

Is There Hope for Human Survival?



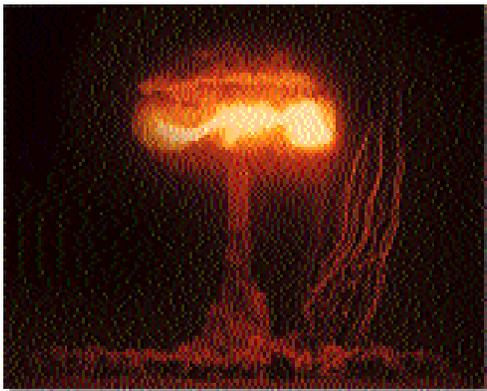
Is There Hope for Human Survival?

“Today’s prophets . . . are often not religious leaders but a small group of academics who, breaking free of disciplinary specialisation, have surveyed our age from the broadest of perspectives and brought back a report of imminent danger.”—Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi, Britain

Weather has long fascinated people. By observing the sky—the shifting shades, colors and shapes of the clouds—we can often predict changes in the weather.

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ commented on this same fascination: “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but *cannot discern the signs of the times?*” (Matthew 16:2-3, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus’ point was that our innate fascination with



The world changed forever in 1945. That year, with the detonations of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, man for the first time demonstrated the frightening potential to destroy all human life.

observing and analyzing weather conditions should tell us something: that we should also observe and analyze the signs of our times.

But anyone who watches the weather knows that conditions can rapidly change. Destructive storms can suddenly materialize, wreak havoc, then dissipate as quickly as they started. Often the weather can seem menacing, and skies will turn dark and threaten-

ing, but no storm develops. The potential danger passes. So it is when we consider Bible prophecy. Well-intentioned people have correlated prophecies with geopolitical events and trends and concluded that prophecy is being fulfilled before their eyes. But then unseen factors come into play, events alter course, and trends change. The predicted storm dissipates. Such false alarms have happened before. They will occur again. But one day the storm *will* hit with full fury. Startling and frightening biblical prophecies will be fulfilled. Will you be ready?

THREATS TO PHYSICAL SURVIVAL

“ . . . We have reached a point of historic crisis. The forces generated by the techno-scientific economy are now great enough to destroy the environment, that is to say, the material foundations of human life.”

—Eric Hobsbawm

The world changed forever in 1945. That year, with the detonations of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, man for the first time demonstrated the frightening potential to destroy all human life.

Since then our weapons have grown far more powerful and threatening. Those first wartime atomic bombs, though devastating, were only 12½ kilotons—equivalent to about 12,500 tons of conventional explosives. The largest bomb successfully tested since the war, by the former Soviet Union, has been estimated at 60 megatons, or almost 5,000 times the power of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blasts and the equivalent of 60 million tons of TNT.

Even though nuclear-weapons inventories were scaled back as a result of treaties between the United States and the Soviet Union, enough nuclear warheads remain to destroy human life many times over. The destruction unleashed in the Hiroshima bomb is estimated at only a millionth of the destructive power of the world’s nuclear arsenal.

Besides America and Russia, at least five other nations have nuclear weapons: Britain, France, China, India and Pakistan. Experts assume that other countries also possess nuclear warheads and delivery systems and that still other nations are actively pursuing the development of nuclear arms.

The nuclear menace remains the most obvious threat to human survival. But by no means is it the only one. Authorities cite several ways in which human



Growing air, soil and water pollution are major threats to human health—and even life—in many areas.

actions or natural disasters could eliminate most—if not all—human life. Among them:

- *Chemical weapons.* Many countries own stockpiles of nerve gas and other nightmarish concoctions so deadly that a single droplet inhaled or absorbed through exposed skin would kill a person within minutes.

- *Biological weapons.* Many of the same nations that have developed chemical weapons have also produced biological weapons. The resulting horrifying man-made



Many countries own stockpiles of nerve gas and other nightmarish concoctions so deadly that a single droplet can kill a person within minutes.

epidemics could spread like wildfire through defenseless populations.

- *Conventional weapons.* Man continues to develop ever-more-destructive conventional bombs, bullets and rockets even as he constructs nightmarish laser weapons, particle-beam generators and neutron bombs.

- *Environmental destruction.* Although some nations have made remarkable strides in slowing environmental degradation, conditions are rapidly worsening in poor countries. Growing air, soil and water pollution are major threats to human health—and even life—in many areas.

- *Disease epidemics.*

AIDS is estimated to have taken more lives than any of the world's previous great epidemics, including the black plague of the Middle Ages and the worldwide flu epidemic of 1918-19. Other mysterious killer diseases, such as Ebola, Lassa fever, Marburg virus, Machupo virus and dengue fever, have emerged in recent years.

- *Famine.* Advances in agriculture have kept food production slightly ahead of population growth. But increasing soil depletion, water shortages, drought and social unrest raise the specter of devastating famines that could return at any time.

- *Natural disasters.* Earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, floods and tornadoes take thousands of lives every year. Scientists acknowledge that asteroids and meteors have struck earth repeatedly in the past—and could in the future, with devastating impact on all of earth's inhabitants.

As we will see in this lesson, many of these threats to human survival play prominent roles in prophecies in the Bible.

FIRST THE GOOD NEWS

Many people assume that Bible prophecy is all bad news. Many events prophesied to happen are unbeliev-

ably frightening and traumatic. The Bible is clear about this—and the reasons these events will take place.

But the Bible is also clear that both *bad news* and *good news* lie ahead. Although the world before long will see its darkest days, these storm clouds are the prelude to a wonderful world such as we have never witnessed and can barely imagine. Jesus Christ described these awesome events as “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matthew 24:8, NASB).

Paul likened end-time events to the travail of a woman giving birth. But her pain is quickly overtaken by joy; she forgets her agony as soon as new life comes into the world (Romans 8:18-23).

Although the lesson you are reading focuses on certain traumatic events that will take place, later we will discuss the wonderful world tomorrow—the time that lies beyond this age of human suffering and sorrow. Bear in mind as we read through the pertinent prophecies that, as discussed in the previous lesson, God is always in control and does everything for a purpose, even if that purpose isn't always clear to us.

