

Chapter 9

Signs of the Times

These had to be heady times for the disciples of Yahshua. They were finally—after three fascinating years of following Him around—starting to see some vindication, some evidence that His ministry was paying off. They had heard the teaching. They had seen the miracles. They had been there when He had accepted the adoration of the throng who had gathered along the road from Bethlehem with their palm branches to witness the arrival of the perfect Passover lamb, chosen by the High Priest from the sanctified flocks at the City of David. Of course, neither the crowd nor the disciples understood that Yahshua Himself was to be that sacrificial Lamb before the week was out. They had witnessed the Master’s cleansing of the Temple, proving to all that He was no ordinary Rabbi but a man who spoke with the authority of Yahweh Himself. Three of them already knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt, for they had seen him transfigured into a being of indescribable glory before their very eyes not many weeks before. Yes, the future was looking bright for the followers of Yahshua.

So it was in an upbeat mood that they strolled through the confines of Herod’s Temple like the country bumpkins they were, gushing at its magnificent architecture and massive stonework. *Will the Master make this his Kingdom’s headquarters? They sure don’t build ’em like this in Capernaum.* It was therefore something of a shock when Yahshua informed them that the whole thing was going to be turned into a pile of rubble. (cf. Matthew 24:1-2)

Later that day, or perhaps the next, the three who had witnessed His transfiguration, plus the brother of one of them, found themselves alone with the Master, and they asked Him the same thing you or I would have asked. **“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things [i.e., the destruction of the Temple] will be fulfilled?’”** (Mark 13:3-4, cf. Matthew 24:3, Luke 21:7) Here we go again, trying to sort out the answers to two questions at the same time. And the task isn’t made any easier by the fact that Yahshua took the opportunity to teach them truths concerning events which they hadn’t asked about. How could they? Curiosity doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Remember, they all still thought that Yahshua’s earthly reign was about to begin.

Yahshua saved the first question, “When,” for later. Instead He launched into a discourse that explained the signs and circumstances surrounding not only the impending sack of Jerusalem that would leave “not one stone upon another,” but also the last days of planet earth, to which there are some striking parallels to Titus’ 70 A.D. offensive. Once again, we see prophecies with near and far

fulfillments delivered in the same breath. But since this is our jigsaw puzzle to work out, let's take all the pieces out of the box that look like they might fit and examine them one by one.

“Jesus, answering them, began to say: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am He,” and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.” (Mark 13:5-7, cf. Matthew 24:4-6, Luke 21:8-9) He began with a warning of false Messiahs showing up. Luke's version adds that they will say, **“The time has drawn near,”** and warns, **“Therefore, do not go after them.”** The word “He” in “I am He” was supplied by the translators; it isn't really there. Yahshua is warning us about men who say “I Am,” in other words claiming, on some level, equality with Yahweh. There have been many through the ages, enjoying varying degrees of temporary success. As the end approaches, expect to see more Muhammad, Hitler, Jim Jones, or David Koresh types attracting gullible followers.

It bears pointing out that the phenomenon of “rumors of war” didn't really get off the ground until late in the 19th century. Only in recent years have we had the technological capacity to “hear” about every little conflict that might or might not be happening in the world. Yahshua knew there would always be wars—we're fallen creatures: they're in our nature. But we aren't to mistake our detailed knowledge of current events for the end of the world. Ignorance may pass for bliss, but enlightenment doesn't have to ruin your whole day.

And as for false Christs, they fall into two categories—those pretending to be godly, and those who admit to no god whatsoever. They both say the same thing: “I have the answer. Follow me.” The first group attempts to undermine the Church from within; the second attacks from outside. Some in the false-godly group leans toward legalism—the piling up of rule upon rule until the underlying truth is buried under a mountain of minutia. The law of the Sabbath, for example, had been given to instruct the people about Yahweh's grand plan. The Jews turned it into an onerous burden, specifying precisely how far you could walk or how much you could pick up without becoming a heinous lawbreaker. And how in the world do Roman Catholics get the doctrine of priestly celibacy out of **“A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife...”**? (I Timothy 3:2) Later in the same passage, Paul actually calls such synthetic legalism demonic: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”** (I Timothy 4:1-3)

