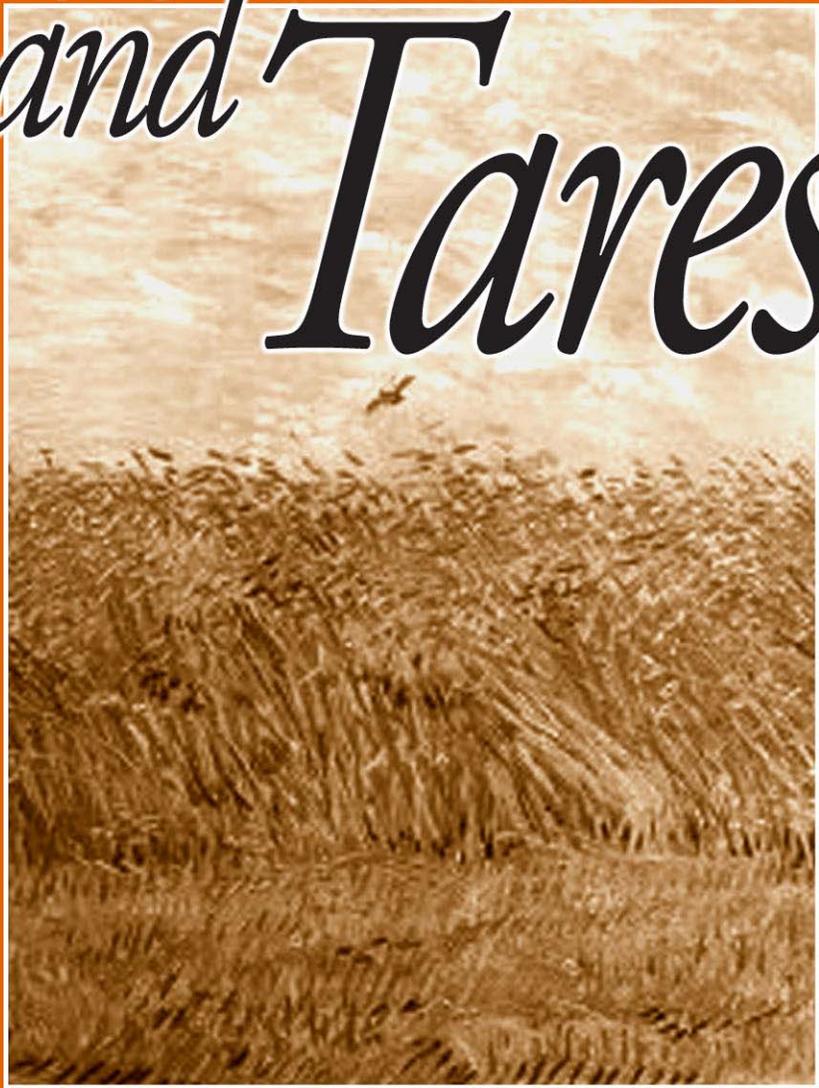


Wheat *and* Tares



HAROLD CAMPING

Wheat and Tares

By Harold Camping

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Introduction

A most wonderful characteristic of the Bible is its perfect consistency. That is, the entire Bible is perfectly true and trustworthy. Therefore, when any truth has been correctly learned from the Bible, that truth will never be negated or compromised by other Bible citations. This perfect consistency of the Bible is to be expected because the Bible is God's Word.

In these last years, by God's mercy, we have become aware of the truth that simultaneous with the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the Church Age has come to an end. The consequence of the end of the Church Age is that God no longer uses local congregations to evangelize the world. In fact, the Holy Spirit will no longer save anyone in a local congregation. Moreover, since God has abandoned the local congregations, Satan as the man of sin, looking like an angel of light, rules in each and every local congregation. Consequently, true believers, if not already driven out, are commanded to come out.

Much information on this very sad and traumatic subject has already been made available in the book "The End of the Church Age and After." This book, "Wheat and Tares," includes additional information that has been found in the Bible. This additional information perfectly corroborates and emphasizes the same truths already set forth in the book "The End of the Church Age and After."

While this is an exceedingly sad study, it is derived entirely from the Bible. Hopefully, it will help the reader to search the Bible even more diligently and carefully than he has ever done before.

Chapter 1

Wheat and Tares

In the very center of the Gospel message is the parable of the wheat and the tares. We find this parable recorded in Matthew 13:24-30, where God says:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

The Bible gives us the spiritual meaning of this parable in Matthew 13:37-43, where we read:

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

We will learn that the parable in these verses teaches that at the end of the world there will be a separation of the saved individuals, who are called “wheat,” from the individuals who thought they were saved, but in actuality, had never become saved. They are called “tares.”

Immediately, we can know the following.

1. The field is the world. Since local congregations have been placed all around the world, we can understand that the wheat and tares are found in these churches.

2. The good seed are the children of the kingdom, that is, they have become saved. Throughout the New Testament era until the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the local churches had been given the commission and the mandate to evangelize the world. Moreover, those who became believers were to become members of a local church, if possible. By the end of the church age, local congregations could be found throughout the world, and that is in harmony with the language of this parable, which states that the field wherein the seed was sown is the world.

3. The tares are weeds that look virtually identical to the wheat. They represent those who are still in Satan's kingdom, that is, they are not saved. However, during the church age, they were found in the same churches in which the true believers were found. They were altogether mixed in with the true believers and looked so much like the true believers that it was impossible to accurately separate them from the true believers. Matthew 13, verses 29 and 30, teaches that the tares were to remain with the wheat. That is, if an attempt is made to separate the tares from the wheat it might happen that the wheat is also removed.

To understand this more fully, we shall begin our study of this very informative parable by looking carefully at the character of the local churches as they have existed throughout the New Testament era.

Church Members

The first question that must be asked is: Who are to be members of the local congregations? This question must be asked because in this parable, the wheat and the tares typify church members. The Biblical answer must be that hopefully, the members are those who truly have become saved. With this truth in mind, many churches readily proclaim that their congregation is a saved membership. Their membership is spoken of as "members in full communion." In other words, they believe that each and every one of their members is a true child of God. They believe the proof of this is that each and every member has been baptized in water, made a personal confession of faith, agrees that their church doctrines are Biblical, attends worship services fairly regularly, and lives a decent, moral life. In fact, if a member becomes divisive or begins to live immorally, he is excommunicated. Thus, the spiritual overseers of the congregation believe the church membership is being maintained as a saved membership.

Having said all this, the big question must be asked. Who makes the decision that permits any individual who professes Christ to become a member of the congregation? The answer is, the pastor and the elders and deacons make that decision. They carefully examine the person's conduct and his profession of faith in Christ, and they make the decision that he has become saved, and therefore, should be a member in full communion. Insofar as they can determine, this person is truly seed that will grow up as wheat.

But therein lies a huge problem. Can these pastors or elders or deacons look into the soul of this person and know with absolute certainty that this individual has been given a new resurrected soul? The answer is obvious. Of course, they can't. Only God can do that.

Isn't it true that many people can give an appearance of salvation when they are not truly saved?

Then how can they know that this person has truly become saved? Isn't it true that many people can give an appearance of salvation when they are not truly saved? God deals with this problem in Hebrews 6:4-6. This passage teaches:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

As we examine these verses, we might think they are speaking about a congregation of saved members. Such phrases as, “**tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God,**” surely must refer to those who have become saved. However, in this citation God speaks of a congregation that has been brought very close to the kingdom of God but consists mainly of unsaved members. We know we understand these verses correctly because the same passage speaks of falling away, and that is impossible if a person has become truly saved. A truly saved person has been given eternal life and nothing can separate him from the love of God. Moreover, in the same context of Hebrews 6, God says in verse 9:

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

In other words, in this passage God is not speaking of those who had become saved. Rather, He is speaking of those who could easily be identified with those who had become saved, but in actuality, they had not become saved. Thus, we are made to understand how impossible it is to know with certainty which church members are saved and which church members are still not saved.

Ye Shall Know Them by Their Fruits

True, the Bible declares in Matthew 7:20:

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Doesn't this verse tell us we can know the true believers by looking carefully at the spiritual fruit they have produced? The principle is true but what human being is qualified to truly know the fruit produced by another person's life? A pastor, an elder, or any member of a congregation may outwardly appear to be a godly person,

devoted to serving the Lord. But unknown to anyone, he may have an intense desire for wealth, or he may have seriously wrong sexual desires, or he may have great pride that is not readily discernible. In the public eye he may appear to be very godly but in his private life he may demonstrate that he could hardly be a true believer. Or he may be living as godly as possible because deep in his heart, he is trusting his own good works as a basis for salvation.

Ultimately, the fruit that should be seen in the life of the true believer is obedience to God.

Without question, the statement “**by their fruits ye shall know them,**” can help any individual analyze his personal relationship with God. He knows his own thoughts and motives and desires. He can know whether the fruit of his life measures up to the standards God has established in the Bible. It is also true that God knows everything about this person, and He knows precisely if the fruit of this person’s life indicates that he is a true believer. But at best his fellow man can only hope that he is truly saved. Ultimately, the fruit that should be seen in the life of the true believer is obedience to God. Therefore, the command of our day to forsake the local church is one test whereby a person can know if he is, indeed, a true believer.

Moreover, later in this study, we will be reminded of God’s Words in II Corinthians 11 where God speaks of Satan, who comes as an angel of light, and his ministers. In that context, God speaks of Satan’s ministers as “**ministers of righteousness.**” This helps us to see the extreme difficulty of knowing if someone is truly saved. Thus, we are brought back to the teaching of the wheat and tares parable that the separation must occur at the end of the world.

Surely, we must realize that it is impossible for any pastor, elder, or deacon to positively ascertain that any individual in the congregation is truly saved. It is no wonder, then, that as God speaks of the local congregation in Sardis, He declares in Revelation 3, verses 1 and 4:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. . . . Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Obviously, we can readily see that in the church in Sardis a few members were wheat but most members were tares. God saw the hearts of the members of the church in Sardis, and He can accurately declare that only a few were true believers.

Wheat and Tares Members Cannot be Separated

We can now begin to see the beginning reality of the wheat and tares parable. All through the world, churches are to be found. The membership of these

churches appears to be saved, that is, they all appear to be wheat. But in any church, as in the church in Sardis, there are those who identify with the language of Hebrews 6:4-6. Outwardly, the whole membership is considered to be wheat. But in reality, part of the congregation are tares as was the situation in the church at Sardis.

There is no good way to separate the wheat from the tares. Throughout the church age, the wheat and the tares have grown together. Outwardly, the conclusion is that all the members of any church that is reasonably faithful to the Bible must be saved. They all give the appearance of being wheat. But no one can know for certain that they are saved. No one can know for certain that they are not tares.

There is no good way to separate the wheat from the tares.

The parable continues. At the end of the world, the wheat is separated from the tares, and the tares are bound together in preparation for them to be cast into the fire. How is this accomplished?

God answers this in verses 39-41 of Matthew 13:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

Again, questions must be asked. What time in history identifies with the phrase “the end of the world?” Who are the angels? In reality, how will the tares be gathered? How will this separation be accomplished? Doesn’t Christ come on the last day? On that final day, will not all the believers bodies be resurrected as glorious spiritual bodies and immediately be caught up to be with Christ in the air? (See I Thessalonians 4:17.)

Simultaneously, will not those believers who are living at that time be instantly changed into their glorious spiritual bodies and also instantly be caught up to be with Christ in the air? (See I Thessalonians 4:17, I Corinthians 15:51-52.) On that last day, what will happen to the bodies of the unsaved who died previously? What will happen to the unsaved who are living? Will not everything be destroyed forever (II Peter 3:10)?

The above questions are all true. Therefore, how can the language of Matthew 13:40-43 concerning the separation of wheat and tares at the end of the world be in agreement with these truths?

To understand this we should examine several additional key words in this parable. The first word is the word “harvest.” God uses this word in connection with His plan to bring the Gospel to the world so that the fruit of the harvest -- those who become saved -- can be brought into the kingdom of God. We read in Matthew 9:36-38:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

. . . harvest is concerned with people becoming saved.

We can readily learn from these verses that harvest is concerned with people becoming saved.

But who are the laborers that God uses to bring in this harvest of saved people? In Matthew 13:39, God speaks of the reapers in this end-of-the-world harvest as angels who send the Gospel into the world so that people might become saved. Does the Bible teach that God uses angels? Obviously, we must examine the word “**angels.**”

Angels or Messengers

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *malak*, which is frequently translated “**angels,**” at times is also translated “**messenger.**” This is also true in the New Testament. The New Testament Greek word *aggelos* is frequently translated “**angel.**” But at times these words are also correctly translated “**messenger.**” As we examine verses that contain the word *malak* or *aggelos*, we find that the messenger that is in view can be God Himself, or it can be angels, or it can be humans who have a message to bring. The context in which the verse is found must determine the proper translation.

For example, we read in Malachi 3:1:

Behold, I will send my messenger [*malak*], and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger [*malak*] of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

The word “**messenger**” is used twice in this verse. The first “**messenger**” must be John the Baptist who was sent by God to announce Jesus as “**the lamb of God.**” The second “**messenger**” is clearly Christ who is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant.

In fact, in the Old Testament the word *malak* is translated more than 100 times as “**angel**” and almost 100 times as “**messenger.**” Usually, when it is translated “**messenger,**” it is speaking of men who are bringing some kind of message to others. However, as we have seen in Malachi, the messenger can be God Himself.

In the New Testament, the word *aggelos* is translated as “**angel**” about 180 times and as “**messenger**” seven times. For example, in Matthew 11:10-11, the Bible speaks of John the Baptist as a messenger of God. There we read:

For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger [aggelos] before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We can clearly see, therefore, that the Hebrew *malak* in the Old Testament and the Greek *aggelos* in the New Testament must be carefully examined in the context in which they are found to determine whether they are speaking of God Himself, of angels, or of humans.

That brings us back to Matthew 13:39, where God speaks of a harvest in which the reapers are angels. Can we be sure the word *aggelos* in this verse, which was translated “**angel**” by the King James Bible translators, is speaking of angels and not those who are saved, who as messengers of God, bring the message of the Gospel to the world?

In answer to this question, we will look at God’s statement in John 4:35-38:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.

*The reapers gathering in the harvest are those
who have become saved.*

These verses clearly show that the reapers gathering in the harvest are those who have become saved. They obviously are those who as messengers of God have been commanded to bring the Gospel to the world. They faithfully send forth the Word of God so that God can apply the Word to the hearts of those elected to salvation. Thus, those who become saved are the harvest of believers who enter into the kingdom of God.

Therefore, returning to Matthew 13:37-43, the Greek word *aggelos*, found in verses 39 and 41, would be more accurately translated “**messenger.**” The angels do not bring in the harvest. It is brought in by the believers who bring the Gospel to the world so that the harvest -- those who become saved -- can be reaped and brought into the kingdom of God. Thus, in the first part of the parable of the wheat and the tares, the believers are called seed that produce wheat. But as the parable continues, the true believers are called messengers who are to bring in the harvest of the wheat.

The End of the World

But what about the phrase the “**the end of the world,**” which is found in Matthew 13, verses 39 and 40:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

How are we to understand this phrase? To answer this question we should examine how God uses the phrase “**the end of the world**” elsewhere in the Bible. In Hebrews 9:26, we read:

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

On the one hand, in this context the phrase “**end of the world**” points to A.D. 33 when Christ went to the cross to demonstrate how He paid for the sins of the elect. Thus, the phrase “**end of the world**” can include the whole New Testament era. This final period of time that lasts approximately 2,000 years is the end of the world that finally will have lasted about 13,000 years. The phrase is used in a similar way to the way God uses the phrase “**last days**” in Acts 2:17. It can be shown that in the context of Acts 2, the term “**last days**” includes the entire New Testament era.

However, returning to Hebrews 9:26, in this context, the phrase “**end of the world**” may focus on the judgment that Jesus experienced on behalf of those He came to save. Thus, Hebrews 9:26 is not decisive in informing us how to understand the phrase “**end of the world.**”

However, in Matthew 24:3 we find the same phrase. In this context, it is more helpful in showing us how to understand the phrase “**end of the world.**” We read:

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

This verse serves as an introduction to the information set forth in Matthew 24 that teaches the timing and character of the Great Tribulation. This chapter also teaches that the Great Tribulation is immediately followed by the return of Christ and by the end of the world. Thus, we can be assured that the term “**end of the world**” can clearly identify with the time of the Great Tribulation and the end of this world¹.

Significantly, it is during the time of the last part of the Great Tribulation that the final harvest of believers will be brought in.

Significantly, it is during the time of the last part of the Great Tribulation that the final harvest of believers will be brought in. As we learned in the book “The End of the Church Age and After,” at the time of the “**latter rain,**” a “**great multitude which no man can number**” will become believers (Revelation 7:9-14). As individual believers send the true Gospel into all of the world, this final harvest of souls is brought into the kingdom of God.

It is also the time when those who are saved are commanded to come out of the local church. This is so because in the church institution, which consists of all the local congregations, the Holy Spirit is no longer applying the Word of God to the hearts of anyone.

Thus, we can be assured that the phrase “**the end of the world**” clearly can be identified with events that occur during the Great Tribulation, and the end of the world.

We have learned that the parable of the wheat and the tares is focused on the time of the Great Tribulation. We should now begin to understand God’s declaration of how the tares came to exist within the local congregation.

In the next chapter, we will learn the identity of the enemy that sowed the tares.

Chapter 2

The Enemy that Sowed Them is the Devil

In Matthew 13:39, Jesus makes a very important declaration. There He declares, **“The enemy that sowed them is the devil.”** Thus far, we have learned in our study that the wheat (the church members who are true believers) and the tares (church members who have not become saved), co-existed throughout the church age in the local congregations. In this statement of Matthew 13:39, God reveals that Satan is definitely involved in the local congregations. It brings our attention to this most solemn and important piece of information.

Therefore, it is very essential that we look at the Bible’s declarations as to how Satan has been involved in the churches throughout the church age. In order to understand this, we should back up and look at the Bible’s declarations concerning this all-important matter.

Sometimes we have the idea that because of the victory of Christ on the cross, and because of what we read in Revelation 20, that Satan, to a very high degree, has been taken out of the spiritual war, the war that goes on between Christ and Satan. Thus, we can readily adopt the idea that throughout the church age, the local congregations existed in a very secure way, and they did not have to worry that much about Satanic involvement. However, when we carefully examine the Biblical statements concerning the activities and the prerogatives and opportunities of Satan throughout the New Testament era, we find that it is quite a different story.

Satan Is Bound

First, we want to find out what Revelation 20:2-3 is teaching about the binding of Satan. There we read:

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

We have read this quotation many, many times but probably have not understood what it means. What does it mean that Satan was bound and then later on loosed? Based on what we read in Hebrews 2:14, we know that when Christ went to the cross, Satan was destroyed in some sense. There we read:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself [Christ] likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

And from Revelation 13, we know that Satan was given a deathblow. We read in Revelation 13:3, wherein God is speaking about Satan:

And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

And because of Christ's victory on the cross, we can be sure that Satan was cast out of heaven. We read in Revelation 12:9:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

And anticipating Christ's victory on the cross, He said in Luke 10:18:

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

As we examine these verses, we conclude very correctly that at the time of the cross, Satan was given a deathblow. He was no longer able to go into heaven to accuse the brethren (Revelation 12:10). He was consigned to earth. Consequently it is guaranteed that at the end of the world, Satan will be destroyed along with this universe. We have understood this quite correctly. That is why we read in Revelation 20:10:

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

He Should Deceive the Nations No More

However, we also read something very interesting in Revelation 20 that should be factored into our thinking. We read in Revelation 20:3:

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

We learned in the book "The End of the Church Age and After" that the end of the thousand years is the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Therefore, the language, "**that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled,**" appears to imply that now that we are in the time of the Great Tribulation, he again is able to deceive the nations. This is so because the thousand years, during which he was bound, ended with the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Let's begin to develop the truth, "**that he should deceive the nations no more.**" Prior to the time of the cross, we know that Christ was the perfect preacher, and yet, virtually nobody became saved. Christ preached for three and a half years,

and at the end of that time, only a few appeared to be saved or actually had become saved during His ministry. There is plenty of evidence that except for a few, virtually nobody became saved.

We have learned that as Christ preached, and He was the perfect preacher, Satan was there to snatch away that Word so that it would not find root in the heart of those who heard it.

