

# **Revelation**

(A Study of the Eschatological Application of Prophecy)

## **Part 1**

### **Introduction and Conclusion**

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This is the first of a series of in-depth studies on the book of Revelation. This paper was prepared as a contribution to the Prophecy Research Initiative sponsored by the Christian Heritage Institute. The focus of these studies is on the eschatological application of the prophecies of Revelation with support from the rest of the Bible. With its constant references to the rest of the Bible, Revelation can never be studied in isolation. In many ways, the book of Revelation is the “Reader’s Digest Condensed Version” of the Bible. It gives a broad overview of the message of the whole Bible as it reveals the character of Christ.

## Structure of Revelation

The Introduction and Conclusion of Revelation are very important to its interpretation. Unfortunately, these important sections are very commonly overlooked. Although individual verses are often quoted from them in topical studies, the passages as a whole have not often been analyzed in their contextual setting for the light that they shed on the overall interpretation of the book of Revelation.

By now, most of us are aware that the structure of the book of Revelation is very significant to its proper interpretation. We know that the book is written in a chiasm, with the climax in the center (chapters 12-14) between parallel build-up and resolution phases. Each major section is introduced by a sanctuary scene, and many of the sections are portrayed in series of sevens – the letters to the Seven Churches, the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, the Seven Last Plagues, etc. Within many of the series of seven, we also find a pattern of 4-2-1, with Interlude Scenes between the sixth and seventh elements in the series. The diagram below shows the basic structure of the book of Revelation. It was adapted from one presented in C. Mervyn Maxwell's book, *God Cares Volume 2*.

<b>7 Churches (1:10-3:22)</b>						<b>New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5)</b>	
Sanctuary Scene (1:10-1:20)	<b>7 Seals (4:1-8:1)</b>					<b>Heaven and the Millennium (19:1-20:15)</b>	
Messages to 7 Churches (2:1-3:22)	Sanctuary Scene (4:1-5:14)	<b>7 Trumpets (8:2-11:18)</b>			<b>7 Last Plagues (15:1-16:21)</b>	<b>Fall of Babylon (17:1-18:24)</b>	
	Seals 1-4 (6:1-8)	Sanctuary Scene (8:2-5)	<b>Great Controversy (11:19-14:20)</b>		Sanctuary Scene (15:1-8)		
	Seals 5-6 (6:9-17)	Trumpets 1-4 (8:6-12)			Plagues 1-3 (16:1-4)		
	Interlude (7:1-17)	Trumpets 5-6 (8:13-9:21)	Sanctuary Scene (11:19)		Interlude (16:5-7)		
	Seal #7 (8:1)	Interlude (10:1-11:13)	Scenes 1-4 (12:1-17)		Plagues 4-6 (16:8-12)		
		Trumpet #7 (11:14-11:18)	Scenes 5-6 (13:1-18)		Interlude (16:13-16)		
			Interlude (14:1-13)		Plague #7 (16:17-21)		
		Scene #7 (14:14-20)					

It is very significant to note that the sections of the book of Revelation do not appear in chronological order. Although the events within each series do proceed in chronological order with respect to themselves (with exception, perhaps, of the messages to the Seven Churches), the Introductory Sanctuary Scenes and the Interlude Scenes do *not* portray events that are a part of the chronological sequence within the series. The Introductory Sanctuary Scenes serve to characterize the nature, importance, and significance of each ensuing series within the context of the plan of salvation and of end time events. The Interludes are scenes of assignment and assurance for the church. The assignments are instructions to the church relative to the events of the particular series in which they occur. The scenes of assurance are glimpses past the last event of the series and provide assurance to the church of the certainty of their salvation and of the result of God’s plan for them. The impact of the structure of Revelation will be discussed in further detail in later studies on the particular sections of Revelation.