So it will be with end-time events. God knows our nature; He understands the way we think and act. He has seen from almost 6,000 years of human experience that we regularly and frequently bring enormous suffering on ourselves through our own choices and misdeeds. As the Bible aptly and repeatedly points out, we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8; Job 4:8; Hosea 8:7).

Keep this in mind as we examine what lies ahead for our world. Prophecy reveals that man will bring himself to the brink of extinction. But it also reveals how we will survive!

Before we begin examining the Scriptures, we strongly urge you to look up every cited verse in your own Bible. This lesson will discuss specific verses that often are part of long and detailed prophetic passages. Many books in the Bible are devoted to prophecy, and much of that prophecy concerns end-time events. This lesson, because of limited space, is only the barest outline. We encourage you to read the verses and their contexts—including, in many cases, the surrounding chapters—to gain a deeper understanding of end-time events.

We also invite you to request your free copies of *Are We Living in the End Time?* and *How to Understand Bible Prophecy*. Contact us at the address in your country, or the country nearest you, listed at the end of this



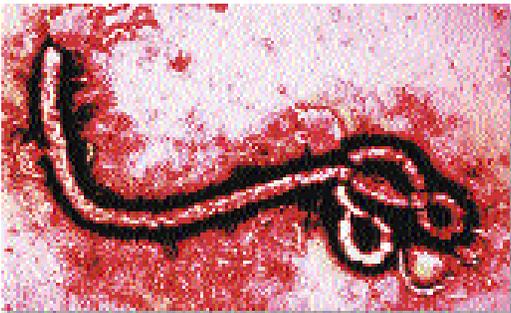
Man continues to develop ever-more-destructive conventional bombs, bullets and rockets even as he constructs nightmarish laser weapons, particle-beam generators and neutron bombs.

lesson. Both booklets will deepen your understanding of Bible prophecy and the end time.

CAN WE KNOW THE FUTURE?

Humankind has long found intriguing the idea of somehow knowing the future. Through the centuries various peoples have sought out seers, fortune-tellers and mediums to predict what lies ahead. These self-proclaimed seers usually come to nothing. Their few accurate predictions are either outnumbered by their misses or are lucky guesses.

The Bible, however, is different. It contains hundreds of detailed prophecies, then it shows how many of those predictions were fulfilled centuries later. Much of the Bible is prophecy, and its predictions are so sure that we could call Bible prophecy “history written in advance.” In this lesson we will read the headlines of tomorrow. Let’s see what the Bible says is in store for this world.



Other mysterious killer diseases, such as Ebola, Lassa fever, Marburg virus, Machupo virus and dengue fever, have emerged in recent years.

Does God foretell the future?

“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the begin-

ning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Does He allow people to understand what will take place in the future?

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

God has revealed specific aspects of the future through His prophets. The messages of those prophets, as well as some of the apostles who had aspects of the future revealed to them, are recorded for us in the Bible. God’s Word is the only sure source for understanding the future.

Can God bring to pass what He has foretold?

“. . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:11).

It is one thing to predict the future. It is something else entirely to have the power to bring those events to pass. No human seer has that power!

Does the Bible speak of various ages?

“So [Jesus] said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life’” (Luke 18:29-30).

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age . . .” (Galatians 1:3-4).

Jesus Christ contrasted “this present time” with “the age to come.” The apostle Paul described this era as “this present evil age.” In this lesson we see what the Bible says about the transition from “this present evil age” to “the age to come.”

Does the Bible discuss “the end of the age”—our particular epoch in history?

“Now as [Jesus Christ] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (Matthew 24:3).

Did Jesus Christ predict specific conditions and events that would precede His return?

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near . . .” (Luke 21:27-28).

“So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near” (verse 31).

Carefully study Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These are parallel accounts of the Olivet Prophecy, given by Jesus Christ to His disciples shortly before He was crucified. In this astounding prediction, given on the Mount of Olives, Jesus summarizes the conditions and events that will affect the world in the time leading up to His return.

This prophecy also unlocks our understanding of the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, which describe some of the same events. After completing this lesson, you should also read these two books to expand your comprehension of end-time conditions and events.

DO NOT BE DECEIVED

What was the first warning sign Jesus described?

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you’” (Matthew 24:3-4).

Jesus begins with a sobering warning: Do not allow yourself to be deceived! Many people are familiar with

Jesus Christ's Olivet Prophecy. They are aware of the events and conditions He described. Yet many don't realize they have missed the first warning sign Jesus Christ gave. They have fallen prey to religious deception!

Will religious deception be widespread?

"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (verse 5).

"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (verse 11).

"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (verse 24).

Note the words Jesus used: "... Many will come . . . and will deceive many . . . Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." The Greek word *polus*, translated "many," means "many, much, great" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Many"). This deception is clearly massive and widespread.

Be sure to study all these scriptures in your Bible. Read the words of Jesus Christ and the apostles when they warned of a great religious movement—invoking Christ's name—that would lead most of the world astray. Tragically, most have ignored the warnings Jesus Himself gave. (To better understand how this great religious deception came about, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

Who is involved in this deception?

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13).

Within only a few years after Jesus Christ's death, people began to distort and misrepresent His message. When two decades had barely passed, the apostle Paul warned congregations about "false apostles," telling them that he had already suffered at the hands of "false brethren" (2 Corinthians 11:13, 26). These deceivers came in Christ's name, but they led many astray with their distorted message.

Who is the real mastermind behind this worldwide deception?

"... Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

What is the approach of this religious deception?

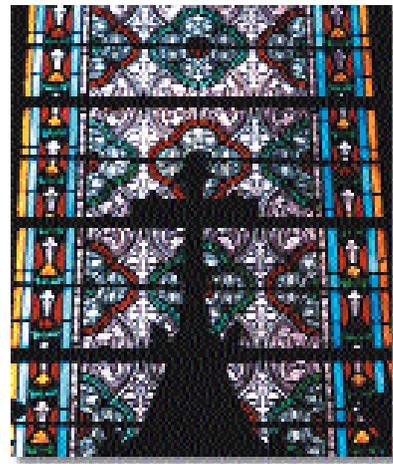
"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may

well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7).

Jesus Christ predicted that some would take His name and claim to represent Him—but those same people would be deceivers. They would claim to be Christian but would bring a *different message* and a *counterfeit Christianity*.