We must remember that two things are required in order for the Word of God to bring salvation to anyone. First of all, the Word that is preached or declared must be the Word of God. We know that from Romans 10, verse 17, where God says:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Secondly, the Word preached must be applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts and lives of those God is planning to save. We learned from the parable of the sower in Luke 8 that Satan can prevent the preached Word from bearing spiritual fruit. Jesus explains this in Luke 8:12:

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

So, we see very clearly that before the time of the cross, this is the way Satan was quite successful in inhibiting salvation. Each time the Word of God was declared, Satan was there to snatch it away so that it would not take root in the hearts of those who heard it. He was able, therefore, to deceive the nations, because in the entire world wherever the Gospel was preached, that would have been the situation. We are amazed, and yet it is a truth that God gave us, that when Jesus was preaching, that is exactly what was happening. It was happening in the temple, in the synagogues, and by the seashore. That is why we see very few results even though Jesus was the perfect preacher. God allowed this to happen, and yet His election plan would never be frustrated by Satan. His chosen have to receive their inheritance, in God's perfect timing. We must never think that Satan could snatch the Word away from one of God's elect.

*Each time the Word of God was declared,
Satan was there to snatch it away . . .*

Satan Bound and the Holy Spirit Ruling

That particular aspect of Satans activity was stopped at the time that Christ went to the cross. As the New Testament church was being developed, Satan was bound in the sense that he could not frustrate the Word of God by snatching it away from the hearts of those that Christ intended to save. In this sense, throughout the church age, Satan was bound.

More than that, the Holy Spirit had been poured out. Thus, beginning at Pentecost in A.D. 33 and throughout the New Testament church age, God the Holy Spirit has been in the midst of every congregation that recognized the Bible as the Word of God. In these churches, God applied His Word to the hearts and lives of the elect.

We witness this truth very dramatically when we look at Pentecost in A.D. 33. Peter preached one sermon and about 3,000 people were saved. Obviously, Peter was not nearly the perfect preacher that Christ was, yet the fact is that about 3,000 truly became saved that Pentecost day. This is a dramatic evidence of the statement that Satan was bound so that he could not deceive the nations and also that the Holy Spirit was actively saving souls. These are facts that we know to be true and trustworthy.

How then are we to understand the parable of the wheat and the tares which teaches that throughout the Church age, Satan has been busy sowing tares or weeds? Does the Bible have more to say about this? Indeed, the Bible has much to say about it. This truth is sprinkled all through the New Testament.

Satan is at War with Christ

First of all, in Revelation 12:17 where Satan is called a serpent, we read about the body of believers which is called a woman who is in the wilderness. We can be assured that the woman in the wilderness represents the believers throughout the New Testament time. In this citation, we read a very significant truth. Revelation 12:17 says:

And the dragon was wrath with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

From this declaration we learn that the warfare goes on throughout the New Testament era. This is a solemn truth. Satan was bound in the sense that he cannot frustrate God's plan to save every one of the elect as they come under the hearing of the Gospel. Simultaneously, God the Holy Spirit is busy applying the Word of God to the hearts of those individuals that He plans to save. But Satan is still at war.

This brings to mind the words of Ephesians 6. Most of us are quite familiar with this serious citation, but we have not really understood its tremendous importance. We read in verses 11 and 12 of Ephesians 6:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Here again is the declaration that there is warfare going on. In this particular context, God indicates the protection God's true people can have so that Satan does not overcome them. He says in Ephesians 6, verses 13-17:

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

He speaks about “**having your loins girt about with truth,**” and the truth is Christ Himself. He speaks about , “**having on the breastplate of righteousness,**” and “**your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,**” and “**taking the shield of faith**” and “**the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**” The essence of all of these statements is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the protective armor that shields the true believers from the assault of Satan who continues to make war in the local congregation. Satan is there trying to snare away those who are present in the local church.

*Satan continues to have a total and terrible vendetta
against the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Satan continues to have a total and terrible vendetta against the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Christ is in heaven, he cannot assault Him personally, because Satan is bound to the earth. But in the local congregations, the body of Christ lives or lived. Therefore, that is where Satan can assault Christ.

There are many other passages that warn us that this warfare is happening. We read for example in James 4:7:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

We read in Ephesians 4:27:

Neither give place to the devil.

This indicates that the Devil is very active within the churches. We read in II Corinthians 11:3-4:

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty [*craftiness*], so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit,

which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*.

In these verses, God is warning that if someone comes with a false doctrine or with a false gospel, trying to entice those within the congregation to believe these wrong doctrines, that is the means by which Satan will come to snare them.

I Timothy 3 speaks about the qualifications of an elder in the local congregation, and God says in verse 6:

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

That is a very, very serious matter. It means that this new elder could be someone who is not saved, and if he is not saved, it means that he is still identified with Satan. Furthermore, God teaches in I John 3:8:

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

In this context, God is teaching that those who commit sin includes everyone who is unsaved. They are still of the Devil. This is emphasized, for example, in I Timothy 5:15, where again God warns the New Testament believers:

For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Again, as we continue to study this, we discover that those who follow after Satan or who are identified with Satan are all the unsaved.

In Acts 26:16-18, God emphasized that Satan has authority over the unsaved. In this context, as God sends Paul forth to declare the Gospel to the world, God instructs him:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power [*authority*] of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

In this very important passage, the phrase “**the power of Satan,**” indicates the authority of Satan. We learn from this verse that those who are unsaved, who are still identified with Satan’s dominion, are under the authority of Satan. We will find that this is very important information as we continue in our study.

In II Corinthians 11, God further tells us how Satan works. Wouldn't it be nice if Satan showed himself as a devil with a red suit and a forked tail so we could

know quickly that it was Satan? But God indicates that Satan is the father of lies, and therefore, we dare say that he is the master deceiver. He is very much a deceiver, and he operates in a very deceptive way. We read in II Corinthians 11:14:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

This, too, is an exceedingly important statement because it shows us how Satan operates. He does not come appearing as a wicked person, as he does, for example, in the non-church world of the drug culture, the red light district of a city, and in the wicked hearts of heathen people who know nothing about the Gospel. Oh, yes, Satan works there, too. But in this verse, we read that Satan works within the local congregation. He comes as an angel of light, that is, as a messenger of the Gospel. Christ is the light of the world, and Christ is the messenger of light. But Satan is the master counterfeiter, and he comes as an angel of light so that unbelievers cannot discern that he is Satan. He looks very much like Christ.

*Satan can neutralize them by coming into them
as an angel of light.*

Then this passage describes how he operates in the local congregations. Please, bear in mind, this is what has been going on throughout the church age because it is part of the warfare, or it is the way in which Satan fights against Christ as he seeks to overcome Christ. Satan cannot frustrate the Gospel from saving God's elect, but he can try to completely neutralize the local congregations, which are the external representation of Christ's kingdom. Satan can neutralize them by coming into them as an angel of light.

How Does Satan Fight

The question is: How does he do this? He is a spirit being. But God shows us how he does this. The Bible declares in verse 13 of II Corinthians 11:

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

In this verse, Christ is speaking about preachers and elders and deacons who look very holy, very decent, very moral, very much like they really love the Lord Jesus. In their own minds, they are completely convinced that they are faithfully serving the Lord Jesus. But they are false. Furthermore, God says in II Corinthians 11, verse 15:

Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers [*Satan's ministers*] also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Isn't that something? Those ministers, who serve Satan within the local congregations, appear to be ministers of righteousness. How frightening!

Now we can understand why we read in Ephesians Chapter 6 that true Christians are to put on the whole armor of God so that they can withstand the wiles of the devil. God's true people must have the protection of the Gospel and the protection of Christ. Any time they stray away from the authority of the Bible and they begin to trust men, they are putting themselves in the position to be snared by Satan.

Speaking about those who have been snared, we read in II Timothy 2:26:

And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

This verse is teaching that there are those who have been snared according to the will of Satan. He wants people to be under his authority. But this verse also carries the hope that there is the possibility of being made free from the fact that an individual has been snared. The only way anyone can become free is to become truly saved.

This kind of activity is anticipated in I Timothy 4:1, also, where we read:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

God is warning us in the Scriptures, and we don't normally take enough notice of these warnings, that Satan is very active in the local congregations, trying to frustrate God's plan. He can't keep the elect of God from becoming saved, God will not allow him to frustrate that plan. But insofar as the local congregation, as a divine institution utilized by God to be the caretaker of the Gospel and to faithfully declare the Gospel to the world, Satan has been warring within it. Satan has been constantly attempting to neutralize local churches by filling them with his own ministers of righteousness. How terrible this is!

Satan has been constantly attempting to neutralize local churches by filling them with his own ministers of righteousness.

Given the fact that these ministers of righteousness, and all those in the congregation who have been snared by Satan, look virtually identical to the true believers, we can see how it is impossible to separate the wheat from the tares. Therefore, we understand that Satan can be very successful. In fact, that's why we read that the church at Sardis, which was only a few decades old, already was a dead church. Revelation 3:1 says:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

This passage emphasizes that already, Satan had caused most of the people of that congregation to be under his authority.

Remember earlier we learned that those who are not saved are under the authority of Satan. Concerning this church at Sardis, we read in Revelation 3, verse 4:

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

This indicates that a few true believers were still there. Now we can begin to see how Satan sows the seed of the tares. He does so by bringing in leadership that looks like messengers of righteousness and preachers of righteousness, and then he snares those in the congregation by enticing them to trust the doctrines of men rather than the Bible alone. They are brought under Satan's authority rather than Christ's authority.

Small wonder then that we read in Revelation 2:9 that the church in Smyrna, which was only a few decades into the church age, already had within it those who were in the synagogue (assembly) of Satan. We read there:

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

In like manner, the church in Pergamos had within it those who held the doctrines of Balaam (a wicked prophet of the Old Testament) and the teachings of the Nicolaitans, which God hated. Therefore, God declared in Revelation 2:13:

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

This congregation dwelt where the seat of Satan was. That is, to some degree, Satan was already ruling in that young church. We will examine this concept more carefully later in this study. In Revelation 2:24, God says:

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

This verse implies that some in that congregation also already had identified with Satan.

As we study these references given to us in Revelation 2, we are learning that just a few decades after the church age had begun, already Satan was sowing tares in the local churches.

The Transition to Satan's Sole Rule

Therefore, we can see why the Bible says in II Thessalonians 2 that the man of sin, who can be shown to be Satan, took his seat in the temple at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. This is teaching that he rules in the local congregations. It isn't as if at the end of the church age there had to be a great change. There was very little to indicate any change had taken place because the local congregations were already so infiltrated with Satan's ministers (who appeared as ministers of righteousness) that any difference in true spiritual character was indiscernible. True, in one sense there was a great change. At the beginning of the Great Tribulation, Christ abandoned the local congregations. We read about this change in several places in the Bible. One citation is II Thessalonians 2:7, where God says:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [*restraineth*] will let [*restrain*], until he be taken out of the way.

In this verse, the one who restrains Satan is the Holy Spirit, and actually, the phrase, "**be taken out of the way,**" would be better translated, according to the Greek language, as, "**taken out of the midst.**"

We have learned that throughout the church age, it was God's plan that the Holy Spirit be active in the churches to restrain Satan so that he could not prevent the Gospel from saving the elect who heard the Words of the Bible. Satan cannot frustrate that activity. But, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit was taken out of the midst, thus, there is no one to restrain Satan. Moreover, God commands the true believers, if they have not already been driven out of the churches, to come out of the churches (Matthew 24:15-16, Luke 21:20-21, Revelation 18:4). Therefore, Satan has a totally free hand to do his will within the congregations.

. . . long before the end of the church age, perhaps a great majority of the people in a congregation were not saved.

We should remember that long before the end of the church age, perhaps a great majority of the people in a congregation were not saved. They were already under the snare of Satan because Satan has been sowing his tares during the entire church era, and so, they were already under his authority. But at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the true believers had been driven out and they have been commanded to come out. Moreover, God the Holy Spirit is no longer in the midst because He has abandoned the local church. So, that leaves the whole local congregation under Satan's authority.

Satan Becomes the King of the Local Churches

Now we can understand the language that the man of sin will take his seat in the temple. Satan has complete control of the local congregation. Some

congregations gave complete control to him many, many years ago. They have become false gospels. They have developed an authority other than the Bible alone and in its entirety. However, even in those congregations in times past, as long as the Bible was still utilized within that congregation, there was the possibility of someone becoming saved. This was true even though perhaps the total membership was already under the authority of Satan. But once the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the congregations, that meant that every congregation throughout the whole world is now under the authority of Satan. Satan is in authority even though the pastor may believe that he is preaching faithful messages of the Bible.

Of course, we have to ask the next logical question. Isn't it true that if a believer truly loves the Lord, if he truly is a child of God, then he will have an intense desire to do the will of God? But what if a pastor, an elder, a deacon, or a fine member of a congregation thinks he is a child of God and believes he is a child of God, and yet, he will not obey God's command to come out of the congregation? If he is not trembling before the Word of God, can he really be a child of God? We will address these very serious questions later in this study.

We now can begin to understand that throughout the church age, Satan has been very active in the local congregations as an adversary of God.

Throughout the church age, Satan has been very active in the local congregations as an adversary of God.

We surely would think and even dare to assume that as a result of God's action in separating the wheat from the tares in the congregation throughout this end-time period, by the time the Day of Judgment comes, only tares will be left in the congregation.

As we continue our study of this very significant parable, we should address some other important phrases that are a part of this parable.

Chapter 3

While Men Slept

There is another statement made in the parable of the wheat and the tares that we should look at very carefully. We read in Matthew 13:25:

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

What does “**while men slept**” mean? Obviously, in this context, God is talking about the development of the New Testament church during which Satan somehow was able to sow tares amongst the wheat. So, how can we understand the phrase, “**while men slept**”?

It is true that in many places in the Bible, the idea of “sleeping” is associated with death. However, in this reference, death is not in view. Rather, God has a time in view when He has not opened spiritual eyes. We read, for example, in Isaiah 29:10-12:

For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it *is* sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

In this passage, God is teaching that if God does not open our “eyes” to the revelation that has been placed in the Bible, then it is like the “book” is “sealed” or it is like we are still sleeping.

We get the same idea when we look at Daniel 8:18-19:

Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end *shall be*.

Here again, before knowledge is given to Daniel, God uses the figure of him being in a deep sleep.

Do you recall that in Daniel 12:9, God told Daniel and us, also:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

In other words, the idea of the book being “sealed” is the idea that truth is written in the Bible but there is a time for God to reveal to the readers what He has written. God has a timetable for revealing various aspects of truth of the Bible.

God even uses the idea of sleeping in connection with Himself as He develops His divine program. We read in Psalm 78:65-66:

Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.

Therefore, the idea of awakening from sleep is frequently used in the Bible to indicate that it is time for God’s program to advance. He has carefully written about His entire program in the Bible, but the ability to know what is taught is unavailable until the time comes for God to awaken us from sleep. Then He opens spiritual eyes, and many recognize what God’s plan is.

Incidentally, this is the same figure that is used in Matthew 25 where the Bible speaks of the ten virgins. While they were sleeping, the shout came that the bridegroom was coming and they awakened. It goes on to indicate what followed. There again, it indicates that throughout the church age, and the local churches are represented by the ten virgins, there were many things in the Bible that were not known. Then the time comes when it is God’s good plan to open spiritual eyes so that those He enlightens can recognize more fully what God’s plan is. Most often, this is in connection with His return at the end of time.

. . . all through the church age God has not revealed to the local congregations the enormous war that has been going on between Satan and the local congregations.

Thus, we see a tremendous truth here, namely, that all through the church age, God did not reveal to the local congregations the enormous war that was going on between Satan and the local congregations, or Satan and Christ, who was represented in the local congregations. All through the church age, Satan was considered a defeated foe. As long as we tried to be as faithful as possible to the Word of God, we believed that the local congregation was not going to be seriously troubled by Satan. Confessing members were considered to be true representatives of the kingdom of God. If they had been baptized in water, made confession of faith, promised to obey the confessions of the church, and lead decent moral lives, we believed they must truly have become saved.

We Are Awakened

However, now that we are right near the end, many are awakening from sleep, that is, God is opening spiritual eyes to teach some of the things that have previously been sealed. One gigantic truth being discovered is that all through the

church age, Satan was waging an intense war within the congregations. So intense is his attack that already, at the very beginning, as we learned from Revelation 2 and 3, Satan was sowing his tares in the churches. Because he comes as an angel of light and his ministers as ministers of righteousness, he was able to occupy the church increasingly throughout the church age.

*Now that we are right near the end, we are
awakening from our sleep.*

The local churches did not clearly recognize this and were unaware of Satan's very serious attacks on the local congregations. I am not aware of any theologians of the past who have clearly seen this. They have seen Satan as an enemy. Certainly, Martin Luther saw Satan as a fierce foe who brought great persecution to the true believers. However, neither he nor any theologians or Bible teachers of the past saw it in the way that is being seen now.

In fact, if theologians had seen the truth of Satan's attack on the church during the church age, chaos could easily have resulted. Church overseers, aware that Satan could be infiltrating their local congregation by bringing in leaders who were ministers of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:14-15), would have been suspicious of each and every pastor, each and every elder, etc. There would have been a constant, ongoing witch hunt.

Thus, true servants of God (wheat) would have been cast out of the churches along with some of the tares. God underscores this by the language of Matthew 13:29:

But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

Thus, the wheat and the tares had to remain until the end of the church age. This truth is presently coming to light as God opens spiritual eyes to these truths.

We must remember that anyone who is not elect of God is not a saved person and he will never become saved. But that does not mean he cannot be a very decent, moral person. For example, people in other religions and people who believe in a false gospel, which obviously is a false gospel because its authority is other than the Bible alone, can be decent people. Most of the members of the false churches are decent, moral, upright people who give every appearance of belonging to the kingdom of God. Can it be that these fine upstanding people are still in Satan's kingdom? The answer must be, Yes!

There are only two spiritual kingdoms in the world. One is the kingdom of God, and its citizens are only those who are truly saved. Each and every other person in the world is a citizen of Satan's kingdom. It is true that if an individual in Satan's kingdom is one of God's elect, in time, God will save that person, and he will be taken out of Satan's kingdom and become a citizen of God's kingdom.

Satan Sows the Tares and Departs

We have been learning that all through the time of the church age, Satan was busy sowing tares in the local congregations. However, we immediately have more questions. Can we know more clearly, even though he is free to do this, how he is able to do this? Why does it say in Matthew 13:25 that he does this and then goes his way? We should try to answer these questions.

We will begin by analyzing the nature and desires of mankind. We humans were created in the image of God. This means that we have a basic understanding that there is a God to whom we must answer. In fact, God's law, the Bible, teaches us that God's laws, to some degree, are written on the hearts of mankind. That is, intuitively, all men know it is wrong to murder, to steal, and to commit adultery. The consequence of this intuitive knowledge of God is man's desire to be involved in some kind of religion that recognizes a higher being and permits him to worship this higher being.

Therefore, throughout the history of mankind, men have identified with some kind of worship activity. In some cases, it was a religion centered on a wood or stone idol, such as we see in the Buddhist religion, or some other religion, such as Islam or Taoism, in which they thought they had found their solution, or it may have been a religion that identified with the Bible, such as Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition, a great many people identified with the Christian religion, which we knew as the local congregations that believe that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God.

*What prompts an individual to become part
of a particular religion?*

The question is, what prompts an individual to become part of a particular religion? Why did he choose to become a Buddhist, a Mormon, a Seventh-Day Adventist or a Baptist? Only the individual can answer that question. His upbringing, his family ties, his social environment, his own perceived understanding of the value of that particular religion, all may enter into his choice.

True, in connection with the Christian religion, many joined a local congregation because they actually became saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they knew they should become a member of a local congregation that is as faithful as possible to the Bible. Ideally, these were the only persons who should have become members.

However, there are many unsaved individuals, who for a variety of reasons (including some of those named above), have a desire to become part of the Christian religion, just as many of his contemporaries develop desires to become a part of the Mormon religion, the Christian Science religion, or the Buddhist religion. True, as an integral part of the Christian religion, he becomes acquainted with the Bible and he does hear the Gospel. However, unless he is one of God's elect, he will never become saved. Nevertheless, when he follows the rules of the church he joins, such as being baptized in water and making confession of faith, he is assured that he is a genuinely

saved member of that local church. The rules of baptism and confession of faith, etc., are certainly in accordance with Bible truth.