Others in the destroy-from-within crowd are merely in it for the money (or power, or sex). These “gurus in Rolls-Royces” are easy enough to spot, but their

message tickles the ears so nicely, people follow them in droves anyway. Make no mistake: these slick talkers are not the semi-harmless parasites they seem, but dangerous heretics. **“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit [KJV: make merchandise of] you with deceptive words. (II Peter 2:1-3)**

At some level, the false-prophet syndrome applies to anyone who puts self or things before God, whether they’re “religious” or not. Paul warns us that things will get worse as we approach the end. **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (II Timothy 3:1-7)** These epithets were applicable to some extent in Paul’s day, of course, but who can deny that they are more than descriptive of today’s world? They are *characteristic* of our entire generation. These traits define the age we live in. As such, this kind of behavior has come to seem normal—everybody’s doing it. But we have been warned: these are indicators that we are in the Last Days. There is peril here. Turn away!

Humanity has made such great scientific strides in the last century, it’s no wonder many have come to regard—in their hearts if not with their lips—science and technology as the new gods. As we ease into the 21st century, the salient question is no longer, “Can we do it?” but “Should we?”. But having declared ourselves—or worse, the work of our hands—as god, we no longer have any basis upon which to answer our own question. If the theory of evolution is fact, (it’s not, by the way) then why should we do anything that isn’t in the interests of our own short-term self-preservation or gratification? There’s nothing left to do but mock those naïve throwbacks of a quaint and bygone era that truly believe in one all-powerful Creator-God.

On the other hand, that very Creator-God saw this attitude coming, and warned us about it a couple of thousand years before it happened. **“Remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus, the Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” (Jude 17-19)**

Jude was referring to what Peter had said: **“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.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth, standing out of water and in the water. By the word of God, the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth, which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”** (II Peter 3:3-7) In other words, these scoffers believe that Noah’s flood is just a myth told to entertain and intimidate small children. *I don’t believe it ever really happened, so you can’t frighten me with wild tales of a coming judgment by fire. If God didn’t judge us then, He’s not going to start now.* The bad news is, what you don’t know *can* kill you.

Back on the Mount of Olives, Yahshua continued his discourse describing what the world will be like as we approach the end. **“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows [i.e., birth pangs].”** (Mark 13:8, cf. Matthew 24:7-8, Luke 21:10-11) The Luke passage adds, **“There will be... pestilences...”** Some of these signs are man made. We’ve heard about so many “wars and rumors of war,” we’ve almost gotten used to it. Famine is the inevitable result of prolonged war, for war interrupts whatever productive activities a nation may have had going for it, including the production and distribution of food. But you don’t need war to experience famine. It can be caused by errant political theories, as we saw in the U.S.S.R. and China under Communism. And wherever Islam makes inroads, poverty and strife invariably raise their ugly heads, for Islam is a doctrine that promotes piracy and plunder, not productivity and prosperity. Famine follows folly. I offer Ethiopia and the Sudan as 20th century examples.

“Pestilence,” or disease, has always accompanied war, though any disruption in the fabric of society—cultural, political, or even weather related—can promote the spread of disease. For the last hundred years, pandemics have swept the globe every thirty years or so, as if to remind mankind that even with all of our scientific knowledge and pride in our ability to manage our environment, we are still pitifully impotent. Recently, pestilence has been promoted from war’s byproduct to part of the very arsenal. Anthrax, smallpox, Ebola, and bubonic plague are being cultivated as weapons of war. But as deadly as all these are, they may not do as much damage in the long run as sexually transmitted diseases like Aids—the *self-inflicted* pestilence that would die out tomorrow if Yahweh’s design for the family were universally observed. I hate to sound unsympathetic, but God’s pattern—one man joined exclusively with one woman for a lifetime—is the only “cure” that makes any sense. Anything else is a band-aid on a train wreck.

Earthquakes aren't man-made phenomena (yet), of course, and they've occurred sporadically throughout recorded time. The USGS reports that for the last century, there have been an average of 19.5 good-sized earthquakes (magnitude 7.0 or greater) per year, worldwide. So on the face of it, the prophecy can be considered "fulfilled" in spades. But there's more to it. The Greek word translated "earthquake" (*seismos*) occurs ten times in the New Covenant scriptures, five of them in prophetic passages. Of the remainder, four describe historical earthquakes. No surprise there. But the last says, **"And suddenly a great tempest [*seismos*] arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'"** (Matthew 8:24-27) High winds and rough seas also qualify as *seismos* events. This makes every hurricane, tornado, typhoon and cyclone a potential fulfillment of Yahshua's prophecy. In 2005, America suffered so many of these, they ran out of names. And don't forget tsunamis, earthquake-driven ocean "storms." They too fit the profile of *seismos*.