In Paul's day this movement was well under way. Some were already preaching "another Jesus" and "a different gospel." Most churches in our time focus on a gospel *about* Christ while *ignoring the focus of His teaching*. Obscuring His intended message, they preach a gospel that is different from "the gospel of the kingdom of God" Jesus taught (Mark 1:14). Be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to better understand this vital truth.



Jesus begins with a sobering warning: Do not allow yourself to be deceived! Many people don't realize they have missed the first warning sign Jesus Christ gave. They have fallen prey to religious deception!

In spite of this deception, will the true gospel—the gospel of the Kingdom of God—also be proclaimed before Jesus Christ's return?

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

A DANGEROUS AND DYING WORLD

Besides massive religious deception, what other conditions did Jesus Christ predict would envelop the world at the end of our age?

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . ." (Matthew 24:6-7).

World War I began in 1914. It was followed barely two decades later by World War II. Both were so horrifyingly bloody and destructive that they led to worldwide efforts to find lasting peace, first through the League of Nations and then the United Nations. In spite of honorable intentions, the world has witnessed dozens of other major wars and smaller armed conflicts. The

world remains dangerous and unstable—and prophecy tells us it will grow increasingly worse.

Did Jesus Christ predict another major sign, one that often accompanies warfare?

“And there will be famines . . .” (verse 7).



Not all famines and epidemics are strictly the result of war. Topsoil erosion, mineral depletion, loss of arable land, water and soil contamination and corrupt governments and policies also contribute to our growing inability to feed ourselves.

Will other conditions also bring great suffering?

“And there will be . . . pestilences . . .” (same verse).

The social unrest and disruption of agriculture and distribution systems that accompany war lead to food shortages and famine. The hungry, weakened victims of war are susceptible to illnesses and epidemics. War brings devastation and untold suffering, and not just to the combatants themselves.

Of course, not all famines and epidemics are strictly the result of war. Topsoil erosion, mineral depletion, loss of arable land, water and soil contamination and corrupt governments and policies also contribute to our growing inability to feed ourselves. Natural disasters such as droughts, floods and excessive heat or cold also destroy crops and can bring famine. Disease often rapidly follows to further plague a weakened population.

Many all-too-human habits—such as polluting our environment, poor diet, lack of sanitation and crowding into cities—also set the stage for famine and epidemics. Even modern travel is a two-edged sword. The same conveniences that allow us to travel all over the globe in a matter of hours can inadvertently allow the undetected and speedy spreading of diseases.

Did Jesus Christ predict natural disasters?

“And there will be . . . earthquakes in various places” (same verse).

In spite of these horrors, will world conditions grow even worse?

“All these are the beginning of sorrows” (verse 8).

A SUDDEN AND DANGEROUS TURN OF EVENTS

If this time of unparalleled troubles were allowed to continue, what would be the result?

“It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . .” (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

Nothing will compare to that time! This unprecedented era will prove to be so dangerous that, unless God were to intervene, all living things would die. Carefully read and study Matthew 24 to better understand these conditions and events.

Will God allow humans to utterly destroy themselves?

“. . . But for the sake of God’s chosen [that time] will be cut short” (Matthew 24:22, Revised English Bible).

“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1).

Although humanity will be brought to the brink, God will intervene to stop its extinction. God will “cut short” this time so that some will be spared. This is the good news that will emerge from the bad.

Can people predict exactly when these events will come to pass?

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (verse 44).

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13).

Will these events come suddenly?

“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Will many people be surprised by these sudden events?

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Jesus said that events leading up to His return would take most people by surprise. They will be like people in Noah’s day who continued their daily routines thinking life would go on as usual. But those in Noah’s day were dead wrong. They ignored Noah’s warnings about the

increasingly depraved and degenerate world around them—until it began to rain.

A SOLEMN WARNING TO BELIEVERS

Will some have a general idea of when these events will take place?

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matthew 24:32-33).

Although the Bible is clear that no one will know the exact time of Christ’s return, both Jesus and Paul said that Christ’s followers should be able to recognize the signs leading to it. Many prophecies give us explicit details that can help us know when that time is near. That is why it is vital that you read and study these prophecies in your own Bible (comparing other versions and translations can often help increase your comprehension). Be sure also to carefully read and consider “Does Prophecy Tell Us When Jesus Christ Will Return?” on pages 8-9.

How are we to prepare for these momentous events?

“. . . Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord

Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11).

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36, NASB).

“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert” (Mark 13:33-35, NASB).

“Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’” (verses 35-37, NASB).

“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Revelation 3:3).

God’s Word gives us plenty of direction so we can be spiritually prepared for these events: “. . . Let us not sleep . . . Watch and be sober . . . [Put on] the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation . . . Be on guard . . . Keep on the alert . . . [Pray] in order

Glossary

Blindness: An inability to see. “In Scripture blindness is a term frequently used to denote ignorance or a want of spiritual discernment . . . a lack of understanding resulting from unbelief” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “Blindness”).

Human nature: The characteristics, tendencies and behavior of a human being. At birth human nature is fundamentally neutral. However, over time and under the influence of Satan, human nature is predominately characterized by vanity, jealousy, greed and self-gratification. As creatures of choice, we are enjoined and expected to resist the pulls of base self-motivation and respond to the leading of God’s Spirit.

Messiah: A Hebrew word meaning literally “anointed one,” synonymous with the Greek word *christos*, translated Christ. “In ancient Israel both persons and things consecrated to sacred purposes were anointed by having oil poured over them . . . The Israelites did not think of crowning a king but of anoint-

ing him when he was enthroned . . . [The future Messiah] is to destroy the world powers in an act of judgment, deliver Israel from her enemies, and restore her as a nation. The Messiah is the King of this future kingdom to whose political and religious domination the other nations will yield. His mission is the redemption of Israel and His dominion is universal. This is the clear picture of the Messiah in practically all of the OT passages which refer to Him” (*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, “Messiah”).

Prophecy: A prediction of events to come. “A discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; esp[ecially] by foretelling future events” (*Revised Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon*, “Propheteia”).

Sign: “The rendering of several Hebrew and Greek words, which usually denote a miraculous, or, at least, divine or extraordinary token of some (generally) future event” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “Sign”).

