



*Will Jesus
come from
the sky
or as a thief?*

*I shall come on
the clouds of heaven!*

Behold! I shall come like a thief!

**Will Jesus Come
From the Sky
or as a Thief?**

**Rethinking a
Questionable Assumption**

Be always on the *watch* and *pray* that you may be able to...stand
before the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:36 NIV)

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Why did Jesus Ask Us to “Watch”?

Keep a *watch* on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by...worldly cares...Be on the alert, *praying* at all times. Christ (Luke 21:34-36 NEB)

Be on guard!...keep *watch*...you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, *I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’*
Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

Blessed is he who *watches*, and keeps his garments... Christ (Rev. 16:15 NKJ)

Unto them that look for Him, shall He appear the second time. Hebrews 9:28

Will Jesus Come from the Sky or as a Thief?

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ISBN: 9780937661154

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011924523

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A Serious Challenge to an Old Assumption

When Jesus came the first time, “who” or “what” saw Him? Every “eye” in the head, or every “eye” in the heart? What about the second time? Will the rule change from the “eye” in the heart to the “eye” in the head—from insight to eyesight?

This book examines and exposes to critical eyes all the “imaginary toys” that Jewish and Christians theologians have made out of “the letters” of Bible prophecies over the last 3,000 years. It invites all faithful Jews and Christians, who have been walking through “the broad gate” of literal interpretation of prophecies, to take a break and change course for just a little while. It asks all truth seekers to jump over “the walls of metaphoric images” and enter “the enchanting and beautiful rose-garden of inner meanings.”

“*Will Jesus Come from the Sky?*” shows how “the bare letters” can confuse and kill “the spirit of prophecies,” and how “the spirit” can clothe those letters with meaning, purpose, and absolute harmony. It shows the grave perils of thinking within the small and dark confines of “letters” and “words” without seeing the glorious light that binds them and harmonizes them. It portrays the meaning and purpose of this everlasting and most fundamental, but widely ignored truth:

The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. II Corinthians 3:6

Can any harm come to you from expanding your vision, from seeing “the letter” in the light of “the spirit,” from entering a new garden and perhaps picking a few flowers? Can you search for knowledge but get lost?

Seek and ye shall find. Matthew 7:7

Through knowledge shall the just be delivered. Proverbs 11:9

My people perish for want of knowledge. Hosea 4:6

We are surrounded by many traps. A common trap is the glammers of this world; the illusion that the more we have the happier we will be. Are those who have fallen for this trap aware of their captivity? Are Christians who are crowding into a spacecraft called “the rapture,” and waiting for a lift up, aware of their trap?

The signs and clues that confirm the coming of Jesus as a thief are everywhere, why then so many have missed them? The most obvious reason is that interpreters have engaged in “selective perception.” They see what their “itching” eyes like to see and what their “itching” ears like to hear.

Have you ever listened to parents whose son or daughter committed suicide? Have you not heard them say: “There are so many signs. Why did I miss them?” Human beings have an enormous ability to engage in “selective seeing.” That is exactly what the Jews did. They saw only the one set of the signs they wanted to see. Jesus knew this would happen again. And He urged us repeatedly to “Watch!” That is exactly what this book

does. It brings to your attention all the signs that have been ignored, distorted, or covered up in many subtle ways—so subtle few believers can detect them.

Jesus predicted that the people of our time will fall into three traps. Do you remember them? Here they are:

- Anxieties of life
- Pleasures of life
- Drunkenness (a state of spiritual apathy and unawareness)

These traps serve one purpose: They prevent us from being watchful. To see if your friends are spiritually drunk or sober, put them to this test. Tell them one at a time that you have made a thorough investigation of the signs pointing to the Second Advent, and you have consequently discovered that Christ has already returned and left the world. You could also claim that He is still alive and is mingling with people “like a thief,” but He does not want to let “strangers” know his identity. He allows only the trustful know him. Carry out this test ten times to find out how the average believer responds to this most glorious news. You may be surprised to find out that none of your friends will believe you, that none of them can think beyond the confines of tradition.

Some Christian leaders and scholars remind us that we should heed this most significant lesson in history: The Jews prayed persistently for the Advent of their Redeemer, but when their prayers were answered and their Redeemer stepped on the scene, instead of glorifying him, they condemned Him! Why? He did not fulfill their imagined expectations. Could this happen again?

Distinguished theologian, Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton believes that it can indeed happen, that history can once again repeat itself. In a spirit of humility, he asks Christians not to be complacent, not to disregard this most urgent lesson of history. In the following statement, Dr. James Kennedy—the noted scholar and founder of Westminster Academy—pays homage to Dr. Hodge for his rare insight and his awareness of this possibility:

The great Princeton theologian of the last century, Dr. Charles Hodge, said something which is worth remembering. He said that though the Old Testament is filled with some 333 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ; in spite of that, nobody got it right. And as you know, they crucified Christ because of a misunderstanding about what the Messiah was really coming to do. And we should because of that be somewhat humbled and modest in our attempts to interpret prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. It is quite possible that all of us [Christian leaders] are wrong as well.¹

Please ponder the profound meaning of the preceding statement. Read it several times and determine if you can find any flaws in it. Ask yourself repeatedly: What reason do I have to be sure that what happened to the best of Jewish scholars and leaders will not happen to me and other Christians? What reason do I have to believe that those who came before me failed to know the meaning of prophecies, but I cannot fail? If your answer is “yes,” that is, if you believe that we too may fail to know the meaning of prophecies, then it is essential that you read *Will Jesus Come from the Sky or as a Thief?* Would you risk your eternal life for a little negligence, for failing to pay attention, in the words of Jesus:

failing to be “*watchful*”? What harm can come to you from knowing? “Through *knowledge* shall the just be saved” (Prov. 11:9), not through *lack* of it!

I

The Two Missing Links

Among Christian publications there are two highly noticeable “missing links”:

- The absence of an impartial study of the language of the Scriptures, of the unique way our Creator speaks.
- The absence of a study of the prophecies that point to the Return of Jesus “like a thief.”

This book fills both of these vacuums: It examines the unique language of the Scriptures, and it brings to light the prophecies that many Christian authors would rather hide or wish could not be found in the Bible!

After reading *Will Jesus Come from the Sky or as a Thief?* you will be puzzled by this question: the two “missing links” are so noticeable, why have so many failed to see them for so long? As you read this book, you will become keenly aware of the vast difference between the way God speaks and the way we speak. *You will discover “the mystery of metaphors.” You will have a chance to look beyond “words” and “letters” to see the glory and beauty of the Spirit.* You will recognize that without lifting the veil of metaphors, it is impossible to discern the true meaning of God’s Word, to see its awesome beauty, harmony, and splendor. Prepare yourself, then, for many surprises in this inspiring journey from the ways of “the letter” to the wonders of “the Spirit.”

To be objective, put yourself in the position of the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus. When their Redeemer came, did not His manner of coming contradict everything they had heard all their lives and accepted as the absolute truth? If this happened then, could it not happen now? If this happened to the Jews, could it not happen to Christians? What do you think makes the people of this age special? Is there any biblical prophecy that gives Christians of this age a reason to believe that they are spiritually wiser than the Jews of the time of Jesus, who completely misunderstood the prophecies? On the contrary, biblical prophecies predicting the spiritual state of the people of this age offer only bad news:

The great day of the Lord is near...and people will walk like blind men...

Zephaniah 1:14, 17

Do you recall this prophecy from Jesus?

At that time many will turn away from the faith...

Matthew 24:10

If people lack faith, can they be faithful to the Bible? Do you also recall the following prophecy from St. Paul about the way the Christians of this age will behave. To get a full picture of this prophecy, let us see it in *The Amplified Bible*:

For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions.

II Timothy 4:3-4

Consider also these prophecies:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power....They are the kind who are always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

II Timothy 3:1-7

...That day will not come except the apostasy comes first—that is, unless the [predicted] great falling away of those who have professed to be Christians has come...

II Thessalonians 2:3

The problem is this: no one wants to admit that these verses apply, even remotely, to him. It is always someone else who qualifies.

To become worthy of God's grace and enter His heavenly Kingdom, we must stand with absolute humility before Him:

Blessed are ***the poor in spirit*** [the humble], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Christ (Matt. 5:3)

For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns ***the humble*** with salvation.

Psalms 149:4

In the spirit of humility ask yourself: ***“Is it possible that St. Paul’s prediction may apply to me?”*** If you think you are open-minded and you are willing to listen to the news that your ears may ***not*** like to hear, then test yourself by responding to these critical questions:

Jesus was born as a baby, why then did He say:

I have come down from the sky.

Christ (John 6:38)

If Jesus wanted to come from the sky, why would He say:

I shall come upon you like a thief.

Christ (Rev. 3:3)

Most Christians do not like to set their hope on a Savior who comes like a thief. They do not want to claim a humble man as their Redeemer. They wish for someone who is extremely powerful. But does not this wish in itself present an example to confirm St. Paul's prediction that Christians of the last days will tend to satisfy their hearts' desire rather than strive to seek knowledge? What would an "itching ear" like to hear concerning the Return of Jesus? Consider the following message promoted in a series of books known as "Left Behind." So far, over fifty million copies of this series have been

sold. In the history of publications, secular or religious, few books can rival them in popularity. Here is the gist of what these books teach:

O dear brothers and sisters in faith! Stay on board and be cheerful! Be certain that when Jesus returns, you will suddenly be lifted to heaven to live in peace and joy forevermore! Don't let anyone distract you from this promise! When that glorious moment arrives, all nonbelievers, including many Christians—about 90 percent of the earth's population—will be left behind to suffer and die in pain and misery. Even if you call yourself Christian, but you are “unsaved,” that is, if you have not turned your heart to the Lord and asked for forgiveness of your sins, you will not be safe from the impending horrible disasters. To save yourself from the raging fire, you must always be a Christian “in good standing!” because you do not know when that final moment comes!

You may disagree with the preceding view, but you may still insist that there is only one way Jesus will come: from the sky. If this is what you think, ponder the following possibility. Suppose all your life you had heard from your parents, pastors, and priests that Jesus could come:

Either from the sky as a “mighty King.”

Or like a “thief,” a “suffering Servant,” as He came the first time.

If you had heard both of these views, what do you think your belief would be? Would it not allow for both possibilities? That is precisely what this book asks you to do: to learn about and prepare yourself for ***both*** possibilities. What can you lose by doing this? And what can you lose by ***not*** doing this? You may even ask: Why should I read a whole book about this one topic? Why should I care about the way Jesus will come? If that question crosses your mind, then consider this unthinkable and awful possibility:

If Jesus came from the sky, you could not fail to see Him. What if He didn't? What if He failed to fulfill your fixed—but up to now unchallenged—assumptions? What if He came as a humble Man, and once again faced rejection and ridicule? What would be your reaction then? How would you judge Him? What would you call Him? Would you not be tempted to call Him a false prophet? Would you not be tempted to condemn Him? Would you not be tempted to consider Him even an Antichrist? Are you willing to take that chance? If you are willing to take that chance, then you can certainly ignore the message of this book.

Suppose you were a judge. Would you be satisfied to hear just one side of a story? Common sense requires of us to learn all the facts. Wisdom prompts us to become well informed before making a decision.

The true beginning of wisdom is ***the desire to learn.***
Wisdom of Solomon 6:17

Through ***knowledge*** shall the just be delivered.
Proverbs 11:9

My people perish for want of ***knowledge.***
Hosea 4:6

This is all you are being asked to do: to cultivate a desire to learn, to seek a knowledge that can change your destiny, not for just a few years, but for all eternity. ***Wisdom is ever-awake and watchful. It does not take a break! It cannot rest or sleep in the darkness of apathy and unconcern. Wisdom is always daring and curious. It thrives on knowledge, and never takes tradition for truth or submits to ignorance or inaction. Like an eagle with open wings and far-reaching and piercing eyes, it is always soaring, seeking, searching, and watching:***

Keep a watch on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by...worldly cares...Be on the alert, praying at all times. Christ (Luke 21:34-36)

The Literal Theory of Heavenly Descent has been presented to Christians as the only viable theory. This book presents an alternative theory that is not only more plausible, but provable. It invites you to rethink “an untested assumption” that, like a mighty river, has flowed from the minds of literal-minded interpreters for centuries without facing any serious challenges. This book brings to your attention the most critical flaws of that theory. It shows the perils of putting one’s hope, and building one’s destiny, on that unreliable theory. It invites you to see how “the literal assumption” made long ago has gradually been raised from the status of a mere theory or hypothesis to that of an absolute and unquestionable truth.

I have read many prophecy books written by well-known authors and scholars. One fact stands out in their works: they treat controversial questions as if they have been fully resolved. The authors ignore what fails to fit and offer their readers what they love to hear. They act as if their interpretations are the absolute truths revealed to them in some mysterious way. “***Will Jesus Come from the Sky or as a Thief?***” asks the very questions those authors and scholars fail to ask. It puts their literal-traditional interpretations on trial in the court of justice, where the dissenting voice is also heard.

What would happen if you were far-sighted but did not know it? Then one day you started reading with glasses that corrected your eyesight? That is what this book can do for you. Once you look through it, you will see the Word of God with a clarity and consistency that you have not seen before.

The long-cherished hope of seeing “Jesus coming down on the clouds with great glory and power” has been built like a magic castle in so many hearts for so many centuries, that it requires an entire volume to disperse “the clouds” and let the light shine through. Can a castle be shaken with bare hands? It takes mighty efforts even to unlock and open its gate! This book is an invitation to all truth seekers to enter this splendid castle, take an “inside look,” and see if it was built with solid facts or with fantasy and desire.

It is my hope that you will explore the message of this book with the attitude that was required of the Jews of the time of Jesus. Only those who made humility and courage their guiding light recognized their Lord. Only those who did not allow traditional expectations to dim their vision of truth detected the glory of “the heavenly thief” in their midst. Only those who liberated their conscience from the influence of “authority figures” recognized their Redeemer.

Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, and the other apostles did not ask their rabbis—who knew more Hebrew and Greek—if they should investigate the claim of Jesus. Not only that, but

they also *went against the established traditions and powerful and literal-minded teachers of the Law such as Annas and Caiaphas*—the two most distinguished religious leaders and scholars among the Jews at the time of Jesus. Should we not learn from their examples? Should we not learn the lessons of history.

2

The Twin Sets of Signs and Clues that Jesus Gave

Most Christians believe that when Jesus comes, *He* will look for them; they do not need to look for *Him*! This belief has made them passive. They continue to wish and wait for His coming as previous generations have done for nearly 2,000 years. They accept the traditional assumptions made by Bible interpreters long ago that there are only three requirements for seeing Jesus:

- Remaining awake and sober
- Having good eyes
- Looking up into the skies

Today we are in the same position that the Jews were at the time of the First Advent. They loved God and prayed in their homes and synagogues for the Advent of their Redeemer just the way Christians do now. Yet when Jesus came, they failed to recognize Him. Why? Consider these reasons:

- They engaged in “selective seeing.”
- They followed “the letters” of prophecies, but ignored their “spirit.”

The first requirement for making a sound judgment is to be objective: to see everything as it is. The majority of the Jews saw only what their “itching eyes” wanted to see. The Scriptures gave them *two* sets of seemingly opposite signs and clues, but they saw only *one* set—the one that crowned their Redeemer with military power and majesty. What were those signs and clues?

One Set of Signs and Clues for the First Advent

The Lord swore to David an oath which He will not break: “A prince of your own line will I set upon your throne.”
Psalms 132:11

But you, Bethlehem...out of you will come...One who will be ruler over Israel...
Micah 5:2

Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion.
Numbers 24:19
See also I Chronicles 17:11-14

The Other Set of Signs and Clues for the First Advent

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...He was pierced for our transgressions... *Isaiah 53:3, 5*

Most Christians fail to realize that the Scriptures also give us *two* sets of seemingly opposite signs regarding the Second Advent, just as they do concerning the First Advent:

One Set of Signs and Clues for the Second Advent

They will see the Son of Man on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. *Christ (Matt. 24:30)*

Look, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him... *Christ (Rev. 1:7)*

The Other Set of Signs and Clues for the Second Advent

Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake... *Christ (Rev. 16:15)*

...the Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night...we must keep awake and [remain] sober. *I Thessalonians 5:2-8*

Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time. *Hebrews 9:28*

Be...like men waiting [looking KJ] for their Master...so that when He comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for Him. *Christ (Luke 12:35-36)*

I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. *Christ (Rev. 3:20)*

Thus the first reason that the Jews rejected Jesus was *selective seeing*: They saw only one set of clues, the one their “itching eyes” wanted to see. What was the other reason? It was worshipping “the letters” of prophecies, but ignoring their “spirit.” It was being “letter-minded” instead of being “spirit-minded.”

As we shall see throughout this book, the most distinctive feature of God’s language is His abundant use of metaphors, similes, and symbols, such as flesh and bread for the Word of God, water for eternal life, light for guidance, fire for justice, oil for wisdom, king for celestial majesty, clouds for obstacles, and heaven for spiritual loftiness, greatness, and glory.

Without recognizing this unique feature of God’s language, the spirit of the Scriptures remains beyond our reach. Without lifting the veil of symbols and metaphors, the beautiful Bride of truth remains concealed from our vision.

What lessons can we learn from the events of the First Advent? The lessons are quite simple. We must resolve to do precisely what the Jews failed to do:

- ***Avoid selective seeing.*** Look carefully at *both* sets of signs and clues that the Scriptures give us.

- *Avoid being literal-minded.* Recognize God’s unique manner of speaking.

That is exactly what this book sets out to accomplish:

- To help you see *all* the signs and clues that Jesus gave concerning His Second Coming, not just the ones that our “itching ears” would like to hear!
- To help you recognize the supreme powers of the prevailing *Traditional Bias*—a bias that is tilted toward extreme and unjustified literalism, a bias so powerful it does not allow any dissenting voice to be heard.

Let us now take a look at God’s unique language in the next chapter. Let us see His distinct way of speaking and communicating with human beings.

3

Spiritual Truths in Spiritual Words

The following verses are the light of guidance for understanding the Scriptures. Without allowing this light to shed its splendors on the Word of God, we will be groping in darkness:

It is the *Spirit* which gives life...The things which I have told you are *spiritual*...
Christ (John 6:63)

This is what we speak...expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words. I Corinthians 2:13

Let us examine the supreme powers and potentials that lie hidden in the preceding pronouncements. Let us see what difference these would make if their message had been heeded by Christians. Why do you think the followers of Jesus—about two billion of them—have been divided into more than 20,000 sects and denominations? Take the example of baptism. Someone said, “We must baptize by immersion,” another said, “No, by sprinkling,” and yet another said, “I don’t think we need to do any of this.” And so each of them went his way and started his own church!

Now suppose those dissenting believers had looked at *the spirit* of the Scriptures instead of focusing on *the letters*. How would they have behaved? They would have declared, “What really matters is loving Jesus and one another. It doesn’t really matter how or if one is baptized.” They would have known that the ceremony of baptism is only a process, a symbol of spiritual purity. You may baptize yourself every day of your life, and it would not do you any good if you carried grudges against your neighbor or deception and lust in your heart.

History testifies that the dissenters and dividers have always done their destructive work in the dark closet of literal thinking and imagining. They have failed to realize that it is “the spirit” that bestows life, unity, and harmony, and that “the letters” breed only death and destruction (II Cor. 3:6).

Our Creator teaches us throughout the Scriptures that we must be spirit-minded, not letter-minded. We must focus on the big picture, not simply the words and letters. For the spirit is always bigger than the words and letters. To see the beauty of the Bride, we must pass through the veil of metaphors and symbols to discover the underlying truths.

As St. Paul teaches us, not only are *the truths* of the Scriptures spiritual, *the words* that contain the truths are also spiritual. The implication of his pronouncement is clear: To discern the Word of God, we must wear “spiritual glasses.” Only then can we see their

true meaning. There is no verse in the Bible that contradicts St. Paul's teaching, not a single verse that says the Scriptures express "*literal* truths in *literal* words." ***Why then do so many Bible interpreters pride themselves in being literal?*** Why do so many people openly disobey the Bible? This is a great mystery that should be carefully explored. Consider these two reasons among others:

- It is easier to be literal. It does not take much imagination.
- Literal thinking gives credibility to one's belief.

Which would most people prefer?

- A Savior who comes quietly as a thief, who looks like "the neighbor next door," who eats food and gets sick, and appears lonely and helpless?
- Or a Savior who comes with might and majesty, who is surrounded by angels, and takes care of His enemies with the force and speed of lightening. Which Savior would you choose?

God's Unique Language

Does God speak in a unique language, one that is different from ours? Does He often communicate with us through parables, metaphors, and symbols. Does He always speak in literal terms or in spiritual language? Where can we find the key to this puzzle? Consider this verse among others:

A man who is ***unspiritual*** refuses whatever belongs to the Spirit of God; it is folly to him; he cannot grasp it, because ***it needs to be judged in the light of the Spirit.***

I Corinthians 2:14

The Scriptures show a clear contrast between God's way of speaking and the human way of speaking. The most striking contrast lies in God's abundant use of metaphors, parables, symbols, and similes. The Gospel clearly confirms this fact:

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables, ***and He did not say anything to them without using a parable.***

Matthew 13:34

What is a parable? According to *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*:

A parable is often no more than an extended metaphor or simile, using figurative language in the form of a story to illustrate a particular truth.

What purpose does a parable serve? According to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, it may serve as a:

- Prophetic figurative discourse (Num. 23:7, 18, 24)
- Similitude (Ez. 17:2; 21:5; 24:3)
- Poem (Num. 21:2-30)
- Riddle or dark saying (Psa. 49:4; Ezekiel 17:2; 20:4-9)
- Didactic, symbolic or figurative utterance (John 10:6; 16:29)

Opening the Bible is like stepping into a beautiful rose-garden. Every page is filled with fragrant and blooming blossoms of spiritual truths expressed through metaphors—blossoms that engage the mind and enchant the soul.

Here are a few other features of divine language compared to human language:

- Critical messages are spoken briefly and succinctly without details.
- Judgments are made in an absolute—versus relative—language.
- Subjects are changed suddenly.
- Arguments against dissenters are avoided.
- Messages are expressed with supreme authority.
- The language used is novel, creative, and unique. It is readily distinguishable from human language.

Let us explore in the next chapter a consequence of failing to recognize the unique language of prophecies.

4

Today's Schools of Prophecy

Many Christians assume that the scholars and Bible teachers know the best, just as the Jews did at the time of Jesus. They simply leave biblical judgment to them. They often fail to realize that “the experts” are often confused and at odds with each other. This chapter takes you behind the scene to show you the level of confusion among those who claim to understand the prophecies.

Without a spiritual perspective, the Bible looks like scattered pieces of a puzzle. Literal interpreters assemble the pieces of the puzzle and try to make them fit together. But they face enormous obstacles. The prevailing confusion among prophecy experts has give birth to many “Schools of Prophecy” with varying views and impressive labels:

- *Premillennial Pretribulational*
- *Premillennial Posttribulational*
- *Premillennial Midtribulational*
- *Prewrath Rapture*
- *Premillennial Partial Rapture*
- *St. Augustine's Amillennial*
- *Warfield's Amillennial*
- *Evangelical Postmillennial*¹

Even the followers of *each* school differ in their views. For instance:

Evangelical postmillennialism...needs to be distinguished from the liberal theological view that teaches that a kingdom of God or utopia would be created on earth through human achievement...A new kind of postmillennialism different from both the earlier liberal and evangelical varieties, is gaining popularity and respect today. The new postmillennialism differs drastically from the old liberal utopian belief...²

To get a glimpse of the extent of contradictions that the literalists encounter and the complex and even incomprehensible theories they conceive to resolve them, see Appendix II.

It is ironic that among the literal-minded Christians—who claim to believe in “what the letters of the Scriptures say”—there is bitter disagreement. Apparently, in each of those schools “the letters” speak a different language! Letter lovers and letter worshippers are so sure of their rightness that they engage in “Scriptural wars of words!” They turn the church into a battleground and the Word of God into weapons of contention and conflict. If you find this hard to believe, then read *The Last Day Handbook* by Dr Robert Lightner, professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr Lightner, a devoted

Christian, wrote that book solely to bring peace, or at least establish a truce, among the members of those schools. The following quotations from his book tell the story:

Christians who may agree on all the essential doctrines of the faith have been locked in verse-by-verse combat over who is right and who is wrong in the great eschatological debate... You have a right to know why men of God who agree on all the essential fundamentals of the faith differ so widely and battle so tenaciously over prophecy.³

It seems that as soon as a particular view is presented and defended, it is countered and answered by arguments from an opposing side.⁴

Dr Lightner states that:

Virtually every facet of unfulfilled prophecy has been explored countless times. In fact, one would have difficulty finding any stones that have not been turned in the field of eschatology.⁵

Prophecy books are extremely abundant and popular. “Prophecy experts” have turned over every stone countless times. They have inspected every grain of sand under the microscope of literal thinking. They have displayed those piles of sand—their personal thoughts and theories—to millions of Christians as if they were the genuine pearls of truth. And yet they have left untouched the mountains of evidence that contradict their theories. They have become so preoccupied with the handfuls of colorful and glamorous stones and gravels that they have lost sight of those towering mountains.

Prophecy experts claim that the second time Jesus will not come as a helpless and lonely man. He will come as a victorious King with military might and majesty, surrounded by millions of powerful soldiers. They tell the believers what their “itching ears” like to hear, and never get tired of hearing.

This book shows how unfounded, unreasonable, and unscriptural those popular theories are. *Will Jesus Come from the Sky or as a Thief?* presents overwhelming evidence to show that Jesus will come again just the way He told us He would—like a thief! ***This is the only view, the only perspective that is missing in all those Schools of Interpretation. As we shall see, it is the only view that can make the pieces of the prophecy puzzle fit with precision, that can bring harmony into the prevailing chaos and confusion. And that is the undeniable proof of its soundness.***

Suppose we had the pieces of an engine, but did not know how to put them together. Suppose we showed those pieces to millions of people and asked them to make the machine, but they all failed. Why? Because they worked under the influence of a preconceived belief or bias that clouded their thinking. And then after years of trial and error, someone discovered a way to put the pieces together to make the machine. Would not that achievement in itself prove that the assembling method was right? If you saw the engine working as a unit, would you still doubt or deny its existence?

The literal thinkers have failed, and continue to fail, because they are looking for the City of God with the dark “veils of metaphors” on their eyes. Unless they remove those veils, they will not see the awesome beauty and harmony of that City.

What is the purpose of speaking in Spiritual Language, and why is it used so abundantly in the Scriptures? Understanding this question is the key to the mysteries and wonders of the Word of God. Let us explore it first from a scientific perspective in the next chapter, and then later study it from Biblical perspective.

5

The Two Modes of Thinking

Do not judge superficially... John 7:24

This chapter reveals one of the most fascinating mysteries of the human mind. It explains why many sincere and well-meaning people cannot agree. It discloses a common but overlooked reason for arguments, conflicts, and wars. Recognizing this mystery of the human mind helps us to understand people. It can prevent arguments, whether they are between family members, politicians, or religious leaders. It can broaden our vision and help us see the word of God from a new perspective.

Scientific studies indicate that the human mind is endowed with two unique capacities or Modes of Thinking:

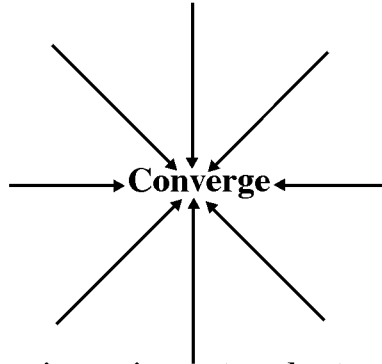
Convergent thinking

Divergent thinking

“Convergent thinking” is needed when the problem *has one correct solution*. It is the kind of thinking we use to add or subtract, to name the capital of a country, or to understand and follow a set of directions. “Divergent thinking” is needed when a question *has many answers*, when it can be resolved in many ways. It is the kind of thinking we use to design a new city, to write a novel, to interpret a piece of poetry, to produce a movie, to organize a symphony, or to unravel the mysteries of the universe. Success at school mostly requires convergent thinking. Success in life mostly requires divergent thinking.

Convergent Thinking

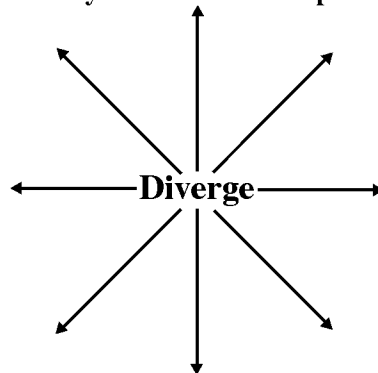
“Converge” means coming together (thinking of one answer or solution, solving a problem according to known rules or principles.)



The main requirement: understanding, concentration, and memory

Divergent Thinking

“Diverge” means moving in different directions (thinking of many answers or solutions, going beyond the ordinary and the commonplace.)



The main requirement: creative imagination

“Convergent thinking” is like traveling in a truck on a highway at full speed to deliver a package. “Divergent thinking” is like driving in a convertible car on “a road less traveled” to enjoy the forests and the flowers along the way, and to watch the sunrise, the sunset, and the beautiful butterflies.

To get a global picture of the two Modes of Thinking, let us describe each of them through other relevant words:

<i>Convergent</i>	<i>Divergent</i>
Reductionist	Global
Letter-minded	Spirit-minded

Narrow	Broad
Strict	Open
Conventional	Innovative
Limited	Extended
Precise	Encompassing
Legalistic	Spiritual
Literal	Intuitive
Fixed	Flexible
Predetermined	Creative
Restricted	Imaginative

Letter-minded thinkers, as a rule, see “the small picture;” spirit-minded thinkers see “the big picture.” Some scientists believe that the left side of the brain mostly controls “reductionist thinking” and the right side “global thinking.”

How can we apply or practice the following counsel?

Do not judge superficially...

John 7:24

To apply or practice the preceding counsel, we must cultivate and use **both** Modes of Thinking. Our mind must flow continually from one Mode to the other. Consider this example: to be a good driver, not only we must look at specifics, such as potholes on the road and the speedometer in the car, but also have a global view of the entire highway and of everything else that surrounds us. The proverb, “penny-wise, pound-foolish” describes a similar phenomenon.

The two capacities or Modes of Thinking are complementary. Everyone has a specific supply of both, and uses each of them in a unique way, depending on the task at hand. Individual differences are enormous. Some people are richly endowed with both capacities; others have much of one and little of the other. We have all met people who are good at following directions or doing a mathematical problem, but do not have much imagination. They are often set in their ways and seldom do they generate or accept new ideas. They feel secure when they receive literal and specific directions, but get lost in a forest of inner meanings and metaphoric truths. Their narrow mode of thinking often affects their attitude and feelings; they become rigid and fearful of new ideas. I have taught creative thinking to thousands of college students for over 30 years and have been amazed at the contrast between these two groups.

Although people are endowed with various levels of these capacities, they have the ability to shift from one Mode of Thinking to another. For instance, people are more likely to shift to “convergent,” narrow or “one way” thinking when they face personal or emotional issues. They are also more likely to resort to convergent thinking when they consider their religious beliefs. It is evident that one’s beliefs are rooted within deep emotions and loyalties. Most believers are reluctant to leave a known highway on which they have traveled all their lives, even for a brief detour. The fear of getting lost is always present.

Understanding the two Modes of Thinking often explains why well-meaning people do not see each other's point of view, why arguments are so common, and why new ideas sometimes have to wait centuries before they are accepted. It also shows why so few people are willing to take "the road less traveled."

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.
Christ (Matt. 7:13-14 NIV)

Have you heard the story of the Australian doctor who discovered that ulcers are often caused by bacteria? His discovery was so radical, so far away from the accepted norm, the medical community ignored his finding. Prestigious medical journals refused to publish reports of his research. He had to infect himself with the bacteria to prove his point. Even after this bold attempt, the medical establishment continued to ignore his findings, and even to degrade and make fun of him. Consider also these examples:

- In 1850, Dr Ignaz Semmelweis was run out of Vienna because he asked medical students to wash their hands before they entered his Vienna obstetrical clinic. He moved to Budapest, where his innovation slashed the death rate through childbirth fever from as high as 25% to less than one percent. He compiled research figures over 10 years and published them in 1861. He was totally ignored. He died in 1865 following a mental breakdown.
- Then in 1867, Dr Joseph Lister broadened Semmelweis' work to sanitation in all surgery, with dramatic results. But the British Medical Association and leading surgeons were outraged.
- Dr Louis Pasteur, a chemist, devised the germ theory of infectious diseases, which provoked violent opposition. How could a mere chemist presume to tell doctors how to do medicine?
- Dr Harvey's monumental work on the theory of blood circulation was forbidden to be taught at the University of Paris Medical School for 21 years.
- Dr Fleming's discovery of penicillin was ridiculed and ignored for 12 years.¹

Studies indicate that education does not change our Mode of Thinking. It simply reinforces or enhances the existing modes. It is also believed that the educational systems of all nations have been, and still are, strongly biased toward methods and practices that enhance and reward convergent thinking at the expense of divergent thinking. The students are often not encouraged to think for themselves or to search for new ideas. They are required to memorize what the teacher gives them. But the balance is slowly shifting. It may take another century before it is restored. Traditions are extremely obstinate and enduring.

Many reasons contribute to this imbalance. One of them is this: creative thinking is difficult to test. Compare that with a test in geography, reading, or math. Both parents and "authorities" want "results," concrete evidence that children are learning. Only a score can demonstrate this. In a sense, most people judge the level of success in teaching or learning in terms of quantity, rather than quality.

The two Modes of Thinking are equally good and equally essential. They are gifts from God to us. As long as we use them for the specific purpose for which they are intended,

we function within the “safety zone.” It is their abuse that causes conflicts. A car is built to take us through highways. Can we also use it to climb a mountain? What will happen if we do? In the physical world the consequences are visible and undeniable. In the world of thought the consequences can be denied, concealed, distorted, or rationalized.

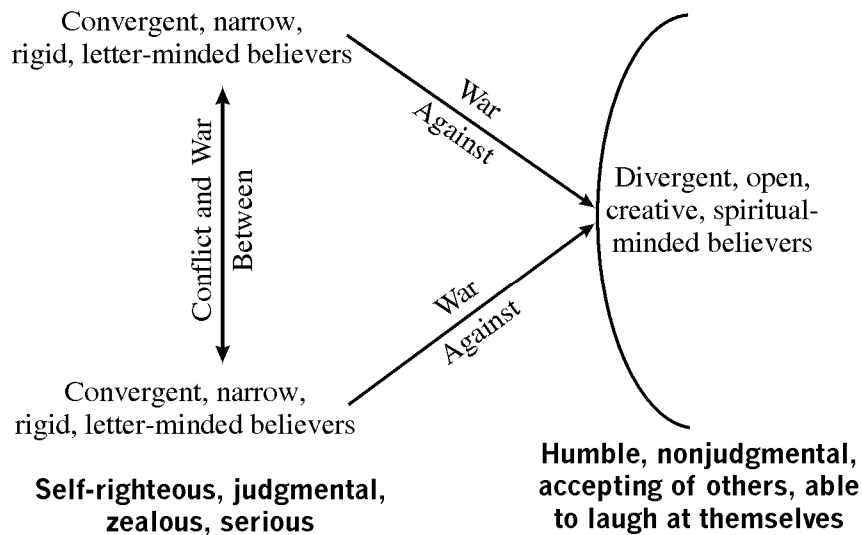
Consider also this example: to solve a math problem we need a rather narrow focused perspective. Seldom can we solve a math problem by being creative. We must follow the rules. What if we need to solve a family problem? Can “reductionistic” rigid thinking help us?

We should not assume that global thinkers are better or have higher moral values than reductionistic thinkers. The question of goodness or moral values is not an issue here and has no relevance to our discussion. As stated, the issue is *the use or abuse of the two Modes of Thinking*.

It is best not to have letter-minded thinkers in positions of leadership, because the answers are not “in the book.” A leader must be a master in both Modes of Thinking, especially the creative mode. Winston Churchill is an excellent example of such a leader. It is said that when he faced a problem he could think of so many solutions, he did not know which ones to choose!

We should also note that our Mode of Thinking has a powerful impact on the choices we make. Imagine the negative consequences of “a creative thinker” choosing to be an accountant, and “a conventional thinker” choosing to be an architect! Consider also the life of a married couple with opposite modes of thinking! As we can see, the root-cause of many conflicts lies in the brain, in the way it views and processes information. The following figure illustrates the main reason for religious fanaticism and religious wars.

The Grave Consequences of Being Strictly Letter-Minded



The workings of the mind have a profound impact not only on the destiny of each soul but on the destiny of humankind

An excellent way to discern the difference between a literal and a spiritual thinker is to compare the way St. Paul thought and acted as a Jewish Pharisee and then as a Christian Saint.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. *Galatians 1:13-14*

[I was] a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. *Philippians 3:5-6*

Why did the Jewish Paul reject Jesus? Was it not that he interpreted the prophecies literally rather than spiritually? As a Jew, Paul was a wonderful believer. He followed every law to the letter. But what he considered an advantage worked against him. Without knowing it, he was a captive to “the letters of prophecies.” Only the grace of God liberated him.

As a Christian author notes:

If anyone could get God’s attention or earn his favor, it would have to be Paul. But as it turns out, Paul in his former life as a Pharisee discovered that his devotion to law-keeping failed to open the portals of heaven.²

The choices we make and the quality of our lives depend on the quality of our thinking. At school we learn the names of capital cities, plants, and stones, but not how to cultivate and use our mental capacities. We take full control of our cars on highways, but leave the destiny of our souls to chance or to “authority figures.” Have you heard the story of a young bride who would fry first the upper part of the fish, and then the lower part? When her husband asked her why, she said because her mother did it. And when the mother was asked, she said, “My frying pan was too small!” This story demonstrates the way many people choose their way of life and destiny! They submit to tradition. Even after having new opportunities for growth, even after receiving new knowledge, they continue to act as if their “frying pan” is too small.

As there are rules or guidelines for building a house, playing chess, or driving a car, so are there rules or guidelines for sound thinking. The following is a list of eight traits or virtues that two scientists—Dr Richard Paul and Dr Linda Elder—have discovered to be essential to sound thinking. For a detailed description of these traits, see Appendix III:

- ***Intellectual Humility***
- ***Intellectual Integrity***
- ***Intellectual Courage***
- ***Intellectual Perseverance***
- ***Intellectual Empathy***
- ***Faith In Reason***
- ***Intellectual Autonomy***
- ***Fairmindedness***³

What would happen if everyone lived by these virtues? What would happen if everyone followed this injunction: “Let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isa. 1:18)? We would find an entirely different world within and without. Did God give us the gift of reason for no reason? Did He say, “Use that gift to understand the ***earthly*** creation (the cosmos), but not the spiritual ***creation*** (the Scriptures)?” Imagine for a moment that the power of

reasoning disappeared from the face of the earth. What would the world be like? It would be as if human beings did not exist, as if the earth was populated only by animals. We can also answer that question by looking at three types of people:

The *drunk* or *drugged*

The mentally *deranged* or *deviant*

The *dull* thinkers

We know and abhor the serious consequences of being *severely* afflicted by any of these conditions. But we often do not know and do not abhor the consequences of being *mildly* afflicted, the consequences of failing to live up to our fullest intellectual potential, especially on questions of faith. We may subconsciously even enjoy a mild affliction! It helps us get through the day. Is this why the Scriptures make the following dire predictions about those of us who are living in this age?

...they [the people of the last days] *grope in the darkness* without light and are left to wander like a *drunkard*. Job 12:25

...all the nations shall *drink* continually. Obadiah 1:16

...the inhabitants of the earth were *intoxicated*. Revelation 17:2

For all the nations have *drunk* the maddening wine... Revelation 18:3

Wake up, you *drunkards*, and lament your fate...Alas! the day is near, the day of the Lord. Joel 1:5, 15

Is this also the reason we are given these admonitions?

Be on your guard; do not let your minds be dulled by *drunkenness*... Christ (Luke 21:34)

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief... Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and *be sober*. I Thessalonians 5:4-6

A careful study of the Bible leads every fair-minded Christian to this conclusion: Prophecies portray a far more negative picture of the people of our time than the people of the time of Jesus. In the light of those prophecies, can we claim to be more faithful, open-minded, impartial, and watchful than they were? Should we not then take extra care to remain sober, vigilant, and watchful?

In the next chapter, we will explore what Mode of Thinking the Scriptures mostly require—*conventional* or *creative, reductionistic* or *global, literal* or *spiritual*?

6

The Language of the Scriptures

*Why is My Language not clear to you?
Jesus (John 8:43)*

*The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.
II Corinthians 3:6*

Let us consider an example to see how “the letter” can “kill” the spirit of faith in the human heart. Let us assume that you are teaching a Jewish friend about Jesus, and he says that according to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Redeemer of Israel must be called Immanuel:

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, behold, the young woman who is unmarried and a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel—God with us.

Isaiah 7:14

See also Matthew 1:22-23

Your Jewish friend then challenges you to show him any prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures that says the Messiah shall be called Jesus. Notice the power of just a few letters of the alphabet. Simply by focusing on a few letters—I, M, A, N, U, E, L—your friend can deny his Redeemer! He can even call Him a false prophet or an anti-Messiah! Now suppose your friend was a spirit-minded Jew. How would he see the word Immanuel? From a spiritual perspective. He would focus on its meaning: “God is with us.” The seven letters of “Immanuel” would not prevent him from seeing the Spirit of Jesus who can always be described as “*God is with us*” and indeed with anyone who sincerely invites Him to his heart. Anyone who is with Jesus is also with God. Can we separate the radiance and glory of the sun from the sun?

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory...

Hebrews 1:3

Instead of killing the spirit of faith in your Jewish friend, the prophecy would work the opposite way: It would awaken the spirit of faith and eternal life in him.

A man who is unspiritual refuses what belongs to the Spirit of God; it is folly to him; he cannot grasp it, because it needs to be judged in the light of the Spirit [spiritually judged ASV].

I Corinthians 2:14

The reason for considering the workings and wonders of the human mind in the previous chapter was to resolve a question with far-reaching consequences: What mode of thinking does an understanding of the sacred Scriptures require? To get to the depths of their meanings, do we need mostly convergent (predetermined) thinking, or mostly divergent (free and creative) thinking? The Bible is filled with specific facts like names and numbers. There are books, called “Bible Trivia,” that turn them into games that even children can play. These facts require “convergent thinking.” The Bible is also filled with

open-ended questions that do not have predetermined answers, the kind of questions that are not good for games. It is clear that to be in tune with God's Word, to be in touch with His unique Language, we must use *both* modes of thinking. Not only do we need a mind that can travel on a highway, but also a mind that can visit many gardens at once to pick a few flowers from each of them!

Through His Words, our Creator has provided a fertile ground for both capacities to grow. It is clear He wants us to use both Modes of Thinking, just as He wants us to use both of our eyes.

What happens when the balance of power shifts in favor of convergent thinkers, when they establish themselves as the authority? The answer to this question lies in the history of religious conflicts and wars. Were those wars ignited mostly by literal, zealous, rigid, and "one way" thinkers, or by spiritual, open, and imaginative thinkers? Did they come out of narrow minds that paid only lip service to "love thy neighbor," or out of minds capable of seeing "the big picture" in the light of "the spirit"? What kind of thinking causes conflict and divisiveness within the church? Is it the thinking of Literal Minds that worship "the letter" or the Spiritual Minds that glorify "the Spirit"?

