

THE
KINGDOM
OF HEAVEN
IS AT HAND

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KINGDOM
OF HEAVEN
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A HARMONY OF THE BIBLE'S
END-TIME PROPHECIES

CRAIG REID



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2nd Printing 2014.

Printed in the United States of America

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-565-5

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2003103478

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Introduction

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3). Here we are some 2000 years later, and this very question has been asked and repeated by Christians in every language since it was first posed by Jesus' disciples on a mountain outside of Jerusalem. As important and intriguing as this question is, so much more important is the implied statement that is made in the asking. Jesus was not asked, *will* You come back, or *if* You come back, but rather, *when* You come back. As sure as Jesus walked on this earth some 2000 years ago, we can be absolutely sure that He will come again. The Holy Bible is replete with statements and illustrations dealing with Christ's return and the events that will take place at that time. When Christ returns to the earth, life as we know it now will come to an end. Although that is a vague and broad statement, its meaning will become quite clear throughout the pages of this book.

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Scripture offers substantial evidence concerning the events of the end times, although problems can arise with the clarity of this evidence. Whereas there are a great many scriptural references to the end times, the Bible does not give us a straightforward, chronologically progressive account of these events. While such books as Daniel and Revelation are very concentrated in their end time message, other prophecy on this subject is widely spread throughout the rest of the Bible as well. For the end times student, the task is to incorporate the vast sum of scriptural evidence and develop an interpretation that honors, explains, and provides order to this diverse collection of prophecy.

At the outset of our discussion, a critical statement regarding our source of information should be made. As the written word of God, the Holy Bible is completely and absolutely true. Although the Bible was written by men, their words were supernaturally inspired or breathed by God, and God continues to preserve its truth to this day. If we find apparent errors or contradictions within the Bible, it is simply because we lack the knowledge and/or understanding to grasp the truth. The interpretations presented in this book have been developed within these bounds of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references contained herein are from the King James Version.

While holding to biblical inerrancy is not necessarily a distinguishing trait for many of the end time interpretations, the method of interpretation often is (see Appendix C). In general, there are two prevalent methods of interpreting biblical prophecy. The first, and perhaps more common, is known as the allegorical method. Using this method, much of the end time prophecy is spiritualized, or taken figuratively. Descriptions of certain events in the Bible are assumed to be symbolic, giving the interpreter great latitude in his reasoning. One must wonder how the allegorist living in Old Testament times would have interpreted prophecies concerning the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

The other method of interpretation is often referred to as the literal method. Using this method, prophecy is interpreted according to its obvious meaning. If the prophecy is obviously literal, it is interpreted literally. If it is obviously symbolic, it is interpreted symbolically. While this method does require a certain degree of discernment and common sense, it is, in this author's opinion, the only permissible method of interpreting biblical prophecy.

The Bible reveals to us that at some point in the future, a man will rise to power, and under the guise of peace, he will make a seven-year covenant with the nation Israel. The Jews will again worship God and offer daily sacrifices in a new temple in Jerusalem. There will be peace between Israel and her long-despised Arab neighbors. This peace, however, will not last. The man who brought a covenant of peace will return to Israel some three and a half years later, but with the might of many armies. He will capture Jerusalem, desecrate the Jewish temple, and begin a campaign of persecution like the world has never seen. We know this man only as the antichrist. He will exalt himself as god, and demand that every person on the earth worship him. Those who refuse, if they are discovered, will be killed. Antichrist's reign of persecution will last for forty-two months, and is known as the Great Tribulation. However, at some point during the Tribulation, Jesus will descend from heaven and rescue His faithful followers away from the wrath of Antichrist. Jesus will come down from heaven, be seen among the clouds of the sky, and He will gather every Christian off the earth. This is known as the Rapture. With His saints removed from the earth, God will unleash a series of fierce judgments upon the earth and all who remain. This time of judgment is called the Day of the Lord, and is a time in which God will bring punishment and destruction upon the unrighteous. Sober attention should be given to God's promise of judgment, for it will be severe and unlike anything the world has ever known. At the completion of the Day of the Lord, Jesus will return to the earth to reign as king in a perfect

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and holy kingdom. Only those who were found righteous by their faith in Him as Lord and Savior will be welcomed into this kingdom. There, they will enjoy unfathomable pleasure. Jesus will reign on this earth as king for a thousand years, referred to as the Millennium. At the end of the thousand years, God the Father Almighty will descend from heaven, and He Himself shall dwell among us, His people, forever more.

