

Chapter VI

A NEW TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

It is claimed that one out of every thirty verses in the Bible is concerned with the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom upon this earth. This claim is consistent with the theme of the Scriptures -- the redemption of man. Even though believers of every age have counted themselves to be redeemed (which is proper), their redemption will not be completed until they are raised, glorified, and adopted at the coming of the Lord.

This promise, like all of God's promises is certain. Its fulfillment can be compared to the Old Testament saints who were promised the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, but they did not receive the Holy Spirit of God (to permanently indwell them) until Christ was glorified in His death, burial and resurrection (John 7:37-39). When the Lord *led captivity captive and gave gifts to men*, the redeemed in paradise became *the spirits of just men made perfect* in heaven, and the living saints received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (*to never leave them nor forsake them*). Similarly, the saints of all ages, both living and dead, will not receive the redemption of their bodies until the Lord raises, glorifies and adopts them. This truth is reinforced by John in

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the third chapter of his first epistle, where he wrote:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (I John 3:1-2)

This is the wonderful hope of the believer. It is this hope that should have caused every believer from the ascension of Christ to the present time to have longed for His coming; to have longed for that day when believers will no longer be subject to sin, to sickness, to sorrow, to dying and to death; to have longed for that day when our imputed status (the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ) will become our actual standing; in other words, to long for the day when we shall at last be like Him.

The study of the second coming of our Lord is certainly not limited to a few books of the Scriptures. We find it declared in shadows, in types, and in direct statements throughout the Word of God. One such statement is found in the book of the Revelation, where John wrote:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (Revelation 1:1-3)

There are three things in these verses which all believers in Jesus Christ should know. First, the subject of this book is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. A revelation is an unveiling. This means that the contents of the book of the Revelation is an unveiling of the circumstances and events that shall lead to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth and the establishment of His Kingdom upon this earth.

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There are numerous prophetic overviews of last-day events in the Word of God. *The Revelation* provides us with one more. In this regard, we know we are *rightly dividing the word of truth* when all of the information that we glean throughout the Word of God (on a particular subject) fits together perfectly. This is true of every subject in the Word of God, not just the second coming of our Lord. Consequently the information we shall observe in the book of the Revelation will reinforce what we have already learned from Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the seventy weeks of Daniel, and the seven feasts of the Jews. It will also provide us with additional information for our *edification, exhortation and comfort*.

Second, John declared that this is an unveiling that is to *shortly come to pass*. This, of course, as we have seen earlier, is from God's perspective -- *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*.

We know from our earlier studies in the book of Hosea that we are in the latter part of the *latter days*. In November of 1947, following the atrocities of World War II against the Jewish people, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine. Then, on May 14, 1948, Israel declared herself to be a nation among the nations of the world once again. Our Lord had prophesied this event when He spoke to His disciples about last-day events:

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation [a people, i.e., the nation of Israel] shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Luke 21:28-33)

Third, God promises a special blessing to those who read and hear the words of this

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prophecy and keep the things that are contained in it. This means that the study of the book of the Revelation in particular, and the study of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in general, will provide special blessings to the people of God, but only to those who read, hear, and understand what is written on this subject.

One of the primary blessings that comes to the student of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* is peace of mind. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote of the second coming of our Lord in the context of comforting and edifying believers:

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. (I Thessalonians 5:1-11)

First, this portion of Scripture reveals that the day of the Lord *so cometh as a thief in the night*. Since the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, events that are signs of the coming of the Lord to believers bear no significance whatsoever to the unsaved of this world. This means that the rapture of the church, the revelation of the antichrist, and the judgments of the great tribulation period will not register in the minds of the inhabitants of this world that they are signs of the coming of the Lord. In their spiritual blindness that day will catch them completely unaware, as *a thief in the night*. We stated earlier that the Lord will come for

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the redeemed *as a thief in the night*. There is no contradiction. Rather this is a double reference that refers to two different events with the same language.

Second, believers are told, in the face of all of the judgments that shall befall the earth during the tribulation period (*the time of Jacob's trouble*), *For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*. This refers to the believer's preservation from the wrath that is to come upon the earth before our Lord comes to establish His Kingdom and not to the salvation of the soul. This is the reason Paul could say, *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do*.