The language of sacred Scriptures, like all great works of literature, is clearly tilted toward an abundant use of figures of speech—metaphors, parables, symbols, similes, and allegories. It is hard to open a page and not see them shining brightly like jewels on a crown. All the words of Jesus were adorned with these gems of beauty and wonder. Jesus used metaphors specifically to communicate messages that were:

- Spiritually reasonable, but literally "unreasonable"
- Spiritually possible but literally "impossible"
- Spiritually true, but literally "untrue"

Consider these few examples. If we take them literally, they are:

Untrue:

I have come to set fire to the earth... *Christ (Luke 12:49)*

All men will hate you because of Me. But not a hair of your head will perish.
Christ (Luke 21:17-18)

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. *Christ (Luke 10:19)*

...some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. *Christ (Matt. 16:28)*

...if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. *Christ (John 8:51)*

...no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die. *Christ (John 11:26)*

Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. *Christ (John 2:19 NIV)*

Literalism:

...he who hates his life...will keep it... *Christ (John 12:25 NKJ)*

...all who draw the sword will die by the sword. *Christ (Matt. 26:52)*

...Jesus Christ, who is...the ruler of the kings of the earth. Christ (Revelation 1:5)
The victory is mine; I have conquered the world. Christ (John 16:23)
For you granted him authority over all people... Christ (John 17:1-2 NIV)
I am the root and the offspring of David... Christ (Rev. 22:16)
This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven... Colossians 1:23

Impossible or Unlikely:

To him who overcomes...I will also give him the morning star. Christ (Rev. 2:26-28)
...the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated. Christ (Rev. 17:2)
...among the lampstands was someone "like the son of man"...out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. Christ (Rev. 1:12-16)
He has shut your eyes and covered your heads. Isaiah 29:10
...let the dead bury their own dead. Christ (Matt. 8:22)
Everyone will be salted with fire. Christ (Mark 9:49)
And if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. Christ (John 12:32)
I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. Christ (Matt. 17:20-21)
If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you. Christ (Luke 17:6 NIV)
If you ask anything in My name I will do it. Christ (John 14:14)
I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things... Christ (John 14:12)
...I have come into this world...to make blind those who see. Christ (John 9:39)
Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long... Exodus 20:12 NIV

Unreasonable:

I have come into this world...to make blind those who see. Christ (John 9:39)
I have come to turn "a man against his father..." Christ (Matt. 10:35)
And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Christ (Matt. 23:9)
...no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Christ (John 3:3 NIV)
...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners... Christ (Luke 4:18 NIV)

...hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Christ (Mark 9:47-48 NIV)

Let the dead bury their dead.

Christ (Luke 9:60)

Metaphor:

He saveth the poor from the sword...

Job 5:15

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Christ (Luke 6:25 NIV)

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

John 4:11 NIV

Do not call anyone on earth “father”...

Christ (Matt. 23:9 NIV)

“Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin.”

John 9:40-41 NIV

...a man is not defiled by what goes into his mouth, but by what comes out of it.

Matthew 15:11 NEB

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away...And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.

Christ (Matt. 18:8-9)

As we can see, in Spiritual Language some of the rules that prevail in Literal language are broken. If we fail to observe this fact, the consequences can be fatal. Church history records that:

Shortly after the publication of William Tyndale’s English New Testament, the attempt to restrict its circulation was defended on the ground that the simple reader might mistakenly take such language literally and “pluck out his eyes, and so the whole realm will be full of blind men...”¹

Jesus promises to “cut into pieces” any “servant,” any religious leader or Bible teacher who fails to prepare Christians for His return (Matt. 24:51). Can you imagine Jesus cutting thousands of pastors, priests, and Bible teachers into bits and pieces?

How many literal and rigid thinkers have died while trying to prove that the following verses literally mean what they say?

And these signs will accompany those who believe: ...they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all...

Christ (Mark 16:17-18)

It is unreasonable to expect Jesus to return once again to His own “generation.” And yet literally that is what He said He would do:

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other...I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Christ (Matt. 24:30-34)

A literal mind can, on the basis of the preceding verses alone, consider Jesus a false prophet because He made false predictions. The only way we can resolve the riddle of “generation” is to recognize that Jesus was speaking in Spiritual Language. He was referring to “a group of people with common characteristics, who may live at any given time in history.” He was referring to the kind of people who would be, in some way,

related to His contemporaries. For instance, Christians and Jews who live in the twenty-first century are, in terms of their basic beliefs, like the ones who lived in the first century. What Jesus meant was that at the time of His Return there would still be Christians and Jews who would witness the fulfillment of His promises.

Consider also this example: In human language, “I” means “I” and “he” means “he,” but not in God’s language. In relation to His Return, Jesus used “I” and “He” as synonyms:

I shall come again... Christ (John 14:2)

When the Son of Man comes...**He** will sit on **His** throne... Christ (Matt. 24:31)

The Scriptures also apply metaphors to emphasize or dramatize a point:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill prophets... Christ (Luke 13:34)

“Jerusalem” does not kill the prophets; people do. The Holy City is used here as a literary device. As we shall see, in the *Book of Revelation*, Jesus uses Jerusalem as a metaphor also to refer to ***the Design of a New Civilization*** that comes from God through His promised Redeemer.

Ponder the meaning of this statement:

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Christ (Luke 7:28)

A letter-minded interpreter would have to admit that since Jesus Himself was born of a woman, He would have a lower station than some of His humblest disciples, like Mary Magdalene and Peter. But a spirit-minded believer knows that Jesus is not talking about His station, but rather the station of humility. He is saying: By God’s standards, the smallest and lowliest are the greatest. He is glorifying the supreme honor of humility.

Consider also this example: Jesus was absolute Goodness and Perfection, and yet to teach us humility by example, He said:

Why do you call Me good?...No one is good—except God alone. Christ (Luke 18:19)

On the basis of the next verse, a letter-minded believer would have to believe that God has been practicing polygamy, because He Himself admits this fact:

“...I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. Jeremiah 31:32

Letter-minded sinners and pleasure seekers would have to love the next verse. It offers them so much; they could not have asked for more:

...every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Christ (Matt. 12:31)

A Christian—an active church member—who had murdered his wife, his three young children, and his mother, was arrested after 18 years of hiding. As shown in a TV documentary, he expressed some remorse for his crime, but felt “good” about the victims, whom he knew were in heaven. Hence, he minimized the severity of his crime. He acted as if he had killed a cow. When asked, “Do you believe you will join your family in heaven?” He said, “Yes, I have confessed my sin. I know I am forgiven!” This is a classic, although extreme, example of being literal-minded. It displays the grave dangers of living by the letter of the law at the expense of the spirit.

We should make every effort to be “rich in spirit,” yet Jesus said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Christ (Matt. 5:3)

Who are “the poor in spirit”? The humble, who acknowledge their spiritual poverty.

Metaphoric language serves many purposes. To dramatize His message, Jesus often used bread, water, flesh, and blood in place of an abstract expression, such as “Spiritual Sustenance.”

I am the living bread...If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Christ (John 6:51)

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Christ (John 6:53)

To see the fallacy of literal-mindedness, let us examine the metaphor of “fire” in relation to the First and Second Advents:

<i>First Advent:</i> I have come to <i>set fire</i> to the earth... Christ (Luke 12:49)	<i>Second Advent:</i> ...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in <i>blazing fire</i> with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel... II Thes. 1:7-8 See also II Peter 3:7; Matt. 20:1-14
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Bible teachers apply two standards of interpretation to the word “fire.” When they speak of the First Advent, they consider it a ***metaphor***. When they speak of the Second Advent, they consider it ***real fire***. Why should we have double standards? Should we simply assume that at a given point in history God changed His Mode of Speech? Should we simply assume that this time fire is ***real*** fire?

Aside from that untested and unbiblical assumption, let us raise a rational question: “Why would Jesus come with fire?” To burn people? Can you imagine the loving, gentle Jesus coming back with a completely opposite character? Can you imagine the consequences of burning over one billion Chinese, one billion Muslims, one billion Hindus, all the Jewish people throughout the world, and everyone else who does not believe in the Gospel? What do we think about Hitler who burned six million Jews? For every Jew that Hitler burned, Jesus would have to burn as many as 900 people!

Consider also this prophecy:

On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.
Luke 21:25 NIV

What does Jesus mean by “the sea”? Does He mean a specific “sea” or all “seas”? The use of the article “the” points to a specific sea. Why would nations of the earth experience anguish by seeing a roaring sea? It is far more reasonable to think that Jesus is once again speaking in metaphoric language. What does “the roaring sea” symbolize? Most likely the restless masses of humankind. Today most people do not enjoy the safety and security that true faith can bestow on their soul. They try drugs, alcohol, pornography, and adultery; they spend their lives in search of pleasures and poisons, and yet they fail to find true contentment.

Our world is also being tossed around by the threat of violence and terrorism, by the loss of family stability, and the loss of values. Consider the spread of a new and horrible disease—AIDS—that has come upon us mostly from the loss of loyalty, self-control, chastity, and separation from God—the only Source of true security and peace.

“The roaring sea” may also symbolize the prevailing illusions and myths that float through the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. Today people are sunk in the sea of fancies, false beliefs, and assumptions. That “sea” has no roots in reality. It changes by the winds and whims of time. People hear so many lies from their leaders, they lose their sense of trust. They live up to a figure only to find him unreliable and as confused as the rest of the people. Today human race is restless in many ways. The great tribulation, stress, and anguish—predicted by Jesus—is already upon us.

Have you known any author who uses the past tense to refer to a future event? Yet that is what the Scriptures do. These prophecies from Isaiah, expressed in past tense, are accepted by virtually all Christian scholars to refer to the future Messiah of the Jews, Jesus:

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, ***he will see his offspring and prolong his days***, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and ***he will divide the spoils with the strong***, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53: 1-12 NIV

Did Jesus have physical or spiritual offspring? Did God prolong His earthly life or His spiritual life and memory among the believers?

To see the fallacy of being literal-minded, consider the promise of the *Book of Revelation* that Jesus will come with ***a sword in His mouth***. What is the purpose of a sword? To cut people into pieces? What else, if we are literal-minded? How incredible, how demeaning

to the glorious station of Jesus—the absolute and the essence of Love and Compassion—to come back *to burn* and *cut into pieces* hundreds of millions of people! How can a literal mind accept this unimaginable cruelty? “Cutting people into pieces” is also promised in Matthew 24:45-51.

To see further the fallacy of literal-mindedness, let us consider a prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures. According to Luke 3:2-6, John the Baptist and Jesus fulfilled the following prediction from the Book of Isaiah:

Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. ***Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight***, the rough ways smooth. Luke 3:4-5; Isaiah 40:3-4

We know that John and Jesus did not literally fulfill the preceding prophecy. Even if they had, what would be the advantage of eliminating all the valleys and the mountains? How monotonous would the world become without them? And what would be the advantage of changing all roads into straight lines? Once again we can clearly see the fallacies and flaws of literal-mindedness.

The Book of Acts, attributed to St. Luke, declares that by the Advent of Jesus, Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled (2:14-21). That prophecy predicted a set of extraordinary signs similar to the ones Jesus gave concerning His Second Advent. Here are the signs that St. Luke declares were fulfilled in the First Advent:

- Wonders were displayed in heaven.
- Wonders were displayed on earth.
- Fire and pillars of smoke appeared.
- The sun turned into darkness.
- The moon turned into blood.

Is there any record that any of these events happened? None! Did St. Luke lie to us? Of course not! As we learned from St. Paul, he was simply speaking in God’s unique language. He was expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words.

This is what we speak...expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words. I Corinthians 2:13

If the Bible did not contain these vast and wonderful treasures of parables, metaphors, and symbols, it would not have survived so long. It would not have become such an immortal source of spiritual knowledge. Our minds crave for metaphors, similes, and parables because they create colorful images. We are designed to love and be touched by pictures. No wonder television is so popular. We can be sure that when parents read to their little children, they enjoy the pictures as much as their children do!

All those who have attacked the Bible have carried out their work—just like those who have divided Christianity—mostly in the dark closet of literal thinking. And where did they find their weapons? In the works of literal-minded believers. The debate on the shape and position of the earth is a classic example everyone knows. But there are countless others. Without spiritual perspective, the Bible will turn into a book of fables and falsehoods. To use St Paul’s expression, it will appear foolish to follow it (I Cor. 2:14). With a literal perspective you can probably find a verse on every page of the Bible to discredit the entire Book—a Book that has guided humankind for more than 3,000 years.

Let us continue in the next chapter our study of metaphoric language by looking at some examples of communication between the divine, divergent, and spiritual Mind of Jesus; and the convergent, narrow, and literal minds of the Pharisees.

7

The Clash Between Jesus and the Pharisees

Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what He was telling them.

John 10:6

The Gospel shows clearly that the clash between Jesus and the Pharisees was indeed a clash between “a Divine and Divergent Thinker” and hundreds of “closed and convergent thinkers,” a clash between “a Spiritual and Fluid Mind,” and myriads of “literal, rigid, and narrow minds.” We find the Pharisees on the ancient track of tradition, and Jesus at the gateway of a new garden, inviting them, and even pleading with them, to leave their track for a moment to enter the paradise of His Presence. He invites them to come and marvel at the beauty of His splendid and heavenly flowers.

Without any question, every one of those who saw the Divine Splendor in Jesus—disciples like Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene—was endowed with a divergent, fluid, and spiritual mind. Each of them could see the most powerful King in that poor Son of a carpenter, the most glorious Face behind the face of that homeless Man. Each of them could behold in Him the whole Kingdom of Heaven blazing with all its beauty and splendor.

Jesus appeared in two opposite ways to the people of His time—and still does to the people of our time. “The sleepers” saw Him, and still see Him to this day, as an ordinary man. The Heavenly Thief, who came from heaven, walked among “the sleepers” without disturbing their dreams, without being detected. But “the awakened” were not fooled by His “mask.” They saw Jesus as the sun shining with all His glory and greatness. To them He was, and still is, as visible as the lightning that “comes from the east and flashes to the west” (Matt. 24:27).

Could any of the Pharisees with hearts hardened with time and burdened with tradition, see the hidden glory of Jesus? The narrow-minded, “one way” thinking Pharisees with their massive loads of preconceived notions, and list of preconditions, moved on the track of tradition with the speed of a mighty train. But in the forest of parables, metaphors, and inner meanings, they stood powerless. They saw no light beyond their dark glasses of tradition, no truth beyond their preconceived notions. Note the following dialogue concerning the meaning of a simple metaphor “the sky:”

Jesus

Pharisees

I have come down from the sky...
Christ (John 6:38)

Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph; we know
His father and mother. How can He say, "I
have come down from the sky?" John 6:42

All through the Bible we see a clear contrast between the Spiritual Mind of Jesus and the literal minds of the Pharisees:

Pharisees: Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? (Mark 2:24)

Jesus: The Sabbath was made for men, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)



Jesus I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. (John 3:3)

Pharisees How can a man be born when he is old?... Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born! (John 3:4)



Pharisees and teachers of the law: Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders...? (Mark 7:5)

Jesus: You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. (Mark 7:8)



Jesus: I am with you only for a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. (John 7:33-34)

Pharisees: Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? (John 7:35)



Jesus: I stand with the Father who sent me. (John 8:16)

Pharisees: Where is your father? (John 8:19)



Jesus: If you hold to my teaching...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

Pharisees: We...have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? (John 8:33)



Jesus: If a man keeps my word, he will never see death.
(John 8:51)

Pharisees: Now we know that you are demon-possessed!
Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you
say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never
taste death. Are you greater than our father
Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who
do you think you are? (John 8:52-53)



Jesus: Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of
seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. (John
8:56)

Pharisees: You are not yet fifty years old...and you have
seen Abraham! (John 8:57)

Jesus: Before Abraham was born, I am! (John 8:58)

After hearing Jesus say, “I am,” the Pharisees could take it no more: “They picked up stones to stone him” (John 8:59).

Consider also this example: The Jews believed that before the Messiah comes, Elijah must come from the sky, because, according to Hebrew Scriptures, he was “seen” going up to “the sky:”

...Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more.
II Kings 2:11-12

Was it not then reasonable to expect and see “the same” Elijah come down from the sky the same way he had gone up? Yet none of this happened. What a test to the literal and narrow-minded!

When the Jews asked Jesus about the return of Elijah, He simply said that John the Baptist *was* the expected Elijah (Matt. 17:11-13). To “convergent thinkers” this claim is outrageous. Elijah and John were two different persons born to different parents, centuries apart. Further, no one, including John, believed that he had come down from the sky. Yet to the divergent, spiritual, and imaginative thinkers, this did not pose a problem. They readily understood and accepted Jesus’ statement. After all, we are spirits with bodies, not bodies with spirits. Our bodies are only garments we borrow for a while from the earth, and then return to the earth.

The spirit alone gives life; the flesh is of no avail [counts for nothing NIV].
John 6:63 NEB

To test yourself to see whether you are a convergent-conventional or a divergent-creative thinker, imagine you were a Pharisee living at the time of Jesus. If you had faced this test, do you think you would have passed it? If you would have, you are indeed blessed. You are endowed with the precious gift of “Spiritual Thinking.” Celebrate this gift. If you

think you would have failed the test, then you may have a “Spiritual Handicap.” But you are not alone.

As we noted, a major difference between the two Modes of Thinking is this: The convergent-reductionistic mind tends to focus on a small part of the picture; the divergent-global mind tends to focus on the whole picture. The letter-minded Pharisees always looked for a specific verse to refute Jesus. Instead of looking at the glory of the Sun—the light of the world—they looked at the Sabbath. Their narrow perspective caused them to deny their Lord. Their example should serve as a wake up call to every sincere Christian.

Jesus had no father and was homeless, yet when some people, who were searching for Him asked Him where He had been, he said:

Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house? Luke 2:49 NIV

Note this question and answer from Jesus:

***Why is My language not clear to you?
Because you are unable to hear what I say. Christ (John 8:43)***

Why were the Pharisees unable to hear? Because they could not understand the Spiritual Language. They were surface and narrow thinkers, lovers of the letter, not the Spirit. To be just in our judgment, we must attain true understanding, and to attain true understanding, we must pass from the surface or “the letter” into “the spirit,” from the shell into the pearl.

Do not judge superficially, but be just in your judgment. *John 7:24*

Consider the meaning of the word “Law” in this statement from Jesus:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets...but to fulfill them. *Christ (Matt. 5:17)*

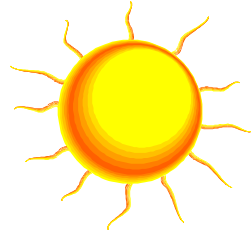
What does Jesus mean by “the Law”? Does He mean *specific “Laws”* or does He mean *the principle behind the Law*, namely order and justice in society? If we think with a *literal* mind, we have to conclude that, God forbid, Jesus lied to his listeners. Because, as we know, He changed several Jewish laws, including the law of divorce. The literal-minded Pharisees did not need any other reason to deny Jesus. They could accuse Him of lying. It is evident, we must discern Jesus' statement *spiritually*.

Once again we see the grave dangers of being literal-minded. The following quotation from *Romans* clarifies the spiritual meaning of Law from God's spiritual perspective:

...a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly...by the Spirit [in the spirit ASV], not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. *Romans 2:28*

It seems history repeats itself. Many literal-minded Christians of this age are following the example of the Pharisees. Instead of focusing on the big picture, that is always enlightened with “the Spirit,” they focus on the small picture, that is darkened and obscured by the rigid and narrow walls of “the letter.”

***The Spiritual View
of the Truth***



The Spirit-Minded look at the
glorious sun above the horizon

***The Literal View
of the Truth***



The Letter-Minded focus on the
potholes on the ground

Most believers submit their most precious gift—their everlasting destiny—to tradition and to what “authority figures” tell them to be the truth. Who are those “authority figures” They are as fallible as everyone else. Believers seldom question or doubt the authority figures. Let us explore, in the next chapter, how traditions gradually gain the status of truth, how “ideas” or mere “opinions” expressed by fallible people are accepted and gradually elevated to the position of “unquestionable and self-evident facts.”

8

How Traditions and Myths Become Truth

You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

Christ (Luke 16:15 NIV)

People in all ages have followed tradition as their guiding light. Is our generation an exception?

You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

Christ (Mark 7:9)

As your fathers did, so do you.

Acts 7:5

As did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

II Kings 17:41

Dr James Dobson, a noted Christian author and orator, believes that at the root of every falsehood and every evil generated from the human heart lies “an untested assumption.” What was the untested assumption at the First Advent? That Jesus would be “a literal king.” Where did this assumption originate? In the mind of an ordinary human being. Someone made and promoted that assumption; other believers liked it, and jumped on the bandwagon! It was as simple as that. One false assumption, made by an ordinary human being, set the course of history.

We can now place that false assumption behind us. Do we have another one in front of us? Is there an “untested assumption” among today’s Christians like the one accepted by the Jews? This time there is not one, but many—so many that they can fill a book. Hundreds of such books—often in conflict with each other—have now been printed. Who made those assumptions? Every one of them was made by an ordinary human being like the rest of us. Each time someone told his listeners *what they wanted to hear*. Over the course of years and centuries, more and more people accepted the ideas. Gradually they gained the supreme power of tradition, and finally the status of truth.

Today we have a set of expectations that, like a giant fortress, surround the hearts and minds of millions of Christians. Does anyone dare to shake or demolish this ancient and beloved fortress? Can anyone even dare to challenge or question its design?

To demonstrate people’s attachment to tradition, Jesus offered a beautiful metaphor—that of old wine:

And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, “The old is better.”

Christ (Luke 5:39)

To recognize the awesome power of tradition, consider this example. What do you think will happen to a pastor who stands before his congregation and questions the truth of the literal return of Jesus from the sky? What will happen to him, if he says, “We have been wrong all these years. Jesus will not come from the sky, but rather as an ordinary man, exactly as He did the first time”? Will he continue to receive the respect and the trust of his congregation as he did before? Will not his non-traditional beliefs jeopardize his position as a pastor? Fear of offending others stifles the spirit of freedom and openness.

Were the Christians who set in motion the Literal Cycle of Tradition, immune to human misjudgment? Of course not! What credentials did they have? We can be absolutely certain of this fact: Every expectation that Christians cherish today about the way Jesus will return and the things He must do is based on an “untested assumption” made long ago by a Bible reader or teacher—subject to all the ordinary human weaknesses—and then accepted by other Bible readers and teachers.

Perhaps you may wonder: “Why do most people throughout all ages tend to be literal-minded?” ***Because being literal-minded requires less effort than being spiritual-minded.*** Most people tend to follow the path of least resistance. Those who set us on the literal track did what came to them most naturally. But if there had been many spiritual-minded thinkers at the beginning with persuasive powers, perhaps we would now be following a different course. Perhaps we would have an entirely different set of expectations about the Second Advent.

People trust their religious leaders—whatever their religion—as long as their leaders do not deviate from tradition. Most of the interpretations and expectations we now have, initially came from the religious leaders and were then passed on to others. What then is the source of every interpretation of every prophecy of the Bible? The mind of a human being who is as likely to err as is any other human being.

As a parallel to the way traditional expectations of the Second Advent were born, consider the way denominations were formed. According to *The World Christian Encyclopedia*, the one church of Jesus has been divided into over 20,000 sects and denominations. But how was the church divided? Somebody got an idea, and if he was persuasive enough and could tell his listeners what their “itching ears wanted to hear” (II Tim 4:3), they followed him. Then they took a little corner from the One House of God, put walls around it, called it by a new name, and proudly considered themselves a little—and sometime a lot—closer to the truth than their other spiritual brothers and sisters.

Jewish expectations of the First Advent and Christian expectations of the Second Advent were born and promoted in exactly the same way. After many people follow an idea over the course of centuries, it gradually gains such a momentum and status that no evidence, however conclusive or powerful, can stop it. Most people follow the idea as if it were the absolute truth. They accept it without testing the original “untested assumption” made long ago by someone as fallible as they are.

Is this not the way Jewish expectations sprouted and spread? What evidence is there to show that we are any different or spiritually wiser than they were?

Let us for a moment forget the past. Let us carry out a simple experiment at this more advanced age in history. What do you think will happen if we bring together a hundred

theologians, scholars, and religious leaders from various denominations and religions, and then ask them to come to an agreement on a critical question such as: which denomination or religion can best save the soul? Over the course of their lives, those theologians—whatever their religion or denomination—have traveled along the same highway and delivered the same goods to the same types of people. What are the chances that a free exchange of ideas will convince some of them to have a change of heart?

Each of those theologians has some fundamental beliefs that rest on certain assumptions. Any change of heart requires a denial of those beliefs. Faced with new assumptions, those theologians would feel insecure, bewildered, and threatened.

Let us now examine some of “the untested assumptions” that Bible teachers have made, and continue to make, about the Word of God:

- Jesus almost always spoke in a literal language. Biblical prophecies must, therefore, be fulfilled according to “the letter.”
- Bible teachers are permitted, and have the spiritual wisdom, to interpret prophecies.
- Expectations about the return of Jesus that have come to us through tradition are quite reliable, even sacred. They are based on “sound principles of interpretation.” Any believer who questions traditional beliefs gives evidence of being heretical or un-Christian.
- Bible teachers and interpreters are able to distinguish which prophecies are literal and which prophecies are metaphoric.
- Since the Advent of Jesus, God’s language has changed from spiritual to literal. If the word “king” in the First Advent meant “spiritual king,” this time it means “literal king.”

Please note this universal principle: the same action, most likely, leads to the same consequence. If we start with some “untested assumptions” made by a few Christians long ago, we will end up where the Jews ended, and we will face the same destiny they faced. If we do exactly what they did, then we will face the same consequences.

All these things happened to them as examples—as object lessons to us—to warn us against doing the same things.

I Corinthians 10:11

Should we not therefore learn from the past, from the misjudgments of previous generations?

Please review the five untested assumptions listed above to see if you can find any evidence to support them. History contradicts them; reason contradicts them; and as we have seen, and we shall see later, the Scripture also contradicts them.

St. Paul predicted that at the time of the end, Christians will turn their ears to ***myths***:

...they will gather to themselves one [Bible] teacher after another...chosen to satisfy their own liking...and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions.

II Timothy 4:3-4

They are the kind who...[are] always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

II Timothy 3:6-7

What is a myth? According to the dictionary:

Myths are tales that have come down to us from the ancient past. One Greek myth, for example, explained the apparent movement of the sun as the god Apollo driving a fiery chariot across the sky.¹

The human heart is the battle ground for truth. The two opposing forces are “the human desire” and “reason.” Reason is a heavenly gift that raises us above the animal kingdom, that helps us separate the truth from myths. Without this gift, the line between truth and myth vanishes. That is why our Creator asks us to engage in reasoning:

“...let us reason together,” says the Lord.

Isaiah 1:18

Myths can become victorious, they can conquer the human heart only if the powerful forces of “the human desire” are left to themselves, if they are allowed to roam unchallenged.

How does “the human desire” conquer “the forces of reason”? By applying the following strategies:

- **Ignoring** what fails to fit.
- **Altering or distorting** the meaning of what fails to fit.
- Focusing on “the small picture” rather than “the big picture.”
- Making something **bigger** or **more important** than it is.
- Making something **smaller** or **less important** than it is.

Each of these strategies can by itself work wonders. If they cooperate, they gain enormous powers. Consider this example. It is now 2,000 years since Jesus has come. He has established a spiritual Kingdom that will continue for evermore. His Word will continue to shape lives for countless centuries to come. Now compare Jesus’ power with that of all the kings who have ever lived and ruled. Is there any comparison? Today none of those kings has any power. Only their memories remain. But Jesus continues to rule as the King of Kings in millions of lives. He will shine, like the sun with all its glory and splendor, for ages to come.

How can anyone fail to see the awesome greatness of Jesus? How can the Jews, who continue to this day to anticipate His coming, fail to see His light? How can they overlook His Kingdom? How can they fail to recognize Him as their Messiah? The answer can be found in the awesome power of “the human desire” and the **seemingly simple** strategies it uses to conquer and rule the heart.

Can Christians liberate themselves from the “myths” that St. Paul predicted would conquer their hearts and souls? They can if they make these two admissions:

- That St. Paul was inspired to make his prediction and that he did not speak in vain.
- That no Christian can consider himself an exception to his prophecy.

Failing to make these admissions is itself “believing in a myth” and “living by a myth.”

The next chapter presents the prime principles that should guide our interpretation of the Word of God.

9

Principles of Interpretation

The Scriptures offer several principles and instructions to guide our spiritual journey away from myth and toward reality. They are classified and presented in this chapter under seven topics:

1

God reminds us that His Mode of Speech is unique, that He often speaks in Spiritual or Metaphoric Language:

That is what we speak...expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words. I Corinthians 2:13

I will open my mouth in *parable*. I will utter *dark sayings* of old. Psalms 78:2

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; He did not say anything to them without using a parable. Matthew 13:34

2

God tells us why He hides His message inside “an envelope,” why He speaks in Spiritual Language:

The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.” Christ (Matt. 13:10-16)

According to the *Zondervan Bible Dictionary*, Jesus used parables because:

It was an effective method of revealing truth to the spiritual and ready mind and at the same time of concealing it from others...¹

Those who had rejected Him were not to know the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”²

According to *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*:

Jesus' parables... fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10. Like a double-edged sword, they cut two ways—enlightening those who sought the truth and blinding those who were disobedient.³

Why would Jesus conceal certain mysteries or truths from unreceptive and obstinate listeners? This is a most intriguing and critical question. By resolving this mystery, we can attain a much deeper level of awareness and insight into our relationship with our Creator. Let us begin with an analogy, which is also a kind of metaphor. Suppose you are a beautiful bride. Would you like to be seen by people who would not appreciate your charm, who would not hesitate to insult you, to make fun of you and even stone you? Would you not want to hide yourself from such people? In the same way, consider the truths Jesus that taught as a Beautiful Bride. The spiritually blind and deaf did not deserve to see that Beauty without a “veil.”

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them.

Christ (John 12:40)

The parable, the metaphor and the simile is that “veil.” Jesus spoke about the same principle, the same “protective veil” when He said:

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls before pigs.

Christ (Matt. 7:6)

Ponder the supreme wisdom in Jesus' instruction. Why do you think religion has become so cheap and worthless in this age in the eyes of so many people? How do you feel when “preachers” knock on your door to preach to you a free lesson on the exclusive truth of their denomination? If they did it once, you could tolerate it. But they continue to come even after you have rejected their message several times. This behavior violates Jesus' clear instructions that we should not waste the precious pearls of faith, that we should not keep throwing the seed of our beliefs at a rock—at unreceptive people.

What types of people recognized Jesus? Those who could tear, with their hearts and souls, “the veil” of prophetic metaphors. Those who could see with their inner eye the most glorious King behind the face of that homeless Man, Jesus.

This is the standard with which God tests our sincerity: Do we have the courage and the faith to arise to lift “the veil” and see His Beautiful Bride? If we do not have the faith and the courage, God in His justice does not want us in His Kingdom. We do not deserve to behold His awesome Splendor and Beauty.

The way God treats and teaches us is the way parents should teach their children new skills. To help their children mature, parents endowed with wisdom, give them tasks that are neither too hard nor too easy. Suppose you wanted to teach a child to reach for a toy. You would have three options:

- Put it well within his reach, so that he can get it with no effort.
- Put it beyond his reach.

- Put it just beyond his reach, so that by stretching himself and standing on his toes he can get it.

The last option is the wisest. And that is the way God treats us and teaches us. To reach and grasp the pearls of truth, we must stretch our hearts and souls. Those who understood the meanings of Jesus’ parables—that always carried a Spiritual Truth—were the ones who made a little effort to rise above their preconceived notions dictated by tradition. They turned a “stumbling block” into a “stepping stone.” They stood spiritually taller than the others and as a consequence they could see more.

3

God teaches us why many people cannot break the seal and open “the spiritual envelope.” He tells us why they fail to unlock or understand His language:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God...because *they are spiritually discerned*. I Corinthians 2:14

God also makes this prediction:

...the wisdom of their wise will perish...*the discerning of the discerning shall be lost*. Isaiah 29:14

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. II Timothy 4:4

Can interpreters who have lost their “wisdom” and “discernment” recognize that the Word of God must be “spiritually discerned”? Will Christian and Jewish authors, who engage in “one sided,” literal, narrow thinking concerning the meaning of prophecies, just as the Pharisees did, abandon their old ways? Will Bible teachers, who according to Paul “turn their ears away from the truth,” open their hearts to the truth? Will they learn the lessons of history? Are they humble enough to acknowledge that human beings are short-sighted?

4

God warns us of the grave dangers of clinging to the literal at the expense of the underlying spiritual truth:

The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. II Corinthians 3:6

A man who is unspiritual refuses what belongs to the Spirit of God; it is folly to him; he cannot grasp it, because it needs to be judged in the light of the Spirit [spiritually judged ASV]. I Corinthians 2:14

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment. Christ (John 7:24)

We should remember that it was the clinging to the literal, the *surface* meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures and ignoring their *spiritual* meaning, that gave the Pharisees the audacity to insist that Jesus must be killed. And it was the recognizing of the “spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures,” and their “inner meanings” that “gave life” to the disciples and all those who later acknowledged the divine station of Jesus.

5

God declares that no one can break the seal, that no one can open “the envelope.” This is especially true of prophecies:

But no one...could open the scroll or even look inside it.

Revelation 5:3

6

God condemns those who “prophecy in His name,” who give their private personal interpretation of prophecies, but speak as if God Himself is offering the interpretation:

...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

II Peter 1:20 NKJ

...no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself.

II Peter 1:20 NEB

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...? Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Christ (Matt. 7:22-23)

Does this book break God’s commands that we should not engage in prophesying in the name of the Lord? The purpose of this book is not to interpret the prophecies or make predictions, but to convince the believers to be open-minded. It offers the Biblical evidence to prove ***that we must not close the door to the possibility that Jesus will return as a thief in the night*** and will once again be rejected by those who, like the Pharisees, have already decided how He must come. What if the Literal Theory is wrong? ***Is it prudent, is it wise to insist on the accuracy of one view and close the door to the other possibility?***

7

God promises to open “the envelope,” to reveal the mysteries by lifting “the veil” from the Spiritual Language of the Scriptures at the Second Advent.

Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. *Christ (John 16:25)*

When the Lord comes He will bring into the light of that day all that at present is hidden in darkness...

I Corinthians 4:5

See also John 14:24-26

Spiritual Language: the Ultimate Means of Sifting and Separating the Faithful from the Unfaithful

To clarify His reason for speaking through parables, Jesus used still another parable. He offered the example of planting a seed in different types of grounds (Luke 8:11-15). Does a “stony” heart deserve the honor of harboring the seed of truth? Does a heart filled with

the thorns and weeds of prejudice, deception, hatred, and hypocrisy deserve the honor of receiving and cherishing the glorious seed of divine knowledge?

No doubt the disciples understood the language of their Master most of the time, but the Pharisees were bewildered. They did not care what Jesus said. They just wanted to quarrel with Him. They acted the way many literal-minded people of our time act. Such people instantly refute and sometimes attack the spiritually minded believers because of their own convergent, rigid, and narrow minds. Would God welcome such people into His heavenly Banquet? No! The example provided by Jesus demonstrates exactly why God speaks in metaphoric language. By the subtle veil of a few simple metaphors, He keeps the narrow and literal-minded “believers” out of His Banquet.

This is one of God’s most marvelous miracles—a few ordinary words like “sky” “clouds” “seeing” “sword” and “fire” separate the open-minded from the closed-minded. They draw a line between those who worship “the spirit” and those who worship “the letter.”

Ponder the meaning of the following verse. It offers a key that unlocks many mysteries:

He [the Lord] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and ***will expose the motives of men’s hearts.*** I Corinthians 4:5

Question: What scriptural verses are often “hidden in darkness”?

Answer: The metaphoric verses, especially the prophecies. No wonder we have so many schools of prophecy.

Question: How will the Lord, by revealing what is hidden in the Scriptures, also reveals or “exposes what is hidden in men’s hearts”?

Answer: Christians who are humble, faithful, and spiritual-minded will accept the metaphoric interpretation of prophecies by the Lord at His Second Coming. But the closed-hearted and letter-minded Christians will insist on the accuracy of their Literal Theories. They will argue with their Redeemer, who once again will appear as a humble Man. This simple test will separate the believers. It will cause some Christians to go to the right, others to the left.

He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Christ (Matt. 25:33)

He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Christ (Matt. 25:33)

The metaphoric prophecies are “the sword” that will divide the believers. They are the crucible of “fire” by which all people will be tested—a crucible that every Christian must enter:

...the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. Revelation 3:10

These trials come so that your faith may prove itself worthy...when Jesus Christ is revealed. I Peter 1:7

A test requires a response, and a response requires freedom to make choices. If Jesus came from the sky with great power and glory to destroy the wicked, then how could the people be tested?

Did not the Jews also face the Test of Metaphors in the First Advent? Did not the word **King**, even as a mighty sword, separate the Jews? Did it not send some of them to the right of Jesus and others to His left?

Understanding the Word of God is like breaking the code of a secret language, as practiced in the military, except that in this case, there is no secrecy. The instructions for recognizing the uniqueness of the language and for knowing human limitations are clearly given to us. The amazing and puzzling fact is the ability of the human heart to ignore and even to conceal the instructions.

God made this prediction concerning us—those who live during the last days:

...the wise shall understand. Daniel 12:10

Understand what? Understand:

That human beings do not have the wisdom to determine what the prophecies mean.

That the Word of God is unique and often beyond human understanding.

That “the letter” should always be seen in the light of “the spirit.”

That the Word of God must be discerned spiritually.

That prophecies are often expressed through metaphors.

That no one should become a slave to the voice of tradition or to the assumptions of theologians and Bible teachers, no matter how popular they may be.

That it is unwise to walk in the footsteps of the Pharisees who simply assumed that they knew what the prophecies meant.

That a sincere believer is always humble.

That the lessons of history should not be ignored.

That a true believer is open-minded and unafraid of the truth.

That a true seeker has the courage to listen to new ideas, especially those that challenge the prevailing and popular interpretations of prophecies. He knows traditional interpretations were originated in minds as likely to err as his mind.

Wisdom is never afraid of new knowledge or new challenges. It always acts with courage. Wisdom is ever awake, vigilant, and watchful. It does not sleep or take a break, and it never takes tradition for truth.

Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch...***do not let Him find you sleeping.*** What I say to you, I say to everyone: “***Watch!***”

Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

In the next chapter, we will explore the implications and consequences of taking a literal and firm stand on the meaning of prophecies.

10

Preconditions and Prejudgments

Let us begin this chapter with the definition of two critical words:

Precondition: a condition required to be fulfilled beforehand; a prerequisite.

Prejudgment: to pass judgment on (a person, opinion, or action) beforehand.

Example: The jury was reminded to keep an open mind during the trial and not to prejudge the case.

Consider the First Advent. The Pharisees felt they had no need to learn who Jesus was. They already knew He was a false prophet. Why? Because they had a list of the things they believed He must first accomplish before He could qualify as their Messiah. Their expectations were “preconditions” or “prerequisites” for accepting their promised Redeemer.

What about today’s Christians? Do they not also have a similar list? Yes, they do, except that their list is much longer. Those who start with a list of “preconditions,” are in effect telling their Redeemer that to make Himself acceptable to them and to make Himself worthy of their attention, He must first meet their Prerequisites. If He fails, then nothing else matters. His Spirit could be as brilliant as the sun, His wisdom as vast as the heavens, His knowledge beyond limits, and yet if He fails to fulfill their “preconditions,” He will be called just another false prophet.

The literal-minded believers—whether they are Jews or Christians—have acted and still are acting as if they are the Dean of Admissions at a famous university, and their expected Redeemer is just a student trying to gain admission! Consider the following dialogue between a student and the Dean of Admissions:

The Student: Dear Dean, I have not gone to school and have no credentials, but I know more than all the professors in all the world’s universities. I am endowed with a knowledge that you cannot even measure. Please put me to the test. Give me a chance to prove myself!

The Dean: Dear student, I am sorry, we have a list of prerequisites that must be met. You do not qualify for admission!

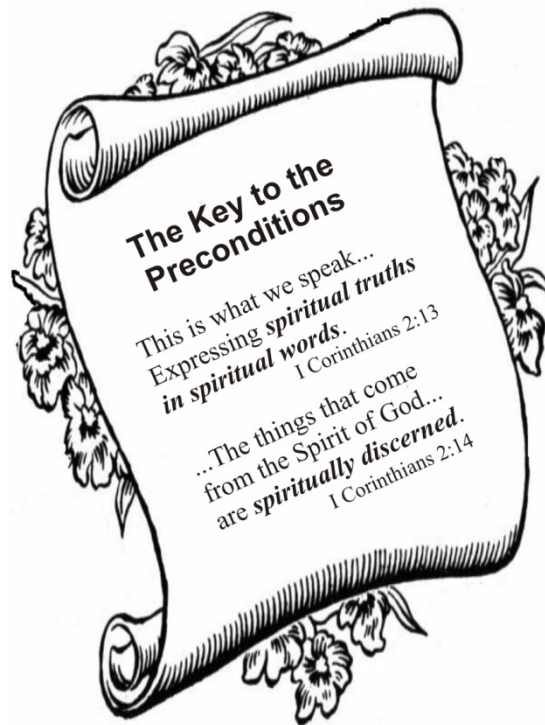
All “Christian Preconditions” for the Second Advent, like all “Jewish Preconditions” for the First Advent share a common core. To be worthy of any attention, the expected Redeemer must first put on a spectacular show. He must do something out of this world.

He is not allowed to break the laws of Moses or Jesus, but He must break the laws of nature. Note the sense of desperation in Jesus' response to the skeptics of His time who, like the people of this age, always demanded miracles as the essential Precondition for believing in Him:

Will none of you ever believe without seeing signs and portents? Christ (John 4:48)

As stated, the Preconditions for the Second Advent are far more elaborate than the ones for the First Advent. They require the recreation and reordering of the whole universe! The credentials that literal-minded Christians require for admitting the expected Redeemer into their lives includes the ability to break virtually every law of nature, the power to present a dazzling show, the like of which the world has never seen. The show, it is assumed, will serve as the ultimate blow to all the skeptics who have ignored or rejected the Lord, and perhaps have made fun of the true believers for being simple-minded.

Let us briefly review some of the Preconditions most Christians expect and even demand from their Redeemer before they would seriously consider His claims. Let us also consider how those Preconditions can be, in Paul's word, "*spiritually discerned.*"



Preconditions

Precondition: When Jesus comes, He will sound "the trumpet call of God."

Spiritually Discerned: When Jesus comes, He will invite the people with the power and authority of the Voice of God.

Precondition: When Jesus returns, He will lift “the good Christians” to heaven.

Spiritually Discerned: By accepting Jesus, the new believers will be spiritually lifted to the heaven of hope and faith. Those who fail to “lift the veil,” those who refuse to see His great glory with “the eye in their soul,” will not be lifted. They will be left in the gloomy night of denial, confusion, and separation from God.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, the dead must rise out of their graves.

Spiritually Discerned: By accepting Jesus, “the spiritually dead” will become “the spiritually alive.”



Precondition: When the Redeemer comes, “the dead in Christ” will rise first.

Spiritually Discerned: Believers who have destroyed their ego (the illusion that I know and I know that I know), who have attained the state of utter humility, will be the first to know their Lord and rise from the darkness of spiritual death to the light of a new life. This is exactly what happened in the First Advent. Peter was among the first to rise from spiritual death to everlasting life.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, He must kill all the wicked.

Spiritually Discerned: When a person fails to recognize his Redeemer, he becomes “spiritually dead.” By his denial, he commits “spiritual suicide!”



Precondition: When Jesus comes, He will engage in a great war the like of which the world has never seen. It is called Armageddon. At that time “the Antichrist” will rise.

Spiritually Discerned: The war is first and foremost spiritual. Its battleground is the thousands of synagogues, churches, and mosques around the world. Religious leaders of all previous faiths—who will feel threatened by His influence and the loss of their power—will wage a war of denial and accusation against the spread of His teachings. It will be a war the like of which the world has never seen. There will be thousands of Antichrists from the ranks of both religious and political figures, from every persuasion, who will make every effort to extinguish His light with all their might. But they will fail.

His army will consist of His disciples who defend His claim and His message with words and wisdom. They will endure much suffering and persecution, but the Christ and His army will at last overcome all the Antichrists, and uproot them all:

The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Christ (Luke 3:9)

The supreme victory of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, does not come from His power to wage wars and wield the sword, but to win the heart of humankind, one heart at a time:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

Christ (Matt. 13:31-32)



Precondition: When Jesus comes, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Spiritually Discerned: By accepting Him and following His Word, the believers will be empowered to create a new world of joy, hope, love, and peace. The new world will be blessed with the heaven of a new Faith, enlightened with the Sun of Truth, bejeweled with the stars of knowledge, and adorned with the gardens of spiritual purity and splendor growing everywhere on earth.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, He is so brilliant that He will flash like “a lightning from the east to the west.”