Luke also reports **"fearful sights and great signs from heaven,"** (Luke 21:11) though in his account, these are listed separately from the signs that Matthew and Mark identify as "the beginning of sorrows," so they might occur only later, during the Tribulation proper. "Fearful sights" is *phobetron*, a word used only once in the Bible. It means "that which strikes terror" or something that causes fear, apprehension, fright, or panic—anything that scares you so much you want to run away screaming. It wouldn't be a stretch to expect purposeful acts of terrorism, especially Islamic terrorism, based on this prophecy.

"Great signs from heaven" means pretty much what it sounds like: unusual and unmistakable omens appearing in the sky, visible portents of extraordinary events that transcend the common course of nature. These could take the form of unprecedented meteor showers, unexpected comets, or perhaps aurora borealis style phenomena in latitudes farther south than usual, due to a rapidly deteriorating magnetic field—a precursor to a reversal of the earth's magnetic poles (something that has happened before during the planet's history). Whatever these events turn out to be, it should be noted that of all the signs heralding the Last Days, this is the *only one* that isn't already here.

Yahshua next told his disciples about the persecution they would suffer "before all these things" (i.e., during the course of the Church age) and how to comport themselves, assuring them that before the end comes, **"This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations."** (Matthew 24:14) Notwithstanding the fact that angelic preaching during the Tribulation will

reach every human ear (cf. Revelation 14:6), the Gospel has *already* been preached “in all the world.” All that are left unreached are tiny pockets of indigenous tribespeople. At the end of the 19th century, the Bible had been translated into 522 languages. By the close of the 20th, 2,200 people groups possessed the Word of God in their native tongues. That’s 99.95 percent of the world’s population, a statistic that’s bolstered by the ubiquitous availability of electronic media today—radio, television, and the Internet. If people haven’t heard the Gospel at this late date, chances are it’s because of one of two reasons: either they’re purposely avoiding it—willful ignorance—or they’re being intentionally kept in the dark by those who rule over them—as in the world of Islam today.

Yahshua’s teaching at this point spilled over into events that are yet future to our study: we’ll get to them in order of their appearance. But there’s a principle we need to be familiar with at the outset—the sign of the fig tree: **“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 [the kingdom of God] is near—at the doors!** (Matthew 24:32-33, cf. Mark 13:28-29, Luke 21:29-31) He is saying that we can know when His Kingdom’s coming is near by paying attention to the signs of the times.

Of course, we, being human, can’t resist trying to pin down the exact time of Yahshua’s coming for His people. Admit it: deep down inside, our attitude is often, “If He’s not coming back until Friday and it’s only Tuesday, I can live like the Devil today, try to clean up my act on Wednesday, and repent on Thursday, just in time to look golden on the big day. I’ll sow my wild oats now and then pray for a crop failure.” None of this is a new phenomenon. The same mindset has been in play for millennia: **“Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says Yahweh: None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done,’ says Yahweh.”** (Ezekiel 12:26-28) Some things never change. Yahshua knows our weaknesses. I imagine that’s one of the reasons why He didn’t plainly delineate the chronology of His coming for all to see. Rather, the clues are scattered throughout scripture: you have to dig deep to figure it out—you have to *want* to know. God has told us far more about His schedule than most Christians realize. (See my appendix on chronology entitled “No Man Knows: What God Has (and Hasn’t) Told Us About The Chronology Of The Last Days.”) But a casual reading of any single passage of scripture will leave us with the feeling that it’s all a little vague.

Vague or not, though, we can and should define our terms. What did He mean by “the Kingdom of God?” The general answer (since He was speaking in generalized terms) is the time when Yahshua will personally, physically reign on

the earth. This Kingdom will commence at the end of a period of time called the Tribulation. You probably already knew that. But we're also told that the Tribulation will begin with a specific sign, and that it will last for a specific period of time. Therefore, the people who witness the event that begins the Tribulation would need only a calendar to figure out—to the very day—when the end will be. Why, then, do we need signs as general as the budding of the fig tree?

