord's coming, but it can know he is coming. Therefore, the saved should be watchful. Like wise virgins, they should be ready for their Master's return (Matt. 25:1-13), and like faithful servants, they should invest their talents in the Master's service (vv. 14-30).

If we believe that Jesus could come for us at any time and we do not have to wait for signs to be fulfilled, we surely ought to lead the kind of life that honors our Savior and attracts the lost to him. We cannot say we have at least tomorrow to honor and serve him. If we need to reconcile with an offended brother or sister in Christ, now is the time to do so. If we need to pray for a loved one's salvation, now is the right time. If we need to perform a charitable deed or talk to a neighbor about Christ, we should not procrastinate. If we need to rid our lives of enslaving bad habits, we should do so today. An any moment anticipation of Jesus' coming in the air for his church should lead to an every moment dedication of our lives to him. First John 3:3 observes wisely that our hope of seeing Jesus inspires pure living: "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

Appendix C



WHO IS THE ANTICHRIST?

Bible teachers have written numerous articles and books about the Antichrist. Hollywood has produced movies about him. Pastors have preached countless sermons castigating him. And he has been the topic of numerous group sessions and conversations. Yet, no one knows his actual identity. Speculation has run in high gear for ages, though. Many centuries ago, Christians believed Nero was the Antichrist. He surely was a psychopathic villain, but time proved he was simply that. Many sermons and writings of Reformation vintage identified the pope as the Antichrist. With the passing of time, others fell under suspicion. Much like pinning the tail on the donkey, believers blindly pinned the name *Antichrist* on such infamous characters as Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler, and Mussolini. More recently the tag has been attached respectively—and ridiculously—to John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, Moshe Dayan, Ronald Reagan, and even Santa Claus.

Although no one can name the Antichrist, almost everyone agrees that he will be the head of the revived Roman Empire in the tribulation. This identification dominates the prophetic thinking in evangelical seminaries and the writing of popular books on prophecy. But does Bible prophecy assign a political role to the Antichrist? Can we take for granted that he will rule the world from a European capital?

Have you read or heard even one verse of Scripture that specifically mentions the Antichrist as the head of the revived Roman Empire? I haven't. Nor have I read any verse that specifically mentions him in any other role. So it seems to me that no one can say dogmatically that the Antichrist is this person or that. Although I do not believe he will be the head of the revived Roman Empire, I respect those who do.

Let me explain why I reject the popular view.

First, every Scripture passage having the word

“antichrist” deals with religious apostasy, not political influence. You may be surprised to learn that the word doesn't appear in the Old Testament and only five times in the New Testament. Further, all the references to “antichrist” huddle together in John's epistles. Take a look:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22)

But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:3)

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John v. 7)

If we look at the context in which John wrote about the Antichrist, we will observe that he is the culmination of many religious purveyors of false teaching (1 John 2:18). *The Antichrist is the liar* (v. 22). He denies that Jesus is the Messiah and that his Father is God (v. 22; 4:3). He is *the deceiver* (2 John v. 7).

A closer examination of the Greek word translated “antichrist” allows for the interpretation that he is a counterfeit Christ. *Anti* can mean either *against* or *in the stead of*, and *christos* means *messiah* or *anointed one*. He is the one Jesus spoke about when he commented, “I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him” (John 5:43). Jesus was speaking to the Jews as their Messiah, and the Antichrist will pose as Israel's Messiah.

Two diabolically evil, powerful figures appear in the tribulation, the seven-year period that I believe stretches from the rapture to the return of Christ to earth and the inauguration of his kingdom. This position absents the church from the tribulation and places Israel in the central focus of God's attention as he pours three series of judgment on the earth: (1) the Seal Judgments, (2) the Trumpet Judgments, and (3) the Bowl Judgments. During the tribulation God will discipline and purify Israel. This "time of Jacob's trouble" (see Jer. 30:7) will bring salvation to Jews who acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah (Zech. 13:1). Two-thirds of the people of Israel will perish, but one-third will be saved. The Lord promised in Zechariah 13:9, "This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

The first diabolical figure to emerge in the tribulation period is the "beast" that rises out of the sea (Rev. 13:1). The description that follows his introduction indicates that he is a powerful political figure in control of the revived Roman Empire, symbolized by the seven heads (Rome's seven successive forms of government). Dispensational interpreters see the ten horns as rulers of the empire until the "beast" emerges as the uncontested ruler. Another reason to believe he is the head of the revived Roman Empire stems from the fact that he rises from "the sea." From a biblical perspective of geography, the "sea" is the Mediterranean Sea. The Roman Empire primarily encompassed the Mediterranean world, and the revived Roman Empire probably approximates this area. This beast from the sea is so powerful that his subjects ask, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" (v. 4). He is so blasphemous that he slanders God, heaven, and those who dwell in heaven (vv. 5-6). He makes war against the saints, and unbelievers universally worship him (vv. 7-10).

Once in uncontested power, the Roman prince, the beast from the sea, rules "for a time, times and half a time" (three and a half years or forty-two months or 1,260 days; Rev. 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:5). His reign of terror extends from the middle to the end of the tribulation.