Spiritually Discerned: Those with an inner eye, wherever they live, in the east or the west, will see the light of His glory. He will present His message with unswerving courage before the masses of humankind. He will not fear His enemies, and will not hide in “inner chambers,” or far away deserts and mountains. His enemies will be powerful and determined, but they will be unable to prevent Him from fulfilling His divine Mission.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, “a new Jerusalem” must come down from the sky.

Spiritually Discerned: By following His new teachings, His followers will create a new civilization. The *blueprint* for this city will come from the heaven of divine knowledge, not mortar and bricks from the sky.



Precondition: When the Redeemer comes, the wolf and the lamb must live together.

Spiritually Discerned: By submitting to their Redeemer, old enemies will become new friends. They will live as “one fold” under “one Shepherd.”



Precondition: When Jesus comes, there will be a new earth and a new heaven.

Spiritually Discerned: When He comes He will create a new heavenly and earthly civilization. The power and glory of the heavenly civilization—the spiritual Kingdom—will come from the love of God within, from the “One Heart” of humankind; the power and glory of the earthly civilization will come from the unity the promised Redeemer will establish among all the nations of the earth by bringing the divided “flock” together:

I will give them one heart and one way of life. Jeremiah 32:39

...there shall be one flock and one shepherd. John 10:16



Precondition: When Jesus comes, the stars must fall.

Spiritually Discerned: Religious leaders are supposed to guide their followers just as stars guide travelers. If religious leaders refuse to accept the new Redeemer, they will fall from grace, and lose their light and position of honor.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, He will burn the wicked.

Spiritually Discerned: The soul of those who refuse to accept Him will burn in the “fire of separation from God” even though they may be totally unaware of this fire. He will also set fire to the old order of doing things.



Precondition: When Jesus comes, He will destroy the wicked with a sword in His mouth.

Spiritually Discerned: He will separate those who accept Him from those who reject Him with His Word. His verdict is His sword.



Precondition from the Jews: When our Messiah comes, the mountains must be leveled and the valleys raised.

Spiritually Discerned: When the Redeemer comes, the proud and the self-righteous will be humbled and the lowly will be exalted.

*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever
humbleth himself will be exalted. Christ (Matt. 23:12)*



Precondition from the Jews: When our Messiah comes, all crooked roads will be made straight.

Spiritually Discerned: When the Messiah comes, He will straighten out the crooked ways of the world.



Why should all these “signs” be “spiritually discerned”? Because they are examples of the way God has always spoken. That is why He teaches us to approach and unlock His Word with His own Key:

This is what we speak...expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words. I Corinthians 2:13

Is God obligated to imitate our way of speaking? Is He not allowed to speak His way? Once again, consider the past, the response of the Pharisees to their Redeemer. One word damaged their “spiritual eyesight” so severely that they could not discern the Glory of Jesus, “the light of the world.” What was that word? **King!** How powerful a single word can be! Consider the human eye. It is so precious! It is hard to imagine anyone would sell it, whatever the price. Yet that most precious gift can be totally destroyed by a little poison. The touch of some poisons can destroy not only the eye but its host as well. ***The same principle holds true with spiritual sight.***

How many “spiritual eyesights” has that single word—King—destroyed in the last 2,000 years? The amazing fact is this: that word is still alive, and it is as powerful today as it was in 27 A. D., when Jesus proclaimed Himself a King. Even after He has proven Himself to be the true King of nearly 2,000 million Christians, that one word still continues to block the eyesight of countless millions. Perhaps half the earth’s population still cannot discern the supreme Glory of the Son.

The example of the word “King” demonstrates clearly the workings and wonders of the mind in controlling our destiny. The divergent, fluid, flexible mind can readily recognize the supremacy of a “Spiritual King” over a “literal king.” He can soar beyond the earthly to the heavenly. But the “convergent, rigid, narrow mind” gets stuck in the mud of narrow and literal thinking. If the Jews had shifted their thoughts from literal to spiritual, they would have seen in Jesus a King infinitely more glorious than all the kings who have ever reigned.

The inability or the failure of the most brilliant minds to apply “spiritual discernment” to the meaning of one word should make every Christian as humble as a child and as daring as a lion—humble enough to abandon self-satisfaction and self-righteousness; yet daring enough to explore new frontiers of knowledge, to be willing to step on “a road less traveled,” even though few people are willing to take that road (Matt. 7:13-14).

In the parable of the talents, Jesus encourages us to abandon our fears. He wants us to combine courage with wisdom. He wants us to put all our mental powers, all our intellectual capacities at the command of a pure heart—free from fear, from selfish concerns, and from all preconditions.

Fear can desensitize us to everything else but fear itself. It can make our “field of spiritual vision” narrower and narrower until we see nothing but fear itself. It can create a sense of apathy, complacency, and self-righteousness. ***It can lead to unawareness or “drunkenness:”***

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with...drunkenness...

Christ (Luke 21:34)

The next chapter explores the most precious gift humans may have—the gift that will lead them to the presence of God.

II

Two Kinds of Wisdom

Among Jesus' parables perhaps none contains as many treasures of knowledge and wisdom as does the parable of Wise and Foolish Maidens. Let us begin this chapter with that parable, and then later unearth its treasures:

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves." But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. "Sir! Sir!" they said. "Open the door for us!" But he replied, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Christ (Matt. 25:1-13)

Who is more likely to understand the true meaning of the Word of God? The one with a good heart, or the one with a good mind? Which is more likely to please God and receive His blessings? A soul enchanted with love, or a brain overflowing with facts? Contrary to common beliefs, the key to the Kingdom of God is not in the hands of theology professors at Harvard and Princeton, or in the mind of the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, or in the thoughts of the Dean of Hebrew University, or on the lips of bishops, priests, pastors, and rabbis. Understanding the Word of God and receiving His blessings neither depends on a person's position in the church nor on the number of best sellers he has in print. They rather depend on ***a pure and humble heart that uses the mind wisely.*** Consider this amazing statement from Jesus:

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, ***for hiding these things from the learned and the wise, and revealing them to the simple [children KJV].*** Yes, Father, such was thy choice.

Christ (Matt. 11:25-26)

What is the quality that helps us make sound decisions? It is wisdom. Is there only one kind of wisdom? No! Both common sense and the Scriptures teach us that there are two kinds of wisdom: worldly and spiritual. Worldly wisdom helps us succeed in worldly

affairs. Spiritual wisdom helps us succeed in spiritual affairs, specifically in our relationship with God. A pastor may be a perfect director of a church. He may have charisma, give the best sermons, treat people with courtesy and kindness, attract many new members, and generate huge income for his church, yet fail miserably in his relationship with God. This pastor has worldly wisdom, but may lack spiritual wisdom. He may be like a successful and prestigious rabbi, in charge of a huge synagogue, who considers Jesus a poor, homeless Jew—a sharp thinker who chanced on a good idea at a critical time.

...we speak of ***God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden...None of the rulers of this age understood it***, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

I Corinthians 2:7-8

This is one of the best-kept secrets: The person you trust and whose advice you follow in your spiritual life may have great worldly wisdom, but lack spiritual wisdom. Ask yourself this question: “Is it wise to build my everlasting destiny on someone else’s heart, one that I cannot know, rather than on my own heart, one that I do know? Can I know anyone else as well as I know myself?”

Many believers fail to realize that a little fear, selfishness, worldliness, or lust in the heart has a thousand times more power to conceal the truth than a thousand years of Bible study has the power to reveal the truth! Anyone who depends on anyone else except himself—and of course God—for guidance, lacks spiritual wisdom, and may remain a spiritual slave to the whims of his leader’s worldly wisdom and honor.

Worldly knowledge and success, such as a degree in theology, does not in itself lead to spiritual wisdom. It often accomplishes just the opposite:

Knowledge puffs up...

I Corinthians 8:1

A selfish heart abuses the mind for selfish gains; an unselfish heart uses the mind for common good. Spiritual wisdom is a child conceived by the mind in a heart that is noble and receptive:

But the seed on good soil stands for those with ***a noble and good heart***, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Christ (Luke 8:15)

Consider the following prophecy spoken through Daniel. It was given to him after a prophecy that pertains to our time:

None of ***the wicked*** will understand, but those who are ***wise*** will understand.

Daniel 12:10

Obviously, the preceding verse refers to spiritual, not worldly wisdom. God teaches us that the opposite of being spiritually “wise” is being “wicked.” As we can see, failure to understand the Word of God does not come from a lack of Bible study. It comes from “the wickedness of the heart.”

This message needs to be repeated a thousand times and more: that understanding the Word of God comes from spiritual wisdom, and spiritual wisdom comes from the goodness of the heart and the soul, not from knowing Greek and Hebrew. It comes from sincerity, not from the seminary. It comes from spiritual purity, not from status and power in a church or synagogue. Some of the most brilliant—and often convergent—minds

deny even the existence of the One who created them! Why? Because of the previous recordings on their minds, and the pollutants in their hearts and souls!

If, according to Daniel, the spiritually wise can “understand,” what, then, makes them wise and helps them understand? Jesus offered numerous parables to prepare and enlighten Christians concerning the way He would return. One of them (Matt. 25:1-13) is the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Maidens quoted at the beginning of this chapter. It is perhaps the most beautiful of all the parables Jesus taught. It offers a treasure-house of wonder and wisdom. To reach the depths of its meanings, to discover its hidden gems, we must read it repeatedly and ponder upon its profound mysteries. Its prime message is the role of wisdom in finding Jesus and knowing Him at His Return.

According to this parable, two groups of young women (also known as bridesmaids or virgins) are expecting the Return of Jesus—the Bridegroom. The two groups behave in exactly opposite manners. Half of them act wisely, the other half act foolishly. What makes the two groups so different?

The two groups of young girls are waiting for their Lord. After a long time, the Bridegroom finally arrives—at midnight, the darkest hour. But He finds that only one group of girls are present, the ones with “the oil”—a metaphor that stands for spiritual wisdom. Only *they* are ready to welcome the Bridegroom. The others are absent! The Bridegroom takes the wise girls with Him into His Banquet. The foolish girls miss Him. They arrive later, but are not admitted into His Banquet, even though they plead with Him to let them in.

What does the metaphor “young girls” “virgins” or “bridesmaids” imply? It implies a certain level of innocence, purity, sincerity, simplicity, honesty, and devotion to the Lord. It may refer to any Christian who loves Jesus, who prays often, who is charitable, and in his or her heart is proud of being a Christian. We find such wonderful believers in every church. It is always a joy to meet them and work with them. They are indeed “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13).

It is essential to note that Jesus considers both groups of young girls equal in terms of their innocence, purity, and devotion. None of them has broken her vow of chastity. They are all spiritually virgin or pure. They differ only in relation to one quality: wisdom. Why does Jesus single out wisdom as a critical virtue? The following example will show the reason. Suppose two young girls—both wonderful Christians, one of them wise, the other foolish or naïve—are about to choose a spouse. How will they behave? The wise one will make every effort to know her future husband. She will leave “no stone unturned.” She will pay careful attention to everything he says or does. She will remain ever vigilant and watchful. She will not be fooled by empty words, false claims, and glamorous looks. The light of her wisdom will guide and protect her from falling into a trap.

What about the foolish one? She will behave in just the opposite way. She will believe whatever her itching ears like to hear. She will overlook whatever she does not like to see. She will submit to her emotions. Her lack of wisdom blurs her judgment and endangers her future.

Both of these young girls are equally innocent and pure. Both of them are equally devoted to the Lord, yet their lives and destinies, quite likely, will be exact opposites.

One will live a life of happiness, the other a life of misery. That is how much difference wisdom can make. The consequences of a single critical choice often endure for generations.

What does the parable of the wise and foolish maidens teach us? What is the message *inside* “the envelope”? The most critical and obvious message is this: Christians who expect the Return of Jesus are not all alike. ***Wise Christians remain spiritually present, vigilant, and watchful. They use their “inner light” to find and recognize the Heavenly Thief, and are consequently allowed to follow Him into His Heavenly Banquet. The Christians that Jesus calls “foolish” miss their Lord, because at His coming, they are spiritually absent.*** They do not have the inner light and wisdom (oil) to obey His instructions. They lack the courage to leave their secure and well-established surroundings to search for their Master.

The parable clearly teaches us that to be a true Christian, acceptable to the Lord, ***it is not enough to be just an “Innocent Christian.” It is essential to be also a “Wise Christian.”*** It is essential to combine the twin virtues of Innocence and Prudence. It is essential to be both sincere and vigilant. No wonder Jesus asked us to be as pure as a dove and as wise as a snake (Matt. 10:16).

Compare the twin virtues of innocence and wisdom to the wings of a bird. Can a bird fly with one wing? In the same way, just being an “Innocent Christian” does not mean that we can gather the spiritual strength we need to leave our “comfort zone” for the sake of searching for our Lord.

To see the role of wisdom clearly, think of some of the most devoted Jews you have known. Why do they not acknowledge the station of Jesus? What can they lose by knowing Him? Whatever prevented “devoted Jews” from accepting Jesus in His First Advent can also prevent “devoted Christians” from accepting Him in His Second Advent.

The realization that everyone looks “good” to himself should make everyone humble:

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes...

Proverbs 16:2

Simply assuming that I am “a good Jew” or “a good Christian,” and therefore I will not be “left out” is unwise. Such an attitude or assumption is the essence of complacency, and the exact opposite of “watchfulness.” To help Christians know Him, what virtue did Jesus emphasize more than any other? ***Watchfulness!***

Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch...***do not let Him find you sleeping.*** What I say to you, I say to everyone: ***“Watch!”***

Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

If Jesus came from the sky in a way that every eye saw Him, then how could those innocent but foolish Christians miss Him? To be visible to every eye, Jesus must come during the daylight hours. But this parable teaches us that He comes at the darkest hour, at “midnight.” What does midnight stand for? It stands for inner darkness and confusion within the hearts and minds of many Christians—Christians who praise the Lord with closed eyes, believers who have lost “the oil” in their souls, and are unable to see and acknowledge Jesus’ presence. He is all around them, and yet they are not around to see Him. He is present (parousia),¹ but they are absent. They cannot discern the Kingdom of heaven within their souls (Luke 17:20-21). This is the only difference between the two groups of believers.

Let us ask a critical question: Why did the foolish Christians miss the Bridegroom? Was it because of a lack of inner light and spiritual wisdom, or a lack of Bible study? What about the wise Christians? Who were they, and what did they have? They had the most precious and the most glorious gift a human being may ever receive: ***the light of spiritual wisdom***. That gift guided them to their Lord. They had no need to depend on someone else for enlightenment.

The following verses clearly confirm the critical message contained in the parable of the wise and foolish Christians. They show that the people of this age live in spiritual darkness. They live without the light of spiritual wisdom:

The great day of the Lord is near...***and people will walk like blind men.***

Zephaniah 1:14, 17

Ponder also the meaning of these verses:

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, ***so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.***

Christ (Luke 12:35-36)

What does Jesus mean by saying, “Be dressed”? He means, “Be spiritually prepared. Make your soul worthy of Me.” What does He mean by saying, “Keep your lamps burning”? He means, “Let the oil of wisdom give you light.” What does He mean by saying, “When He comes and knocks”? He means, “When He comes and invites you to watch or to pay attention to Him, when He asks you to investigate His identity.” What does He mean by saying that we should immediately “open the door” for Him? He means we should open our hearts to His invitation. What does “opening the heart” imply? It indicates that we have the choice of accepting or to rejecting Him.

If Jesus came from the sky, who would dare to reject Him? Countless millions of closed-hearted and even hostile people would become so enchanted with His Power that they would rush to embrace Him. Opening one’s heart to a humble being who comes “like a thief” is a task that puts the faith of every believer to the most challenging test. That is why we are urged to make every effort to find Him and to follow Him. The implication of “opening the door” is clear: If we open our hearts to Him, He will open His Banquet to us. If we keep our hearts closed, if we ignore the news of His coming, if we are spiritually absent at His coming, like the foolish Christians, we will face only closed doors. We will only hear what ***they*** heard:

I tell you the truth, I don’t know you. Christ (Matt. 25:12)

What are the qualities of ***the spiritually wise***? What precautions do they take? How do they behave?

- They are watchful; they pay attention to any news, any sign, and any clue that the Heavenly Thief has arrived.
- They pray constantly to be spiritually present at His coming. They do not keep saying “My Master is taking a long time in coming” (Luke 12:45).
- They do not simply assume that since they have not seen Him on the clouds, He has not already come.

- They are humble. They do not say, “I am sure if the Lord had come, I would have known.” They always keep in mind their Master’s warnings that He will come upon them like a thief. They accept the possibility that they may miss Him.
- They set aside the prevailing traditions, preconditions, assumptions, and prejudgments about the meaning of prophecies and the manner of Jesus’ coming.
- They are persistent in their search. They never stop praying and looking for Him.
- They search for Him, even if they hear that He has come in the guise of the humblest Man, from the most unlikely place, one they have never heard of: a small town in Peru, a village in Russia, a district in Israel, or a city in Persia.
- They realize that the traditional assumptions regarding the way Jesus will return are only assumptions.
- Since they know that He will come at an hour they do not expect, they will not remain complacent in their churches. They step out and search for the news of His coming. They realize that in this spiritually dark and dreary age, the coming of a humble and lowly Thief does not appear on the front-page news.
- They are keenly aware of their everlasting destiny. They know that they have come to this world to make choices, and that choosing their everlasting destiny is their first and foremost responsibility. They recognize that their first responsibility is to “seek the Kingdom of God.” If they do this, they are sure that, as God promises, everything else will take care of itself (Matt. 6:33). They know that the promised Kingdom is the presence of their Lord—the Heavenly Thief. If they miss Him, they will also miss that Kingdom.
- They refuse to take a firm stand on the meaning of prophecies. They do not build their destiny on tradition. They do not follow Bible teachers who prophesy in the name of the Lord. They always keep before their eyes this grave warning from their Master:

Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name...?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me...”
Christ (Matt. 7:22-23)

- They make every effort to avoid the Three Most Dangerous Traps specified by Jesus (Luke 21:23-25). These traps prevent believers from fulfilling their first and most urgent responsibility—paying attention to the news of the coming of their Lord:
 - The trap of seeking worldly pleasures, of trying to make more and spend more money, as if making and spending money was the reason they came into this world, as if it is possible to have two masters.
 - The trap of getting caught in the anxieties and pressures of daily living.
 - The trap of “drunkenness” or unawareness. The trap of hearing the news of His coming, but taking no action as if nothing has happened.

The spiritually wise recognize that if Jesus came from the sky and every eye saw Him, then there would be no need for such dire warnings. The warnings are needed only

because most Christians fail to recognize the coming of the Heavenly Thief, because most of them fall at least into one of the three dangerous but concealed traps. They are so deeply immersed in worldly pleasures (trap 1), so busy (trap 2), and so numbed or “drunk” by the Theory of Heavenly Descent (trap 3), they pay no attention to anyone who has not fulfilled their preconditions, anyone who has not come down from the sky.

- And finally, *the spiritually wise* are keenly aware of the consequences of complacency. They remain awake and make every effort to avoid facing the following encounter, to avoid making this urgent plea and hearing this ominous response:

Foolish Christians: “Sir! Sir! Open the door for us” (Matt. 25:11).

Jesus Christ: “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you” (Matt. 25:12).

It is clear that in this age of fear, doubt, and confusion, only a few Christians follow the preceding instructions, only a few heed the warnings. Only a few have the courage and the spiritual wisdom to know that they must step out of the invisible trap of tradition. Most people are prisoners of their fears. They hesitate to leave their comfort zone, whether that zone is loyalty to their parents instead of God, fear of disrupting their marriage, fear of losing their position or prestige in the church, or simply fear of being deceived. No wonder prophecies point to the shortage of spiritual wisdom and discernment in our time:

***...the wisdom of their wise men shall vanish and
the discernment of the discerning shall be lost. Isaiah 29:14***

If we are sincere believers, if we have a genuine desire to keep our lamps lighted with wisdom, we will obey our Lord. We will constantly “watch.” Watch the sky? No, the sky does not need watching. Thousands of cameras and satellites around the world are already doing that. What then needs watching? The news that can be readily dismissed. The news that does not make it to our television screen. The news of the coming of a seemingly ordinary Man, who will make as much news the second time as He made the first time, a Man who will keep His identity hidden from strangers—from all those unworthy of seeing His Divine Beauty and Splendor.

Take ye heed, ***watch and pray***...

Christ (Mark 13:33)

Watch ye therefore, and ***pray always***...

Christ (Luke 21:36)

...Unto them that look for Him [Christ] shall He appear the second time. Hebrews 9:28

What will happen to those who do not obey the Lord, who do not watch, pray, or look for Him? They will be in the position of foolish Christians who may be physically present at His coming, but spiritually absent:

...they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding...

Christ (Mark 4:12)

When confronted with new ideas that challenge their ancestral beliefs, many believers, whether they are Christians or Jews, reach for their favorite “security blanket.” They say, “I need to do more Bible study.” Is this “blanket” safe? Does it protect a believer’s faith,

or does it help him escape from the harsh reality of hearing what he does not want to hear? Let us explore this question in the next chapter.

12

Like the Days of Noah

A few days before His crucifixion, Jesus offered the most extensive and specific signs concerning His Second Advent. They are recorded in Matthew, Chapters 24 and 25 and Luke 17. Here is one of those signs:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

Christ (Luke 17:26-29 NIV)

See also Matt. 24:37-39

This is how *The New American Bible* translates the same prophecy as recorded in Matthew:

The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time. Matt. 24:37

A verse from the Hebrew Scriptures confirms Jesus' prediction:

These days recall for me the days of Noah...

Isaiah 54:9 NEB

Let us see what happened to Noah. According to *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*:

With unwavering confidence in the Word of God, Noah started building the ark. For 120 years the construction continued. During this time of grace, Noah continued to preach God's judgment and mercy, warning the ungodly of their approaching doom (2 Pet. 2:5). He preached for 120 years, however, without any converts (1 Pet. 3:20). People continued in their evil ways and turned deaf ears to his pleadings and warnings until they were overtaken by the Flood.¹

As we can see, Jesus names a well-known historical figure to show that, in His Second Coming, history will once again repeat itself. Why did He choose Noah? Because Noah's ministry offers a classical example, a prototype of how people treat the Ones God sends to guide them. His story points to the depths of ingratitude and worldliness to which people descend at the dawning of God's great Messengers. The Greek word used for "coming," in Jesus' prophecy, is *Parousia*, which according to scholars, has double meanings: "coming" and "being present." Thus verse 37 can also be translated as:

The coming **and** presence of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time.

The word “parousia” indicates that in this prophecy Jesus predicts not only *the way* He will come but also the way He will be treated *after He comes*. Which of the following choices is in harmony with Noah’s ministry—His *coming* and *presence*—among people:

- Coming to this world from the sky as the Ruler of the universe and living and being present among people with supreme power and glory.
- Coming to this world from the womb of a mother, and living and being present among people with no earthly power, the way Noah and Jesus came and lived among people.

It is clear that the prophecy is in harmony with the second choice. Imagine if Noah had come from the sky with great might and majesty! Would people have dared to ignore Him much less reject, ridicule, and mistreat Him? How could “the days” or events of Noah’s time be repeated if Jesus descended visibly from heaven with might and majesty? That would be absolutely impossible.

If the Lord returned from the sky with supreme power and glory, surrounded by thousands of angels, as many Christians expect, people would be dumbfounded by seeing His awesome and spectacular Return. Language has no word to express their feelings. Some believers would faint, others would fall to their knees before His supreme majesty. They would rush to His presence with a sense of utter reverence, awe and ecstasy. Many would die to come close to Him or even get a glimpse of His glory.

How do most people behave when they come close to a celebrity—a movie star, a president, a famous athlete, a well-known musician, or someone with vast riches? Fame has a cost: loss of one’s freedom.

If Jesus returned from the sky as the Ruler of the universe, what Noah encountered—continual rejection and ridicule—would not happen. Jesus’ prediction would not come true.

In His prophecy, Jesus even singles out the point of comparison, the specific parallel between His “coming and presence” and Noah’s. He indicates that in Noah’s days, people continued to tend to their daily business—as they have always done—working, shopping, eating, sleeping, and getting married. The behavior Jesus singles out points to people’s unawareness of their Redeemer’s presence among them. It shows that “the days” He spends in this world are quite ordinary—like any other day. His prediction points to a world sunk to the depths of apathy, negligence, worldliness, and spiritual drunkenness. The *continual* denial of Noah points to the *continual* denial of Jesus by the masses of humankind at His Second Advent

The behavior Jesus singles out—pursuing an ordinary life—confirms the other meaning of parousia: presence. It shows that Jesus comes and lives among people, and so do the people who see Him or hear about Him, as they have always lived. There is no ambiguity in the prophecy:

The coming and presence of the Son of Man will repeat the events of Noah’s time. Just as it was in “the days” of Noah, so also will be in “the days” of the Son of Man.

Sometimes one story reminds us of another. The story of a saint reminds of another saint, that of a king of another king. We do not compare the story of Alexander the Great with

the story of St. Paul. The two figures are not comparable. Comparing the events surrounding a supremely powerful figure, with thousands of angels at His command, with events surrounding a humble and rejected Prophet like Noah is unreasonable.

The literal meaning of this prophecy—coming in an ordinary way—further reinforces and clarifies the meaning of many other prophecies, such as “coming like a thief” and the remedy Jesus prescribes for recognizing a “thief:” Being watchful. How did Noah appear to people? Did they see His divine glory? No, He walked like a thief—in the darkness of unbelief, apathy, and unawareness—among dreamers who were out of touch with reality. They felt and acted like many believers of this age, who are dreaming of the sudden descent of their Redeemer from heaven to earth, and their own sudden ascent or “rapture” from earth to heaven.

“The days” of Noah lasted “120 years.” He constantly admonished, and warned the people of the consequences of unbelief, but they paid no attention. They did not “watch.” They remained spiritually asleep and blind until disaster surrounded them. Can a greater contrast be imagined between the way people responded to Noah, and the way two billion Christians would feel and act if they saw their Redeemer on the clouds, coming from the sky with His mighty and majestic angels?

Why then so many Bible teachers ignore prophecies that contradict their “heavenly theories”? The comparison Jesus made is literal, based on facts of history. He used no figures of speech that require decoding. He left no room for misinterpretation. And yet His intention has been widely ignored. Why? It strikes at the root of the Literal Theory—a theory that tells marvelous myths to the masses of believers—myths that they love to hear. They buy over 50 million copies of a series of books, which like science fiction, fascinate their imagination.

The literal-minded interpreters of the Bible declare: “The Bible says what it means, and it means what it says.” Why, then, in this case, and many others, do they fail to follow their own advice, their own word? Despite Jesus’ clear prediction, I have not seen any Bible teacher who questions or even indirectly points to the utter contrast between what Jesus promised in this prophecy, and what the masses of Christians are expecting. Is it a “conspiracy of silence” or a “conspiracy of tradition” that prevents so many believer from paying attention to the facts? Tradition has such an awesome power, it can silence the heart of the most sincere believers. It can numb the hearts of millions for centuries. It can conceal the most evident truth. What is the opposite of being watchful? It is looking through the eyes of everyone else—and not with one’s own eyes. It is looking through the filter of tradition. It is not thinking and judging with a judicious and critical mind.

To leave no room for doubt, Jesus prefaces His prediction with another statement—one that further confirms the idea of coming in an ordinary way, the way He came the first time:

The Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. First, however, he must suffer much and be rejected by the present age. As it was in the day of Noah... Luke 17:24-26 The New American Bible

We should note that the Olivet Discourse—Matthew 24 and 25, which contains the preceding prophecy—is about the Second Advent. It relates to the future, not the past or

present. Further, the discourse was delivered a few days before Jesus' crucifixion. By then, He had already faced suffering, rejection, and ridicule. Note how clearly Jesus predicts the events of His Second Advent:

- When the appointed “day” comes, His glory will blazon forth. It will encircle the earth. Like the lighting that dazzles the eyes, people will be unable to ignore His influence upon the world. When “His day” of triumph arrives, the mustard seed of the Kingdom will have grown and become the largest of all trees (Matt. 13:31-32). It will cast its shadow on all the peoples of the earth.
- But that tree starts with a small seed—so small that people fail even to notice it. As we know, historians of the first century failed to detect the supreme powers concealed in a homeless Jewish man, named Jesus. Most of them did not consider Him worthy of any attention. They did not “watch.” But to reach “His day” of glory, the prophecy declares, Jesus must endure much suffering.
- He will “be rejected by the present age.” Most translations read: “by the present generation.” Christian scholars indicate that the Greek work used for “generation” has a special meaning. It points to a body of people who live over an extended period of time. Some translations such as *the New American Bible* substitute the word “age” for “generation” to confirm this idea. If we put the two meanings together, we arrive at this definition: a special group of people who live within an “age” or an extended period of time. Who are the intended people? And what is the age in which they live? Consider this promise from Jesus:

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20 NIV

What does Jesus mean by “the end of the age”? The time when Christian dispensation ends. When will that be? It will be at the precise moment when Jesus declares His Ministry in His Second Advent. And who are the people who live within the predicted age? Jesus' followers—Christians. When Jesus returns, Christians will lose touch with Him, unless they recognize and acknowledge Him again. If they fail, they will be in the same position the Jews have been for 2,000 years. The rule that applied to the Jews will apply to Christians. When Jesus came, Moses “was no longer with them.” In the same way: When Jesus comes the second time, Christians who ignore Him, who fail to “watch,” will lose their connection with their Redeemer. They will no longer be Christians. Jesus will tell them: “I do not know you” (Luke 13L25). Who are these Christians? Among them are those who prophesy in His name. They write science fiction and put the seal of Jesus on their books! Note how clearly Jesus predicted what has become so popular in these days: making prediction in the name of the Lord.

- Then Jesus predicts much suffering for Himself. What does that imply? It implies that most of His followers will not recognize Him. How would you feel if your loved ones ignored you and even accused you of being a liar and deceiver? Persecution can come from all nations, and from the followers of all religions. It can be mental, physical, or both.
- To make sure there will be no room for doubt, Jesus concludes His prediction by comparing His coming and presence among people to the events that accompanied

Noah, a well-known Figure, who offers a classic example of how God's Messengers and Redeemers have always been treated.

Let us now compare two similar prophecies, one about the First Advent, the other about the Second. By far the most definitive prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures that predicts suffering for Jesus is the following:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not...But he was pierced for our transgressions...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:3-6 NIV

Which prophecy is more definitive? The one Jesus offered about Himself, or the one Isaiah offered about Jesus? Isaiah's prophecy, compared to that of Jesus, lacks several significant ingredients:

- It speaks in past tense, not future.
- It does not specifically refer to the Jewish Messiah. It simply says: He.
- It does not offer a historical example.

The Jews have been blamed for failing to recognize the purpose of Isaiah's prophecy. They did not have a precedent, but we do. We are far more privileged than they were. What will the future generations say about us, if we fail to recognize the purpose of Jesus' prophecy—one that is far more definitive than that of Isaiah. Should we continue to ignore Jesus' clear prediction of suffering for Himself because it does not fit the traditional expectations? Should we downgrade its significance, brush it aside, or twist its meaning because it does not tell us what we like to hear, that this time it will be different: our Redeemer will not come to suffer, but to make His enemies suffer! Should we become a captive in the conspiracy of silence that tradition is imposing on so many sincere believers? Should we join the ranks of Christians who make this prophecy to come true: believers will listen to Bible teachers who will tell them what their itching ears like to hear (II Tim 4:3 NIV).

The Literal Recipe

How do prophecy interpreters play their game? They have several strategies that have proved effective for many centuries. In general, they make the prophecies appear much simpler than they are. Seldom if ever do they refer to verses that contradict their conclusions. Suppose we have a recipe for a cake. The recipe is somewhat confusing. If we follow the directions literally, it will not please our palate. So we change its ingredients and their proportions until it suits our taste. We change the recipe, but not its name. People buy and eat the cake without knowing what they are being fed.

Prophecy interpreters use many strategies to make their theories taste good. There is, however, one strategy that they all use. There is one rule they all break. They leave one ingredient out of their recipe. They ignore the abundant use of metaphors in prophecies.

God has always seasoned His prophecies with figures of language—symbols, similes, and parables. These symbols or figures share one common denomination: they point to a

miraculous event, to something that captures the heart of humankind—a heavenly show the like of which people have never seen. That was and still is the show the rabbis are telling their followers to expect. That was and still is the added ingredient in the cake the rabbis are feeding their followers. That recipe has worked for them. It has prevented their followers from paying attention to Jesus. That recipe is so good to the taste, it will always work. It tastes sweet to the palate of every human being.

Who Does not Like Fireworks?

As long as people like what they are fed, they have no reason to protest. Why stand up in the crowd? Why become a thorn on the stem of a beautiful rose? Why challenge one's rabbi, priest, or pastor? It is far easier to remain silent, to go with the crowd through the wide gate (Matt. 7:13). The literal recipe is so good it has kept millions of highly intelligent people prisoners in their synagogues for 2,000 years. It will do the same for Christians.

Let me now cite one recipe used by a famous theologian. Two Christian authors wrote a series of stories—*Left Behind*—based on a prophecy from St. Paul that when Jesus returns, the believers will rise to meet Him in the air. A scholar in Great Britain wrote a stinging article concerning the popular series. Then one of the twin authors of the series—Tim Lahaye—responded to the criticism. Let us hear from both sides. Here is how Tim Lahaye, refers to critical remarks made by a British author concerning his literal approach:

... a British New Testament scholar essentially called me a “pseudo-theologian” for championing the idea that, whenever possible, Bible prophecy should be interpreted literally. He believes that texts such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*—a passage that describes what is usually called the “Rapture” of the church—ought to be interpreted metaphorically or symbolically, not literally.

This man calls my interpretation of this passage “distorted” and considers the popularity of my fiction series, *Left Behind*, “puzzling, even bizarre.” He suggest that my “pseudo-theological version of *Home Alone* has reportedly frightened many children into some kind of (distorted) faith” and instructs his readers that “Paul’s mixed metaphors of trumps blowing and the living being snatched into heaven to meet the Lord are not to be understood as literal truth, as the *Left Behind* series suggests, but as a vivid and biblically allusive description of the great transformation of the Present world.”²

How does Mr. Lahaye respond to the preceding criticism? He begins with this statement:

Of course, when biblical writers intentionally use metaphors and symbols, we must try to understand what they meant to convey through these images. But when they speak plainly—when they employ non-poetic language in a straightforward way—what right

* For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

have we to pronounce their words “metaphorical” or their ideas merely “symbolic”? How can we usurp the authority to give their words whatever interpretation suits us? Certainly, we may disbelieve their message if we so choose. But we have no justification to claim that they meant “Z” when their own words declare they meant “A.”³

He then describes the approach he will use to prove his point:

I want to accomplish my goal by showing how several prophecies of the past were actually fulfilled in their own day. If we see that God most often fulfilled past prophecies in a literal way, shouldn't that suggest how we ought to interpret prophecies that pertain to the future?

I don't believe that God gave us prophecy to keep us confused about what lies ahead. Modern “prophets” may speak in riddles, mumbling one vague sentence after another, but the God of prophecy speaks in order to be understood, believed, and obeyed. We can have confidence that he means what he says, for always in the past his prophecies have come to fulfillment *exactly as he foretold they would*.⁴

Mr. Lahaye then offers a list of fulfilled prophecies, such as:

- The destiny of Jerico
- A prophecy about an event in the life of David
- The destiny of two kings
- The destiny of two cities
- The birth of Israel in recent times

He finally concludes:

As for me, I'll stick with my literal interpretation of Bible prophecy. I'd rather face God one day and hear him ask, “Tim, why didn't you seek a ‘deeper meaning,’ a more sophisticated understanding of the words in my Book?” than to hear him sadly wonder, “Tim, why didn't you simply believe what I told you?”⁵

What strategy does Mr. Lahaye use, in the preceding argument, to prove his point?

- He uses the outcome of *literal* prophecies to prove the outcome of *symbolic*.
- He avoids giving even the outcome of one unfulfilled symbolic prophecy, such as the prophecies that pointed to the coming of a king. He compares a prophecy that requires a complete, immediate, and radical change in the entire planet (the Rapture) with the gradual fall and rise of kings, cities, and countries—events that do not require deviation from the laws of nature.
- He says nothing about the numerous literal prophecies that contradict the literal descent of Jesus from the sky.
- He says nothing about inherent problems in the literal interpretation of St. Paul's prophecy, such as attributing the most horrible deeds to Jesus: burning thousands of millions of nonbelievers. He transforms Jesus—the absolute essence of love, gentleness, and compassion—to a mass-murderer!

- He says nothing about the status of children. At what age they will be considered responsible to be burned to death, and many other similar questions.

A casual reader who loves to believe Mr. Lahaye would not think of the preceding questions. He would simply trust the judgment of a popular theologian—with over 50 million copies of his books in circulation. Who dares to challenge such a successful Bible teacher?

Why is Mr. Lahaye not concerned about these unanswered questions? If he loves the literal approach, then, why does he ignore the literal prophecies that contradict his conclusions? Why does he try to change the meaning of literal prophecies that undermine his beliefs? Why does he find a deeper meaning for “coming like a thief”? Why does he find a deeper meaning for “as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of Son of Man”? Why does he find a deeper meaning for the many parables Jesus uttered to show that once more people will reject Him?

13

Will Bible Study Help?

The purpose of this chapter is not to discourage Bible study, but to show that the way it is usually carried out is not in itself conducive to enlightenment.

Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness. We are designed to live in the light. We should always seek the light of truth. Unfortunately, this light is often obscured and distorted by Traditional Bias. Even as our bodies adapt to a climate, so do our thoughts to what we are told to be “the truth.” We get so used to Traditional Bias that we seldom see its contradictions and distortions. Even if we see them, we tend to overlook them. Who has the courage and the self-confidence to question a view that has been proclaimed and confirmed by thousands of experts for centuries?

Bible study is valuable only if it is carried out in the spirit of freedom and absolute impartiality. Consider this verse:

Through knowledge shall *the just* be delivered.

Proverbs 11:9

Can you be a *just* member of a jury if you start with preconceived notions? Then how can you judge the Word of God with justice if you have already accepted “the Traditional Bias”?

Another “security blanket” is dependency. When confronted with new ideas about the Scriptures, most people—whether they are Christians or Jews—fail to think for themselves. Instead, they turn to someone who has had more Bible study. Is this a wise move? Once I sent a challenging book that questioned many traditional beliefs to a famous psychology professor who had displayed a keen interest in the relationship between psychology and religion. He appeared quite devoted to the church and was teaching in a small religious college. I was curious about his views and expected him to read at least a chapter. To my utter surprise, when I called him several months later to ask him for his views, he simply said, “I gave the book to a professor in the Department of Religion. He knows more about this topic than I do.” I thanked him and said goodbye. That is how the story ended!

One of the most prevalent beliefs is that the way to heaven is paved with “Bible study” and those who devote much time to the study of the Scriptures are more spiritual, more enlightened, and more receptive to the truth.

This assumption is rooted in an unfounded belief that our relationship with God and our capacity for knowing the truth is connected to the quality of our brain, that if we read the Bible long enough, if we study the Greek and Hebrew origins of words, and if we go to a seminary, then we will become more receptive to the truth.

Will knowing Greek and Hebrew give a believer the gift of Spiritual Wisdom? Some of those who have studied theology give us the impression that the key to the Kingdom of Heaven lies hidden in knowing Greek and Hebrew. To claim that without knowing Greek and Hebrew we cannot truly know the truth is like saying that without special glasses we cannot see the sun. Do we have to learn Hebrew to know Jesus in His First Advent? Why then do you need to know Greek to know Him in His Second Advent? The Spirit of Jesus shines in His Word as brightly as the sun.

Compare knowing Jesus to knowing God. To know God, do you need special courses in college? No, the only requirement for knowing God and discerning the glory of His Son is a pure heart. With a pure heart, not only we are able to know God, but also to see Him:

Blessed are ***the pure in heart***, for they will see God. Christ (Matt. 5:8)

Why did Jesus say that God reveals the truth to children, but hides it from the learned (Matt. 11:25-26)? Because children have pure hearts. It is clear that to receive the blessings of God and to come to His Presence, we need “heart surgery,” not “brain surgery,” we need humility, not theology.

Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up. *James 4:10*

The heart is the master and the brain the servant. But if the heart is not in good shape, it will allow the brain to take over and become the master. That is what happened to the rabbis who rejected and ridiculed Jesus. They had heart problems, not mind problems. Has their condition changed? Since the time of Jesus, they have had over 2,000 years of Bible study. Some of them are masters of Hebrew and Greek. Has their Bible study helped them? Will it help them if they study it for another 1,000 years?

If you feel you are not competent to choose your spiritual destiny, if you feel you must ask the opinion of someone else who is more advanced in Bible studies, ponder these questions once again: If that person, for whatever reason, misleads you, can he defend you before God? No, everyone stands alone before God and is accountable for his choices:

...every man shall bear his own burden. *Galatians 6:5*

...every one of us shall give account of himself to God. *Romans 14:12*

If our relationship with our Creator is spiritual, if it is connected to the heart, then how could you trust someone else’s heart more than your own heart? Do you know anyone’s heart better than your own heart? Depending on someone else’s heart is a clear sign of avoiding one’s spiritual responsibility. It shows a lack of faith. It shows trust in people, in “authority figures,” rather than in God.

Consider these verses addressed to the Jews who depended on Bible study as a way to salvation:

You diligently study the Scriptures...yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.
Christ (John 5:39-40)

Could the preceding verses apply equally to Christians of our time? Yes, we find a prophecy with precisely the same message about those who live at the time of the Second Advent. We are told that the people of “the last days:”

...are the kind who...are...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.
II Timothy 3:1-8

What value does Bible reading have if it fails to help its readers to “acknowledge the truth”? Bible reading is of value only if it is based on true faith. But at this point in history, our minds are drowning in facts, while our hearts are thirsting for faith:

At that time, many will turn away from the faith... Christ (Matt. 24:10)

Do you have faith that Jesus spoke the truth about the decline of faith in our time? If you do, do you think the scholars, pastors, the priests, and popular Christian authors are an exception?

How did the Bible teachers of the time of Jesus behave? Did they have more faith than the rest of the people?

Woe to you experts in the law, because *you have taken away the key to knowledge.*
You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.
Christ (Luke 11:52)

As Jesus indicates, those who were expert in the laws of Moses, the religious leaders, did just the opposite of what they were supposed to do. They served as locked doors, instead of open doors to the Kingdom of Heaven. Do you really believe in the following predictions?

The love of most will grow cold. Christ (Matt. 24:12)

What kind of love will grow cold? Love for God and love for truth.

For the time will come when people will stop listening to the truth and will *wander off to fables.*
II Timothy 4:3-4

Are those who have spent a lot of time studying the Bible an exception to Jesus’ prophecy and to St. Paul’s prediction that people will love myths more than the truth? Are theology professors an exception? Are pastors, priests, and rabbis an exception? Not according to the preceding prophecies. If you have true faith in the Scriptures, if you really believe that the preceding prophecies are true, then what will you gain from more time spent studying the Bible? Is it not reasonable to assume that you will devote more time to the study of “myths”?

All the instructions Jesus has given to prepare us for His Return pertain to our heart and soul. In all of His instructions, He asks the believers to be *spiritually* prepared and present. Not once does He refer to Bible study. According to St. Paul’s prophecy, today’s Christians listen to Bible teachers who will tell them what they like to hear:

...to suit their own desires, they [Christians] will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. II Timothy 4:3

Will today’s Christians listen also to teachers who will tell them what they do *not* like to hear? What will happen to those teachers? I once had a fifteen minute interview on a Christian radio station that covered many states. The interview was recorded for later broadcast. After waiting for several weeks without hearing the interview on the radio, I called to learn what had happened. The man who had conducted the interview, simply said, “My manager did not approve it. From our experience, when we broadcast ideas

that are nontraditional, we get many angry calls from our listeners.” He then apologized and said, “You know, we are listener supported.” I asked him if at least he could send me a copy of the interview. He did, and I still have it.

Steven Covey, the author of *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, offers an excellent example that pertains to today’s Bible studies. He says that suppose you were looking for an address in Paris, but you used the map of Dallas. Would trying harder help you find the house that you are looking for? What is wrong with the map most Bible teachers use? Their map consists of lines drawn long ago by people who found it much easier, and more pleasant, to travel on the literal track. They failed to take into account God’s unique Mode of Speech. ***They failed to realize that the Word of God must be “spiritually discerned”*** (I Cor. 2:14). More of the same will not help. The wrong map will not lead us to our divine destiny.