It's because "the Day of the Lord" is a process, one that begins with a singular event: the rapture of the Church. As we shall see, the rapture is the only future event that is imminent; there is nothing in the prophetic timetable that must be accomplished before Yahshua's Ekklesia is taken out of the world. There are, however, many prophetic puzzle pieces—including the sign that will begin the Tribulation—that *cannot* fall into place until after the rapture has come to pass. For this reason, when Yahshua says, "**When you see all these things, know that it is near,**" we can safely assume that the "it" He's talking about is the *rapture*—the one specific event that launches the Last Days.

And when will that take place? Ah, that's the best kept secret in all of scripture. "**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven.**" (Mark 13:32, cf. Matthew 24:36) Yahshua opted not to communicate that information (though, as we saw in the previous chapter, the idiom Yahshua used actually *did* identify the rapture's day of the year as the convocation of *Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets; He just didn't tell us the year). Why did Yahweh choose to conceal the time? I think (SF2) it's because He knew that to Satan this could be the second most useful piece of information in all of history. (The first was the plan to let him crucify the Messiah: if Satan had realized that Yahweh would use Yahshua's death and resurrection to redeem mankind from the curse of sin, I believe he would have done his level best to make Him into the first-century version of a rock star. Fame, fortune, following—*anything* but the death of the cross. The devil's not stupid, but he's a long way from being omniscient.) As it is, even with the timing a well-guarded secret, our Adversary has been able to use the doctrine of Christ's coming to divide believers and pry their focus off of what really matters—living godly lives in the time we're given. Imagine the damage Satan could do if everyone knew the date God had planned for the rapture.

The risen Christ hadn't even ascended back to heaven before the storm began. In an effort to get Peter's mind off the other disciples and onto the task at hand, "**Jesus said to him, 'If I will that [John] remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.' Then this saying went out among the brethren that [John] would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?'"** (John 21:22-23) Every believer of every age has a job to do. We aren't to be preoccupied with the role given to other believers any more than we are to be

wrapped up in the world. Name a crisis, name a distraction, and Yahshua says, **“What’s that to you? You follow Me!”**

The biggest distraction, of course, is the passage of time. That’s why Yahshua gave us this parable: **“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** (Matthew 24:42-44) Remember what I said about the date being kept a secret? The “master of the house” here is not God, but Satan, the “ruler of this world.” (John 12:31) Yahshua is about to break into his house and take back what’s His, and like a “thief in the night,” He’s not telling anybody when He’s coming. Makes perfect sense when you look at it that way.

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 24:45-51; cf. Luke 12:41-48) For the unfaithful servant, the master’s return will come as a total surprise. Faithful servants, on the other hand, know their master well enough to be able to discern, at least approximately, when He will return. They pay attention to the fig trees.

Being “cut in two” needn’t be taken literally—i.e., in a physical sense. Having one’s reward and blessing halved is reason enough for “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here again, I think we can safely equate the “blessed servants” with the church at Philadelphia, and the evil servant with the Laodicean assembly. At first glance, the difference seems to be what they’re doing, but their behaviors are the direct result of their beliefs—or their unbelief. The Laodiceans *will* come to a saving knowledge of their Master’s intentions, but only after it’s too late to avoid being “cut in two.”

On a similar tack, Yahshua commanded his disciples to **“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”** (Mark 13:33-37) Here again, Yahshua is talking to His own servants—not to those of another man’s household—in other words, the Church, His called-out assembly.

In the space of four sentences, He told us four times to *watch*. Therefore, I think He wants us to watch. Just a guess.

And again, **“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** (Luke 12:35-40) Like the parable of the ten virgins, this one uses the wedding metaphor. This time the Master plays the role of a wedding guest. The servants know that these little soirées might be over in a couple of days, but they can go on for weeks. All they can do is do what they’re supposed to be doing while the Master is away: not only run his household properly, but keep a vigilant eye out for His return. It’s not optional; it’s their job.