The preceding paragraph provides just a skeletal outline of what will take place in the period known as the end times. The Bible provides a great deal of insight into those times. I cannot emphasize enough how unique and powerfully awesome these times will be. The interpretation I present in the pages of this book seeks not only to explain the events of the end times, but even more importantly, to help them become real in the mind of the reader. As with other accepted literal interpretations, this one foretells of a number of literal end time events, including the Antichrist, the Tribulation, the Rapture, the Day of the Lord, and a thousand-year millennial kingdom. What differentiates this one from other pre-millennial interpretations is the understanding that the Rapture will take place after Antichrist has come to power. The importance of that cannot be overstated; for it means that Christians will suffer the persecution of Antichrist.

Obviously, many faithful Christians will not be persuaded by the arguments presented in favor of this interpretation. That is acceptable, and I welcome any challenges to it. Of paramount importance, however, is the notion that we do not become divided as Christians over a difference in eschatological beliefs. Jesus Christ, and our faith in Him must always be foremost in uniting us as one body. No matter what is thought of the interpretation presented in this book, I am absolutely confident of one thing: Jesus is coming back to this earth—and He is coming soon!

The Interpretation

Clearly, when students of the Bible set out to understand end time prophecy, they spend a considerable amount of time reading and re-reading the book of Revelation, meditating on the words and the unique imagery John uses. After all, no other book in the Bible is so dedicated to explaining the events of the end times. The level of detail provided in the descriptions of certain events is quite impressive. And although certainly confusing at times, Revelation is undoubtedly the single most comprehensive book of prophecy in regard to the events of the end times.

That being said, however, we must realize the overwhelming abundance of end time prophecy scattered throughout the rest of the Bible. Chuck Swindoll has pointed out that one out of every thirty verses in the Bible makes reference to things yet future, including the return of Christ.¹ The Old Testament prophets spoke of the end times on many occasions. In the New Testament, twenty-three of its twenty-seven books make mention of Christ's return.²

Although the majority of scriptural references in this book come from the book of Revelation, many additional end time prophecies

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from other books of the Bible have been relied upon and referenced in support of the interpretation presented herein. One such prophecy found in the Old Testament provides a very important key to understanding what is going to occur in the end times. The prophecy of seventy weeks, found in the ninth chapter of Daniel, forms what I consider to be the foundation for interpreting all other end times prophecy.

PROPHECY OF SEVENTY WEEKS

In Daniel 9:24–27, we are given one of the most interesting prophecies in all the Bible. It is a prophecy that was given to Daniel by an angel of God named Gabriel. This prophecy was given to Daniel in 538 B.C.,³ and its fulfillment began the following century. Much of this prophecy has already come to pass, and we can look back in history and witness the wonder of prophecy fulfilled. Its final fulfillment, however, will not come until the time of Christ's return. As a result, we can look ahead and embrace with excitement and confident expectation all that is yet to come in the last days.

PROPHECY FULFILLED

Let us first take a moment to discuss Daniel 9:24–26, the portion of this prophecy that has already come to fulfillment. Historical interpretations of this prophecy have undoubtedly been numerous and have varied to great extents. While I am not inclined to review those interpretations here, I will briefly state certain conclusions from the one that appears most reasonable to me. A more thorough review of both this interpretation and another one that has gained wide acceptance can be found in Appendix B—Daniel's 483 Year Prophecy.

The Interpretation

First, the prophecy: “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined” (Daniel 9:24–26).

It is widely accepted that the seventy weeks mentioned at the start of this prophecy is actually a reference to seventy weeks of years, that is seventy times seven, or 490 years. The Hebrew phrase can be translated literally as seventy sevens, as it reads in certain translations of the Holy Bible. Given the fact that Daniel had just previously been considering a prophecy of Jeremiah involving a time period of seventy years (Daniel 9:2, see Jeremiah 25:11), when he is given this new prophetic vision involving a time period of seventy sevens, it is most reasonable to conclude that the unit of time is again that of years. So in other words, 490 years were established so that the things in verse twenty-four may come to pass; that is, the finish of the transgression, the end of sin, the reconciliation for iniquity, the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, the sealing up of vision and prophecy, and the anointing of the most Holy.