Imagine yourself telling a Jewish friend about Jesus. What do you think he should do? Should he open his heart and listen to you, or should he rush to his rabbi and ask him what to do? If you say, “He shouldn’t go to his rabbi,” why then should you go to your priest or pastor? Going to a pastor or a rabbi points to this conclusion: you have more trust in a human being than in God.

Please remember that the person you trust cannot even save himself. It is God who saves us and chooses us for His Banquet, not a rabbi or a priest:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him. Christ (John 6:35)

You did not choose Me, I chose you... Christ (John 15:16)

You are totally on your own. Your spiritual destiny is not in the hands of your rabbi, your priest, your pastor, or your spouse. The only way you can receive guidance is to stretch your hands towards God and plead with Him to make you worthy of the truth. It is entirely up to Him to respond to your pleadings and prayers by stretching His hand to lift you up and lead you to His Presence. God knows your heart. If you have a pure heart, He will lift you up and lead you. If you are fearful, if you do not trust Him, if you fail to obey His instructions, then you will get no help. You will be left to yourself.

To prepare Christians for His Return, Jesus left a Manual of Instructions. His Manual does not contain any reference to depending on Bible scholars or learning Greek and Hebrew origin of words. His Manual points to searching and seeking knowledge in the spirit of absolute humility, devotion to God, and spiritual independence and awareness. The centerpiece of His Manual consists of two guiding principles: “***watching***” or paying attention to the news of His coming, and ***praying*** to become worthy of knowing Him.

Be always on the ***watch*** and ***pray*** that you may be able to...stand before the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:36)

Keep a ***watch*** on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by...worldly cares...Be on the alert, ***praying*** at all times. Christ (Luke 21:34-36)

Be on guard!...keep ***watch***...you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘***Watch!***’ Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

Take ye heed, *watch* and *pray*... Christ (Mark 13:33)

Be ye yourselves like unto men *looking for their Lord*... Christ (Luke 12:36)

Christ...will appear a second time...to those who are *watching for Him*. Hebrews 9:28

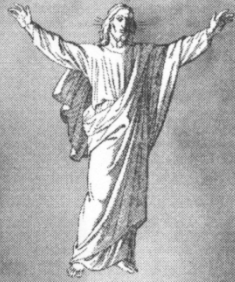
Unto them that *look for Him*, shall He appear the second time. Hebrews 9:28

What is the opposite of being *watchful*? It is being *complacent, negligent, careless, asleep, or thoughtless*. It is being spiritually drunk. It is saying, "If the Master comes, I will know. I do not need to search for Him. *He* will search for me."

What is the purpose of praying? To become worthy of knowing Him and receiving the honor of being chosen by Him. To receive help in one's search. To acknowledge that it is God who chooses, and that He will choose only the believers who trust Him and obey Him, who look up to Him instead of looking up to their priests or pastors. Jesus, at His Second Coming, chooses disciples and followers the way He chose them the first time:

For many are invited, but few are chosen. Christ (Matt. 22:14)

Let us now explore some of the critical metaphors Jesus used concerning the manner of His Return.



Look, He is coming with
the clouds, and every eye
will see Him.
Revelation 1:7



This is the day when I come like a thief!
Happy the man who stays awake...
Revelation 16:15

14

The Metaphor of “Coming from the Sky”

Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. John 16:25 NIV

In this chapter, let us examine the promise of “coming down from the sky.” Let us see if it passes both the test of reason and the test of the Scriptures.

Consider the extraordinary events associated with the return of Jesus as a set of dominoes. All the dominoes are interrelated. If we can prove that one of them is metaphoric, then they all have to be metaphoric. If one domino falls, then they all will fall. For instance, if we can prove that “coming down from the sky” is metaphoric, the promise of “every eye shall see Him” will also have to be metaphoric. As the number of falling dominos increases, it becomes progressively more clear that the literal assumptions are nothing more than assumptions.

Let us therefore consider a list of the major dominoes connected to the events that happen in the sky:

- Jesus will come down from the sky
- He will appear on the clouds
- Every eye shall see Him
- Even those who crucified Him will be present to see Him
- He will come with fire to punish those who do not believe in the Gospel
- There will be a sword in His mouth
- The Holy City will also come down from the sky

In Chapter 3, many examples were given to show that Jesus used metaphoric language to describe events that were impossible, extraordinary, or unreasonable. An example is His statement that true believers can drink poison without facing any danger, or promising to “cut into pieces” any “servant” or Bible teacher who fails to prepare Christians for His Return. We also noted that Jesus used metaphoric language to describe events that did not literally take place. For instance, although He was born to Mary, He said:

I have come down from the sky.

Christ (John 6:38)

It is not clear why Jesus made the preceding statement. Perhaps He spoke in response to this prevailing expectation:

When the Messiah appears no one is to know where He comes from. John 7:27

How could Jesus literally meet the preceding expectation? Only by coming through the sky from another planet or sphere. Only then could He say, “No one knows My birthplace!”

We examined still another metaphoric example of “coming down from the sky.” As we noted, Jesus declared that John the Baptist—an earthly being—was the return of Elijah, who had long ago ascended into the sky. We should note that the return of Elijah as John teaches us one more metaphoric lesson: the true meaning of “return.” John had no “literal” or worldly connection to Elijah, and yet Jesus declared that he was the “return” of Elijah.

“Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him...” Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist. Matthew 17:12-13

Once again we are facing an identical promise—this time, the promise of the return of our Redeemer from the sky:

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky... Christ (Matt. 24:30)

Is it possible that once again God is speaking in the same metaphoric language He spoke through Jesus as indeed He has spoken through all His Messengers and Teachers? Is it possible that when Jesus said that He would come again from the sky, He meant the way Elijah returned and the way He Himself came from “the sky” the first time?

We have two specific events or concepts from the past concerning the same event: coming down from the sky. We also have two clear explanations—both metaphoric—about the meaning of those events or concepts. Should we ignore these examples from the past as a guide to understanding the meaning of the same sign, the same event, and the same concept concerning the future?

Many Bible teachers assume that God’s language changed with the arrival of Jesus. From that time forward, God stopped using metaphoric language in His prophecies. They claim that this time “sky” is “the sky”—it literally means what it says.

But where is the evidence for assuming a change in God’s language? Can they find a single verse in the entire Bible to show that, beginning with Jesus, God changed His prophetic language from spiritual mode to literal? There is not a shred of evidence to show that such a change occurred. In fact, as we shall see, there is clear and conclusive evidence against this assumption.

When Jesus was speaking about His return, did He not say:

Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. John 16:25 NIV

Let us now test another literal domino associated with the sky. Not only do we have a promise that Jesus will come from the sky but also the Holy City, Jerusalem:

I saw the Holy City...coming down out of sky...prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Revelation 21:2

What does Jesus mean by “Holy City coming down out of sky”? He means ***the blueprint for a new civilization***—the City of God. Many Christians have assumed that the promised Kingdom will come upon us suddenly. They think it will come just the way snow comes to cover the earth. In the evening the earth is bare. We get up in the morning and see it clothed with snow. They forget Jesus’ prediction that the Kingdom of God rises gradually the way dough rises or the way a mustard seed grows to become a shading tree—little by little, day by day:

Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.” Again he asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

Luke 13:18-21

God gives us flour, water, and yeast. But we must put the ingredients together to make nourishing bread. God plants the seed, but we must nourish and protect it, just the same way early Christians did. God will not do our work for us.

The next verse provides the insight that we need to know the metaphor of “coming out of the sky:”

The city does not need the sun...to shine on it, for ***the glory of God gives it light.***

Revelation 21:23

If God is Spirit, what would His glory be like? Would not His Glory—the Glory of God—also be spiritual? Thus if the “Glory” that gives “light” to the Holy City is spiritual, “the city,” “the sky,” and “the coming down” must also be spiritual.

Let us test another domino about Jerusalem:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city [Jerusalem].

Revelation 22:14

Question: Having the right to “the tree of life” is the most glorious gift from God. Should we assume that the only requirement for receiving this gift is a set of clean clothes? Apparently it is not necessary to take a shower! Once again, we clearly see the fallacy of literal-mindedness. What does the expression “clean clothes” symbolize? It symbolizes spiritual purity:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Christ (Matt. 5:8)

How then do “the pure in heart” see God? They see spiritually, because God is Spirit. The pure in heart can also see the Spirit of God in the One He sends to redeem humankind.

Let us test yet another domino relating to the City of God:

Blessed are those who...***go through the gates into the city.***

Revelation 22:14

Are “the gates” that allow people to enter Jerusalem literal? If all the evil people have been burned, why then should this glorious city have any gates? Why should it have walls?

Consider the parable of the wise and foolish maidens. Jesus used that parable to teach us the meaning of Spiritual Wisdom. What type of Christians could not enter the heavenly

Banquet? The foolish ones. What was the obstacle that prevented them from entering? A closed “gate” or “door.” Why was the door closed? Because when the Bridegroom arrived, those Christians were not attentive or watchful—they were spiritually absent.

What do “the doors” or “the gates” of the City symbolize? What does their presence teach us? It teaches us that entering the City requires both action and permission, and that waiting passively for Jesus is not good enough. We must search for the gate that leads us to the Heavenly Thief. We must make a choice, and we must take advantage of our freedom in this world to make every effort to enter the City of God—a City that is enlightened with the Glory of God. If we fail to enter through the gates into the City in this life, the gates to His Kingdom will be closed to us in the next life.

Consider also the following verse about the Second Advent from the same book. It clearly shows that when Jesus returns, our freedom of choice will not be taken away from us:

I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me. *Christ (Rev. 3:20)*

The following verses also declare the same principle:

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their Master to return from a wedding banquet, ***so that when He comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for Him.*** *Christ (Luke 12:35-36)*

If Jesus came from the sky surrounded by fire and His mighty angels, how could even the closed-hearted and unyielding skeptics dare to keep their hearts closed to Him? But is that the way God wants to enter our hearts and conquer our souls? The verse clearly shows that Jesus will once again come as a humble Man as He did the first time. Only if He came like a thief; only by hiding His great glory in humility, gentleness, patience, and suffering, would there be a need to “knock on the hearts”; only that manner of coming would allow human freedom to reign.

Let us test yet another domino related to “the coming down from the sky.” According to a prophecy, the same people who were present when Jesus was “pierced” or crucified, will also be present when He returns:

Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, ***even those who pierced Him...*** *Revelation 1:7*

To understand the meaning of “the presence of those who crucified Jesus,” let us look for a similar example from the past as we did in the example of the coming of Jesus and Elijah from the sky. By doing so, we can once again see God’s unique way of speaking—His spiritual or heavenly pattern of speech. According to the Gospel, Jesus once told a number of Jews, who had gathered around Him and were arguing with Him, that ***they*** were the ones who had killed Zechariah:

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, ***whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*** *Christ (Matt. 23:35)*

Please note that Jesus not only accuses the Pharisees who were standing around Him with murder, He even specified the location where they committed the murder. Jesus also

places the blame on those around Him for “all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth.” Even if there were no other example of Metaphoric Language in the Bible, this one example alone would reveal the mysteries and wonders of God’s unique language—His heavenly Mode of Speech.

On the surface—literally—Jesus’ statement is untrue. It shows a total disregard for justice. Those addressed by Jesus were not even born when Zechariah was killed. Can you imagine yourself being accused of murdering someone you have never met? It is clear that Jesus’ statement must be “spiritually discerned.”

What, then, did Jesus mean? He meant that those listening to Him were “*the same kind of people*” who had murdered Zechariah. But Jesus did not make this clear. Why? Because that is the way He spoke; that is the way God has always spoken to us.

God’s language is unique. He wants to show us His distinction, authority, and power. He wants to move us from narrow, rigid, and literal thinking towards fluid, vast, and spiritual thinking. He wants to expand our hearts and minds. He often puts His message inside an envelope. To read His letter, we must make a little effort. We must open the envelope; we must look beyond the surface. The envelope is in the literal language; the content of the letter is in the Spiritual Language.

A creative, fluid mind can readily “fill in” the blanks in Jesus’ declaration:

- You killed Zechariah
- You (are the kind of people who) killed Zechariah

Jesus used figurative language for several reasons. He used that language in relation to His teachings:

- To conceal certain truths from those not receptive to His message.
- To allow His listeners to draw truths according to their spiritual capacities.

In relation to prophecies, Jesus used figurative language:

- To protect them from abuse. For imposters could live or act in such a way to show that the prophecies apply to them.
- To allow only the humble and the pure-hearted recognize Him in His Second Advent. Accepting the One who comes “like a thief” is a challenge to every believer. Only the faithful take time to know such a Redeemer.

In the next chapter, let us explore the metaphoric meaning of another related domino: “being visible to every eye.”

15

The Metaphor of “Seeing”

To see the beauty and wonders of Spiritual Language, let us continue our search in the garden of inner meanings for still more flowers, and perhaps even a few butterflies. Let us examine another word related to the coming down from the sky: “seeing.” Jesus promised that when He returns from the sky, “every eye will see Him.” Did He mean physical or spiritual “eye”? Again “the key” to this question lies in His own Word, in His own unique—and spiritual—language. Consider this well-known verse:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. *Christ (Matt. 5:8)*

Does Jesus mean “seeing” God with the heart or with the eye? He simply said, “They shall see.” He did not say “see spiritually.” Why not? Because that was His Mode of Speech.

Let us consider another verse about “seeing.” Have you heard of a special “ointment” or “salve” that Christians are asked to “buy” from Jesus? In the Book of Revelation, which is mostly about the events of our time, Jesus asks Christians to “buy” such a remedy. What for? For their eyes! For what purpose? To heal them! Is there something wrong with their eyes? Apparently there is:

I counsel you to buy from Me...salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. *Christ (Rev. 3:18)*

If believers did not need this ointment, why should they waste their money? But why do they need good eyes? To “see” Jesus. What else is worth seeing? What else would require such a remedy? If we are on the literal track, why not take Jesus’ advice literally. Let us go to every store in every town in search of this ointment!

Once again, when Jesus spoke about this ointment, did He say that it was spiritual? Why not? Because that is the way He spoke. Our Creator wants us to make a little effort to find the message *inside* the envelope rather than merely look *on* the envelope.

Let us consider yet another example that clarifies the prophetic and spiritual meaning of “seeing” the Glory of Jesus in His Second Advent:

He who loves me...I too will love him and *show myself* to him. *Christ (John 14:21)*

Has Jesus ever shown Himself to you physically? Then what does He mean by saying “I...will show Myself”? He means *spiritually*, but He omits that critical word. That is the way He often spoke—in spiritual language.

Isaiah prophesied that a day will come when all humankind will behold the Glory of God:

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh [all mankind] shall see it together. *Isaiah 40:5*

The Gospel indicates that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the First Advent (Luke 3:6).

Question: Was Isaiah's prophecy spoken in a literal or in a spiritual language? "***All flesh shall see***" is quite similar to "***Every eye shall see.***" *The Living Bible* reads: Then ***all mankind shall*** see the Savior sent from God.

Did "all flesh" or "every eye" see the glory of Jesus in His First Advent? Why, then, apply double standards to prophecies? Why consider "seeing" a ***spiritual*** event in the prophecies of the First Advent, but take it as a ***physical*** event in the Second?

Consider also this instruction:

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may...be able ***to stand before the Son of Man.*** Christ (Luke 21:36)

Does Jesus mean you should "stand before the Son of Man" physically or spiritually? If all Christians saw Him, then they would all rush to His presence. But Jesus declares that in order to receive the gift of "standing before Him" we must pray. It is clear that many Christians will be unable to "see" Him. Why? Because like those foolish maidens, they will be spiritually absent, and will therefore be unable to "stand before Him" with their hearts and souls.

How can we see "the Glory of God"? With "faith" in our heart, or with "eyes" in our head?

Did I not tell you that if you have faith you will see the glory of God? *Christ (John 11:40)*

Jesus said:

Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. *John 14:9*

What does Jesus mean by "Me"? Does He mean His Spirit or His body? The real Jesus was His Spirit, the Spirit of God within Him. That Spirit will come with the clouds, in the clouds, and on the clouds.

Ponder the meaning of this marvelous metaphor:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! *Christ (Matt. 6:22-23)*

What does Jesus teach us in the preceding passage? That we must keep the eye in our heart open, that we must let the light of wisdom illuminate our soul. The consequences of outer darkness will last but for a little while; the consequences of inner darkness will never end.

Thus, is it possible that "coming down from the sky" means "coming down from the presence of God" who is heavenly and always above us, and infinitely greater than us? Is it also possible that "every eye" means "every eye in the heart of the sincere believer"?

who is willing to look and judge through his own pure heart, his own inner eye, rather than “the eye of tradition”?

Ponder also the following question. Who deserves to “see” the Glory of God or the Glory of Jesus? Everyone who has “eyes in his head” or who has “eyes in his heart”? Who deserves that supreme honor? The closed-minded people who are “spiritually blind” but have perfect eyes, or humble and holy people who have wonderful hearts but perhaps no eyesight?

Note how clearly the following verse clarifies the meaning of seeing Jesus the second time:

...without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14

Does this verse speak of a physical eye or a spiritual eye? It is clear that God allows only the pure in heart and the holy in spirit to see the glory of His Son.

To prepare Christians for His return, Jesus emphasized one word more than any other: Watch! This word also undermines the Theory of Literal Descent.

Question: If every eye will see Him, why then would we need to “watch”? What is the difference between “seeing” and “watching”? “Watching” implies an intense state of “seeing.” It involves both intention and effort. It says: *try* to see. It is the same with “hearing” and “listening.” Listening implies making an effort both to hear and to understand. Listening requires more than just hearing—just as watching requires more than seeing. Why did Jesus call the religious leaders of His time “blind guides” leading “the blind” (Matt. 15:14)? Because they were “looking and looking,” but could see nothing but their fears, prejudices, and illusions.

By asking us to watch, Jesus intimates that if we fail to look intensely with the eye in our soul, we will miss Him. We may be standing next to Him, but be unable to know Him: to see His celestial glory. By saying that “Every eye shall see Him,” Jesus means every spiritually-sighted person who watches, or investigates the news of His coming, with all his heart and soul will see Him, even if he lives in a cave or deep in the forests of Amazon, even if he is born blind and works in a submarine that floats in the depths of oceans.

The following verse as worded in the *King James Version* clarifies the meaning of the word “watch.” It points to intention and effort, just as “seek and ye shall find” does:

...unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time...

Hebrews 9:28

In the next chapter, let us put to the test of critical thinking another “domino” of the Literal Theory: *the clouds*.

16

The Metaphor of “Clouds”

Close observation shows that whenever Jesus refers to His heavenly or visible Return to the earth, He includes the word “clouds:”

They shall see the Son of Man coming *on* the clouds of sky... Christ (Matt. 24:30)

...He is coming *with* the clouds. Christ (Rev. 1:7)

He was robed *in* a cloud...His face was like the sun... Christ (Rev. 10:1)

This unique combination in itself should raise a red flag. Why? Because “clouds” and “seeing” are essentially incompatible. It is the function of clouds to conceal, rather than to reveal. If Jesus wanted to be seen by every eye, why would He come “with,” “in,” or “on” the clouds?

Aside from studying the unique language of the Scriptures, let us look at the practical problem of seeing Jesus in the sky. As we know, millions of square miles of the earth are covered by thick clouds or by darkness for many months of the year. How can those people living in utter darkness, on mountains surrounded by clouds or deep within thick jungles see Jesus?

Consider this incident. Once, because of intense fog on the ground, our plane had to circle around in the clouds over Chicago for 45 minutes. There were planes above and below us at various levels, all circling above the airport until they had permission to land. During those 45 minutes, I looked out to see one of the other planes but was unable to get even a glimpse of any of them. All those jets were many times bigger than a human being, yet I could see no sign of any jet. “Let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isa. 1:18). If jets are so difficult to see within close range, how then can “every eye” be able to see a human being riding on the clouds throughout this vast planet covering hundreds of millions of square miles?

True, God has the power to make the impossible possible. But who has the authority to decide, or the Biblical evidence to show, that God will in fact do this? Is it prudent to build our destiny on an assumption, when that assumption is repeatedly contradicted by the Scripture? Did not the Jews make a similar assumption? Did not Jesus condemn all those who wanted to know Him by seeing Him break the laws of nature, that is, to make the impossible possible? What did Jesus tell them?

A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! Christ (Matt. 12:39)
See also Matt. 16:4

Have the rules changed? Does it say in the Bible that they have changed or will change? Where does it say that God's language suddenly changed from metaphoric to literal? Where does it say that the Word of God must be "discerned literally"?

Then what does the word "clouds" indicate? It indicates that the Glory of Jesus will be surrounded and concealed by the "clouds" of assumptions and illusions that have ascended out of the hearts and minds of millions of Christians, who in St. Paul's word, have turned their ears toward myths. It means He will be robed and wrapped in the clouds of tradition generated by personal and private interpretation of the Bible by teachers who have told, and continue to tell the believers what "their itching ears want to hear," just as many politicians do.

His coming is the source of the profoundest joy, but the clouds of misconceptions surround Him and prevent many people from basking in the joy of knowing Him:

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad, let the distant shores rejoice. ***Clouds and darkness surround Him...*** Psalms 97:1

When Jesus comes as a humble man, His Spirit will shine as brightly as the sun, and yet the clouds of literal thinking are so dense, they can fully conceal His light. That is why He said:

He was robed in ***a cloud***...his face was like ***the sun***... Revelation 10:1

Ponder the metaphoric meaning of "clouds" and "darkness" in the following prophecy about the gathering of the Jews in this age in Israel:

I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered ***on a day of clouds and darkness***. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. Ezekiel 34:12-13

What is the connection between the words "distress" and "clouds" in this verse:

That day will be ***a day of...distress...a day of clouds***... Zephaniah 1:15

The verse indicates that the rejection of the promised Redeemer will result in distress and spiritual darkness.

Note the word "clouded" in this translation:

Be on your guard—***see to it that your minds are never clouded*** by dissipation [pursuit of pleasure] or drunkenness [complacency], or the worries of this life... Christ (Luke 21:34-36)

It is clear that such precautions would be needed only if Jesus came the way He came the first time, as an ordinary Man.

Note the amazing statement Jesus made to the high priest during His interrogation:

And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of sky. *Christ (Mark 14:62)*

Did Jesus fulfill His promise literally? Obviously not! Why then did He make this promise? ***Because that is the way He spoke, in Spiritual Language.*** This language does not follow the rules of literal language. In Spiritual Language, words assume metaphoric

meanings; past, present, and future merge, and distance vanishes. In the preceding statement we find all the critical elements of “coming down from the sky:”

See

The Son of Man

Coming on the clouds

Sky

It is obvious that Jesus used all these words metaphorically. Why did He? Because that was His Mode of Speech, His characteristic way of speaking. ***Instead of adapting His standards of speaking to ours, we must adapt our standards to His. We must try to see everything from His perspective.*** If we fail, instead of seeing beauty in His Words, we will see inconsistency and contradiction.

Consider this verse once again:

He was robed in ***cloud***...his face was like ***the sun***... Revelation 10:1

What does “robed” imply? It implies that the light of Jesus—brilliant as the sun—will be surrounded and covered by unfounded assumptions and expectations. One of those assumptions is that the word “clouds” literally means water vapor.

“Clouds” can also be a metaphor for “the body” because the flesh conceals the glory of the Spirit. God uses the human body as a means of both concealing and revealing His glory to us. The spiritually sighted saw the glory of God in Jesus; the spiritually blind saw nothing.

He [God] makes the clouds His chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. Psalms 104:3

Jesus’ body served as a chariot for the Spirit of God. That body, like a cloud, concealed the Glory of God in Jesus from those who were not worthy of seeing that Glory.

Tradition is so powerful that it can cover a hundred suns, just as dark and thick clouds can. It is no wonder Jesus predicted that even though He will shine as brightly as the sun, yet He will be robed or concealed in a cloud. Believers may choose to see either “the clouds” or “the sun,” ***just as those foolish and wise Christians had a choice to be spiritually absent or present.***

To gain insight into God’s unique language and to become more objective and spiritual, compare the following two verses, one about the Second Advent, the other about the First. Then try to answer this question: Why should we apply two opposite standards to these verses? Who decided that at a given point the language of Jesus changed?

First Advent

I have come down ***from the sky***... Christ (John 6:38)

Second Advent

... they shall see the Son of Man coming ***in the clouds of sky***... Christ (Matt. 24:30)

Was Jesus—the light of the world—less brilliant than the sun? Why then have so many failed and continue to fail to see His light? For lack of eyesight or insight?

Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light... John 3:19

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:5

In the next chapter, let us put to the test one more “domino” of the Literal Theory: *fire*.

17

The Metaphor of “Fire”

Another domino associated with “coming down from the sky” is the use of “fire” as a means of punishment and destruction:

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven *in blazing fire* with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be *punished* with everlasting *destruction* when He comes...

II Thessalonians 1:7-10

That day will bring about the *destruction* of the heavens by *fire*...we are looking toward a new heaven and a new earth.

II Peter 3:12-13

As we noted, metaphors are commonly used throughout the Scriptures to describe actions or events that literally are unlikely, untrue, unreasonable, or impossible. Sometimes the Bible gives us the key to understanding the inner meaning of such metaphoric passages. “Fire” is such a word. Let us review several examples. Consider this seemingly incredible statement from Jesus:

I have come to bring fire [set fire^{NEB}] to the world, and how I wish it were already kindled!

Christ (Luke 12:49)

Did Jesus set fire to even a small wooden shack, much less cities, countries, and the world? Then how should we discern Jesus’ intention? Spiritually, in the light of the spirit:

<i>The Literal Words</i>	<i>In the Light of the Spirit</i>
I have come to <i>set fire</i> to the world.	I have come to destroy the decaying, outdated, and prevailing world order.

Let us now apply St Paul’s guidance and directive that the Word of God must be “*discerned spiritually*” (I Cor. 2:14) to a few more verses:

<i>The Literal Words</i>	<i>Spiritually Discerned</i>
“Everyone will be <i>salted with fire</i> ” (Mark 9:49). “The fire will test the quality of each man’s work” (I Cor. 3:13).	Everyone will be put in the crucible of tests and trials. By his response to the Message of Jesus, everyone will reveal the degree of his spiritual purity.

<i>The Literal Words</i>	<i>Spiritually Discerned</i>
Our God is <i>a consuming fire</i> (Heb. 12:29).	Our God is mighty and powerful. He is a just God who punishes the cruel people.
The Son of God, whose eyes are like <i>blazing fire</i> (Rev. 3:18).	The Son of God whose eyes are powerful—so powerful, they can transform the world with a glance.
He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with <i>fire</i> (Luke 3:16).	He will cleanse you with the power of the Holy Spirit and with a spiritual fire that will destroy your “old self.”

Let us now discern the spiritual meaning of Paul’s and Peter’s prophecies concerning the Second Advent:

<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Spiritually Discerned</i>
<i>When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven</i>	When the Lord Jesus reveals His spiritual glory from the heaven of a new Revelation, from the heaven of celestial power and majesty.
<i>In blazing fire</i>	With awesome spiritual power.
<i>With His powerful angels</i>	With disciples or servants who are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, who soar in the heaven of knowledge and nearness to God. Through the Word of God, they gain the power to transform lives.
<i>He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus</i>	He will punish those who fail to investigate and know God’s plan for humankind, those who refuse to obey the commands of Jesus that they should search for Him even as they search for a thief. The greatest punishment a human being can experience is spiritual poverty, is being deprived of God’s grace. Worldly poverty is temporary; spiritual poverty is everlasting. The poorest of the poor are those who deny the Redeemer of the Age. They are not even considered alive.

<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Spiritually Discerned</i>
<i>They will be punished with everlasting destruction</i>	Anyone who denies Jesus at His Second Advent will be spiritually dead. A body in a state of coma is technically alive, but is practically dead. The same principle applies to the soul. When a “dead” soul passes away from this world, it experiences a second death. From a temporary hell, it enters an everlasting hell.
<i>Shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes</i>	Anyone who denies Jesus at His Second Advent will receive the most severe punishment. He will be “shut out from the presence of the Lord.” Remoteness or separation from the presence of God is the same as being spiritually dead. It is like living in spiritual darkness. This is the gravest punishment a soul can impose on itself.
<i>That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire</i>	On that Day, the heavens of previous religions will pass away. This is like the passing away of yesterday and the dawning of today. We cannot live in yesterday; we must live in today.
<i>We are looking toward a new heaven and a new earth</i>	We are looking forward to enjoy a new spiritual and a new earthly Civilization. Jesus will bring a blueprint for this glorious Civilization, but the responsibility of building it rests upon us.

Once again, we can ask: Why, in the preceding prophecies, is the word “spiritual” omitted? Because that is the unique feature of God’s language. He often uses physical words to expose spiritual realities. He utters words that pertain to earthly images and concepts to express heavenly truths. That is the purpose of symbols, similes, allegories, metaphors, and parables. To discern God’s Word, we must raise our vision to His Way of speaking, not lower His Way to our vision.

Let us now ask some questions. *“Let us reason together,” says the Lord*” (Isa. 1:18).

- Why would God want to set fire to the world?
- Why would God want to destroy the “heavens”? Does He not like His own creation?
- The “heavens” are vast empty spaces. How can they be “burned”?

- Why would God want to take away or destroy our beautiful earth with millions of species of plants and animals? Humans sometimes deserve punishment. Should animals also be punished?
- Even if Jesus wanted to punish the people, why would He use “fire”?

St. Paul’s prophecy states that Jesus will come with fire to punish *those who refuse to obey the Gospel*. Let us disregard non-Christians for the moment. What percentage of Christians obey the Gospel? Statistics indicate that over 80 percent of them engage in sexual activity before or outside marriage. Some authorities place the number even higher, because many couples who are “in love” have sex with their future spouse before marriage. Further, a large percentage of divorces are unlawful. They are not caused by infidelity, which, according to the Gospel, is the only acceptable reason for granting a divorce. If we use just this one sin, what percentage of Christians will be saved from the fire? If we include all sins, it is hard to imagine that anyone will have a chance.

Many people—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—depend on their religious leaders for spiritual guidance. Perhaps they are unaware of the grim statistics. Perhaps they have not heard that, according to experts, about 50 percent of unmarried priests are sexually active. Perhaps they do not know that, according to Dr Charles Swindol, president of Dallas Theological Seminary, a recent study indicates that about 50 percent of pastors admit viewing pornographic materials in a given year.¹

Perhaps the masses of Muslims, who submit their everlasting destiny to their religious leaders, do not know that some of those leaders have become the source of much violence and terror in the world today. They work behind the scene to instill in their followers hatred and prejudice against any nation that may be perceived as a threat to their theological theories and doctrines. Perhaps they have not heard the following prophecy from their own Prophet, Muhammad, predicting the spiritual state of the Muslims of this age and the depravity and evil character of many of their spiritual leaders:

*There will come a time for any people when there will remain nothing of the Qur’án except its outward form and nothing of Islam except its name and they will call themselves by this name even though they are the people furthest from it. Their mosques will be full of people but they will be empty of right guidance. The religious leaders of that day will be the most evil religious leaders under the heavens; sedition and dissension will go out from them and to them will it return.*²

At this point in history, a series of books, with the scary and exciting theme of “Left Behind,” are best-sellers. It is reasonable to assume that most of the Christians who read them believe that they will be among the few who will be lifted to heaven rather than among the many who will be left behind. Reading these books helps them feel good about themselves. Let us put their optimism to the test. Let us estimate their chances of being lifted high into heavens.

If we take “the fire” literally, then we have to conclude that children will have the best chance of being lifted. They are the most innocent. But the problem is this: When does childhood end? Try to solve this puzzle. At what year, month, day, minute, and second does a person leave childhood behind and becomes responsible enough to deserve the fire? *We have to draw the line somewhere*. Where would you draw the line? Would you say: “Anyone who is precisely 12 years old or younger will be saved, and anyone who

has passed that age by one minute or even one second will be left behind to suffer and be destroyed”? It is easy to generalize and talk about the millions of unbelievers left behind for the fire but difficult to deal with the specifics. As it is said, “The devil is in details.” The destiny of children is one of many details that by itself undermines the Literal Theory.

Let us put the Literal Theory to one more test. Try to list the names of all your friends and relatives, and then check the names of the ones who may deserve to be left behind and burned. What do you think the list will show you? That human beings do not exist in “black and white.” They exist only in “shades of gray.” You will conclude that it would be most cruel to **burn** one shade of gray, and send the next shade to **heaven**.

The International Bible Society has published a wonderful booklet called *The True Seeker*. Its main theme is God’s love for His children:

As much as you believe you are interested in finding God, it turns out he is even more interested in finding you.³

God shows himself as the sovereign initiator of love who seeks out the lost.⁴

God’s love is so great that he was willing to deliver over to death his most precious treasure—his only Son—so that the world might have the opportunity to find life through him.⁵

Jesus spent his time with sinners and outcasts—those who most clearly felt their own brokenness and longed for salvation. If today you sense your own neediness, if today your heart seeks to cry out for help, do not ignore God’s overtures.⁶

The booklet offers many verses from the Scriptures to show God’s love for the ungodly, the disadvantaged, and the lowly:

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.” In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. *Luke 15:7-10*

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light

Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus was the very essence of gentleness, love, and compassion. He would not hurt even **the feelings** of a sinner—one who disobeys the Bible—**much less hurt or scorch his body**. How can the literalists ever picture Jesus in their minds as a violent Man. Killing even one person is an act of terror and violence, let alone burning hundreds of millions even if they are sinners. And who isn’t one?

For the sake of simplicity, let us think for a moment in black and white to highlight what segment of society will have the best chance of escaping the fire? Among American adults, that segment consists of black women who live in southern states! Why? Because

according to a study by the Gallup poll, they are the most saintly Americans. Most people have never heard of this significant study!

The study also found that women as a whole—whether they live in northern or southern states—are more saintly than men. It is ironic that by far the greatest number of church leaders are men, yet their chance of being “saved” is far less than that of southern, black women! Is the Gallup study evidence of the fulfillment of this prophecy?

The last shall be first, the first shall be last.

Christ (Matt. 20:16)

The Gallup study once again confirms the fact that human standards are often contrary to God’s standard, and that the way to heaven is not paved with Bible study or advanced courses in theology, but with hearts pure and saintly.

In this and the preceding three chapters we have observed the downfall of the most critical dominoes of the Literal Theory: “every eye,” “seeing,” “sky,” “coming down,” “clouds,” and “fire.” Do we need to go further? Even a cursory study of prophecies in the light of the spirit indicates that every assumption of the Literal Theory is a fallen domino. It neither stands the test of the Scriptures, nor the test of objective analysis. The fallen state of the most critical dominoes of the Literal Theory should send this message to all sincere Christians: the time of literal thinking has finally come to an end. We must consider that Mode of Thinking only as a passing phase of history, and move on to our divine destiny.

In the next chapter, let us study the grave dangers of literal thinking. Let us see its destructive consequences. Let us see how it has undermined the welfare of humankind for thousands of years.

18

The Analogy of “Coming Like a Thief”

Part I

Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. *Christ (Revelation 16:15)*

The idea of coming like a thief is a warning. It points to danger. What is the danger? Missing the Thief! What precautions should we take to find Him? This chapter and the next cover what Jesus Himself asked us to do.

As we noted, Jesus sometimes used metaphors in a unique way: to express concepts that are *spiritually* sound—reasonable, possible, and true—but not *literally*. Examples offered include: “drinking poison,” “removing one’s eyes,” and “cutting one’s hands.” Only a divine Being has the authority and the wisdom to speak in this language.

In addition to such unique metaphors, Jesus also adorned His words with analogies. Analogies are found abundantly in all works of literature. They serve many purposes. Their foremost function is to transform an abstract idea into a concrete one, to turn the invisible into the visible.

Jesus compared:

- The Word of God to seed and the human heart to soil.
- The gradual growth of His Kingdom, at His Second Coming, to the growth of a mustard seed into a huge plant.
- Spiritual truths to pearls and those who fail to recognize their value to pigs.
- The true believers to “the salt of the earth.”
- His new teachings to new wine.
- Christians who obey Him to sheep and the ones who disobey Him to goats.
- The manner of His coming to the way a thief comes.
- Virtues needed to become worthy of knowing Him to “clothes.”

What does the analogy of coming like a thief teach us? Does it imply that Jesus will hide Himself in remote deserts, mountains, or dark chambers? Absolutely not! Only a coward would do that. Jesus would only hide *His glory* from the strangers—those who do not

deserve to see it unveiled. That is exactly what He did the first time, and that is exactly what the analogy teaches us that He will do the second time.

Jesus was “the light of the world,” yet only a few could see that light, only a few could recognize His glory:

Then they asked him, “Where is your father?” “You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” John 8:19 NIV

The principle behind coming “like a thief” is not new. Jesus taught us the same principle when He asked us not to waste the seed of truth in a stony heart, in a closed mind, or in a soul surrounded with weeds of prejudice, fear, hypocrisy, and selfish desires. His strategy for revealing His glory at His Second Coming is also in harmony with His instructions that we should not throw the pearls of knowledge before pigs, that is before people who could not care less what the truth is.

No, Jesus does not mean that He will hide Himself. On the contrary, He will stand before the highest authorities. He will challenge them with absolute courage—but also with kindness and gentleness—as He did the first time. The analogy simply points to the repetition of the events of the First Advent.

Jesus was, is, and will always be the light of the world. His glory shines more brightly than the sun, yet it has remained and will continue to remain hidden to the spiritually blind. In His lifetime Jesus received little if any recognition. Historians of the time made only a vague reference to Him. He was a Heavenly Thief invisible in the darkness of ignorance and prejudice. But eventually the splendor of that obscure Figure encircled the globe. It became as visible as the lightning that flashes from the East to the West.

Among all the expressions Jesus used to teach us about the way He will return, the analogy of coming like a thief under the cover of darkness is the most instructive. No other expression could convey His intention more clearly. And no other comparison could undermine the Literal Theory with greater force.

Yet like all the other signs that Jesus gave to help us find Him, this one has also been distorted, diluted, and stripped of its power to make it fit the Literal Theory. Many sincere Christians do not ponder its meaning. It would make an interesting study to ask one hundred Christians to indicate what they think the analogy means to them. Many believers accept whatever they are told without asking any critical questions. They simply assume that “someone” else knows better than they do.

Now you have a chance to encounter the challenging questions you have not heard before. Now you have a chance to put yourself in the place of a judge who hears from **both** attorneys, not just one.

As true believers, we must remain impartial. We must do everything within our power to understand Jesus’ intention. We can do this only if we ponder upon this analogy with a critical mind, without any preconceived expectations or beliefs.

The best way to understand the meaning of the analogy of “coming like a thief” is to see if Jesus Himself explained it. The parable of the wise and foolish maidens offers much insight into this question. According to that parable, Christians who found and followed Jesus to His Heavenly Banquet, had an adequate amount of “oil” that kept their “lamps”

lighted. That oil provided the inner light or insight they needed to see and recognize the Bridegroom (or catch the Thief), who arrived *in the darkest hour of the night—midnight*. The parable indicates that the Christians who lack “oil” or inner light and wisdom will be unable to see and recognize the celestial Thief.

As we can see, it is “the oil” or inner light that helps us catch our beloved Thief! If Jesus wanted to be seen by every eye, He would select a clear day, without clouds. He would also select midday, when the light is most intense; not midnight, when there is no light. What conceals the glory of Jesus is spiritual darkness. And the remedy for overcoming this darkness is inner light, not sunlight. What prevents us from seeing Him is the lack of an awakened eye, not the lack of a healthy eye.

Thus with only two changes of metaphor—“Bridegroom” for “Thief,” and “lack of oil” for “being asleep” or “being naked”—it becomes clear that the parable of the wise and foolish maidens fits the idea of a thief who comes during the dark hours of the night in such a way that some Christians would miss Him. In fact, “being naked” is a perfect parallel to “lacking oil.” They both point to “spiritual deficiency.”

Yet another way we can discover Jesus’ intention in warning us that He will come like a thief is to look at the prescription or the strategy that He offered to help us catch the Thief. By knowing the remedy or the prescription, we can detect the disease. If the prescribed drug is caffeine, we know the disease is sleepiness; if the prescribed drug is a sleeping pill, we know the disease is insomnia. Let us therefore look at both possibilities—coming from the sky, and like a thief—and see what kind of prescription each of them would require. Suppose Jesus wanted to come down from the sky. What instructions would He give us? In what ways could He help His loved ones find Him and recognize Him? If that were the case, He would offer mostly physical remedies. He would try to prepare or sharpen our physical senses. If He were speaking today, His instructions would probably look like this:

- Make sure you have good eyes.
- Have a list of friends who would call you if they were the first to see the signs of the Son of Man coming on the clouds.
- Invest in a pair of binoculars.
- If you own private planes, do not crowd the sky. You would cause accidents and block the view of those on the ground.

As we can see, a physical event requires physical instructions or aids. Did Jesus give any such instructions? Now suppose Jesus would want to come like a thief, that is, as an ordinary human being. What instructions would He give us? In what ways could He help His loved ones find and recognize Him? He would try to prepare our *hearts and souls*, not our eyes and ears. *His prescription would be spiritual*. It would probably look like this:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn the lessons of history. Do not start with preconceived expectations as the Jews did. • Do not be fearful. • Be open-minded. • Take time to fully investigate the News of My coming. Seek and ye shall find Me. • Be humble. Do not say, “I know and I know that I know” as the Jews did. • Do not be a servant of the church. Be a servant of the Master of the church. • Judge with wisdom. • Be spiritual-minded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful not to be deceived by false prophets. • Use your mind. Ask critical questions. Be rational, not fanatical. • Do not be complacent or self-satisfied. • Pay close attention (watch), otherwise you may miss the News of My coming. • Do not depend on authorities or the majority opinion. • Make yourself worthy of knowing Me. Keep your soul pure and noble. • Depend on God, pray to Him and ask for His help.
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Did Jesus give instructions such as these? Yes, He did. Let us review the ones He emphasized the most. *All the instructions Jesus gave are spiritual.* They do not relate to a visible descent from the sky. They all pertain to the heart and soul of the believers, and they are all interrelated:

Stay Awake

Do not let Him find you *sleeping*. Mark 13:36

Happy the man who stays *awake*... Revelation 16:15

Watch

Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch...do not let him find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to everyone: “***Watch!***” Matthew 13:33-37

Pray

Watch ye therefore, and *pray always*. Luke 21:36

Avoid Traps

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like *a trap*. Luke 21:34

Have Courage

See the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30

Be Wise

See Chapter 11, Two Kinds of Wisdom.

Be Spiritually Prepared

Blessed is he who...*keeps his clothes with him*... Revelation 16:15

Accept His Invitation Immediately

Be...like men waiting for their master...so that when he comes and knocks *they can immediately open the door for him*. Christ (Luke 12:35-36)

Most People Will Not Accept His Invitation

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, *but they refused to come*... Christ (Matthew 22:2-6)

What does Jesus mean by asking us not to sleep? He means living in a heightened state of awareness. This state of awareness is needed only if there is some degree of secrecy. Why does He prescribe this medicine? He knows that at His Return many Christians will be sound asleep in their churches.

What does Jesus mean by asking us to watch? He means paying close attention to the news of His coming. Being watchful is also a heightened state of awareness, but higher than being awake. This state of mind also points to some degree of secrecy. Why does He prescribe this medicine? Again He knows Christians will pay little attention to the news of His coming. He knows that they will have their eyes on the skies, instead of looking for someone who hides His divine glory as a thief conceals himself in darkness.

The word “Watch!” is an extremely critical word. It is both a command and a warning. It carries the most significant message that Jesus had for us to awaken us to the news and to the manner of His coming, *to help us pay attention to all of His instructions*. It is the key that unlocks many mysteries.

“Watching” is not a mechanical activity, but in essence, a spiritual experience. It requires passing through several layers of “clouds.” It demands overcoming several levels of mental and spiritual handicaps that may prevent us from seeing the glory of the Son of Man and standing before Him.