As malignant to humanity as the Roman prince is, it does not appear that he is the Antichrist, although much popular prophetic teaching calls him the

Antichrist. For one thing, he does not pretend to be Israel's Messiah. For another, he does not perform any miracles. The true Messiah established his credentials by performing miracles. Doesn't it seem logical to expect a false messiah, someone posing in the stead of the Messiah, to perform miracles? Further, Jesus, the Messiah, functions as High Priest, but the Roman prince does not cast himself in the role of a priest.

The second beast described in Revelation 13:11-18 seems to match John's identification of the Antichrist as a religious apostate, a liar, and a deceiver. He rises from the earth (v. 11), which must represent Israel. After all, Israel is central to Bible geography.

This second beast, also known as the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), is even more diabolical and dangerous than the first beast. A religious deceiver is always more dangerous than an overtly wicked person. He is what Jesus described as a wolf in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15).

The false prophet imitates Jesus Christ in several ways. First, he has "two horns like a lamb" (Rev. 13:11). Jesus came to Israel as the Lamb of God, the one who would die for the people's sins. Isaiah 53 depicted the Messiah as a lamb being "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (v. 7) and being "cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people he was stricken" (v. 8). However, Jesus spoke words of life, whereas the false prophet speaks "like a dragon" (v. 11). Energized by Satan, called "the great dragon" in Revelation 12:9, the false prophet speaks Satan's lies and opposes the truth.

Second, the false prophet performs "great and miraculous signs" (Rev. 13:13). Like Pharaoh's wicked magicians, the false prophet puts on quite a spectacular show of supernatural wonders. The Jewish leaders did not respond in faith to the miracles Jesus performed to demonstrate that he was the Messiah, but numerous Jews in the tribulation will believe that the false prophet is the Messiah based on his signs and wonders. But all of his show-stopping wonders are designed to deceive, and those who accept him as the Messiah are deceived (v. 14).

Third, the false prophet directs worship to the Roman prince (v. 14). In consort with the Roman prince, he sets up an image in honor of the Roman prince, animates it, and commands everyone to worship it (vv. 14-15). At the beginning of "the times of

the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24), Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, erected an image in his own honor and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it. Near the end of “the times of the Gentiles” the false prophet (Antichrist) duplicates this event. However, he commands everyone to bow down and worship the image of the Roman prince (Rev. 13:15). All who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image faced execution. Similarly, all who refuse to worship the Roman prince’s image face execution (v. 15).

The prophet Daniel predicted that this horrific act of idolatry will occur in the middle of the tribulation. He wrote: “In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him” (Dan. 9:27).

Jesus pointed to this despicable act as a sign to righteous Jews in Judea to flee to the mountains for refuge. In the Olivet Discourse, he said, “So when you see standing in the holy place the ‘abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:15–16).

Because they were suffering intense persecution, the Thessalonian believers thought they were living in the tribulation period. Paul helped to clear up this misconception by pointing to two features of the tribulation. It would reveal the Antichrist (the false prophet), whom Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as “the man of lawlessness.” The tribulation would also feature “the rebellion” (vv. 1–3). The rebellion likely refers to Israel’s act of turning her back on God and capitulating to the false prophet’s demand that everyone worship the Roman prince’s image.

In the tribulation period the false prophet controls not only Israel’s religious life but also her economic life. He forces everyone to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, perhaps a laser ID. Without this mark, no one can buy or sell. The mark is 666, which is the number of the false prophet’s name. This number appears in only one other place in Scripture: Ezra 2:13. This passage reports that 666 descendants of Adonikam accompanied Zerubbabel to Jerusalem from captivity in Persia. *Adonikam* means “the king who rises up,” so we may wonder if the name

of the beast that rises up from the earth is Adonikam. This is merely conjecture, however.

Many ingenious methods have been applied to disclose the false prophet’s name, but the attempts seem pointless. Those who are converted to Christ in the tribulation—the 144,000 Jews and their converts (Rev. 7:1–9)—will know his identity and be cautious. The wicked will also know his identity, but they will be deceived.

It does seem highly unlikely that the Antichrist is a Gentile. Because he poses as Israel’s Messiah, he must surely be a Jew. Perhaps he belongs to the tribe of Dan. Revelation 7:4–8 lists the tribes of Israel to which the 144,000 sealed Jewish believers of the tribulation belong. The tribe of Dan is conspicuously absent, although the tribe will participate in the kingdom the Messiah establishes after the tribulation (Ezek. 48:1).

Dan was the first tribe in Israel’s history that practiced idolatry. The Antichrist introduces idolatry to Israel in the tribulation. Further, when Jacob blessed his sons, he prophesied: “Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider tumbles backward” (Gen. 49:17).

The second beast of Revelation 13:11–18 imitates the three offices held by Jesus: prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, he speaks like a dragon and performs lying wonders. As a priest, he directs worship to the Roman prince. As a king, he rules in Israel and does whatever he wants.

Why would the false prophet in Israel direct worship to the head of the revived Roman Empire, the Roman prince? I believe the reason is simple. A treaty existing between Western Europe and Israel is suddenly broken (Dan. 9:27). Now Israel is vulnerable to attacks from every direction. She must placate the Roman prince and do precisely what he demands. Israel assumes that the alliance with the Roman prince will save the day; therefore, she feels secure. At that time the people of Israel live in unwallled villages, and are “peaceful and unsuspecting” (Ezek. 38:11).