The prophecy found in verses twenty-five and twenty-six concerns a time period of seven weeks of years and sixty-two weeks of years (49 years and 434 years), or simply 483 years. We are told that these 483 years begin with the going forth of the commandment, or decree, to restore and to build Jerusalem, and they con-

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tinue until Messiah the Prince. To fully understand this prophecy of Daniel 9:25–26, one must answer four basic questions: 1) which commandment or decree is being referenced, 2) what year was the decree given, 3) what event is being referenced with “unto the Messiah the Prince,” and 4) what was the year of that event.

The decree of Daniel 9:25 was issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus, King of Persia, in 454 B.C., representing the starting point of the 483 year prophecy. The end point occurred in A.D. 30, when Jesus was crucified at Calvary. Contrary to popular teaching, this interpretation assumes the biblical year to be approximately 365 1/4 days, equivalent to the modern day year in our Gregorian calendar. Therefore, from 454 B.C. to A.D. 30, there is a span of 483 years (there is not a year zero), thereby resolving Daniel’s 483 year prophecy.⁴

PROPHECY UNFULFILLED—THE SEVENTIETH WEEK

As interesting as it is to see prophecy fulfilled (and by the way, it’s more than just interesting—God uses fulfilled prophecy to bring some to faith, and certainly to strengthen the faith of others) I can’t help but be even more intrigued by prophecy yet unfulfilled. Through an understanding of prophecy, we can be secure in the knowledge of what is to come. Though certainly aware of the fragility of this life, we are comforted in the great hope of resurrection, eternal life, and the fulfillment of numerous and wonderful promises that await us. We don’t need to be prophets to look into the future. We need only to read and understand what the prophets have already spoken, or more precisely, what God has spoken through them.

The seventieth week of Daniel 9:27 is the great foundation upon which the end time prophecies are put together. Daniel writes, “And

The Interpretation

he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation (offering) to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” As discussed earlier, this week is actually a week of years, which is seven years. Again, there are probably many who consider these seven years to be 360-day years, but this interpretation utilizes the solar year for these last seven years, as it did for the first 483 years. Therefore, this seventieth week of years is a time period of approximately 2557 days ($7 \times 365 \frac{1}{4}$).

Though we are not told specifically, we can determine that there is a time gap between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth. In other words, the seventieth week does not begin immediately after the end of the sixty-ninth week. We do not know when the seventieth week begins. Look at Daniel 9:26. After the seven and sixty-two weeks (after 483 years) Christ will be cut off, and then “the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” Since Jesus was cut off (crucified) in A.D. 30, and the sanctuary, or temple was not destroyed until A.D. 70, there must be a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Without a gap between the two weeks, the temple would have been destroyed and the “one who shall make it desolate” would have come, all within the seven years following the crucifixion. And we know from history that that is not what happened. Assuming the seventieth week has not yet begun at this time, the gap between the two weeks is still continuing to expand. The important thing to understand is this: someday the gap between the two weeks will come to an end, and the seventieth week will begin. We need to be ready should that happen during our lifetime.

As a point of clarification, I used in the preceding paragraph the ancient date of the sanctuary’s destruction (A.D. 70) as being

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the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 9:26. While that particular destruction could certainly be argued as the true fulfillment of that prophecy, or at least the first of two or more fulfillments, I do not believe that prophecy will be fulfilled until the last days. More attention to that subject is given in Appendix D. However, for the purpose of determining the existence of a time gap between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth, I have utilized the first possible fulfillment of that prophecy, which would be the A.D. 70 destruction.

Antichrist

Before we begin our discussion of the events that will take place in this seventieth week, let's first take a moment to introduce this man who is referenced in Daniel 9:27. Who is this *he* who makes this covenant, and with whom will he make it? The answer: he is Antichrist. Nowhere in Revelation or the Old Testament prophets is he actually called Antichrist, but John refers to him in 1 John 2:18 where he says, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists." Again in 1 John 4:3, John says, "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." So we see that although the spirit of antichrist has existed in this world for at least the last 20 centuries, at the time John was writing these words, "the antichrist" had not yet come. As we study descriptions of the man who makes the seven-year covenant, it should become clear that he is *the* antichrist John referred to in the two previously cited verses.

Perhaps the best way to learn about Antichrist is to first look at the big picture prophecies dealing with him. These are found in Daniel 7, along with supporting prophecy found in Daniel 2. Daniel 7 describes a vision Daniel had one night whereby he was told of

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four great kings or kingdoms that would come to power on earth. Here they are described as four beasts, whereas in Daniel 2 they are described as parts of a great statue constructed of clay and various metals. The four kingdoms are commonly and sensibly interpreted as the Babylonian, Medo Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. What is important to this discussion is this fourth beast, the Roman Empire, and the kings that arise out of this kingdom. Daniel 7:24 says, “And the ten horns out of this kingdom [Roman] are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.” It is this eleventh king who is the subject of this discussion; for this eleventh king is the man referred to simply as the antichrist.