Consider the following seven “successive levels or layers of watching:”

- Paying close attention to *the news* of the coming of Jesus as a humble Man, just the way He came the first time. Since most Christians expect Jesus to come from the sky, they will ignore the news of His coming like a thief. Thus they will be unable to pass even this first layer or level of “watching.”
- Focusing attention on Him: His self-sacrifice, and the supreme glory and greatness that emanates from His soul. Investigating the heavenly Wisdom and the absolute Perfection manifest in His life.
- Paying attention to the literal prophecies He has fulfilled, just the way He fulfilled them the first time.

- Listening to His Word carefully to see if they echo the Voice of God.
- Allowing His Word to sink deeply into our soul.
- Thinking about Him and His Message constantly.
- Carefully putting the pieces of “the puzzle” together to see if they fit. Doing research concerning all the evidence He presents to prove His divine Mission, without any regard for traditional expectations and assumptions. Gathering all the relevant facts about Him, without depending on other people’s judgment.

From the “Stage of Watching,” we must then move to the “Stage of Praying.” Praying requires entering a state of complete submission to the Will of God. It involves asking Him, pleading with Him repeatedly, and allowing Him to lead us in whatever direction He wishes, even if it is toward the narrowest gate or toward the most unpleasant encounters, such as facing persecution, rejection, and ridicule for His sake.

Why does Jesus ask us to pray? He knows that without His help, His loved ones will be unable to know Him. The need for praying also points to some degree of secrecy. Consider also this verse:

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect Him. *Christ (Luke 12:40)*

What does Jesus mean by saying, “You also must be *ready*”? He means spiritually. For only a pure heart can “see” His great glory. Why does He use the word “also”? He wants us to be as prepared to follow the recommended strategy for finding Him as He is prepared to follow His strategy of concealing His glory from unprepared eyes. He means we must obey His repeated instructions to watch for Him, to be alert to the News of His coming, to investigate any message that points to His arrival unexpectedly as an ordinary Man endowed with superhuman Wisdom.

The expression “like a thief” is also used concerning “*the day*” of the coming of the Lord:

...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Thessalonians 5:2

When the third millennium arrived, millions of people celebrated its arrival. Could we say: “The new millennium came like a thief in the night”? An event or a day comes “like a thief” only when people could miss its arrival. What if they watch for it? What if they know the time of its arrival? How did “the day” of the First Advent arrive and pass? It came and passed “like a thief in the night.” A few believers who were awake and sincerely anticipated its coming recognized not only the new Day but also the new Redeemer. By now, two millennia have passed from that glorious Day, and yet the majority of the people of the world have failed to recognize its arrival. They are still sound asleep. That is precisely what the analogy predicts will happen again. Just as a thief comes and leaves, the day comes and passes. But the sleepers continue to dream of a heavenly hand that will suddenly “rapture” or lift them to heaven.

In this verse Jesus explains *why* we need to watch:

Therefore keep watch, ***because you do not know the day or the hour.*** Christ (Matt. 25:13)

What does this warning imply? It implies that only by paying close attention can we know “the day or the hour” of the Advent. It is evident, if we fail to pay close attention, we will miss that glorious Event. The idea of secrecy is clearly implied. If Jesus had planned to come from the sky, there would be no need for this warning.

Jesus was the Master of analogies, parables, and metaphors. To confirm the idea of secrecy, He also compared *the day* of His coming to *a snare*:

For as a snare shall it [that day] come.

Luke 21:35

If Jesus had planned to return from the sky, why would He give us this warning? Such a warning is justified only if “that day” arrives and passes like the passing of a thief through the night.

Who succeeds best in hunting? The one who conceals his trap so skillfully that the hunted does not detect it. What are the hidden snares that we lay for our own sense of awareness and watchfulness? What are the spiritual obstacles that may entrap us, that may prevent us from knowing the truth, from recognizing a coming that is as stealthy as a thief’s? Traps do not change that much. The traps that caught and continues to catch the Jews are the same ones that catch the Christians. Has human nature changed in the last 2,000 years? Are Christians who live in the 21st century a species of human being different from the Jews of the first century?

Jesus warned us and urged us to be “watchful” because a trap is always concealed, otherwise it would not work. An easy trap to fall into is literal thinking, because it offers us many attractions, such as an instant “rapture” away from the pains of this world into the paradise of peace and rest. This trap, like all others, is skillfully concealed under the ground and deeply-rooted grass of tradition, human desire, and fantasy. The grass has grown unchecked over the course of many centuries to create the massive and impenetrable layers of Traditional Bias.

Anyone who fails to ask critical questions, such as raised in this book, can easily stay in the trap of literal thinking. To avoid it, we must “watch” every step of our short journey in this world toward our everlasting destiny. We must dig deep beyond the massive layers of Traditional Assumptions. We must not hesitate to ask the hardest questions from the literalists to expose their carefully concealed traps.

Consider and compare the following nine metaphors that Jesus used to protect us from the traps all around us:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| • Thief | • Trap |
| • Night | • Asleep |
| • Watch | • Drunk |
| • Clouds | • Treasure hidden in |
| • Mustard seed | a field |

All the preceding nine metaphors point to concealment, to an inability to see clearly. And they all indicate a need for careful attention and penetrating vision—a vision that can pierce the clouds of misconception, the night of ignorance, the trap of Traditional Bias, and the drunkenness of complacency, self-satisfaction, unawareness, and distorted thinking. These thick and dark clouds have completely concealed the glorious Face of our

Lord. They have allowed us to see the signs and clues that we would like to see, and ignore the ones that we consider unpleasant, such as receiving once again a suffering Servant instead of a conquering King. They have so blinded our hearts and souls that we are groping in utter darkness:

They grope in darkness with no light; he makes them stagger like drunkards.

Job 12:25

Let us conclude this chapter with an analogy. Suppose you went to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower. When you reached Paris, would you need any instructions to *see* the Tower? No, every eye that gets close enough to the Tower will see it. Now suppose you were looking for a friend who lived in Paris. What would you need to do then? Would you not need to look carefully at street signs and numbers? Why would you need to be careful and watchful? Because you might miss the signs. That is what Jesus' instructions imply. They predict that many Christians will miss the signs and the time of His coming because they will be unwise. To be specific, He predicts that they will be asleep, inattentive, drunk, or caught in one or more traps. How could anyone under these conditions recognize the Heavenly Thief's divine glory hidden under the mask of a humble human being?

A critical question is this: Is our relationship with God physical or spiritual? Is it from body to body or from spirit to spirit? If the Spirit of God breaks the laws of nature, then our relationship with Him will completely change. The beauty and wonder of *faith* will suddenly disappear.

In the next chapter, let us resolve this mystery: How do the literalists interpret the analogy of the thief in the night? How do they handle this sharp thorn on the stem of a beautiful flower?

19

The Analogy of “Coming Like a Thief”

Part II

The analogy of a thief presents a serious challenge to letter-minded believers; it undermines their fondest wish and dream: to see their Savior return from the sky, perhaps on a white beautiful horse, with superhuman powers to destroy—burn and kill—millions of His “enemies.” The idea of coming like a thief is so powerful, it can completely undermine the Literal Theory. No other expression or analogy can convey the message of “secrecy” more clearly and graphically. This chapter focuses mostly on how the literalists cope with the dilemma of making Jesus’ analogy fit their theory. To be fair, we should also hear their side of the story—a side that is supported and promoted by thousands of Christian scholars and authors and countless millions of Christians who simply accept whatever their itching ears like to hear.

Jesus’ promise that He will come like a thief is a simple analogy that portrays a simple fact: secrecy. It is so simple, it does not need an explanation. Ask a child: “How does a thief come?” And he will say: “secretly.” But since this simple analogy totally undermines the Theory of Literal Descent, many Bible teachers have nullified it. They have tried to find a way around it to support their long standing tradition. Removing the threatening message of secrecy from this analogy has been their most urgent mission. To succeed in their goal, they have resorted to their imagination. They have looked for and found a concept that is related to the way a thief comes, minus the idea of “secrecy.” But as we shall see, without knowing, they have done just the opposite. They have made the idea of secrecy even more certain!

Just for the sake of curiosity, try to put yourself in their position. See if you can find a concept that is associated with the way a thief may come, minus the idea of secrecy. Stop here and think for a few minutes before proceeding.

Did you solve the puzzle? Now look at the following choices and see if your answer matches the preferred choice of the literalists.

Question: How does a thief come? In many ways. He may come:

- Quickly
- Slowly
- With a specific plan
- With dark clothes
- With pepper spray
- With gloves and soft shoes
- With a ladder
- Suddenly
- Not suddenly
- With special tools
- When no one is in the house
- Gently
- Violently
- Fearfully
- Cautiously
- Recklessly
- With full of knowledge of the design of the house
- With knowledge of the valuables inside the house

As you can see, all the preceding concepts can be related to the coming of a thief. But none of them conveys any degree of secrecy, except perhaps wearing dark clothes. For instance, you can come with “a clear plan or strategy” to rob a house, but in full view of the householder. You can come so openly that “every eye” of every resident in the house will see you! You can still claim that you have come like a thief because your definition of coming like a thief is: coming with a strategy.

Question: Which of the preceding concepts do you think the literalists have chosen?

Answer: Suddenly. We can be certain that sometime ago a persuasive Christian came across this idea, and had the talent and the resources to promote it. He set in motion a wheel that is still rolling. But why has no one said, “Perhaps this wheel is moving in the wrong direction”? But what incentive is there to raise this question? If everyone has accepted that Jesus will come from the sky, and someone has removed a serious obstacle to that assumption, who would want to criticize the problem solver? Common sense indicates that instead of being criticized, he would receive appreciation for offering a *seemingly* reasonable solution to a long standing dilemma: How can this powerful analogy be explained away? How can this big thorn be removed from the stem of a beautiful flower: the glorious Return of the Lord from the sky?

The suggestion that “suddenly” is an equivalent to “coming like a thief” has offered relief to many Christians who hate to believe that their glorious Redeemer will come like the lowest and perhaps the most despised and feared member of their society: a thief who breaks into their house while they are asleep!

Let us now put the literalists’ theory to the test of both reason and the Scriptures. First, let us see what “suddenly” means.

Question: What is the difference between “coming suddenly” and “not coming suddenly”?

- “Suddenly” is used when an event is *not* preceded by signs or warnings, when it is unexpected.
- “Not suddenly” is used when an event *is* preceded by signs or warnings, when it is expected.

Let us apply this definition to the coming of a thief:

- If a thief decides to come suddenly, he will give no advance warnings to the householder. If he did, the householder would stay awake to prevent him from doing his work.
- If a thief decides *not* to come suddenly, he will inform the householder about the time he will come and the way he will break into his house.

A comparison between the two choices makes it clear that only coming “suddenly” is in harmony with a thief’s objective. Therefore, what does it mean to say that Jesus will come “suddenly”? It means that His coming will *not* be preceded by specific signs or warnings that people could clearly and specifically link to Him. It means that the thief will not let the householder know that he intends to break into his house. The householder is taken by surprise. Note how clearly Jesus clarifies and confirms this point:

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.
Christ (Luke 12:39-40)

As we can see, the word “suddenly” does not in any way contradict or even dilute the most critical and central concept inherent in the analogy of coming like a thief: Secrecy. On the contrary, it confirms it. It indicates that the thief will arrive without giving any signs that he is indeed arriving. It indicates that he will depend on the strategy of secrecy.

Those who claim that “coming like a thief” means “suddenly,” but not “secretly,” face still another dilemma or serious challenge. That challenge comes from one of the most enlightened Christian scholars, Dr Ray Stedman. As he indicates, in Matthew 24, Jesus:

...describes a coming in power and glory immediately following the terrible time of trouble that He calls “the great tribulation” and the darkening of the sun and moon and the falling of the stars from heaven (Matt. 24:28-30). But it would be impossible for such a coming to take by surprise anyone who knew of our Lord’s description. For in the same chapter Jesus speaks of His coming as unexpected and sudden as the flood came upon the people of Noah’s day; and He likens it to a thief creeping into a household at night, without warning, and surreptitiously removing its treasure (vv. 36-44). Yet how could His coming be both unexpected and preceded by such cosmic events of dramatic character?¹

The response to the question Dr Stedman raises is that the miraculous signs Jesus describes have inner meanings, that they should be *discerned spiritually*. Only by recognizing the spiritual language Jesus uses to describe extraordinary events can we find harmony in His words.

After describing the heavenly signs, Jesus declares that He will take some people away (Matt. 24:40-41). The Thief comes to claim and collect His spiritual treasures; they are all His. Who or what are these treasures? They are the awakened and enlightened souls who recognize His divine glory under the mask of human weakness. They are the hearts and minds of the spiritually wise believers who are able to detect His divine splendor in a human being who looks like them and is one of them. He wants only their hearts and souls. While the bodies of these enlightened and awakened believers are on earth, He raises their souls to heavens on high—near Himself.

If you think we already have more evidence than we need to know what coming like a thief means, you may be surprised to find out that there is still one more piece of evidence. This evidence also comes from Dr Stedman. He points out that the original Greek for “coming” is “Parousia”—a word that means both “coming” *and* “presence.” Thus when Jesus warns us that He will come like a thief, He means that He will not only arrive like a thief, He will also be *present* among us like a thief, He will also *live* among us like a thief. Consider this example. When a shoplifter intends to enter a store, he does not ask anyone to show him to the manager. After he arrives, he does not carry a sign, he does not announce his presence. He blends with the crowd and carefully does his work. Only a watchful detective, only a keen observer will recognize him. Thus the word “Parousia” extends the idea of secrecy from the moment of one’s arrival to the entire period of one’s presence. No wonder Jesus compares His days with those of Noah. Not only did people fail to recognize Noah’s *arrival*, but also His *presence* among them.

To recognize the significance of Dr Stedman’s idea, consider this example. We do not say “My friend arrived and then *stayed* with us *suddenly*, or was *present* among us *suddenly*. A guest may arrive suddenly, he can also suddenly say that he will stay, but he cannot *stay* suddenly! His arrival eliminates the element of surprise.

To gain further insight, let us apply the analogy of the thief to the First Advent of Jesus. How did Jesus reveal His identity? We do not know the details. What we do know is this: On a given day, Jesus was walking along the shores, when He saw a fisherman, named Peter. He told him to stop fishing and to follow Him instead. This encounter happened suddenly. It was not preceded by a marching band of angels with trumpets in their hands or on their wings! Some people knew the signs of the times, but those signs were not visibly connected to Jesus.

Jesus was a heavenly Thief who walked among people. He knew every one of them. But only a few keen observers, only a few awakened souls could unravel His heavenly mask and get to know Him. Those few were spiritually pure souls. They were the precious treasures that Jesus cherished and accepted as His own. The identity of Jesus was fully hidden to perhaps 99.99 percent of the people.

After revealing His identity to Peter, Jesus continued to declare to other Jews that He was their Messiah, and “the Kingdom of Heaven was upon them.” But there was no visible signs of the Kingdom. People were utterly surprised. They could not believe that one of them—a homeless Man—was making such an incredible claim. They rejected Him because His divine Glory was hidden behind a humble and seemingly ordinary and helpless Man. As we can see, in His First Advent Jesus came both “suddenly” (giving no advance warnings visibly linked to Him), and “as a thief” (concealing His divine Glory). ***The two concepts are in perfect agreement, and both of them point to secrecy.***

Those who distort the meaning of “thief in the night” act like this: suppose you invite a hundred people to a restaurant at dinner time. But when they arrive at the restaurant, you tell them that the purpose of the invitation is to give them a chance to walk around and look at your splendid silverware. The guests protest and say, “Our purpose in coming here is to eat, why don’t you feed us?” In response you say, “We just wanted you to see our restaurant.” This is exactly what has happened to the meaning of “coming like a thief.” Its powers and purpose have been totally stripped away.

Consider still another example. You ask your child to go to school. After a few minutes, he returns and says that he went to school. You say the purpose of going to school is to learn, not just go to school. The child says, “No I have gone to school. I have done my job.”

When the human mind determines something to be true or false, when it starts with a given assumption, then it distorts everything else to suit its picture of reality created by that assumption. The mind reverses the reality: It claims that *the metaphor* (coming from the sky) means what it says, but *the literal* (coming like a thief) does not mean what it says! What an amazing, irrational, and inconsistent claim!

A serious problem with tradition is this: If a prediction fails to fit the expectation, then the interpreters use all their imaginative powers to distort its meaning:

Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. Christ (Matt. 15:6)

To reveal the manner of His Return, to show us that recognizing Him will not require perfect eyes in the head, but piercing eyes in the heart, Jesus gave us numerous signs, clues, and instructions. Let us study one more instruction that, like all the others, has also been distorted to fit the Theory of the Literal Return.

20

Who is “the Other Counselor”?

Part I

Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:7

On two occasions (John, Chapters 14 and 16), Jesus spoke about the coming of a divine Being named the Comforter or Counselor. In this chapter, let us examine Jesus’ first discourse:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you *another Counselor* to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. *The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.*

Christ (John 14:16-17)

The traditional view is that these verses are not about the Return of Jesus; they are about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Some Bible translations, such as *New International Version* accord an official status to this assumption by adding subtitles to Jesus’ discourse such as: *Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit*, and *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. Why would interpreters who pride themselves in being literal-minded change the literal meaning of this prophecy? Because it clearly contradicts the assumption of “every eye shall see Him.”

Let us put tradition aside and use common sense. The prophecy refers to a visible, living person. It prophesies the coming of *another Counselor* or Savior like Jesus who appears among the people, but He will not be accepted by them. Why is there a need to bring the Holy Spirit into the picture?

The Greek word for “Counselor” is “Paraclete.” In place of the word “Counselor,” Bible translators sometimes use the words “Comforter,” “Helper,” or “Advocate.” Some words have multiple meanings and usages. Paraclete is one of them. The most reasonable way to know the intended meaning of a word with multiple meanings is to see it in its context. To test this idea, to see whether Paraclete in the preceding verse refers to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus Himself, let us replace Paraclete with “the Holy Spirit” and see if it fits the context:

And I will ask the Father and He will give you *another Holy Spirit*...

As we can see, “the Holy Spirit” does not fit the context of the verse. “Another Holy Spirit” makes as much sense as “another God.” The word “another” can refer only to a Being who is visible. Jesus clearly implies this fact by saying that although people should *see* and *know* the other Paraclete or Comforter, they will fail to do so.

Can another “Paraclete” or “Comforter” refer to Jesus? Definitely! As we shall see, in this discourse Jesus specifically speaks about Himself. In such a context, the word “another” indicates that He Himself was a “Paraclete” or a “Counselor.” Christian scholars admit this fact:

“Another Helper”...means that in His earthly ministry, Jesus has been the Paraclete.¹

In fact, the Gospel indicates that Jesus’ disciples sometimes called Him “the Paraclete” (Advocate or Counselor):

My little children...we have *an Advocate** with the Father, *Jesus Christ* the righteous.

I John 2:1

Paraclete or Counselor can refer to both Advents of Jesus. As a human being, Jesus was visible, yet the world failed to see Him. In His First Advent also Jesus came like a thief. Many prophecies, including the one we are examining, indicate that history will repeat itself.

Another Comforter means “one more” of the same kind. This is the literal meaning of the prophecy:

First Comforter: First Advent

Second Comforter: Second Advent

Question: Why did Jesus say “another” Comforter? Why did He not use the word “I”? Because that is the way He commonly spoke. Using “He” in place of “I” is quite common in Jesus’ language. Sometimes He spoke as if He Himself will return, sometimes as if someone else. He also used the same pattern of speech on topics other than His return:

For you granted *Him* authority over all people...*I* have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave Me to do.

John 7:2-4

That great Spirit who is both the beginning and the end, is “the Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:8), is also both “I” and “He.”

In His reference to “another Paraclete,” Jesus once again repeats such a pattern of speech. In the verse immediately after promising that “another Comforter” will come, He used the word “I.”

I will not leave you comfortless [orphans]. I will come to you.

John 14:18

Who can bring us comfort? By using the word “comfortless” Jesus once again teaches us that He is a Comforter.

* Some translations, like *The New International Version*, avoid the use of this title. Instead of “Advocate,” the NIV reads: one who speaks to the Father in our defense.

Compare the Spirit of Jesus to the sun and His body to a mirror. We have only one sun, but many mirrors. Thus we *can* have “another Paraclete” or “Mirror,” but we cannot have “another Holy Spirit,” even as we cannot have “another God.”

The return of Elijah as John the Baptist demonstrates the idea of the Return of Jesus as both “I” and “He.” When John was asked: Are you Elijah? He said: No! (John 1:21). Yet Jesus said that he was (Matt. 11:14). In literal terms, there is a contradiction between the two statements. In Spiritual Language, there is perfect harmony, because in that language, it is the spirit that matters, “the flesh is of no avail,” it does not really count (John 6:63). Elijah and John were spiritually as one soul, and yet they were different individuals.

In His prophecy concerning the coming of “another Paraclete,” Jesus said:

The world cannot accept Him, because *it neither sees Him nor knows Him*. John 14:17

The preceding statement contains two facts about the way people will treat the promised Comforter:

- They will fail to see Him.
- They will fail to know Him.

It is evident that the preceding points are related to each other. The reason people fail to know the Comforter is that they fail to see Him. The statement clearly implies that people are expected to see the Promised One. Otherwise, how can they accept someone they cannot see?

Question: is the Holy Spirit a Body or a Spirit? As God is invisible, so is the Holy Spirit. We do not have to see the Holy Spirit to accept Him. If we insisted that before accepting Him, we must see Him, the gift of faith could not exist. It would be the same as saying: Before believing in God, I must see Him.

Note that Jesus promises to give us *another* Paraclete. The Holy Spirit was and is always present among the true believers. Why should Jesus give them “another” gift that they already have?

The Holy Spirit was pouring down like rain on Jesus’ disciples. They could not have remained steadfast in those terrible conditions without the aid of that most glorious Spirit. Not even for one second did the power of the Spirit cease to support and inspire those persecuted and sometimes frightened disciples. How could Jesus even imply that unless He departed from this world, the Holy Spirit would not come to His loved ones—His dearest disciples. To His disciples Jesus said:

Peace be with you!...Receive the Holy Spirit.

John 20:21-22 NIV
See also Luke 2:26; 3:22

Therefore in the context in which Paraclete is used, it is far more reasonable to think that by “another Paraclete” Jesus is referring to His Second Advent, the coming of the Son of God in the glory of His Father. That is indeed the general topic of the discussion Jesus is pursuing. Because as we noted, immediately after speaking about “another Comforter,” He declares that He will not leave His loved ones comfortless. We are as His children and He is as our Father. He comes to comfort us, to show us that the Father will not leave His children alone as orphans.

Jesus said that the promised Comforter will be “with you forever.” Jesus made a similar promise in His First Advent:

And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. Christ (Matt. 28:20)

...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Christ (Matt. 28:20)

The promise of the coming of “another Counselor” is extremely significant. A full understanding of Jesus’ intent by itself completely undermines the Literal Theory. Let us therefore look at Jesus’ entire discourse verse by verse and do so in another translation (*New English Bible*):

<p>I am going there [to heaven, but]...I shall come again and receive you to Myself...and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another to be your Advocate [Counselor]. John 14:3, 16</p>	<p>Jesus gives us the news of His departure and the promise of His Return. Then He speaks about His Second Advent as if someone else will come. As we noted, John the Baptist was “someone else,” yet he was the return of Elijah.</p> <p>Further, Jesus repeatedly referred to Himself both as “I” and as “He.” We should get used to this unique style of Spiritual Language.</p>
<p>The world cannot receive Him [the Counselor], because <i>the world neither sees Him nor knows Him</i>; but you know Him, because <i>He dwells with you and is in you.</i> John 14:17</p>	<p>When the Spirit of Christ comes as a Counselor, the world cannot see Him because the world will be spiritually blind. The same thing happened the first time: “He came into the world...and the world did not know him. (John 1:10). But Jesus’ true disciples already know that Spirit because they have allowed His Spirit to dwell within them. They knew Him when He appeared as Jesus in 27 AD, and they will know Him when He appears again as the Counselor 2,000 years, or even 100,000 years later.</p> <p>Jesus’ and St. Paul’s predictions (Matt. 24:10; II Tim 4:3-4) point to the widespread spiritual decline among those Christians living at the end of the age. What can this decline imply? That the believers will not heed the message of the Bible, that they will distort it to satisfy their own desires. Disregarding or failing to acknowledge the fulfillment of Jesus’ and St. Paul’s predictions in itself points to the fulfillment of their predictions!</p>
<p><i>I will not leave you bereft; I am coming back to you.</i> John 14:18</p>	<p>Jesus shifts again from “He” to “I.”</p>

<p>The man who has received My commands and obeys them—he it is who loves Me... <i>I will</i> love him and <i>disclose [show] Myself to him.</i> John 14:21</p>	<p>Jesus states what is the essential requirement for seeing the Spirit of truth within Him. This requirement applies to both Advents. Only the Jews who truly loved Moses and obeyed Him recognized Jesus. The same rule holds true with the Christians of this age. This is an unchanging law of God.</p>
<p>In a little while the world will see Me no longer, but you will see Me... then you will know that I am in My Father, and you [are] in Me and I [am] in you. John 14:19-20</p>	<p>Jesus declares that after He has gone, those who failed to see the Spirit of truth in Him will assume that He no longer exists. But His true disciples will continue to see Him, because they are spiritually united with their Master.</p>

Note that Jesus gave identical clues concerning His First Advent as Jesus and His Second Advent as ***the Counselor***:

First Advent

Then [after I am gone] you will know that... you [are] in Me [Jesus] and I [am] in you.
John 14:20

Second Advent

[Then you will know that the Counselor] dwells with you [true Christians] and is in you.
John 14:17

Let us continue with the rest of Jesus' discourse concerning the Counselor:

<p>All this I have spoken while still with you. But <i>the Counselor, the Holy Spirit</i>, whom the Father will send in my name, <i>will teach you all things</i> and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:25-26</p>	<p>The use of the expression “the Holy Spirit” in this prophecy has caused much confusion among Christian interpreters. They have assumed that “the Counselor” is a title for the Holy Spirit rather than “the Holy Spirit” being a title for the Counselor. This assumption has changed the intent of the prophecy from the topic of the Second Coming of Christ to the topic of “the coming of the Holy Spirit.”</p> <p>Since this prophecy also contradicts the traditional expectations of the Second Advent, it has received the same treatment that other similar prophecies have received. Its meaning has been totally altered to prevent it from contradicting the Literal Theory.</p>
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When we repeatedly hear an idea, we take it for the truth. The meaning of this prophecy is one of those ideas that has been repeated for centuries without being seriously challenged. Seldom does a believer dare to question an accepted and beloved “myth” no matter how irrational it may be. It is always easier and safer to go with the flow.

However if we liberate our mind from our previous learning and examine carefully and objectively the contents of this prophecy, then we will discover that the traditional interpretation of this verse is unfounded—that Jesus uses “the Holy Spirit” as a title for the Counselor rather than the Counselor as a title for the Holy Spirit. The content of the prophecy offers us all the clues that we need to reach this conclusion. Note Jesus’ statement once again:

...the Counselor, *the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send...*

It must be clear to every student of the Bible that the Holy Spirit was, is, and will always be, present in Jesus and in the lives of all His true disciples. As we noted, Jesus promised that He would always be with us. In this verse, our Lord is making a special promise concerning a future event—an event that is not only unusual but is also of great significance.

The idea of “sending” the Holy Spirit in the future implies the absence of that Spirit in the present. Is the Holy spirit sometimes inactive or absent? Was that Spirit unreachable when Jesus made that promise to His disciples by predicting the coming of a glorious Being called the Counselor? When our Lord was speaking to His disciples, was the Holy Spirit taking a break? The absence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of true believers makes as much sense as the absence of God. Similarly, “the sending of the Holy Spirit” makes as much sense as “the sending of God.” If we can “send God” to someone, we can also “send the Holy spirit!”

To see the fallacy of traditional interpretation, look at the prophecy without the words “the Counselor:”

...*the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send...*

Let us now see if the title of the Holy Spirit can be applied to Jesus. Was not Jesus the manifestation of God? Did He not say: “My Father and I are one”? If Jesus can be “the Lord,” can He not also be “the Holy Spirit”? Referring to Jesus as “the Holy Spirit” (whether we speak of His first coming or second coming) in no way contradicts biblical teachings.

Thus the clues contained in the prophecy clearly indicate that the topic of the discussion is not “the coming” of a Spirit, but rather the expression of a Spirit in a specific Being called “the Counselor” who appears as a human being. As we shall see later, Jesus used still another title to identify Himself at the time of His Second Coming. He called Himself “the Spirit of truth.” All these titles—the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, and the Holy Spirit—refer specifically to the same divine Being: Jesus Christ at the time of His Second Coming.

There is yet another way that we can disclose the identity of the Counselor. We should ask: Why does He come? What is His mission? By knowing His mission, we should be able to tell who He is. Suppose we do not know what the word “teacher” means. But if we are told that his function is to teach the children, then we can tell who he is and why we need him. Jesus declares in this verse that the Counselor *comes to teach us “all things.”* As we shall see later Jesus designates in a similar discourse (John 16) an identical function for the Counselor (the Spirit of truth) in words with an identical meaning. He states that He comes to guide us “into all truth” (John 16:12).

Did not Jesus come for the same reason? Did He not come to teach us the truths that we could “bear”? Our Lord’s purpose in using the expressions “all things” and “all truth” is to point to the new treasures of knowledge and wisdom that He will disclose to the world at the time of His Second Coming.

If we reject the relevance of this prophecy to the Second Coming by continuing to claim that it refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit, then we should ask: When did that Spirit teach us “all things” or guide us “into all truth”—truths that Jesus Himself did not disclose? What are those truths? Where are they recorded? And who was the recipient of those spiritual treasures?

It is evident then that the knowledge of “all things” or “all truth” can come only from the Lord, the One who knows “all things” and has “all truth” at His command; the One who speaks to us, and manifests to us the vast treasures of knowledge in Words that come from the Father as He did the first time.

<p>I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. John 14:30</p>	<p>This verse also shows that the prophecy relates to the Second Advent, and not to a spiritual experience or an invisible Being. Here Jesus is implying that His early life will come to an end, but we should be hopeful. Because the cycles of redemption will not cease. The prince of this world—the One who rules the universe—will come again to talk to us and share with us the treasures of truths that He has not yet revealed to the world. Because what we receive at a given time depends on our spiritual maturity:</p> <p><i>When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.</i> <i>I Corinthians 13:11</i></p> <p>This prophecy shows that Jesus equates Himself at His First Advent with the One He promises to send later: the Redeemer of the last days whom He calls “the prince of this world.” He begins with the sad news of leaving, and ends with the good news of coming back. In prophecies of His Second Advent, Jesus repeated the same pattern of speech: He often combined the news of His departure with the promise of His return:</p> <p><i>I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again...</i> <i>John 14:2-3</i></p> <p>...you will not see Me again until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” <i>Matthew 23:39</i></p> <p>Note once again Jesus’ reference to His Return. He uses both “Me” and “He” to show both His oneness with the One who comes, and His independence from Him.</p>
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<p>He [the Counselor] has no hold on me [Jesus]. John 14:30</p>	<p>This expression implies that the promised Counselor, the Prince, will be independent from Jesus, that He will be another Being, but endowed with the same Spirit and Power. As we noted, John the Baptist was “the return” of Elias, and yet he was another person. He was his return in “spirit and power.”</p>
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Jesus’ promise concerning the coming of *another Counselor* is repeated again in John, Chapter 16. The study of that chapter will further clarify Jesus’ intent in referring to the coming of the Counselor. Let us continue this topic in the next chapter.

21

Who is “the Other Counselor”?

Part II

Chapter 16 of John presents yet another discourse on “the other Counselor.” Christian scholars connect Jesus’ second discourse also to the coming of the Holy Spirit, especially to the coming of that Spirit on a specific occasion to Jesus’ disciples, when they were celebrating a Jewish feast called Pentecost.

Let us put this assumption also to the test. Let us see if the events of the Pentecost have any relevance to Jesus’ discourse.

Jesus’ Literal Predictions	Explanations
<i>Now I am going to Him who sent Me. John 16:5</i>	A reference to the crucifixion.
<i>Unless I go away the Counselor (the Paraclete) will not come to you. John 16:7</i>	<p>This verse by itself proves that Jesus is not speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. How can we ever imagine that the Lord and the Holy Spirit cannot coexist, that we can have only one of them at a given time! How could such an assumption ever be made? I have not seen or heard anyone ask this simple question! “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory” (Heb. 1:3). And the Holy Spirit is the radiance of Jesus’ glory. If we can separate the sun from its light, then we can separate Jesus from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the ‘Father’” (John 14:9). Could He not also say: “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Holy Spirit”?</p> <p>Did Jesus not promise to His disciples and to all Christians that: “And surely I will be with you <i>always</i>, to the very end of the age”? Could Jesus <i>always</i> be with His followers, <i>always</i> be spiritually present without the radiance of the Holy Spirit? Could Jesus ever be without God? “The One who sent Me is with Me” (John 8:29). But the verse perfectly fits the promise of the Second</p>

Jesus' Literal Predictions	Explanations
	<p>Advent. It is evident that we cannot have “two Christs” <i>at the same time</i>. The two Advents cannot coexist. One age must end before another can begin.</p>
<p><i>But if I go I will send Him to you. John 16:7</i></p>	<p>This verse further indicates that the two Advents cannot coexist: Jesus must leave before He can return. To give hope to His disciples, Jesus combined the news of His departure with the promise of His Return. This is one more clue that He is speaking about His Return.</p> <p>In reference to His return, Jesus used both first person “I” and third person “He.”</p>
<p><i>When He comes, He will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment... John 16:8</i></p>	<p>Once again Jesus refers to a specific person who will come at a specific time for a specific mission.</p> <p>Here Jesus mentions three key points—sin, righteousness (good deeds), and judgment—and finally explains each of them.</p> <p>Whether we think of the First Advent or the Second, we must recognize that Jesus Himself had full authority to be the Judge—to accept, convict, or forgive. “<i>You have given Him authority over all flesh</i>” (John 17:2). Jesus said, “<i>For judgment I have come into this world</i>” (John 9:39).</p> <p>Anyone who opened his heart to the Lord, entered the paradise of His presence; anyone who denied Him, fell from grace. We have no reason to believe that Jesus would first of all delegate the responsibility of judging to the Holy Spirit; and further, delay that judgment to a time when His disciples were celebrating a feast on a given day! But this statement is clearly applicable to Jesus Himself, to both of His Advents.</p>
<p><i>In regards to sin because men do not believe in Me. John 16:9</i></p>	<p>This statement confirms Jesus’ prediction that when He returns, He will find little faith among people, including among Christians: “<i>When the Son of Man comes will He find faith on earth?</i>” (Luke 18:8). As we noted, St. Paul also clearly confirms the scarcity of true faith among Christians of this age. Consider also this prediction: “<i>Did I not tell you that if you believed [in Me], you would see the glory of God?</i>” (John 11:40).</p> <p>At His first Advent, Jesus faced the Jews who did not believe in Moses, because He told them: “<i>If you believed Moses, you would believe Me</i>” (John 5:46). Will history</p>

Jesus' Literal Predictions	Explanations
	<p>repeat itself? As Jesus predicted, since only few Christians who live in the last days have faith in Him, only a few of them will recognize Him at His Second Coming, only a few will see the Glory of God in Him.</p> <p>All the prophecies we have reviewed, and many others, point to this conclusion: At the time of the Second Advent, most Christians will be spiritually absent because they will have set their hopes and eyes on the skies, instead of setting them on an earthly Redeemer who would conceal His supreme glory in the physical frame of a humble Man.</p>
<p><i>In regards to righteousness because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer. John 16:10</i></p>	<p>Once again Jesus is talking about His absence. This verse gives us one more clue that the topic of discourse is His Second Coming. The few Jews who truly believed in Moses also believed in Jesus. He accepted the righteous deeds of those believers. The same holds true at the Second Advent. By then a new age has begun. The work of redemption will have a new dawning.</p>
<p><i>And in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. John 16:11</i></p>	<p>The translation used here is <i>The New International Version</i>. I checked several other versions, including <i>The New King James Version</i>. None of them contains the word “now.” Therefore the verse does not pertain specifically to the time of Jesus. It is timeless.</p> <p>The most amazing fact about the traditional interpretation of this verse is this: Bible interpreters have assumed that “<i>the prince of this world</i>” does not refer to Jesus; rather it refers to Satan! Why? Because they have further assumed that the <i>prince of this world</i> has been condemned by God, and not by people! I have not seen nor heard anyone challenge this assumption. Compare these interpretations:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Traditional Interpretation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">...the prince of this world [Satan] stands condemned [by God].</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Nontraditional Interpretation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">...the prince of this world [Christ] stands condemned [by people].</p> <p>Tradition has an overwhelming power. It crushes any freedom of thought. Does the traditional assumption fit the context? In this discourse, Jesus is talking about</p>

Jesus' Literal Predictions	Explanations
	<p>judging. Why give this most glorious and supreme authority and honor to Satan—an authority that belongs duly to the Father and the Son? Jesus will judge those who will deny Him and mistrust Him, the same way He judged them the first time. Here as elsewhere Jesus is predicting that history will repeat itself, that the One who is the Prince of this world will be condemned by the masses of people.</p> <p>In another chapter of John, Jesus clearly applies the title “Prince of this world” to His Second Advent:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I will not speak with you much longer, for <i>the prince of this world</i> is coming. John 14:30 NIV</p> <p>What do Bible interpreters say about the preceding verse? They claim that in this verse also Jesus predicts the coming of Satan! How amazing! How incredible! Why have they taken such a position? Because one’s assumptions must not contradict each other. If “the prince of this world in John 16:11 refers to Satan, then the same expression in John 14:30 must also refer to Satan! One false assumption leads to still other false assumptions.</p> <p>In this verse, Jesus predicts the “coming” of a “Prince” in the future. Why would Jesus predict the “coming” of Satan in the future? Did Satan not exist before and at the time of Jesus? Further, if Jesus meant Satan why did He not say “Satan”?</p> <p>In some versions of the Bible, “the prince of this world” is translated as “the ruler of this world.” What an amazing shift of authority to think that Satan is the ruler, when we know that it is “Jesus Christ, who is...the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5), who is “head over every authority” (Col. 2:10), and “the only Sovereign” (I Tim. 6:15). How could the One who declares that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18), delegate that authority to Satan?</p> <p>What an incredible thought to believe that God has abandoned the authority of ruling the world and has delegated it to Satan, His foremost enemy! No belief can be more amazing or father from the truth. This verse by itself proves the awesome powers of tradition. It shows how an untested assumption gradually gains the status of truth as it passes from generation to generation and endures through the centuries. By now this assumption</p>

Jesus' Literal Predictions	Explanations
	<p>has gained so much momentum, it leaves no room for freedom of thought. Christians read the traditional interpretation without making any objective analysis, without asking even the most obvious questions.</p> <p>Now compare these two prophecies:</p> <p>I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. John 14:30</p> <p><i>I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.</i> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. John 16:12-13 NIV</p> <p>In John 14:30, Jesus teaches us that He will not speak to us because the One promised to come—the Prince of this world—will do the rest. He will come again to speak and to reveal to us greater measures of truth.</p> <p>In John 16:12-13, He declares that He has “more to say” but it is unfair to burden the believers with “more than they can bear.” But when He returns as “the Spirit of Truth,” He will reveal to them greater measures of truth—“all truth.” Should a first grade teacher start with alphabet or with algebra? The expression “all truth” indicates that at the time of His Second coming, people’s capacity to learn and understand will be much greater than at any time in history.</p> <p>The following verse has a similar tone with the expression “I will not speak with you much longer”:</p> <p>For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Christ (Matt. 23:39 NIV)</p> <p>Compare also these verses. One verse refers to being condemned by the people, the other points to His crucifixion:</p> <p>Now the prince of this world stands condemned. John 16:11</p> <p>Now is the Son of Man glorified [by being crucified]... John 13:31</p> <p>In the following verse, Jesus refers clearly to His Return. He uses the same title—the Prince of this world—to identify Himself, and yet by tradition it is assumed that it refers to Satan:</p>

Jesus' Literal Predictions	Explanations
	<p>I will not speak with you much longer, for <i>the prince of this world</i> is coming. John 14:30</p> <p>Why would Jesus predict the coming of Satan? This assumption is incredible.</p> <p>The word "<i>Prince</i>" is used repeatedly to refer to Jesus:</p> <p>...from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until <i>Messiah</i> [Christ] <i>the Prince</i>... Daniel 9:25</p> <p>But you denied the Holy One...and killed <i>the Prince of life</i>... Acts 3:14-15</p> <p>God has exalted Him to His right hand to be <i>Prince and Savior</i>... Acts 5:31</p> <p>And he will be called...<i>Prince of Peace</i>. Isaiah 9:6</p> <p>There is no biblical basis for assuming that "the Prince or the Ruler of this world" refers to Satan. No reference in the entire Bible gives us a reason to associate these two titles. It is amazing how anyone could have imagined or concocted such a connection. It is even more amazing that so many people have accepted this idea for so long!</p>
<p>I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear. But when He, <i>the Spirit of truth</i>, comes, <i>He will guide you into all truth</i>. John 16: 12</p>	<p>John 16:12 is one of the most significant prophecies of Jesus. Yet it has been reduced to a meeting held among Jesus' disciples. A prophecy about the Second Advent has been downgraded to a gathering of a few believers at a given time! We should note that Jesus used numerous titles in reference to His Second Coming, among them "the Spirit of Truth" and "the Holy Spirit."</p> <p>Let us once again see what Jesus means by saying that the people of His age were unable to "bear" the weight of certain truths. When Jesus came, He taught certain new and progressive truths that the generations before Him could not "bear." Those teachings were so advanced that people could not understand, accept, nor practice them. As an example, consider changing "an eye for an eye" to "turn the other cheek." People needed to reach a higher level of spiritual maturity to appreciate and embrace this new truth. In this verse, Jesus is teaching us that there are still new truths that those who live in the Christian dispensation cannot understand nor appreciate. But by the time of the Second Advent, they will be spiritually and socially ready to embrace them.</p>

Consider this example. At the time of the First Advent and 18 centuries beyond, the world was not ready to abandon slavery. No wonder it was not forbidden in the Gospel. But by 1863, when Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the world was ready. There is no logical reason to believe that at the Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' departure from this world, people suddenly gained such a spiritual capacity to "bear" new truths that a few years earlier they could not have borne! Further, what are and where are those mighty truths that are promised to be so advanced that Jesus Himself did not teach us? *The Amplified Bible* shows more clearly the profound meaning of what Jesus declared to those who would live in the Christian dispensation:

...you are not able to bear them nor to take them upon you nor to grasp them now.
John 16:12

I checked Acts 2 and studied the verses that supposedly show the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, and also reviewed several Bible references to find out what "truths," if any, were revealed during that memorable feast of Pentecost. I could find nothing except references to "speaking in tongues," a controversial topic that is often heatedly argued between Christians. I could not find even a single truth that was revealed to the disciples at that feast! The truths Jesus promises are of such stature, and are so comprehensive, as to be worthy of the all-encompassing and glorious description of "**all** truth" or "**all** the truth." The word "**all**" gives us a clear clue that the knowledge that Jesus will reveal to us at His Return will be far more—perhaps a hundred or even a thousand times more—than He taught us at His First Advent. Let us examine the rest of the discourse.