Although we understand these things about the structure of Revelation, we often seem to disregard them in order to make points that we feel are significant. One very good example is the description of the seventh Trumpet in Revelation 11:15-18. This passage very clearly describes the moment of Jesus’ Second Coming. Because we want to emphasize the significance of the Ten Commandments in relation to end time events, we often try to group the following verse, Revelation 11:19, with the description of the seventh Trumpet. Revelation 11:19 says, “And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the

ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm". But according to the structure of the book of Revelation, we know that this is an improper application of the passage. The vision of the Ark of the Covenant and the temple being opened is not associated with the description of the seventh Trumpet. Instead, and of much greater import, it is the Introductory Sanctuary Scene for the Great Controversy section which follows. The vision of the Ark in the temple here is not to highlight the significance of the law in relation to Jesus' Second Coming. Rather it is to characterize the importance of the series that follows to the plan of salvation. Just as the Ark in the Most Holy Place was the very heart of the plan of salvation – for there atonement was made in the presence of God for the sins of the people – so the Great Controversy scenes of Revelation 11:19-14:20 are the very heart of the message of the book of Revelation. These scenes describe the significance of the entire plan of salvation in a more direct and comprehensive way than it appears anywhere else in Scripture. The Great Controversy scenes answer the greatest question we have with regard to the presence of sin and the apparent slowness of God in dealing with the sin problem. The Great Controversy scenes answer the question, "Why?". Why would a loving God allow the horrible effects of sin for so long? Why does He delay the end? Why did Jesus have to die? The introductory scene of the Ark of the Covenant and the Most Holy Place opened in heaven characterize the nature and importance of the Great Controversy scenes in relation to God's plan of salvation.

## **The Most Disregarded Aspect of the Structure of Revelation**

Another thing that we have seemed to disregard about the structure of Revelation, is the importance of the Introduction and Conclusion of the book. We seem to want to jump right into the Introductory Scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches beginning in verse 9 of the first chapter, and skip right over one of the most significant sections of the whole book. Likewise, we often group the book's Conclusion in 22:6-21 together with the description of heaven and the new earth, and miss the importance of that passage. Since Revelation's Introduction and Conclusion are so closely interrelated, together they will be the subject of this study. Likewise, since the second half of Revelation chapter one comprises the Introductory Sanctuary Scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches of chapters two and three, those sections will be considered together as a unit in the second study of this series. This study will therefore focus on Revelation 1:1-8 and 22:6-21.

Rev 1:1-8

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,  
2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.  
3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.  
4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;  
5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,  
6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.  
7 Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.  
8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Rev 22:6-21

6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.  
7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."  
8 And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.  
9 And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God."  
10 And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.  
11 "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy."  
12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.  
13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."  
14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

- 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.
- 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."
- 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.
- 18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book;
- 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.
- 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
- 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

## The Introduction

The Introduction of the book of Revelation is broken into four subsections. Verses 1-3 describe the source of the book, the method of its communication, and the impact on those who read and head its message. Verses 4-6 comprise the salutation that typically appears at the beginning of a letter.

Verse 7 stands alone as a singularly important verse in the context of the Introduction. It states the theme and primary topic of the entire book. Immediately after the greeting or salutation of his letter, John states the central topic of all that is to follow. The whole of the Book of Revelation centers around the primary theme that is stated in these words, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." – Revelation 1:7. This central theme highlights the significance of the eschatological interpretation of Revelation.

Verse 8 is the final verse of the Introduction. As the cornerstone of the message, it reiterates the authority of God. The authority of God is one of the recurring themes in the Introduction and Conclusion. We will now turn our attention to these recurring themes.

### *Common Themes and Phrases of the Introduction & Conclusion*

There are several key phrases and ideas that are repeated in the Introduction and Conclusion of Revelation. Once again, it is important to note that these themes help us to contextualize the rest of the book. They provide the central themes that will be expounded upon in the body of the book. The fact that these points are repeated, often in the exact same words, in both the Introduction and Conclusion, demonstrates their significance in our interpretation of the rest of the book. The ideas are introduced in the Introduction, expounded upon in the body, and summarized in the Conclusion.

First, we will look at some of the phrases and ideas that are repeated in both the Introduction and Conclusion. Then we will briefly analyze the purposes of the themes developed from these repeated phrases and ideas. The following are some ideas that are repeated in both the Introduction and Conclusion, along with quotations from the verses in which they appear.