Through their prophets, the Jews were given signs that would signal the coming of Messiah. Isaiah, for example, had told them, **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”** (Isaiah 35:5-6) The prophets hadn’t been sent for their health. Yahshua had a right to expect the people to recognize these signs when He performed them. **“Then He also said to the multitudes, “Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time? (Luke 12:54-56) We have far more detailed prophecies describing what’s coming in our day than the people of first-century Israel did. Does Yahshua expect any less discernment of us today? I think not.**

Paul pointed out that the perceptions of God’s people and those of everyone else would be (or at least should be) completely different. Believers were to be expectantly watching, while non-believers would be blithely ignorant. **“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 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....”** Several times in scripture this graphic metaphor of a woman in labor is used of the Last Days. The lessons are clear. First there’s no stopping birth pangs—you can’t negotiate with the baby to stay in there and cook for another month. Second, the whole process hurts like you wouldn’t believe (or so my wife tells me). And third, once you’re pregnant—and make no mistake: *the world is*—it’s only a matter of time before the baby comes; the bigger the tummy, the closer the time. God’s idea of the

“water breaking” is the rapture of the Church. How close is it? Look at the world around you. People are starting to ask if it’s twins.

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore 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.” (I Thessalonians 5:1-8) Did you notice the shifting pronouns? *You* know that Christ’s coming will catch the world by surprise. *You* are not in the dark. But *they* will be caught unawares—*they* will not escape. There is a clear differentiation here between those who should be terrified about the coming Day of Yahweh (but aren’t) and those who needn’t be. Paul’s admonition is to be vigilant, sober minded, and equipped with faith, love, and hope. We who are “sons of light” have nothing to worry about.

Why? Because **“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.** (I Thessalonians 5:9-11) If the rapture were on God’s schedule for any time other than preceding the Tribulation, then these verses would be a lie. For the Tribulation is nothing if not a time of wrath upon the world. And for those who would insist that the Church, like Noah of old, will be kept from harm as it rides out this seven-year period of hell on earth (willfully forgetting about the multitudes of Tribulation martyrs mentioned in Revelation 6 and 7), then why in the world did Paul tell us we could comfort each other with the news? We were never given one word of instruction as to how to live through the Time of Jacob’s trouble, but a boatload of teaching on how to miss it all together.

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:7-9) Farmers don’t dread the coming harvest—they look forward to it. In fact, they work very hard toward that goal. Likewise, we are to be patiently expectant concerning Yahshua’s coming, treating our brothers and sisters with love and kindness until His return.

I need to back up for a moment and define some terminology I’ve been using. Although my goal with this book is to explore all of the yet-to-be-fulfilled

scripture in the Bible in chronological order, I've had to refer to some future events that we haven't gotten to yet. (I know, I know. I haven't gotten to *anything* future yet except for the rapture and some generalized signs of the times.) Two terms that need to be introduced ahead of time are the "Tribulation" and the "Antichrist."

If you'll recall from chapter 7, Daniel received a prophecy that revealed that Yahweh would deal with the nation of Israel for only "seventy weeks," or 490 years, starting with a specific event named in the prophecy. **"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."** (Daniel 9:24) The first-century advent of Yahshua accomplished some of these objectives—precisely on schedule. However, a quick look around you will reveal that "everlasting righteousness" has yet to be "brought in," "transgressions" are continuing, and "sins" have apparently not "ended." And the reason you're reading this book is that "vision and prophecy" have yet to be "sealed up." In other words, we aren't completely there yet.

A gap of undetermined length, you'll recall, was prophesied to come after the 69th week, that is, the 483rd year. The 70th week, the last seven-year period, was described like this: **"Then he [the prince who is to come] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."** (Daniel 9:27)

This final "week," or seven-year period, is elsewhere called the Tribulation, the Time of Jacob's trouble, the Day of the Lord, the Indignation, and the Hour of Temptation. The second half is called the "*Great* Tribulation," for reasons that will become clear when we get there. Much of the Biblical prophecy yet to be fulfilled is concerned with this period of time, for Yahweh will use it **"to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy,"** in other words, to complete his program for the nation of Israel.

This "prince who is to come," the "one who makes desolate," is commonly known as the Antichrist—a word which comes from John's description: **"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the**

Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.... Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” (I John 2:18-23, 4:3) The apostle points out that just as there are many who are “anti”-Christ, i.e., against Him, there will be one Antichrist—with a capital A—who will personify the lie claiming that Yahshua is not Messiah—not God in the flesh. He will do this by assuming Messianic status for himself. Paul calls him the “man of sin,” and in the book of Revelation, John describes him as a “beast rising up out of the sea.” We’ll look at him in detail later, for he is one of the central characters of the last days. For now, suffice it to say that he will be a real person, who will with Satan’s help gather for himself more power than any man has ever known.