<p><i>He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears.</i> <i>John 16:13</i></p>	<p>This prediction is a perfect description of the relationship between Jesus as the Son, and God as the Father. Jesus repeatedly reminded us that He received His authority from God, that He did not speak on His own, that He told us what the Father taught Him. ("<i>I am not Myself the source of the word I speak to you: it is the Father</i>") (John 14:10). By saying, "He will not speak on His own," Jesus gives us another clue that He is talking about Himself, not the Holy Spirit. The verse indicates that the relationship between the Father and the Son will not change when Jesus returns.</p> <p>The verse shows that the Comforter is not a Ghost, but rather a human being who "hears" and "speaks." The use of "only" shows that He delivers the precise words of His Father.</p>
<p><i>And He will tell you what is yet to come [He will tell you things to come NKJ].</i> <i>John 16:13</i></p>	<p>A sign of the One sent by God is to have knowledge of the things to come. Jesus declared: "<i>I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.</i>" (John 13:19). See also Isaiah 41:21-23. The verse from John 16 indicates that Jesus will return with the powers He had at His First Advent. We have no evidence that the Holy Spirit at Pentecost gave any "knowledge of the things to come" to anyone.</p>

<p><i>He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. John 16:14</i></p>	<p>The Counselor, the Spirit of truth (Jesus at His Second Advent) will take the difficult verses of the Gospel and clarify them to the new believers. By so doing, He will acknowledge and glorify the Spirit of Christ that is ever-living and ever-present. Again we have no evidence that at the Pentecost the Holy Spirit fulfilled this promise.</p>
<p><i>In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while you will see Me. John 16:16</i></p>	<p>In this verse, Jesus once again shifts the pronoun from “He” to “I.” This is a unique feature of the Spiritual Language. This verse gives us yet another clue that the entire discourse is about His Return. In this verse, once again we see the pattern of combining the ideas of “leaving” and “returning.”</p>

Both of Jesus’ discourses in the Gospel of John indicate that He is not talking about a given feast and an invisible Spirit, but rather about a visible Being who comes, communicates with people, and teaches them specific truths just as Jesus did in His First Advent. It is amazing how the Pentecostal Theory has been accepted for decades or centuries as the fulfillment of a prophecy that offers numerous clues concerning the Second Advent and none concerning what happened at Pentecost on a given day or days.

Jesus’ reference to “*the Counselor*” and “*the Prince,*” or *the One who rules or governs,* is also found in Isaiah’s well-known prophecy:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the **government** will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful **Counselor**, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. Of the increase of His **government** and peace there will be no end. Isaiah 9:6-7

The prophecy of “another Paraclete” is in perfect harmony with all the other prophecies pointing to the inability of the masses of Christians to see and immediately recognize the Heavenly Thief, the One who comes in the night of disbelief and unawareness. It points to the absence of the same quality—spiritual wisdom and inner light—that has deprived countless people of the honor of “seeing” and “standing before their Savior: the Son of Man.”

We have many fallen dominoes in the Literal Theory. Understanding the true meaning of “another Paraclete” inflicts one more blow to that fallen theory.

The King of Jews and the King of Christians

Then *the King* [Christ] will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father.”
Christ (Matt. 24:34)

Christians have criticized the Jews for centuries for their failure to recognize and honor their promised King: Jesus. Have you wondered why the Jews failed? This question is so critical, so consequential, it should occupy our thoughts all the days of our lives. It should be the talk of every church. Why is it so critical? Because it is part of our collective memory of our past. The answer to this question offers the most significant lesson for every Christian. The answer reveals this mystery: How did those who were in our position act and why? If your friend had an accident and you knew some day you may be in his position, would you not do everything in your power to learn about the accident and the ways of avoiding it?

History is our collective memory of our past. What would happen if you suddenly lost your memory? How incapable and incompetent you would become! Would you not turn into the little child you were at age two or three?

Common sense indicates that in all probability we are like the Jews who lived in the first century. We have no reason to believe that we will treat our King differently. We have no reason to believe that we are wiser. As we noted, the judgment of the Scriptures is much harsher on us than it is on the Jews who faced Jesus. Is there any evidence to show that we are wiser or more righteous? The very thought of believing that we are better is in itself an indication that we are not. Pride is a sin that conceals the glory of God. Let us therefore stand before our Lord with absolute humility and acknowledge our spiritual fallibility, our weakness, and even our blindness—our deep desire to ignore or erase whatever we do not like to see.

Why, then, did the Jews fail? This question is so critical, it deserves an entire volume. It should be examined from every angle: Biblical, spiritual, emotional, mental, and social. Let us examine it here only from a biblical perspective. As we noted in Chapter 2, the Hebrew Scriptures portrayed two images of the Jewish Messiah: a glorious King, and a suffering Servant. But the Jews saw only one image: that of a sovereign King. It would be quite instructive to put ourselves in their position and see the Hebrew Scriptures from their perspective, and then compare their position in the first century with ours in this century.

The Jews found many prophecies that promised them a King. Some of them specifically compared Him with David—their greatest and most glorious ruler (see Chapter 2). But nowhere did they find any prophecies that predicted suffering for their King. Then where does the idea of a “suffering Servant” come from? It comes mostly from the book of Isaiah. Yes, Isaiah speaks at length about the sufferings of a figure, but nowhere does he state that he is speaking about the Jewish King. We can only surmise that the unknown figure is the promised Ruler of the Jews. To Christians, Isaiah’s prophecy is quite convincing, but not to the skeptics, because the link between “the King” and “suffering” is not there. Despite this, Christians have blamed the Jews for their lack of spiritual discernment, for their utter failure to welcome their King. What about us? Do we have the link between “suffering” and “our King”—the link that the Jews did not have? To make an impartial comparison, let us begin by looking at the evidence the Jews had:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not...But he was pierced for our transgressions...the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
Isaiah 53:3, 5, 6

Suppose you were a Jew, how would you respond to a Christian who quoted to you the preceding verse? You would probably raise these two questions:

- The prophecy is in the past tense. It does not refer to the future.
- The prophecy does not link “suffering” to “the promised King of Israel.” It does not refer to our Messiah. “The Jews considered Isaiah 53 as a metaphor for captive Israel.”

Let us now see how the prophecies link “our King” to “suffering.” The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24 and 25) is considered Jesus’ Will and Testament and contains His most significant and best-known prophecies concerning His Return. For the sake of brevity, let us examine the first part of His discourse as recorded in Chapter 24.

<p><i>When the Son of Man comes in His glory...He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goat on His left.</i> <i>Matthew 24:31-33</i></p>	<p>What is the only reasonable way of separating people into two groups? The only way we can do this is to see whether they accept or reject a message. When people receive an invitation, they can either choose to come or choose not to come. Although Jesus Himself is the judge, it is people themselves who take sides—who go either to the right or to the left.</p> <p>Can you think of any other reasonable way to divide people into two groups? Suppose you wanted to divide people into two groups in terms of their faith and spiritual purity. Where would you draw the line? Wherever you draw the line, you will find that the people close to the line are very similar. It is unfair to treat two brothers who are spiritually alike in opposite ways: condemn one of them to death, and crown the other with everlasting life. People do not exist in purely “black and white.” They always exist in shades of “gray.” To recognize this fact, list the names of all your relatives,</p>
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and then see if you can divide them into groups: those who deserve to die in agony, and those who deserve to live in peace and joy forever.

The literal interpretation of St. Paul's prophecies indicates that Jesus will come "***in blazing fire...to punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ***" (II Thes. 1:7-10). Consider the millions of innocent people living in the deserts of Africa or the villages in India and China who have had no chance, a little chance, or a little more than a little chance, to learn about God or the Gospel. The point is this: the possibilities and degrees of opportunity and accountability are endless. Even children in the same family sometimes do not have the same opportunities to know Jesus. It is unfair and unreasonable to divide people into two groups on the basis of their past. When Jesus came the first time, He did the same thing: put the believers on His right and the deceivers on His left. But He first gave them a chance. They were free to choose His side or the side of the deniers.

There are two verses in the gospel that resolves more questions than any other. In only a few words they define the meaning of divine justice:

But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Christ (Luke 12:48)

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. Christ (John 15:22)

According to the most fundamental rule of justice, it is an absolute injustice to divide all people into two groups—sheep and goats—and then to offer one group the most severe punishment, and the other the most glorious reward imaginable.

The spiritual meaning of Jesus' prediction is this: those who hear the news of His Return can either investigate the news of His coming and follow Him, or they can ignore or even oppose Him. By their own action, they decide to act as sheep or goats. Each choice leads to a consequence: spiritual life, or spiritual death.

Consider this analogy. Suppose you have lived in a dark room for an entire year. Then someone invites you to step

	<p>outside to see the sun. But you refuse to respond to his invitation. When Jesus returns, this is what will happen to Christians who are closed-hearted, spiritually drunk, or negligent, just as happened to the Jews.</p> <p>There is also the question of compassion. Jesus paid special attention to the disadvantaged members of society. To show how much He cared for them, He said:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick.</i> <i>Matthew 19:13</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.</i> <i>Luke 15:3-7</i></p> <p>How could we ever imagine that Jesus will return with an opposite set of values! How could we ever imagine that He will come to "burn" millions of disadvantaged people without giving them a chance, without first inviting them to His Kingdom. How could we ever imagine that we would hear Him say: "It is not the sick who need a doctor, but the healthy"? Who are "the healthy"? They are the self-righteous, the ones who consider themselves "good Christians," believers who think that a long line of angels are waiting to "rapture" them straight to heaven! While going up they will look down on their non-believing friends and say: "I told you so!" Such believers existed also at the time of Jesus. They were called Pharisees.</p>
<p>Let us continue with Jesus' prophecy. After blessing those who supported His humble followers, the King turns to those on His left and declares:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and</i></p>	<p>We should note that these verses are all about the Second Advent. Jesus is speaking about the persecution of His obedient followers (the sheep) by His disobedient followers (the goats). These verses indicate that when Jesus returns Christians will take sides: some of them will recognize Him and welcome Him, others will reject Him and even persecute Him. In these verses Jesus is referring to the rebellious actions of some Christians against His humble followers ("the least of these" new believers). It is evident that if some Christians persecuted the followers of Jesus, then they would also persecute Jesus Himself, because they would consider Him the source of the problems.</p>

<p><i>you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?” He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.</i> <i>Matthew 25:41-46</i></p>	<p>Religious leaders who witness the decline of their powers will rise against the source of their downfall. These verses indicate that Christians will respond to their King exactly the same way the Jews responded to their King. Some of them will offer their lives for Him, others will take the lives of His followers. The Book of Revelation confirms the martyrdom that Jesus’ followers will have to endure:</p> <p><i>I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. Revelation 20:4</i></p> <p>We should note that the Book of Revelation is primarily a prediction of the events of the Second Advent. It is about the future, not the past. We should also note that the spread of the teachings and influence of Christ at His Second Advent will also threaten non-Christian nations. The King and His followers will face persecution everywhere on our planet. The level of persecution will depend on the level of people’s fanaticism and violence. In many Muslim countries, beheading is a common method of execution. That will happen when Muslim leaders see thousands of their people—pure-hearted Muslims—recognize and acknowledge the glory of Jesus! We should note that Jesus will not come just for the Christians. He will invite all nations. His love is all-inclusive.</p>
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In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus makes yet another reference to His sufferings:

For the Son of Man in His day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ***But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.***
Christ (Luke 17:24-26)

Question: Does Jesus’ prediction that “He must suffer” refer to the First Advent or to the Second? Consider these points:

- In the preceding verses, the topic of discussion is not the first Advent, but the second. It is unreasonable to assume that among all the verses that pertain to the future there is a sudden change to the present. It is far more likely that Jesus is referring to the treatment He will receive at His Return. We should note that the preceding discourse was offered three days before Jesus’ crucifixion. By then He had experienced three years of humiliation and rejection. The cycle of His sufferings and rejection had nearly ended. At that point, it does not seem reasonable to say, “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected.” The statement seems predictive rather than historical. Nevertheless Jesus’ statement holds true for both Advents. In the beginning, Jesus was rejected not only by “the generation” that lived in His time, but also by future generations. But when “His day” of earthly

supremacy and glory arrived (around 300 A. D.), the truth of His divine mission spread and shone as “the lightning.” The prophecy indicates that the same pattern would be repeated for the Second Advent.

- It is true that the words “this generation” may lead us to think that Jesus was referring to the people who lived during His time. The best way to test this possibility is to search for the use of this expression in an identical context: other prophecies of the Second Advent. The only other instance in which Jesus used “this generation” in relation to His Return is in the following verse, quoted earlier:

...this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. *Christ (Mark 13:30)*

But the events Jesus predicted did not happen during His “generation.” The preceding verse shows clearly that by “this generation” Jesus meant ***a group of people with common characteristics*** who may live at any given time in history. The same kind of people who rejected Him the first time would be present at His Second Coming and would act in the same way they acted the first time.

Bible dictionaries support such a definition. For instance, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* offers the following as one of several acceptable definitions of ***generation***:

The entire body of those who are connected together by similarity of disposition.¹

It then cites this example from the Hebrew Scriptures:

For God is with the generation [the kind of people who are] ***of the righteous.*** *Psalms 14:5*

Even when Jesus used the word “generation” out of the context of prophecy, He had the same idea in mind:

A wicked and adulterous ***generation*** asks for a miraculous sign! *Christ (Matt. 12:39)*

Jesus’ statement can be rephrased in this way: Only the kind of people who are unfaithful ask for miraculous signs.

Disciples of Jesus and deniers of Jesus were of the same generation. The word “unfaithful” obviously applies only to the masses of people in Jesus’ time who refused to accept Him without seeing miracles. It also applies to countless other generations who have continued to reject Him for the same reason. Only those people were and are “adulterous” or unfaithful to the commandment and covenant of God that we should not base our faith on physical evidence:

Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God... *Deuteronomy 6:16*

And that is what we would be doing—tempting or testing our Lord—if we believed that before accepting our promised Redeemer, we must see Him descending on the clouds.

- Finally, to clarify His intent, in His discourse on His Second Coming, Jesus offers a classical example of a rejected Messenger of God. He compares the treatment He will receive at His Second Advent with the treatment Noah received. The example

of Noah should leave no doubt as to the purpose of Jesus in saying that: ***first He must suffer many things and be rejected.*** Noah did not come from the sky with power and great glory. He faced rejection and ridicule as did Jesus. The prophecy indicates that this drama will be repeated once again. Note this translation:

The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time.
Christ (Matt. 24:37)

The same message is confirmed in the Hebrew Scriptures:

These days recall for me the days of Noah... *Isaiah 54:9*

Many Christians believe that Jesus suffered once and will not suffer again. That statement is indeed true. Then why did He say: “First He must suffer”? To resolve this conflict, we must ponder the spiritual meaning of “return.” Jesus clearly taught us what “return” means. We could not have a better example than the return of Elijah as John the Baptist. They were two different individuals, but they were endowed with the same spiritual powers and virtues; they were like two beautiful roses, spiritually identical. When John the Baptist came, Elijah was in heaven and He did not return to endure the sufferings of John. Thus the Jesus who came 2,000 years ago will forever remain in heaven at the right hand of God. He will not return to suffer again. God will send another Being as glorious as Jesus, the incarnation of the same Christ Spirit, to teach us the truths that He did not reveal to us earlier because of our lack of spiritual maturity. Therefore, be at rest, Jesus of Nazareth will not suffer again! The glory that was hidden in Him will be revealed in another Man who will manifest the same divine powers that He did.

Let us now pause and ponder. Let us compare our position with that of the Jews. Is there more biblical evidence pointing to their “suffering King” than to our “suffering King”? The answer is clear. We have at least two prophecies linking our King to suffering. They have none. They must only assume that the unidentified figure in Isaiah’s prophecies is their Messiah. Now suppose Jesus came in the guise of a thief, the way He came the first time, and we rejected Him as the Jews did. What will the judgment of future generations be of us? Will they not be even more astonished at our lack of spiritual discernment than we are at the Jews’ lack of spiritual discernment?

As we can see, the more we study Jesus’ promises—with total freedom from the influence of Traditional Bias—the clearer it becomes that the unchallenged assumption and expectation cherished by Christians that Jesus will return with worldly glory and military power is as unfounded as the same assumption and expectation cherished by the Jews some 2,000 years earlier.

In recognizing their Redeemer, Christians enjoy many advantages over the Jews. Consider the following among others:

- They are indeed blessed: they have the Jewish Model for their ideal teacher. It offers every lesson they need to know the Lord at His Second Coming. The Jews did not have such a Model at His First Coming. The Jewish Model by itself makes it a hundred times easier for us to recognize our expected Redeemer.
- Literal-mindedness is not condemned as clearly and strongly in Hebrew Scriptures as it is in Christian Scriptures.

- The number of prophecies concerning the Second Advent are about six times greater than the ones concerning the First Advent (1,800 versus 300).
- Numerous prophecies—from both Testaments—portray an extremely negative picture of the peoples of this age, including Christians. This observation should lead us to an intense awareness, open-mindedness, and unconditional humility. It should destroy every trace of self-righteousness. It should rescue us from pride, apathy, and negligence.
- As we noted in this chapter, prophecies that point to the rejection of our Redeemer by the masses of people are more numerous and more clear than the ones concerning the Redeemer of the Jews. There are further relevant prophecies that are not presented in this chapter.

Imagine the level of accountability that Christians face, if in spite of all these advantages, they still reject their Redeemer. Do they have any excuse?

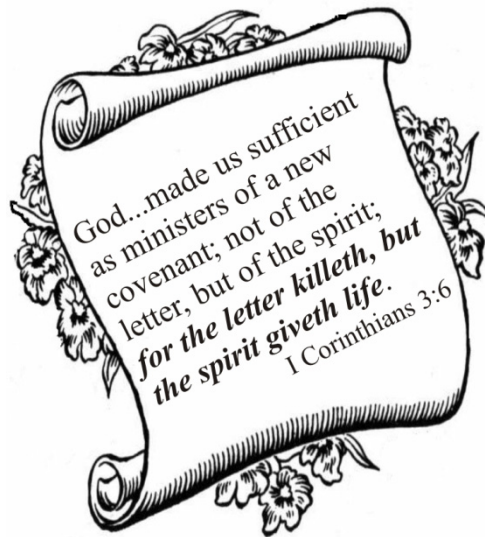
Let us now move to another topic: the devastating consequences of literal-mindedness.

Literal-Mindedness, an Enduring, Dangerous, and Epidemic Disease

Why do you think Jesus asked this question:

Why is My Language not clear to you? Christ (John 8:43)

The following verse contains only 27 words, but it is as weighty as “the seven seas.” If it is put into action, it can change the world. These 27 words should be written in gold and posted on a wall in every home and every house of worship:



What would the literalists do, if the Scriptures confirmed their non-biblical assumptions? What would they do if they found a single verse that glorified literal-mindedness? What would they say, if they could find a verse that declared: “**The letter gives life, but the spirit kills**”?

Consider also the next verse. Why did Jesus say:

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Revelation 19:10

Did He not intend to glorify “**the spirit**” of prophecies rather than their literal meaning?

Most believers seldom think about or fully recognize the way the literal mind works. No one has ever condemned the cloudy minds of letter-lovers as severely and exposed them

as plainly as did Jesus. That was the mind and the mode of thinking and reasoning that dominated the religious life of the Pharisees. The following verses should serve as a grave and graphic warning to all literal-minded Christians who, like the Pharisees, without knowing, have lost both their desire and their ability to see “*the spirit* of prophecy” shining brightly as the sun behind “the clouds of letters.”

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.
Christ (Matthew 23:23-24)

Literal-mindedness has always been and continues to be the most widely undiagnosed and untreated spiritual disease among the followers of all religions. Its danger comes from this: seldom, if ever, do those afflicted have any awareness of its presence or of its deadly consequences.

Literal-mindedness is by far the deadliest and most rampant disease that has inflicted the hearts and minds of millions of believers in every faith and in every age throughout all ages. Surprisingly, it is common not only among “convergent thinkers” but also “divergent thinkers.” The reason is this: Believers are not encouraged to think for themselves. They are rather instructed to submit to “the authority figures” and remain loyal to traditional beliefs.

Among its common symptoms are a sense of self-righteousness, narrow-mindedness, emotionalism, loss of rational powers, a sense of superiority, fanaticism, dogmatism, radicalism, and even terrorism. These feelings together create a sense of “spiritual drunkenness”—a state of mind predicted in the Scriptures:

Keep a watch...***do not let your minds be dulled...by drunkenness...***Be on the alert, praying at all times...
Luke 21:34-36

The feelings, attitudes, and beliefs that originate in literal minds create the perfect breeding ground for the emergence and spread of sectarianism, divisiveness, prejudice, dissention, violence, terrorism, and war.

In recent years we have witnessed the destructive influence of the fundamentalist religious leaders in many Islamic countries. These leaders are letter lovers. They look for a verse in the Qur’án that supports their theological perspective and use it to fulfill their selfish dreams and desires. Spiritually-minded Muslims often express a sense of shame at the violent acts of the fundamentalist Muslims who sacrifice “the spirit” at the altar of “the letter.”

What makes literal-mindedness so dangerous is this: ***on the surface it appears quite harmless***. Its supporters love the exotic feelings that they derive from it. Sometimes they love it so much that they get drunk on it!

Amazing as it may seem, many believers are proud of having this disease! And they look down on anyone who has not been inflicted! This is of course a clear symptom of having the disease!

Literal-mindedness has had *four devastating consequences* on the spiritual and social destiny of humankind.

- It has caused the denial of every Messenger and Prophet that God has ever sent. This was the prime reason the Pharisees rejected, ridiculed, and condemned Jesus.
- It has made the Word of God to appear contradictory, irrational, unscientific, and even anti-scientific. We all remember the bitter arguments about the shape and position of the earth. The anti-scientific and irrational attitudes have resulted in a loss of faith and the decline of the dignity of believing.
- It has caused continuous division and strife within religions, and wars between religions. In this age it has given birth to extreme fundamentalism, fanaticism, and radicalism in several religions. Terrorism is another by-product of literal, rigid, narrow thinking. Today the negative forces of extreme “fundamentalism” have become more powerful and are exerting more influence on human life than ever before.
- It has damaged and demeaned the supreme dignity and honor of having faith and being a true believer. It has turned religion into child’s play. Consider an example. To help us visualize and experience the virtues of innocence, purity, and humility, Jesus asked us to become “like little children (Matt. 18:3). But a literal mind can distort even such a simple metaphor. According to the history of the church, some Christians:

...placed a literal interpretation upon Christ’s teaching that His followers must “become as little children.” Consequently, they made it a part of their practice to creep like little children as an evidence of their humility. They crept in their homes, on the street, and, in some cases, in church.¹

The preceding is an extreme example, but it shows the supreme wonders and powers of the letter-minded, who are often determined and sometimes go out of their way to prove their point.

Consider these statements from Jesus about the sword:

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. *Christ (Matt. 10:34)*

If you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. *Christ (Luke 22:36)*

How would a literal-minded believer, inclined toward violence, interpret the preceding verses? Would he not use them to justify aggression?

Now consider this instruction from Jesus:

Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. *Christ (Matt. 5:39)*

How would a literal-minded believer, inclined toward pacifism, interpret the preceding verse? Would he not allow others to take advantage of him and his loved ones? According to historical records, members of a Christian denomination in North America—inclined towards pacifism—tried to live literally by the preceding instructions. They did not believe it was “Christian” to defend themselves. Strong men allowed predators—who were well aware of their extreme pacifism—to attack and rape their wives and daughters,

while they watched praying helplessly! This is how dangerous and degrading extreme literal-mindedness can become.

The consequences of literal-mindedness to the destiny of mankind are beyond estimation. The extremes, the radicals, the fundamentalists in every religion, have used their Scriptures as a launching pad for rejecting, downgrading, and attacking their opponents. Through simplistic and radical thinking, they have attracted many simple-minded and zealous followers to support their divisive and destructive acts against “outsiders.”

Since sacred Scriptures are subject to interpretation, the narrow-minded, letter-minded, fanatical, and convergent believers can always find a verse that gives credibility to their selfish desires. Consider how being “black” was stigmatized as a symbol of punishment inflicted on the people of Africa. Until recently the Mormon Church prevented Afro-Americans from attaining any high position in the Church.

What is the remedy for this seemingly harmless but deadly disease? The remedy is found on every page of the Scriptures. Every page of the Scriptures testifies to God’s unique Spiritual Language. No faithful believer—Jew or Christian—can deny this fact. For most people, at least in the beginning, the critical challenge is not finding the remedy; it is admitting that one has the disease.

Only God can change the human heart. All we can do is give our consent. This book does not and cannot offer a remedy. Its purpose is to help overcome the denial. It is a call to awareness, an invitation to all Christians who love the truth, even if it is not delivered in a seminary or in a Sunday sermon.

This book is not a medicine, but a prescription for freedom from an epidemic addiction not only among Christians, but also among the followers of all religions. The decision to take the medicine is a choice given to each of us.

In this life we face many paths that lead to different destinations. If you believe in freedom of choice, if you believe that it is by opening our hearts and minds that we can receive the light of truth, if you believe that the door of knowledge opens only to those who knock, then consider the following prescription for overcoming the dangerous, the undiagnosed, and the epidemic disease of denial:

- Before you undertake your spiritual journey for truth, make every effort to drop “the massive load” of tradition. This load has been generated, amassed, and preserved by literal-minded thinkers over the course of many centuries—by interpreters who sometimes misinterpret even the words of their loved ones, let alone the Word of God.
- Read this book several times. Each time you read it, you will gain new insight into the unique language through which God speaks to humankind.
- Pray to God and plead with Him to join you in your spiritual journey. We are told repeatedly that without the help of the Heavenly Hand, we are helpless. We are unable to climb the Mountain of God alone. After all, it is God who chooses us. All we can do is to let Him:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you...

Christ (John 15:16)

...no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him.

Christ (John 6:65)

Only God can change hearts. Only He can provide the healing remedy. Shall we not turn to His unfailing grace? Shall we remain silent? Shall we not trust His promises that no sincere prayer will remain without an answer?

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.

Christ (Matt. 7:8)

24

Who Has the Right to Interpret Prophecies?

Let me once again repeat that the prime purpose of this book is not to interpret prophecies, but *to expose the fallacies of traditional-literal interpretation*. If you do not wish to accept the views offered in this book, you can at least recognize the grave dangers of being closed-minded.

Who had the wisdom and the right to explain the meaning of the prophecies of the *First Advent*?

- *The woman*: When He comes, He will explain everything to us. John 4:25
- *Jesus*: I who speak to you am He. John 4:26

Has the authority to interpret the Word of God shifted from the Lord to His followers? Who decided that it has shifted? What was the rule in the First Advent concerning the meaning of prophecies? Who had true knowledge of their meaning?

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *He [Jesus] explained to them [the Jews] what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.* Luke 24:27

Are the people of this age so spiritually wise that they do not need Jesus Himself to come and *explain* or *interpret* to them the prophetic passages that refer to His Second Advent? Did the Jews need the help of Jesus to understand their Scripture?

Then *He [Jesus] opened their understanding*, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24:45

Can we rightly claim that unlike the Jews we do not need the help of our Redeemer? Can we assume that *“our understanding is already open,”* and therefore we can comprehend the true meaning of the prophecies on our own?

To the Jews who expected a powerful king, Jesus said:

How foolish [dull NEB] you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? Luke 24:25-26 NIV

Is there a reason to believe that we are not as traditional and closed-minded as the Jews were?

Who was the Lord of the Sabbath at the First Advent? Who was in charge of everything?

So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Christ (Mark 2:28)

Who is the Lord of the Sabbath today and every other day since the world began? Jesus Himself! Only He has the authority to unseal the envelope, to open the Book, and to reveal its contents. We are not authorized to do it in advance of His coming.

Who has known the mind of the Lord?

I Corinthians 2:16

Prophecies come from the mind of the Lord. Did the rabbis of Jesus' time know the mind of the Lord? Do the Bible readers of our time know the mind of the Lord?

Tradition has taught most Christians to be certain of their interpretations. Can anyone rightly claim to have the only true interpretation of prophecies? Yet any believer who sets preconditions for accepting Jesus by insisting that "Before I can accept Him I must see Him come down from the sky!" has assumed the role of an infallible authority.

...lean not on your understanding...Do not be wise in your own eyes... *Proverbs 3:5, 7*

About the prophecies of the last days, Daniel was told:

...the words are kept secret and sealed till the time of the end.

Daniel 12:9

Who, then, is able or worthy to "break the seal" of the prophecies of the last days?

Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? ***But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.*** *Revelation 5:2-3*

The impression one gets from most books about prophecy is that their authors have ***already*** broken the seal and revealed the content of the scroll. They have ***already*** done Jesus' work for Him!

If a friend gave you a letter in a sealed envelope, would you know what is in the letter? Why then do so many Bible teachers act as if they know?

All prophetic vision has become for you like a sealed book...

Isaiah 29:11

Why then do so many Bible teachers prophesy in the name of Jesus?

Many will say to me on that day, "***Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?***"
Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

Christ (Matt. 7:22-23)

Why then do so many people insist that Jesus' body must come down from the "sky" rather than His Spirit? Why do they set so many preconditions? Why do they disobey their Lord? We are told that:

He is coming to judge the...peoples with His truth.

Psalms 96:3, 13

It appears that most Christians have already made up their minds. They have already judged Him with ***their*** truth! They have already decided the truth about the way the Lord must come. Instead of looking for ***His*** judgment, they are expecting Him to look for ***their*** judgment.

There is much disagreement and confusion concerning the meaning of prophecies, even among the literal-minded believers. Note how clearly the Scripture has predicted the prevailing confusion among the peoples of the world, including Christians:

The day God visits you. ***Now is the time of their confusion.***

Micah 7:4

Ponder the following verses as a lesson from the past:

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and *tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign...”* Matthew 16:1-4

Why did Jesus condemn those who asked for miraculous signs? Because the Pharisees had prepared a list of preconditions or prerequisites for accepting their Messiah. Do not Christians of this age have a similar list? Do they not, like the Jews of the past, say: “Before we consider your claim, you must do something extraordinary, you must show ‘a sign from heaven,’ such as floating through the skies”?

What authority do the literal-minded leaders have? None! The only thing they have in their favor is a large number of followers and control of the media. The literal voice is heard everywhere; the spiritual voice is not given a chance. Do the literal-minded Christians of the twenty-first century have greater authority than the Pharisees of the first century? Can they find a single verse that gives them the right to interpret the Bible? On the contrary, they have been strictly forbidden to take a firm stand on the meaning of prophecies. They are asked to postpone their judgment and to *wait for the Lord to come and explain what everything means:*

But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself.

II Peter 1:20

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; *wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness...*

I Corinthians 4:5

It is clear that many Christians have been disregarding and disobeying the preceding instructions. They have not been waiting for the Lord to come and bring to light the true meaning of prophecies. Can a Christian disobey the Bible and still consider himself a true believer? Let us examine this question in the next chapter.

25

Can a Believer Say “I Believe in the Bible” but Disobey Its Message?

He who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. John 14:24

A true believer in the Bible accepts everything in that Book, not just the parts he likes. He does not pick and choose. If he says he trusts his Lord, then he accepts everything his Lord teaches him. Why, then, do the literal-minded believers, who consider themselves the true Christians, continue to disobey the commands of the Bible that they should not rush to judgment, that they should wait for the Lord to come and explain to them what the prophecies mean just as He did the first time? Why do they also continue to ignore the testimony of the Gospel that the Word of God must be “discerned (understood) spiritually”? If they believe in the *entire* Bible, how can they, by their interpretation, violate this clear testimony? Can they find a single verse that says “the Word of God must be discerned *literally*”? There is none! All the warnings contained in the Scripture are aimed at the literal-minded. All its testimonies are aimed *against the worldly-minded*—those who glorify the physical. Consider these verses:

Judge not according to appearance...

Christ (John 7:24)

But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. *You judge by human standards...*

Christ (John 8:14-15)

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are *spirit* and they are life.

Christ (John 6:63)

...the kingdom of God is *within you*.

Christ (Luke 17:21)

Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him “unclean,” but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him “unclean.”

Christ (Matt. 15:10-11)

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty. Zechariah 4:6

There is no verse that says “the spirit” kills or that “the letter” gives life! There is not a single verse that supports literal-mindedness. Everything Jesus said and glorified pertained to the spiritual. Why, then, do so many Christians claim to believe in the Bible, and yet continue to disregard and even violate its most fundamental rule of interpretation?

Let us start with the workings of the mind, rather than the wonders of the heart. Let us explore “convergent thinking” as one of the many reasons for the general failure to see “the letter” in the light of “the spirit,” to discern the literal word in the light of God’s Spiritual Language. As we previously noted, convergent thinkers feel secure only on busy highways where they can follow other travelers. They do not feel secure on a “road less traveled.” They feel that if they venture off the highway, they will get lost in the forests of parables and countless gardens of symbols and similes. They are not used to the fragrance of “spiritual flowers” blooming in God’s beautiful gardens of heavenly truth.

The reasons why the Christian Faith has been divided are extremely enlightening. They can teach us precious lessons. Was the one church of Jesus divided and abused mostly by Spiritual Thinkers who saw their Lord as the very spirit of Christian Faith, or mostly by rigid and literal thinkers who focused on “the letter” but failed to see “the spirit”? Was it not divided and abused by the believers who failed to open their hearts and minds to see the beauty of the Bride behind the veil of words? If they had seen the Bride, they would have instantly sensed the fallacy of building dividers within the church. Instead of dividers, they would have supported and strengthened that one beautiful Church that Jesus gave them. Instead of dividing His House, they would have surrounded it and blessed it with thousands of spiritual gardens.

If nature-lovers had overcome the wall-builders, we would now have a very different world with a different scene. Instead of seeing many narrow roads with confusing “one way” signs pointing toward more than 20,000 denominations, we would see one beautiful highway surrounded by myriads of meadows and gardens. We would see Christians traveling a little, stopping a little, and exchanging fresh flowers everywhere. We would find no trace of “one way roads” and “narrow roads” with “dead end” signs. Is it not reasonable to assume that the same kind of believers who distorted the teachings of Jesus to create so many denominations also distorted the meaning of prophecies?

Ponder the following prediction about the spiritual state of Christians in this age:

They [Christians] will hold to *the outward* form of our religion... II Timothy 3:5

Can any sincere Christian claim that he believes in the Bible, and yet refuse to acknowledge that the preceding prediction has come to pass? In the following verses, Jesus teaches us that the requirement for showing Himself to us is loving Him, and the requirement for loving Him is obeying His counsels.

If you love Me, you will obey what I command. Christ (John 14:15)

He who loves Me...I too will love him and *show Myself to him*. Christ (John 14:21)

Will Jesus show Himself also to Christians who ignore His repeated commands that they should search for Him as diligently as they search for a thief or for “buried treasures”? Will Jesus show Himself also to Christians who do not wait for Him to come and interpret the prophecies for them as He did the first time? Will Jesus show Himself also to those who “prophesy in the name of the Lord”? The answer could not be stated more clearly: Jesus shows Himself only to Christians who obey Him.

The preceding prophecies and instructions from Jesus indicate that:

- Those who have faith, who are true Christians, love Jesus.

- Those who love Jesus, obey His commands and counsels.
- Those who obey His commands and counsels, look for Him.
- And those who look for Him will find Him the second time.

Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time. *Hebrews 9:28*

What is the ultimate destiny of those who follow tradition rather than Jesus' repeated urgings that Christians should search for Him? They will learn that they were not Christians. The following verse, repeated several times in the Gospel, describes what they should expect to hear:

I tell you the truth, I don't know you. *Christ (Matt. 25:12)*

Many Christians keep their hearts and minds closed to new or nontraditional ideas for fear of being deceived. Are they justified? Let us explore this question in the next chapter.

26

Fear of Being Deceived

Abraham Maslow, a noted psychologist, believes that the second most basic of all human needs is safety or security. Today that need is threatened more than ever before. In the absence of security, fear—one of the most powerful of all emotions—becomes dominant, and finds a haven in the weary hearts and minds of humankind. A critical consequence of fear is escape and avoidance. Fear stifles the spirit of courage and initiative, and keeps people prisoners within their own comfort zones. Relate the stifling force of fear to religion, attach it to hell-fire and the ominous thought of “being deceived,” and you will have the most powerful and paralyzing weapon against the spirit of search and inquiry.

No doubt the literal-minded Pharisees were well aware of this weapon and used it to prevent the pure-hearted Jews from paying any attention to their Messiah. The Gospel shows that the fear of being deceived was as rampant in Jesus’ time as it is today. Note Jesus’ kindly words to the fearful:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. *Christ (Luke 12:32)*

What is the source of fear? Lack of faith:

Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?	Matthew 8:26
O thou of little faith...	Matthew 14:31
O ye of little faith...	Matthew 16:8
Where is your faith?	Luke 8:25

Many Christians assume that if Jesus comes like a thief, they will not be wise enough to recognize Him, because any human being can come like a “thief,” but none from the sky. If this is what you think, if you feel you lack confidence to separate the Heavenly Thief from earthly thieves, consider these points:

First a brief response: Jesus came as a thief the first time. How did you know Him? If you could know Him the first time, why would you be incapable of knowing Him the second time?

Now a detailed response:

- The one who lies and deceives is also selfish. He is not willing to sacrifice everything for God. From this sign alone you will be capable of recognizing 99.999 percent of liars.

- A liar and deceiver has a level of wisdom similar to other human beings. The difference between the One sent by God and the wisest human being is like the difference between the sun and a candle.

Further, the wisest person you can name has acquired his knowledge from others, from his environment. The One sent by God receives His knowledge from God. From these two signs alone you will recognize 99.999 percent of liars.

- In the life of the One sent by God you will find absolutely no trace of sin. From this sign alone you will recognize 99.999 percent of deceivers.
- In the life of the One sent by God you find the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies—prophecies about many events of His life, events that are totally beyond His control. From this sign alone you will recognize 99.999 percent of deceivers.
- When you listen to His Manner of Speech, you will learn that He speaks with such authority and in a language that you have not heard from anyone else. You will find that He speaks spontaneously, in a novel way, and with absolute certainty, without any change of mind.

Further, He declares repeatedly that His Word is the Word of God, that He says absolutely nothing without His permission. From these two signs alone you will recognize 99.999 percent of deceivers.

- You discern many other distinctions in Him. For instance, you will realize that His fruits are perfect, and His influence on His followers is positive. You will see that He will gradually transform the lives of countless people. You will note that He has the power to turn sinners into saints. You will realize that His Words are ahead of your time, that He resolves all the mysteries of the Bible, that He will **gradually** create a new world of justice and peace. From these signs you will recognize 99.999 percent of deceivers.

Now put all these signs together. Do you still feel you are incapable of knowing the Heavenly Thief? Do you still fear that you may be deceived? If you are fearful of saying “yes” to Him, what do you think that indicates? A lack of faith on your part, or a lack of evidence on His part? Ponder what Jesus told the Jews:

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. *John 5:46*

How does this statement apply to you? If you had known Jesus as a Heavenly Thief the first time, you will know Him the second time. If you can’t know Him the second time, it shows that you did not know Him the first time.

“Fear” may look innocent, but it has the power to lead us to the gravest of all sins and the most severe punishment. It can prevent us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus spoke the Parable of the Talents to prepare Christians for His Return. What is the parable about? Courage and fear. What did the Master say to ***the fearful Christian*** who failed to invest his “talent”?

You wicked, lazy servant!...throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping... *Christ (Matt. 25: 26, 30)*

Can any action from a Christian, other than a failure to pay attention to the news of the coming of his Lord, justify such a severe punishment—being thrown into darkness? Can any action, other than choosing to be spiritually drunk instead of being watchful, justify the punishment of hell?

Consider also the following warning:

But *the cowardly*...their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Revelation 21:8

Again, why should a fearful Christian go to hell? No fear would justify such a severe punishment except the fear of leaving one's comfort zone in search of the Heavenly Thief—the One who rides upon and remains hidden in the Clouds of Illusions, in the Night of Unawareness, and in the Darkness of Spiritual Drunkenness?

For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine... Revelation 18:3

As the preceding prophecy indicates, the epidemic of "Spiritual Drunkenness" is so widespread, so potent that it does not stop with the Christians. It encompasses, overtakes, and desensitizes the conscience of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Let us now look at the stifling forces of fear in action. Let us see its devastating impact on our lives, let us see how it can even undermine our everlasting destiny. Consider this simple example. Suppose you say to a fellow-believer: "I have heard that someone claims to be the return of Jesus. Should I test his claim? Should I find out who he is and what he says?" What do you think he will say? Most likely: "Don't you remember Jesus' warning that many false prophets will come? I am sure if Jesus had come, we would all have seen Him. As you know, Satan is all around us. You don't want to put your faith at risk! You don't want to lose your soul!"

What is the root cause of this fear? Where does this paralyzing attitude originate? Mostly from the Literal Theory of Heavenly Descent. ***By far the most damaging consequence of this theory is the absolute state of passivity and avoidance it has generated in the hearts and minds of virtually all Christians.*** It has completely destroyed the spirit of openness and inquiry. Believers say to themselves: "If Jesus is supposed to come from the sky, and if my eyes will be blessed by seeing Him, why should I bother to pay attention to the news of His coming in any other way? All I need is to hope, wish and wait. I do not need to look for *Him*; He will look for *me*."

The inevitable and unique consequence of the Literal Theory is this: It is so powerful, so all-encompassing, so awesome, that it conceals or distorts any evidence that fails to satisfy its demands. Like a mighty torrent it uproots any thought or any proof that stands in its way.

Consider Jesus' critical pronouncement on the ways of separating true prophets from false prophets. First of all, its relevance to the Return of Jesus is ignored; and second, the meaning of its guidelines is distorted. Jesus' statement as recorded in Matthew 7:7-28, contains the most significant, the clearest, and the most critical counsels on this topic. Yet seldom has it received the attention it deserves. Let us do what others have failed to do—let us put it to the test of critical analysis.

In His discourse on false prophets, Jesus included seven critical instructions that, like a chain, are intertwined and interrelated. Together they give us a clear Picture or Image of

both a true Prophet and a false prophet. To do justice to Jesus' counsels, we must look at the whole Image with all its interrelated links. They are so interconnected that even if we remove one of them, everything falls apart and crumbles.

Consider this analogy. Suppose you are concerned for your safety and you purchase an alarm system for your house. Now suppose you review its manual of instructions, but **ignore all of them except this one**: "Thieves are very tricky and clever. They come suddenly and catch you by surprise! You must be extra careful!"

What will happen if you focus on that warning alone, but ignore all the other instructions for staying safe? You may become a prisoner in your house. You may not feel it is safe to step outside the house. This example is not an exaggeration. It portrays the state of the mind of today's Christians.

Let us now look at each of the Seven Links that Jesus specified to guide us and to give us the wisdom to tell the difference between a Prophet inspired by God and a prophet motivated by self-interest. Let us also test each of those links by this standard: does it confirm or contradict the Literal Theory of Heavenly Descent?

Before reviewing the instructions, let us settle one question: Are they relevant to both Advents of Jesus? Some Christians assume that many of the instructions apply only to Prophets. They do not apply to the First or Second Advent of Jesus, because Jesus is not a Prophet. Such an assumption is totally unfounded. First of all, according to both testaments, Jesus was called a Prophet:

For Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you **a prophet like me** from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." Acts 3:22-23

Note that the verse from Acts does not say "a prophet **greater** than Moses." It simply says, "**like** Moses."

Some of the Jews were astonished at Jesus' supreme wisdom. They could not believe that the son of a carpenter could be so wise. Yet they refused to honor Him as a Prophet. Jesus offered a reason for their refusal:

Only in His own town and His own house is a Prophet without honor. Matthew 13:57

It is obvious, in the preceding passage, Jesus applied the word "Prophet" to Himself.

"Prophet" was perhaps the most common title by which people in Jesus' time referred to Him:

A great prophet [Jesus] has appeared among us. Luke 7:16

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that **you are a prophet.**" John 4:19

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "**This is Jesus, the prophet** from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 21:10-11

"Prophet" is perhaps the only title for Jesus that is confirmed:

- In the Hebrew Scriptures
- In the words of Jesus Himself

- In the writings of a distinguished Apostle of Jesus
- In the words of the people who listened to Jesus

To confirm Jesus' uniqueness as the Son of God, seldom Christian authors refer to Him as a Prophet. The following statement by Tim LaHaye, one of the authors of best-selling series *Left Behind* is a rare exception:

Who is the greatest biblical Prophet of all?...Jesus. I admit, we don't normally think of Jesus as an unsurpassed Prophet. Much more likely, we call him by other titles: Savior, Lord, Son of God, Good Shepherd. And he is all of these things, of course—but he is also the greatest Prophet who ever walked on earth.¹

It is ironic to note that the literal-minded Jews believe that Moses is greater than Jesus. Why? Because Moses *defeated* His enemies, but Jesus *was defeated* by His enemies!

If Jesus was a Prophet like Moses, why should the instructions not apply to Him? Second, whether Jesus is called the Savior, the Son of God, the Lord, the Word, Immanuel, or a Prophet, one principle links all His titles: His Message came from God and was the absolute truth. His title does not change the validity of His Message.

The purpose of Jesus' counsels on true and false prophets is not to introduce His titles, but to give us God's standards for separating truth from falsehood. The word "prophet" used in His instructions does not in any way alter the message.