However, idolatry invites God’s wrath. When Israel practiced idolatry in Old Testament times, God unleashed armies from the north to punish his ancient people. Assyria invaded the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC and led many Jews into captivity. Judah, the southern kingdom, was less idolatrous than her sister to

the north and survived longer, but ultimately she fell into the hands of a northern army. The Babylonians led a large contingent of Jews from their homeland to Babylon in 597 BC.

The idolatrous worship of the Roman prince in the tribulation initiates similar divine judgment. The “king of the South” (likely Arab states) attacks Israel, and then Lord brings “the king of the North” into Palestine. Daniel 11:40–45 reports:

At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him [the Antichrist] in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

According to Ezekiel 38:18–23, the Sovereign Lord will destroy the northern invader in the mountains of Israel. He will shake the aggressor with a mighty earthquake. Landslides will crush the invader while panic causes the soldiers to turn on one another. Further, rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur will pummel the troops. Ezekiel 39:4 describes the slaughter as a provision of “food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals.”

Where is the false prophet, the Antichrist, when the northern army invades Israel? He leaves Israel and hides out until the coast is clear. Zechariah 11:17 states: “Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!” Perhaps Jesus alluded to the false prophet’s desertion when he contrasted an uncaring hired shepherd with the Good Shepherd. He warned: “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf [the northern invader?] coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf

attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:12–13).

With the demise of the northern invader, the Roman prince occupies Palestine, overruns Jerusalem, and desecrates the temple area and Jerusalem. Jesus predicted a Jewish dispersion when this occurs: “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). This same disaster is described in Revelation 11:2: “But exclude the outer court [of the temple]; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months [the second half of the tribulation].” At this time the Antichrist cooperates fully with the Roman prince at the expense of the Jews. Daniel 11:38–39 reveals that he “will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts ... and will distribute the land at a price.”

The alliance of the Roman prince and the Antichrist will not go uncontested in the tribulation. Armies from the East will cross the Euphrates River and march against the Roman prince’s forces at Armageddon (Rev. 16:12–16). At this time God will intervene to destroy the Gentile powers. He will unleash an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude and simultaneously rip the skies with lightning flashes, rumblings, and thunderclaps. Hailstones weighing one hundred pounds will fall on men (see Rev. 16:17–21).

These dramatic occurrences precede the most dramatic judgment of history. Revelation 19:11–21 portrays the return of Jesus to earth in a blaze of glory. Accompanied by the armies of heaven, he captures the Roman prince and the false prophet (the Antichrist) and casts them alive into “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (v. 20) and kills the armies gathered at Armageddon. When the judgment concludes, birds of carrion feast on the dead. The Roman prince and the Antichrist’s kingdom may have been powerful and vast, but it ends as something *for the birds*.

This study of the identification of the Antichrist would not be complete without stressing once again that the Bible does not assign the name “Antichrist” specifically to any end-time figure. The identification



APPENDIX C

is therefore a matter of conjecture. However, it seems to me that the weight of scriptural evidence supports the position I have described in this article. In the final analysis, we do not have to know who the Antichrist is, and an inordinate curiosity may distract us from our main task of sharing the good news with lost and bewildered men and women.

If this article has accomplished anything, I hope it has shown that we must not be dogmatic about matters the Bible leaves open to interpretation. Saying dogmatically, “This is this” and “That is that” can be divisive. Each of us is free to speculate about matters not clearly defined in the Bible, but if we disagree, we ought to do so agreeably.

We may not be able to pin an antichrist nametag on an individual, but we can plainly detect the spirit of antichrist. Its mark is on every religious teaching that contradicts the Bible’s portrayal of Jesus Christ. He is the virgin-born Son of God. He led a sinless life, performed real miracles, shed his blood for our sins, arose bodily from the grave, was seen by many witnesses, ascended to heaven, and is coming again. He merits our deepest love and our undying loyalty.

Appendix D



WHATEVER YOU DO TO THE POOR, YOU DO TO JESUS

Poverty blights our planet. In some countries children live in cardboard boxes and rummage through garbage sites in search of scraps of discarded food. Parents sell their young daughters as prostitutes in order to support their families. Homeless kids beg on the street. People live near open sewers. Women wash clothes in filthy streams.

But poverty isn't limited to foreign countries. It plagues Western nations too. A pastor I know well ministered in an American community that included several streets of small run-down houses with neither indoor plumbing nor central heating. Outhouses were commonplace. But a nearby town was in even worse shape. Most residents burned their trash in a backyard trash pit. For two or three dollars a hauler driving a beat-up car with the back seat removed would shovel the burned trash into his car and take it to a dump. Kids didn't eat well, but hair lice did. Periodically, schoolteachers had to comb through students' hair for signs of infestation.

According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, the official poverty rate in the United States in 2003 was 12.5 percent, up from 12.1 percent in 2002. In 2003, 35.9 million people were in poverty, up 1.3 million from 2002. When the report was issued, the poverty threshold was defined as \$18,810 for a family of four and \$12,015 for two people.

Of course, some people live at poverty level or below because they refuse to work. Others work hard at a pay rate that doesn't keep pace with rising costs. Some are seniors on a fixed income that doesn't fix the problem of ever-increasing costs of utilities, taxes, groceries, health care, and other necessities. Some live in poverty because they are physically incapacitated.

