

What Time is It?

Arlen L. Chitwood

The Lamp Broadcast, Inc., Norman, Okla.

The question is often asked, "What time is it on God's prophetic calendar?" Are we living in a time immediately preceding Christ's return? Or, could things as we know them today go on for another century or even another millennium?

Ample information is given in the Word of God to provide a clear, concise answer to the preceding. "What time is it?" The answer which Scripture provides reveals beyond any shadow of a doubt that *it is much later than many care to think or admit*. The return of the Lord to remove His Church into the heavens, and following events comprising the Tribulation on earth (which immediately precede Christ's return to the earth), are just around the corner. "Time" before these events begin to unfold could be counted in hours, or days, or weeks, or months, or even a few years. To think of this "time" though as even approaching a century, much less a millennium, is completely out of line with Scripture.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees during the time He was on earth over nineteen hundred years ago for not being able to discern "the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3). And this is a rebuke which must be understood not only in the light of Christ's first coming but also in the light of His second coming as well, for the same conditions which prevailed in Israel 2,000 years ago prevail in Christendom today. The same unbelief and unpreparedness existing in Israel immediately preceding Christ's first coming exist in Christendom today immediately preceding Christ's second coming.

I. Christ's First Appearance

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them, and departed (Matt. 16:1-4).

The question is often asked, "What time is it on God's prophetic calendar? "Are we living at a time immediately preceding Christ's return? Or, could things as we know them today go on for another century or even another millennium? Ample information is given in the Word of God to provide a clear, concise answer to the preceding. "What time is it?" The answer which Scripture provides reveals beyond any shadow of a doubt that *it is much later than many care to think or admit*. The return of the Lord to remove His Church into the heavens and following events comprising the Tribulation upon the earth (which immediately precede Christ's return to the earth) are just around the corner. "Time" before these events begin to unfold could be counted in hours, or days, or weeks, or months, or even possibly a few years. To think of this "time" though as even approaching a century, much less a millennium, is completely out of line with Scripture.

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Unbelief in Israel

There were a number of different ways in which the Jewish people at the time of Christ's first advent could have known His identity, but five of these different ways seem to stand out in a rather peculiar manner. These five ways have their basis in particular prophecies given in different places in Scripture, which all began to come together at about the same time, centering in *one person*. And when Israel's Messiah appeared, the Jews during that day could have easily recognized, from the Old Testament Scriptures, that He was exactly Who He claimed to be.

1. The Chronological Sign

In the Book of Daniel, depicting events occurring over five hundred years preceding the days Christ was upon earth the first time, Daniel had "understood by books" the number of years that the Jewish people would remain in captivity (Dan. 9:2). The length of the captivity had to do with a law of the Sabbath concerning the land of Israel. The Israelites under this law were to have allowed the land of Israel to lie idle (not be tilled) every seventh year (Lev. 25:1ff), and the Israelites had violated this law throughout a 490-year period preceding the captivity. But even though the Sabbaths had not been kept during this time, God was still going to fulfill His law concerning the land and the law of the Sabbath. After all, this was *His land* and *His law* (Joel 3:2).

To bring matters to pass, God allowed His people to be taken into captivity by a Gentile nation -- the nation of Babylon. They were removed from His land and transported into the Mesopotamian valley where they would remain for *seventy years*. This was one year for every seven, during which time the land could realize "her Sabbaths" that the children of Israel had failed to keep (*cf.* II Chron. 36:17-21; Jer. 25:8-12).

Daniel, understanding "by books" (*i.e.*, different parts of the revealed, written Word of God) the number of years that the Israelites would remain in captivity, lived at a time between two 490-year periods. The Israelites were in captivity for violating the law of the Sabbath pertaining to the land at the end of the first of these two periods; and it was revealed to Daniel that a second period of equal length, through which the Jewish people must pass, lay in the future (Dan. 9:24-27). God revealed to Daniel that a definite event would mark the beginning of the second 490-year period. This revealed event was the decree "to restore and to build Jerusalem" (later issued by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C.). Then, 483 years after the decree had been issued, Israel's Messiah was to be "cut off," necessitating His presence among His people on earth (this was the event Isaiah had referred to in his prophecy over one and one-half centuries earlier -- "...he was *cut off* out of the land of the living" [Isa. 53:8]). (Scripture uses a 360-day year. This is a year based on the course of the moon rather than the sun -- a lunar year of 360 days rather than the solar year of 365.25 days which we use today [the Julian year].

The dates 445 B.C. and 30 A.D. are based on the Julian calendar, and the time between these two dates must be changed from the Julian year to the type year which Scripture uses -- from years of 365.25 days to years of 360 days -- to arrive at a full 483 years "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince.")

The Jewish people living during the days Christ was upon earth the first time could have done the same thing Daniel did over five hundred years earlier while in Babylonian captivity. They could have gone to the written Word of God to ascertain, through studying the chronology of a subsequent 490-year period, exactly where they were living time-wise within God's plans and purposes for the nation. They could have known, the same way Daniel knew, that the time was *almost at hand*. In the first instance, a return from captivity was in view; but in the second instance, Messiah's presence among His people was in view.

2. The Star out of Jacob

When Christ was born, a Star appeared in the East, leading wise men from the East into the land of Israel. These wise men associated this Star with the birth of Israel's King; and, traveling from the East, they appeared in Jerusalem, the capital of Jewry, asking about the King, apparently thinking that the King of the Jews would be born in this city. And their presence, in connection with the appearance of this Star, caused *trouble*: "When Herod the king had heard these things [the report of the wise men concerning the appearance of the Star in the East], *he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*" (Matt. 2:1-3).

Herod demanded of the chief priests and Scribes "where Christ should be born," and he was referred to the prophecy in Micah 5:2: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matt. 2:4-6). Herod then sent the wise men to Bethlehem to search for the child, secretly planning to do away with the One of Whom the prophecy had referred after He had been found (Matt. 2:7, 8, 13). The wise men then departed from Jerusalem, and the Star which had appeared in the East reappeared and led them to the home where the child was. Being warned of Herod's intentions in a dream though, they later returned to their own country on a route which would not take them back through Jerusalem. The child was then taken down into Egypt by Joseph and Mary, a place where Herod had no jurisdiction, and was kept there until Herod's death (Matt. 2:9-15).

The appearance of the Star in the East could only have been associated with Balaam's prophecy in Num. 24:17-19: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall arise out of Israel...out of Jacob shall he come that shall have dominion..." A "Star" has been used since time immemorial to reflect upon *greatness and splendor*. In Balaam's prophecy though the word "Star," with its significance, does not appear alone. The "Star," referring to a person (One possessing greatness and splendor), appears in connection with a "Sceptre," referring to the same person (One Who will rule and reign). Thus, the greatness and splendor of this person will be manifested as He rules and reigns; and this person can only be Israel's Messiah, the "King of the Jews," for *He is the One Who will "have dominion."*

The "wise men" knew this; that's the reason they traveled to the capital of Jewry. And "Herod the king," along with "all Jerusalem," knew this also; that's the reason he and those in Jerusalem were troubled. It is not only clear from Scripture that the religious leaders in Israel should have known by the appearance of this Star that Messiah was present, but Scripture goes one step further. Scripture reveals that *they did know*. This is the reason they were troubled. Messiah was present, and the religious leaders, along with the people of Israel, were unprepared for Messiah's appearance. The religious leaders had not done that which they had been called to do -- prepare the people through instruction from God's Word. And after Messiah's appearance they sought a way out through rejecting and later crucifying their Messiah.

The knowledge possessed by the religious leaders in Israel at this time was no mystery. Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, going to Jesus by night, said, "Rabbi, *we know* [the religious leaders in Israel] that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Then shortly before Christ's crucifixion, He made it very clear that the chief priests and the Pharisees knew even more than Nicodemus had earlier admitted. They knew exactly Who He was. This is revealed in the parable of the Householder and His vineyard (Matt. 21:33ff). In this parable Jesus made it quite clear that the nation's religious leaders, who had been placed over the vineyard (Israel) in order to extract fruit from the vineyard (to ready the people for Messiah's appearance), knew precisely Who the Heir (Christ) was when he made His appearance. This is the revealed reason that "they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (*cf.* vv. 38, 39, 45).