Therefore, if a man calls Himself both a Prophet and the Return of Jesus, the instructions definitely apply to Him. A true Prophet speaks the Word of God. If such a Prophet declares that He is also the Return of Jesus, then we must accept His Word because He is in touch with God and follows His commands. That is exactly what Jesus did. He was a "Prophet like Moses" but He claimed many other titles. Since He was a true Prophet, we accept all His other titles.

Jesus' instructions are universal principles that will never change. They come from the Mind of our Creator Who does not alter His principles and standards of knowing Him. They apply to both Advents of Jesus and to anyone else who claims to speak for God.

Let us now examine *the Seven Counsels of Jesus* in the next chapter.

27

The Seven Counsels, Laws, or Links that Lead us to our Lord, and Protect us from False Prophets

1

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find.

Christ (Matt. 7:7)

This instruction is in perfect harmony with all the others that Jesus gave about the way we can find Him on His Return. A thief does not come and knock on the door. Only by remaining spiritually awake and alert, only by seeking, searching, and watching for Him can we detect His Advent:

...Christ...will appear a second time...to *those who are watching for Him*. Hebrews 9:28

The instruction to “seek and knock” confirms God’s unchanging and everlasting way of offering His gifts:

Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and *whoever wishes*, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17

See also John 7:38

This first principle shows that we must take the initiative, that we must step out of our comfort zone to search for our Redeemer. If we fail to taste his fruits and to test the spirits, we have disobeyed our Lord:

...test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

1 John 4:1

Question: If Jesus came from the sky and every eye saw Him, what would be the purpose of asking, seeking, knocking, and looking for Him? Even a glimpse of His heavenly descent would be so awesome that it would overwhelm us. Seeking and finding would have no relevance.

2

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?...how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Christ (Matt. 7:9-11)

God promises to give us His divine gifts in response to our prayers and pleadings. The honor of knowing our Redeemer at His return is so divine that we must pray and plead

with Him every moment of our lives to make us worthy of that honor. This instruction is also in harmony with Jesus' other commands:

Be always on the watch, and **pray** that you may be able to...stand before the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:36)

Question: If Jesus came from the sky, we would instantly recognize Him and follow Him. Why would we need to pray?

3

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Christ (Matt. 7:13-14)

Why did Jesus ask us to find safety in a “narrow gate” rather than a “wide gate”? Because He knew that at the time of His Return only a few would behold His hidden glory. This is a clue that what happened in the First Advent will be repeated in the Second.

The preceding instruction is also in harmony with the message of several parables. They show that when Jesus returns, most Christians will offer excuses to avoid entering the gate of His Kingdom. Consider this parable among others:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but ***they refused to come.*** Christ (Matt. 22:2-3)

It is helpful to note that Jesus also used the analogy of a “small gate” or a “small door” in relation to His **First** Advent, but with some more details:

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ***Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.*** Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.” Luke 13:22-30

Let us briefly review Jesus' statement. These principles are universal; they apply to both Advents:

- At the beginning, when “the Mustard Seed” is just planted, when God's Redeemer has little if any honor in the eyes of the masses, only a few will respond to His call. At that time, the big gate overwhelms the small gate.

- In this life, people have full freedom to choose their gate, but at death they lose that freedom.
- The gate they choose here will lead them to the *same* gate hereafter.
- Entering heaven does not depend on “eating and drinking with Jesus,” or membership in a given church. It does not depend on physical connections or labels. What matters is spiritual, the “flesh is of no avail.”
- Many Christians have grand illusions about their goodness. They think all the angels of heaven are waiting to carry them to their mansions.
- Many of them will be disappointed after they pass away. When the veil of death is lifted, they will only see the angels of wrath. They thought they would have the highest rank in the Kingdom of God. They will find themselves to have the lowest rank.
- Others will have just the opposite experience. They thought they would be positioned last in the Kingdom of God. They will find themselves placed among the first.

Let us look at one more prophecy about the size of the gate:

The coming of the Son of Man *will repeat what happened in Noah’s time.*

Christ (Matt. 24:37)

Question: When Noah came, how small was the gate that led to salvation? Did many enter that small gate? The example of Noah is just one of many clues that point to this fact: when Jesus returns, very few Christians will pay attention to the news of His coming. Only a few of them will enter His gate.

Question: If Jesus came from the sky and people saw His awesome Advent with thousands of His mighty angels, it is hard to imagine that the masses of humankind would hesitate to follow Him. His “gate” would be the biggest gate. Why then would that gate lead to destruction?

4

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Christ (Matt. 7:15-20)

The preceding passage is the heart and soul of all of Jesus’ counsels about the ways of knowing Him. It declares God’s absolute standard and ultimate guide for separating right from wrong.

Earlier we noted the need for prayer. The purpose of praying is to reach out to God and to ask for His blessings. The purpose of “tasting the fruits” is to reach out to our own hearts

and souls, to our own spiritual and mental resources, to use the gifts that God has already given us.

We must use all the resources at our disposal to be in harmony with God's Will. We must use what we have and what He is willing to give us. Testing without praying, or praying without testing is like trying to fly with one wing.

To help us understand His guiding principles, Jesus used two metaphors: that of "a ferocious wolf" and that of "a bad fruit." How can we tell the difference between a wolf and a shepherd? Simply by looking and paying attention. If we "watch" with our hearts and souls, our work is quite easy. If we pray, it will be even easier, because the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet is far greater and more evident than the difference between a shepherd and a wolf. The only requirement for seeing the obvious difference is a little supply of "oil," a little bit of *Spiritual Wisdom*.

God has given to every pure and sincere soul the power to detect deception. Think of some of the people you consider to be "phony." How did you recognize that characteristic? By paying attention to their deeds, not to their words. Now suppose John, an ordinary person, falsely claims to be the return of Christ. Do you not think it will be at least a thousand times easier to detect the deception in John than in other phonies? Why? Because you expect far more from someone who claims to be the return of Christ.

As you can see, telling the difference between a Redeemer from God and a deceiver is quite easy. If we rely on God's standards and His guidance, we can separate them as we can separate day from night. Yet many Bible teachers pretend that the differences are quite fuzzy. This false assumption casts fear in the hearts of believers and undermines their confidence. Instead of confirming Jesus' command to seek and watch, many Bible teachers encourage avoidance and inaction. They instill doubt in people's God-given ability to know the difference. They destroy their initiative. They make people totally dependent on "experts"—theologians, authors of Bible books and Bible teachers who, without permission, keep "prophesying in the name of the Lord."

Question: If Jesus came from the sky with His mighty angels, why would we need to taste His fruits? We would instantly recognize Him!

5

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"
Christ (Matt. 7:21-23)

Why does Jesus emphasize obedience? Because He knows many Christians will disregard His instructions. He knows they will act against every guidance and every counsel He has given them. He knows that neither His command, nor His encouragement is sufficient to lift them from their state of passivity. He knows that they will not look for their Lord, they will not pray, nor will they pay attention to the news of His coming as a thief. He knows that they will seek their security from "the wide gate" rather than "the

small gate,” that they will focus on miracles and demons rather than His tangible and testable fruits, and that they will engage in prophesying in His name without knowing the true meaning of the prophecies. He knows that they will take advantage of His name, and then offer their private, personal interpretations of prophecies as the truth.

We should note that some Christian authors and orators who have been using the Bible “to prophesy in the name of the Lord” have gained global fame and enormous fortune.

Since Jesus knows that most Christians of the last days will disobey His counsels, He warns them of the most severe punishments in store for them. He informs them that they will not be allowed to enter His Kingdom. What will they hear when they plead with their Lord to let them in? The Lord will say:

I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers! Christ (Matt. 7:23)

By saying, “I never knew you,” Jesus means: “You were not Christians! You were not members of my household! Because a true member of my household knows me, respects me, and obeys me.”

If Jesus came from the sky, visible to all, then there would be no need to taste the fruits. No one would dare to disobey Him, and any choice between the ‘narrow’ and ‘wide’ gates would be irrelevant. These instructions and warnings are only relevant if Jesus were to come again as a humble man just as He came the first time. Only then would people be required to ask, to seek, to pray, and to taste the fruits, rather than depend on their flawed and literal interpretation of metaphoric prophecies. Only then would they be in a position to obey or deny their Lord. Only then would the most glorious reward or the most severe punishment be applicable.

6

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. *Christ (Matt. 7:12)*

On the surface, the preceding statement does not relate to knowing a Prophet of God or a Redeemer. As a rule, we relate it to the way we treat others as individuals. But a little reflection shows that it has another implication: the standards that we apply to the Second Advent of Jesus must be comparable and compatible to the standards that we apply to the First Advent. This is called “intellectual integrity.” Let us consider several examples of this universal Law of Justice:

- What standards do the Jews apply, and what standards do Christians ask them to apply? The Jewish standards require ***worldly powers*** from their Savior. We know that standard is wrong.

How do Christians explain the Jewish disappointment that they did not receive a powerful King? By saying that they expected the wrong kind of king. That they should look at Jesus’ ***spiritual glories*** rather than His worldly powers.

- We say to the Jews that without the help of their Messiah, they cannot understand the prophecies of their Scriptures concerning the First Advent. To be fair, we must say to ourselves: as they failed to understand the meaning of their Scripture, we too

are quite likely to fail. We too need the help of our promised Redeemer to come and to explain the true meaning of prophecies of the Second Advent.

We cannot use double standards, yet claim to be just. We cannot tell the Jews, “You did not have the Spiritual Wisdom to decode the prophecies of the *First* Advent, but we do have the Wisdom to interpret the prophecies of the *Second* Advent.”

- Can a Jew know Jesus without searching, seeking, and praying? Of course not! We expect him to go through all those steps. Why then should we feel that we are exempt from seeking, searching, and praying?
- Would it be fair if a Jew in response to your invitation to learn about Jesus simply said: “Sorry, I am afraid, I have been warned of false prophets.”? You would expect him to at least read the Gospel first. Why, then, should the rules of being a true seeker change between the two Advents?

As we noted, a fundamental rule of sound thinking is *Intellectual Integrity* defined by scientists as:

Recognition of the need to be true to one’s own thinking; to be consistent in the intellectual standards one applies; *to hold one’s self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one’s antagonists; to practice what one advocates for others; and to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in one’s own thought and action.*¹

If we, as honest believers, do not practice *Intellectual Integrity*, what can we expect from others? Should not our standards be even higher than those of scientists? Should we expect less integrity from religion than from science?

Question: If Jesus came from the sky, why would we need to be reminded that we should adopt and apply a single standard of justice?

7

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.
Christ (Matt. 7:24-27)

What qualities is Jesus describing? Wisdom and foolishness. Do you remember the parable of the wise and foolish Christians? What did that parable teach us? That there will be two kinds of believers. The wise Christians will find the Bridegroom; the foolish Christians will miss Him.

Question: If Jesus came from the sky with great glory and power, would not all Christians—both wise and foolish—see and recognize Him?

Are today's Christians obeying all the preceding instructions? By no means! The majority of believers disobey every one of them:

- They neither ask, nor seek and knock. They refuse to search for their Lord. Instead they are passively waiting for Him to come and look for them. They do not take the news of His coming seriously.
- They fail to pray to God to help them find their Redeemer.
- They seek their safety in numbers, by knowing that they have walked through “the wide gate.” They shy away from any “narrow gate.” Evidence of this attitude is the rejection of any interpretation that is non-traditional, such as the one offered in this book.
- They refuse to taste the fruits of anyone. Since they have already decided that Jesus will come from the sky, every earthly being has to be a deceiver. No test is needed.
- They think that a good sign of being loyal to Jesus is to go to their churches, to sing His praise, and keep saying, “Lord, Lord.” They fail to remember Jesus’ warning that simply saying, “Lord, Lord” is not enough. ***The sign of being a sincere Christian is to obey all of Jesus’ counsels and admonitions about His Second Coming and the ways of finding Him.***
- They use double standards in relation to the First and the Second Advents. They acknowledge that the Jews did not understand the prophecies. Yet they claim that they themselves do.
- Jesus’ warning about the two groups of Christians—the wise and the foolish—does not awaken them from their dreams. They have fixed their hopes and eyes on the skies. They do not consider that there is any possibility that they may miss their Lord. They brush aside or misinterpret His promise that He will come “like a thief.”

Today's epidemic fear of false prophets is excessive and mostly unjustified. Sincere Christians need not fear false prophets. What they must fear is fear. Can you imagine a threat more serious than the following?

But ***the cowardly***...their place will be in the fiery lake...

Revelation 21:8

Think for a moment. What kind of fear would justify the punishment of hell-fire? Does anyone deserve such a severe punishment except a believer who hears the news of the coming of his Lord, but, out of the fear of being deceived, refuses to use his “talents,” fails to seek, to knock, to taste His fruit, and to pray to God to guide him and give him the ***Spiritual Wisdom*** he needs to recognize the Heavenly Thief? Does anyone deserve everlasting separation from his Lord except a believer who allows his excessive and unjustified fear of being deceived, rather than his trust in God, determine his destiny?

Jesus knew that at His Second Coming, many Christians would be like prisoners in their churches. He knew they would be gripped with fear and would pay little if any attention to the news of His coming like a thief. To pacify their phobias and to awaken them to the grave consequences of remaining passive and fearful, He offered a remarkable parable—that of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).

According to the parable, a Master gives some capital—called “talents”—to three of His servants. Two servants invest their “talents,” the third one hides his share. Later, the Master returns and asks His servants to show what they had done with their “talents.” Two of the three servants declare that they increased them by investing their shares, but the third one says that he kept his share hidden out of fear.

How does the Master respond to them? The two servants, who had displayed courage by investing their “talents,” receive the most glorious gifts. The third one—the fearful servant— hears these ominous words from the Master:

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. *Christ (Matt. 25:30)*

What does the Parable of the Talents teach us? First, that there are two kinds of Christians: the fearful, and the courageous. What separates them? Initiative and a lack of initiative. Since this parable is about the Return of the Master, we should ask: initiative about what? About making an effort to find the Heavenly Thief, the Spirit of God, the King of Kings, who conceals His divine identity in a human temple, who comes as a humble human being.

It is said that courage defines a human being more than any other quality. In a way, Jesus confirmed this fact by showing the unimaginable difference between those who live by unjustifiable fear and those who live by courage. The vast difference between the two types is this: The believer who is too cautious descends to hell; the believer who shows courage and initiative ascends to heaven. That is the difference! Can a spiritual weakness or strength exert more power, can it make more difference in determining the destiny of an individual?

What does “fear” indicate? Lack of faith. It leads to a clear violation of our Lord’s command. Why? Because in order to tell the difference between right and wrong, we must first approach the issue. If we escape from reality, if we fail to test the fruit, how can we know it is bad?

Millions of people continue to call Jesus a false prophet. Why? Because they fail to test His Spirit, because they refuse to search for truth with a pure heart—pure from fear and prejudice.

As we noted, the Hebrew Scriptures call Jesus a “Prophet like Moses.” The Gospel confirms this (Acts 3:22-23). The Jews should be proud that one of them, a Jew, was a Redeemer and a Prophet like their Prophet—Moses—but with many more followers. Yet their official stance to this day is that Jesus is a false prophet. Otherwise why do they not follow Him?

Why then have the Jews failed to acknowledge Jesus? Because of a lack of evidence or a lack of initiative? Obviously, because of a lack of initiative. “Let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isa. 1:3). If a little fear, lack of initiative, or attraction to tradition, can exert such power on the lives of the Jews, could not those qualities exert a similar power on the lives of Christians?

What makes the two Prophets—Moses and Jesus—alike? What concrete evidence do we have that they both were true Prophets? By what testable and objective standards can we know them? ***The Seven Counsels of Jesus*** offer the most comprehensive guidelines.

They apply to Moses, to the First Advent of Jesus, and to the Second Advent of Jesus. God's standards are constant. They do not change from age to age.

As we noted, Jesus did not use miracles as evidence of His station. In fact He condemned Christians who assumed that by engaging in supernatural acts, they were doing a service for their Lord. When they asked "Lord, Lord, did we not...*in your name* drive out demons, and perform many miracles" (Matt. 7:22)? Instead of appreciating them for this service, He called them "evildoers." The implication is clear: engaging in the supernatural is an evil act. Why did Jesus condemn such people? For many reasons. First, miracles turn religion into a magic show. Second, claiming miracles as proof is by far the most common evidence cult leaders and deceivers have used, and continue to use, to make themselves credible. Claiming a miracle is by far the most abused of all evidences.

Consider this question: Would you accept as your Redeemer a person who claims to have walked on water and then hands you a list of testimonials as his evidence? Why not? Because our relationship with God is spiritual, not material. ***Miracles may force us to believe, but they do not transform our hearts***; they do not make us more loving and spiritual. Miracles are so worthless as evidence, so undependable that they may even deceive the very elect, the ones who are the hardest to deceive:

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.
Christ (Matt. 24:24-25)

Unlike miracles, other evidences cannot be faked. For instance, deceivers cannot falsely show that they have fulfilled prophecies, that they have produced good fruits, that they have made great sacrifices, that they have loved their enemies, that they have infinite knowledge and wisdom, that their love for God is boundless, that they have no fear, that their trust in God is beyond measure.

Human beings can readily fake miracles, but they cannot fake spiritual qualities for very long. ***They cannot demonstrate self-sacrifice through selfishness. They cannot prove honesty through deception. They cannot show detachment from the world by living in luxury. They cannot show courage by being fearful. They cannot show knowledge through ignorance, even as "a bad tree cannot bear good fruit"*** (Matt. 7:18).

Therefore, false teachers can "bear" or produce miracles, but they cannot bear or produce good fruits. Miracles can come from the mind of a genius; but good fruits can come only from the heart of the righteous.

The difference between a Redeemer or a Prophet inspired by God and a false prophet motivated by selfishness or ignorance is like the difference between day and night, or in Jesus' words, like the difference between a shepherd and a wolf. If you can tell the difference between day and night, or a shepherd and a wolf, you can also tell the difference between a Prophet of God, and a prophet of deception.

Now suppose that instead of opening your eyes, you run into a closet and close the door and your eyes. Could you still tell the difference between day and night? Therefore what is the key that unlocks the door of true knowledge? That key is made with "the oil of wisdom." That was the key that allowed the wise Christians to enter their Lord's Banquet. In His discourse on true Prophets and false prophets, Jesus analyzed "the oil of wisdom"

into its seven components. Only if we obey Him are we true Christians, and only then can we enjoy fellowship with Him.

Let us now look at some of the obvious signs of a *false prophet*.

- He is selfish. He devotes his efforts to worldly gains.
- Deception is manifest in his life. Lying is the weapon he uses to make himself credible.
- He nurtures prejudice and pride in the hearts and minds of his followers.
- He cannot show that he has fulfilled any prophecies.
- He cannot change himself, let alone others.
- He gives his followers a false sense of security.
- Instead of uniting people, he divides them.
- Instead of proving His claim by spiritual qualities—wisdom, love, knowledge, and patience—he tries to attract people by worldly evidence: miracles supported by questionable testimonials.
- He does not respect human freedom. He manipulates people’s beliefs.
- He cannot show us knowledge of the things to come.
- He manifests lust for power and control.
- He is fearful and constantly tries to protect himself. He hides in “inner chambers” or in deserts and mountains.
- He tells his followers what they like to hear instead of teaching them the truth.
- He has little if any tolerance for pain and suffering.
- His knowledge is limited and what he knows comes from studying the works of other people.

Even by using one or two of these fifteen signs, we can readily recognize a false prophet. If we use all of them, the difference between a false prophet and a true Prophet becomes as clear as the difference between darkness and light. Why then should so many people fear deception? Can they not depend on all these signs and more?

To conclude: If we are sincere in our claim that we know and love the Lord, we must put all His counsels to work, not just the one that teaches us caution. Fear and avoidance will not lead us to the One we love. They will only lead us away from Him. We must have courage to test every spirit who claims to be the Spirit of God, even if he has not come down from the sky:

...test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

1 John 4:1

Let us explore in the next chapter the role and responsibility of religious leaders in preparing Christians for the Return of their Lord.

The Faithful and Wise Leaders

...only the wise leaders shall understand. Daniel 12:10

Jesus offered numerous parables to prepare Christians for His Return. One of them is the parable of the faithful and wise servant:

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, “My master is staying away a long time,” and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. *Christ (Matt. 24:45-51)*

In this parable, Jesus uses several metaphors—words and expressions with special meanings. Let us first decode them—see their parallels in our everyday language—and later view them and study them as a whole:

Jesus’ Metaphoric Language	Expressed and Explained in our Everyday Language
<i>The faithful and wise servant the Master has put in charge of His household.</i>	Those who serve in a position of leadership in the church—the pope, pastors, priests, bishops, elders, evangelists, Bible teachers and scholars. Here Jesus clearly indicates that the true leaders are both faithful and wise.
<i>To give His (other) servants their food.</i>	Such leaders give the believers the spiritual food—the attitudes, the virtues, and the knowledge they need—to recognize the Master at His Return.
<i>At the proper time.</i>	When the time of the Advent is near or when the Master has already returned.
<i>My Master is staying away a long time.</i>	This statement implies any or all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignoring or showing little if any interest in the promise of the Second Advent.

Jesus' Metaphoric Language	Expressed and Explained in our Everyday Language
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of encouraging Christians to investigate the news of the Return of Jesus as a thief, assuring them that He has not yet come. • Discounting the present possibilities and opportunities. Always referring to the future, by “extending” the appointed time of the Advent.
<i>Beat his fellow servants.</i>	Abusing one's position, failing to perform one's duty as a leader of the church. Refusing to give Christians “the food” or the knowledge they must receive concerning the Return of their Lord. Putting one's desires above the Master's commands and counsels.
<i>Eat and drink with drunkards.</i>	Associating or sharing “food” (ideas and beliefs) with like-minded believers who are also spiritually complacent, “drunk,” or unaware of the Return of the heavenly Thief. Avoiding the believers who are spiritually sober, watchful, and wise.
<i>The Master will cut him to pieces.</i>	Any religious leader or spiritual authority who engages in such misdeeds (such as failing to prepare Christians for the Return of the Master or ignoring the news of His Return) will receive the harshest punishment, because he has put himself above his Master. He is enjoying leadership in the church, while the One who put him in charge of His Household is being ignored, rejected, and ridiculed as a false prophet or perhaps even as the Antichrist.
<i>Assign him a place with the hypocrites.</i>	Anyone who assumes the responsibility of being a spiritual leader must be willing to sacrifice everything for his Lord, including his position in the church. If he glorifies his Master by words, but refuses to pay attention (watch) to the news of His Return—for whatever reason—he is a hypocrite.
<i>Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.</i>	Only faithful and wise Christians will be allowed into heaven. The unfaithful, the hypocrite, the spiritually drunk and foolish will be sent to hell. Their predominant feelings in hell will be grief (weeping) and anger (gnashing of teeth)—grief for the opportunities lost and the imminent punishment imposed; and anger at one's own folly, negligence, and failure to have been faithful and wise while one had a chance.

Let us now put the pieces of the parable together and study its contents as a whole. Jesus, the Mighty, the Lord, who has all powers in His hands, speaks to His servants, the church leaders, those in charge of His Household, with supreme authority as the All-Powerful Master and Mover of the universe. He commands them to arise and prepare their fellow-

believers for His Return. He offers them the most glorious rewards and blessings if they conform to His command (put them in charge of all His possessions), and warns them of the most grievous punishment (put them in hell with the hypocrites) if they fail to perform their divine duty.

In this most authoritative parable, Jesus divides the religious leaders into two groups:

- Those who are “faithful and wise.”
- Those who are “wicked.”

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness. That is how Jesus describes the young girls who, because of their lack of wisdom, miss Him. But in this parable, Jesus describes the unfaithful and unwise leaders as “wicked,” not as “foolish.” Why? Most likely, the reason for the harsh verdict is the awesome responsibility the Master has delegated to church leaders. In his prophecies of the last days, Daniel also uses “wise” and “wicked” as opposites:

None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise understand. Daniel 12:10

The Revised English Bible attaches the word “leader” to the “wise:”

...the wicked will continue in wickedness and none of them will understand; only ***the wise leaders*** will understand. Daniel 12:10

Jesus then describes the conduct of each group of leaders. The faithful and wise leaders give their followers “their food at the proper time.” They teach them and prepare them for the Return of their Master. What about the wicked leaders? Jesus points to the three infractions they will commit:

- They keep saying “My Master is staying a long time,” a statement that implies a lack of interest in the promises of the Master to return and reclaim His Household. It also implies that although the Master has returned, the unfaithful leaders continue to tell their followers to wish and wait for the future.
- Such leaders abuse their position of honor, because they fail to prepare their followers for the Return of their Lord, and perhaps discourage Christians from investigating the News of His coming as a humble man. They may even call Him a false prophet or the Antichrist. They display more interest in their temporary security than in their spiritual and everlasting destiny.
- And finally, such leaders are the kind who “eat and drink with the drunkards.” They associate only with, and receive support from, Christians who live in a state of “spiritual drunkenness,” which is the exact opposite of “watchfulness.” As Jesus’ statement implies, and St. Paul confirms (II Tim 4:3), the spiritually drunk leaders tell their followers what their itching ears like to hear, and the leaders in turn listen only to those followers who tell them what their itching ears like to hear! This is what happened in the First Advent. Do people learn the lessons of history?

Question: If Jesus came from the sky, would the issue of preparing Christians for the Second Advent be as critical as Jesus describes in this parable? There are many wonderful pastors who seldom if ever talk about the Second Advent. Catholic priests

generally ignore this issue altogether. Would Jesus send all those devoted pastors and priests to hell just because of their failure to talk about the Second Advent?

If Jesus came from the sky, even the most ignorant Christians would at a glance recognize Him. Talking about the Advent would not make much difference in leading the believers to their Lord. Only if Jesus came as a humble Man, only if He concealed His glory in a thief-like manner—as He did the first time—only then would all these dire warnings and horrible punishments be justified. It is only then that “the believers” would dare to deny Him, argue with Him, denounce Him, and persecute Him the way they did the first time. It is only then that they would deserve the punishment of hell. Only then would justice demand “the equivalent treatment” promised in the Scriptures:

...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. *Christ (Luke 12:8-9)*

If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Christ (Luke 9:26)

In the parable of the faithful and wise servant, just as in the parable of the wise and foolish maidens examined earlier, Jesus emphasizes and asks His followers to live by the greatest of all virtues: Wisdom. What does “Wisdom” teach us? If “Wisdom” could speak, what would it say? The following is perhaps the message it would send to every faithful follower of the Lord, especially to every pastor, priest, Bible teacher, or any other servant the Master has put in charge of His Household:

Dear Servant of the Church:

You have heard and taught to others the “Theory of Heavenly Descent” many times. It is carved on your memory as if in stone. What if that theory is unfounded? Are you—the leader of the church, the one the Master has put in charge of His Household—not responsible to present also the other theory, that of coming like a thief, to your followers? Can any harm come from teaching both points of view, both theories? Have you pondered what you may do to your Lord if your one-sided theory turns out to be wrong? The consequence of ignoring or distorting the promise of the Lord “to Return like a thief” is awesome. It may lead you—the servant of the Lord—to deny, to denounce, and perhaps even to persecute your Master, the One you praise and glorify in your sermons and songs, the Savior you cherish as the joy of your life and the Lord of your destiny. Because if your Master returns as a humble Man as He did the first time, then you will be tempted to call Him the Antichrist, instead of the Christ. You will be tempted to do to Him what the people who prayed for His coming—”His own”—did to Him the first time.

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. John 1:11

In the parable of the faithful and wise servant, Jesus also makes this statement:

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. *Christ (Matt. 24:50)*

Question: If Jesus came from the sky, would it really matter if He came on a day or at an hour people were not aware of? Suppose you expected a guest, but did not know when he would come. Suppose he came at midnight, when you were asleep. If he knocked, and

you opened the door and saw him, would you not know him and welcome him? As we can see, being unaware of the day or the hour would be critical only if your guest came in a way that you could miss him. It matters only if he entered your house and left without your awareness, just like a thief.

If Jesus appeared on the clouds, He would be on every television screen. Everyone with a camera would be outdoors taking pictures. His heavenly descent would be by far the grandest Event since the beginning of time. That day would not have come like a thief in the night:

The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night... *1 Thessalonians 5:2*

Thus it is obvious that Jesus' repeated emphasis on preparation, watchfulness, wakefulness, vigilance, alertness, and wisdom is needed only if He comes in a way that many Christians will miss Him exactly as many Jews missed Him the first time. That is what "coming like a thief" means.

Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake... *Christ (Rev. 16:15)*

The overwhelming evidence presented throughout this book indicates that seeing the Light of the Lord requires insight, not eyesight; that we must search for Him not with a camera in our hands, but with wisdom in our hearts; that we can find Him not by gazing at the clouds, but by scattering the clouds of untested and unproven assumptions and suppositions generated from the minds of the letter-minded Christians. To catch the Heavenly Thief, we must overcome not our dozing or defective eyes, but our sense of complacency, or in Jesus' terminology our spiritual "drunkenness." We must make every effort not to build our everlasting destiny on the unfounded theory or assumption that when the Lord comes we will be the first to see and welcome Him. We must make every effort not to fall into the hidden trap of literal thinking. That well-concealed trap, that seemingly plausible assumption, led the masses of people—who believed they truly loved their Lord—to reject, to ridicule, to denounce, and to crucify their Lord! Are we holier or wiser than they were?

To help us find Him, Jesus left a Manual of Instructions. If we are His faithful disciples, *we must pay attention to the entire manual*, not just the metaphorical signs and symbols that surround Him with fire and sword, and with dramatic miracles and angelic powers.

Will the Lord appear to those who are looking for Him with "a lamp" in their hands or "the oil" in their hearts?

...be ye yourselves like unto men *looking* for their Lord... *Christ (Luke 12:36)*

Will Christ appear the second time to those who "are watching for Him" with their telescopes and camcorders, or those with their pure hearts and unbiased and critical minds?

...Christ...will appear a second time...to those who are *watching* for Him. Hebrews 9:28

To see the Glory of God, do we need to arise from our beds, or to escape from the blindness in our hearts?

Arise...your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. *Isaiah 60:1*

Entering the Kingdom of Heaven is by Invitation

The Scripture clearly shows us that entering the Kingdom of Heaven has always been, and will always be, by invitation. Our Creator *has always invited us* in the gentlest and kindest words:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Christ (Matt. 11:28-30)

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:3, 5

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Psalms 95:6

A critical feature of the Literal Theory is this: on His return Jesus will not invite people to come to Him, nor will He give them a choice. Our returning Redeemer will make no effort to ask the sinners to repent and the unbelievers to believe. He will not give them a second chance. He will simply mark those who have already been “good Christians” and take them to heaven. Anyone who fails to “disqualify” as a Christian will remain to suffer and die a painful death.

But the Gospel teaches us otherwise. It indicates that God will not change His mode of dealing with human beings, that He will continue to respect our freedom of choice, that He will continue to invite us and give us the honor of choosing to accept or reject His invitations.

The Bible abounds with inviting and encouraging words. Consider also the following examples. They all indicate that we will have an opportunity to accept or reject our expected Redeemer. They all come from the Book of Revelation—the most significant resource regarding the events of the Second Advent:

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! Revelation 19:9

Come, gather together for the great supper of God.

Revelation 19:17

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes [the

obstacles], I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. *Revelation 3:20-21*

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. *Revelation 22:17*

Our Creator has always called us, and will continue to call us, and give us the opportunity to say yes or no.

I called you, but you did not answer. *Jeremiah 7:13*

As God knocks at the door of our hearts, so must we knock at the door of His grace:

...knock, and it shall be opened unto you... *Christ (Matt. 7:7)*

The command to seek our Lord will never be annulled or cancelled:

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. *Isaiah 55:6*

Literal theorists have caused most Christians to believe that at the Second Advent, God will suddenly change His ways, that at the moment of Jesus' Return, **He will suddenly close the door of His Kingdom to all except those who have already been "saved."** This is an illusion. It is one of the myths that St. Paul predicted will dominate the hearts and minds of Christians living in the last days. No theologian, no Bible teacher can ever close that door. The grace of God never ceases. The way to His Kingdom will always remain open.

See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. *Revelation 3:8*

How Will People Respond to Jesus' Invitation?

The evidence presented shows that Jesus has sent us many invitation cards in advance. Most of them are found in the book of Revelation. Did He also predict that Christians would accept these invitations? No! His predictions are quite ominous. They remind us precisely of what happened at the time of the First Advent. Consider this parable:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find."

So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding

clothes. “Friend,” he asked, “how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are invited, but few are chosen.” *Matthew 22:2-14*

The preceding parable is not about the past; it is about the future: the Second Advent. When Jesus uses the expression “the kingdom of heaven” or “the kingdom of God,” He refers to the coming of that kingdom to earth as it is in heaven—an event linked to His Return. Christian references confirm this fact.

Jesus’ parable offers many precious lessons. It confirms the fact presented earlier: that entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven is by invitation only.

The parable also indicates that some people are invited first. Why? Suppose you were a governor and you had a significant message for the residents of your state—a message that required a radical change from the established ways of thinking and doing things. You know that you will not be telling them what they would like to hear.

How would you communicate your message? Where would you start? Would it not be reasonable to start with the state officials in high positions and then go to the public? What would you do if those officials showed no interest in your message, and paid no attention to your invitation? Would you not then go directly to the people?

In this parable—that of the wedding banquet—Jesus intimates that He expects more from the leaders of the church, that He wants them to take the lead in bringing guests to His banquet. But the opposite happens. The leaders, the ones who are “the first,” pay no heed to Jesus’ invitation. Note once again what happened:

“Tell those who have been invited [first] that I have prepared my dinner [spiritual food]...” *But they paid no attention and went off...* *Matthew 22:4-5*

You have repeatedly read in this book that Jesus’ command to Christians to “Watch!” means: “***Pay attention to the news of my coming.*** Pay attention to anyone who invites you to investigate the news of my coming.” This parable clearly confirms this view. It shows that the news of the Return of Jesus spreads, but Christian leaders will refuse to pay any attention to that glorious news. They will disobey the command to “Watch!” because they have assumed that the Lord will come from the sky.

That assumption is so pervasive and so powerful that it destroys every trace of initiative and curiosity in the believers. It prevents them from conducting even the most cursory investigation of any claim, even if it is supported by mountains of evidence. That is exactly what happened at the time of the First Advent. One word—***king***—was, and still is, so pervasive and so powerful that it has prevented countless millions of Jews from opening their hearts and souls to the glory of Jesus.

What else does this parable teach us? Since those who rank first in religious hierarchy refuse to accept the invitation, the King invites the ordinary people. Some of them accept the invitation, but the King finds a few of them unfit for His banquet. They, too, like the ones invited first (the religious leaders) are not wearing “wedding clothes.” They, too, are spiritually unprepared for the great honor of being with their Lord. Therefore, they are removed from the banquet and thrown into “the darkness”—the place of weeping, regretting and of experiencing anger (grinding of teeth) at one’s foolishness. The

expression “tying hand and foot” symbolizes a state of being spiritually handicapped, lacking the freedom to roam in God’s glorious Kingdom.

Of course, all this happens spiritually. The souls of those who deny their Lord will, by their own choosing, enter hell (remoteness from their Lord) both in this world and the next. In this world, they can conceal the hell in their heart and soul, because “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes” (Prov. 16:2). But when they pass away from this world, they will suddenly see the pathetic state of their souls as plainly as they had seen their bodies before their death. Self-deception has enormous, indeed unlimited, powers. It can even conceal the hell-fire that is blazing in one’s heart and soul.

Note the last verse:

For many are invited, but few are chosen.

Christ (Matt. 22:14)

We know that at the time of the First Advent, out of the many who were invited, only a few were chosen. In this parable, Jesus predicts that this pattern will be repeated.

Although we must take initiative to choose God, it is ultimately God who chooses us for the supreme honor of spending eternity with Him. Note what Jesus told His disciples:

You did not choose me, but I chose you...

Christ (John 15:16)

See also John 6:65

God has His own standards of judging who deserves to know Him and be chosen to receive rewards according to his faith, nobility, service, and spiritual purity. Those without “suitable clothes” cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Such people would feel and look out of place there. They will be like a worn-out or dirty patch on a precious garment.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Revelation 3:18

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Wailing and Mourning

All the tribes of the earth will mourn [lament] over Him [the Redeemer]...

Revelation 1:7

In the prophecies concerning His Return, Jesus offered a critical clue that is either overlooked or distorted by literal theorists:

At that time...all the nations of the earth will *mourn*.

Christ (Matt. 24:30)

All kindreds of earth shall *wail* because of Him [the promised Redeemer of our time].

Revelation 1:7

What does the word “wail” mean? According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* it means *to grieve or protest loudly*. Why do people wail? They wail almost always because something happens against their desire. Wailing is certainly not a positive response.

Therefore the prophecy may have one or both of the following meanings:

- People protest against the new Redeemer, because He is attracting new followers and is threatening their security.
- People grieve over the way the protesters treat their Redeemer; they mourn His sufferings.

Sometimes one prophecy clarifies the meaning of another. The following prophecy points towards the first meaning of “wail” (protesting loudly when observing an event against one’s desire):

At that time [our time]...The shepherd will have nowhere to flee, the leaders of the flock no place to escape. Hear *the cry* of the shepherds, *the wailing* of the leaders of the flock, for the Lord is destroying their pasture.

Jeremiah 25:33, 35, 36

See also verses 34, 37, 38

Note how clearly Jeremiah decodes the meaning of “wailing” used by Jesus in His prophecies of the Second Advent. Jeremiah indicates that the religious leaders of our time—the shepherds—will *wail*. Why? Because they see that they are losing their “flock” (their followers) and their “pasture” (their livelihood). Did not religious leaders also *wail* at the time of the First Advent?

Ponder this question: How would the pastor or the priest in your church respond if he noted that half of his congregation have handed in their resignations to follow an ordinary human being—as ordinary as Jesus looked at His First Advent? How much “mourning” or “wailing” would that cause? If the resignations spread to several churches, and then to the nation, would that not threaten the whole establishment? Would that not be viewed as

the spread of a deadly and contagious disease? Would not religious leaders rave and protest bitterly at what was happening to their world?

Consider also these translations of Revelation 1:7:

...all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. *The American Standard Bible*

...the peoples of the earth shall lament Him bitterly. *The New American Bible*

Whether we consider the first meaning of “wailing” or its second meaning, the conclusion is the same: the Redeemer is not welcomed by the masses of people. Indeed both of the meanings are relevant and related: the masses of people who are displeased with Him will inflict sufferings on Him and His followers, while the few who are pleased will mourn His sufferings and those of His followers.

If people saw only power and great glory, they would exult and rejoice rather than mourn over their Savior. Grief and mourning come as a result of seeing pain and suffering. It is evident that when people become aware of the afflictions of their Savior, they express grief and sorrow.

The word “rage” in the following prophecy from Psalms further clarifies Christ’s purpose in using the word “wail:”

Why do the nations *rage* and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.

Psalms 2:1-2

Many Christian writers and scholars acknowledge that the masses of people will rebel against Christ at the time of His Second Coming. But they claim that the Redeemer will use *physical force* to subdue them. They maintain that He actually wages war to bring peace. Statements like these are common among Christian publications:

When Jesus Christ comes to stop world suicide, the nations will quickly drop their own quarrels. The joint military forces of the world will then turn their efforts against Christ and attempt to fight and destroy Him!¹

And again:

The returning Christ will be forced to deal with rebellious nations in the only language they understand—*overwhelming force*! Only then will men be willing to try God’s way of life and come under His government...²

Some literalists such as Hal Lindsey, among the most widely read Christian authors of our time, describe specific ways in which the war is waged. Here is a brief summary of Lindsey’s views as stated by Christian scholar Dr. Barry Chant:

The Russians will then invade the Middle East, sweeping through the Arab lands and then into Israel. God will not allow the Russians to defeat the Jews and thus annihilate them. Meanwhile Red China will marshal an army of 200 million men to attack the Antichrist. At the same time, a revived Roman empire prepares for a showdown in the Middle East against the Chinese...Lindsey notes that it is unusual that a land battle should be fought in these days of nuclear warfare and acknowledges that the movement of 200 million troops is not easy, but suggests that even though all this is “incredible” it will happen. The final battle will be so dreadful that “blood will stand

to the horses' bridles for a total distance of 200 miles northward and southward of Jerusalem..."³

Dr. Chant, like many others, believes that "at the end of the age, there will be an actual war between the armies of men and the forces of God."⁴ But he feels that Hal Lindsey has gone too far in literalism. He writes:

There are real problems with the literal view, of course. To take just one example, the idea of blood flowing for 300 kilometers at a depth of over a meter is clearly impossible. This has to be taken symbolically. And of course, there are other very obviously symbolic pictures-such as that of Christ riding a horse and having a sword coming out of His mouth. If these are metaphorical expressions, then there must be many others as well.⁵

To see the dangers of literalism, let us consider a few implications of a war between the forces of Christ and the military forces of our planet. "Let us reason, sayeth the Lord" (Isa. 1:18).

- Since Christ and His angels come suddenly, would the governments of the earth have a chance to unite against Him? It Once took quite a few days before the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on *the shape* of the table around which they would negotiate! The relationship between the two countries has since improved, but they have no provision or plan for a heavenly attack or encounter.
- Would the united forces of the earth have any chance of winning against Christ? Would they resort to nuclear weapons? That would be suicidal. What kind of weapons, then, would they use? Conventional? Bombs would not work; they would fall on the earthly people themselves. Tanks would be helpless against a force that has the air at its command, for the forces of Christ come from heaven. Guns and artillery would not have a sufficient range to reach the flying angels.
- What would happen to the wounded? Under international law, the wounded in a war must be cared for. Are the forces of Christ less compassionate than the earthly forces?
- Virtually all the presidents, prime ministers, and military leaders of the western world are Christians. Why would they declare war against a wonderful Figure such as Christ with His host of angels who have come to save them *with visible proofs of their awesome majesty, great power, and breathtaking beauty and splendor?*
The most advanced weapons are held by Western nations, especially by the United States. If the expected war against the heavenly forces broke out, the Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and atheists would depend primarily on the United States to be in forefront of the battle against Christ. How ironic that the war against Jesus Christ would be waged primarily, perhaps exclusively, by Christians, by those who worship Jesus and attend churches to glorify Him! Are those who believe in a literal war aware of the implication of their beliefs?
- How demeaning it must be to the Creator of the universe to have to engage in war with human beings! Can we imagine an act less dignified to the Redeemer of the world and His angels than holding and firing weapons on earthly soldiers?

- Why would the One whose thoughts and words command the earth and the heavens *need* to resort to war and violence? In the twinkling of an eye He can cause all the sinners and the unfaithful to enter a sleep from which they can never escape. In an instant He can make the rebellious vanish like dew in a desert. He is the One who with but one word can capture the heart of all humanity. Whatever He wills, if He says “Be!” then suddenly: “It is!”

By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made.

Psalms 33:6

- Although *physical* war seems far fetched and quite unrealistic, *spiritual* war seems to be inevitable. It is a war that has been waged between the masses of people and the Messengers of God since the dawn of history.

Just as Janness and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men [the people of our age] oppose the truth.

11 Timothy 3:8

What then would be the most likely response of the people to the powerful, descending angels?

- Utter awe at their majestic and incredible sight.
- Indescribable dread of the wrath of God and eternal punishment.
- Prayerful and trembling hands that would reach heavenward to seek forgiveness and mercy.
- Utter joy that God’s promises have come true.
- Immeasurable hope to be among the elect.

Only an insane mind would refuse to submit to *visibly* powerful angels, to the awesome sight of One crowned with great glory and splendor.

We often ascribe to God some of our own vices: injustice, cruelty, favoritism, and apathy. War is another vice we attribute to Him.

31

I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Nothing to Eat

Christ (Matt. 25:42)

Prophecies pointing to the rejection of Jesus on His Return are numerous. Consider the following verses from the Olivet Discourse, which contains some of the most significant signs and clues Jesus gave concerning His Return:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25:34-36

The preceding verses indicate that some believers will recognize Jesus, accept His invitation, and support Him as they did the first time. These believers are on the right side of the King.

Then the King turns to His left and speaks to those who will deny Him:

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."