Poor people reside in urban areas and rural areas, in small towns and midsize towns. Every big city faces the problem of homeless men and women panhan-

dling on the streets and camping under bridges or on riverbanks. Some poor families attend our churches. Becoming believers did not solve their financial problems, but it did solve their sin problem and placed them into God's family. They can access supernatural peace and support as they struggle to get out of the red and into the black. They must be encouraged by the pastor's announcement at Communion that a freewill offering will go to the Benevolent Fund, the fund that exists to help the needy.

Perhaps you have heard a pastor conclude the announcement of the freewill offering by commenting, "Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Is it true that the poor are the least of Jesus' brothers? Let's examine Matthew 25:31-46, the context in which Jesus made this statement. Jesus was delivering his famous Olivet Discourse, which was prompted by his disciples' request. "'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" (Matt. 24:3). The question came in response to Jesus' assertion that every stone of the temple will be thrown down (v. 2).

Jesus answered the disciples' curiosity about end-time events by identifying a number of signs that would precede his coming in glory to establish his kingdom. The following verses describe his coming and the inauguration of his kingdom:

At that time ["immediately after the distress of those days" (Matt. 24:29)] the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (24:30)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (25:31)

APPENDIX D

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (v. 34)

It is in regard to the inauguration of his kingdom in the end-time, after the “distress” (the tribulation), that King Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

Zeroing in on the inauguration of Jesus’ kingdom, we find that it occurs after Earth’s darkest period, the tribulation. During that horrendous time, religious deception and global disasters will rise to unprecedented levels. Jesus predicted religious deception, international strife, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. He prophesied that believers would be persecuted and even martyred. Wickedness will abound, the love of most will grow cold, and the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed to all nations. Further, the abomination of desolation will stand in the Holy Place. (See Matt. 24:4–15.) These signs signal the arrival of the Son of Man from heaven (v. 30).

In Appendix C we studied the role the Antichrist plays in the abomination of desolation. He erects an image in the temple in honor of the Roman prince, the first beast. He animates the image and imposes the death penalty on all who refuse to worship the image (Rev. 13:15). Also, he forces everyone to receive the mark of the beast on the right hand or on the forehead (v. 16). Without this mark, no one can buy or sell (v. 17).

Jesus instructed believers (both Jews and Gentiles converted after the rapture) to seek sanctuary in the mountains at first sight of the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15–16). He advised a hasty evacuation:

Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. (vv. 17–20)

Why this advice? Jesus explained: “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (v. 21). The distress will be so intense that the days will be shortened; otherwise, no believer would survive (v. 22).

We might wonder, *What’s going on here?*

In every period of history, God has preserved a faithful remnant. For example, he preserved Noah and his family in the time of the catastrophic flood. Those eight souls rode out the storm. They were safe in the ark. God had shut them in! When idolatrous Ahab and Jezebel ruled Israel, the nation followed their lead and worshipped Baal; that is, all but a remnant. Elijah and seven thousand other Israelites refused to bow down to Baal. Even in the captivity, a remnant of believers kept the faith. Perhaps most memorable were Daniel and his three friends. God preserved Daniel’s friends after Nebuchadnezzar had them bound and tossed into a blazing hot furnace for refusing to worship his image. They emerged from the roaring flames untied and unscathed. Not even the faintest scent of smoke had settled onto their clothes. When Rome occupied Palestine in the first century, most Jews blindly followed the apostate religious leadership of the scribes and Pharisees, but a remnant of Jews was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. The gospel of Luke names some of them: Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon, Anna, and John the Baptist. Revelation indicates that a remnant of believers will shine like lights in the inky darkness of the tribulation.

Revelation 7 introduces us to a nucleus of tribulation believers. It numbers 144,000 saved Jews. God seals them—marks them for protection—prior to the great tribulation, the second half of the tribulation. Throughout the great tribulation, they serve as evangelists, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and winning a great multitude to Christ (v. 9; Matt. 24:14). At the end of the great tribulation, when Jesus stands on earth and prepares to inaugurate his kingdom, he comforts these redeemed saints. The Antichrist had persecuted them relentlessly in the great tribulation. They had experienced hunger, thirst, and exposure to the elements, but in King Jesus’ kingdom they will never hunger or thirst or suffer scorching heat (Rev. 7:16). “The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (v. 17).

Some, perhaps many, tribulation believers will face martyrdom. Having refused the mark of the beast, they will not be able to buy food or water. Nor will they be able to rent or buy a house. They will die of hunger or

thirst or exposure to the elements. However, when Jesus returns to earth to set up his kingdom, he will raise the martyrs from the dead. Along with Old Testament saints who will experience resurrection at this time, they will enter the messianic kingdom. "The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (Rev. 7:17).

The kingdom on earth will include resurrected and translated believers of the church age (compare Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:16–17; Jude v. 14–15) and resurrected Old Testament believers (Dan. 12:2–3; John 5:28–29). But tribulation martyrs, too, will experience resurrection at Jesus' return to earth. Revelation 20:4 discloses:

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Since all of these saints enter the kingdom in glorified, resurrection bodies and therefore do not procreate, we might ask how earth's population grows to such incredible numbers by the end of the one-thousand-year kingdom rule. After all, Revelation 20:7–9 describes a rebellion of massive proportions against Jesus at the close of his one-thousand-year reign. Satan, who has just been released from a thousand-year imprisonment in the Abyss (v. 2), leads this rebellion. His followers are described as coming from the four corners of the earth and gathering to battle "like the sand on the seashore."