Does Bible Prophecy Tell Us When Jesus Christ Will Return?

Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" With these words, Jesus' disciples urged Him to tell them what events or conditions would mark the time of His return (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus explained that some signs that His return was imminent would be unmistakable. He noted that, just as a fig tree leafing out is a sure sign of the coming summer, "so you also, when you see all these things, know that [My return] is near—at the doors!" (verses 32-33).

God in His Word gives us a broad outline and sequence of prophetic events. Some details are still beyond our view at this point in history. However, among the many prophecies of events leading up to Christ's return are major events and conditions that can be confirmed and identified historically.

First condition: man's ability to annihilate life

The first of these certain prophecies deals with a specific condition that would be present only as the end time draws near. Christ said to His disciples that the end time "will be a time of great distress; such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus warned that a time would come when the destructive capacity of mankind would be so awesome that all life could be obliterated from earth. This is why the time of "great distress" is so terrifying, unequalled in history.

Mankind has warred since the dawn of history but never before had the ability—with rocks and clubs, bows and arrows, cannon and automatic weapons—to wipe out humanity and fulfill this prophecy. This situation changed in 1945 with the detonation of the first nuclear weapons. With thousands of nuclear warheads at its disposal, mankind has the frightening ability to destroy human life from the planet many times over.

This circumstance never existed in history until the latter half of the 20th century. Never before could mankind utterly destroy itself. Christ predicted that, left unchecked, mankind would do exactly that. This is one of the reasons He must intervene to save mankind.

Second condition: modern Israel

The second condition that will exist before Jesus Christ's return concerns the existence of the nation of modern Israel.

Prophecies in the books of Joel, Zechariah and elsewhere in the Bible indicate an organized, significant Jewish presence in Jerusalem before Christ's second coming. Daniel 12:11 implies that sacrificial rituals will be renewed and then disrupted before Christ's return. Jesus Himself warned, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).

The abomination of desolation, described several times in Daniel 8-12, deals with the defiling of the sacrifices and

the holy place in Jerusalem. For such prophecies to be fulfilled, at least an altar in a "holy place" is needed if a temple is not actually built.

In Ezra 3 we see that, after the destruction of their first temple, returning Jews offered sacrifices in the appropriate location decades before the second temple was constructed. A modern revival of the sacrificial system would, therefore, be possible without requiring that a temple be constructed.

Before the 20th century these seemed like impossibilities. The Jewish people had been scattered for almost 2,000 years, and the Ottoman Empire was in control of the land. Jews did not have the military power, unity or backing to return to their former land. Yet it happened. Once the fledgling nation formed in 1948, it still appeared the Jews would never control all of Jerusalem. Yet, in the 1967 Six Day War, Israel took possession of the divided city.

It was impossible for Christ's prophecy to be fulfilled while the Arabs and Turks held dominion over the city. Israel's regaining of control over Jerusalem in 1967 helped set the stage for this prophecy, too, to come to pass.

Some of the circumstances necessary for fulfilling Christ's prophecy are not yet in place. The Israeli government, to defuse further religious tensions, decided that the Temple Mount—the area where the temple had stood and animal sacrifices were offered—should remain under the control of Muslim authorities. Since 1989, however, organized efforts have begun to prepare for the building of a temple. Several Jewish groups have publicly organized to carry out this plan.

At this point in history only a relatively small minority of Jews believe it is their responsibility to rebuild the temple apart from direct divine intervention. Modern Israel is largely secular; it would take a dramatic increase in religious fervor to arouse enough support for restoration of the temple or renewal of sacrifices to begin.

That is how matters stand at the moment. Of course, these conditions could change rapidly in the volatile political climate of the Middle East.

Third condition: a new power on the world stage

The third condition deals with the latter revival of the Roman Empire, prophesied extensively in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

The prophet Daniel, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a colossal human image, spoke of a series of "kingdoms" to arise on the world scene. The first of these kingdoms was the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar himself (Daniel 2:28-38). It was to be followed by three other kingdoms (verses 39-40). These four kingdoms were, in order, the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman empires.

Speaking of the fourth and final kingdom, Daniel said that it would be "strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (verse 40). Rome indeed proved to be more domineering than its predecessors, swallowing up its remnants in a reign that lasted for centuries.

However, Daniel revealed other fascinating prophetic details about this kingdom. The part of the image in

Nebuchadnezzar's dream representing the Roman Empire, the feet and toes, was composed "partly of potter's clay and partly of iron." This indicated that "the strength of the iron shall be in it," but also that it would be "partly strong and partly fragile." Also, "just as iron does not mix with clay," the components of this kingdom would not adhere firmly together for long (verses 41-43).

Then, says Daniel, "in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . ; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (verse 44). This is clearly a prophecy of the Kingdom of God, brought into reality on the earth by Jesus Christ at His return.

But is something wrong with this sequence of events? Surely the Kingdom of God wasn't established in the days of the ancient Roman Empire. Jesus Christ is not enthroned as the supreme ruler of the world (1 John 5:19). Was Daniel wrong about the timing of these events?

Understanding Daniel's prophecy

The answer is to be found when we examine other



Prophecy reveals specific conditions that will exist before Christ's return: man's ability to destroy all

human life, reinstatement of sacrifices in Jerusalem and a dominant multi-nation superpower.

prophecies that speak of this fourth kingdom. We learn that the Roman Empire, far from being forever gone and forgotten, is destined to rise again!

The apostle John was given a vision of events that would take place during the remainder of human history. Like Daniel, God inspired John to write of the events leading up to Christ's second coming. Revelation 19 describes His glorious return to earth, culminating in the overthrow and destruction of "the kings of the earth, and their armies," a great false religious leader, and something called "the beast" (Revelation 19:19-20).

This "beast" corresponds to the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, seen in symbol by Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted by Daniel. Both the beast seen by John and the image explained by Daniel will exist and be destroyed by Jesus Christ at His return. Prophecy thus indicates that the beast and the Roman Empire are one and the same.

An empire to rise again

Revelation 17 gives us additional details to help us understand the nature of this empire and how it could exist both anciently and at Christ's return. This chapter describes a "scarlet beast . . . having seven heads and ten horns" (verse 3). It is described as existing, then not existing, then existing again (verses 8, 11). This gives us the key to understanding these sometimes-puzzling prophecies. The Roman Empire existed in the past, it does not exist now, but it will rise to exist again.