3. Departure of the Sceptre

Another sign revealing Messiah's presence was the departure of the sceptre from Judah. In Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons in Genesis, chapter forty-nine, Jacob said concerning Judah, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come..." (Gen. 49:10).

The "sceptre" was the *symbol of governmental power and authority*. The one exercising such power and authority could be said to hold the sceptre. Judah was singled out and recognized by his father to be the one through whom would be realized the tribal rulership in Israel, forfeited by Reuben through the forfeiture of his birthright. Governmental power was to be vested in the tribe of Judah, from which Messiah, the King of the Jews, would come (*cf.* I Chron. 5:2).

About seven hundred years prior to Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah, God had established human government, wherein fallen man -- though he would be unable, in his fallen condition, to govern the earth as God had originally intended -- could govern himself upon the earth. This was done immediately following the Flood during Noah's day. And at this time a basis for all civil government was laid down. This basis involved *capital punishment for a capital offense*: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). Through God's command given to Noah, hundreds of years before the giving of the law through Moses, it was revealed that for man to be his own governor, hold the sceptre after this fashion, he must possess the power to execute capital punishment among those whom he rules. That is, *the right to exercise power and authority is vested in the right to execute capital punishment*.

Jacob clearly revealed in his prophecy that the sceptre would not depart from Judah until Shiloh (Messiah) came; and when Israel's Messiah came, that is exactly what occurred -- the sceptre departed from Judah. In John 18:31, Pilate,

seeking to remove himself from the entire situation surrounding the charges brought against Christ by the religious leaders in Israel, sought to have the Jewish people take Christ and judge Him themselves; but those bringing the charges against Christ responded, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

Thus, by the Jewish religious leaders' own admission to Pilate immediately before Christ's crucifixion, the power vested in the tribe of Judah had disappeared, signaling that Messiah, according to Jacob's prophecy, had come. The sceptre had actually departed about 6 or 7 A.D. when Judaea became a Roman province; and the religious leaders in Israel should have known at that time (and possibly many of them did know), according to Jacob's prophecy, that Messiah was present. Their statement to Pilate over two decades later though, recorded in John 18:31, was a clear acknowledgement that Messiah had to be present at that time.

The religious leaders in Israel knew Who Christ was, they (within the framework of Jacob's prophecy) were openly admitting this to Pilate (whether they fully realized all that their statement implied or not), and the chief priests then went so far as to claim allegiance to Caesar in order to force Pilate to carry out that which they themselves no longer had the power to perform. The chief priests rejected their long-awaited, prophesied King, knowing Who they were rejecting, and claimed allegiance to a pagan, Gentile ruler; and no one opposed their actions. This was the spiritual condition in which Christ found Israel at His first coming, a condition produced by the failure of the religious leaders to fulfill their calling -- a failure of those to whom the vineyard had been entrusted, a failure to extract fruit.

4. **Born of a Virgin**

The religious leaders in Israel were apparently quite familiar with certain events surrounding Christ's birth, though they had twisted these events to show gross sexual misconduct on the part of Mary, His mother. The Pharisees asked Christ, "Where is thy Father?" And shortly thereafter, referring to the same matter, they said, "We be not born of fornication," implying that Jesus had been born after this fashion (John 8:19, 41).

God had declared in Eden, in His statement to the serpent concerning Satan's ultimate defeat, that the Redeemer would enter into the world through a female descendant of Adam and be "her seed" (Gen. 3:15). Almost three and one-half millenniums later, over six hundred years prior to the birth of Israel's Messiah, Isaiah prophesied that the One of Whom God had spoken in Eden would enter the world in a miraculous manner. This person, to be called "Immanuel ['God with us]," was to be born of a virgin from the house of David (Isa. 7:13, 14; cf. Matt. 1:21-23). And this prophesied, miraculous birth was to be a *sign* to the house of David that Israel's Messiah would make His appearance after this fashion to not only effect man's redemption but to also effect Satan's defeat and then rule and reign over "the house of Jacob" (cf. Gen. 3:15; Matt. 1:21-23; Luke 1:31-33). The Pharisees would have been well aware of Isaiah's prophecy, and Jesus' claim to be the One fulfilling this prophecy is undoubtedly what brought about their question and statement concerning His Father and mother in John, chapter eight. They *knew* that He was the One fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, and this was merely part of their continuing efforts to discredit and do away with Him.

The Pharisees, along with the Sadducees, asked for "a sign from heaven"; and they had already been given a number of signs from heaven. His virgin birth was one such sign, a sign which they had rejected, though knowledgeable concerning its authenticity. Therefore, Jesus said that no additional sign would be given to this "wicked and adulterous generation" except "the sign of the prophet Jonah" -- pointing to the approaching events of Calvary and beyond, resulting from their rejection of the signs which had already been given (Matt. 16:1-4; cf. Matt. 12:38-40).

5. **Signs During Jesus Earthly Ministry**

Jesus appeared on this earth during a particular *time*, prophesied by Daniel; His appearance was announced by a *Star*, prophesied by Balaam; He was born of a *virgin*, prophesied by Isaiah; and Judah relinquished the *sceptre* following His birth, prophesied by Jacob. Other signs were also in evidence (such as the place of His birth [Micah 5:2] and the appearance of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds at the time of His birth [Luke 2:8-18]). And then to further authenticate His identity, Jesus performed *miraculous works* throughout His ministry. These were "signs" directed to Israel having to do with *the King and the proffered Kingdom*. They were the credentials of the true Messenger of the Kingdom, along with those of His disciples, to whom He had given power to also perform miraculous works among the Jewish people (cf. Isa. 35:1-6; Matt. 4:23-25; 10:1-8).

The Scribes and Pharisees though, seeing these miraculous works, did everything within their power to discredit Christ, bringing reproach upon both the Messenger and His message. They even went so far as to attribute the power exhibited through His miraculous works to Satan himself; and by so doing, they wrought untold confusion among the people. Though the people of Israel were amazed at Christ's miraculous works, as early as the events recorded in Matthew, chapter twelve, the Jewish people (because of the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees) seemed to lean more toward heeding what these religious leaders were saying than what Christ was saying. The question which they asked in Matt. 12:23 -- "Is not this the Son of David?" -- shows in the structure of the Greek text not only confusion on their part but also more of a feeling that Jesus was not the Messiah than a feeling that He was the Messiah. The words in their question, along with the complete expressed thought, translated into English, would read something like this: "Possibly this is the Son of David; but we're confused, and we really don't think so."

The Scribes and Pharisees "shut up the kingdom of the heavens against men ['before men,' 'in front of men']." They had no intention of entering this kingdom themselves, and they did everything within their power to see that the people of Israel (those comprising the vineyard) didn't enter either, resulting in the nation being left in a "desolate" condition, without excuse (Matt. 23:13, 18, 39).

Consequences of Unbelief

The two most influential sects during the days Christ was upon earth among His people the first time were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees came mainly from the ranks of the Scribes, and the Sadducees came mainly from the ranks of the priests. The Pharisees though were, by far, the most prominent of the two sects and held undisputed sway over all aspects of Jewish life in Israel. The Pharisees actually held a position in Israel which allowed them to completely control and rule the public life of the nation. They were so influential in the religious life of Israel that the Sadducees (whose religious beliefs were quite different) often had to accede to their demands in order to be accepted by the people. And their acceptance by the masses extended to the point that even the Sadducean high priests heading up the Sanhedrin also often had to accede to their decisive influence.

Because of this, the Scribes and Pharisees -- not the Sadducees -- were the ones which Jesus recognized as occupying "Moses' seat" (Matt.23:2). Moses was the one through whom the law had been given at Sinai shortly before the establishment of the theocracy. The law simply had to do with rules and regulations governing the people of God within this theocracy; and the Scribes and Pharisees, seated "in Moses' seat," were the keepers and legalistic teachers of the law. The shadow of regality still remained in the Divine law even though the theocracy had long since been taken from Israel; and the Scribes and Pharisees, because of their influential position in Israel, were recognized by Jesus as occupying a similar position of leadership over Israel to that held by Moses in the theocracy itself almost 1,500 years earlier.