Because the hints revealing God’s chronology are spread out all over the Bible, it’s not surprising to find that even serious students of eschatology often find themselves disagreeing as to what will happen when. It was worse in the apostolic age, when the “Bible” was only the Old Testament; hence prophecies concerning the Church were hard to come by. God was in the process of revealing His truth through His apostles, but Peter, Paul, and John couldn’t just put up a website on the Internet and call it a day. Rather, they had to go somewhere in person, teach the believers what had been revealed to them, and later write letters reminding them of what they’d said, correcting any misconceptions they might have picked up. It’s those letters, of course, that form the bulk of the New Testament.

In the early church, the final advent of Christ was a hot topic, though it was destined to be neglected for sixteen or seventeen centuries. I’m thankful for the controversy they dealt with then, for the apostles’ corrective teaching survives to this very day. For example, Paul wrote to Timothy, “[Hymenaeus and Philetus] **strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.**” (II Timothy 2:18) Getting things out of order *can* “overthrow the faith of some,” because God’s order, God’s plan, is a reflection of His love. These two guys had been teaching that the resurrection—including the rapture—had already taken place. And people were saying, “Wait a minute! I trusted Yahshua with my soul. Now you’re saying He’s forgotten all about me?”

Paul wanted to assure them that He most definitely had not. **“But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule**

and all authority and power. (I Corinthians 15:23-24) Notice the order here: first is Christ's resurrection, then the resurrection/rapture of the of the Church-age saints, then Christ "delivers the kingdom," ending our inept and corrupt human governance once and for all. That's why Yahshua warned his disciples (and us) not to believe any rumor they heard about the coming of Christ: He knew that by the time He appeared to the world, we'd be long gone!

Paul gave more information to the believers in another town: **"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed...."** (II Thessalonians 2:1-3) That's a mouthful, so let's analyze it, bit by bit. The Thessalonians were concerned about the **"coming of our Master, Yahshua the Messiah"** and their **"gathering together to Him."** That's two different things. Although it isn't specifically stated here, we needn't presume that they will both happen at exactly the same time.

Paul then tells them that before the coming of the Day of Christ (in contrast to the "gathering together"), two things will happen. First, there will be a "falling away," and second, the "man of sin" will be revealed. The Day of Christ can be taken to mean the whole Tribulation scenario, or it can focus on the climax, when Yahshua returns in glory to rule the earth. Both of these things will take place before that Day is fully accomplished. The "man of sin" is clearly the Antichrist, Satan's counterfeit Messiah. But what in the world does the "falling away" mean?

The Greek word for "falling away" is *apostasia*, meaning a state of defection—or falling away—from truth, in a word, apostasy. I've heard expositors say it means "departure," implying the rapture is in view. As much as I'd like that definition to be true, it's not. Paul is talking about good old-fashioned apostasy, a forsaking of the truth. The church at Laodicea—condemned so roundly in Revelation 3, is the perfect picture of end-times apostasy, having a form of godliness but denying its power. The unrepentant church of Laodicea is here with us today. One could say that it began "officially" with the birth of the ecumenical movement in 1948, though it has in truth been around since John's day. That leaves only the man of sin to be unveiled before the Day of Christ.

But Paul wasn't through. He next revealed that the Holy Spirit, the One who now restrains evil in the world—partially through the agency of the Church—will be "taken out of the way" before the "lawless one," a.k.a. the Antichrist, is unveiled. **"And now you know what is restraining, that he [the Antichrist] may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed...."** (II Thessalonians 2:6-8) Here Paul has addressed the Thessalonians'

concerns about the timing of the “**gathering together to Him**” (i.e., to Yahshua). The Antichrist will not be revealed in his true nature until after the Holy Spirit is “**taken out of the way.**” And as we’ve seen, that can’t happen as long as the Church is on the earth, for the Holy Spirit lives within us. Therefore the rapture—the “gathering together” about which Paul was trying to calm their shaken minds—must precede the unveiling of the Antichrist, which in turn must precede the Day of Christ. The chronology is beginning to emerge.

Helping us narrow down the timing is Yahshua’s Olivet discourse bombshell: “**Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.**” (Matthew 24:34-35, cf. Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32-33) In context, Yahshua spoke these words as he concluded the parable of the fig tree, right before He announced that nobody perceived the day or the hour of His coming. Therefore it clearly wasn’t intended to be a means by which we could calculate its date. Rather, it is an indication that when “all these things” start happening, they will take place within a relatively short span of time—one generation. In other words, the Day of Yahweh won’t be spread out over a couple of millennia, like the Church age was.