Furthermore, we must consider that each person has been given certain abilities by God. We see this in a secular world. One person may be born with great musical talent and another with great talent to become an engineer. Each individual, therefore, frequently will try to utilize these talents to provide the greatest advantage to himself. Likewise, included amongst those who join any given religion, there will be those who have a basic natural talent or desire to be a leader in that religion. He, therefore, aspires to be a theologian, a pastor, a priest, or an evangelist. This situation prevails in every religion of the world. The same situation has prevailed in the local congregations that believe the Bible is the only Word of God. Men and women have come into these churches and then aspired to have significant leadership positions.

Many times, however, these individuals were not saved, and they began to bring heresy into the congregation. This was already occurring within the seven churches named in the first two chapters of the Book of Revelation. The Nicolaitans, who must have followed an unsaved man named Nicolas, were already in leadership positions. There was Jezebel an unsaved woman in the church of Thyatira. These individuals were exposed by God who knows the hearts of mankind.

Ordinarily, individuals who aspire to these leadership positions in the local congregations do not come with any malice in their thinking. Rather, they are looking at that local congregation as simply a place where they can exercise their particular professional talents. For example, in the secular world, a man with engineering talents strives to be the best engineer possible. He has become a part of the profession of engineering. Another individual enters into the legal profession and becomes an excellent attorney. Another enters into the medical profession and becomes a fine doctor.

*There are those who wish to enter into the profession
of preaching or the profession of theology.*

Likewise, there are those who wish to enter into the profession of preaching or the profession of theology. But these pastors and theologians may not understand that preaching and teaching the Bible is not a profession in the sense the word “profession” is used in the secular world. The preacher is to be a very humble servant of Christ, humbly ministering to the spiritual needs of the congregation. He should be an outstanding example of piety and humility to the flock as he ministers the Word and prays for the congregation.

We must remember that God formed the institution of the local churches as the external representation of the kingdom of God. But the local churches can be just as attractive to unsaved people as religions that obviously have no connection with the kingdom of God. Therefore, we can fully expect that even as unsaved people enter the false religions, amongst them there will be those who see an opportunity in the church to exercise their preaching or leadership talent, so this will happen in the local churches for which we have a concern.

True, if a man comes into a local congregation and endeavors to crudely change the rules of the church, and he brings in doctrines contrary to those held by the congregation, he may be summarily excommunicated. But the difficulty lies in the fact that those who wish to make maximum use of their leadership talents, and who will faithfully teach the doctrines of the church, also can come into the congregation, and yet, they are not saved. And because they are not saved, they are still under the authority of Satan.

Therefore, as emissaries of Satan, they come into the congregation and appear to be “**ministers of righteousness**,” according to II Corinthians 11:14-15. Remember that Satan is the father of lies. He does his best work by giving an unsaved man a desire to enter into the local congregation. This man in his own mind will be fully convinced he is serving Christ.

. . . the wheat and tares are virtually indistinguishable.

We have learned that the wheat and the tares are virtually indistinguishable. Therefore, the members of the church cannot know that this man is not a saved man. Moreover, he is a decent, moral individual with a great many professional talents that appear to make him a great asset to the work of the church. He may be charming, intelligent, a superior Bible scholar, and an excellent speaker. But, without himself or the congregation realizing it, he is an emissary of Satan because he is still an unsaved man. Even though the church is ruled over by God, this individual is still under the authority of Satan because he is unsaved.

We see this already in the church of Pergamos in Revelation 2:15, where we read that the Nicolaitans were very active. We know that Satan cannot take over the congregation because God is ruling there. But, he can have some authority. Therefore, in connection with the church of Pergamos, God speaks about Satan taking his seat. That is, Satan, to some degree, is ruling there. Obviously, he is ruling because there are unsaved individuals living under his authority who are his emissaries. That, in turn, gives Satan some ruling power.

Satan Departs

Matthew 13:25 tells us that after this tare (weed) is brought into the congregation, Satan goes away. That is, he departs. He departs because God is ruling that congregation. But Satan has accomplished much in his warfare against Christ. He has succeeded in bringing his “minister of righteousness” into that congregation.

We must remember that this “minister of righteousness,” who became a member of this congregation, is not at all aware of what true salvation is. He has never experienced it. Neither does he fear and tremble before God. He does not clearly recognize that the Bible is the divine authority that structures and determines what ought to be taught in this church. He, therefore, is ready to embrace doctrines or practices that are somewhat contrary to the Word of God. These doctrines or practices already may have gained some foothold in other churches of his denomination.

Furthermore, because of his position as pastor, deacon, or elder, he has been appointed to have the spiritual oversight of this congregation. In his spiritual oversight, he may not be sensitive to the Biblical requirements for other church leaders, such as elders and deacons. However, because of his position in the church and his apparent leadership capabilities, he may greatly influence the selection of those who eventually become fellow deacons and elders. And so, as time goes on, an increasing number of tares are brought into leadership positions within this congregation.

At the same time, the membership of that church will also reflect the spiritual condition of leadership. More and more members will be allowed in who actually have no experiential knowledge of salvation.

However, as long as they adhere to the basic rules for membership, each member is looked upon as a genuinely saved member. Remember, the basic rules that apply to those who are considered to have become saved, normally include the following.

1. A decent moral lifestyle.
2. Water baptism.
3. Confession of faith.
4. Promise to obey and uphold the doctrines of the church.
5. Reasonable attendance at worship services.

We must understand that none of these things, in themselves, prove that a person has been saved even though they are Biblical practices derived from the Bible and condoned by the Bible.

Such virtues as true humility and a deep concern for the truth of the Bible are frequently not considered in acceptance of church members.

But if most of the leadership are not saved, it will be even more difficult for them to bring in members who are truly saved. They, themselves, have never experienced salvation. Therefore, the above basic rules become the sole criteria for membership. Such virtues as true humility and a deep concern for the truth of the Bible are frequently not considered in acceptance of church members.

Now we can begin to understand the terrible condition that prevails in many local churches. Pastors may excel in their leadership position because this is their profession, much like an attorney will excel as an attorney because he is part of the legal profession. Therefore, the church leader, in his effort to show his colleagues and his denomination his professional abilities, can be an outstanding pastor. But it does not mean for a moment that this proves that he has become saved. In too many instances, known only to God, these individuals are not at all humble shepherds who fear God and tremble before Him.

On the one hand, the true pastors, who love the Lord and are definitely saved and fear God and tremble before Him, are constantly and deeply concerned that each doctrine they teach is as true to the Bible as possible. On the other hand, those who

are not saved, but for whom preaching is a profession, are concerned about their acceptance and approval by their fellow pastors and their denomination. So, they follow their church confessions.

We should not be surprised at the awful indictment God makes concerning the shepherds who should be caretakers of the flocks. This indictment focuses on the local congregations in this time in history. We read about this in Ezekiel 34. What terrible language we find there. God tells us in Ezekiel 34:2-6:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: *but* ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up *that which* was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because *there is* no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek *after* them.

What terrible language is recorded in these verses.

If Satan can fill a local congregation with people who appear to be saved but are not saved, then that church will be a very ineffective means of building the kingdom of God.

We can now increasingly see Satan's plan as he, the adversary of Christ, opposes Christ. If Satan can fill a local congregation with people who appear to be saved but are not saved, then that church will be a very ineffective means of building the kingdom of God. If he can put unsaved people (who may believe they are saved), in the spiritual leadership positions of the church, he can more effectively neutralize that church as a vehicle of God to reach the world for Christ.

Mystery of Iniquity Already Working

Now we can understand II Thessalonians 2:7, which reads:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will* let, until he be taken out of the way.

Satan's assault on the local churches, as he planted tares in them throughout the church age, was not understood by the true believers or by anyone else. It was a mystery. In fact, any truth of the Bible remains a mystery until God reveals it. We

have repeatedly learned that God has a well-defined timetable for revealing truth. Each truth of the Bible is revealed to God's people in accordance with God's timetable. The mystery was the fact that even though Satan was bound for a period of time, represented by a thousand years, the entire duration of the church age, he could and would still wage war on the churches by sowing tares among the wheat. This phenomenon was not at all understood by the churches. This iniquitous, wicked activity was going on right under the noses of the church overseers, but they were hardly aware of it. II Thessalonians 2, verse 7, declares that this was going on right from the beginning of the church age. It was a mystery, and therefore, it was not recognized by the early church fathers nor by anyone at any time during the church age.

The Tares in the Congregation

Those in the congregation who are under the authority of Satan are not at all sensitive to God's commands.

Those in the congregation who are under the authority of Satan are not at all sensitive to God's commands. They may be earnestly trying to follow the dictates of their denomination because that is what they promised to do when they became a member. But they have no inner compulsion to carefully check out what they are taught by searching the Bible. And when they hear that doctrines are being taught on Family Radio, for example, that the seventh-day Sabbath was a ceremonial law, and that water baptism and the Lord's Supper were ceremonial laws, they have no desire to investigate these things in the Bible. This is because in their unsaved condition, they do not tremble before the Word of God.

Likewise, when they hear that there are those who are teaching that the church age has come to an end and the true believers are to forsake their local congregation, their reaction can range from total indifference to livid anger. In any event, it will not cause uneasiness in their soul because they are still under Satan's authority. Their soul is still spiritually dead so that there is no part of their personality that desires to obey any and all the commandments of God.

However, the true believers in the congregation are increasingly disturbed by the changes they see in their own church and in many other denominations. They are wondering how these changes could happen. They, therefore, begin searching the Bible for answers. In many instances, they feel compelled in their soul to leave their congregation or they may be driven out because they are asking too many embarrassing questions. This is happening throughout the Christian world. Unfortunately, the tares appear to vastly outnumber the wheat, and so ordinarily, those who are spiritually troubled appear to be a very small percentage of the whole.

Present Church Parallels Israel

We should be surprised and dismayed as we receive this unhappy dismal information. However, as we are learning about this, we must realize that the

situation in the local churches of our day is very parallel to that which existed in Israel in the days of Jesus. Remember that for almost 1500 years, national Israel had been appointed by God to be the caretaker of the Word of God. No other people in the world were as intimately associated with God as was Israel. In fact, God used holy men of Israel to write the Bible as the Holy Spirit moved them. And the Lord Jesus our Messiah came from the nation of Israel.

. . . the situation in the local churches of our day is very parallel to that which existed in Israel in the days of Jesus.

Nevertheless, as God neared the time when He would shift from the institution of the nation of Israel being the caretaker of the Bible to the church age, Jesus had very ugly things to say about national Israel. For example, in Matthew 23:27-29 and 33, Jesus had this to say of the religious rulers:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, . . . *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

In John 8:43-45, Jesus had these terrible words to say of the Jews:

Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not.

We must remember that the Pharisees were the Bible teachers in the temple and the synagogue. The scribes were the theologians. These men were the spiritual rulers of the congregations of Israel. They, together with a great many of the congregation (the nation of Israel), appeared to be very holy, devout, decent, moral, righteous citizens of God's kingdom. Judas, too, who betrayed Jesus, looked very much like the other apostles but Jesus called him a devil (John 6:70). We have no information that the eleven truly saved apostles thought of Judas as being unsaved.

Unfortunately, that is the situation that prevails at the present time in the local churches. Wonderful, decent, moral, upright people lead the congregations as pastors, elders, and deacons. And the congregations themselves consist of equally decent, morally upright people.

The question is, and it is a tremendously serious question: Are these individuals wheat or tares? As we are learning in this study, we cannot know. However, as we go on in this study we will learn that there is a divine mechanism by which God is presently separating the wheat from the tares.

We can now understand more easily the assertion of II Thessalonians 2:3 that the time would come that the man of sin (Satan) would take his seat (rule) in the temple (the local congregations). For many years, Satan has been filling the churches with his servants who are called “**ministers of righteousness**” (II Corinthians 11:15), therefore, as the true believers are driven out, and indeed, commanded to come out, the congregation will consist only of those who are servants of Satan. Then, because the Holy Spirit is no longer present to restrain Satan, Satan will indeed be ruling in that congregation as an angel of light. The local church will have become like the church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1) except that there will not even be a few true believers left in the church. The church has become dead.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, we will examine one more very important question. How will the separation of the wheat and the tares be brought about? God had made no provision, He had provided no mechanism, to accomplish this at any time throughout the church age. Somehow, it is to be accomplished during the time of the Great Tribulation. But how will it be accomplished?

The Wheat and the Tares are Separated

To answer this question, we must consider the nature of the Gospel that is sent into all of the world. In II Corinthians 2:14-16, God declares:

Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

These verses teach us that as the true believers send forth the Gospel there will be those who come to spiritual life, but there are others who come further under the wrath of God. In Hebrews 4:12 God speaks of the Word of God as a two-edged sword. We get the picture that it cuts one way to bring salvation but it also cuts to damn people to destruction.

Throughout the church age, the focus of the Gospel was on salvation and building the external representation of the temple of God, which consists of all the local congregations. We are taught by the Bible that in that temple there would be true believers typified by the language “**gold, silver, and precious stones**” (I Corinthians 3:11). They are equivalent to the wheat spoken of in the parable of the wheat and the tares. God recognized that in that same temple there were also the “**wood, hay, and stubble**” (I Corinthians 3:11). They are equivalent to the tares spoken of in the parable we are studying.

We have learned that the timing of the end of the church age coincides with the beginning of the Great Tribulation. However, after the end of the church there still must be the final harvest.

Throughout the church age there were those who truly became saved, and they became citizens of the eternal, invisible church that will never come to an end.

Throughout the church age there were those who truly became saved, and they became citizens of the eternal, invisible church that will never come to an end.

In fact, even though the church age (the age of the external visible church), has come to an end, God is still adding to the invisible eternal church as a great multitude which no man can number is becoming saved during the present time of the Great Tribulation.

As we learned in the book “The End of the Church Age and After,” the reapers who are sent forth in this final harvest, which takes place during the second part of the Great Tribulation, will not be sent out by the local congregations. They will be saved individuals outside of the churches who will be harvesting a great multitude which no man can number (Revelation 7:9).

The Gospel they send forth should be much more faithful to the Bible than that offered throughout the church age. However, there will be one major change in the context of the Gospel being sent forth. During the church age, a focus of the Gospel was identified with the building of the local congregations. During the church age, believers were, if possible, to be a member of a local congregation.

But in this last harvest, the Gospel that is being presented has been focused on teaching that the church age has come to an end and that God’s judgment is on the local churches. God is no longer saving people in the churches.

If the true believers have not already been driven out of the local congregations, they are to come out. The church spiritually has become Babylon. Regardless of how faithfully a pastor may preach, the Holy Spirit is no longer working in the churches to apply the Word of God to the hearts of the hearers so that they might become saved.

It is this situation and this command by God that is the means by which the separation of the wheat and tares is accomplished.

The Reapers Gather the Tares

In Matthew 13:30, we read another phrase that we must deal with as we carefully study the parable of the wheat and the tares. We read there:

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

We should examine the phrase, “**in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares.**” We have already learned in our study that the reapers are the true believers as they send forth the Gospel.

How is it that God can say they are to gather the tares and bind them into bundles? Isn’t that the work of God?

In answer to that question, we must remember that as God sends out the Gospel, it is true that God the Holy Spirit does all the work. He does the work of bringing people to salvation. Furthermore, the Gospel does the work of bringing further judgment upon those who do not become saved. Yet, as we read the Bible, God uses language from time to time to show that the true believers, as they are in the business of obeying God by sending forth the Gospel, are almost spoken of as if they themselves are doing the saving.

God identifies the true believers very closely with what the work of the Gospel is doing.

We must remember that God is not saying we do the saving. But, because we have been assigned the task of sending forth the Gospel, we are obediently doing so. It is that Gospel that does the spiritual work. However, God identifies the true believers very closely with what the work of the Gospel is doing.

For example, God speaks about these reapers in John 4:36, where we read:

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

We have already understood the reapers to be the true believers as they faithfully send forth the Gospel. The reapers are busy bringing in the harvest as they faithfully share the Gospel and people are being saved. In so doing, God is saying they are gathering fruit unto eternal life. The harvest of believers is the fruit that is gathered.

We read, for example, in Matthew 12:30:

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

This verse is saying that as God is busy doing His work of gathering people, either into salvation or into judgment, He uses language that those who are sending forth the Gospel are gathering with Him as they proclaim the Gospel. Therefore, in similar fashion as true believers publish abroad that the church age has ended they are gathering the tares together. This teaching that the church age has ended is an integral part of the Gospel that God works through to accomplish this gathering.

They, too, must understand the time that we are living in, and in so doing, Christ with us is gathering the tares to be burned.

As God's true believers faithfully declare this to the world, the churches which are the local congregations, also hear this. They, too, must understand the time that we are living in, and in so doing, Christ with us is gathering the tares to be burned. This is the meaning of Matthew 13, verse 30, that says the reapers are to gather tares together and bind them in bundles in preparation for burning.

In the Book of Jeremiah, God is focusing on the end of church age and God's judgment on the churches. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is used as a prime example of that judgment. In that setting, God declares, for example, in Jeremiah 5:15-17, and 20:

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. . . . Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, . . .

Jeremiah 4:16-17 further commands:

Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field, are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the LORD.

This same command is echoed in Revelation 14:6-7:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

As we learned earlier in this study, throughout the church age, an integral part of the Gospel declaration was the command to become a member of a local congregation. It was there that individuals could become baptized in water. It was there that they could observe the Lord's Supper. It was there that they were under the spiritual oversight of the overseers of the congregation. Only in the event of serious sin was anyone excommunicated from the congregation. Those who became members were to be regarded as having become truly saved, having become truly born again.

However, we also learned that no one could absolutely know which of the members were already saved. This is so because no one can look into the heart or soul of an individual. Only God can do that.

It is in the time of the latter rain, when the final harvest is brought in, that God has provided the mechanism by which the wheat and the tares can be separated.

However, it is in the time of the latter rain, when the final harvest is brought in, that God has provided the mechanism by which the wheat and the tares can be

separated. He does this by first of all giving the information that once the Great Tribulation has begun within the local congregations, the Holy Spirit is no longer applying the Word of God to the hearts of those who are under the hearing of church preaching. As we read in II Thessalonians 2:7:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [*restraineth*] will let [*restrain*] until he be taken out of the way [*the midst*].

The Holy Spirit was in the midst of the congregation throughout the church age to restrain Satan from frustrating God's purpose to save. The Holy Spirit applies God's Word to the lives of those whom God has chosen to become saved. Moreover, during the Great Tribulation, the man of sin, who can be shown to be Satan, has taken his seat (that is, he rules) in the temple (the local congregation).

These solemn declarations are to be published throughout the world and to the churches as we are commanded in Jeremiah 5 and Revelation 14. During the time of the Great Tribulation, the local churches have become spiritually Babylon because Satan who is the king of spiritual Babylon has made the local congregations his palace, the seat of his government. Because he comes as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14), and as the father of lies (John 8:44), members of local churches believe they are worshiping Christ but in actuality, they are worshiping Satan.

God's Command to Come out of the Local Church

Therefore, an integral and important part of the Gospel that is to be sent forth during the time of the final harvest is the command that if they have not already been driven out of the church, they are to come out of the local churches, which God now calls "Babylon." We read this in the following passages.

Matthew 24:15: When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

Luke 21:20-21: And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

Revelation 18:4: And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

Jeremiah 12:7: I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

Jeremiah 51:6: **Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence.**

It is this command to come out of the local churches that is to be published throughout the world.

It is this command to come out of the local churches that is to be published throughout the world. It is the mechanism by which God is separating the wheat from the tares. True, many true believers are driven from the churches. Perhaps when they were members of churches they insisted too strongly that there should be greater fidelity to the Word of God. They are typified by the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who have been killed by the churches.

But the true believers who remain within the churches are to come out. They are to come out because God's judgment has fallen on each and every church wherever it may be located throughout the world. Furthermore, they are to come out because they still have the task of presenting the true Gospel to the whole world as the final harvest is brought in.

They, as well as the great multitude who are saved during the time of the latter rain, which is occurring during the last part of the Great Tribulation, are to publish in all the world that the church age is finished and God is bringing in the final harvest as the true Gospel is proclaimed by saved individuals. And the true Gospel includes the serious declaration, the command that the true believers are to come out of the churches.

It is by this means that the wheat is being separated from the tares. Those who are true believers within the local churches had been given a new resurrected soul at the time they became saved. In their new resurrected soul, they never want to sin. They have come to love the Bible as the voice of God, and they live out their life in fear and trembling before God (Philippians 2:12-13). Therefore, when they see the spiritual decay within their churches and also begin to hear that the Bible addresses this problem, they have a great desire to know God's will concerning these matters. While they may have great respect for their church and their pastor, they have a much greater respect for the Bible, which they know is the ultimate and final authority.