The image interpreted by Daniel had feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. In Revelation 17 we see what the 10

toes of mixed iron and clay represent. The 10 toes correspond with the 10 horns of the beast seen by John. "The ten horns . . . are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings . . ." (verses 12-14).

Now the picture becomes clearer. Just before Christ's return 10 "kings"—the original Greek indicates *rulers*, not specifically kings—will unite in a political, economic and military alliance. Some will be stronger than others, just as iron is stronger than clay. Because they represent various nationalities and cultures, they will be divided in ways other than in their allegiance to the beast. The power and authority that come from their confederation will last only a short time before they make the fatal mistake of resisting Christ at His return, at which time they will be crushed and destroyed.

Some question whether the current moves to unify European countries are in any way related to this proph-

sied power. It is interesting to let history show the roots of the movement. Michael Elliot of *Newsweek* recently reported: "In January 1957, six nations signed a treaty on the site of the ancient Roman Capitol, and brought into being the European Economic Community . . . An aide to Paul-Henri Spaak, the then Belgian foreign minister, remembers that his boss said, 'Do you think that we have laid the first stone of a new Roman Empire?' Recalls the aide, 'We felt very strongly we were Romans that day' " ("Don't Spoil a Success," *Newsweek*, international edition, Jan. 29, 1996, p. 40).

At the least, the idea of beginning a new Roman Empire was on the minds of the founders of this organization of nations. It has continued to prosper as barriers to integration tumble one by one and greater cooperation in economic and military affairs comes about. Time will tell where these trends will lead—and how quickly.

Where does this leave us? With mankind possessing the capacity to destroy life in several ways, with Israel in control of Jerusalem and a desire among a few Israelis to restore the temple and sacrifices, and with determined efforts afoot to unify the nations of Europe, we would do well to heed the warnings of biblical prophecy and not ignore its connection with world conditions.

The scenarios we have described appear to be the most likely way various prophecies of Daniel and Revelation could be fulfilled in light of current conditions. However, whether they occur in this way or not, the Bible remains the inspired Word of God. These prophecies *will* come to pass regardless of whether we understand all the details.

that you may have strength to escape all these things . . . Hold fast and repent . . .”

The apostle Paul vividly describes mankind’s attitude, approach and outlook in the end time: “But be certain of this, that in the last days . . . men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, uplifted in pride, given to bitter words, going against the authority of their fathers, never giving



The red horse (the color of fire and blood) and its rider clearly represent warfare.

praise, having no religion, without natural love, bitter haters, saying evil of others, violent and uncontrolled, hating all good, false to their friends, acting without thought, lifted up in mind, loving pleasure more than

God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, Bible in Basic English).
At the end of this age, men and women will be utterly selfish and self-absorbed. They will be blind to the increasing danger signs all around—and taken by surprise. If we do not follow God’s instructions to be sober-minded, watchful and alert, we run the risk of falling asleep and being spiritually unprepared—and we will suffer the consequences of our neglect.

Will some assume that Jesus Christ will not return after all?

“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

What is God’s perspective on the timing of Christ’s return?

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (verses 8-9).

Peter tells us that some will misunderstand the conditions leading up to Christ’s return because they view time from a limited human outlook rather than from God’s perspective. God, who is immortal and eternal and has always existed, doesn’t look at time the same way we do. When trends and events don’t develop as we think they should, or when Jesus doesn’t return when we expect, some fall into the trap of assuming that the biblical promises and prophecies will not take place.

These people, said Peter, make a fundamental mistake. They fail to recognize that God is patient, allowing time

for us to turn to Him in repentance. God “now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world . . .” (Acts 17:30-31).

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: TIMETABLE FOR THE END TIME

Does the book of Revelation give us additional details about events leading up to Christ’s return?

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:1-3).

The book of Revelation—a revealing of the future—is history written in advance. It describes in detail the events leading up to Christ’s return, then tells us what will happen beyond that time. Be sure to look up and read these scriptures and surrounding passages in your Bible.

Does the book of Revelation confirm the sequence of events of Jesus Christ’s earlier prophecy?

Carefully read and study Revelation 6:2-8. Here the same conditions Jesus Christ described in the Olivet Prophecy are present in symbols: the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

The white horse represents a powerful, conquering religious deception. (Some assume that the rider of this horse is Jesus Christ, but a comparison with the description of the returning Christ in Revelation 19:11-16, and the sequence of events Christ gave in the Olivet Prophecy and the book of Revelation, shows they are not the same).

The red horse (the color of fire and blood) and its rider clearly represent warfare. The black horse and rider depict famine (note the comment about the outrageously high cost of food). The sickly colored pale horse represents the sickness and disease that inevitably follow warfare and food shortages.

How will the conditions represented by these four horsemen impact humanity?

“. . . And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6:8).

According to this prophecy, war, violence, starvation and disease may take hundreds of millions of lives. These disasters will also affect animals, which will also take a large toll of human life through predation and spread of disease.

How does Revelation depict the sequence of events that will precede Christ’s return?

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back,

sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1).

The book of Revelation depicts the events described in the Olivet Prophecy through a series of seven “seals.” In the time of the apostle John, who wrote this book under the inspiration of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1-2), official correspondence was customarily fastened with a wax seal. To read what was inside, the seal had to be broken and the scroll unrolled. This is what John saw in vision. (Be sure to study the charts on page 12 to better understand the flow of events described in the book of Revelation.)

What do these seven seals symbolize?

Revelation 6 describes the opening of the first six seals, which depict major events and trends. You should read this entire chapter carefully. The first six seals are:

- First seal (verse 2): religious deception (compare Matthew 24:4-5).
- Second seal (verses 3-4): war (compare Matthew 24:6-7).
- Third seal (verses 5-6): famine (compare Matthew 24:7).
- Fourth seal (verses 7-8): disease (compare Matthew 24:7).
- Fifth seal (verses 9-11): tribulation and persecution of true Christians (compare Matthew 24:9-13; Luke 21:12-19).
- Sixth seal (verses 12-14): an earthquake and heavenly signs (compare Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11).

What is unique about the seventh seal?