The answer to this question about the origin of earth's tumultuous millennial population brings us full circle to the question: Are the poor the least of Jesus' brothers? You see, when Jesus returns to earth, he will gather the nations before him for judgment. All who come before Jesus' bar of justice do so in unglorified bodies. They are the sheep and goats mentioned in Matthew 25:31–33. He will welcome the sheep into his kingdom (v. 34), but he will consign the goats to eternal fire (v. 41). His criterion for judging will be "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (v. 40).

But we cannot identify the poor of every period of history as the least of Jesus' brothers. Understanding

the distress of Jewish believers of the tribulation leads us to the positive identification as Jesus' brothers and to the conclusion that charitable treatment of even the least of these tribulation believers will capture Jesus' favorable attention.

Hunted and hounded by the Antichrist and his followers, Jewish believers will seek refuge wherever they can find it. Like those who hid World War II Jews from the Nazis, some individuals will help the persecuted Jewish believers of the tribulation. They will give them food, drink, and shelter. Just as believers in every period of history are saved by grace alone through faith, those who aid the persecuted tribulation saints will be saved by grace. Their kindness will demonstrate their acceptance of the gospel of the kingdom preached by the Jewish remnant. Jesus will accept them into his kingdom as "sheep."

Those who refuse sanctuary and assistance to the saved Jews of the tribulation will demonstrate by their negative actions that they did not accept the gospel of the kingdom. Therefore, Jesus will identify them as goats and exclude them from his kingdom.

You may recall Jesus' words to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (see Acts 9:4–5). Of course, Saul was persecuting believers. Before Jesus stopped him on the Damascus road, Saul had arrest warrants in hand for believers in Damascus, and he did not intend to show any mercy. He would apprehend women as well as men and haul them off to prison in Jerusalem. Jesus regarded such persecution as persecution against himself.

Similarly, Matthew 25:31–46 shows the oneness Jesus and the saved Jews of the tribulation share. They are his "brothers" (v. 40), and Jesus regards the treatment they receive as the treatment he receives. He tells the sheep, whom he welcomes into his kingdom, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (vv. 35–36). He tells the goats, whom he consigns to eternal punishment, "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I

APPENDIX D

was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me” (vv. 42–43).

So the poor are not the least of Jesus’ brothers! But we should offer compassionate help to the poor. The Bible commands such treatment.

In preparation for their settlement of the Promised Land, the Lord gave the Israelites laws to live by. One law concerned harvest time. It instructed: “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:9–10).

Out of similar concern for the poor, the Lord commanded the Israelites to give their fields, vineyards, and olive groves a rest every seventh year. The seventh-year produce would be designated for the poor and the wild animals (Ex. 23:11).

Undoubtedly, righteous Boaz observed the command in Leviticus 19:9–10. Ruth, a Moabite widow, asked her mother-in-law, Naomi, also a widow: “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor” (Ruth 2:2).

After receiving permission, Ruth “went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters” (v. 3).

Later, Boaz, the owner of the farm, instructed his workers: “Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don’t embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her” (vv. 15–16).

This incident flared into one of the greatest love stories of all time. Boaz married Ruth, and Ruth became an ancestress of our Savior (Matt. 1:1–5).

The New Testament, too, includes teaching about helping the poor. When Jesus stood up to read Scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth, he read from Isaiah 61:1–2: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). When the apostles in the church in Jerusalem received complaints that the Grecian widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, they instructed the congregation to choose seven Spirit-filled, wise men to superintend this ministry to the needy (Acts 6:1–3). Later, a council

convened at Jerusalem to decide whether Gentile converts must become Jews. The decision was a resounding no, but the council urged Paul and Barnabas, representatives of the Gentile converts, to remember the poor (Gal. 2:1–10). Faithful to this responsibility, Paul spearheaded a relief fund among Gentile churches for the benefit of poor believers in Judea (see 2 Cor. 8 and 9).

Many Scriptures show God’s concern for the poor and commend those who help them. Here are a few:

The righteous care about justice for the poor. (Prov. 29:7)

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Prov. 31:9)

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen ... ? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? (Isa. 58:6–7)

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. (Zech. 7:10)

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” (Matt. 19:21)

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. (Luke 14:13–14)

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him? (James 2:5)

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17–18)

Clearly, the Bible mandates that we help the poor, but how can we fulfill this mandate? Here are a few suggested ways:

✦ *A church pantry and clothes closet.* If your church doesn’t provide assistance to the poor by maintaining a food pantry and a clothes closet, why not suggest that it start such a ministry? Needy people will see your church as an institution that not only talks about God’s love but also demonstrates it.

✦ *Meals for the homeless.* Even if it is simply a matter of preparing sandwiches and delivering them to the homeless, this project can include the

entire family and communicate God's love to many hopeless men, women, and teens.

- ✠ *Serving a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal.* Some Christians forego Thanksgiving and/or Christmas with extended family, strap on an apron, and serve a hot meal to the needy at a rescue mission or soup kitchen. God's love reaches the hungry on a platter!
- ✠ *Job skills assistance.* You may be able to help the poor help themselves by developing their résumé-building and job interview skills. Teaching a craft or job skill may open doors to independence for those who want to work. Check with your community for opportunities to work with the needy.
- ✠ *Community volunteerism.* Many poor people need transportation to medical facilities and government offices. Some, especially the elderly and physically challenged, need meals delivered to them. Why not volunteer to help?