And so, in their uneasiness about these matters, they will read and study the Bible very carefully and pray that God will give them wisdom. In the Bible, they will discover that they have been commanded to leave their local church.

Of course, there will be those who forsake the congregation who are not true believers. They may use the teaching of the end of the church age as an alibi for their disobedience within the churches during the time when the local churches were still the holy place wherein the Holy Spirit was saving people. However, by coming out of the churches, they have placed themselves in an environment where God is saving people as the true Gospel is sent forth into all the world by individuals. Therefore, there is still the possibility that they might become saved.

First Bind the Tares

As we continue our study of the wheat and tares parable, some questions remain concerning the proper understanding of Matthew 13:30, where we read:

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

How are we to understand the sequence that the tares are to be first gathered and bound to be cast into the fire and then the wheat will be brought into the barn? Moreover, what does this verse mean when it teaches that the tares will be bound into bundles?

Judgment First Comes to the Local Church

The sequence of events can readily be understood if we remember the principle that at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, God brings judgment on the local congregations, where the wheat and the tares have coexisted throughout the church age. The wheat (the true believers) who are driven out and/or commanded to come out of the churches will continue to exist in the world until the last day. They are the invisible eternal church that can never be destroyed.

The gathering of all of this wheat into the barn must identify with the last day when the harvesting will have been completed.

In fact, a great additional harvest of wheat will be taking place because it is during the last part of the tribulation that the final harvest of believers is taking place. It is during this time that the final additions to God's invisible eternal church is taking place. The gathering of all of this wheat into the barn must identify with the last day when the harvesting will be completed. When Christ returns for His elect, the wheat will be gathered into the barn. That is, all true believers will be caught up to be with Christ in the air and be given their eternal resurrected bodies.

However, during the Great Tribulation, there is activity going on within the local churches where the tares are found. We have learned that the tares are church members who have not become saved. Therefore, their spiritual eyes have not been opened to the reality of the end of the age of the local congregations. They do not want to obey God's command to believers to come out of these churches. Thus, they will resist, they will argue that the time has not come to obey this command, they will argue that this command is not reasonable, etc.

It is at this time that God will begin to bind them to prepare them for the final destruction.

God Sends Them a Strong Delusion

The Bible teaches that there are at least two ways in which God will bind them. The first way is that they will be given a strong delusion. The second way is that they will be given ears that cannot hear the truth.

The strong delusion is spoken of in II Thessalonians 2:11. The context of this chapter is the time when the man of sin (Satan) has taken his seat (he rules) in the temple (in the local congregations). II Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of Satan coming with signs and lying wonders, and then we read in verse 10:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

II Thessalonians 2, verses 11 and 12 then warn:

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

They are easily deluded and believe a lie because they are citizens of the kingdom of Satan. For example, because they are deluded, they easily fall for the snares of Satan, such as signs and wonders, and tongues etc.

God Closes Their Ears and Blinds Them

The second warning that is given is in the language of Jeremiah 5:21:

Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

It is further amplified in Acts 28:26-27:

Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

In this context, it can be shown that Paul is a picture of or represents the believers who have been driven out of the churches at the end of the church age. The leaders of the Jews, in this context, can be shown to represent those who remain in the local congregations at the end of the church age. They have heard that God has shifted from the age when God used local churches as the caretakers of the Bible to the time of the latter rain, when God is using individuals to evangelize the world.

These Jewish leaders wanted to listen to Paul's words but they showed a prejudice against him. Acts 28, verse 22, reports:

But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

However, Paul, who was one of the finest theologians of that day, diligently taught what he had learned. Acts 28, verse 23, explains:

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

Paul shared the truths he had been preaching with these Jewish leaders and because it was God's Word that Paul was teaching, one would expect the Jewish leaders to be very interested and troubled by the things they were learning. But that did not happen.

The conclusion of their meeting with Paul is summed up in Acts 28:29, where we read:

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

Thus, the Bible teaches they applied their own thinking to determine the reasonableness of the truths Paul had brought them. They were not at all ready to accept God's Word and obey it. The consequence of their unreadiness or unwillingness to accept these truths and be obedient to them is given in the words of Acts 28:25-28:

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

These verses teach that they had ears that cannot hear and eyes that cannot see.

Actually, these verses in Acts 28 introduce us to a terrible truth. In the historical setting, these verses are addressed to the leaders of the Jews who lived in Rome, and these Jews faced the fact that God shifted from using the synagogues and temple or national Israel as the caretaker of the Bible to the utilization of local congregations as they would exist throughout the church age. As we have seen, in the spiritual application, the Jewish leaders are representative of the members of the local churches during the Great Tribulation.

Therefore, we see a very definite parallel and an equal spiritual condition in the local congregations at the end of the church age and in national Israel at the end of the time God used the nation of Israel as the caretaker of the Gospel. Thus, we should look a bit more carefully at the spiritual condition of national Israel from the time God shifted to the church age and all the way to the present day.

In Matthew 13, Jesus explains why He spoke in parables as He preached to the people of Israel. Matthew 13:15 declares:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Please note that this verse is essentially the same as Acts 28:25-28. We cannot miss the identical teaching in both passages even though in the first instance, Matthew 13:15 was speaking directly to the nation of Israel while Acts 28:25-28 was stated shortly after the church age had begun. Acts 28:25-28 is anticipating the condition that will exist in the local congregations at the time of the end of the church age. Therefore, we should determine what else God has to say of national Israel, particularly as it relates to Israel at the time God finished using them as caretaker of the Gospel.

Romans 11 is an especially helpful part of the Bible in connection with the question we are examining. The whole chapter speaks of the spiritual condition that existed in national Israel a few decades after God made the shift to the church age. The chapter opens with the question: Has God cast away His people? The context shows that national Israel is in view. The answer comes very clearly in Romans 11, verse 5, where God says:

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

This verse speaks of a remnant and we read the solemn declaration of Romans 11, verses 7 and 8, where God says:

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

These verses teach that except for a remnant of the people who became saved, the rest were blinded. Immediately, two very important truths should be noted. First, the language that declares that the rest were blinded agrees with the language we examined a bit earlier in Matthew 13:14-15, where God warned in this prophecy that, **“By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.”**

The second important truth we must immediately recognize is that only a remnant would remain faithful. A remnant is a tiny part of the whole. God uses the illustration in Romans 11:4 of the 7,000 that remained faithful during the time of Elijah. At that time, the nation could have had perhaps one to two million people in it. Seven thousand is less than one percent of one million. We must understand that a remnant is a very tiny part of the whole.

As we continue to look at the nation of Israel, we read the prophecy in Romans 11:25 that this blindness would continue until the end of the world. That verse declares:

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Two facts in this verse should be observed. The first is that the phrase “**the fulness of the Gentiles [the nations] be come in,**” points to the end of salvation. It teaches that blindness in part will remain on national Israel as long as one individual remains in the whole world who still must be saved. When the last one of God’s elect is saved, we know that the harvest will be completed. Thus, we know that this blindness of the people of national Israel will continue until the end of the world.

The second truth we should note is that this verse declares that a part of national Israel will be in blindness. That means that there is also a part of national Israel that will be true believers. At the time Romans 11 was penned, these believers were spoken of as a remnant. God gives the example of the 7,000, which was less than one per cent of the population of the nation of Israel in Elijah’s day. How big is the remnant at the time the last of the nations are being saved? The Bible does not answer that in a clear way. However, because we live very near the end of time, we can readily understand that it is still a very tiny remnant of the whole nation of Israel. Today, the percentage of people of Jewish descent who have become true believers in Christ is a very tiny number. However, these true believers are not members of the Jewish synagogues. They are outside of these synagogues.

However, these true believers are not members of the Jewish synagogues.

This brings us to a very terrible, a very unhappy conclusion. Remember that God uses virtually identical language as He prophesied concerning the blindness that came on national Israel and the blindness that will come on those who remain in the local churches during the time of the Great Tribulation. This blindness directly relates to the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares will be bound in bundles as God prepares them for the Day of Judgment. God binds them by blinding them as He has done to national Israel. A further contribution to that blinding is the fact that God gives them a strong delusion so that they become very susceptible to the lies of those who trust their churches rather than the Bible.

The parallel nature of the shift from national Israel to the time of the church age and the shift from the church age to the time of the latter rain, when God assigned the task of the care taking of the Gospel to individuals rather than the institution of the church, makes us strongly suspect that the blindness of those in the churches will be as great as the blindness of those in the synagogues during the days of the apostles and which continues in the synagogues today. If that is true, it means that when the end comes, virtually all local congregations will have changed very little from the way they are today. Virtually none will disband as a whole congregation. The membership will not believe the truth that God is no longer present in their congregation.

Moreover, we suspect that only a tiny percentage of those in the present congregations will finally see the truth and come out of their church as God has commanded. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the prognostications of this paragraph should prove to be altogether wrong and a sizable percentage of the people do come out? How marvelous that would be! However, it is sadly likely that the spiritual condition of local congregations today is at best similar to that which existed in the church at Sardis (Revelation 3). It was a dead church even though it still had a few true believers in it.

God Will Not Save Any Longer

When we examine the verses, Matthew 13:15 and Acts 28:25-28, a bit longer, we read something that should startle and frighten us. We read in Matthew 13:15:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

These verses are from Isaiah 6:9-10, which gives further explanation. There we read:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

These verses are teaching that it is God who is closing the heart, the ears, and the eyes of the hearers of the Gospel, lest they become saved.

These verses are teaching us that it is God who is closing the heart, and the ears, and the eyes of the hearers of the Gospel, lest they become saved.

How can this be? The purpose of the Gospel is to save people. But these verses declare that there will be a time when God will deliberately close the ears and eyes of those who hear the Gospel so that the hearers cannot become saved.

Now we can understand these verses. There are two areas of the world in which this ominous warning has become a fact. The first area is the synagogues of the Jewish nation. During the time Jesus and the apostles preached in them, very few people became saved, and the situation continues to today. The synagogue leaders do not want Christ as their Savior.

The second area where these verses apply even more forcibly is in the local churches at the end of the church age. God sends them a strong delusion. That is, God is deliberately preventing anyone from becoming saved. No longer is there any grace and mercy within these churches. How awful! How terrible! This flies in the face of everything the Gospel is. We send the Gospel into the world so that people might become saved but now, because God's righteous judgment has fallen upon the local congregations, salvation is not possible within them. The situation is serious because it is all over the world, and when Jesus comes to destroy the world, then, too, there will be no mercy. There will be no more salvation possible.

We have learned that there cannot be salvation within the local churches because the Holy Spirit is no longer in the midst of the congregation to apply the Word of God to the hearts of the elect. This reminds us of the verses in Ezekiel 22:30-31:

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

The context shows that "the land" that God has in view is the local congregations. The only man who can prevent God from destroying that land is Jesus Christ. But the verse ominously declares, "I found none." Therefore, verse 31 continues by speaking of God's judgment falling on their heads.

Now we can see how God binds the tares to prepare them for burning. The warning is clear. In these days, God commands the true believers (the wheat) to flee from the local churches. Those who are not true believers (the tares) will argue against it. In the process, if they are not God's elect, God will intrude into their lives by making it impossible for them to understand the terrible danger they are in as they insist on remaining within the churches. Hearing they shall not hear. Their spiritual eyes will be closed. The fact is that God will delude them to make them believe the lies of those who insist that all is well in the local church.

From the vantage point of being able to look back on the history of the churches and denominations, we know of one situation in a great many churches that greatly facilitates God's terrible judgment of blinding the eyes and deluding the minds of theologians and Bible teachers. We will look at this situation and see how it relates to the Biblical teaching that we have come to the end of the church age and we are now commanded to leave the local church.

Bible Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics is the science of Bible interpretation.

Every seminary and every denomination utilizes a teaching method called Biblical hermeneutics. Biblical hermeneutics is the science of Bible interpretation, that is, rules have been established to guide the reader of the Bible to properly understand what God is saying to him as he reads the Bible.

As we look back on the early theologians of the church age, something of great significance surfaces. One of the earliest theologians of the church age was a man named Origen who was born in the year A.D. 185. He was a Bible teacher in the town of his birth, Alexandria, and then later, he established a Bible school in Caesarea. In the 1959 edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a church historian writes that Origen was “the most distinguished and most influential of all the theologians of the ancient church, with the possible exception of Augustine.” This church historian calls special attention to Origen’s teaching of Bible interpretation or Bible hermeneutics, and says that Origen “distinguishes a three fold sense of Scripture, a grammatical-historical, a moral, and a pneumatic (spiritual), the last being the proper and highest sense.”

Origen “distinguishes a three fold sense of Scripture, a grammatical-historical, a moral, and a pneumatic (spiritual), the last being the proper and highest sense.”

The historical record shows that Origen taught some doctrines that were not as Biblical as they should have been. But in the matter of Bible interpretation, it appears that he was entirely correct. These very same principles of interpretation have been taught by Family Radio during the past several decades (see “First Principles of Bible Study”), even though Family Radio was completely unaware of Origen’s teachings.

Great Care Must Be Exercised

The hermeneutical principle that was taught by Origen and presently is used by Family Radio requires great care to avoid conclusions that are unbiblical. The first level, the grammatical-historical teaching, is usually self evident. The second level, the moral teaching, may not be as easily seen but the finding of this level of understanding does not readily produce conclusions contrary to the Bible’s teaching.

It is the third level, the spiritual, that can produce serious non-Biblical results.

It is the third level, the spiritual, that can produce serious non-Biblical results. As we study the Bible, we find that several rules must be followed carefully to avoid making a shambles of the most important intent of the Scriptures. When we search the Bible, we learn to keep at least three very important principles in mind as we try to discover the spiritual meaning of metaphors, allegories, similes, and parables. These three principles are as follows.

1. The third level, the spiritual meaning, must relate to the Gospel. We cannot look at the Biblical historical account and try to identify it with political nations or any past or present secular phenomenon. The spiritual meaning must identify with some aspect of God's Gospel program that is discussed in the Bible.

2. When the Bible gives an account of an historical situation, the spiritual meaning of words and phrases employed in that Biblical account must be derived from the Bible.

3. The spiritual conclusions derived from an historical account in the Bible must be in agreement with everything else the Bible teaches concerning God's salvation program. If we arrive at a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible concerning God's Gospel program, then immediately, we know that we have not correctly understood the spiritual meaning of the passage.

We have learned that the whole Bible and every part of the Bible is teaching something about Christ and His wonderful plan of salvation. Thus, the whole Bible and every part of it is a spiritual book. That is why we read in I Corinthians 2:13:

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

As we have indicated, the search for the spiritual or Gospel meaning of any verse can be very difficult. It requires a great understanding of some teachings of the Bible. It requires searching through the Bible for many, many hours. It requires constant prayer that the Holy Spirit will help us and open our eyes to truth. It requires a total commitment to the principle that each and every word in the original languages of the Bible were the very words that God had made a part of His Bible message. Thus, each and every word and phrase in the Bible must be considered important.

God Shows Us How He Wrote The Bible

The basis for the above method of Bible interpretation is found in the Bible itself. We know from passages such as Jeremiah 36:2 and II Samuel 23:1-2 that every word of the Bible comes from the mouth of God. Jeremiah 36:2 declares:

Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all

the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.

II Samuel 23:1-2 declares:

Now these *be* the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man *who was* raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word *was* in my tongue.

We learn from verses such as Matthew 13:34-35 that Jesus constantly utilized parables when He taught. We read there:

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

Simply stated, a parable, which also may be called a metaphor or an allegory, is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. We must remember that the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1).

*. . . we can be sure that everything written in the Bible
is the Word of Christ.*

Since the Bible is the Word of God and Christ is the Word of God, we can be sure that everything written in the Bible is the Word of Christ.

Therefore, when the Bible says, “**without a parable spake he not unto them,**” we can be certain that the whole Bible is presented to us with a great number of absolutely trustworthy historical facts, but until we find the Gospel meaning hidden within these historical facts, we have not begun to receive the rich spiritual blessings that are inherent in every part of the Bible.

It is for these reasons that we can know that in the days of Origen, at least in the teaching of the proper method of Bible interpretation, they had come to truth.

The Bible Hermeneutic Is Abused

However, the church historical record shows that early on, serious abuses of this method of Bible interpretation began to occur. By the time of Augustine, who came on the scene about 200 years after Origen and who was a prominent bishop in the Roman Catholic Church, the spiritual understanding of Bible phrases was being warped to correspond with the desires of the church. It was no longer possible to obtain a true understanding of the Bible.

Apparently during the following millennium, until the days of the Reformation, the understanding of proper Bible interpretation continued to degenerate. This degeneration coincided with the massive abuses that had become an integral part of the church and which set the stage for the Reformation.

The Printing Press

About the year 1455, beginning with the Gutenberg Bible, it became possible to print Bibles. Prior to that time, all Bibles were handwritten. Therefore, they were exceedingly rare and very expensive. Moreover, most people were illiterate. Usually, only a church or a seminary possessed a Bible.

The beginning of printing was probably the most significant event that brought about the Reformation.

However, the invention of the printing press changed all that. Soon it was possible for increasing numbers of people to possess and read Bibles for themselves. They no longer could be deceived by church leaders who until that time had control over what was taught, and so they taught what they wished to teach about God and His salvation plan. Thus, the beginning of printing was probably the most significant event that brought about the Reformation. Increasing numbers of people could read the Bible and thus became aware of the spiritual abuses of the churches. Great abuses in doctrine and in practice became evident to many people.

At the same time, God raised up men like Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Knox, and others who dared to fault the established church. Because increasing numbers of people were able to own and read a Bible, the teachings of these Reformers were understood and applauded by many more people.

We must remember the Biblical principle that God gives in Romans 10:17:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The increasing numbers of Bibles available in the various languages of Europe brought about a great spiritual awakening throughout that part of the world. Many people now had access to Bibles that had been translated and printed in their native languages. Thus, the invention of the printing press was probably the single greatest means that God used to bring about the Reformation.

. . . it was during this time that many of the Confessions of the Protestant churches were written.

At the same time, men like Calvin and Luther, etc., began to strenuously object to the massive abuses that characterized the church of that day. As a result of the printing press, their complaints could be distributed and read widely.

Furthermore, they began to publish more correct teachings concerning Bible truth. Thus, it was during this time that many of the Confessions of the Protestant churches were written. For example, at this time the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, the Westminster Confession, and the Baptist Confession were written. These Confessions greatly assisted the local churches and denominations in their return to a more Biblical understanding of the truth of God's Word.

However, already in the Confessions that were written at this period of history, contradictions began to appear. For example, the two New Testament ceremonial laws, water baptism and the Lord's Supper, were called sacraments, and statements were made that the observance of these ceremonial laws brought spiritual merit. It was not understood that they were ceremonial laws. It was taught that water baptism sealed the participant into the covenant. It was taught that faith that God gave the prospective believer was the instrument God worked through to bring that person to salvation.

These contradictions have persisted to the present day so that every church now tends to preach a gospel that is not based on the Biblical truth that only God can save a person and no human can make the slightest contribution to his salvation.

But now let us return to Origen and his teaching of Bible interpretation. Remember we saw that he was exceedingly Biblical when he taught that everything in the Bible had within it a spiritual meaning. Remember, too, that early on, his teaching was seriously corrupted by the church so that by the time of the Reformation, the church's teaching of Bible interpretation needed careful correction.

Seeds of Death Are Sown

Amazingly, as the task of correcting the abuses of the church was undertaken, the conclusions adopted by the Reformers became the seeds of death for the church. Instead of realizing the Biblical correctness of Origen's position on Bible interpretation and carefully fine tuning the Biblical rules to protect it, they threw away everything he taught and developed a Biblical hermeneutic that was completely unbiblical.

. . . we therefore should see Christ on every page of the Bible.

The church theologians did not understand that the Bible has one central message that permeates every page of the Bible. The central message of the Bible is God's Gospel plan of salvation. Since Christ is central to this plan, we therefore should see Christ on every page of the Bible. That is, every historical account in the Bible is an absolutely true and trustworthy fact of history and must be understood as the Word of God in which some aspect of the Gospel was hidden.

Instead, beginning with Calvin and Luther and continuing through the years following the Reformation, they came up with the principle of literal interpretation. In the book *Things to Come*, the author Dr. Dwight Pentecost offers a quote of one commonly held definition of "literal interpretation." It is as follows.