“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour: And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:1-2).

The seventh seal is divided into seven “trumpets,” which reveal further events leading up to Jesus Christ’s return. These events, which are not described in the Olivet Prophecy, are sometimes referred to as “the seven trumpet plagues.” The seventh seal is comprised of these seven events. Be sure to read all of Revelation 8 and 9, which describe the events to occur at the first six trumpets.

The first six trumpet plagues are:

- First trumpet (Revelation 8:7): devastation of earth’s vegetation.
- Second trumpet (verses 8-9): devastation of oceans and seas.
- Third trumpet (verses 10-11): devastation of rivers and fresh water.
- Fourth trumpet (verse 12): sun, moon and stars partially darkened.
- Fifth trumpet (Revelation 9:1-11): a satanically influenced military power.
- Sixth trumpet (verses 13-19): an enormous rival military power.

What happens as a result of this sixth trumpet plague?

“By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed . . .” (Revelation 9:18).

Here we read that another third of earth’s inhabitants will die at the hands of this massive 200 million–man army (verse 18). This is in addition to those who have lost their lives earlier. These frightening prophecies help us understand how all life on earth will be threatened with extinction!

How do people react to these events? Do they finally repent of their evil and turn to God?

“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (verses 20-21).

Incredible as it may seem, even after man has brought utter disaster on himself and after God begins to punish him for his rebellion and sins, man will still choose to defy his Creator. He will continue in the same direction that will bring mankind to the brink of extinction.

What happens when the seventh trumpet sounds?

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The blast of the seventh trumpet announces the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to earth. “The kingdoms of this world”

come under Christ’s dominion as the Kingdom of God is at last established on earth! At the same time, “the dead in Christ will rise”; God’s faithful servants throughout history will rise from their graves to eternal life with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

To better understand these vital subjects, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *What Happens After Death?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. All discuss these subjects in much greater detail.



According to this prophecy, war, violence, starvation and disease may take hundreds of millions of lives.

Will Jesus Christ literally return to earth?

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:4).

This obviously describes a physical, literal return to earth. Jesus Christ will return to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem from the city’s east side. Apparently a massive earthquake will then split the mountain in half, opening a new valley running east to west from Jerusalem to the Judean desert.

Why will Jesus Christ return to earth?

“Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world . . .’” (John 18:37).

At Jesus’ trial before His crucifixion, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, asked Him if rumors about His being a king were true. Jesus responded that this was true, that He indeed was born to be a king. However, He also told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (verse 36). Christ’s purpose at that time was not to

overthrow the Roman government and restore the kingdom of Israel, which people assumed was the intent of the Messiah. Jesus’ kingdom—the Kingdom of God—would not be established on earth until far into the future. (Be sure to read “Was Jesus the Promised Messiah?” on pages 14-15.)

Was Jesus Christ’s destiny prophesied to Mary before His conception and birth?

“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end’” (Luke 1:30-33).

The angel told Mary that her son was destined to “reign over the house of Jacob”—the restored 12 tribes of the Israelite nation—in a kingdom that would have no end.

Is Jesus Christ’s kingdom—the Kingdom of God—a literal kingdom?

“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of

Story Flow of the Book of Revelation

Seven seals

1. Religious deception (*Revelation 6:1-2; compare Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-25*)
2. War (*Revelation 6:3-4; compare Matthew 24:6-7*)
3. Famine (*Revelation 6:5-6; compare Matthew 24:7*)
4. Disease epidemics (*Revelation 6:7-8; compare Matthew 24:7*)
5. Tribulation and persecution (*Revelation 6:9-11; compare Matthew 24:8-12, 21-22*)
6. Heavenly signs (*Revelation 6:12-17; compare Matthew 24:29*)

Seven trumpets

1. Destruction of vegetation (*Revelation 8:7*)
2. Devastation of oceans and sea life (*Revelation 8:8-9*)
3. Devastation of rivers and fresh water (*Revelation 8:10-11*)
4. Sun, moon and stars darkened (*Revelation 8:12*)
5. Rise of major military power (*Revelation 9:1-12*)
6. Rise of competing military power (*Revelation 9:13-19*)
7. Seven last plagues (*Revelation 15:1; 16:1-21*)

Armageddon and return of Jesus Christ

Chapter Outline of the Book of Revelation

Chapter Story Flow

- | Chapter | Story Flow | Insets* |
|---------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. | Introduction | |
| 2-3. | | Message to the seven churches |
| 4-5. | Prelude—Setting | |
| 6. | First six seals | |
| 7. | 144,000 and the great multitude | |
| 8-10. | The trumpet plagues | |
| 11. | The two witnesses | |
| 12. | | The true Church |
| 13. | | The two beasts |
| 14. | | The three messages |
| 15-16. | The seven last plagues | |
| 17-18. | | The false church |
| 19. | The return of Jesus Christ | |
| 20. | The Millennium | |
| 21-22. | The new heaven and new earth | |

*Several chapters in the book of Revelation are insets. Although most of the book’s chapters flow in chronological order, these chapters describe background events and conditions that are not part of the story flow and may span centuries.

heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

In vision the prophet Daniel saw Jesus Christ—“one like the Son of Man”—come to God the Father—“the ancient of Days.” In this vision Christ was “given dominion and glory and a kingdom” in which “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.” Notice that He will rule over physical peoples and nations of all languages. This is clearly describing literal rulership over physical, flesh-and-blood human beings.

What will Jesus Christ’s title be at His return?

“And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of kings and lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16).

Jesus Christ was destined to rule! His kingdom was foretold by the Hebrew prophets, revealed to Mary before His conception and birth and affirmed by Jesus Christ Himself. He will return to rule on earth over all kingdoms, governments, peoples and nations. He will be the supreme authority, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all the earth!

AN UNSEEN EVIL INFLUENCE

We have seen that the world was predicted to be a dangerous place at the time of the end. Man’s actions have brought us to the brink of extinction. But why do we think and act in such self-destructive ways? Is another factor—one that few recognize—at work influencing human behavior?

Is a major source of spiritual blindness at work in the world that prevents people from understanding God’s truth?

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

There is a reason that few people understand and accept God’s truth: *Satan the devil*. This powerful, unseen spirit being is a master of lies and deception. As the mastermind behind the religious deception that envelops the world, he has blinded humanity to God’s truth. All of us have fallen prey to his lies to some extent.