- ✠ *Fund-raising to benefit the poor.* Your family can take on a fund-raising project to benefit the poor. Parents in one neighborhood encouraged their children to operate a lemonade stand on hot Saturdays and give 50 percent of the profits to a soup kitchen. Perhaps your family can brainstorm similar ways to benefit institutions that help the poor.

These suggested enterprises are few, but they can launch you into a ministry to the poor that communicates God's love in tangible ways. You may discover many more opportunities by hosting a brainstorming session at church or by inviting concerned Christian friends into your home. Poverty is not going to go away, but if we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, even neighbors on welfare, we will try to improve their lot in life. *It is the least Jesus' brothers can do!*

Appendix E



ARE WE WORKING IN THE KINGDOM?

I don't recall when the shift in terminology first occurred. I don't think it happened in the '50s or '60s or even the '70s, but it happened, took hold, and intensified. Today, the old terminology is almost nonexistent, and the new seems to be here to stay. I'm referring to the shift from such statements as "We are doing the Lord's work" and "We are furthering the cause of Christ" to the statements "We are working in the kingdom," "We are doing kingdom work," and "We are building the kingdom." Although I would not question the motives of those who use the new terminology, I do question the terminology's theological accuracy. The issue is one of definition and timing. If we define the kingdom as the reign of Christ over the church, we believe that the kingdom is present on earth now in a spiritual form. If we define the kingdom as the literal, earthly reign of Christ, we believe that the kingdom is future and distinct from the church. The former view allows us to say we are working in the kingdom or doing kingdom work or building the kingdom. The latter view leads us to say we are doing the Lord's work or advancing the cause of Christ (or some similar expression), but we are not working in the kingdom, doing kingdom work, or building the kingdom.

The latter view is sometimes called the millennial kingdom idea. It is not a contrived theory begun by dispensationalists, although it is inherently dispensational. Archibald Robertson claims this view "prevailed in the Church generally for two centuries and a half, and in the Western Church for four centuries ... until the time of Augustine."ⁱ Augustine adopted an allegorical interpretation. Alva J. McClain writes, "Augustine may be regarded as the father of this Church-Kingdom idea."ⁱⁱ

Not all theologians see the kingdom in the same light, although they all agree that God reigns over all things and in the broadest sense his kingdom includes everything and every created being. Usually, they call this domain "the kingdom of God."

We read about God's universal kingdom in a number of passages of Scripture. Here are a few:

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. (Ps. 11:4)

But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. (Ps. 75:7)

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. (Ps. 103:19)

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. (Ps. 145:13)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. (Isa. 6:1)

The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. (Dan. 5:21)

Many theologians differentiate between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven in some instances but equate the two in certain scriptural contexts. For example, Emory H. Bancroft writes:

"The kingdom of heaven" in the first twelve chapters of Matthew has an entirely different force and scope from that which it has in the later chapters. In Matthew, the kingdom which John announced was "at hand" was the messianic kingdom of Old Testament prophecy, whereas in the parables of Matthew 13, etc., the "kingdom of heaven" has reference to the Christian profession. Yet both of these significations of the "kingdom of heaven" are spoken of as the kingdom of God in the other Gospels. It would therefore be as scriptural to say that the "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 3 is the kingdom of God also; but it would not be accurate to say of other Scriptures that the kingdom of God is synonymous with the "kingdom of heaven" except we qualify our words by adding which aspect of the "kingdom of heaven" we are referring to.ⁱⁱⁱ

If all of this seems confusing, the reason is simple: It is. I believe the confusion clears up if we perceive both terms, “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven,” as references to the future messianic kingdom (the millennial, earthly reign of Christ) except where the scriptural context clearly points to God’s universal kingdom over all things and all beings. I see no reason to relate the parables of Matthew 13 to Christian profession. They were addressed to Jews who anticipated a messianic kingdom. Appropriate to this interpretation is the use of the messianic name “Son of Man” in verses 37 and 41. Further, the setting for the parables is the millennial kingdom, not the church age. Notice these expressions: “the harvest” (v. 30); “the harvest is the end of the age” (vv. 39–40, 49); “the harvesters are the angels” (v. 39, cf. 24:30–31; 25:31–33); “will weed out of his kingdom” (13:41); and “will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vv. 42, 50; cf. Rev. 20:11–15 [the final judgment]).

Although many excellent Bible teachers explain the coexistence of believers and unbelievers in a period of explosive growth as Christendom spreads and includes those who merely profess to be believers as well as genuine believers (for example, the weeds and the wheat), these characteristics mark the messianic kingdom. Only saved human beings enter the kingdom. Raptured and resurrected Christians, resurrected Old Testament believers, and resurrected tribulation martyrs will enter the kingdom having glorified bodies. They will not procreate. But saved survivors of the tribulation, the sheep on Jesus’ right hand (Matt. 25:33–34) will enter the kingdom in natural bodies, and they will procreate. As a result, the kingdom will experience a population explosion, and both believers and unbelievers will inhabit the planet under King Jesus’ rule. However, at the end of the kingdom reign, unbelievers, who merely gave lip service to the King, will side with Satan when he is released from his one-thousand-year confinement in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1–3, 7–8). They surround the kingdom’s capital violently and pit themselves against the King, but they are no match for our omnipotent Lord and Savior. They become fuel for fire that falls from heaven (vv. 9–10). Only genuine believers, the wheat, remain to enjoy eternal bliss.