Throughout the earthly ministry of Christ, the Scribes and Pharisees, in this position, used their power and influence among the people to sway the masses, turning them against Christ and the message He was proclaiming. This is the reason one finds an entire chapter in Matthew's gospel given over to a condemnation of their actions (Matt. 23:1ff). The King and the Kingdom had been rejected (Matt. 21:5-19), the King was about to be crucified (Matt. 21:37-39), the kingdom had been taken from Israel (Matt. 21:43), and the house of Israel was about to be left desolate (Matt. 23:37-39). Prior though to pronouncing desolation upon the house of Israel, Jesus pronounced "Woe" after "Woe" upon the Scribes and Pharisees because of what they had done (Matt. 23:13ff).

The Scribes and Pharisees had literally closed the door to the kingdom of the heavens for the nation of Israel, resulting in the kingdom being taken from Israel and the house being left desolate. The entire matter constituted a terminal act of rejection in Israel, resulting in iniquity reaching a full measure, necessitating God's judgment (*cf.* Gen. 15:14-16). Thus, climaxing His condemnation of those who had brought this about, Jesus announced that "all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (going all the way back to the blood of Abel) would come, not only upon the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, but upon the nation as a whole (Matt. 23:34-36).

1. The Kingdom Taken from Israel

Israel was made the repository of both earthly and heavenly promises and blessings during Old Testament days (Gen. 14:19; 22:17, 18), and numerous Old Testament saints looked beyond the earthly promises and blessings to the heavenly. They desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly"; they sought "a better resurrection," apparently paralleling the "out-resurrection" in connection with "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" awaiting Christians who aspire to heavenly promises and blessings (*cf.* Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28; Phil. 3:11-14; Heb. 11:8-16, 35).

The realization of earthly promises and blessings was opened to Israel at Kadesh-Barnea during the days of Moses and thirty-eight and one-half years later under Joshua as the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan. However, because of continued disobedience lasting over centuries of time, the Israelites never rose to the heights to which they had been called -- "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation," through which the Gentile nations of the earth would be ruled and blessed. The kingdom reached the heights of its glory in Old Testament days during the reign of David and the succeeding reign of his son Solomon. But after Solomon's death, things began to rapidly deteriorate; and God eventually allowed Gentile nations to come in and uproot His people.

The realization of heavenly promises and blessings, on the other hand, was opened to Israel almost fifteen hundred years later when Christ was upon earth the first time. Rather than the earthly kingdom, the kingdom covenanted to David, Christ offered to Israel *the kingdom of the heavens*. This was a rule from the heavens over the earth rather than a rule upon the earth within the Davidic kingdom. The kingdom of the heavens (heavenly promises and blessings) was *at hand*, in the same sense that the earthly kingdom (earthly promises and blessings) had been *at hand* during the days of Moses and Joshua. (Refer to Dan. 7:18-27 for an Old Testament example of saints occupying heavenly places in the kingdom. The words "the most High" in vv. 18, 22, 25 [second usage], 27 should be translated "the high places," or "the heavenly places. The offer to Israel of these heavenly places in the kingdom, the "kingdom of the heavens," was something the Israelites could have easily understood from what their own Scriptures revealed.)

Israel though, because of the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees, rejected the proffered kingdom and crucified the King. And Christ, shortly before His crucifixion, took the kingdom of the heavens from Israel (anticipating the "one new man" in Christ being called into existence to be the recipient of this offer) and left the house of Israel *desolate* (Matt. 21:43; 23:38).

2. Two Thousand Years of Desolation

God gave Israel forty years to repent of what the nation had done -- from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. Jesus spent forty days among His followers between the time of His resurrection and ascension, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). These individuals then carried the message to Israel, and it was attended by signs, wonders, and miracles (at least thirty specific miracles can be found in the Book of Acts). However, Israel did not repent, signs of a miraculous nature consequently ceased after the Jewish people clearly demonstrated the course which the nation would follow (about 62 or 63 A.D.), and at the end of forty years God allowed Titus with his Roman legions to come in and destroy Jerusalem (70 A.D.). The Jewish people were then subsequently driven from their land and scattered among the Gentile nations of the earth. (Note a parallel between the twelve spies sent into the land of Canaan during the time of Moses for forty days [the land of their inheritance, within a theocracy] and the apostles hearing the things pertaining to the kingdom of God for forty days [which involved, at least in part, the theocracy restored to Israel (*cf.* Acts 1:3, 6)]. The true report of the spies [proclaimed by Caleb and Joshua] was rejected by the people of Israel during Moses' day, and the true report of Christ's disciples was rejected by the people of Israel following Christ's ascension. And both rejections resulted in dire consequences.)

The Jewish people dispersed throughout the Gentile nations for two millenniums have suffered persecution after persecution, which seemingly (though not really) reached a climax in modern times in Europe during the years of the Third Reich. Six million Jews were killed in Europe during the years 1939-1945. However, the real climax is yet to come. Under the impending reign of Antichrist, two-thirds of the Jewish population of the earth will die during the three and one-half years of his power. That is, some twelve million Jews will be killed during this time. This will be twice the number killed by the Third Reich in Europe, and it will occur in less than half the time (note that the days during the last part of the Tribulation, for Israel's sake, will "be shortened" [Matt. 24:22]).

Antichrist is going to take an already desolated house and produce a further desolation, *one without parallel in history*. He will be the "abomination of desolation" who will "make it desolate, even unto the consummation" (cf. Dan. 9:27; 11:31; Matt. 24:15). And all of this can be traced back to what occurred in Israel two millenniums ago, resulting from the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees.

II. Christ's Second Appearance

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them, and departed (Matt. 16:1-4).

The religious leaders in Israel had been sharply rebuked by Christ for being able to understand things in the natural realm but not being able to carry this same understanding over into things in the spiritual realm. They could understand signs in the sky above, signs having to do with approaching weather patterns through the present appearance of the sky; but they, on the other hand, possessed no similar comprehension concerning the signs of the times, signs having to do with the appearance of Israel's Messiah.

The way the Greek text is worded in Matt. 16:3 shows two things about the way Israel's religious leaders understood "the face of the sky" but lacked understanding when it came to "the signs of the times": 1) They had learned to discern weather patterns by the appearance of the sky through experience, and 2) they had learned enough about the matter that they were able to do it quite well. Just the opposite though is shown by their inability to discern "the signs of the times": 1) Experience was lacking, and 2) they had correspondingly learned very little about the matter.

It is not taught in Matt. 16:3 that the religious leaders in Israel, and even the nation at large, knew nothing about the signs of the times. Other Scriptures make it quite clear that they did know some things about these signs. They knew enough, for example, to know what the appearance of *the Star in the East* meant (Matt. 2:2, 3), and they knew enough to know the identity of *the Heir* when He appeared (Matt. 21:38, 39). Matt. 16:3 simply shows that their knowledge and interest lay, not in the spiritual, but in the natural. They were quite knowledgeable about something which, by comparison, was of little consequence; but they lacked the same degree of understanding in that which should have been uppermost in their thinking.] The end result of such spiritual leadership was a decadent nation, a nation not at all ready for Messiah's coming; and the entire matter was climaxed by not only the nation's rejection of the King and the Kingdom but the crucifixion of the King Himself.

Immediately preceding His crucifixion, Christ removed the proffered kingdom (the kingdom of the heavens) from Israel. The nation which God had called into existence to be the repository of both heavenly and earthly promises and blessings was, from that point forward, no longer the repository of these particular promises and blessings associated with the Messianic kingdom. These heavenly promises and blessings were removed from Israel in view of a new creation being called into existence to be the recipient and to bring forth fruit in the realm where Israel had failed. The house of Israel was then left desolate, and the King, following His death, burial, and resurrection, returned to the place from whence He had come (back to heaven) until such a time as His offenders (the Jewish people) would *acknowledge their offense, and seek His face* (Matt. 23:38, 39; Hosea 5:15).

During the interim, God is calling out a separate and distinct people for his name -- taken mainly from the Gentiles, though also from Israel as well-- who comprise the "one new man" *in Christ* (Acts 15:14; Rom. 11:5, 25; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:13-15). And the offer to occupy positions with Christ in the kingdom of the heavens, which at one time was extended to Israel, is presently being extended to those comprising this one new man.

Because of Israel's rejection of the proffered kingdom, God's dispensational dealings have changed. Israel has been set aside while God deals with a separate and distinct household; and though God will once again resume His dealings with Israel, such awaits the consummation of His present dealings with the "one new man" *in Christ*. God's dealings with the house of Israel will resume during "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7-11), but until that time God is going to concern Himself with house hold dealings separate and distinct from those (both past and future) with the house of Israel.