- Revelation of Jesus (This is extremely important in that the very first words of the book show us that every portion of the book reveals something to us about the character of Jesus.)
  - ❖ “The **revelation of Jesus Christ**” – Rev 1:1
- Message given by God to Jesus, sent via an angel to John to give to the churches
  - ❖ “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which **God gave Him to show to His bond-servants**, the things which must shortly take place; and **He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John**...” - Rev 1:1
  - ❖ “**John to the seven churches** that are in Asia...” - Rev 1:4
  - ❖ “... and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, **sent His angel to show to His bond-servants** the things which must shortly take place.” - Rev 22:6
  - ❖ “And **I, John**, am the one who heard and saw these things...” - Rev 22:8

- ❖ **"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches.":** - Rev 22:16
- I am coming quickly; the time is near
  - ❖ "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, **the things which must shortly take place.**" - Rev 1:1
  - ❖ "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; **for the time is near.**" - Rev 1:3
  - ❖ "Behold, **He is coming** with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." - Rev 1:7
  - ❖ "...of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants **the things which must shortly take place.**" - Rev 22:6
  - ❖ "And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near.**" - Rev 22:10
  - ❖ "Behold, **I am coming quickly**, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." - Rev 22:12
  - ❖ "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, **I am coming quickly.**" Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." - Rev 22:20
- Blessed is he who heeds the words of this book; cursed is he who distorts the message
  - ❖ "**Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it;** for the time is near." - Rev 1:3
  - ❖ "And behold, I am coming quickly. **Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.**" Rev 22:7
  - ❖ "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city." - Rev 22:14
  - ❖ "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them,** God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,** God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. Rev 22:18-19
  - ❖ "And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; **let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.**" - Rev 22:17
- I am the Alpha and the Omega
  - ❖ "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, **from Him who is and who was and who is to come;** and **from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;** and **from Jesus Christ,** the **faithful witness,** the **first-born of the dead,** and the **ruler of the kings of the earth.** To **Him who loves us,** and **released us from our sins by His blood,** and **He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father;** to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." - Rev 1:4-6
  - ❖ "**I am the Alpha and the Omega,**" says the Lord God, "**who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.**" - Rev 1:8
  - ❖ "And he said to me, "**These words are faithful and true**"; and **the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets,** sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place..." - Rev 22:6
  - ❖ "And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; **worship God.**" - Rev 22:9

- ❖ "**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.**" - Rev 22:13
- ❖ "I, **Jesus**, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. **I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.**" - Rev 22:16

### *Purposes of Intro & Conclusion*

The themes and ideas that are repeated in the Introduction and Conclusion of Revelation identify three purposes of these sections of the book. The three purposes are these:

1. Establish Credibility
  - a. Identify the source of the message and the means of its communication
  - b. Establish the authority of God to provide such a message
2. Encourage people to read and heed the message
3. Establish the central theme of the book – Jesus’ Second Coming

These purposes are common to the Introduction of many forms of literature. Whenever an author is prepared to make significant or disputable claims, it is important for him to establish his credibility. Who is he to make those assertions? How does he know that the claims are valid? What is the source of the information? The book of Revelation makes some very bold claims. God is careful to establish the credibility of the information up front at the beginning of the book, and to reiterate it in the Conclusion. John did not come up with these ideas on his own. God gave the message to Jesus to give to His bondservants. Jesus communicated it to John through an angel and in Person in a vision. Jesus could have chosen to reveal the message of Revelation to any human being. But in order to more firmly establish its credibility, He chose to reveal it to John. He chose John, because he was the last remaining of the twelve disciples - the last of those who had personally spent time with Jesus during his lifetime. John was one “who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw” – Rev 1:2. Or, as John put it in his first epistle...

I Jn 1:1-3

- 1 What was from the beginning, **what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--**
- 2 and the life was manifested, and **we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--**
- 3 **what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also,** that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

John was with Peter and James on the Mount of Transfiguration when they became eyewitnesses of the majesty of Christ.

2 Pet 1:16-18

- 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.**
- 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"--
- 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

In the Introduction and Conclusion, God also establishes His own authority and ability to make these claims. He is the Eternal One, “who is, who was, and who is to come”, “the Alpha and the Omega, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty”. God has used these elements of His character to vindicate His authority before. When Moses asked God what His name was, so that he could establish credibility with the Israelites in Egypt, God replied, “I AM that I AM. Tell them that I AM sent you.” Later when Israel was lost in idolatry before the Babylonian captivity, God used His ability to declare the future as a test between Him and the Idols that Israel had begun to worship.

Isa 41:21-23

- 21 "Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong arguments, the King of Jacob says.
- 22 **Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place;** as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them, and know their outcome; or announce to us what is coming.

23 **Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods;** indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.