This brings us now to another prophetic overview in the book of the Revelation. This overview, like the seven feasts of the Jews, will reveal the sequence of events that shall bring about the second coming of our Lord to this earth. It begins with John's declaration:

... to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1:4-8)

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden [lampstands]. The seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches: and the seven [lampstands] which thou sawest are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:19-20)

In this opening statement to the seven churches of Asia, John asserted, *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the*

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earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. In this statement and others in the Revelation, John never speaks frivolously of the judgments that are to come during the great tribulation period prior to the return of the Lord. He recognizes that these judgments are the birth pangs that shall produce the return of the Lord. He knows that these birth pangs shall produce conditions on earth such as the world has never known (Matthew 24:21). He knows they cannot be avoided. Some of them are judgments from God; others are expressions of the rage of the antichrist. John simply writes, *Even so, Amen.*

The apostle spoke of things past when he wrote of his experiences on the island of Patmos. He spoke of things present in chapters two and three when he wrote specifically to the messengers (the angels) of the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. He also spoke of things to come in his seven letters to the seven churches, as well as in the remainder of the book of the Revelation.

There were many more churches in Asia at the time John wrote to the seven churches named in the Revelation. In fact, most of the churches established by the apostle Paul in his three missionary journeys into Asia are not mentioned in this book. Only Ephesus is mentioned. Of the seven churches John addressed, five of them were in a state of apostasy. Only two of them could be counted faithful. So the apparent reason the Spirit of God chose these seven churches was that their particular historical circumstances provided a prophetic overview of church history, from the first century until the end of the church age and the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel.

We must be aware that while the general character of any of the seven churches of the first

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century has been seen in future ages, all seven churches existed in one age. This means it must be possible for any particular church of any particular age to bear the characteristics of any one of the seven churches. In other words, no church is compelled to assume the character of the age in which it exists, but has the choice to be faithful to that which the Lord has committed to its trust. Nevertheless throughout the church age, as characterized by five of the seven churches in Asia, churches have plunged deeper and deeper into apostasy.

In my view, we are presently living in an age that is characterized by *a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind* (See Matthew 13:47-52). This is simply another view of the Laodicean church:

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. (Revelation 3:14-18)

The Laodicean church is described by our Lord as *lukewarm*. This tepidness has nothing to do with zeal or lip service to God. It reflects their attitude towards the Word of God. Thus experience became more important than sound doctrine in the Laodicean church. The attitude of the Laodiceans was the same as the attitude of the nation of Israel at the first advent of our Lord. Remember our Lord said, *This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*. And the apostle Paul described Israel to the Romans, when he wrote, *I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*. Further the prophet Hosea wrote:

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My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)

And the prophet Amos declared:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. (Amos 8:11-12)

The same attitude that brought about the apostasy of Israel has brought about the apostasy of the church. Paul said, *For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him* (Acts 13:27).

Earlier in this chapter we stated that the parable of the dragnet in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Matthew portrayed the present age of the Laodicean church. The dragnet is a portrayal of the techniques of mass evangelism. Mass evangelism operates on an unstable foundation despite its apparent successes. In order to gain the cooperation of all of the churches of an area, evangelists have minimized the importance of doctrine to maximize the attendance in their meetings. They, like Balaam with the nation of Israel, have taught the people to violate their separation in the name of unity. The result of the counsel of Balaam was the idolatry of the nation of Israel. This, too, is the result of the counsel of the mass evangelists.

As time passed many churches learned from the mass evangelists that minimizing doctrine maximized their attendance, and maximizing their attendance maximized their material wealth. This resulted in the birth of the nondenominational or interdenominational church. It also produced churches that have retained their denominational identity, but have adopted the same

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tactics of the so-called nondenominationalist. Thus, in fulfillment of the prophetic aspect of the Laodicean church, many of our present-day churches are Laodicean. They say, we are *rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*, but our Lord said of them, *And knowest not that [you are] wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul used the Jews as an example to the church to maintain its separation and to *flee idolatry*. Yet, upon inspection, it is evident that many a church that bears the name of Jesus Christ has made exactly the same mistakes that Israel made; so that the present-day church (prophetically characterized by the Laodicean church) is as apostate as Israel was at the first advent of our Lord.

After completing the seventh letter to the seventh church, it is not surprising that the fourth chapter of the book of the Revelation begins with the sound of the trumpet, and a call to the apostle John, *Come up hither*. This is more than an invitation to the apostle to come into heaven. This call to John represents the call to all of the redeemed. This is a prophetic display of the first resurrection. It signals the end of the church age and sets the stage for the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel's vision:

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst

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of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:1-11)

In heaven John finds twenty-four elders, twelve of the twenty-four represent the twelve tribes of Israel (the Old Testament saints), and the other twelve represent the twelve apostles of the Lamb (the New Testament saints). The entire company of the twenty-four elders represents the resurrection of the redeemed of all ages. They have been clothed in white linen (which represents the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ). They have crowns upon their heads (which represent their reward for faithful service). They are in the presence of the Lord in heaven.

After having been rewarded for their faithful service (by the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit), the twenty-four elders will cast their crowns before the feet of the Lord saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* This brings us to our next chapter, *The Revelation of the Antichrist.*