The United Church of God offers this Bible Study Course, *The Good News* magazine and other literature to help you understand the truth of what the Bible really says—regardless of what some say it says.

How extensive is Satan’s influence in the world?

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of

old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9).

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

These verses reveal that Satan dominates the world. His influence is so pervasive that he is even called “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Apart from God, humans are under his power and domination (Acts 26:18). This is not God’s world, but the devil’s.

Does Satan play a major role in human sin and suffering?

“[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Satan has actively influenced people from the time of our first parents, Adam and Eve. He successfully turned them away from God (Genesis 3). Ever since, humanity as a whole has chosen to live apart from God.

What is the natural result of this spiritual blindness and lack of the knowledge of God?

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . .” (Hosea 4:6).

Apart from God, and blinded to His knowledge, can man make right decisions?

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

“O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

What is the result of humanity’s departure from God’s saving knowledge and choosing its own way?

“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity . . .” (Isaiah 59:1-4).

“The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness!” (verses 8-9).

From mankind’s beginning, people have willingly

embraced satanic ways—and they have suffered the consequences. Satan has brought about untold sin and suffering. To understand the reason for so much anguish and sorrow in the world, we need look no further than Satan, our own actions and decisions and the results of our sins. This violent, bloodstained world—a planet edging ever closer to disaster—is the result of people collectively rejecting God’s guidance and choosing to follow “the god of this age.”

Will Satan be particularly active just before Christ’s return?

“. . . Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath . . .” (Revelation 12:12).

Why is he particularly angry at this time?

“. . . The devil [has] . . . great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (same verse).

Knowing that his time is short, and that Jesus Christ will soon replace him as ruler of earth, Satan will vent

his fury against the world’s inhabitants. His rage will bring even more suffering and sorrow.

Will the devil direct his anger to a particular group of people?

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child . . . And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:13, 17).

Just as Satan hated Jesus Christ and orchestrated events to bring about His execution (Luke 22:2-6; John 13:27), he also hates those in the Church Jesus founded. He is the driving force behind persecution of those who are faithful to Jesus Christ and keep God’s commandments.

Does Jesus Christ confirm that His followers would be persecuted?

“But before all these things, they will lay their

Was Jesus the Promised Messiah?

What was Jesus Christ’s purpose? Why did He come to earth? Why will He come again? The answers to these questions will become evident when we examine the concept of the Messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning “Anointed One.” Anointing was used to set someone or something apart for a specific purpose. It was used, among other things, to signify that kings had been chosen by God to rule (1 Samuel 15:1; 16:12-13; 1 Kings 1:34). *Christ* means “Anointed One” in Greek, the language in which the New Testament has been preserved for us—the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah*. The two terms mean the same thing (John 1:41; 4:25).

The Hebrews understood that their Scriptures contained many prophecies of a divinely appointed ruler who would restore the glory and grandeur of the kingdom of Israel. For example, Isaiah 9:6-7 says: “. . . The government will be upon His shoulder . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever . . .”

Jeremiah 23:5-6 adds: “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”

After the kingdom of Israel and the nation of Judah were taken into captivity by Assyria and Babylon, respectively, the Israelite people looked to these promises for a deliverer. In the first century after Christ, the Jews who had returned to their homeland from Babylon several centuries earlier were dominated by the Roman Empire. In their oppression they prayed and hoped for the appearance of the promised Messiah, a conquering king who

would deliver them from their Roman overlords and restore Israel to national greatness.

From many prophecies they deduced, correctly, that the Messiah was soon to appear. Hopes ran high. When John the Baptist came on the scene, some thought he might be the Messiah. Scripture tells us that “the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ [Messiah] or not” (Luke 3:15).

John said he was not the Messiah, but he did point people to Jesus of Nazareth. One of John’s followers, a fisherman named Andrew, immediately believed in Jesus. “He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ)” (John 1:40-41). Both Andrew and Simon (Peter) became followers of Jesus.

Jesus acknowledged that He was the long-awaited Messiah in a conversation with a Samaritan woman. “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He’” (John 4:25-26, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus also acknowledged that He was the Messiah at His trial. “And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?’ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:60-62).

Jesus knew that He was born to reign as a king. When the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, questioned Him before His crucifixion, Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews;

hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake . . . You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Luke 21:12, 16-17).

Jesus prophesied that, as events come to a climax before His return, some will lash out at those who are faithful to God. Some will be imprisoned, some killed. In a world increasingly hostile to God and His laws, those who believe in and try to live God's way will be hated. As Paul warns us, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

AN EVIL INFLUENCE REMOVED

What will happen to Satan when Jesus Christ returns?

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that

serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:1-3).

Before Jesus Christ can transform the world through the Kingdom of God, he must first remove Satan's poisonous influence from humanity. Satan, that evil, murderous spirit, will be banished and his power over humans broken. Only then will mankind begin to submit to God's law and the rule of Jesus Christ.

Will Jesus Christ then reeducate the world?

"Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

For thousands of years Satan has held sway over

but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked Jesus if He were indeed a king. Jesus responded: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:36-37).

That Jesus' kingdom was not for that time was misunderstood by most of His followers. They had hoped and assumed that Jesus Christ would lead a popular uprising that would throw off the hated Romans and establish a new political entity. Some of the disciples even argued among themselves as to who among them would hold the primary positions in the new government (Matthew 20:20-21; Luke 9:46; 22:24).

Their understanding was limited. They didn't realize that Christ must first come to suffer and die for the sins of mankind and only later come as the conquering king they expected.

When Jesus was tried and executed, they were bewildered and dismayed. Their hopes and dreams of power and grandeur were dashed. Peter and some of the other disciples returned to their old occupations as fishermen (John 21:1-3).

Even after Jesus appeared to them again, they still didn't understand. They still thought Christ would establish the Kingdom of God immediately. Notice Acts 1:6-8: "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"

Jesus explained that the timing of that kingdom should not be their primary concern; indeed they would not know when it would be established. Their focus, Christ said, should be on the work He had assigned them. The Kingdom of God would be established in due time.