God's present household dealings though will terminate after a similar fashion to His past household dealings (Rom. 11:21). Apostasy, ignorance, unbelief-- all in relation to the proffered kingdom -- will mark the end of the present dispensation (Rev. 3:14ff). But even so, God will still realize His purpose behind setting Israel aside and calling the Church into existence (Rom. 11:29).

(Bear one thing in mind. Many Old Testament saints [Israelites] qualified to rule from the heavens; and even though the nation of Israel forfeited this right, these saints will still realize heavenly promises and blessings [Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28, 29]. And it is the same in Christendom. Even though the present dispensation, as the last, will end in apostasy, ignorance, and unbelief in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, such will have nothing to do with those saints who qualified [or are presently qualifying] to realize heavenly promises and blessings.

Actually, during the coming age, it seems that the Old Testament saints who qualified to occupy regal positions from the heavens will rule over *Israel*; and the New Testament saints who qualified to occupy such positions will rule over the *Gentiles*. God has been calling out rulers to occupy heavenly positions in the kingdom for the past 4,000 years, spanning two dispensations. Individuals called out during the second of the two dispensations [the present dispensation] have been promised power only over the Gentile nations, not over Israel [Rev. 2:26, 27]. However, there will have to be rulers over Israel under David and the twelve apostles [Ezek. 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25; Matt. 19:28], and such will very likely consist of those Old Testament saints who qualified to rule from the heavens.)

Unbelief in Christendom

There is a very similar situation existing in Christendom today, immediately preceding Christ's return, to that which existed in Israel almost 2,000 years ago when Christ came the first time. The religious leaders were not bringing forth fruit through instructing the people concerning Christ's appearance then (which resulted in a people who were not ready for His appearance), and the religious leaders today are not bringing forth fruit through instructing the people concerning Christ's reappearance (which has resulted in a people who are not ready for His reappearance).

There was a small segment of the people in Israel watching and waiting for the Messiah's first appearance (note Simeon and Anna for example [Luke 2:25-38]), and there is a small segment in Christendom watching and waiting for His reappearance. A small segment of the religious leaders then were not content to go along with the mainstream of thought exhibited by their peers (note Nicodemus for example [John 3:1, 2]), and there is a small segment in Christendom today who are not content to do the same. But, by large, this was not the case then; and, by large, it is not the case today. *Signs* announcing Christ's soon appearance were in evidence 2,000 years ago, and *signs* announcing Christ's soon reappearance are in evidence today. And as these signs were ignored by the Israeli people then, they are being equally ignored by Christians today. In this respect, history is merely repeating itself.

As there was a chronological sign surrounding Christ's first appearance, there is likewise one surrounding His reappearance, though not based on a 490-year period of time. Then there is the sign of the fig tree (Israel), with corresponding activity among Gentile nations. And in conjunction with events surrounding Israel and the Gentile nations there is also to be a repetition of the days of Noah and Lot immediately preceding Christ's return (Luke 17:26-31).

The chronological sign and the sign surrounding Israel should be sufficient to show any rational thinking person exactly where we are time-wise during the present dispensation, but other signs exist as well. And all these signs point to the same thing once again: God's intervention in man's affairs through Christ's personal presence draws nigh.

1. The Chronological Sign

In the chronology of time surrounding Christ's reappearance, one can easily ascertain that the time for Christ's return is very near by reference to the septenary arrangement of Scripture. We are living at a time very near the end of six days (6,000 years), dating from man's creation, or very near the end of two days (2,000 years), dating from Christ's first appearance. And Christ will return at the end of six days, dating from the former, or at the end of two days, dating from the latter (*ref.* Chapter III).

In the chronology of time in Scripture, one can ascertain the exact number of years from the creation of Adam to the Exodus from Egypt under Moses. The total number of years between these two events was 2,508, which, in order to better understand the overall picture, should be broken down into at least three divisions: It was 1,656 years from the creation of Adam to the Flood during Noah's day (*cf.* Gen. 5:1-32; 7:6); then from the Flood to the birth of Abraham was 352 years (*cf.* Gen. 11:10-26, 32;12:4); and from the birth of Abraham to the Exodus from Egypt under Moses was 500 years (*cf.* Gen. 15:13, 14; 21:5; Ex. 12:40, 41; Gal. 3:17).

Though numerous periods of time are given, Biblical chronology from the Exodus under Moses to Christ's first advent cannot be followed in the same sense that it can be followed from the creation of Adam to the Exodus. Thus, we have to look to secular history for a date of the Exodus; and the best date, based on late archaeological discoveries, would be about 1446 B.C. However, these are years based on the Julian calendar, consisting of 365.25 days per year, and the 2,508 years from the creation of Adam to the Exodus under Moses are years of 360 days each (the length used throughout Scripture). Thus, the 1,446 years based on the Julian calendar, for purposes of chronological computations within the 6,000 years allotted to man, comprising Man's Day, must be converted to years of 360 days each. This conversion will add 21 years, giving us a date of 1467 B.C. for the Exodus. Then, 1,467 added to 2,508 provides a total of 3,975 years (of 360 days each) from the creation of Adam to the point where B.C. ends and A.D. begins in our present reckoning of time.

Today we are living in the year 1989 A.D. However, again we are dealing with years based on the Julian calendar, which must be converted. And converting, for purposes of chronological computations, 29 years must be added, making 1989 years on the Julian calendar equal to 2,018 years of 360 days each. And 2,018 years on the A.D. side of the division of time added to the 3,975 years on the B.C. side of the division of time brings the total number of years from the creation of Adam to the present time, as close as we can figure them, to 5,993 years.

If 5,993 is the correct number of years from the creation of Adam to the present year (1989), this leaves us seven years short of 6,000. And time for the Tribulation, which will comprise the last seven years of the 6,000, must still be taken into consideration to complete this reckoning of time. Thus, one can easily see from the computation of time covering Man's Day, from a Biblical framework and perspective, just how near we are to Christ's return for His Church, which will occur *preceding* the Tribulation. One thing though must be kept in mind when dealing with time during Man's Day. The computation showing 5,993 years from the creation of Adam to the present is based on *three unknowns*, which would allow for the possibility of a slight error (probably a few years at the very most).

First, we do not know that the archaeological date of 1446 B.C. for the Exodus is the exact year this event occurred (this date is based on archaeological discoveries, not Biblical chronology). *Second*, we do not know that our calendar as we have it today, showing this to be the year 1989, has been kept completely intact over the years. Both of these dates though would have to be quite close, if not completely accurate, making the total number of years from the creation of Adam to the present very close to 5,993 years, if not exactly 5,993 years. *Third*, in the Biblical chronology, the birth of each individual named would not have occurred at exactly the same time each succeeding year. This would allow for an error of at least part of a year (plus or minus) for each of the twenty-six generations from Adam to Moses.

Nevertheless, knowing the overall chronology of time within the 6,000 years should cause Christians to stop and consider the time in which we are living. But as the available chronology of the 490 years went unheeded in Israel at the time of Christ's first coming, the available chronology of the 6,000 years comprising Man's Day is going unheeded in Christendom today, immediately preceding Christ's return.

2. Israel and the Nations

When Christ was upon earth the first time, He cursed a fig tree which had leaves but no fruit; and the fig tree dried up "from the roots." The fruitless fig tree "withered away," but the roots remained (Matt. 21:18-20; Mark 11:12-14, 20, 21). The "fig tree" represented *Israel*, which was about to experience the same fate because of its fruitless condition. The house was left desolate, and forty years later Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the Jews subsequently driven to the ends of the earth. The house of Israel, left desolate by Christ and subsequently dispersed by a Gentile power throughout the nations of the earth, ceased to exist as a nation, but the roots remained.

Christ though, in the first of the Olivet Discourse parables, referred to the reappearance of Israel in a fruitless condition, again under the symbolism of a "fig tree," with leaves only (Matt. 24:32). Israel's reappearance after this fashion was to occur near the end of the present age. And this reappearance of Israel as a nation in the Middle East is the revealed event which sets things in motion among the Gentile nations of the earth, anticipating Christ's reappearance.