Isa 44:6-8

6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: **'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me.**

7 'And who is like me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. **And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place.**

8 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; **have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses.** Is there any God besides me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none."

Isa 46:5-10

5 "To whom would you liken me, and make me equal and compare me, that we should be alike?

6 "Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh silver on the scale hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; they bow down, indeed they worship it.

7 "They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; they set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; it cannot deliver him from his distress.

8 "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors.

9 "Remember the former things long past, **for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me.**

10 **Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done,** saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

Isa 48:3, 5

3 **"I declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.**

5 Therefore I declared them to you long ago, before they took place I proclaimed them to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.'

Part of God's credibility is that He can declare the end from the beginning. The very book of Revelation itself is a testimony to the credibility of God. Yet He bases his credibility in the fact that He not only can declare the end from the beginning, but that He is ultimately in control of those events, and that He IS the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. So the book of Revelation was not just a theory dreamed up by John. It was a revelation from God that was communicated by a holy messenger, and given to one who had personally born "witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." At the end, the book of Revelation will be a testimony to its own validity, in that its declarations will be seen to have come true.

God also establishes the authority of Jesus in these passages as well. Jesus is "the faithful witness", "the first-born of the dead", "the ruler of the kings of the earth", the one who "released us from our sins by His blood and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father", "the root and offspring of David", "the bright and morning star". Jesus demonstrates His role in relation to the Father by revealing that God gave Him the vision to give to His bondservants. Yet He also establishes His equality with God when He asserts of Himself that, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13) – an identification that was made of God the Father in Rev 1:4,8.

After establishing the credibility of the information in the book, God encourages His people to read and heed the messages by proclaiming a blessing upon them if they do so. He also proclaims a curse on those who ignore the message, or who alter it in any way.

Finally, in the Introduction and Conclusion, God establishes the central theme of the book. This part is so significant that we should place it under its own subtitle, for the benefit of those who do not read completely through each subsection.

## **The Central Theme of Revelation**

God accomplishes three purposes in the Introduction and Conclusion of Revelation: 1) establishes its credibility, 2) encourages His people to read and heed its message, and 3) establishes the central theme of the book. This is very important. First and foremost, the book is "The revelation of Jesus Christ". It is a revelation of His character. But the particular focus of this book is, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." (Rev 1:7) The Introduction and Conclusion do make pronouncements about other elements of Jesus' character – those identified in the section above. However the specific focus

of the book is on Jesus' Second Coming. "Behold, He is coming with the clouds" (Rev 1:7); "These words are faithful and true... And behold, I am coming quickly." (Rev 22:6-7) "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22:20). The central focus of the book of Revelation is the Second Coming of Jesus. This theme is repeated throughout the Introduction and Conclusion. It is repeated throughout the whole book. The theme is not, "The history of the church from the first advent to the Second Advent". There *is* an application of the prophecies of the book to the history of the church, but that is not its primary focus. Nowhere in the Introduction or Conclusion of the book, do we find the history of the church identified as a central theme of the book. The central theme is repeatedly identified as the Second Advent. Therefore, although there is a valid historical application to many of the prophecies, the primary application of the prophecies is an eschatological one. The Second Advent is the central theme that is identified in the Introduction and Conclusion of the book.

## **"Behold I Come Quickly"; "The Time Is At Hand"**

Now we need to deal with perhaps the most problematic theme that is repeated throughout the Introduction and Conclusion, as well as the rest of the book of Revelation. How we deal with this problem will have a significant impact on how we interpret the remainder of the book. In the first verse of the book, God tells us that He is revealing "the things which must shortly take place". (Note that the Greek *en táchei* can also mean quickly, speedily, or in haste.) In verse three He tells us that "the time is near". In the Conclusion, this thought is repeated at least five times. Chapter 22 verse six says that the "things must shortly (*en táchei*) take place." In verse seven Jesus says, "behold, I am coming quickly (*tachú*, same root as *táchei*)." In verse ten He commands John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." In verse twelve, "Behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." And finally, Jesus' last words of the entire Bible in 22:20, "Yes, I am coming quickly."