There are two questions just begging to be asked at this point. First, what precisely is “this generation?” The Greek word is *genea*, and according to Thayer the primary meaning is “fathered, birth, nativity.” It can also mean “that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family, the several ranks of natural descent, the successive members of a genealogy,” or “metaphorically a group of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character—especially in a bad sense, a perverse nation.” It can even mean “the whole multitude of men living at the same time,” or “an age (i.e. the time ordinarily occupied by each successive generation).” In other words, the word is so general, it could mean any number of things. The immediate context has nothing to do with family relationships, though; it seems to indicate that the “generation” or group of people who see the initial signs that the end is near will also see “all these things.”

The second obvious question, therefore, is what is included in “all these things?” The “budding of the fig tree,” is more than a metaphor for the changing of the seasons: it is a euphemism for the return of Israel to the land of promise. But the passage up to this point has discussed everything from “the beginning of sorrows”—described as the appearance of false messiahs, wars, famines, disease, seismic and weather disasters, persecution of the faithful, and the worldwide availability of God’s Word—through the end of the Tribulation when, as Matthew records it in 24:30, “**They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**” Those alive on the earth when the signs start to appear will not have all died before this climactic event occurs. This is *so* clear, in fact, that it calls into question the opinion voiced so often from American pulpits—that we

shouldn't bother trying to identify the date of Yahshua's coming, because "no man knows the day or the hour." Taking half a verse out of context and stripping it of its cultural significance is a flimsy excuse for willful ignorance.

When did the signs begin? It could be as early as 1933 with the rise of the prototypical false christ Adolph Hitler and the worldwide war he precipitated. And many expositors can't help but notice the convergence of prophetic signs in the year 1948: the statehood of Israel, the rise of the ecumenical movement, and the signing of the Benelux agreement—the precursor to today's European Union. (We'll explore the significance of these harbingers of the Last Days in due time.) I'll admit that prophetically, '48 was a very good year. But the Olivet discourse doesn't blatantly predict specific events that relate to the Messiah's return. Rather, Yahshua talks primarily about how to behave when the signs occur: don't let anyone deceive you... don't be troubled... if you see the abomination of desolation, head for the hills...and don't follow anyone in those days who claims to be the Christ, even if he's got really cool signs and wonders.

For all I know, 1933 or 1948 just might be the watershed years they seem to be. And there are other indications that point toward the sooner—rather than later—return of Christ. In fact, we have been provided with enough information (given a few baseline doctrinal assumptions) to pin down not just the generation, but *the very day*, of Yahshua's return to the Mount of Olives and most every other major event during the Tribulation—everything except the year of the rapture. But it is pointless, even counterproductive, to fixate on the dates upon which things are going to happen, to the exclusion of weightier matters. It's not what we were called to do. We were called to love Yahweh our God with our whole being, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves, remember? The information was given to us to help keep us watchful and alert—working out the dates should merely awaken us to the lateness of the hour. Of course, this knowledge could prove to be a matter of life or death to those saved after the rapture.

God has His own timetable, as Peter reminds us: **"Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with Yahweh one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Yahweh 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."** (II Peter 3:8-9) The Methuselah factor is in operation today. I believe that Yahweh in His mercy may have delayed the great flood many years beyond the point when mankind reached utter depravity, ultimately tying its timing to the life of Methuselah, who consequently lived longer than any other man. (Methuselah's name could be translated "when he dies, it—i.e., the flood—shall be sent.") In the same way, God is giving mankind today every opportunity to repent—now, before He brings His long-overdue wrath upon the earth. But we should not be ignorant of the fact that Yahweh's "one day equals a thousand years" equation is

not a metaphor. He clearly established a pattern in His description of our origins: six “days” of creation followed by a seventh day upon which God “rested,” codified in the Torah’s six-day work week plus a Sabbath rest, and in the cycle of *miqras*—six feasts and one fast. All of this, I am convinced, corresponds to seven thousand-year periods of time in which the entire story of Yahweh’s redemption of man will be told: six thousand years of fallen man’s dominion followed by one Millennium of King Yahshua’s perfect reign. And any way you slice it, we are rapidly approaching the beginning of the seventh millennium.