A rule to guide us as to when to interpret literally and when figuratively has been carefully stated by Cooper. He says:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.

*This might well become the axiom of the interpreter.¹
Pentecost further states:*

The foundations of the Reformation were laid in the return to the literal method of interpretation.

In the Reformation period itself two great names stand out as exponents of the truths of Scripture: Luther and Calvin. Both of these are marked by their strong insistences on the literal method of interpretation.²

Quoting another church historian, Pentecost declares:

Concerning Calvin's contribution Schaff writes:

Calvin is the founder of the grammatico-historical exegesis. He affirmed and carried out the sound hermeneutical principle that the Biblical authors, like all sensible writers, wished to convey to their readers one definite thought in words which they could understand. A passage may have a literal or a figurative sense; but cannot have two senses at once. The word of God is inexhaustible and applicable to all times, but there is a difference between explanation and application, and application must be consistent with explanation.³

According to the literal method of interpretation, which is also called the "grammatico-historical" method of interpretation, the single truth we can learn from the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, which we read in John 11, is that God recorded the historical fact that a dead man was raised, thus showing that Christ had power to raise a person from physical death to physical life. In that case, we dare not see in this miracle the teaching that even as God did all the work to give physical life to Lazarus, He does all the work to save spiritually dead people. Thus, the literal method of interpretation of this passage essentially empties it of its Gospel intent and content.

¹ David L. Cooper, "The God of Israel" (Los Angeles: The Biblical Research Society, 1945), p. III.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1964), p. 27.

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church II* (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1884), cited by Hospers, p. 521.

. . . the literal method of interpretation of this passage essentially empties it of its Gospel intent and content.

Is the Bible Perspicuous?

As a function of the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation, the principle of the perspicuity of the Bible is also maintained.

Pentecost quotes another church historian as follows:

Luther also maintained the perspicuity of Scripture. . . . He sometimes came near to the modern remark that “the Bible is to be interpreted like any other book.”⁴

The word “perspicuity” means “clearly expressed, or lucid.” Unfortunately, the concept of the perspicuity of Scripture, which is very commonly taught in our day, is completely contrary to the Bible. For example, we read that the jailor of Philippi was told in Acts 16, verse 31:

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, . . .

This command seems so easy to understand. But when we look at this command carefully, we realize that it can be understood only when we examine it in the light of a host of other Scripture verses that teach that we are spiritually dead and cannot of ourselves believe on Jesus. The fact is that the only way we can believe on Him is if God has already saved us. Thus, this seemingly lucid Bible statement is not at all perspicuous.

Perhaps the teaching of the perspicuity of the Bible is fostered by the idea that to become saved, we must understand why we need salvation and how we can become saved. Thus, God must have written the Bible so that the reader can easily understand these concepts.

However, it is very significant that when God described the path to salvation in Romans 10:17, He did not say, “faith cometh by understanding and understanding by the Word of God.” Had God said that, a very young child or an individual with the mental faculty of a two-year-old could never become saved. Rather, the emphasis is on hearing the Word of God, and He says in Romans 10:17:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

An unsaved person may be physically deaf or mentally impaired when he is under the hearing of the Bible, but if he is one of God’s elect, at an appropriate time,

⁴ From F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1886), pp. 325-330.

God will give him spiritual ears as He applies that Word of God to his life and gives him an eternal resurrected soul. This is true for the baby as well as for the highly intelligent mature person. Before he was saved, he could have had some understanding or no understanding of the Bible. However, after salvation, as the Holy Spirit further opens the mind of the saved person, if he is mentally capable, he will increasingly understand the Bible.

Not Church Doctrine

When we look more carefully at the truth that the Bible is not at all easy to understand, we can begin to understand why God could use the institution of the local churches in such a successful way to accomplish His goal of saving the elect who are scattered throughout the world. Given the fact that so many denominations have so many doctrines that are not faithful to the Bible, how is it that as they sent missionaries into the world, so many people gave evidence that they probably had become saved?

Remember the principle, “**faith cometh by hearing.**” The Bible does not say, “faith cometh by understanding.” Many churches and missionaries have taught some wrong doctrine. But they did desire that individuals in the congregations and in the mission fields own and read a Bible in their native language. This means that an organization like the Gideons, whose goal is to place Bibles wherever possible, has been an excellent contributor to God’s Gospel program. This means that the Wycliffe Bible Translators, who want to provide the Bible in every language of the world, has been greatly used of the Lord in the evangelization of the world. This means that the various Bible societies that God has raised up have experienced great blessings. And this is the focus of the ministry of Family Radio. We must use our every effort to encourage people all over the world to read the Bible.

Once God has saved a person, God has given him spiritual ears to hear and God has applied the Word of God to his life, so that person is eternally secure. This is so even though he may have become a member of a church that has some non-Biblical teachings. However, because he was given a new resurrected soul at the moment of salvation, he will become increasingly uncomfortable in the church as he learns from the Bible that there are errors in their teaching. And today, we are discovering serious errors in the teaching of churches, errors that result from their exceedingly unbiblical method of interpretation.

. . . a diligent search is required to discover the truths of the Bible.

Also, as we have seen, the widely held teaching that the Bible is perspicuous (easy to understand), is causing true believers great dismay. The true believers increasingly realize that a diligent search is required to discover the truths of the Bible. The immediate apparent truth that is seen in a verse may not be truth at all when it is viewed in the light of the rest of the Bible.

Who Is the Author?

The consequence of the faulty hermeneutics that is characteristic of most local churches may be seen in another way. A very distinguished and highly regarded theologian named Louis Berkhof is quoted by Dwight Pentecost in his book *Things to Come*. For many years, Dr. Berkhof was the President and Professor of Apologetics of the very conservative and reformed Calvin Theological Seminary. The quotation is as follows.

1. Basic Assumptions for Historical Interpretation.

- a. The Word of God originated in a historical way, and therefore, can be understood only in the light of history.
- b. A word is never fully understood until it is apprehended as a living word, i.e., as it originated in the soul of the author.
- c. It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background.
- d. The place, the time, the circumstances, and the prevailing view of the world and of life in general, will naturally color the writings that are produced under those conditions of time, place, and circumstances.

2. Demands on the Exegete. In view of these presuppositions, historical interpretation makes the following demands on the exegete:

- a. He must seek to know the author whose work he would explain: his parentage, his character and temperament, his intellectual, moral, and religious characteristics, as well as the external circumstances of his life . . .
- b. It will be incumbent on him to reconstruct, as far as possible, from the historical data at hand, and with the aid of historical hypotheses, the environment in which the particular writings under consideration originated; in other words, the author's world. He will have to inform himself respecting the physical features of the land where the books were written, and regarding the character and history, the customs, morals and religion of the people among whom or for whom they were composed.
- c. He will find it to be of the utmost importance that he consider the various influences which determined more directly the character of the writings under consideration, such as: the original readers, the purpose which the author had in mind, the author's age, his frame of mind, and the special circumstances under which he composed his book.

d. Moreover, he will have to transfer himself mentally into the first century A. D., and into Oriental conditions. He must place himself on the standpoint of the author, and seek to enter into his very soul, until he, as it were, lives his life and thinks his thoughts. This means that he will have to guard carefully against the rather common mistake of transferring the author to the present day and making him speak the language of the twentieth century. . . .⁵

It would appear that Dr. Berkhof did not understand that the sole author of the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. It would appear that he could not have understood that the Bible is God's law book for the whole human race. It would appear that he could not have understood that every word in the original languages of the Bible was carefully crafted by God. It would appear that he could not have understood that we are to be in fear and trembling as we study the Bible and realize that God had great purpose for each and every Word of the Bible. It would appear that he could not have understood that even as Jesus spoke in parables in the New Testament, He also spoke in parables in the Old Testament.

Just think! These kinds of things that were taught by Dr. Berkhof are the kinds of things that are being taught in seminaries of our day. No wonder pastors are unable to correctly understand many parts of the Bible.

We must diligently study anything and everything in the Bible until we come to spiritual truth. For example, if we read the Book of Ruth as a true historical statement but without seeing the Gospel message hidden in every verse, we seriously empty that book of the Bible of its intent and content.

The Sad Consequence

Now that we have briefly offered these examples of the post-Reformation understanding of Bible interpretation, let us return to the awful consequence of what the Reformers did. I am afraid that in their zealous attempt to remedy the bad hermeneutics that apparently existed in the church before the time of the Reformation, they threw the baby out with the bath water, to use a figure of speech. That is, instead of understanding the sound method of hermeneutics that had existed in the early church during the time of Origen, they brought in the totally unbiblical hermeneutic that they called the historical-grammatical literal hermeneutic. In so doing, they effectively locked the door to a correct understanding of many Scripture verses and then they threw away the key.

The problem is greatly magnified when we realize that the kind of Bible interpretation taught by Dr. Pentecost and the kind of attitude toward the Bible expressed by Dr. Berkhof is typical of what a great many pastors have learned in their seminary.

⁵ From Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), pp. 13 ff.

Jesus Spoke in Parables

Now we can more fully understand the implications of the language of Matthew 13 that addresses the subject of parables. Jesus declares in Matthew 13 that he spoke in parables so that as a consequence, many would not be able to understand but the parables would assist the true believers in their understanding of truth.

In Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked Jesus, “**Why speakest thou unto them in parables?**”

In Matthew 13:34-35, God tells us:

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

Thus, Jesus was constantly teaching by means of parables. The New Testament gives several examples of this.

Jesus answered the disciples’ question about the fact that He spoke in parables in Matthew Chapter 13, verses 11 to 14, where we read:

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

From studying these verses we understand that the use of parables was one method God used in the Bible to bring spiritual truth to the true believers. However, at the same time, the parables blind those who are not true believers.

As we learned earlier, the whole Bible is the Word of Christ. At times, God gives examples of His teaching method in which the employment of parables is very important.

For example, Jesus declares in Matthew 13:44:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

In Galatians 4:22-31, God speaks of Hagar, who bore Ishmael of Abraham, as a picture of Mount Sinai, which in turn represents the Jerusalem that is still in spiritual bondage.

In the case of the Book of Proverbs, God gave the name “proverbs” to this book. The Hebrew word for “proverbs” is frequently also translated “parables.” Thus, we are to look for the spiritual or Gospel meaning in every verse of the Book of Proverbs because every verse is written as a parable or a metaphor.

We read in Psalm 78:1-2:

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:

We should also understand that each and every ceremonial law that governed blood sacrifices, burnt offerings, the seventh-day Sabbath, and so on, were like parables or allegories. In each case, the physical act pointed to some aspect of God’s Gospel program.

These and many other examples are given in the Bible to illustrate the way God wrote the Bible. In each Biblical example of a parable or a simile, God gives the heavenly or spiritual meaning, and this meaning is always some aspect of God’s Gospel program.

Thus, we can be certain that the method of Bible interpretation taught by Origen and also by Family Radio is completely Biblical.

These Signs Will Follow Them that Believe

An excellent illustration that indicates the complete Biblical validity of the requirement that we find the spiritual or the Gospel meaning of every Bible statement is seen in Mark 16:17-18, where we read:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Theologians who seek an understanding of these verses by the grammatical-historical literal method of interpretation have concluded that these verses were fulfilled as the apostles were empowered by God to heal the sick and cast out devils.

In II Corinthians 12:12, we read:

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Additionally, when Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Melita, while he gathered sticks for a fire, a viper fastened onto his hand. He shook it into the fire and he was not harmed. Now this is looked upon as a fulfillment of Mark 16:18, that they shall pick up serpents.

The problem with the conclusion of these theologians is that it does not agree with the prophecy of Mark 16:17, which declares that “**these signs shall follow them that believe.**” The Bible does not declare that these signs will follow the

apostles. Rather, it says these signs will follow those who believe, that is, these signs will be in evidence wherever true believers are found.

However, unless we understand the principle set forth in this study, which is derived from Mark Chapter 4 and Matthew Chapter 13, that Christ spoke in parables, and without a parable He did not speak unto them, then we have no way of understanding these verses. The fact is that many doubt that a good part of Mark Chapter 16 belongs in the Holy Canon. It is easy to sympathize with them if we expect verses 17 and 18 to be understood as literal truth. But there is no possibility of making sense of these verses if they are to be understood literally as they stand.

When we discover the spiritual meaning hidden within these five signs that follow believers, we not only find harmony with the rest of the Bible, but also we can know that only God could have written these verses. Indeed, we can be certain that, without question, these verses are an integral part of the Holy Canon.

The first sign that will follow those who believe is that in Christ's "**name shall they cast out devils.**" This is a figure that points to those who will become saved when the Gospel is sent forth by the believers. All the unsaved are in Satan's dominion. When the elect become saved, it is as if devils have been cast out of them, that is, they are no longer under the power of Satan. They have been translated into the kingdom of Christ. The miracle that people are saved from Satan's power takes place wherever the Gospel is proclaimed by believers. Indeed, this sign always follows "those who believe."

The second sign that follows believers is that they shall speak with new tongues. The spiritual meaning of this figure is found in the fact that each nation has its own language. The language spoken by the unsaved (regardless of political language), is that of the dominion of Satan. The language of the true believers is that of the kingdom of God. Even if the same English or German or French words are used in both kingdoms, the language by the believer is different from that of the unbeliever. The words may be the same, but their meanings and applications to the speaker will be quite different.

We are reminded of the Old Testament prophecy of Psalm 40:3, where we read:

And he hath put a new song in my mouth, . . .

And in Psalm 98:1 we read:

O sing unto the LORD a new song; . . .

Indeed, wherever true believers are found, we find them speaking with new tongues.

The third sign that will follow those who believe is that they will take up serpents. In the Bible, the serpent typifies Satan (Revelation 12:9). Before people are saved, they are under Satan's power, and he rules over them, but when individuals become saved, they rule over him. To use the figure of Mark 16, verse 18, they are like the snake handler who takes up the snake. Wherever true believers are found, there will be those who rule over Satan as they plunder his house of those who are being saved.

The fourth sign that follows those who believe is “**if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.**” When a person becomes saved, he or she drink the pure water of the Gospel. To listen to a false gospel is to drink poison.

For example, in Deuteronomy 32:32-33, God faults ancient Israel for their idol worship by declaring:

For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.

However, true believers cannot lose their salvation. Therefore, if they should drink poison by listening to a false gospel, they will not lose their salvation. This principle is true wherever true believers are found.

The fifth sign that follows those who believe is “**they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.**” Spiritually, when believers share the Gospel with others, they are ministering to those who are spiritually ill. The Gospel, when applied by the Holy Spirit through the means of the witnessing of believers, brings spiritual healing. God says in I Peter 2:24b-2:25a:

. . . by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray . . .

Thus, we see that these five signs literally follow all who believe, but we must understand them in their spiritual dimension. When we apply the Biblical principle that Christ spoke in parables, we can come to this beautiful understanding of these verses, and we have certain vindication that this principle must be seriously considered wherever the Bible gives historical information that in itself does not relate to the Gospel message.

These two verses of Mark 16 thus are dramatic evidence that we must have the correct understanding of Biblical interpretation if we are to find Gospel truth throughout the Bible. Without the correct method, many parts of the Bible will remain sealed and the Gospel message within them can never be understood.

The Time Has Come for God to Reveal Many of These Hidden Truths

We are now in the time spoken of in Daniel 12:9 where God declared:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

*. . . we have been enabled by the mercy of God
to understand many Biblical truths concerning the end
of the church age . . .*

This verse assures us that many truths heretofore hidden in the Bible are now being revealed. But because God’s method of teaching is by parables, God continues

to hide these additional truths from those who do not understand God's teaching method which constantly utilizes parables. On the other hand, those who understand God's use of parables are being greatly helped in understanding new truths as God takes the seals off the truths that He now wishes us to understand.

This brings us to the reality of the present day. By understanding that we must seek to discover the spiritual teaching of any and every part of the Bible, we have been enabled by the mercy of God to understand many Biblical truths concerning the end of the church age, God's present judgment on the local churches, the latter rain which identifies with the final harvest, and God's command to forsake the local congregation. Because our understanding of these spiritual truths is accurate, we find great harmony and cohesiveness in verse after verse throughout the Bible.

However, for those who have been taught to trust only in the literal grammatical-historical system of interpretation, the door to truth has been locked. They are unable to understand anything the Bible teaches about the end of the church age. Unfortunately, virtually every pastor and every Bible teacher who has been seminary trained has been carefully taught to despise the hermeneutic of Origen and to trust only in the grammatical-historical, literal method of interpretation. That is why they consistently complain that those who teach that the church age has ended are spiritualizing. They are correct in their allegation because that is the way God wrote the Bible. But sadly, they remain completely ignorant of God's teachings concerning these extremely important subjects.

We thus can see how God, utilizing individual true believers who faithfully bring the whole counsel of God, will first bind the tares, and then on the return of Christ, which will be the time when the final harvest is completed, the wheat will be brought into the barn.

This is One of the Final Tests

This command of God that true believers are to come out of the churches is the final tests.

This command of God that true believers are to come out of the churches is one of the final tests. True believers have an intense desire to be obedient to God and do His will, and therefore, eventually, they will come out of the churches. They are the wheat that will be gathered into the barn. That is, they are in complete safety because they are eternal citizens of the kingdom of God. The evidence of their salvation is their intense desire to be obedient to all of God's commands.

On the other hand, the tares are those who are under the judgment of God. The tares, that is the unsaved, will be increasingly convinced that they are in safety as they remain in the local churches. They have not received a new resurrected soul, therefore, they do not fear and tremble before the Word of God. Rather, they carelessly continue trusting that they and their church have done all that was necessary to assure their salvation. In reality, they are being bound. They will be included with those we read about in Matthew 7:21-23, where Christ says:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The Final Harvesting of the Wheat

In Revelation 14:14-16, God describes the final harvest when the wheat is separated from the tares:

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

We have learned that the word “harvest” identifies with those who become saved. At the moment they receive their new resurrected soul, they have been harvested. The Son of man (Christ) is in charge of this harvest as His body, the true believers, send the Gospel into all the world. This harvesting will go on until the last day. Each individual who has been harvested (saved) will be added to the eternal invisible church which is the kingdom of God. As we have learned, it is during this harvest time that the wheat is separated from the tares.

At the end of this harvest, the wheat is brought into the barn (that is, their salvation is completed), and they receive their new resurrected spiritual bodies. But simultaneously, the final day of judgment occurs.

Revelation 14:18-20 warns:

And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.

This is the day when the tares will be burned. This is the day of judgment when not only the tares but all the nations will drink the cup of God’s wrath, as we read in Jeremiah 25:15-16:

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee,

to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.

How awful that the tares who have been left in the local churches will come into this dreadful experience.

How awful that the tares who have been left in the local churches will come into this dreadful experience.

As we have studied the parable of the wheat and the tares, we have come to understand far more clearly the true spiritual situation in the local churches at the end of the church age. We have known already for years that many denominations that may have begun as reasonably faithful to the Bible have long since come under Satan's authority. Any church that has an authority that is different from the Bible alone and in its entirety must be considered a false church. This includes any church that believes in tongues, visions, signs, wonders, or that God can speak through their church fathers. This is so because God warns in Revelation 22:18-19:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

These verses clearly teach that those who have an authority that is wider or narrower than the Bible are under the judgment of God (subject to these plagues). Since they are not saved, they are under the authority of Satan. Thus, Satan rules those churches even though, as we learned earlier in this study, during the church age a person could still become saved in such a church. Of course, that person would not have remained in that false church. In time, he would have tried to find a more faithful church.

But what about all the churches in this day that insist that the infallible Bible is the only Word of God. They will have nothing to do with signs and wonders, visions, tongues etc. Surely they must be essentially filled with true believers.

We would like to believe that. And as we have learned, throughout the church age, that is what was believed.

But now the test is in place. God's command is being declared. The true believers are to come out of the churches. They are to come out of Babylon. The true believers in these churches tremble at the Word of God. They were given a new resurrected soul at the time they were saved, so they have an ongoing, intense desire to be obedient to God's Word. Therefore, they will become increasingly uneasy as they increasingly learn from the Bible about the Great Tribulation and the end of the church age. Finally, they will come out of their local congregation because they want to be altogether obedient to God's commands.

Unfortunately, even though many of the most conservative churches have already heard much about the end of the church age, very few are leaving those churches. Is it possible that these Bible-believing, orthodox, conservative churches are in actuality highly populated by unsaved members -- unsaved members who have experienced water baptism, made confession of faith, and are communicant members of the church who apparently live godly, moral, decent lives? Is it possible that they trust in their church and its doctrines and confessions as the final authority rather than in the Bible?