What all this means is ten kings, or countries, will arise out of what used to be the great Roman Empire, and they will unite with one another. Daniel 2 describes these ten united kings as the feet and ten toes of the great statue of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Daniel 2:41 tells us this ten nation confederation will be a divided kingdom but will have in it the strength of iron. Verse forty-two goes on to tell us that part of the kingdom will be strong, and part will be broken. Following their rise, Antichrist will come to power in yet another nation of the old Roman Empire. As we will see, these ten kings will fully support and subject themselves to this eleventh king we call Antichrist.

In spite of other views to the contrary, I believe Antichrist will arise out of one of the countries of the old Assyrian kingdom. Daniel 11 describes a number of military struggles between various kings of the north and the south. In verse twenty-one, however, the prophecy focuses on one specific king of the north, “a vile person.” The prophecy continues, and in verse thirty-one, we see that forces from this king set up the abomination of desolation. This is the same abomination referred to in Daniel 9:27, our prophetic foundation verse. Therefore, we can identify the king of the north as the man we call Antichrist.

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It is often taught that the northern kingdom of Daniel 11 is representative of the Syrian kingdom. To be precise, however, the northern kingdom was in fact what we know today as the Seleucid kingdom. Seleucus was one of Alexander the Great's generals. Upon the death of Alexander, Seleucus was given control over part of his kingdom—Mesopotamia and the Middle East.⁵ This newly formed kingdom, at least initially, covered largely the area of the old Assyrian kingdom.⁶ By the time it was annexed to the Roman Empire in A.D. 64 however, its geographical area had shrunk, and it became the Roman province of Syria.⁷ But at its start, the Seleucid kingdom most resembled the old Assyrian kingdom. In the final analysis, the difference between Syria and Assyria in this context is not very great. When scholars refer to the Seleucid kingdom as the Syrian kingdom, they might not even be discriminating between the two terms. Dr. Simo Parpola states that “whatever their later meanings, in Greek and Latin usage, Syria and Assyria originally both referred to the Assyrian Empire.”⁸ Having already established that Antichrist is represented by the king of the north, and having further shown that the kingdom of the north is representative of ancient Assyria, we conclude that Antichrist will arise out of the old Assyrian Kingdom.

Returning to Daniel 11, some biblical scholars would identify the king described in verses twenty-one to thirty-five as the historical Antiochus Epiphanes. And they would hold that only verses thirty-six to forty-five are descriptive of the antichrist who is to come. However, it is difficult to support that line of interpretation, as there is no literary break between verses thirty-five and thirty-six that would indicate the king of verse thirty-six is anyone other than the king of verses twenty-one to thirty-five.

Another key reference to Antichrist is found in Isaiah 10. In verse twenty-four, the Lord says, “O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.”

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This reference to the Assyrian could easily be understood as the Assyrians who captured Israel in the seventh century B.C. But look at the preceding prophecy in verse 23: “For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land.” Compare this to Daniel 9:27 where it is written concerning Antichrist that “for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” As Isaiah continues in chapter 11, he gives certain details concerning what we will come to know as the millennial kingdom. This kingdom, as we will see in later chapters, follows the destruction of Antichrist in the end times calendar.

Another reference to Antichrist arising out of Assyria is found in Micah 5:4–15. In these verses, Jesus is described setting up His future millennial kingdom here on earth. In verse six, we are told that Jesus will “deliver us from the Assyrian, when he comes into our land and when he treads within our borders.” As we shall see, prior to the formation of the millennial kingdom, Antichrist and his armies will attack Israel and Jerusalem. Given the chronological order of these events, it is reasonable to conclude the references made to the Assyrian throughout these passages are speaking of the antichrist to come.

One last reference to Antichrist arising out of Assyria is found in Numbers 24:14–25. Here, a prophet by the name of Balaam prophesies about events that I believe will take place in the last days. He foretells of the days when Jesus will come again as judge and as king over His millennial kingdom. He says “there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). Also in his prophecy, Balaam tells of certain people going into captivity under the rule of one named Asshur. Asshur is generally considered to be synonymous with Assyria. In the Old Testament, the words Assyria and Asshur are translated from the same Hebrew word “Ashshuwr.”⁹ As a point of interest, though I recommend