Israel is the "apple [*lit.* 'pupil']" of God's eye (Zech.2:8). The capital of Jewry, the city of Jerusalem, has been placed "in the midst of the nations" (Ezek. 5:5). God looks upon the Gentile nations through Israel, occupying a place in the geographical center of the nations; and God has set the bounds of these nations and assigned their inheritance upon the earth "according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26).

Thus, Israel occupies center-stage when it comes to the nations of the earth. When the "fig tree" (Israel) put forth leaves once again (appeared as a recognized nation once again, which occurred May 14, 1948), this marked the beginning of events transpiring among "all the trees"(all the Gentile nations). In Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, the fig tree would not shoot forth alone. All the trees would shoot forth at this time as well (Luke 21:29, 30).

After what ever fashion one understands the passage in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, it cannot be denied that once Israel became a recognized nation in the midst of the Gentile nations, through whom God could view the nations of the earth, things began to happen among these nations, setting the stage for the appearance of Antichrist and the Great Tribulation (*e.g.*, independence among nations [note especially nations across Africa], or the alignment of nations, anticipating the fulfillment of prophesied end-time events).

Scripture is very clear that the generation of individuals seeing these things occur will be the same generation living when Christ returns (Matt.24:33, 34; Luke 21:31, 32). Thus, in this respect, the emergence of Israel as a nation once again (which portends events among the Gentile nations of the earth) would have to be considered the key sign which God has given signaling Christ's soon appearance.

3. Alignment of the Nations

Gentile nations appear in Biblical prophecy only as these nations enter into God's dealings with Israel. Some nations are never mentioned, for they never enter into these dealings; other nations though are mentioned time after time, for they continually enter into these dealings.

During the years following Israel's emergence on the scene as a recognized nation once again -- the reappearance of the fruitless fig tree -- two superpowers among the Gentile nations, which will enter into God's end-time dealings with Israel, made their presence known. One, the United States, has befriended Israel over the years; the other, Russia, has befriended Israel's enemies during the same period. And the whole scenario is part of a major sign concerning the nearness of the end of the age, with the end of the dispensation even nearer yet.

According to Ezek. 38, 39, a nation north of Israel will, "in the latter years," launch a major military attack against Israel. This nation, along with certain satellite nations, will come down into "the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people[nations]." They will come against those who "dwell safely...dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" in order to "take a spoil, and to take a prey" (Ezek. 38:8-12).

The nation launching and heading this military attack against Israel can be easily identified in Scripture. *First* of all, the people comprising this nation are descendants of Magog, Meshech, and Tubal (sons of Japheth); and these three individuals, following the Flood, settled in the regions to the North, which would be north of Israel or north of the whole Middle East (Ezek. 38:2). *Second*, this nation is referred to by the Hebrew word, *Rosh*, translated "chief" in Ezek. 38:2, 3 (KJV). Rather than "chief prince," the translation should literally read, "prince of *Rosh*." Gesenius, one of the greatest of the Hebrew lexicographers from past years, associated *Rosh* in this passage with "Russia," which would seem to be very much the case. *Third*, this nation will come against Israel from "the north quarters," or "the north parts" (Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2). The literal rendering in all three instances should be, "the utmost parts of the north." This is a superlative expression, pointing to the farthestmost inhabited land north of Israel, which can only be *Russia*.

Satellite nations coming down into Israel with Russia can also be easily identified. Five nations or geographical regions are mentioned in Ezek.38:5, 6: "Persia," "Ethiopia," "Libya," "Gomer," and "Togarmah." "Persia" is simply *Iran* of today. The name was changed from Persia to Iran in 1935; "Ethiopia" and "Libya" would seem to be the same countries called by those names today; "Gomer" is a reference to *Germany* (probably East Germany as we see the present alignment of nations); and "Togarmah" is a reference to the region occupied by *Armenia* and *Turkey*.

Since the emergence of Israel as a nation over forty years ago, events have been rapidly transpiring within these countries which will culminate in the fulfillment of that which was prophesied over 2,500 years ago. Current events within these countries, in this light, are interesting; but one need not understand all the details involved to know that we're living very near that time when Russia will think "an evil thought" and make her move against Israel, accompanied by these countries. Russia has actually been moving against Israel for the past several decades through the Arab nations, more so possibly prior to the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars (1967, 1973) than at the present time. The Arabic nations' military failure (backed by Russia) in these two wars seemingly changed things for Russia in the Middle East, and Russia is probably well aware that if the nation's aspirations to destroy Israel and gain control of the Middle East are to be realized, there will have to be direct military intervention.

Intervention of this nature is exactly what will occur, seemingly during the first year of the Tribulation (Ezek. 39:9). And when Russia makes such a move, nations identified as "Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof" are going to question her actions (Ezek. 38:13). "Sheba" and "Dedan" would appear to point to *Arabian tribes*, "Tarshish" to *the British Isles*, and the "young lions" of Tarshish to *countries settled by individuals from the British Isles -- Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States*. (Ezek. 38:13 is the only place the United States is mentioned in Biblical prophecy, for this is the only place in prophecy that the United States, as a nation, enters into God's dealings with Israel.)

On one side there will be a superpower with certain other nations coming down into Israel. On the other side there will be another superpower with certain other nations questioning Russia's actions. However, before the nations voicing their disapproval can act, God is going to step in and take care of Russia Himself (Ezek. 38:18ff).

Events leading into the fulfillment of Ezek. 38, 39 form one of the major signs of the times with which Christians should be very familiar. Christians should be able to view what is happening in the world, especially the Middle East,

and know that the fulfillment of Ezek 38, 39 can only be very near, correspondingly knowing that the coming of the Lord for His Church can only be even nearer yet.

4. Days of Noah, Lot

Christ referred to conditions existing on the earth during both the days of Noah and the days of Lot as being like conditions which will exist immediately preceding His return: "And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man...Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot...Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed"(Luke 17:26, 28, 30). Preceding the Flood, the people "did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage"; and these conditions continued *until* the day "Noah entered into the ark" (Luke 17:26,27). Preceding the destruction of the cities of the plain, the people "did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded"; and these conditions continued *until* the day "Lot went out of Sodom" (Luke 17:28, 29).

It is evident that the Lord was not referring to pursuits of life which were evil in and of themselves, though "marrying and giving in marriage" during Noah's day would include the cohabitation of the sons of God with the daughters of men. The thought is that the people were going about their everyday activities after a fashion which left them completely oblivious to the impending destruction. Note the words, "And knew not until the flood came and took them all away" (Matt. 24:39). And these same conditions will prevail on the earth immediately preceding Christ's return for the Church. The world as it exists today, paralleling the world immediately preceding both the Flood and the destruction of the cities of the plain, knows nothing about impending judgment; and conditions will continue unchanged, with the people busily engaged in normal pursuits of life, *until*...

The world though cannot be expected to follow any other course. "The whole world lieth in wickedness [in the wicked one]" (I John 5:19). Satan is the "god of this world [age]," and "all the gods of the nations are idols [*lit.* 'nothing'; the translators of the Septuagint Version used the Greek word *daimonia*, referring to 'demons']" (II Cor. 4:4; Psa. 96:5). The world is enmeshed in humanism, with its goals, aims, ambitions, aspirations, following a humanistic approach to all things in life. Thus, it is only natural for the world to pursue a pattern of life as given in the text.

The entire thought centers around a warning to the saved, not the unsaved: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so *that day* [the day of the coming of the Son of Man, with attendant events] come upon you *unawares*. For as a *snares* shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:34, 35). Christians, though engaged in many of the same normal pursuits of life as the world, are to govern their affairs after an entirely different fashion. They are to conduct their affairs within these pursuits of life after a manner which bespeaks their belief in that which has been revealed concerning the coming of the Son of Man.

A major problem exists when Christians ignore or neglect that which has been revealed and become caught up in the ways and affairs of the world (*cf.* Heb. 2:1-3), for the world knows *nothing* of impending change wrought through Divine intervention; and Christians, through an association with the world after this fashion, will gradually find themselves assuming a very similar attitude. They will be lulled to sleep, and "that day" will come upon them in the *same manner* as it will come upon those of the world -- "as a *snares* [in a sudden, unexpected manner]"(*cf.* I Thess. 5:1ff).