Finally they understood. Jesus of Nazareth was indeed

the promised Messiah, but first He had to suffer and die for their sins. Later He would come as conquering king to establish the Kingdom of God.

Peter proudly proclaimed the wonderful truth that Jesus was the Messiah: "But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:18-21).

The dozens of prophecies recorded by the prophets about a Messiah—prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ—are among the strongest proofs that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Many nonbiblical writings are revered by the many religions claiming to be holy and divinely inspired. But none of the other writings can foretell the future, and then, hundreds of years later, provide a record of exactly how those prophecies came to pass.

This is, in essence, the story of the four Gospels. They recall the Old Testament prophecies and show how Jesus Christ fulfilled them as the Messiah born of a virgin and the divine Teacher who would be put to death to make it possible for us to receive forgiveness for our sins.

The Gospels also speak of His resurrection and ultimate return to earth as conquering King. That is the message of the Gospels—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah who is prophesied throughout the Old Testament.

One version of the New Testament, the Jewish New Testament, lists 52 prophecies fulfilled in Christ's first coming (1989, pp. xxv-xxix). Estimates of the total number of prophecies about the Messiah range into the hundreds. Both Old and New Testament testify that Jesus was and is the true Messiah, the Son of God, the one who was sent from God and will come again to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

—of vanity, envy, lust and greed. Jesus Christ will begin a massive reeducation of the world. People will be taught for the first time how to live by God's law.

How will the world be different once Satan is removed from influencing mankind?

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

With this spiritual blindness removed, humanity at last will learn God's ways, which will lead to a transformed world of peace and plenty.

To remind ourselves of the analogy used by Jesus Christ and Paul, note that the world will go through travail as does a woman giving birth (Matthew 24:8, NASB; Romans 8:18-23). But that trauma and pain will be quickly forgotten when new life comes into the world—when Jesus Christ begins to transform the world after His return.

In the next lesson we will examine what the Bible says about the world's transformation, Satan's banishment and the rule of Jesus Christ over the entire earth. It will focus on the central message of Jesus Christ: the gospel—the *good news*—of the coming Kingdom of God!

To better understand the points covered in this lesson, be sure to request the following free booklets:

- *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*
- *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.*
- *The Church Jesus Built.*
- *The Gospel of the Kingdom.*
- *The Book of Revelation Unveiled.*
- *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.*
- *What Is Your Destiny?*
- *What Happens After Death?*
- *Is There Really a Devil?*

For your free booklets, contact any of our offices listed below or you can request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Points to Ponder

These questions are intended as a study aid, to spur further thought on the concepts discussed in this lesson and to help you apply them on a personal level. We suggest you take the time to write out your answers to these questions and compare them to the scriptures given. Please feel free to write us with any comments or suggestions, including questions about the course or this lesson.

• Some Bible prophecies predict the darkest days are yet ahead, but is Bible prophecy always bad news? (Matthew 24:8; Romans 8:18-23).

• How does God communicate to humankind His will in advance of what will take place? (Amos 3:7; Hebrews 1:1-2).

• It is one thing to predict that an event will take place and another to bring it to eventuality. Can God bring to pass what He foretells? (Isaiah 46:9-11).

• In Jesus' Olivet Prophecy, He gave both a warning and prediction of a trend that would begin in the early Church and continue until His return. What was that condition? (Matthew 24:3-5, 11, 24).

• Jesus prophesied of three other primary conditions that would also be prevalent in our world at the end of the age. What are they? (Matthew 24:6-8).

• What did Jesus say would be the fate of all humankind if God does not intervene in human affairs? (Matthew 24:21-22).

• What does God's Word admonish us to do to be ready for these coming times? (1 Thessalonians 5:4-11; Luke 21:34-36; Mark 13:33-37; Revelation 3:3).

• Why was Jesus born, and why will He return to earth? (John 18:37; Luke 1:30-33; Daniel 7:13-14).

• Many problems can be traced to Satan's influence (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9). Will he be particularly active just before Christ's return? (Revelation 12:12-13, 17).

• What knowledge will fill the world as God's government replaces Satan's influence? (Isaiah 2:3, 11:9).

© 2000 United Church of God, an International Association All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Scriptures in this lesson are quoted from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted. Author: Scott Ashley Contributing writers: John Ross Schroeder, Mario Seiglie Editorial reviewers: Peter Eddington, John Foster, Roger Foster, Jim Franks, Bruce Gore, Roy Holladay, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Darris McNeely, Burk McNair, David Register, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Robin Webber, Lyle Wely Design: Shaun Venish

WORLDWIDE MAILING ADDRESSES

NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org
Website: www.gnmagazine.org

Canada: United Church of God—Canada
Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (905) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 614-1749
Website: www.ucg.ca

Caribbean Islands: United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org
Website: www.GNmagazine.org

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org
Website: www.ucg.org/espanol

EUROPE

Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg):

P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org
Website: www.goodnews.org.uk

Eastern Europe and Baltic states:
Head Sõnumid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia

France: Église de Dieu Unie—France
127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France
Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia
Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org
Website: www.labuonanotizia.org

Netherlands: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka
P.O. Box 3535, 111 74, Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 E-mail: sveiga@ucg.org

AFRICA

East Africa—Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda:
United Church of God—East Africa, P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200,
Kenya E-mail: kenya@ucg.org Website: www.ucgeastafrica.org

Ghana: P.O. Box 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana E-mail: ghana@ucg.org

Malawi: P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi
Phone: 085 22 717 E-mail: malawi@ucg.org

Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria
P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria Phone: 08033233193
Web site: www.ucgnigeria.org E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa: United Church of God
P.O. Box 36290, Menlo Park, 0102 Pretoria, South Africa Phone: +27
12 751 4204 Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 E-mail: rsa@ucg.org

Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (02) 226076
E-mail: zambia@ucg.org

Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
Phone: 0773 240 041 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed:

United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202 Fax: 07 55 202 122
Website: www.ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

New Zealand: United Church of God
P.O. Box 22, Shortland St., Auckland 1140, New Zealand
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763 Website: www.ucg.org.nz
E-mail: info@ucg.org.nz

ASIA

All except Philippines and Singapore: United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines
Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444 Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444
Website: www.ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph

Singapore: United Church of God
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Website: www.ucg-singapore.org E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org