We must admit that a straightforward reading of these texts indicates that Jesus would return very shortly after the time that John received the vision. Furthermore, according to a straight reading of these texts, all the events described in the book of Revelation would not only begin shortly after the time of the vision, but would conclude at Jesus' return within a very short period of time. And yet, here we are 1900+ years later, and Jesus has not yet returned. A number of methods have been developed to deal with this apparent disparity – none of which is completely satisfying. We will consider some of the most prominent ones, and then will suggest the one which seems to be the most correct. We will be forced to admit that even this approach is also somewhat problematic, but less so in many ways than the others. Remember that how we deal with this issue will have a very big impact on how we interpret the entire book. Therefore it warrants close consideration.

### **Beginning then...**

The most common method that Adventists and other historicists use to deal with this problem is to assert that the events began in John's day and extend to Jesus' Second Coming. According to this theory, the book of Revelation is a history of the Christian church from Apostolic times until the return of Christ. Furthermore, the book is divided into an historical part and an eschatological part, with chapters 12-14 marking the dividing line. The series of sevens, i.e. the Seven Churches, Seven Seals, and Seven Trumpets, are parallel passages that each covers the history of the Christian era from a different perspective. The descriptions and time periods included in these passages are therefore entirely symbolic. In the eschatological half of the book, the descriptions are said to contain some symbolism, but the events and time periods described are literal. Therefore, while the descriptions of the Seven Trumpets and the Seven Last Plagues are extremely similar to each other (varying primarily in degree of effect with the Trumpets affecting only 1/3 of the world and the Plagues affecting the whole world), the Trumpets are interpreted to be symbolic descriptions of historical events, whereas the Plagues are taken to be completely literal in almost every detail.

You can begin to see the inconsistency here that does not have strong justification from within the text of Revelation itself. Nowhere does the text itself imply that half of the book is symbolic while the other half is literal. That was simply an inference that we have drawn from the book's chiastic literary structure, because it fit nicely into our interpretive model and yielded the results that we liked. There are a number of other problems with this model. First, the passages which state "events which must shortly take place" and "behold I come quickly" use derivations of the same word for "quickly" and "shortly", making them comparable to each other in describing the nearness in time of the events to John's day. We are on somewhat shaky ground, then, when we say that the events will begin shortly after John's vision, but that Jesus' repeated statements that He will come "quickly" refer to an event some 1900+ years distant. Look also at this passage in the Conclusion: "And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." - Revelation 22:10-12. Almost all Bible versions group these three

sentences into a single paragraph. They are *not* considered to be three disparate thoughts, but are considered to be very closely related. Well, the first sentence says that the time (presumably the time of the prophetic events described in the book) is near. The next sentence is the declaration of the close of probation. We are certainly not to believe that Jesus' counsel to the people of John's day was to "let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy." That is a declaration which belongs at the Close of Probation at the end of time. Then in the next sentence Jesus says that He is coming quickly to give each person his reward. As closely as these three statements are linked together in their literary context, we would have a hard time separating the events they describe by 1900+ years.

This particular method of interpretation also has some internal inconsistencies. In the historical section, including the Seven Churches, the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets, the descriptions are considered to be symbolic of historical events. Therefore this description of the first Seal is considered to be symbolic of the Apostolic age when the Gospel went forth in power. "And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.' And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer." - Rev 6:1-2. But we traditionally interpret the sixth Seal as actual literal events, not symbolic of a spiritual era in church history. "And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'" - Rev 6:12-17. We say that the great earthquake was the Lisbon earthquake of 1 November 1755, and that the dark day and the falling of the stars occurred on 19 May 1780 and 13 November 1833 respectively. Furthermore, from the phrase, "And the sky was split apart..." onward, we consider to be literal eschatological events that have not yet occurred, even though they appear in the historical / symbolic half of the book. Likewise, the darkening of the sun in the sixth Seal is considered to be a literal darkening of the sun on 19 May 1780, but the darkening of the sun in the fourth and fifth Trumpets is considered to be the obscuring of Biblical truth by the Papacy and the Muslims. Finally, even though they occur in the historical / symbolic half of the book of Revelation, the seventh Seal and the seventh Trumpet are definitely eschatological descriptions of Jesus' Second Coming, as is the seventh Plague, which appears in the eschatological half of the book. Can you see that there are some internal inconsistencies with this rule of interpretation?