The coming of the Son of Man will "come upon" such Christians *unaware*, and they will not know what is about to occur until that time when it does occur. Just as those during the days of Noah did not know "until the flood came," many Christians during the coming day (because of their involvement with the world) will not know *until*...

In the discourse which Christ delivered to His disciples on Mount Olivet, two days prior to His crucifixion, *three* things are mentioned which every Christian who would keep himself unspotted from the world *must* keep in mind: 1) *Christ will return* (conditions as they presently exist will not continue on and on indefinitely [Matt. 24:37-39]). 2) *No man can know the day or hour of Christ's return* (these specifics have been reserved for the Father alone [Matt. 24:36]). 3) *Man though can know when the time is near through the signs of the times* (God has seen fit, for definite purposes, to reveal these things to man [Matt. 24:32-34]).

Christians living *in* the world, but not *of* the world, must govern their lives after a fashion which bespeaks their belief in the Revelation of God concerning Christ's return. Christ *will* return; and, although we cannot know the day or hour, it has pleased the One Who reserved this knowledge unto Himself to reveal certain *signs of the times*. God has *not* left His people in darkness; and the admonition and warning of Scripture, in the light of that which God has revealed, is to "Take heed...Watch..."

Consequences of Unbelief

The end result of unbelief in Christendom, wrought through the failure of those whom the Lord has placed in positions of leadership to prepare the people for Christ's reappearance, can be clearly seen in Christ's words to the Church in Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, *I will spue thee out of my mouth*"(Rev. 3:15, 16).

The Laodicean Church depicts the prophesied, decadent state in which Christendom will find itself at the close of the dispensation. All that is said to this Church anticipates *judgment* (Rev. 1:9-20), on the basis of *works*(bringing forth fruit [*cf.* Matt. 21:43; 25:19-30; Rev. 3:15]), with *ascending the throne and ruling over the nations* in view (Rev. 2:26,27; 3:21). Christ, upon His judgment seat, will *reject* those who are shown to lack works of a nature resulting in fruit-bearing. They will have failed in their calling as household servants and be *disapproved* (I Cor.9:27; James 1:12). They will not be allowed to ascend the throne with Christ and rule over the nations. Instead, Christ will do exactly as He has stated. He will *spew (vomit)* them out of His mouth, showing not only their rejection but also Christ's attitude toward their prior unfaithfulness. Every Christian will hear one of two things in that day: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant..." or "Thou wicked and slothful servant..." (Matt. 25:21, 23, 26). *Which* depends entirely on faithfulness to one's calling as a household servant during the present day.

3. Seven Days

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created,

in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens (Gen. 2:2-4). In the opening chapters of Genesis, God, through his activity surrounding the earth and man, has established certain patterns, types; and principles set forth therein not only remain unchanged throughout Scripture but they also govern certain aspects of all subsequent Scripture.

When God establishes a pattern, the mold is set, the die is cast. The pattern is established perfect at the outset (Deut. 32:4; II Sam. 22:31; Psa. 18:30). Consequently, subsequent revelation can add elements to the original, but no change in the framework of the original can ever occur. One brief statement -- seven words in the Hebrew text, ten words in the English text -- is all the space God provides concerning the origin of the heavens and the earth as He begins revealing Himself, His plans, and His purposes in the Book of Genesis (1:1). Beyond that, there is one brief statement concerning the ruin of the creation (1:2a). Then God begins a somewhat detailed account of how the ruined creation was restored for man over a six-day period, with God resting on the seventh day (1:2b-2:3).

There is no mention of an eighth day in the opening chapters of Genesis. God moves through *seven days of time*, and He then stops at this point and begins speaking about "the generations of the heavens and the earth"-- a reference to previous activity, occurring both preceding and during the six days leading into the Sabbath. During this time there was a *creation*(1:1), a *ruin* of the creation (1:2a), a *restoration* of the ruined creation (1:2b-2:3), and the *time* involved in this restoration(1:2b-2:3). Then man was created at the conclusion of the restoration of the ruined creation (1:26-31); and immediately following the completion of all activity, covering six days of time, God set aside one day of *rest* (2:2, 3).

Through working six days to restore a ruined creation, followed by a day of rest, God established an unchangeable pattern upon which the whole of His revelation to man is based. This revelation surrounds a subsequent *creation* to that of Gen. 1:1, a subsequent *ruin* of the creation to that of Gen. 1:2a, a subsequent *restoration* of the ruined creation to that of Gen. 1:2b-2:3, a subsequent *time* involved in this restoration to that of Gen. 1:2b-2:3, and a subsequent day of *rest* following the restoration to that of Gen. 2:2, 3. And this revelation, as in the pattern, following the ruin of the creation, concerns itself with events occurring during seven days of time.

This is what is known as *the septenary arrangement of Scripture*. Following the creation and ruin of the material creation in the opening verses of Genesis, there were six twenty-four-hour days of restoration, followed by one twenty-four-hour day of rest. Following man's creation and ruin, also bringing the creation itself into a ruined state once again, God then takes six more days to restore the ruined creature and creation, with a view to resting on the seventh day.

Each day in the latter restoration is not twenty-four hours long, but one thousand years (II Peter 3:8). Following man's creation and ruin, God then takes six days, six thousand years, to restore the ruined creature and creation, in accord with the original pattern; and also in accord with the original pattern, God is going to rest on the seventh day from all His work, on theseventh one-thousand-year period.

The Sign of the Sabbath

"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep...

Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you...

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord...

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

It is a *sign* between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:13-17)

The Sabbath is a *sign* of a "perpetual [an everlasting] covenant" which God made with Israel. Every time the Israelites kept the Sabbath they were not only to remember that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (v. 17),but they were also to know and remember that this was a pattern for another time of work and rest. A *sign* portends something beyond itself; and by looking at the pattern upon which the sign was based, the Israelites were to know that God was going to take another six days to restore the present ruined creature and creation and then rest the seventh day. Thus, by keeping the Sabbath week after week, the Israelites were not only to look back to the Sabbath in Gen. 2:2, 3, following six days of work, but they were also to look out ahead to another Sabbath, likewise following six days of work.

Consequently, every time the Israelites kept the Sabbath they were acknowledging a God-ordained pattern of six days work followed by one day of rest. They were acknowledging that the six days of work in Gen. 1:2b-2:3 to restore a ruined creation form a pattern of a subsequent six days to restore another ruined creation, and they were also acknowledging that just as God rested for one day following the six days of work in Genesis, He was going to rest for one day following the subsequent six days of work.

The Israelites' failure to keep the Sabbath, and thus keep the thought of a coming day of rest following six days of work ever before them, always ultimately resulted in God's judgment. This was a breach of the covenant which God had established, though such could itself effect no change in the covenant. And dire consequences befell both individuals and the nation as a whole for their failure to keep the covenant through keeping the Sabbath, thereby continually recognizing God's *established pattern* through God's *established means* (cf. Num. 15:32-36; II Chron. 36:18-21).

Christians are not under the law of the Sabbath; nor have covenants been made with the Church. However, God's covenant with Israel surrounding the sign of the Sabbath is just as binding today as is His covenant with Abraham, necessitating that the basic principles found in Ex. 31:13-17 be just as true today as they were during Moses' day. Principles surrounding the Sabbath as a "sign" must remain in effect: *The pattern has been established in Genesis; and God has established an everlasting covenant with Israel relative to this matter.*

This is why "a rest [*lit.* 'a Sabbath keeping,' 'a Sabbath rest']"awaits Christians (Heb. 4:9), though they are neither under the law of the Sabbath nor bound by covenants. Both Israel and Christians are separate, distinct creations brought into existence during the six days of work; both occupy the center of attention during separate two-day periods out of God's six days of work (the third and fourth days were given over to the *old creation in Jacob*, and the fifth and sixth days are presently being given over to the *new creation in Christ*); and both creations were brought into existence for specific purposes which will be realized following the six days of work, on the seventh day, the coming Sabbath. Thus, a Sabbath rest awaits both. After six days of work, after six thousand years of work, God is going to rest for a seventh day, a seventh one-thousand-year period. This day of rest will be the Millennial Day, the Messianic Era. At the end of

six thousand years everything will be ready for man to move into the seventh day and realize the purpose for his creation, just as he was to realize the purpose for his creation beyond the six days in the Genesis account.