Matthew 25:41-43

Note how clearly Jesus specifies His sufferings on His Second Advent:

- **Poverty:** He will suffer from lack of proper food, drink, and clothing.
- **Rejection:** The believers will not recognize Him. They will refuse to invite Him into their hearts and homes. People do not invite "a thief" or a stranger to their homes.
- **Sickness and imprisonment:** He will suffer from both.

You may say: "We have freedom of speech. How could Jesus be put in prison?" You are justified in asking this question if we assume that He will come from countries where such freedom is granted. But consider this possibility: Can you imagine the consequences if Jesus appears in a Muslim country and the religious leaders see their followers abandoning them in droves to follow a stranger—an ordinary human being who calls

Himself the Savior of the world? (Prophecies seem to indicate that Jesus will once again come from the East—the Holy Land and its surrounding districts and countries—and not from the West.)

Note the following verse once again. It clearly shows that we will have a choice either to invite Jesus or to not to invite Him:

The King [Jesus] will...say..."I was a stranger and you did not invite me in..."

Matthew 25:40, 43

In the preceding parable, Jesus begins by speaking about His own suffering. Then each of the two groups—believers and deniers—ask Him when did He endure imprisonment, hunger, and sickness. In response, Jesus refers to the suffering of His humble servants. He mourns their pain and not His own. Why? Because the Master loves His beloved servants more than Himself. He feels more from their pain than from His own. This, of course, is a clear sign of His nobility. It shows that the Master cares far more for His servants than for Himself, just like a hungry or sick mother suffers far more for the hunger or sickness of her baby than for her own.

Just consider how is it possible for the new followers of Jesus to suffer, while Jesus Himself will live in comfort? This is an absolute impossibility. A rejected leader is always in greater danger than his followers, because he is considered the source of the threat. It was for this same reason that Jesus was executed before His disciples faced their deaths.

The Supreme Powers of Expectation and Tradition

It is clear that biblical prophecies predicting the rejection of Jesus by the masses of people at His Second Advent are far more numerous and conclusive than the ones predicting the same destiny for His First Advent. As we noted, only one chapter from Isaiah (53) refers to a “suffering servant.” Since that chapter offers several clues relevant to the life and destiny of Jesus, Christian scholars relate it to the First Advent. But nowhere does Isaiah indicate that the prophecy points to the expected Savior of the Jews.

This point comes to mind: Christian interpreters have noticed and proclaimed repeatedly a few verses from Isaiah concerning an unknown “suffering Servant.” And they have wondered why the Jews failed to ponder these verses and recognize their relevance to Jesus. And yet they have failed to notice and acknowledge multiple prophecies concerning their own expected Savior—their own “suffering Servant!” The prophecies that predict suffering for Christ at His Second Advent should have received far more attention than the ones that predict suffering for His First Advent. Why?

- They are far more numerous, and
- They specify who the “suffering servant” is.

Let us be fair to the Jews. They have been criticized for centuries for failing to understand Isaiah’s unspecified references to a “suffering Servant.” If we follow their example and deny *our* “suffering Servant,” how much blame will we deserve, and receive? The Jews failed to notice only one yellow “blinking light” in only one book of the Bible. What will be the judgment of history concerning us—our bias—if we fail to notice numerous “red lights” posted throughout the Bible?

Question: Why have so many people for so many centuries failed to notice so many warning signs? The answer to this question lies in the way the human mind works. Consider this example. How would you see the world through a red lens? Would not that lens tint everything that you see? Would it not make everything appear reddish to your eyes? That is exactly what “the lens of literal thinking” does. It distorts and blends everything into one picture and one color: the victorious return of Jesus from the sky with thousands of flying angels. Any image, any idea that fails to blend and harmonize with that majestic sight, with that glorious portrait, is filtered out. The powerful lens of expectation and intense desire changes the unwelcome color, texture, or image just enough to make it fall and fit into the expected and desired range.

The powers of expectation, intense desire (“itching ears”), ingrained attitudes, and long-standing traditions are awesome. They can conceal the brightest light. That is how Jesus—the light of the world—has remained, to this day, invisible to countless millions of spiritually blind people. These powers are so intense that they conceal even the clear and conclusive instructions of the Gospel, that we must strive to discern the Word of God with a spiritual perspective (I Cor. 2:14).

Consider this question: How can Christian leaders and scholars keep their theory of Literal Descent alive, if they admit that there is even one verse that points to a suffering servant? Would not that verse by itself have the power to shake and even undermine their whole theory? Would it not cast doubt into the minds of their followers? Would it not become a thorn on the stem of a beautiful flower?

Consider also this possibility: anyone who believes that Jesus will once again come as a “suffering servant” would have to admit that he himself may be among the believers who would deny his Lord and make Him suffer! How painful is that admission?

Jewish religious leaders prevented their followers from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus told them:

You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. *Matthew 23:13-14*

Do we have any reason to believe that the role of Christian leaders at the time of the Second Advent will be any different? Do we have any reason to think that they are ready—with keys in their hands—to open that Kingdom to the masses of their followers? Is it reasonable to believe that they are waiting to invite a humble man, who looks like their neighbor, to their churches to proclaim that he is their Lord—the One they have been glorifying and worshipping all their lives? Will they invite a glorious Spirit—hidden like a thief behind the veil of humility, peace, and patience—to their lofty and majestic tabernacles to proclaim that He is their beloved Savior? Will they acknowledge that He must suffer and experience every conceivable pain and agony at the hands of some of the literal-minded and zealous Christian believers who will be listening to Him in those tabernacles?

Will Jewish leaders recognize their Redeemer the second time, and tell their followers: “We are terribly sorry! We missed our Messiah the first time, let us not miss Him the second time!”? Will Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim leaders encourage their followers to investigate the divine origin of a humble man who may look like anyone of them? Do we have any reason to believe that the religious leaders of our age are more spiritually advanced than those who lived in the past? What did Jesus say to the Bible teachers of His age? Would He not repeat the same words today:

Woe to you, teachers of the law [of Moses] and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, “If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” *Christ (Matt. 23:29-30)*

The Key to the Kingdom of Heaven

Where is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven? Is it in the hands of religious leaders and scholars, or is it in the hearts of the humble? Many Christians look for that key in beautiful sermons and in best-selling books by famous authors. This assumption is common among the followers of all religions. Let us put this popular but unfounded assumption to the test.

Few biblical lessons are as clear and critical as the one that portrays the role and the response of religious leaders to the First Advent of Jesus. The rabbis devoted their whole lives to the study of their Scriptures; that was their specialty. They were considered “the first” by the people, and yet they were “the last” to acknowledge the truth.

The Gospel shows that the most bitter enemies of Jesus were the religious leaders of His time. Have you wondered why? Like the Bishops, pastors, and priests of this age, the rabbis read and taught their Scriptures, and considered themselves loyal to the Law and the Prophets. Yet when their promised Redeemer challenged their literal interpretation of prophecies, this is how cruel they became:

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned Him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at Him; they blindfolded Him, struck Him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took Him and beat Him. *Mark 14:61-65*

Yes, the religious leaders were the first in the eyes of people, but the last in the eyes of God. Will history repeat itself? Consider this prophecy from Jesus:

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne...many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” *Matthew 19:28-30*

See also Matt. 20:16

Let us carry this critical lesson of history—the response of religious leaders to Jesus—forward from the first century to the twenty-first. To do so, let us begin with this incredible statement:

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth...the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

Matthew 21:32

Ahead of whom? Ahead of those who ranked first in the religious hierarchy: the chief priests and rabbis. Let us now study the details and examples. Who were the two most highly-regarded leaders in the religious hierarchy among the Jews at the time of Jesus? Who were the two most powerful, most trusted, and most revered religious leaders? They were Annas and Caiaphas. How did they judge their Messiah? They denied Him, found Him guilty of being an imposter, and condemned Him to death. Their knowledge of their Scriptures served the exact opposite of what it was supposed to serve. In their narrow, literal minds, they found no connection between Jesus and the Hebrew prophecies.

Let us now move forward to this century. Let us take a look at ourselves. To be objective in our judgment, let us descend from the floating clouds of assumptions and fantasies to the harsh demands of reality. Let us assume that what happened at the time of the First Advent could happen again. Let us then ask: who are the two most revered Christian leaders of our time? Who are as highly regarded today by Christians as Annas and Caiaphas were by the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus? The most likely candidate for Catholics would be the Pope and the most likely candidate for Protestants would be the reverend Billy Graham.

Now, let us assume that Jesus has returned and these two leaders have condemned Him in the harshest words, just as Annas and Caiaphas had done long ago. They are calling Him a deceiver, a false prophet, and even accusing Him of being the Antichrist. Further let us assume that while this is going on, a number of prostitutes in Detroit, New Orleans, Moscow, Paris, Rome, and Jerusalem have recognized Jesus and are calling Christian leaders everywhere to open their hearts and homes to their glorious Redeemer—the One who has once again appeared as a humble man, who has once again hidden His divine glory in gentleness, patience, and peace.

You may consider this scenario an absolute impossibility. Yet this is exactly what happened at the time of Jesus. This is not an exaggeration. The words of Jesus Himself testify to this seemingly incredible event. The critical question is this: What reason do we have to think that what happened then, could not happen again, that history would not repeat itself?

The purpose of offering this scenario is, of course, not to discredit, in any way, either the Pope, the reverend Billy Graham, or any other Christian leaders. Only God knows their hearts. The Pope and Billy Graham may be as spiritually advanced and as wise and worthy as angels in the highest heaven. The only purpose of citing this scenario and the names of those prominent leaders is to awaken this thought in your soul and the soul of every other sincere Christian: that the way to the Kingdom of Heaven is not paved with status in the Church, with popularity or prestige in the eyes of people, with the number of best-sellers a Christian scholar has written, or with the degrees he has acquired in biblical studies from the most prestigious seminaries.

The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Christ (Matthew 23:11-12)

The Kingdom of Heaven is not paved with Ph.D.s, D.D.s. or the number of faithful followers a charismatic leader may have around the world. That Kingdom is paved first and foremost with humility. Have you ever read a statement like this anywhere in the Bible: “Blessed are Christian leaders and Bible scholars, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”? No, to enter the Kingdom of heaven we do not need degrees or publications, we need spiritual virtues.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus blesses the true believers nine times. In each verse, He glorifies a specific virtue. They all lead us to God, to true knowledge, and to happiness. None of those nine virtues relates even remotely to Bible study. Surprisingly—but is it surprising?—two of them relate to humility:

Blessed are the poor in spirit [the humble], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Christ (Matthew 5:3, 5)

Why would humility receive such an honor? How can it bring glorious blessings from God? Why would God love the meek and the humble? Is humility related in any way to one’s position in the church? Unfortunately, the further a leader rises, the harder it becomes for him to stay meek and humble, and the more he has to lose if he tells people what they may *not* want to hear! If this is true, then Christian leaders are spiritually more handicapped than ordinary Christians! Is this not amazing? Should we then rely on our leaders to lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven? Should we let them determine our everlasting destiny? Should we be complacent and assume that our religious leaders will tell us what we need to know as soon as we need to know it?

Alas, 2,000 years have passed and the rabbis are still not telling the Jews what they need to know! Will Christian leaders be an exception? What can possibly make them an exception?

The Seven Woes

The Gospel contains a discourse called the “Seven Woes.” It shows the highest expression of divine wrath. In this discourse, we see Jesus—the gentle, peaceful, and humble Son—speaking with an anger that can come only from the authority of the Father. Nowhere does Jesus condemn any group of people as severely as He does here.

Who do you think would deserve such an outpouring of wrath? Who else but religious leaders, the “teachers of the law” of Moses and their zealous and closed-minded students, the Pharisees?

Why do you think Jesus condemned those leaders so severely? Consider this example. Suppose you were to leave your children in the care of a friend while you go away on a trip. But when you return to claim your children, your friend denies that you are the parent. Not only that, he insults you, attacks you, and threatens to kill you. How would you feel? How intense would be your anger? This example gives us a glimpse of how Jesus felt when those rabbis denied Him and prevented their followers from offering their hearts and souls to their Lord, to the true head of the heavenly Household.

How did Jesus express His anger at those zealous, closed-hearted and letter-minded leaders? He condemned them seven times, each time prefacing His statements with this grave warning: “Woe to you!” Here is the first of “the seven verses:”

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. *Matthew 23:13-14*

To recognize the intensity of Jesus’ anger at those leaders, note the words He chose to describe them:

<i>Blind guides</i>	<i>Snakes</i>
<i>Blind fools</i>	<i>Brood of vipers</i>
<i>Blind men</i>	<i>Whitewashed tombs</i>
<i>Hypocrites</i>	<i>Full of dead men’s bones</i>
<i>Blind Pharisees</i>	

Matthew 23:1-36

Why would the masses of Jews put their everlasting destiny in the hands of “blind guides” and “fools”? Mostly because they assumed that the key to the Kingdom of Heaven lay in the hands of those who “knew” the Bible “better” than they did. They denied their Lord because they failed to learn this simple but fundamental lesson found throughout the Bible: Only the heart can attract the light of truth, a heart as pure and as receptive as a polished mirror. The mind, like a frame, may hold the mirror, but it cannot and does not receive the light. Will Christians take heed and learn this simple but fundamental lesson? Will they be able to prevent history from repeating itself? Will most of them follow the example of “the wise maidens” who filled their lamps with the oil of wisdom, or will most of them follow the example of the foolish ones who had little if any oil in their lamps?

Conclusion

**What Should
Christians Do?**

34

Being Prepared for Both Possibilities

The purpose of this book is to encourage and cultivate awareness and action, and to guard the believers against complacency, which is the exact opposite of being watchful. True servants are faithful and obedient to their Master:

Keep your eyes open, keep on the alert... It is as if a man [Jesus] who is traveling abroad had left his house [church] and handed it over to be managed by his servants [religious leaders]. He has given each one his work to do and has ordered the doorkeeper to be on the lookout for [the news of] his return. ***Just so must you keep a lookout...*** What I am saying to you I am saying to all; ***keep on the alert!***

Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

It is unwise to wait for the skies to deliver our Hope, and to look up to the clouds to fulfill our desire. We cannot miss Jesus if He comes from above in a spectacular manner. We are promised that “every eye” shall see Him. The promise is unconditional. It allows for no exception. Even the blind will hear about His coming. In that case, if 12 billion pair of eyes will gaze into the skies and behold Jesus along with thousands of angels flying overhead, then all these warnings, instructions, and counsels lose their purpose and relevance.

- That we should “watch” or “pay attention”
- That we should stay awake, alert, and aware
- That we should beware of false prophets
- That we should not let Jesus find us sleeping
- That we should avoid the many traps that surround us
- That we should pray to know Him
- That He will come like a thief

All of Jesus’ instructions and commands instill a sense of urgency. They clearly declare this message: If you are negligent, complacent and inattentive, you will miss your Redeemer. How can this happen? Only if Jesus comes like a thief, only if He is hidden in a physical form, only if He looks like other human beings.

Jesus told the Jews:

You do not know Me...

John 8:19

What did the Jews not know about Jesus? That He was a heavenly Thief among them. The real Jesus was hidden in His body.

Now suppose this is the way Jesus will return, but we keep hoping and insisting that He must come from the skies. Will we not then treat Him the way people treated Him the first time? Will we not reject Him, shun Him, and even call Him the Antichrist? Would any sincere Christian, who walks by the light of wisdom, take that awful chance? Would you? What do we have to lose if we prepare for both a heavenly and an earthly Return of Jesus?

Will History Repeat Itself?

The evidence presented in this book indicates that history will indeed repeat itself, that Jesus will not come in the expected way—surrounded by circles of light and fire and flying angels. Yes, He will be as visible as “the lightning,” to the spiritually awake and sighted. But to the spiritually asleep, negligent, and blind, He will be as hidden as a thief in the darkness of the night.

Only a pure heart will discover His divine distinctions. Only an awakened soul will see His Soul. Only a watchful heart will discern His splendor. Only a ***faithful*** believer will see the glory of God in Him:

Did I not tell you that ***if you have faith*** you will see the glory of God? John 11:40

Jesus was the Lord. He had the power to turn all the skeptics into submissive and fearful believers. But did He ever try to force faith on even one reluctant soul, on even one deceptive heart? On the contrary, He carefully kept the gift of faith hidden from such people. He prevented their eyes from seeing the beauty and glory of God.

The Jews expected their Messiah to come from an unknown place just as Christians believe today. They had the right expectation, but mistook “the cells” for “the soul.” Did anyone know where Jesus’ Spirit came from? It came from God. But does anyone know where God is?

The entire Bible testifies that the events of the Second Advent will be almost identical with those of the First. Jesus will appear as a human and live as lowly a life the second time as He did the first time. And He will be treated as harshly as He was the first time. The events of the days of Jesus and the days of Noah will repeat themselves:

The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah’s time.

Christ (Matt. 24:37)

Asking the Critical Questions

If Jesus comes like a thief, is there any way of knowing with absolute certainty that He is the One that we are expecting—that He is indeed our true Redeemer? To attain that level of certainty, what critical questions should we ask Him? Are there unmistakable standards by which we will be able to know Him?

The Theory of Heavenly Descent has prevented Christians from asking these critical questions. That theory has stifled curiosity. It has prevented thoughtful Christians from considering these issues. But we must keep asking these questions and raising these issues, for the consequences of not doing so are unthinkable. Without contemplating the possibility that Jesus will come as a thief, and without recognizing the standards by which we can know Him, we will be caught totally unprepared. We may stand face to face with Him and speak with Him, without getting even a glimpse of His glory. Were not the majority of the Jews caught in this trap—the trap of not knowing how to know their Redeemer? Did they not face that challenge totally unprepared?

That is why Jesus repeatedly urged us to be properly dressed for His banquet. That is why He urged church leaders to give “food at the proper time” to believers (Matt. 24:45-51). *Now is the proper time.* If not now, when?

This book offers the food that Jesus asked church leaders to offer the believers, but they have so far failed to do so. They have violated Jesus’ instructions in one of two ways: either they have failed to offer any food, or otherwise have offered a food that tastes sweet, but provides little if any nourishment to the soul. They continue to tell the believers, in Paul’s words, what “their itching ears like to hear.”

Should we always be content with our favorite food, with what tastes good in our mouth? Should we disregard the biblical promises that we will receive a humble Savior, because we prefer a powerful One?

To be just to our soul and to guard our everlasting destiny, we must refuse to submit to our personal cravings. We must look impartially at all the foods Jesus prescribed for our soul. We must learn the lesson of the Pharisees. They followed their cravings and it proved toxic to their souls. If we walk in their ways, the same consequence awaits us.

What has happened to the abundance of the nourishing foods that Jesus offered to keep us healthy and to prepare us for His banquet? His offerings have all been locked tightly in the box of literal thinking. Millions of Christians accept and love that box without

making any attempt to look inside. This book is an attempt to open the beloved box and to display all the heavenly foods that very few Christians have had a chance to taste.

Most believers are so wrapped up in the box that they refuse to look inside. They fear that its contents may spoil their appetite! That is exactly what this book does: it kills all appetite for the myth of an easy and blissful rapture into the heavens! Most Christians feel content with what they are given. They have enjoyed playing with the box for centuries. Why take the risk of opening it?

This all seems humorous, but it is a very serious business. Christian leaders have an awesome and compelling responsibility to open the box and let the believers see its contents. What if they fail? What would they lose then? Their losses would be enormous. It would be so much that it is unthinkable. Do they not recall the grave destiny of the Christian leader who failed to give to the believers under his leadership “their food at the proper time”? What happened to that leader? He was “cut to pieces” and sent to hell—the place of everlasting mourning and weeping (Matt. 24:45-50). He was sent to join the company of other hypocrites—the ones who only paid lip service to their Lord, who were not honest enough to tell the believers the bitter truth. They just spoke about tantalizing stories and myths, such as a swift and splendid rapture to paradise!

How many Christian leaders really believe that they will be sent to hell if they fail to prepare their followers for the advent of the Lord? I have not known even one. But they should be reminded and asked: Is this risk worth taking? Are you willing to spend eternity in hell for failing to be honest with the believers who depend on you? Does that awful and terrifying consequence justify this failure?

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Guarding Against Complacency

To nourish our soul with heavenly food, and to dress our spirit for the heavenly banquet, the first step is to escape from the dark prison of apathy and complacency toward a heightened state of vigilance and awareness. Liberating our soul from this prison is our supreme challenge. We have lived in this prison for so many centuries that we are used to its closed environment. We feel safe and comfortable there and consider it our home. We have no reason to step out, nor a desire to do anything except wait and wish. Stepping out of this comfort zone threatens our security.

To be complacent is to be physically or mentally awake, but spiritually asleep. It is being blind to the most glorious sight. To be awake and watchful is *to be open to any news that Jesus has come again like a thief, just the way He came the first time*. If we obey this one command of our Lord, then we will be under His grace. Is this too much to ask? Is this a burden too heavy for any soul? That is all that this book asks, and that is the reason it was written.

To recognize our Lord, we should strive to cultivate in our soul the twin virtues of vigilance and wisdom. Vigilance moves us to action; wisdom guides our steps—it guards us from falling into traps. Wisdom is Heaven’s most glorious gift to humans. Every blessing, everything good and worthy comes from that gift.

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens... *Daniel 12:3*

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom... *Proverbs 3:13*

Our soul is like a piece of pure diamond. Wisdom is the light that makes us glow. Without that glow, we are no more than a piece of gravel.

It is the vision within that gives us the insight to see, recognize, and follow the Bridegroom to His banquet. It was wisdom—”the oil” within—that bestowed light and life on those five maidens in search of their Lord in the deep darkness of the night. Wisdom is not passive. It demands action. Wisdom is not silent. It speaks without fear. Wisdom does not focus only on the present. Its perspective is the everlasting. Wisdom does not conform to convenience. It investigates with critical eyes. Wisdom asks questions and does not rest until it finds the answers.

Why did Jesus give us this counsel:

***I counsel you to buy from Me...salve [ointment]
to put on your eyes, so you can see.
Christ (Rev. 3:18)***

Everyone who has eyes has seen, and will see, Jesus, just as anyone who has a pure heart has seen and will continue to see God. Jesus walked among the Jews, but to them He seemed as invisible as pure air. They did not notice the very source and sustenance of their spiritual life. Why? For lack of eyesight or insight? Who was the real Jesus? His cells or His Soul? Was His essence flesh and bone, or the spirit of God? In an earthly life His Spirit needed a home, His body was that home. His cells, like clouds, concealed His Soul from any soul polluted with pride and prejudice. "Like a thief," He hid Himself from anyone He deemed unworthy of the honor of attaining His presence, from any soul unfit to spending eternity with Him in His heavenly banquet.

Jesus prevented the spiritually blind from seeing His glory. He did not want them to behold the beauty of His Kingdom. They did not deserve to find it. It was in reference to such people that Jesus said:

For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.
Christ (John 9:39)

Why would Jesus prevent such people from seeing the glory of His Kingdom? Would you choose a friend who wants you just for your wealth? Would you make such a hypocrite your companion for all eternity? Rewards must be ***the consequences*** of praying, seeking, discovering, and submitting to the Lord, and not ***the reason*** for seeking the Lord.

A Plan of Action

If Jesus comes like a thief, how can we know Him? What should we expect from Him, and what should we *not* expect from Him?

What Should We Not Expect from Our Redeemer?

Contrary to what most Christians believe, we should not expect miracles from our Redeemer as an evidence of His divine Mission. Only the Creator has the right to test His creatures. Creatures have no right to test their Creator. Asking for miracles is a most grievous sin. It is a violence against God. It is like trying to commit “adultery” in our relationship with our Maker. “Only an adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign” (Matt. 12:39), Jesus told the skeptics who wanted to test Him.

Our Creator wants to have only a spiritual relationship with us, not physical. We should respect and abide by this universal law: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). We cannot bind our spirit to the Spirit of God through material means, just as we cannot tie our thoughts to a tree. Paper and glue bind together, and milk and honey mix together quite well. But how can we bind the glorious honor of “loving God” to the mundane experience of “seeing someone walk on water or float through the air”?

Asking for miracles is sheer hypocrisy and duplicity. It is like saying: “O God, I love you, but I want to have an ‘affair’ with your world!” Our relationships with our Creator must be sustained by faith, not by visible displays of power. As soon as power descends from heaven, faith disappears from the heart.

Even the thought of expecting Jesus to display miracles should not cross our minds. Only our Master can decide if He wants to manifest His divine powers over the laws of nature. It is His choice, and entirely up to Him.

We should not expect our Redeemer to prove Himself by changing the laws of nature, but by changing the hearts of humankind and the laws that govern them. That is by far a greater miracle than all the wonders of the world and the only wonder worthy of Him.

What Should We Expect from Our Redeemer?

Our expectations must relate exclusively to the spirit, not to the flesh. We should expect from our Redeemer a supreme expression of wisdom, nobility, and knowledge on a scale the world has never known. He will look as ordinary as any other human being, but His Spirit will be peerless, transcendent, divine. It will be infinitely kind, gentle, and beautiful. He will shine as brightly as the sun among the stars.

We should expect the One who claims to be our Redeemer to sacrifice everything worldly, including His life, for God. He will show no desire for the comforts and luxuries of this world. He will be as detached from worldly gains and possessions as the wind.

We should expect superhuman courage from Him. He will not run away from danger to mountains and deserts or hide Himself in inner chambers. He will stand with supreme courage before His enemies. He will remain as unshakable in His claim as lofty mountains and as visible to the eyes of the world as “the lightning that flashes from the east to the west.

We should expect Him to fulfill many literal prophecies—hundreds of them. He will show a clear link between biblical prophecies and the critical events in His life on a scale that chance would never allow.

We should expect Him to be the essence and embodiment of perfection and purity. We will find absolutely no trace of sin or deception in His soul.

We should expect to see in Him a level of nobility beyond the reach of even the greatest of saints.

We should expect Him to bear the most marvelous fruits. He will exert a profound influence on all those who are touched by his grace and blessed by His glory.

We should expect Him to speak with divine authority. Everything He says or teaches will come from God, not from Himself.

We should expect His Word to be the essence of exquisite beauty and grace, adorned with supreme authority, unlike anything we have ever heard.

We should expect Him to have knowledge of the changes to come. Whatever he speaks, shall come to pass.

We should expect Him to overcome His most bitter and powerful enemies without resorting to force. His weapon is His Knowledge and His Wisdom.

There will be a spiritual war against Him, on a scale that the world has never seen. That is what “Armageddon” means. Peoples of all nations and religions—Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and powerful political and religious leaders—who will feel threatened by the spread of His message, will rise against Him, but they will be powerless to stop Him, to prevent Him from pursuing God’s plan.

God has always triumphed over His enemies, not by violence but by wisdom, not by war but by His Word.

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty. Zechariah 4:6

God’s army does not need weapons of death and destruction. Those weapons are worthy of soldiers, not the Spirit of God; generals and colonels, not the Creator of the universe. God’s army has always been, and will always be, invisible. He has the power of the Holy Spirit at His command. It was that power that made Jesus—a poor and humble man—victorious over all the forces of the world. It was that Spirit that raised the son of a carpenter to such supreme heights of honor that kings envy.

If we put together all the greatness that human beings have ever displayed, it will be as tiny as a drop compared to the vast oceans of His greatness.

Overcoming the Obstacles

Theological Degrees and Positions in the Church Often Serve as Obstacles

Let us look briefly at some of the obstacles that can prevent us from recognizing our Lord. Contrary to what most people believe, our position in the church or the theological degrees and honors that we have gained offer us no advantage. They have no relevance to our receiving the honor of knowing the Lord. History shows that they actually serve as obstacles—they often hinder us from receiving this honor.

Those whose minds have been crammed with theological theories and assumptions face a greater challenge than others. Those theories and assumptions act like “a cloud” to clutter their minds and to becloud the face of the Son.

He [Jesus] was robed in *a cloud*...his face was like *the sun*... Revelation 10:1

The clouds that conceal the face of the Lord are not vapors. They do not rise from oceans and rivers; they rise from the human heart.

Before anyone can see the Son, he must first unload his burden of “clouds.” The more one has acquired and crammed his heart and soul with unfounded assumptions, with “clouds” of human understanding, the greater is his handicap, and the harder it will be for him to see the Lord. This precious lesson—that religious leaders do not hold the key to the Kingdom of God—is written in almost every book of the Bible. Should we not then take heed of these warnings?

God works in mysterious ways. His ways are often contrary to our ways. Jesus chose peasants and prostitutes for His Kingdom, but left the mighty religious leaders of His time in the darkness of pride, self-deception, and separation from God. He knew that history would repeat itself. And He reminded us that once again those who stand first among Christians will be last. Who are the first? Are they not the ones who consider themselves the most loyal believers? Are not the leaders of church among them? Believing to be first leads to pride, and pride leads to one’s downfall. Should we not then learn this critical lesson of history?

The Fatal Diseases of Fear and Conformity

Many people have falsely claimed to be the Christ. Can you name one—only one—who even remotely resembles the profile of the glorious and transcendent Spirit of Jesus?

The standards of knowing Jesus, as presented in this book, are only a human attempt at describing the divine. No pen can describe the glory of the Lord. Only the heart can know.

According to divine justice, anyone who deserves to know Jesus will receive the honor of knowing Him and entering His Kingdom both in this world and the next. The only requirements for this everlasting honor are:

- A thirsting and humble heart
- A little oil of wisdom
- And a set of wedding clothes suitable for His banquet

Another obstacle that clouds our vision is conformity. It is following the masses of believers. We must make every effort to rise above these clouds.

Most human beings have a tendency to identify with, and to think and act like, those around them. Believers as a rule identify with three groups at three levels: first, with all Christians (about two billion of them); second, with their own particular denomination; and third, with their family members and close relatives. They derive a sense of security and protection by hoping and assuming that these safety nets will save them from misjudgment. Since God's way is often contrary to our ways, this assumption is also false. For we are warned not to follow the crowds, this safety net, like the other safety net (depending on religious leaders), is also deceptive, is also a trap for those who fail to pay close attention:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. *Christ (Matthew 7:13)*

Did not the Jews at the time of Jesus depend on the same safety net? But did that net offer them any protection? The similarities between the events of the First Advent and the predicted events of the Second Advent are both astonishing and alarming.

The Need for Prayer

Among the instructions Jesus offered to help us know Him is the need for prayer. He specifically asked us to pray, ***without ceasing***, to receive the honor of knowing Him:

Watch therefore, and pray always... *Luke 21:36*

To be faithful to our Lord, we must obey Him. We must pray to Him and plead with Him to liberate us first from the dense clouds of prevailing illusions and assumptions, and then from the twin forces of negligence and self-deception. We must pray this prayer every day, indeed every moment, of our lives:

O Lord, my hope and my desire! Sustain my soul through your grace. Guide me in your path. Remove the veil from my heart. Make me lowly and humble. Only a humble soul can receive your grace and your blessings.

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long...***He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*** Psalms 25:4-9

The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground. Psalms 147:6

O my Lord! Help me see myself as I really am, not as I want to see myself. Because, like everyone else, I have special talents and tendencies to justify myself by altering the reality just enough to make everything right in my eyes (Proverbs 21:2).

O Lord my God! Make me aware of my spiritual poverty, and let me ***feel*** the pain of my remoteness from thy glory. Save me from complacency and teach me to mourn for my separation from Thee:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Christ (Matt. 5:4)

O Lord! Here am I, here am I, ready to respond to your call, and honored to accept your invitation.

O my God! I have cleansed my soul from all preconceived expectations, for they have all been generated from human understanding. They are as reliable as roaming clouds. I will not put my trust in them. I will not build my everlasting destiny on clouds.

O my Lord! I will not spend my life waiting for the sky to deliver my heavenly Hope and Desire. I will be always on the look out for you. If I hear the news of your Return even from the humblest person, I will pass no judgment until I have looked into the news and tested it carefully according to your standards.

I will not be self-righteous, like the Pharisees who were sure that they knew the meaning of prophecies. Their certainty was merely a fantasy. They stood face to face with their Lord, spoke with Him, and yet failed to see Him. Without ever suspecting, I too, may be like them.

O Lord, my Hope and Desire! I will ever remain watchful and awake. I remember your repeated promises that when you come, you will invite me to your banquet. You will give me a choice to accept or reject your invitation. I am waiting for your call and am ready to receive you even if you are humble and lowly, even if you have never attended a school, even if you have received no worldly honors. I remember your first Advent. Who would have ever suspected that God would choose a homeless man to be our Savior? If this happened then, could it not happen now?

O my Lord and the essence of my life. I remember your warnings to watch for false prophets and deceivers. Your purpose is to teach me caution, not to instill fear or phobia in my soul. Your warnings will not prevent me from paying attention to the news of your coming like a thief. They will not make me fearful. How can I show my trust in your Word if I disobey your command, if I fail to test the spirits?

O my Lord and my Desire! No human being can ever make himself look like you. You are the light of the world. You shine as brightly as the sun. If all the deceivers put all their

lights together, they may shine as brightly as the flickering flame of a candle. If I can tell the difference between the light of the sun and the flame of a candle, then I should be able to tell the difference between you and the deceivers. I will never allow fear to paralyze my soul. In the book of Revelation you have promised to send the cowards to hell (Rev. 21:8). That is how serious unjustified fear is!

I am certain that if I obey your command to pay close attention to the news of your coming and investigate and test that news ***according to your standards***, I cannot be deceived. If all the deceivers gather together and plot against me, they will be powerless to deceive me. No one who walks in the light of your wisdom and is guided by your hand can be deceived.

A wise and sincere believer—the one who truly knows you—recognizes your voice as surely as he recognizes the voice of his loved ones. Was this promise made in vain:

...and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

Christ (John 10:4-5)

Appendices

Appendix I

“Let Us Reason Together,” Says the Lord (Isa. 1:18)

In our search for truth, we must combine the gift of *reason* with the gift of *prayer*. We must draw both from *the forces within* and from *the powers without*. Here is a brief description of eight qualities or virtues essential to critical thinking as expressed by Dr Richard Paul and Dr Linda Elder:

- ***Intellectual Humility:*** Having a consciousness of the limits of one’s knowledge, including a sensitivity to circumstances in which one’s native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively; sensitivity to bias, prejudice and limitations of one’s viewpoint. Intellectual humility depends on recognizing that one should not claim more than one actually knows.
- ***Intellectual Courage:*** Having a consciousness of the need to face and fairly address ideas, beliefs or viewpoints toward which we have strong negative emotions and to which we have not given a serious hearing. This courage is connected with the recognition that...beliefs inculcated in us are sometimes false or, misleading. To determine for ourselves which is which, we must not passively and uncritically “accept” what we have “learned.”...The penalties for non-conformity can be severe.
- ***Intellectual Empathy:*** Having a consciousness of the need to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them...This trait correlates with the willingness to remember occasions when we were wrong in the past despite an intense conviction that we were right, and with the ability to imagine our being similarly deceived in a case-at-hand.
- ***Intellectual Autonomy:*** Having rational control of one’s beliefs, values, and inferences. The ideal of critical thinking is to learn to think for oneself, to gain command over one’s thought processes. It entails a commitment to analyzing and evaluating beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence, to question when it is rational to question, to believe when it is rational to believe, and to conform when it is rational to conform.
- ***Intellectual Integrity:*** Recognition of the need to be true to one’s own thinking; to be consistent in the intellectual standards one applies; to hold one’s self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one’s antagonists; to

practice what one advocates for others; and to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in one's own thought and action.

- ***Intellectual Perseverance:*** Having a consciousness of the need to use intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations; firm adherence to rational principles despite the irrational opposition of others; a sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended period of time to achieve deeper understanding or insight.
- ***Faith In Reason:*** Confidence that, in the long run, one's own higher interests and those of humankind at large will be best served by giving the freest play to reason, by encouraging people to come to their own conclusions by developing their own rational faculties; faith that, with proper encouragement and cultivation, people can learn to think for themselves, to form rational viewpoints, draw reasonable conclusions, think coherently and logically, persuade each other by reason and become reasonable persons, despite the deep-seated obstacles in the native character of the human mind and in society as we know it.
- ***Fairmindedness:*** Having a consciousness of the need to treat all viewpoints alike, without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of one's friends, community or nation; implies adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.¹

The two scientists also present the following rules or standards of critical thinking:

The Universal Intellectual Standards

<i>Clarity:</i>	Could you elaborate further?
<i>Accuracy:</i>	How could we check on that?
<i>Precision</i>	Could you be more specific?
<i>Relevance:</i>	How does that relate to the problem?
<i>Depth:</i>	What factors make this a difficult problem?
<i>Breadth:</i>	Do we need to look at this from another perspective?
<i>Logic:</i>	Does all of this make sense together?
<i>Significance:</i>	Is this the most important problem to consider? ²

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Appendix II

Complexity of Theories of the Second Advent

Christian scholars, by filtering Biblical prophecy through their literal minds, have made prophecy sometimes even more complex than physics and mathematics! Even the experts cannot understand each other. To get a glimpse of this complexity, read the following passage by one of the best-known prophecy experts, Dr John Walvoord, Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary:

Jesus then compared the situation of the flood of Noah to the time of the Second Coming. He stated, "That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:39-42).

Because this event is somewhat similar to the Rapture in that some are taken and some are left, post-tribulationists almost universally cite this verse as proof that the Rapture will occur as a part of the second coming of Christ after the Tribulation. However, a careful reading of the passage yields exactly the opposite result. At the Rapture of the church, those taken are those who are saved, and those who are left are left to go through the awful period, including the Great Tribulation. Here the situation is just in reverse. Those who are taken are taken in judgment, and those who are left are left to enter the millennial kingdom.

In spite of the obvious fact that the illustration has to be reversed in order to make an application to the Rapture, post-tribulationists sometimes point out that the Greek word *airo*, used to express "took them all away" (v. 39), is a different word (Gr., *paralambano*) than used in verse 40 and in verse 41, "will be taken." Though admitting that in verse 39 at the time of the Flood those taken were taken in judgment, they claim the change in wording justifies reading the Rapture into verses 41-42. However, this conclusion is not only contrary to the text of Matthew 24 but does not take into consideration Luke 17 in its description of the Second Coming where Jesus said, "I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left" (vv. 34-35). In Luke, however, the question is asked by the disciples, "Where, Lord?" (v. 37) In reply, Jesus said, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (v. 37). In other words, the ones taken are obviously put to death in judgment in contrast to what will happen at the Rapture when the one taken is taken to heaven. There is no scriptural basis for reading the Rapture into Matthew 24. The occasion is

entirely different. At the Rapture, the church, composed of those who are saved, is taken to heaven. At the second coming of Christ, the saved remain on earth, and the unsaved are taken away in judgment at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The very word used to describe those taken away in Matthew 24:40-41 is used of Christ being taken away to the cross, obviously being taken in judgment as used here (cf. John 19:16, “So the soldiers took charge of Jesus”).¹



Do you like to be challenged? If you do, try to express Dr Walvoord’s ideas in your own words. Tell yourself or someone else what he is really saying!

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of examples can be given from prophecy books to show how hard the literalists have tried and still are trying to force the pieces of prophecy puzzle to fit into a literal mold. But their efforts have been all in vain. The pieces simply do not fit.

Consider this analogy. Suppose you have a set of directions to a house. You have two choices: either go directly to the house, or travel in the opposite direction by going around the globe, through many unknown territories—mountains, forests, deserts, seas, and oceans—to reach your destination. This is what the literalists have been doing. They have been following, without a map, the long and dangerous road to their destination, all because of one bias: Jesus must and shall come from the sky. There is no other way. To achieve their goal, they have ignored, distorted, and diluted every sign, every evidence that contradicts their most cherished theory! This is how powerful preconceived notions can be!

Appendix III

Secretly and Suddenly

The prophecy of “coming like a thief” is perhaps the most significant sign Jesus gave us concerning the manner of His return. It contains a powerful and vivid metaphor that should awaken every believer, that should make everyone watchful for His coming in an ordinary way—the way He came the first time. As we noted, since the literal meaning of this prophecy undermines the theory of the heavenly Return of Jesus, Bible interpreters have found a way to neutralize it. They claim that “coming like a thief” does not mean coming the way a thief does: secretly. It rather means coming “suddenly.” Although these interpreters believe in the literal interpretation of prophecies, in this case they alter the literal to make it fit their own expectations and desire. Because of the grave injustice done to this most significant prophecy, we should consider it one more time. What is the consequence of altering the meaning of this prophecy? Its consequence is far-reaching. It has allowed us to fall into a state of utter complacency. Jesus asked us to remain awake and watchful. This alteration has created the opposite state of mind. It has destroyed the spirit of curiosity, openness, search, and adventure in almost all Christians. For believers know that they cannot miss a Redeemer who descends from the sky. Misinterpretation of this most significant prophecy is a disservice to sincere believers who delegate their spiritual destiny to authorities: Bible scholars and teachers.

Let us once again briefly put this widely-accepted interpretation to the test. Coming “like a thief” and coming “suddenly” are two different concepts. An event occurs “suddenly” if we do not expect it. “A car suddenly enters our lane.” “We go out to walk. We don’t expect rain, but suddenly it rains.” How does “suddenly” relate to the Advent of Jesus. Consider the First Advent. Did people expect a Man seemingly as ordinary as Jesus to be their promised Savior? Not even His close relatives did. They were utterly surprised to hear this young homeless Man claim to be the expected King of the Jews. This is precisely what may happen again. A Man no one expects to be the Promised One, “suddenly” declares His divine Mission. People will be as surprised as they were at the time of the First Advent.

Further, if Jesus came from the sky following the celestial events predicted in the Olivet Discourse, His Advent would be in direct contrast to what the word “suddenly” conveys.

Let us now see what “like a thief” means. What is the purpose of a thief? A thief has one mission: to steal without being detected. To fulfill his mission, he must do his work secretly. Therefore “like a thief” simply means “like a thief!” It does not and should not need any interpretation.

But to succeed in his mission—to steal without being seen or heard—a thief must choose certain strategies. One of the strategies he can choose is to come “suddenly.” What does this mean? “Suddenly” applies to events that surprise us, that we do not expect, such as meeting a relative in an airport in a far away country. If a thief takes someone by surprise, he has resorted to a “sudden strategy.” Sometimes the best strategy for a thief is to remove the element of surprise. Some employees may steal money from their employers without ever being detected. Some thieves take months to dig tunnels to a bank. They avoid any sudden confrontation with bank employees.

The point is this: there is a mission, and there is a way to fulfill that mission. We set a goal, and then adopt strategies to help us reach our goal. “Ends” and “means” are not the same. Stealing is a mission; it is an end. Choosing a sudden approach is a strategy, a means to an end.

Suppose you need to find work. This is your mission or your goal. But to find work, you need to adopt strategies, such as placing an ad in the newspaper, or sending letters to companies. Needing a job and sending letters are not the same. Strategy is a path that leads us to our destination. It is not the destination.

Not only we are told that Jesus will come like a thief, we are told that the day of His Advent will also come like a thief. What does this mean? It means that that *day* will also be an ordinary day in which the sun rises and sets like any other day. No one will suspect the dawning of the Day of the Lord. The hour of the Advent arrives and passes secretly just like a thief does.

To summarize:

<i>Jesus comes like a thief:</i>	Jesus looks like any other human being. His divine glory remains as hidden in His soul as it was the first time.
<i>The Day of Jesus’ Advent comes like a thief:</i>	The day of His Advent is like any other day. It arrives and passes, but people fail to notice it and recognize it.
<i>Jesus comes suddenly:</i>	A Man no one expects to be a Redeemer suddenly claims to be the One people have been waiting for. People are taken by surprise. They cannot believe that He is the One.

One more question: If Jesus promises to come in an ordinary way, why then did He say that His coming would be like the lightning that flashes from the East to the West?

Consider the following responses:

- Jesus said that He was “the light of the world.” How many people saw that light during His life? Only a few: those who had eyes to see. The same will happen again: those with insight will see His light whether they live in the East or in the West.
- Through modern technology, sometimes even ordinary news spread from the East to the West with the speed of light.
- When Jesus was speaking about His return, He told us that He was speaking in “figurative language” (John 6:25). What does this mean? It means that we should

approach His prophecies with an open mind. If we fail, we may treat our Redeemer the way the Pharisees did. If a prophecy contradicts our theories or expectations, we should not distort its meaning. We should rather leave the door open to both possibilities: coming from the sky or coming like a thief.

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