There are a couple of other problems as well. When you look at the text itself, it often does not support the historical interpretation that we have arrived at. For example, we consider the message to the church of Pergamum to be descriptive of the Christian church during the period from AD 314 to AD 538. However, Jesus' counsel to this church is "Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." - Rev 2:16. This is a reference to Jesus' Second Coming. How can Jesus "come quickly" to a church representing an era that would end over 1500 years before His actual return? Likewise, we consider the message to the church of Thyatira to be descriptive of the Christian church during the period from AD 549 to the 1560's AD. Once again, we see Jesus counsel them, "Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come." - Rev 2:25. In Rev 3:3, Jesus tells the church of Sardis (historically considered to be the church of the Reformation from around 1517 – 1755 AD) "If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you." Finally, we consider the message to the church of Philadelphia to be descriptive of the Christian church during the period from 1790's AD to 1840's AD. But Jesus tells the members of this church, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown." - Rev 3:10-11. The "hour of testing" is obviously a reference to the great tribulation, which has not occurred yet, even though the "Philadelphia church period of history" supposedly ended in the 1840's AD. Notice once again that Jesus says to this church that He is "coming quickly". The "hour of testing" mentioned here is undoubtedly also the same great tribulation that Jesus said He would cast some of those in Thyatira (538-1517) into if they did not repent of the deeds of "Jezebel", the immoral woman. Compare the following passages from Rev 2:20-23 and Rev 18:1-5. Traditionally, our expositors have interpreted the first to be historically representative of the period of Papal Supremacy, described as the message to the church of Thyatira. The second is interpreted as depicting the Latter Rain and the Great Tribulation (Seven Last Plagues) in the very last days. The imagery indicates that the two may describe the same end time event.

Rev 2:20-23

20 "But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, **so that they commit acts of immorality** and eat things sacrificed to idols.

21 "And **I gave her time to repent**; and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

22 'Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness **and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation,** unless they repent of her deeds.

23 'And **I will kill her children with pestilence;** and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and **I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.**

Rev 18:1-5

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 "For **all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality,** and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "**Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues;**

5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

In looking at these references in the messages to the Seven Churches, it is easy to see that we face some significant internal inconsistencies if we are to consider the historicist application to be the final and most complete application of the prophecies.

Finally, there is a general Biblical principle which indicates that prophecies which have already been fulfilled should be clearly understood. Jesus said, "And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe." - John 14:29. We saw that the 1260 year prophecy of Papal supremacy was beginning to be understood as it neared its fulfillment, and is now clearly understood. Yet the best of Adventist scholars cannot agree on the interpretation of the Seals and the Trumpets, even though those events have purportedly been entirely fulfilled in the past. The correct interpretation is evidently not yet clear.

There are a number of aspects of the historicist interpretation that have some merit. We should not completely discount this perspective. This interpretation represents one valid application of the prophecies of the book of Revelation. The problems noted above, however, should lead us to conclude that it is not the primary application. We will take a look at the different applications of Bible prophecies a little later in our study.

## Conditional

There is another method that has been used among some Adventists and other expositors to account for the disparity between Jesus' statements that He is coming quickly (the time is near) and the fact that we are still here over 1900+ years later. Some have suggested that Jesus could have come, presumably even during the generation of the Apostles, if certain conditions had been met. Foremost among these conditions is that the Gospel must be spread to the whole world, and then the end would come. The people contend that the reason why Jesus has not yet returned is because we don't yet fully comprehend or appreciate the Gospel. As soon as there is a generation that really understands and seizes hold of the Gospel message, then it will go to the ends of the earth like wildfire, and then Jesus can return. Another variation on this same theme is that Jesus is waiting for the church to be perfected before He returns. As soon as the church perfectly reflects His character, then Jesus will come back for His bride. Although there are elements of truth woven throughout these interpretations, the ideas as a whole have some significant problems. First let's look at a few of the texts that people base these interpretations on. Then we will discuss some of the problems. Here are some of the texts used to support these interpretations.

### ***This generation will not pass...***

Matt 24:32-34

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;

33 even so you too, **when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.**

34 "Truly I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.**

Matt 16:28

28 "Truly I say to you, **there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.**"

Luke 21:31-32

- 31 "Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.  
32 "Truly I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all things take place.**

Matt 10:23

- 23 "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, **you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.**

Matt 24:14

- 14 "And **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.**

### *When the church is purified...*

Eph 5:25-27

- 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;  
26 that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,  
27 **that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.**

2 Cor 11:2

- 2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, **that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.**

Col 1:21-23

- 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,  
22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, **in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--**  
23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Jude 1:24-25

- 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and **to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless** with great joy,  
25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Rev 7:13-15

- 13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?"  
14 And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**  
15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.