John L. Benson writes:

Satan will appeal to the last generation of children born to millennial saints. Evidently thousands of these children will neglect the time of their probation by refusing to trust Christ as their Saviour. Satan will deceive them into thinking they are capable of vanquishing the King and overturning His kingdom of righteousness and holiness.

Perhaps under the guise of going to Jerusalem to worship at some annual feast, Satan will lead a countless number of sinners in an attack upon the capital city. Fire from Heaven will fall upon the rebel crowd, annihilating them. The devil’s final fling over, God will sentence him to everlasting torment in the lake of fire.^{iv}

Distinguishing between God’s universal kingdom and the mediatorial kingdom answers the question, “Are we working in the kingdom?” In the vast scheme of things, we are, because God’s universal kingdom encompasses everything. However, I don’t think those who use the expression “working in the kingdom” intend such a broad use. They see the church and the kingdom as the same thing. But the Scriptures portray the Messiah’s kingdom not as the church but his future reign on earth. Further, we are not building God’s universal kingdom, because it is already all-inclusive. Nor are we building the Messiah’s kingdom, because it has not arrived.

When John the Baptist heralded the arrival of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, he announced, “The kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2). This was not wishful thinking on his part, because the kingdom of heaven was near. Jesus, Israel’s King, would soon begin his public ministry, validate his messianic credentials by performing signs, and offer the kingdom to all who would repent and receive him.

When Jesus heard that John had been put into prison, he entered Galilee and “from that time on ... began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 4:17).

When Jesus gathered his disciples, he taught them to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9–10). When he commissioned his disciples, he told them to “preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:2).

Israel rejected the King and the kingdom he offered. Consequently, the nation has been set aside,

and God is working through the church to glorify himself and to invite sinners everywhere to trust in his Son as Savior (Rom. 11:1–12). The church was never commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom, but it has been commissioned to preach the gospel of Christ’s vicarious, expiatory, substitutionary death; burial; resurrection; and subsequent appearances to many witnesses (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

When the church exits the earth and meets the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:13–17), God will resume his prophetic program for Israel (Rom. 11:25–27). Many Jews will be saved in the tribulation and will proclaim to the nations the gospel of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 24:14 and Rev. 7). Their message is valid, because the kingdom arrives at the end of the tribulation period.

We know from reading the Gospels that Jesus taught many truths about the kingdom, and not once did the disciples consider the kingdom anything but the earthly rule of the Messiah on behalf of Israel and in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. They failed to understand the need to serve one another humbly and not covet the most prominent positions in the kingdom (Mark 10:35–45), but they were clear about the fact that the kingdom would arrive. Even after receiving from Jesus forty days of postresurrection teaching about the kingdom (Acts 1:3), their focus was still on the earthly kingdom promised to Israel. They asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6).

Had they flunked the course on the kingdom? Had they failed to learn that the kingdom existed only in a spiritual form? Why didn’t they conclude that the kingdom is the church and vice versa? The answer must be that Jesus never taught that the kingdom was only spiritual and existed in the hearts of his followers who compose the church.

How did Jesus respond to his disciples’ inquiry about the kingdom? He did not say, “Look, men, you’ve got it all wrong. Stop thinking the kingdom will be restored to Israel. The kingdom is the church I am about to inaugurate.” Here’s what he said: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (v. 7). In other words, Jesus assured his disciples that the Father will usher in the kingdom promised to Israel, but he will do so according to his preset timetable.

But how do we explain Colossians 1:13, which insists, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves”? Doesn’t this verse teach that Christians are already in the kingdom? The word “kingdom” in this verse translates *baseleia*, a Greek word that can also be translated *royal power, dominion, rule*. The context indicates that the Father has qualified believers for an inheritance in the kingdom and has transferred us from the dominion of darkness to the dominion of Jesus’ rule over our lives. Someday we will participate in Jesus’ millennial rule on earth.

Will conditions be vastly different when King Jesus rules our planet? If newspapers, periodicals, the Internet, radio, and television communicate news items, they will issue only good news. Jesus will see that his subjects and nature, too, enjoy the best of times.

Occasionally, men and women appear on a TV show as candidates for a makeover, usually an extreme makeover. They submit to plastic and cosmetic surgical procedures that restructure their faces, improve their smiles, remove their fatty tissue, style their hair, and adorn their bodies with the latest fashions. They may have begun the makeovers as unappealing “caterpillars,” but they emerge as attractive “butterflies.” The whole earth is waiting eagerly for the extreme makeover Jesus will give it when he returns. Romans 8:19–21 tells us, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

Environmental issues will be in the past when Jesus rules the earth. All of nature will return to Edenic conditions, because Jesus will roll back the curse imposed on nature when Adam and Eve sinned. Isaiah 35 portrays the desert and wasteland blossoming profusely. Forests will spring up, and grasslands will cover the land. This dramatic beauty and productivity comes about because abundant rain will fall on previously parched soil. Isaiah 35:7 teaches that “the burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.” No one will quarrel over water rights or battle drought in the millennium.

Furthermore, living water will flow from Jerusalem westward to the Mediterranean Sea and eastward to the Dead Sea (see Zech. 14:8). The Dead Sea will become a freshwater fisherman's paradise. Ezekiel foretold: "There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Great Sea" (47:9–10).