*Is it possible that these Bible-believing, orthodox,
conservative churches are in actuality highly populated
by unsaved members?*

It is indeed frightening to think that this may be the true spiritual condition of virtually all churches today. As we learned earlier, Satan was already beginning to be successful near the beginning of the seven churches on display in Revelation 2 and 3. Why shouldn't he be increasingly successful as time moves on? Thus, by our day, seminaries and whole denominations may have come under the leadership of unsaved men who have a form of godliness but who have not experienced salvation. What ugly, terrible, awful possibilities! If that is the true spiritual condition of the churches that we thought were most faithful to the Bible, then we can readily understand the terrible language God uses as He indicts the local churches of our day in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many other places in the Bible.

A few examples of the utterly serious nature of this matter are given in the following passages of the Bible.

Jeremiah 5:23: But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.

Jeremiah 5:26-27: For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.

Jeremiah 6:14-15: They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 7:24: But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

The number of these sample verses can be multiplied hundreds of times. They truly describe how God looks upon local churches as increasingly, they become filled with Satan's **"preachers of righteousness."**

We should be in shock as we learn how Satan has been waging war against the body of Christ throughout the time of the church age.

We should be in shock as we learn how Satan has been waging war against the body of Christ throughout the time of the church age. It should frighten us to the core of our being to even consider the possibility that a great many trusted theologians, Bible teachers, pastors, elders, and deacons may have been under the authority of Satan. Yet, as we have seen, that was precisely the situation in the temple and in the synagogues at the time of the apostles. Those priests and Pharisees were just as moral, decent, and as apparently godly as a great many church leaders of our day.

Moreover, another frightening possibility that should occur to every member of a local church is this: "If tares and wheat are virtually indistinguishable, how can I be sure I am not included in the tares? I know it is certain that unsaved church members are just as much under the wrath of God as the most wicked people of the world." This question must be asked because the teaching of the Bible clearly indicates that this is the condition of the local congregations throughout the church age.

These are enormously serious questions. In fact, another question arises. "How can I know for certain that my pastor, my favorite Bible teacher is truly saved?" If he is not saved, he is still under the authority of Satan, and so actually, he is one of Satan's **"ministers of righteousness,"** described in II Corinthians 11. This indeed is a frightening situation.

It does not appear that anyone in the church world could have had any idea of the seriousness of this problem. They could not have known because God Himself teaches that throughout the church age, the wheat and the tares were virtually indistinguishable. Verses such as II Corinthians 11:15, which speaks of Satan's ministers as ministers of righteousness, and Hebrews 6:4-6, where God speaks of unsaved people as having been partakers of the Holy Spirit and having been enlightened, tell us why the wheat and the tares could not be recognized for what they really are.

For certain this tells us that water baptism, confession of faith, church membership, etc., are absolutely no guarantees of true salvation.

For certain this tells us that water baptism, confession of faith, church membership, etc., are absolutely no guarantees of true salvation. We know that

belonging to a church that appears to be altogether faithful to the Bible is no guarantee and faithful attendance at worship services and other activities is no guarantee. Solemn assurances by the pastor or elder that I have become saved is no guarantee, and it is possible that they themselves are tares.

These are frightening statements indeed. But, they must be faced. Judgment Day is almost here, and if I am still unsaved, I know I will be destroyed. If my church has been reasonably faithful to the Bible, then surely, they have emphasized the Biblical truth that the wrath of God is coming upon the unsaved. Now we can understand passages such as the verse that declares we are to make our calling and election sure (II Peter 1:10). We can understand why God says in II Corinthians 13:5:

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

How then can I know that I have become truly saved? If I suspect I am not saved, what can I do? These are extremely serious questions that every person should ask himself.

Chapter 5

Certainty of Salvation

How can I know for sure that I have become saved? This has to be the most important question any person must ask. To answer this question, we must first discover what precisely happens in a person's life at the moment he becomes born again.

There are three exceedingly important actions by God Himself that are absolutely required before anyone can experience salvation. These three actions had to have been done for each and every person who becomes saved. There are no exceptions.

Chosen of God

The first action performed by God on behalf of the individual He plans to save is that before the creation of the world, he had to be chosen of God. God chose each and every person that He would eventually save. We read in Ephesians 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

As God prepared to create this world and its billions of human inhabitants, He looked down the corridors of time and saw a miserable mass of humanity that was altogether in rebellion against Him. Even though God created mankind as perfect beings, created in the image and likeness of God, God knew that mankind would rebel against Him.

We read in Romans 3:10-12:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Yet, in spite of this total disaster, mankind's rebellion against God, God made a decision to redeem some of these rebellious humans so that they would not have to pay the consequences of their rebellion. Of course, the consequences are horrendously awful because the rebellion of the human race is horrendously awful.

God, from before the foundation of the world, chose those whom He wished to have for Himself.

And so God, from before the foundation of the world, chose those whom He wished to have for Himself. This choice had nothing at all to do with any action or desire of mankind. God declares in Romans 9:15:

. . . I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Those whom God chose to be redeemed, that is, saved, were given to the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in John 6:37:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

However, for Jesus to have these chosen ones as His eternal possession, something had to be done about their sins. The perfect law of God decreed that because mankind was created in the image of God, the law of God demanded that the penalty for the sins of each and every individual must be paid. Therefore, even though some were elected by God and given to Christ to become His eternal possession, Christ could not have them unless the penalty for their sins was paid. Since God's law decreed that the penalty for sin is death, effectively, those who were chosen and given to Christ would never be able to come into Christ's possession.

That brings us to the second dramatic action God took on behalf of those who become saved.

The Sin Bearer

As God viewed the universe, which He created at the beginning of time, there was no one whom God could utilize to bear the wrath of God on behalf of those who are elected or chosen by God and given to Christ as His eternal possession. There are verses in Isaiah and Ezekiel that teach us this. Yet, God's perfect law decreed that the penalty of death must be paid before any individual could be allowed to come into God's holy heaven. Every aspect of God's perfect law had to be perfectly satisfied.

Therefore, in an act of mercy and love that is unparalleled, Christ Himself became the sin bearer on behalf of those individuals who had been given to Him. We read in Isaiah 53:6:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Only Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and Son of man, could make the payment needed to atone for the sins of those whom God had predestined to eternal life. Death was the required payment because God declares that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Before the foundation of the world God not only chose a people for Himself, but He carried out the payment for their sins. Revelation 13:8 tells us:

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

In addition we read in II Timothy 1:9-10:

Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace; which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But now is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

In order to pay for our sins, Christ as the Lamb came under the wrath of God, an idea that is impossible for us to understand. He had to die in both body and soul, and then rise again. We see this in Psalm 16:10, where Christ declares:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [death]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

And then, in order for mankind to have some idea of the tremendous price that was paid on our behalf, Christ demonstrated that payment when He went to the cross in A.D. 33. He again came under the wrath of God, but not for the purpose of paying for sin. He was manifested; that is, He demonstrated to the world how much He had suffered on our behalf.

When Christ was hanging on the cross in A.D. 33, that declared and demonstrated to the world that He had become a curse on behalf of those cursed individuals He had chosen for salvation.

We read in Galatians 3:13:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.

This is why He was forsaken by God. We cannot understand exactly what transpired on the cross. It is a divine mystery. To be forever forsaken by God is one description of the awfulness of being under the wrath of God. We see this in the cry of Jesus when He was on the cross and cried out, as we read in Mark 15, verse 34:

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

So now, there are many individuals in this world who, from before creation, were chosen to salvation and who have been given to Christ as His eternal possession.

Their sins have been totally and eternally covered because Jesus became their Savior by paying for their sins even before He created the universe

But one more great act of God is required. These individuals, who were chosen to salvation and whose sins have been paid for, are sinful humans. They don't know anything about God's plans for them. Like the rest of the human race that will never become saved, they are essentially a body and a soul. Their body is that part of their personality that is buried at the time they die. Their soul is their spirit essence that is just as real a part of their personality as their body. We know that the soul is completely substantive because in the case of a saved person, at the moment of his physical death, his soul leaves his body and is taken into heaven where he lives and reigns with Christ. Then at the end of the world, when Christ returns, God will resurrect his body.

However, the chosen individual now lives in this world like any individual who is not chosen to salvation. We read of him in Ephesians 2:1-3:

And you *hath* he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation [*conduct*] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Before he was saved, in his body, he lusted after sin, and in his soul, he lusted after sin. Before he was saved, he was as spiritually dead as any unsaved individual.

That brings us to the third giant act of God, which He does on behalf of those whom Christ came to save.

The Miracle of the New Birth

The third act performed by God on behalf of those who were given to Christ as His eternal possession is that God performs the miracle of giving that elect person a brand new resurrected soul. In answer to a question from Nicodemus, we read in John 3:5:

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Ahead of that, we read in John 3, verse 3:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

To be born of water and of the Spirit means to be born of the Gospel (water) by the action of God the Holy Spirit. God speaks of this action in Romans 10:17, where we read:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

*No one in the world can possibly become saved
unless they hear words from God.*

In God's divine arrangement, He established the environment in which He saves people. That environment is the Bible, which is the only Word of God. This is why no one in the world can possibly become saved unless they hear words from God. And God's only Word is the Bible. That is why throughout the church age, God commanded the local congregations to send the Gospel into all the world. That is why in our day, true Christians, as individuals, are to continue zealously to serve as Christ's ambassadors and send the Gospel into the world.

God does the entire work of saving, and therefore, He can save an elect individual at any time in that person's lifetime. The only requirement is that the individual be under the hearing of the Bible. At the moment of salvation, God gives that individual spiritual ears and a new eternal soul. Thus, a baby can be saved as easily as a mature adult. A person with the mind of a two-year-old can be saved as readily as a college professor.

For that elect person, Christ has already paid for all his sins. What remains is that at an appropriate time known only to God, this person must actually experience the wonderful fact of salvation.

A Mighty Transformation

. . . he has been given a new resurrected soul.

Now the question must be asked: How does the moment of salvation affect this person? What does it mean in his life that he is born again? Remember, before he was saved, in his whole personality, he was exactly like all the non-elect people who will never become saved. Both in body and soul, he lusted after sin and was in rebellion against God. But now, he has been given a new resurrected soul. In that part of his personality, he is a new creature in Christ. When he was born physically, he was a baby with a personality that consists of a body and a soul. At the moment of salvation, he is born again. He is given a new soul that will never die. It is a miracle our human minds cannot understand. There is no physical evidence of this transformation. However, the result of this miraculous transformation of a person's soul can be seen. The fact that a brand new soul is in a person's unchanged body will have a serious impact and change that person's behavior.

This is proven by God's declaration in I John 3:9, where we read:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

In this verse, God is teaching that at the moment of salvation, an enormous change occurs in the individual's personality. In his new resurrected soul, he cannot sin. Since sin is a transgression of God's law, it means that in the soul part of his personality, he cannot initiate sin. In the soul part of his personality, he loves God and God's laws. He has a great desire to be obedient to all the commandments of the Bible.

But in his new soul, he still must live in his old body that was not at all changed at the moment of his salvation. Therefore, he has become a personality with two mutually exclusive desires. On the one hand, he always wants to be obedient to God's laws, and on the other hand, he still lusts after sin. This awkward situation is described by God as the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares in Romans 7:21-24:

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

To be free of our sinful body is the continuing desire of every true believer. However, the tug of war that goes on in the saved personality is not static. There will be progress made toward increasing victory for the new resurrected soul. This will be true because one other wonderful event occurred at the moment of salvation, that is, God the Holy Spirit now indwells the life of that person. We read in Romans 8:9 that if we do not have the spirit of God, we are none of His.

We do not at all understand how Almighty God can dwell in a saved person's life. We must admit it is a complete mystery to us. But because we absolutely trust the Bible, they know that this mysterious fact must be true. The indwelling presence of God Himself in the life and personality of the saved person further stimulates this person to obey God and desire only that which is pleasing to God.

This person has been taken out of Satan's dominion and has become an eternal citizen of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, this person has been taken out of Satan's dominion and has become an eternal citizen of Christ's kingdom. God tells us about this in Colossians 1:13:

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

In Philippians we read that our commonwealth, that is, our citizenship, is now in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Thus, at the moment of salvation, many factors are at work in the life of the one who has been saved, and these factors cause a very decided and important change in the conduct and desires of the saved individual. He will understand and identify with Biblical statements such as those which we find in Psalm 119 and which are sprinkled elsewhere in the Bible.

A few samples of the beautiful language of Psalm 119, which demonstrate the true believer's love and respect for the Bible, follow.

Verse 10: **With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.**

Verse 11: **Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**

Verse 16: **I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.**

Verse 24: **Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.**

Verse 47: **And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.**

Verse 77: **Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.**

Verse 97: **O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.**

These kinds of statements can be found all through the Bible. And anyone who has truly become saved will increasingly experience these desires and motivations in his life. Thus, he recognizes and identifies with the truth expressed in I John 2:3-5:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

The true believer knows that the commandments of God include the whole Bible. He also knows that awful feeling he has when he allows the lustful desires of his body to cause him to sin. He empathizes with a true man of God, David, who fell into grievous sin, and then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he recorded his heart-felt remorse, which we read about in Psalm 51, for example.

Fear and Trembling

One aspect of the truly saved person's character is his recognition of the holiness and righteousness of God and the fact that God is the righteous judge of all the earth. In Philippians 2:12, God declares through the Apostle Paul:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

The salvation the believer is to “work out” in his life is the salvation God has given him. As he grows in grace (II Peter 3:18), that is, as he stops following the sinful desires of his unsaved body and increasingly lives to God’s glory, he does so with fear and trembling.

This is a surprising statement because we would expect that as a result of salvation, all fear of God would be removed. To still tremble and fear before God would appear to be altogether alien to the wonderful security true believers have been given. However, true believers know that Christ has paid for all their sins and they know that they will never be threatened by the possibility of destruction.

He is the Almighty Judge who is completely aware of even the smallest sin in each and every human being.

We must remember that the saved person is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So, the saved person has begun to increasingly love and respect everything the Bible teaches. He, therefore, learns and increasingly becomes aware of the greatness of God. God is the Almighty God who spoke and brought this tremendous universe into existence. He is the Almighty Judge who is completely aware of even the smallest sin in each and every human being. He is so righteous that even the smallest sin is sufficient to cause a person to be destroyed. And the true believer is aware that he still has sins even though he is dramatically more obedient to God’s laws than he was before he was saved. The true believer is thoroughly aware that except for the mercy and grace of God, he too deserves destruction.

A poor illustration of this might be offered. Suppose that by his own stupid and uncalled for action, a person placed himself in an exceedingly dangerous situation. For example, we might think of a child playing with matches. The impact of this action is that he causes the house in which he lives to burn to the ground. By some miracle, at great cost to his rescuer, he is brought to safety. And for days afterward, this child has nightmares as he contemplates his narrow escape. Furthermore, for the rest of his life, he may have a phobia, that is, an enormous fear of fire. This condition can exist even though no fire ever threatens him again. This, of course, is a poor illustration of the life of someone who has become saved, but it may help us to see what God means when He uses the phrase “fear and trembling.”

On the one hand, the believer has an intense love and trust in the Bible, and he increasingly knows he is eternally secure in Christ, and he knows that he can never be threatened by God’s wrath. He knows that all of his sins have been covered by Christ. On the other hand, the more he becomes acquainted with the teachings of the Bible, the more he recognizes the awful wrath of God that he so rightly deserves as payment for his sins. He is aware that it was only God’s mercy and grace that caused his salvation. Therefore, he trembles in fear and awe before God. He recognizes that his salvation was entirely undeserved.

We can understand fear and trembling even more clearly when we look at I John 4:18. There God declares:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

This verse appears to teach that because God loves the true believer and the true believer loves God, the true believer should not fear God any longer. But that conclusion is contrary to the hundreds of Bible verses that teach that the true believer is to fear God. The word “**fear**” as used in this verse, and in the many other verses that speak of the believer fearing God, is a word that expresses fright. This is emphasized in this verse where God declares “**fear hath torment.**”

How can we solve this apparent contradiction? The key to the solution is the word “perfect” that is used twice in this verse. Remember, we learned that to love God is to keep His commandments. In John 14, verses 21 and 23 we read:

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. . . . Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Clearly, to love God is to obey His commandments. If we could perfectly keep His commandments, we would be exercising perfect love. Thus, if we could perfectly keep His commandments, we would have no reason to fear or tremble before God.

Unfortunately, as long as we live on this earth, in our present sinful bodies we will commit sin. Regardless of how much even true Christians grow in grace, in their physical bodies they will never come to perfect love. That will occur only when Christ returns and they receive their eternal resurrected bodies.

However, when we sin as a true believer it should fill us with fear and with terror.

However, if I am a true believer, when I sin, it should fill me with fear and with terror. Think of it. Sin is so awful that it carries the penalty of eternal death. True, I am saved and that sin has been paid for by Jesus my Savior. Nevertheless, it is a sin that I committed, and except for God’s mercy, I deserve death because I committed that sin. How terrible that I would do such a thing! I pray, “Oh, God, please work in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure that I will not repeat that sin. Oh, God, I tremble in thy presence as I realize that except for thy mercy, I should be shamefully executed for that sin.”

The words that God's beloved David penned, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when he committed sin, illustrate this principle. All of Psalm 51 should be read but we will quote just the first four verses:

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

Praise God that with a godly fear true Christians have the secure knowledge that because they have become saved, even though they deserve God's wrath, they will never experience God's wrath.

Thus, we should understand that an entirely different lifestyle and an entirely different attitude toward God and the Bible should be found in the life of the saved person from that which resides in the life of the unsaved person. As we learned earlier, outwardly, both the saved person and the unsaved person can appear to be saved. The wheat and the tares are virtually indistinguishable.

Throughout the church age, almost everyone in each congregation trusted that the teachings of his denomination were in agreement with the Bible. When heretical teachings were offered in the church, those who were wheat as well as those who were tares, who trusted the historical teachings of their church, worked to excommunicate the heretical teachers. If they could not succeed in excommunicating the heretical teachers, those who yearned for the historical teachings that the church fathers had declared to be true to the Bible left the local church and formed a new congregation. This happened dramatically during the Reformation when various Reformed denominations were founded by those who came out of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, many teachings of the Bible were not clearly understood by the local churches, and so different conclusions were adopted by different denominations concerning the same Biblical subjects. For example, each denomination decided what it believed to be the Biblical teaching concerning the nature and practice of water baptism and the Biblical teachings about becoming saved. And yet, each denomination was sure that its own understanding of these doctrines was the Biblical truth. Those who were wheat as well as those who were tares in each denomination thought, and were led to believe by their own theologians, that their church's understanding of these doctrines was altogether faithful to the Bible.

Consequently, the wheat, who feared and trembled before the Word of God, were effectively placated and assured by their church overseers that all was spiritually fine. In addition, the wheat recognized the fact that their teachers and spiritual rulers were placed in these leadership positions by God Himself. Therefore, in their church, they believed they were obeying all of God's commandments.

Greatly Increased Understanding

In our day, God is bringing about great spiritual changes.

However, in our day, God is bringing about great spiritual changes. The world is very close to Judgment Day. Therefore, the prophecy of Daniel 12, verse 9, is being fulfilled, and there God declares:

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

This means that at the time of the end, many truths that were always resident within the Bible would finally begin to be understood by true believers. However, throughout the church age, these truths were not understood at all. But now that we are near the end, God is taking His seal off many truths that had been hidden in the Bible. For the first time, we are learning important truths such as the following.

1. The Bible gives an exact calendar of history, and when the Biblical calendar is aligned with our modern calendar, it shows that creation occurred in 11,013 B.C. Likewise, the flood of Noah's day occurred in the year 4990 B.C. (See "Adam When," available from Family Radio.)

2. The fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath day was a ceremonial law. (See "Sunday the Sabbath," available from Family Radio.)

3. The commands concerning water baptism and the communion service were also ceremonial laws.

4. The time has come when God has finished with His use of the divine institution, the local churches, to evangelize the world.

5. God has assigned individuals who are altogether outside of the local congregations the task of bringing in the final harvest of believers.

6. Throughout the church age, Satan was at war with the local churches, seeding them with tares, which are individuals who remained under his authority.

7. The truly saved are to forsake their local congregations. Outside of the local congregations, they are to continue to evangelize so that the eternal invisible church will continue to grow.