Don’t feel bad if you’ve got a burning curiosity about Yahshua’s coming and can’t help wondering how close it might be. You’re in good company. The disciples, even before Christ’s ascension, felt exactly the same way. **“Being assembled together with them, [Yahshua] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ 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.”** (Acts 1:4-8)

The same mandate applies to us today. We are indwelled with the same Spirit, and we have the same job to do—be witnesses of Yahshua’s glory and grace both at home and abroad. On the other hand, we have also been given reams of information about His plans for our future, plans that appear to be coming to fruition before our very eyes. It was appropriate for Yahshua to tell His Apostles, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”** After all, the subject wasn’t particularly relevant to them, for the age of the Ekklesia had two millennia yet to run. In the same vein, Yahweh’s angel had told Daniel, **“Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.... None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”** (Daniel 12:9-10) And Jeremiah was told, **“The anger of Yahweh will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.”** (Jeremiah 23:20) I can only conclude that we who are living “in the latter days,” at the “time of the end,” shall be given the light to see what our fathers could not: the very timetable of God’s prophetic program. It is we—if we’re willing to open our eyes—who shall “understand it perfectly.”

Yahshua knew what we were going to face, and how we'd react: **"The Master said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers...."** Religious people who masquerade as "God's servants" in order to attain power and wealth will share the fate of "unbelievers," for that is what they are.

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:42-48, cf. Matthew 24:45-51) We've already looked at the parallel passage in Matthew, but Luke reports a bit more. Our responsibility, Yahshua says, is proportional to our enlightenment. We're responsible to know that Yahshua is coming, for He told us He would, but even more, to be doing what He wants us to do until He gets here. Christ's glorious return is approaching—precisely on schedule—whether we know it or not, and whether we know *when* or we don't. It's Philadelphia versus Laodicea once again. The Philadelphians live in anticipation of their Master's return, while the Laodiceans don't even know who the Master is—yet. In Yahshua's illustration, they were all servants of the same master. Some were found doing His will at His coming (that is, His coming *for them*, the rapture) and some were not. There's no getting around it: our behavior reflects our beliefs. If we really believed He could come for us at any time, would we be acting the way we do?

The Messiah's coming is only anticipated by those who know that God has something wonderful planned for them. Everyone else either ignores it, denies it, or lives in blithe ignorance. Yahshua knew that only His children would be looking forward to His return. **"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."** (Luke 21:34-35)

Paul was keenly attuned to the fact of Yahshua's coming. He was thankful for the abundance of spiritual gifts the Corinthian believers had received, because these, he saw, were a confirmation of the faith they so eagerly held in the promise of Christ's return. **"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your**

knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Corinthians 1:4-8 NIV)

But he also warned them that because Christ’s return for His called-out assembly was imminent, they needed to adopt a pilgrim mentality, avoid becoming wrapped up in the things of the world. As Yahshua had said so many times, our lives should be characterized by watchful service and motivated by purposeful anticipation. **“The time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away... that you may serve the Master without distraction.** (I Corinthians 7:29-31, 35) To those who would suggest that Paul erred when he said (almost two thousand years ago), that “the time is short,” I would remind them that the only time that matters is the time we as individual mortals have left on this earth. The time is *always* short between now and death or rapture, whichever comes first. Who among us is ever given more than seventy years or so in which to get our spiritual act together? Paul was right: for us, the time *is* short.

Nor should we neglect our relationship with our brothers and sisters. It’s interesting that the writer of Hebrews saw our need for fellowship increasing as the Day of Yahweh got closer. **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.** (Hebrews 10:24-25) Because of the apostasy and lawlessness that will characterize the times, we believers will need to stick together—especially as we approach the end—for the influence of the world will be pervasive and sinister. If we don’t make a point of spending significant amounts of time with our fellow believers, we might conclude that evil is not only ubiquitous, it’s normal. As in the days of Noah...

But even more important than fellowship is the maintenance of our relationship with Yahshua. John put it like this: **“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”** (I John 2:28) *Strong’s* defines “abide,” the Greek *meno*, as: “to stay in a given place, state, relation or expectancy, to continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, or tarry.” If we’re all wrapped up in the world’s affairs, abiding in Christ is going to be really hard to do. We can’t have it both ways. I don’t know why we’d want to.