Stop Being Ignorant

"But, beloved, be not ignorant [*lit.* 'stop being ignorant'] of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Peter 3:8).

The covenant which God made with Israel surrounding the sign of the Sabbath is not an isolated teaching found only in Exodus, chapter thirty-one. Rather, this is a teaching which draws from a God-ordained pattern in the opening verses of Genesis and, in the sense of "time," permeates all Scripture.

1. A Uniform Teaching Throughout Scripture

In line with the sign of the Sabbath, different writers of Scripture, in different ways, have referred to the present six days of work and what is going to occur at the conclusion of these six days, on the seventh day.

A) Old Testament

Moses, for example, called attention to this in Numbers, chapter nineteen through instruction concerning the method of cleansing for Israelites coming in contact with a dead body. The person was to remain unclean until the seventh day; and on the seventh day, through a cleansing with what is called "the water of separation," he was to be free from his defilement (vv. 2ff).

The unclean person in Numbers, chapter nineteen is a type of Israel, unclean today through contact with the dead body of her Messiah. And as cleansing could not occur until the seventh day then, cleansing cannot occur until the seventh day now. Israel is going to remain unclean until the end of six days, with cleansing occurring on the seventh day following the return of the nation's Messiah and the removal of the nation from her present desolate condition.

Then in the Books of Hosea and Jonah, attention is called to deliverance after two days, on the third day (Hosea 5:13-6:2; Jonah 1:17-2:10). In both of these books, the two days preceding deliverance correspond to the fifth and sixth days of the period during which God is presently working. The reference in both instances is to Israel in her desolate condition during the two days which lead into the Sabbath rest.

In Hosea 5:15, the time dates from a particular offense; and it was at the time of this offense that Israel received a "wound" (v. 13) from which she could not be cured except through the personal intervention of her Messiah (v. 14). The reference is to Christ leaving the house desolate, followed by Israel committing the ultimate offense by crucifying her Messiah. This is the point Israel became unclean through contact with a dead body, which is the reason for the "three days" mentioned with the "seven days" in Numbers, chapter nineteen. As in Hosea, so in Numbers: Restoration/cleansing will occur "After two days...in the third day" (*cf.* Num. 19:12, 19; Hosea 6:2).

The Book of Jonah, dealing with Israel during the same two and three days as Hosea, looks upon the nation in her present desolate condition as *dead* (*cf.* Gen. 23:2; John 11:4-7). Jonah constitutes a dual type of both Christ and Israel -- God's two firstborn Sons -- and spiritual lessons concerning both can be drawn from this book. Jonah died in the belly of the fish and was raised from the dead on the third day, as Christ was raised from the dead on the third day, and as Israel will be raised from the dead on the third day (Jonah 1:17; 2:2, 10; *cf.* Hosea 6:2; Matt. 12:39, 40).

Jonah was commanded to carry God's message to those in the Gentile city of Nineveh, but he refused. Jonah booked passage on board a ship and went in the opposite direction. He subsequently found himself in the sea and in the place of death. After two days, on the third day, he was raised from the dead and delivered from the sea; and he then went to Nineveh with God's message (Jonah 1:1-3:3).

Israel was likewise commanded to go to the Gentiles with God's message (Isa. 43:9-12), but Israel refused and went in a contrary direction with her activities. The nation subsequently found herself scattered among the Gentile nations to which the people had been commanded to go (the "sea" typifies the *Gentiles* in Scripture [Matt. 13:1; Rev. 13:1; 17:1, 15]), and the nation in her desolate condition was looked upon as *dead*. Such is Israel's place and status today -- in the sea and in the place of death, as Jonah. However, as deliverance awaited Jonah, deliverance awaits Israel. After two days, on the third day, Israel, as Jonah, will be raised up to live in God's sight (Hosea 6:2); and, as Jonah, the people of Israel will then carry God's message to the Gentiles (*cf.* Gen. 45:26; Isa. 53:1ff).

(The "three days and three nights" in Jonah 1:17 must be understood within the same framework as teachings drawn from Hosea 6:2 and Matt. 12:40. When dealing with "time," the Jews count part of a day as a whole day; and resultingly they can say "after three days" for something which occurred "on the third day," for at least a part of the third day [counted as a whole day] was taken up with the same conditions which existed on the first two days. The time during which Christ remained in the place of death, prior to resurrection, is spoken of both ways. He was raised "on the third day," and He was also raised "after three days" [*cf.* Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:31].

Jonah was not in the belly of the fish for seventy-two hours and then raised at the end of this period, though still within the third day [an impossibility, for any time within the third day would have been short of seventy-two hours]. All we can know about the length of time Jonah was in the belly of the fish is that he was in this place for at least part of the first day, all of the second day, and at least part of the third day. [By way of parallel in the antitype, Christ was in the place of death only a small part of the first day, all of the second day, and only a small part of the third day; Israel, on the other hand, was in the place of death almost all of the first day, remains in this place all of the second day, and will be removed from this place at the beginning of the third day.)

B) New Testament

New Testament writers continue the same line of thought set forth in the Old Testament relative to the sign of the Sabbath. All four gospel writers, the writer of Hebrews, and Peter have things to say concerning the matter.

In the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), we have the accounts of Jesus being transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John. This event, by the Lord's Own definition (and Peter's years later [II Peter 1:16-18]), had to do with "the Son of man coming in his kingdom," *after six days* (Matt. 16:28ff; Mark 9:1ff; Luke 9:27ff). It will be "after six days" -- *the present six days of work, the present six thousand years of work* -- that the Son of Man will return to establish His kingdom, ushering in the seventh day, the seventh one-thousand-year period, the Sabbath of rest.

Peter, James, and John on the Mount with Christ saw "his glory" (Luke 9:32). He was transfigured in their presence; and Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, in glorified bodies, with a "bright cloud" overshadowing them (the

Shekinah Glory -- present to fill the tabernacle when the theocracy was first established in Sinai [Ex. 40:34], present to fill Solomon's temple at the time of its dedication [II Chron. 5:13, 14], and will be present to fill the millennial temple [Ezek. 43:1-6] -- overshadowed those on the Mount [Matt. 17:3, 5; Luke 9:30, 31]).

In typology, "Moses and Elijah" are representative of *believers from the present dispensation*, appearing with Christ in the kingdom. Moses had died and had been raised from the dead, and Elijah had been removed from the earth without experiencing physical death, typifying both the dead (awaiting resurrection) and those who will not experience physical death (be removed from the earth without dying). Both will appear with Christ in the kingdom, as Moses and Elijah, in glorified bodies. Then "Peter, James, and John" are representative of *the Jewish people, the nation of Israel*, appearing in an elevated position with Christ in the kingdom in natural bodies. And the "others at the foot of the mount" are representative of *the Gentiles*, also to appear in the kingdom, as the Israelites (in natural bodies), but as subjects.

(The expression "eight days" rather than "after six days" is used in Luke's account of the transfiguration. Luke though provides time going back to certain "sayings" of Christ [which would, of necessity, include more than just Christ's statement concerning "the Son of man coming in his kingdom"]. Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, provide the time until the kingdom itself [which would refer more specifically to Christ's statement concerning His return after having received the kingdom from the Father].)

John does not record the transfiguration account in his gospel, but he does record a matter relative to Israel, in line with what is taught elsewhere concerning the six days of work followed by a day of rest, which the other three writers do not record. John gives the account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, and is very careful to provide *numbers* for a sequence of days during which events surrounding the death and resurrection of Lazarus occurred.

This account is the seventh of eight signs in John's gospel, signs directed specifically to the people of Israel in order that they might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:30, 31). Since this sign is directed to Israel (the Jews are the ones who require a "sign"[I Cor. 1:22]), it should only logically follow that the sign concerns Israel. And that is exactly what is involved. The "death and resurrection of Lazarus" is a type of the *present death and future resurrection of Israel*. That such is the case is very evident from several things revealed in the account: 1) The time Lazarus lay in the place of death prior to resurrection, 2) the time Jesus was outside the land of Judaea before returning to raise Lazarus, and 3) the type body in which Lazarus was raised.