8. We are now in that time of Great Tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24:21. During this time, God is no longer working or ruling in the congregations. Therefore, God's mercy and grace are no longer in them.

9. A great multitude, which no man can number, is becoming saved during the period of Great Tribulation. They are being saved all over the world outside of the local churches.

10. The final judgment begins with judgment on the local congregations as God binds the unsaved within these churches to prepare them for their destruction.

11. During the present time of Great Tribulation, God is separating the wheat from the tares.

12. When a person becomes saved, he is given a brand new resurrected soul in which he cannot initiate sin.

13. Salvation requires the sole action of God. No person can do anything at all to initiate his salvation or to guarantee his salvation. The historical parable of the raising of Lazarus, quoted in John 11, clearly illustrates God's method of raising a spiritually dead person to spiritual life.

14. The antichrist is Satan himself.

This is a partial list of many Biblical truths that were not taught or were rarely taught in the local churches. This does not mean that prior to our day, there were no saintly, spiritual theologians who earnestly searched the Bible for truth. On the contrary, throughout history, there have been men who labored diligently in the Scriptures in order to understand Biblical truth as correctly as possible. But we must remember that God has a timetable for revealing truth. Those saintly, godly theologians lived at a time when these truths were not being revealed. Therefore, in spite of their most diligent desire to be as accurate as possible concerning Biblical truth, the foregoing truths were not revealed to them by the Holy Spirit.

This places the present local church theologians and the church members in a very awkward situation.

Now, we are near the time of end, and this is the time when the seals of Daniel 12:9 are being removed by God. Therefore, much new truth is available. But this places the present local church theologians and the church members in a very awkward situation. In the history of their denomination, none of these truths have been expressed or understood. Furthermore, the seminaries that trained the pastors have never understood these truths, and therefore, have never taught them. That is what creates the mechanism by which God separates the wheat from the tares. The true believers (the wheat), who earnestly love the Lord and eagerly wish to be obedient to God's commands, hear about these truths. God has already prepared them to have a concern for these truths because simultaneously, in their own

denominations as well as in other denominations, they see an increasing disregard for the authority of the Word of God.

For example, they are shocked by the destruction of the marriage institution in our day. They hear about and even become personally aware of a pastor or an elder who divorces his wife and then marries someone else. Furthermore, they notice the number of people in their church who are divorced. They take note that the warnings concerning Judgment Day and its consequences are rarely, if at all, proclaimed. They notice that in many churches, and possibly their own, there is a change in the music, and that much more time is spent bringing entertainment into the church. They notice and are concerned about the use of inferior translations of the Bible, like the New International Version (NIV). They are alarmed that gospels featuring signs and wonders have spread all through the church world.

Indeed, the truly saved have every reason to believe that something dreadful is happening in the church world. They begin to search the Bible for answers. Because they are truly saved and God is working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure, God moves them. They begin to understand some of the foregoing truths that heretofore were sealed. As they learn more about these new truths, and check out each one to determine its faithfulness to the Bible, they become aware that, indeed, the time is here that God's judgment is on the house of God. Furthermore, as they continue to ponder these things in the light of the Bible, they realize they must forsake their local congregation.

As the believers study their Bibles and receive help in their Bible studies from a source such as Family Radio, they become acquainted with God's master plan. Indeed, they discover that this falling away of the local churches was predicted in the Bible. God not only prophesied that this would happen but God also prophesied the time when this would happen. And so, they become increasingly acquainted with the Bible's teachings concerning these matters. They begin to clearly recognize the fact that they are to forsake their local congregation. Or, even ahead of that, if they have been voicing their concerns within the congregation of which they were a member, they already could have been driven out. In either event, whether they were driven out or voluntarily came out, they know this is what God has commanded. And when they are out, they will experience great spiritual freedom. They are now completely free to faithfully serve the Lord as they are commanded by the Bible. No longer can there be any pressure on them to obey church doctrines that they believe are not altogether faithful to the Bible. What glorious freedom to be under the perfect authority, and only the authority, of the Bible!

Chapter 6

There are two passages in the Book of Hebrews that many theologians consider to be the most difficult in the entire Bible. Again and again, they have struggled with these verses and attempted to discover precisely what God is teaching here. The two passages are Hebrews 6:4-9 and Hebrews 10:26-31. While these verses have been extremely difficult to understand, we now know why. We will discover that these verses apply only to the time of the end of the church age, the very time in which we are living.

When we truly understand, we will know that these passages teach truths that are completely harmonious with our present understanding of the end of the church age as well as with what we have learned from the parable of the wheat and tares. Therefore, we shall now examine these two passages.

The first passage is Hebrews 6:4-9. There God declares:

For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers *is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*

Renew Them Again

An individual cannot be renewed (that is, saved), again to repentance a second time.

The key to understanding these verses is the phrase in verse 6, “**renew them again unto repentance.**” This phrase assures us that these verses cannot be speaking of individuals. The reason for this is that the word “renew” means to have become saved (Titus 3:5, Romans 12:2). An individual cannot be renewed (that is, saved), again to repentance a second time. When he has become saved, he has been given eternal life. Therefore, he cannot fall from that position. Having become saved, he can never, never fall away. The idea that anyone can fall away after being saved does not agree with all that the Bible teaches about the nature of salvation.

On the other hand, this passage cannot be talking about those who have not become saved because they have never been renewed the first time. So, the passage appears to be impossible to solve.

However, when we recognize that this passage is speaking about a local church or a congregation rather than an individual, we will begin to find understanding. We are reminded of a passage in Revelation 2 that speaks directly to this question. There we read of the church of Ephesus, which was a church that God loved very dearly and which loved God very dearly. God said of this church of Ephesus in Revelation 2, verses 2 and 3:

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

These are very fine words of commendation concerning the church at Ephesus. However, the Bible then goes on to say something about falling and being renewed to repentance. We read in Revelation 2, verses 4 and 5:

Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

This shows us very clearly that this church had fallen away from its first love. That first love indicated its initial obedience to the commands of God. Then God commanded that church to repent and return to that first love, that is, that church had to be more obedient to God's commandments. The congregation was warned that unless they repented and again did their first works, God would remove their candlestick. That is, they would become a dead church if they did not start obeying God's laws more faithfully.

We can see how this relates to the language of Hebrews 6, where God warns us about a church that has been faithful and then has fallen away. God says that this falling away cannot be followed by renewal to repentance, but that idea seems to contradict the admonition of Revelation 2 to the church at Ephesus. They were told to repent and then God would be with them. We know the Bible cannot contradict itself. So, how can we understand this apparent contradiction?

We will discover that in these verses of Hebrews 6, God is speaking of only one time in history, that is, there is only one time when these verses can apply. That time is the end of the church age, the time in which we are now living. Let us investigate this matter more carefully as we continue to look at the Book of Hebrews.

Obedience, God's Expectation

The context of these Hebrews 6 verses actually begins in Hebrews 5:9. In the previous verses, God gives important information about Christ our Savior.

However, in Hebrews 5:9, God begins to speak of those who obey Him. That verse says:

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

This verse teaches that those who have truly been saved will obey Christ. They, of course, have been given a new resurrected soul in which they only want to do God's will. However, as we continue in Hebrews 5, we find that God begins to develop the concept that there are those who are not obeying Him. This kind of thinking is particularly set forth beginning in Hebrews 5:11, where we read:

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

This language points to those who have difficulty hearing. Immediately, we think of two citations that relate to a hearing difficulty. Obviously, this is talking about hearing the Gospel. The first citation is Amos 8:11. There we read:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

We also think of Jeremiah 5:21, where we read:

Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.

Along with Jeremiah 5:21, we remember the words of God to the Jews who argued about the truths Paul was bringing to them. We read in Acts 28, verses 26 and 27:

Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Notice the usage of the phrase “**dull of hearing**” in this passage.

At this time, there is no longer any hope that God will bring any church to a position of reconciliation with God.

These three citations all speak of the condition that exists in the local congregations at the end of the church age. At this time, there is no longer any hope that God will bring any church to a position of reconciliation with God. Therefore, we can be quite certain that these verses of Hebrews 5 and 6 are identified with the end of the church age.

To test this and to obtain truth from these verses, we should look at each one in detail. Hebrews 5:9 sets the stage for that which follows. The phrase “**all them that obey him**” implies that there are those who do not obey Him, and those disobedient persons and churches are under the wrath of God.

We have learned in our study of the parable of the wheat and the tares that there finally comes a time when the tares will be bound in preparation for their burning (Judgment Day). One major way the tares are bound is that the churches no longer have an ability to understand Bible truth. God develops this thought in the verses that follow Hebrews 5:11. We read in Hebrews 5:12-14:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

These verses emphasize the fact that if we are true believers, our understanding of the Bible should consistently increase. One of the chief tasks given to the church was the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). To adequately minister the Word, that is, to teach the Word of God in a God-glorifying way, the church overseers should be constantly increasing their understanding of the Bible. However, in these verses, God is speaking of a condition wherein there is no increase in the understanding of the Bible. The first principles of truth upon which the church was founded remain static. There is no awareness that the Bible is full of gold nuggets of truth, waiting to be discovered in God’s own time. Thus, the confessions, the statements of faith, the systematic theology to which the church subscribes, effectively become the limits of theological truth that the local church holds. There are no attempts to further fine tune these first doctrines to make sure that they are as Biblical as possible.

Newborn Babies Should Grow

But one should never remain a baby.

In these verses of Hebrews 5, God likens this situation to those who never go beyond the baby stage. In I Peter 2:2, God speaks of new believers as newborn babies who desire the milk of the Word. But one should never remain a baby. If he

does, it means there is something dreadfully wrong with that child. However, in Hebrews 5:12, God indicates that the church's knowledge of these first important doctrines is so tenuous, it remains so incomplete, that the teachers in the church are unable to adequately continue to develop as teachers of these things. Rather, they are like babies who still need teachers to teach them concerning these doctrines.

God expects the true believers to grow in grace (II Peter 3:18). Likewise, the local congregation, under the spiritual oversight of the pastor and elders, should grow in its understanding of the teachings of the Bible. As they grow in understanding, they should become increasingly sensitive to that which is right doctrine and that which is wrong doctrine. Thus, their ability to fine tune the doctrinal teachings of the church should increase. They should be able to discern good and evil, as Hebrews 5, verse 14, indicates. They should be increasingly sensitive to and reject doctrines or practices that have been introduced, or may be introduced, into the congregation that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible. In other words, as the local church matures, it should be more and more faithful to the Bible even though it may mean rejection or modification of some of the teachings that the fathers of the church or of the denomination held.

First Principles

God continues to develop this principle in the next verses. In Hebrews 6:1-2, we read:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

In these two verses, God sets forth the fundamental, first principles of Bible truth. These six doctrines should have been understood throughout the church age. In fact, they are the matrix in which church confessions and denominational systematic theology exist. These six doctrines are truly the foundation of the Gospel.

There always should have been an eager desire to understand more of the Bible.

However, in these verses, God instructs the church to go to perfection. That is, there always should have been an eager desire to understand more of the Bible. At any time during the church age, a student of the Bible knew that there were many verses in the Bible that he could not understand. Now, very humbly, he recognizes that God has his own timetable for revealing truth from the Bible. Now and then, as he carefully compares Scripture with Scripture, always praying that the Holy Spirit will lead him into truth, he understands some of the verses a little bit more clearly.

In fact, we read about this in Isaiah 28:9-10:

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.*

These verses in Isaiah 28 emphasize the same truth that we read about in Hebrews 5 and 6. When we begin to understand the Word of God, we are like little babies who begin with milk. Then we are weaned from the milk and move on to more solid food. But the process is little by little, precept (law) by precept (law), here a little, there a little. In Isaiah 28:9-10, God uses the growth of a baby as an example of the growth in knowledge of spiritual truth. The baby does not instantly walk and run. He does not instantly have a full vocabulary. He does not immediately understand proper manners nor is he able to eat the same kind of food that his parents eat. Rather, little by little, he progresses from a helpless baby to a strong, self-reliant adult. He arrives there little by little over a span of many years.

Growing Toward Perfection

This is what God expected of the local congregations throughout the church age. They begin with a reasonable understanding of the six foundational truths set forth in Hebrews 6:1-2. Then little by little, law by law, here a little and there a little, they should grow in their knowledge of the Bible. It may be a slow growth but there must be growth. This is so just as a baby must grow.

This means that Bible scholars should not be content to simply understand the theological statements of eminent theologians of the past, like Augustine or Calvin or Luther, etc. In their spiritual growth, they should become increasingly more precise and Biblical regarding any doctrine of the Bible. In their increasing discernment of good and evil, they should be removing statements from their church doctrine that are not altogether true to the Bible. Thus, as time goes on, there should be increasing agreement between the theologians of the various denominations concerning important teachings such as baptisms and salvation.

Why should this not be? All the denominations look to the Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God. Virtually all the denominations expect their pastors to know Greek and Hebrew, which are the main original languages in which the Bible was written. By their knowledge of these languages, the seminary-trained individuals should be able to check the work of the translators in order to discover errors in translation.

Since, presumably, all the pastors of the various denominations are saved individuals indwelt by the Holy Spirit, one would think that over the years, denominational differences should have increasingly disappeared.

Since, presumably, all the pastors of the various denominations are saved individuals indwelt by the Holy Spirit, one would think that over the years, denominational differences should have increasingly disappeared. The Bible teaches there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). This should be the goal of the church as it strives to obey the command of Hebrews 6:1-2 to go on unto perfection. Effectively, God is saying we are to never cease trying to learn more from the Bible. Thus, denominational differences in understanding baptism, the nature of salvation, and end time events should gradually disappear. Differences in interpretation of various verses that relate to these doctrines should have largely disappeared. We know that the Bible can teach only one truth.

The fact is that this is not taking place. The various denominations hold to their denominational teachings as rigorously as they did at any time in their history. If agreement does begin to develop between two denominations, ordinarily, it will be in favor of a doctrinal position that is less true to the Bible. This is seen today, for example, in many Reformed churches, as increasingly, we find them catering to a free-will gospel. Also, we see it in staunch Baptist churches that previously insisted on the King James Version of the Bible but now have succumbed to the inferior NIV Bible.

Thus, the warning of Hebrews 6:1-2 is very timely. However, in our day, it is a dramatic and timely warning because as we continue in Hebrews 6, we will learn that the warning of these verses is particularly pointing to our day.

As God Permits

We will further develop this truth as we continue and examine the next verses. In Hebrews 6:3, we read:

And this will we do, if God permit.

We must realize that any truth we receive from the Bible is ultimately the work of God the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Any doctrines held by any church or denomination that are true to the Bible were given to true believers within that denomination. Unfortunately, that denomination also may hold doctrines that are not true to God's Word. These latter doctrines are the result of man trying to come to truth without the benefit of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. True believers or unsaved, in either case, these individuals are trying their best to teach the truths of the Bible. Hebrews 6, verse 3, indicates that an increase in truth can happen only as God permits, that is, God has a timetable to reveal truth.

Do you remember what we read in Daniel 12:9? Daniel Chapter 12 concerns the end of the world and events that lead up to it, and in that context, God told Daniel in verse 9:

... Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

It is God's plan that certain truths will not be understood until the time when the world is very near the end. God will not violate his own declarations. Therefore, He will not permit an understanding of these verses until that time has come.

Therefore, a tension existed all through the church age and continues after the church age. On the one hand, the true believers are to constantly study the Bible. They should endeavor to understand everything they possibly can from the Bible. As they do so, they should constantly beseech the Lord to give them a correct understanding. On the other hand, there are many teachings of the Bible that God will not reveal to them, regardless of how earnestly or faithfully they search for truth or pray for truth. God will permit an understanding only in accordance with His own timetable.

There is great blessing to those who eagerly search for greater understanding of difficult passages of the Bible.

Of course, there is great blessing to those who eagerly search for greater understanding of difficult passages of the Bible. As they seek for additional truth, they also constantly review the doctrines which they and their denomination hold to be true. Thus, they will correct any wrong doctrines or ideas they may have. Obviously, as we have already indicated, if this plan of God had been rigorously and vigorously carried out by all the denominations, then in time, the differences in the understanding of the foundational principles set forth in Hebrews 6:1-2 would be greatly minimized.

Hebrews 6, verse 3, which stresses that the true believers will do this if God permits, is particularly significant at the end of the church age, the very time at which these verses are especially directed. As we learned from Daniel 12:9, much truth will be revealed just prior to Christ's return at the end of the world. Since there is so much Biblical evidence that we have arrived at that time in history, we might expect that theologians and Bible teachers all over the world were discovering additional truth from the Bible. This has happened, for example, in Chapter 5 of this study, a number of truths are listed that had not been known prior to our generation.

However, sadly, we must acknowledge that this is not the case in connection with the local congregations. We know this because very few fear and tremble before the Word of God. It is difficult to find a seminary or a church where they are rejoicing over additional truths they have learned from the Bible. In fact, many theologians and Bible teachers flatly deny the possibility of progressive revelation.

We must understand that when we speak of progressive revelation, we are not speaking of revelation in addition to that which is written in the Bible. Progressive revelation simply means that from time to time, God opens our eyes to further understanding of that which is written in His Word. Some theologians speak of this as further illumination.

. . . from time to time God opens our eyes to further understanding of that which is written.

Unfortunately, an understanding of the foundational truths of the Bible is increasingly taken from those who deny that there is increased understanding of

God's revelation, the Bible. As indicated by the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:24-30), even that which they had is taken from them. Moreover, when other people do come to additional truth, these same theologians have no ability to honorably and faithfully critique these new truths. This is so because they themselves are not searching the Bible. And as indicated earlier, they may flatly deny the possibility of learning these new truths. That is, they deny the possibility of progressive revelation.

Unfortunately, these verses in Hebrews Chapters 5 and 6 have very unkind things to say about this situation. A baby must grow. If he does not grow, he is in great trouble. Likewise, there must be spiritual progress as God permits an understanding beyond these foundational truths. If there is no growth, those who are involved are in deep trouble with God. This deep trouble is set forth in the verses that follow verse 3.

Salvation No Longer Possible

Let us continue by examining the next verses, Hebrews 6:4-6, where we read:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

These verses emphasize that because the foundational doctrines set forth in Hebrews 6:1-2 have been taught in a church, there has been great blessing in that congregation. We must remember that throughout the church age, the Holy Spirit was actively saving people in those churches. The foundational truths named in verses 1 and 2 were taught there, so enlightenment was available to the congregation. Some individuals did become saved when they tasted the heavenly gift and the good Word of God.

Many of these tares are pastors and elders and deacons.

However, especially near the end of the church age, there is a falling away. Satan has been able to seed these churches with tares. Many of these tares are pastors and elders and deacons. This is why the church cannot get beyond the foundational doctrines. These tares do not tremble before the Bible. Rather, these tares are "ministers of righteousness" who believe they are serving Christ, and yet, they subtly and increasingly take their congregation away from truth. Then, when God the Holy Spirit leaves that congregation, and God left every congregation at the beginning of the time of the Great Tribulation, the falling away is complete. It is a dead church ruled over by Satan.

It is Impossible to Repent

That sets the stage for the next ominous statements of Hebrews 6:6. Putting verses 4 and 6 together, we learned that, **“it is impossible for those [congregations] who were once enlightened . . . if they shall fall away [literally: and having fallen away], to renew them again unto repentance.”**

This statement echoes all that we have learned about the end of the church age, at which time God’s judgment is upon each and every local congregation. This judgment is on them because God has finished using the institution of the church to bring the Gospel and also because they have become so spiritually dead that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. As a congregation, they cannot be renewed to repentance because God the Holy Spirit has abandoned all the local churches. God is no longer present in any of these congregations. God’s mercy can no longer be found in any local congregation. This is the reason why congregations cannot repent. God is finished with them and He has left them. Never again will they be an instrument in God’s hand to bring the Gospel. As we learned from the parable of the wheat and the tares, God’s only remaining action is to bind the tares in preparation for the burning.

Verse 6 continues with the declaration, **“seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.”** To understand this phrase, we should look back at the time Jesus was crucified. Who were these individuals who wanted Him crucified?

Crucifixion was the most ignoble, the most heinous, the most despicable act that could be committed against a Jewish person. Not only did it mean that the individual would die a slow and torturous death, it also meant that he would be on public display as someone cursed by God. We read in the Galatians 3:13:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

*Crucifixion was the most ignoble, the most heinous,
the most despicable act that could be committed
against a Jewish person.*

Of course, these Jewish leaders were fully aware of this law of God which was first stated in Deuteronomy 21:23. Therefore, their intense desire was not only to kill Jesus but also to publicly shame Him as much as possible.