Longevity and good health will characterize life in Jesus' kingdom. Isaiah 65:20 predicts an infant mortality rate of zero and portrays a life span of one hundred as that of "mere youth." Perhaps the leaves of the trees in the New Jerusalem (a satellite city during the millennium?), described in Revelation 22:2 as being "for the healing of the nations," will promote outstanding health and stimulate longevity. Earth's population will enjoy plenty of light, because Jesus will be its "everlasting light" (Isa. 60:19), and the "sun will never set again" (v. 20). No one will suffer depression from a lack of exposure to light.

Today, medical science is prolonging life so well that the United States government is scrambling to find ways of protecting Social Security for those who will live far into retirement. This problem will not exist in the kingdom, because productivity and prosperity will abound. Isaiah 65:21–22 predicts that everyone will eat well and live securely.

No one will have to lock their doors and go on a vacation and wonder if they will return to a robbed or vandalized house. Property rights will be respected (Mic. 4:4). Jesus' kingdom will be free of gangbangers, molesters, thieves, murderers, swindlers, and troublemakers. If anyone acts up, Jesus will slay him with "the breath of his lips" (Isa. 11:5). Violence will cease, and prisons will be empty (Isa. 60:18).

Mothers will not tell their children, "Don't play in the street," because the streets will be safe. Zechariah 8:5 says, "The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." Children will be safe even around snakes. According to Isaiah 11:8, "The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest."

Wild animals will abandon their savagery. Former predators and prey will live in harmony. "The wolf will

live with the lamb," Isaiah predicts. "The leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together" (11:6–7). Previously carnivorous animals will be herbivorous. "The lion will eat straw like the ox" (v. 7b).

Nations will no longer build military arsenals. Satellites that keep tabs on nuclear development will be unnecessary. Nations will experience peace administered by Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 2:4 states: "He [Jesus] will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." According to Isaiah 9:7, there will be no end to the peace Jesus establishes as he reigns on David's throne.

The first Adam failed to mediate God's "kingdom" in Eden, but the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, will not fail. He "will delight in the fear of the LORD," and he will judge righteously, justly, and decisively (Isa. 11:3–4).

The kingdom reign of Jesus will fulfill all the covenant promises God made to the patriarchs and to King David. He will dwell among the restored, regenerated, and rejoicing people of Israel. Isaiah 12 records Israel's song of praise to the Messiah. The song reflects the joy of his comfort (v. 1), the joy of his salvation (v. 4), and the joy of his presence (v. 6). If we think we have joy now because we know Jesus as Savior, just wait and see how much joy we will have when we, like restored Israel, enjoy his physical presence!

Jesus was rejected when he came to earth the first time, but he will be recognized worldwide at his second coming as Lord and King. He will set up Jerusalem as his capital, and he will be "king over the whole earth" (Zech. 14:9). People from around the globe will make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem "to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles" (v. 16). Failure to make the pilgrimage will result in the King's withholding rain from the delinquents' lands and in his bringing the plague on them (vv. 17–19).

Currently, opponents of Christianity are working relentlessly to remove Christian symbols and practices from public places. The saying of grace at mealtime at

military academies has been attacked as a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Cities have been forced to remove Christian symbols from city seals and nativity displays from public buildings. School kids can sing “Here Comes Santa Claus” but not “Silent Night.” A Ten Commandments monument was removed from Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore’s court, and crosses honoring the memory of victims of the Columbine massacre were removed from a small hillside in a public park near Columbine High School. But this hostile attitude will not surface in Jesus’ earthly kingdom.

Knowledge of the Lord will pervade the earth during the millennium. Isaiah 11:9 predicts, “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” The prophet Jeremiah echoes this truth in Jeremiah 31:33–34: “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, saying, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD.”

Righteousness and holiness will be reflected in even the most unexpected places. Zechariah prophesied: “On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them” (14:20–21).

Christians may not be working in the kingdom now, but we will work in it when it arrives. The prospect is certain, for 2 Timothy 2:12 says we will reign with Christ.

John L. Benson writes:

The glorified saints of all the ages will rule and reign with Christ. All who participate in the first resurrection will rule in the kingdom (Rev. 20:6). This will include the Old Testament saints, the tribulation martyrs, and the church saints. Christ is the heir of the kingdom, and the church saints are joint-heirs with Him.^v

Tragedies like 9/11, suicide bombings in the Middle East, and Chechen rebels’ killing of innocent Russian schoolchildren in Beslan paint a macabre and dismal picture of life early in the twenty-first century. Reasonable men and women question the humanness of those who perpetrate senseless and heartless crimes against innocent people. We also shake our heads when we learn about the growing prison population, the genocides abroad, the breakdown of the family, the disregard for the institution of marriage, and the widespread practice of abortion. The world seems hopeless. Yet, we know a better day is coming. Jesus will take control of Planet Earth someday and turn all that is wrong upside down, shake it out, and discard it. He will reign in righteousness, and the world will resound with shouts of joy. There is hope! Let’s spread it around!

NOTES

- i. “Philo of Alexandria,” *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. E. M. Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1911), Vol. IX, 39.
- ii. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 9.
- iii. Emory H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan, 1976), 287.
- iv. John L. Benson, *The Future Reign of Christ on Planet Earth* (Denver: Accent Books, 1974), 57–58.
- v. Benson, *Truth about Tomorrow* (Denver: Baptist Publications, 1976).