Lazarus lay in the place of death four days (vv. 17, 39), Christ remained outside the land of Judaea the latter two days of the four before returning to raise Lazarus (vv. 6, 7), and Lazarus was raised in a natural (soulical) body of flesh, blood, and bones (vv. 41-44). The picture is that of Israel during the entire four days of the nation's existence -- two days under Law, beginning with Moses, and two days while Christ remains outside the land of Judaea (Thus, John enlarges the nation's present condition and status to include, after at least some fashion, even the time of the nation's existence from Moses to Christ). It will be after the latter two days, singled out in the account (vv. 6, 7), that Christ will return to the land of Judaea to raise the one typified by Lazarus. And the people of Israel will be raised up "to live" in the Lord's sight in soulical bodies of flesh, blood, and bones, in complete accord with the type.

Then the writer of Hebrews refers to God resting on "the seventh day from all his works," and he goes on to refer to a subsequent "rest [a Sabbath keeping, 'a Sabbath rest']," typified by the former rest, awaiting the "people of God [Christians]" (Heb. 4:4, 9). Thus, contextually, the basis for the writer's remarks concerning the "rest" awaiting Christians is found in Exodus, chapter thirty one and the opening verses of Genesis, as is the basis for any teaching concerning all or part of the seven days found anywhere in Scripture.

Beyond the Book of Hebrews is a section of Scripture penned by the Apostle Peter, one of the three individuals present on the mount when Christ was transfigured, who witnessed His glory, which occurred following six days; and Peter specifically states in so many words in II Peter 3:8, taking into account the context (vv. 4-7), that each of the seven days in the opening verses of Genesis point to seven subsequent days of one thousand years each.

The importance of correctly understanding II Peter 3:8, in the light of its context, cannot be overemphasized. Failure to correctly understand that which Peter refers to as "this one thing" has caused confusion in the entire realm of teaching surrounding the septenary arrangement of Scripture.

2. **One Day, One Thousand Years**

Peter begins his second epistle by using the Greek word *epignosis* ("mature knowledge") three times (1:2, 3, 8). This is the word *gnosis* ("knowledge [gained through experience]") with the preposition *epi* ("upon") prefixed to the word. Thus, you might think of *epignosis* in the sense of "knowledge upon knowledge" or "knowledge added to knowledge" in order to help understand the exact meaning of the word. Peter refers to *a mature knowledge* "of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (v. 2), *a mature knowledge* "of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (v. 3), and *a mature knowledge* "of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). The revealed purpose for possessing this mature knowledge is that one may be able to *make* his "calling and election sure," resulting in his one day having *an abundant entrance* "into the everlasting [age-lasting] kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (vv. 10, 11).

Peter then seeks to *stir up* his readers by exhorting them concerning the importance of keeping the goal of their calling ever before them (vv. 12, 13); and to drive his point home, he refers to an event which occurred over thirty years prior to that time: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty [His greatest regal magnificence' -- superlative usage in the Greek text].

For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (1:15-18).

That which occurred on the Mount when Christ was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John had to do with "the power and coming of our Lord," the "glory" which will be manifested when the kingdom has been established, and with Christians entering into and having a part in the kingdom (vv. 11, 16-18). Such is the clear testimony of the opening chapter of II Peter.

Peter then states relative to events on the Mount, "We have also amore sure word of prophecy [*lit.* 'We have the word of prophecy made more sure,' referring to an additional confirmation of the 'word of prophecy']"(v. 19a). That is,

events on the Mount provide an additional confirmation of that which has already been settled in heaven -- events surrounding Christ's return in glory, after having received the kingdom from His Father.

The "word of prophecy" is then likened to a *light shining* "in a dark place," serving as that which God has provided in order to give Christians the necessary knowledge (the light to see how) to move safely through the time of this world's darkness. Christians are to utilize the provided light (study, understand, and be guided by that which is revealed in the prophetic Scriptures) as they await the dawn of a new day (which, contextually, can only be the seventh day) and the realization of events as set forth on the Mount (v. 19b). A light shines on the path out ahead, showing the person where to walk; and apart from the *light shining* "in a dark place," provided through a knowledge of the prophetic Scriptures, there can be no true sense of spiritual direction. This is a major problem in Christendom today --Christians lacking an understanding of prophecy, lacking a sense of spiritual direction, resulting in shipwrecked lives on every hand.

Following several statements relative to the prophetic Scriptures (1:20,21), Peter then begins a lengthy discourse dealing with false teachers, apostates, who would arise among the people of God and seek to lead Christians away from the source of light, away from the prophetic Scriptures (2:1ff). These teachers would even arise from among the ranks of those possessing a "knowledge [Gk. *epignosis*, 'mature knowledge'] of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2:20). That is, there would be those individuals coming into a mature knowledge of the things surrounding Christ, apostatizing, and then seeking to cause others to follow their erroneous ways (2:18).

(That the individuals coming into a mature knowledge of Christ and apostatizing in this passage are *Christians* is not open to question. I Cor. 2:14 makes it very clear that an unredeemed individual cannot even move into a type knowledge of spiritual things as set forth by the word *gnosis*, much less into a type knowledge of spiritual things as set forth by the word *epignosis*, used in II Peter 2:20. Also, contextually, this knowledge would, of necessity, have to be centered in the prophetic Scriptures.)

Toward the end of his discourse on the apostates, Peter again seeks to *stir* his readers, drawing from the first part of his discourse, which not only calls attention to his opening remarks but also to his reference concerning events "in the holy mount" (cf. 1:13; 3:1). And he does this in order that his readers "may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets..." (3:2). Through understanding the prophetic Scriptures, allowing them to keep the goal of their calling ever before them, the recipients of Peter's epistle would be prepared for the "scoffers [apostates]" who would appear "in the last days," saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (3:3, 4). And being so prepared, they would be in a position to *overcome* rather than *being overcome*.

The apostates appearing with this type question in the latter days are described as "willingly...ignorant [*lit.* they have 'willingly allowed something to escape their attention']" (v. 5). And that which they have willingly allowed to escape their attention is revealed to be *certain truths taught in the opening verses of Genesis*. They fail to understand that things have not continued as they were from the beginning of the *creation*(1:1). There was a *ruin* and *restoration* of the creation, with a *time* involved in the restoration (1:2ff). And this establishes a pattern for a subsequent *creation*, *ruin*, *restoration*, and the *time* involved in the restoration.

This is what II Peter 3:5-8 is about. Scripture moves full-circle at this point, and Peter begins to sum up his epistle -- dealing with the return of Christ, "after six days," on the seventh day -- by calling attention to the opening verses of Genesis. Peter refers to "the world that then was [the pre-Adamic world]" and "the heavens and the earth, which are now [the post-Adamic world]" (vv. 6, 7). The emphasis is upon two destructions of the earth (one past [v. 6], and the other future [vv. 7, 10-12]). And between these two destructions (once "time" begins to be reckoned) lie *two seven-day periods*. The *first*, set forth in the opening verses of Genesis, is comprised of *seven* twenty-four-hour days; and the *second*, covering the remainder of Scripture, is comprised of *seven* one-thousand-year days. That's what II Peter 3:8, contextually, pertains to, and Christians are exhorted to "*stop being ignorant...*"

(That II Peter 3:6 has no reference to the Noachian Flood, as inferred by many expositors and Bible teachers, is evident. The whole structure of the book would militate against such a teaching.)

Attention is called to events on the Mount, occurring after six days, which form a basis for remarks throughout chapters two and three, and the septenary arrangement of Scripture to which II Peter 3:8 alludes would be meaningless if the Noachian Flood were in view [*ref.* to the author's book, JUDE, Chapter X, for a more exhaustive analysis of II Peter 3:3-8 in this respect].)

Concluding Remarks

God's revelation to man stops in the second chapter of Genesis with the "seventh day" (Gen. 2:3). There is no reference to an "eighth day," which would signify *a new beginning*, pointing to the ages beyond the coming Sabbath of rest, the ages beyond the Millennial Age. Thus, God at the outset of His revelation, makes known that His revelation to man is going to concern events during *seven days, seven thousand years* of time -- events from the creation of Adam to the end of the Messianic Kingdom.

This is the reason that all Scripture, after some fashion, moves toward the coming seventh day, the Messianic Era; and Scripture, except for a few brief verses, is silent on events beyond the millennium. The emphasis, beginning in Genesis, is upon *man holding the sceptre, ruling over a restored earth(this present earth) on the seventh day*; and this emphasis never changes. Such reveals the importance of earth's coming Messianic Era within the mind of God.