But how does this relate to the end of the church age? Hebrews 6:6 declares:

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

We can now understand what God is teaching here. Those who belong to the churches that have fallen away, at the time when it is impossible for them to be renewed to repentance, are like the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ. God is giving us a signpost that points to the spiritual condition of those who insist on remaining in the local congregations after they have fallen away. Remember, we learned that beginning with the time of the Great Tribulation, every local congregation has been forsaken by God and is under the rule of Satan.

God is warning that the church overseers who insist on disobeying God's command to leave their church, who have never gone beyond the foundational doctrines because they do not understand the principal of progressive revelation, and who do not stand before God in fear and trembling as a true believer should, are like the high priest and Pharisees who desired the crucifixion of Christ. Christ is dead to them and they have no savior. And like the Pharisees who wanted Jesus crucified, effectively, they are heaping shame on Jesus as they despise His commandment to flee from the churches.

Now we can have some understanding as to why Christ has so much to say about the spiritual condition of the Jews and their leaders in Jesus' day. God is actually giving us an in-depth look into the hearts of the members and leaders of the local churches at the end of the church age who will not obey God's command to forsake the churches. God is teaching us that they are exactly like the Pharisees of Jesus' day. And so, again and again, we come back to these terrible things of Matthew 13, Matthew 23, and John 8, where God has so many ugly things to say about the Jewish leaders. These are horrible statements, and God has carefully placed them in the Bible for our instruction.

These awful words of Hebrews 6:6 have greatly helped us to understand why God's judgment is on the churches and congregations. The situation is far more serious than that which outwardly can be seen. It is incredibly serious. If we did not have the Bible, we might suspect that the spiritual condition of the local congregation is dead but we could not be certain. However, the Bible gives us the facts. The situation is very bad but we do not want to believe it. We wish we had not read these terrible verses. But hell is terrible, and it is closing in on the world.

Wonderfully, today is still the day of salvation. Wonderfully, outside of the local churches, a great multitude is being saved. Wonderfully, Christ is still building His church. It is the eternal church that will exist throughout eternity.

As further corroboration of our understanding of these verses, God continues in Hebrews 6, verses 7 and 8:

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

This language parallels Isaiah 5, where God speaks of the church age as a vineyard. That vineyard can be shown to be pointing to the local congregations throughout the church age. The language concerning the end of that vineyard speaks of briers and thorns, just as Hebrews 6:8 speaks of briers and thorns. Isaiah 5, verses 6 and 7, declare:

And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

How awful! How terrible that this is the end of the local churches.

The language of Hebrews 5:9 through Hebrews 6:8 is very foreboding and very negative. However, in the verses that follow, God turns to more pleasant thoughts. He continues in Hebrews 6:9-10:

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Previous verses focus particularly on the end of the church age, but this citation is more usual exhortation about the nature of salvation and the conduct of the true believers. Thus, we learn that these verses of Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 6 are an interjection into the grand doctrine of salvation set forth in the Book of Hebrews.

In Hebrews 10:25, there is another interjection that teaches truths similar to that which we have learned in this study. Therefore, we will look at these verses, also.

Chapter 7

Willful Sin

In Hebrews 10 there are verses that are similar to and just as mysterious as the verses we have been examining in Hebrews 6. Hebrews 10:26 warns:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

This verse speaks of willful sins being committed for which there can be no forgiveness.

But every sin is willful. When David committed fornication with Bathsheba, it was willful sin. He certainly did not lose his salvation. How then can it be that willful sin places a person in such a position that there is “**no more sacrifice for sins,**” that is, because of that willful sin, there is no possibility of forgiveness.

The scribes of Mark 3 willfully accused Jesus of being under the authority of Satan rather than the Holy Spirit. In that very narrow context, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit and for that sin, Jesus said there is no forgiveness. That is the only sin that we have been aware of that carried that warning.

However, Hebrews 10:26 speaks about a willful sin which places the sinner in a position of no possibility of forgiveness. Is this also speaking about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? The context does not appear to indicate that sin. But what sin can be in view?

*They apply only to individuals in the local congregations
at the end of the church age.*

The solution to these Hebrews 10 verses is similar to the solution to the difficult verses we have been examining in Hebrews 6. We will discover that these verses do not apply to the season of the church age. They apply only to individuals in the local congregations at the end of the church age. When we understand this application, the entire passage comes into precise focus.

Assembling of Ourselves

We will begin the study of these verses by carefully examining Hebrews 10:24-25. There we read:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the

manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Immediately, we should take note of the fact that God is giving us a time clue. Verse 25 declares, “**as ye see the day approaching.**” Long ago we learned that Bible phrases like “**the day**” and “**that day**” ordinarily point towards Judgment Day, God’s final wrath on the unsaved. We know that Judgment Day is in view in this verse because when we read a little further, we discover that God declares in Hebrews 10, verses 30 and 31:

... Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Since the final Judgment follows almost immediately after the end of the church age (Matthew 24:29), we can be sure that this passage is speaking about the end of the church age. As we further examine these verses, this truth will be increasingly evident.

Returning to Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 25, we read a very curious comment. Verse 25 declares:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . .

This is indeed curious language. One would think that it would be more logical to say, “not forsaking the assembling of the congregation” or “not forsaking the assembling of the church.” Why does God use the strange language, “assembling of ourselves”? As we have already noted, God is focusing on the time when Judgment Day is very near. We understand this by the phrase, “**so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**”

Another curiosity is the usage of the Greek word *episynagogen* which is translated “**assembling together.**” This Greek word is used in only one other instance in the Bible. That citation is II Thessalonians 2:1, where we read:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by our gathering together unto him.*

The phrase “**gathering together**” in this verse is translated from the same Greek word *episynagogen*. When we look at the context of II Thessalonians 2:1, we know who is assembling or gathering together. This passage is speaking of those individuals who are gathering together to meet Christ at his coming. The only people who are ready to meet Christ at his coming are true believers. Churches will not be ready to meet Christ. Whole congregations are not ready to meet Christ. Even if Christ had come before the church age was over, only a remnant of the congregation would have been ready to meet Him.

The point God is making is that the Greek word *episynagogen* emphasizes the gathering together of individuals. It is not in any way looking at a body of people who are all members of one local congregation.

This agrees with the usage of the same Greek word, *episynagogen*, which we find in Hebrews 10:25, where God emphasizes that individuals are in view as indicated by the usage of the word “ourselves.” Thus, a body of people, like a local congregation, cannot be in view in Hebrews 10:25 any more than a local congregation could be in view in II Thessalonians 2:1.

We might recall that Jesus points to the individuality of those who are raptured. In Luke 17:34-37, God underscores again and again that, “**one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.**” Thus, we see that the focus of Hebrews 10:25 is not on a congregation. It is on individuals.

In the book “The End of the Church Age and After,” we learned from the Bible that the season of the final harvest came after the church age was finished. It is a season when the task of harvesting has been assigned to individuals, not to local congregations. Assembling of ourselves together as individuals means that there is no membership and no spiritual overseers who exercise spiritual rule over the true believers. No outward actions are required, for example, no water baptisms, no confessions of faith, no observances of communion services, no church membership, no promises to uphold the doctrines of a local congregation. It is simply individuals gathering together to exhort one another (the word “exhort” would be better translated “comfort”).

The number of people gathering together may be as small as one individual who is in fellowship with God. We read in I John 1:3:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

As we have learned, a key word is “ourselves.”

It could be that a number of like-minded people will assemble together. As we have learned, a key word is “ourselves.” The focus is on individuals, not on a body of people as it had been to a high degree throughout the church age.

But how does this relate to the next verse, Hebrews 10:26, which declares:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

What could be the meaning of willful sin? As we learned earlier, all sin is willful. We surely know that Jesus came to save willful sinners. He certainly did not come to save “good” people. But these verses are speaking of someone who has committed willful sin for which there is no forgiveness. How can this be? We already mentioned that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is unforgivable sin. But to our knowledge,

that sin was committed only by the scribes who wanted Jesus killed, and it is not in any way in view in these verses of Hebrews 10. There must be another answer.

The Willful Sin of Refusing to Leave the Local Church

Indeed, there is. We must remember the sad fact that at the end of the church age, all over the world, the Holy Spirit left the congregations. God has abandoned the churches and Satan now rules in them. However, at the same time, God commands the true believers to flee from the churches, if they have not already been driven out. They are to come out of the churches, which have become a spiritual Babylon, because they are ruled over by Satan who is typified by the king of Babylon.

Then this question can be asked: If an individual willfully disobeys the command to forsake the local congregation, and he continues to be a part of that congregation, can he possibly find or expect any forgiveness from God? The sad and terrible answer has to be, absolutely not.

The reason there cannot be forgiveness is that God is no longer present in that congregation to forgive. No longer can God's mercy be found in that congregation. Now God is showing mercy only to individuals outside of the local congregation.

Hebrews 10:26 indicates that these individuals have received the knowledge of the truth. That is, they own a Bible and know it is the Word of God. They have learned about many teachings from the Bible. They have knowledge but that knowledge has not produced obedience. They know many Biblical truths but they have never become saved. Unfortunately for them, God is finished with that congregation and He is no longer present within it to save.

This agrees with the phrase, "**there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,**" in verse 26. Thus, if an individual willfully disobeys the command to forsake the local congregation, he is no longer in an environment where salvation and forgiveness are possible.

Obviously, the alternative to salvation is God's judgment. This is clearly emphasized by the following verses of Hebrews 10, verses 27 and 28, where God says:

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.

These verses should frighten church members to the core of their being. These verses are not speaking of the wicked who are out in the world. They are speaking of respectable, decent, moral, apparently godly men and women and children, pastors, and elders, and deacons, and seminary professors who willfully disobey God's command to leave the local church.

God's Mechanism to Separate the Wheat from the Tares

As we learned earlier, this command is the mechanism by which God, at the present time, is separating the wheat from the tares. In these verses, God emphasizes

that there is no middle position. If we willfully disobey the command to come out of the church, we are left without mercy.

To be in a place where there is no possibility of God's mercy has to be terrible beyond belief.

No mercy! How awful! How terrible! God is a merciful God. To be in a place where there is no possibility of God's mercy has to be terrible beyond belief. Even in the most wicked situations in the world, there is the possibility of God's mercy. But in any local congregation, however holy and pure the members may think they are, there is no longer any possibility of mercy. How dreadful!

The excuses that may be offered to justify remaining in the church will not help at all. One can argue, "how do I know the time has come to leave," or "how can I be sure that every local church has been included in God's judgment," or "don't we still have a very godly and qualified pastor who faithfully preaches the Word," etc. But none of that will help the situation. No longer will God be merciful to those who willfully disobey the command to come out.

Hebrews 10, verse 29, further emphasizes the enormous seriousness of willfully disobeying God's command. There we read:

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Three dreadful explanations of the enormity of this sin are set forth in the following (from Hebrews 10:29).

1. **"who hath trodden under foot the Son of God"**
2. **"hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing"**
3. **"and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace"**

We have learned that willful sin is the sin of disobeying God's command to come out of the church. How can God make these terrible accusations because of one willful sin? He can do so because disobedience to this command is like the tip of an iceberg. This disobedience reveals the sad fact that this individual has not become saved. He has been sanctified or set apart in the same sense that the unsaved spouse is sanctified by the saved spouse (I Corinthians 7:14). He has been a member of the divine institution called a church, so he has been set apart from the world in that he could hear the Gospel and be in the company of those in the church, which included true believers. He has enjoyed many of God's blessings because of his association with the church. However, his willful disobedience of this command

demonstrates his rebellion against God. He is despising the true Gospel and effectively claiming that he is wiser than God.

The phrase, “**hath trodden under foot the Son of God,**” is language of a victory. By their disobedience to the command to leave the congregation, effectively, they are insisting they have won. By their “do-it-yourself” gospel, they have achieved a salvation in a way that is pleasing to them. They believe their local congregation has triumphed and is secure all the way to the last day. Effectively, they are saying, “who really needs the Bible when we have these fine doctrines and practices that our church teaches.”

Moreover, do you recall the words of Matthew 5:13, where God says:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

To trod under foot the Son of God thus means to consider Christ as good for nothing or worthless. What a horrible indictment!

The phrase “**the blood of the covenant**” refers to the Lord Jesus who is the very essence of the covenant (the law) of God. But these church members are declaring, effectively, that Christ and His covenant of grace is unholy. They have their own kind of gospel, and they insist that God is wrong to tell people to leave their churches. They insist that it is a sinful act, and therefore, if God commands it, He is unholy; He is guilty of sin.

Finally, by the phrase, “**and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace,**” God declares that they desire to hurt, to reproach, to bring shame on God the Holy Spirit who by His grace has brought salvation. All of the statements of verse 29 emphasize the arrogant rebellion of those who are not trembling before the Word of God.

Effectively, the command to come out of the local congregation puts each and every individual in that congregation on trial.

Effectively, the command to come out of the local congregation puts each and every individual in that congregation on trial. In this trial, God is revealing all those who have never surrendered to God. They have never had broken and contrite hearts. They are confessing members of that church because they trust the pastor or the confessions of the church. However, in actuality, they spurn the Gospel, and they are in complete rebellion against the true Gospel. And now they are in an environment where there is no possibility of salvation. They are tares being bound in preparation for burning.

How harsh these statements are, but this is what God teaches us. These are God’s warnings, and therefore, we should listen to them very, very carefully.

God Shall Judge His People

The phrase recorded in Hebrews 10:30, “**The Lord shall judge his people,**” can now be understood. Ordinarily, we could read this and ask, “how is it possible that God will judge His people? Are not His people those who have become saved? And since they have become saved, doesn’t that mean that they will never come into judgment?”

It is altogether true that “his people” can refer to those who have become saved. But the term “his people” can also refer to those who are members of a divine institution that externally represents the kingdom of God even though they themselves are still unsaved. The Old Testament nation of Israel was God’s people. However, at any time in their history, most of the individuals in that nation remained unsaved.

Likewise, every confessing member of a local congregation throughout the church age was considered to be included among God’s people. But as we have learned in this study, in all likelihood, most of them remained unsaved. Therefore, the solemn warning is given to us that the Lord will judge His people.

This echoes the language of verses such as Isaiah 5:25, where God says:

Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

It echoes the language of I Peter 4:17:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

To make certain that we correctly understand the awful nature of this judgment of God, Hebrews Chapter 10 continues in verse 31:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This verse carries with it all the warnings in the enormous number of Bible verses that speak of the wrath of God. If anyone wishes to know of the danger he is in by his insistence upon remaining in the local congregation, he should carefully read each and every verse in the Bible that speaks of God’s wrath. As he does so, he should remember that in God’s perfect righteousness, in His perfect justice, in His perfect faithfulness to the law of God, in His perfect integrity, all the prophecies of God’s wrath will be carried out.

“**Let God be true, but every man a liar**” (Romans 3:4).

Conclusion

This study has been concerned with very unhappy and awful truths. Now we can begin to understand why God speaks of this as a time of Great Tribulation which has never before been experienced in the world. At a time when we see churches filled with apparently happy and secure Christians all over the world, we are taught that the facts are altogether different. We have discovered that the churches are filled with tares. We have learned that throughout the church age, tares (unsaved church members) have been virtually indistinguishable from the wheat (saved church members). However, now that God has established the mechanism to separate the wheat from the tares, we can begin to see the results.

Why This Terrible Indictment

Before we finish this study, some questions remain that should be addressed. One important question surfaces as we look a moment longer at Hebrews 10:28 and 29, where God declares:

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

We know that any sin is rebellion against God, and the perfect law of God demands destruction as payment for any and every sin. But why should the willful sin of refusing to obey God's commandment to forsake the local congregation cause God to set forth the awful language of Hebrews 10:29? Earlier in our study, we noted that God's wrath is upon these individuals who refuse to come out of the churches because in actuality, they have never become saved. However, isn't it true that God's wrath is the consequence of any sin?

Why does the sin of refusing to leave the local congregation cause God to use the striking language, **"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God."**

Surely, if any and every sin is terrible, then by this statement, God is saying that the sin of not leaving the church at the end of the church age is super, super terrible!

We can find an answer to this question as we examine, once more, God's indictment as recorded in Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10. In Hebrews 6, God speaks of the congregation that is crucifying the Son of God afresh, putting Him to shame. In Hebrews 10, God's indictment is against the individuals for whom there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. God says that they trod under foot the Son of man, that is, effectively, they are declaring that Jesus is worthless. These are enormously serious indictments.

The horror of it all is that the congregation and the individuals in the congregation are well acquainted with the Bible. As we learned from Hebrews 6, they knew the first principles of Bible truth. As indicated in Hebrews 10, these individuals are in a congregation in which the Holy Spirit had been saving people. They also had the Bible completely available to them.

In other words, these local churches and the individual members within them were much closer to the kingdom of God than those who were outside the church. They were in “the holy place,” to use the language of Matthew 24:15. God was in their midst. They were taught many truths of the Bible. Of all the peoples of the world, they were the most knowledgeable of the God of the Bible and His salvation program.

The sin of disobeying God’s command to leave the church reveals a terrible truth. Before the end of the church age, it appeared that the individuals of Hebrews 10 and the congregations of Hebrews 6 were faithful followers of Christ. But now it shows that their trust was not in Christ. It was in the church or in the confessions of the church or in their water baptism etc. They are revealed as being like the seven women of Isaiah 4:1 who wanted the name of Christ but wanted their own bread and apparel. That is, they insisted they were Christ’s children but they wanted to tailor their gospel to suit themselves. Thus, effectively, Christ was not needed for their salvation. They believed their salvation was adequately supplied to them as they followed the rules set forth by their church or denomination.

We are reminded of the teaching of Luke 12:47-48:

And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of *stripes*, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Unfortunately, by means of this study of the parable of the wheat and the tares, together with the warnings of Hebrews 6 and 10, we now understand the grievous seriousness of the warning of Luke 12:47-48. God is instructing us that the most grievous sinners under the fearful wrath of God are not the prostitutes, the murderers, the thieves of the world. Rather, it is those within the churches who are convinced they need not obey the command to come out of the church, thus showing that they had never become saved. How terrible. How awful!

We Are Not to Judge Individuals

One more thought should be expressed. It is true that we are now in the time of the separation of the wheat from the tares. However, those of us who understand this and realize the reality of this must be certain that we do not begin to make judgments regarding individuals remaining in or leaving the churches.

We all know individuals who have heard of the teaching that we are to come out of the congregation, but thus far, they are refusing to do so. We must

remember that no human can see the heart of that person. Inwardly, he may be struggling with that question so that after much prayer and study of that command, then finally, he will leave the congregation.

Moreover, if someone readily leaves the church, that does not in itself prove that he is truly saved. Furthermore, there may be individuals in the church who are elect of God but at this time, they are still unsaved. We know they will not become saved as long as they remain in the church. Therefore, in some way, God must drive them out because it is only outside of the church that salvation is possible.

It is true that they will receive no spiritual guidance from their church. This is so because God has forsaken their church. However, when they hear truth from sources outside of their church, God will have mercy on them, if they are elect of God. They will come to truth and realize they must leave their church.

We learn this as we examine the situation in the synagogues in Paul's day. Remember, at the time Jesus went back to heaven, God shifted the Gospel responsibility away from the institution of the nation of Israel who worshiped in the temple and the synagogues. Ever since that time, no one has become saved because of the preaching of the leaders of the synagogue. This situation continues to our present day.

However, outside the synagogues, there were the churches that had been given the task of sending forth the Gospel. Paul, who had been a Pharisee, was sent to tell those in the synagogues of God's plan of salvation. God now assigned the task of disseminating the Gospel to the local churches. While most synagogues persecuted Paul for his efforts, some of the priests did believe as did some in the synagogues of Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-4, 10-12).

Likewise, in our day, God has shifted the care taking of the Gospel from the local churches to individuals outside the churches. However, as those who are outside share these truths with church members, or as church members listen to radio programs such as those offered by Family Radio, God can work through these efforts to rescue those who are still in the churches but should come out.

Of course, we must admit that the situation in the local churches looks incredibly terrible. So few appear to be troubled by the command to leave the church. In fact, most people within the churches appear to have no interest whatsoever in even beginning to study the question of leaving the church. And each day that passes is a giant step that brings us closer to the final Judgment Day.

However, as people within the churches listen to the Gospel proclaimed by those who are outside of the churches, we hope that some within the churches will become saved and come out of the local churches.

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