1Thes 5:23

- 23 Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you entirely**; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, **without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Rev 7:3-4

- 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, **until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**"  
4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

Rev 14:1,4-5

- 1 And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

4 These are the ones **who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste**. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

5 And no lie was found in their mouth; **they are blameless**.

There are a number of problems with these two interpretations. First we will address the problem with the “this generation...” interpretation, and then we will address the idea that Jesus is waiting for the church to become perfect before He returns.

It is true that the Apostles thought that Jesus would return in their generation. This assumption was based on a number of things that Jesus said. But in those cases it is very important to take a close look at exactly what Jesus said, and the context, to determine what He really meant. There is a classic example of how Jesus’ statements were often misunderstood by the Apostles at the end of the Gospel of John.

John 21:21-23

21 Peter therefore seeing him [John] said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

22 Jesus said to him, "**If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?** You follow Me!"

23 **This saying therefore went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"**

John clearly did die, and Jesus has not yet returned. But you can see how it is easy to read into a statement or passage more than what was intended. We will discuss the problems associated with some of the texts listed above. It is not necessary to demonstrate the problems with every text that is used to support the position, because the rest have similar problems. Here are explanations of some.

Matt 24:32-34

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;

33 even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Luke 21:31-32

31 "Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

“This generation” could refer either to the generation to whom Jesus was speaking, or to the generation that witnesses the signs that Jesus just listed. Given the history since the statement was made, and the fact that we now know that final events will happen rapidly, it is safe to assume that the latter interpretation is the correct one. The final generation will indeed witness all of the signs that precede Jesus’ return.

Matt 16:28

28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

In context, this statement immediately precedes the experience of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Mount of Transfiguration is a miniature representation of the Kingdom of God. We have Jesus in all His glory. We have Moses who represents all those who have died and then been resurrected. And we have Elijah, who represents those who have been translated and never taste death. Moses and Elijah also represent the “Law and the Prophets” or the “Word and the Spirit”. Jesus’ statement was obviously referring to this event, given the context.

Matt 10:23

23 But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.

Matt 24:14

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

If you assume that Jesus would return in the time of the apostles, then these two verses apparently contradict each other. If the apostles don't even finish going through the cities of Israel, then how will the Gospel go to the whole world before the Son of Man comes? The point of Jesus' statement in Matt 10:23 is to warn the disciples that they would be persecuted and that all would not accept the Gospel message. It is not intended to imply that Jesus would return before the Gospel had even made it out of the land of Israel.

Similar kinds of explanations can be made for the other texts that seem to say that Jesus would return in the days of the apostles. The major flaw in this line of reasoning is the concept that the prophecies about Jesus' return are somehow conditional. It just isn't there. Matthew 24:14 doesn't say, "as soon as you finish spreading the Gospel to the whole world, then the end will come." It isn't a conditional promise. It is a statement of fact. "This Gospel of the kingdom *shall be preached* in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come." The Gospel going forth to the whole world is indeed the most definitive sign that Jesus' return is imminent, but it is not a condition of His return. It is a statement of fact. It will happen, one way or another. Either we will allow God to work through us to accomplish this mission, or God will take the reigns into His own hands. If necessary, "the very stones will cry out."

The spread of the Gospel was not a burden that God laid upon our shoulders as a precondition to Jesus' return. God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, not as a burden or as a test, but as a privilege. It is a necessary part of our spiritual growth. At the fall, our relationships were damaged – first our relationship with God, and then our relationships with each other. When Adam and Eve sinned, first they hid from God, and then they began accusing one another. Through the plan of salvation, God seeks to restore those relationships – our relationship of love for God and our relationships of love for each other. That is why God involves us in the Gospel ministry. That is why He divides the Spiritual gifts up between the members of the Body. He is urging us into closer relationships with each other. Did you ever notice that it is easy to "love" someone that you don't have to interact with? But you don't really learn what love is all about until you get close to someone – until you interact with them on a personal and spiritual level.

Let us never forget that the spread of the Gospel is God's responsibility. God makes converts, we don't. All we can do is communicate information and demonstrate God's love in our actions. It is the Holy Spirit's job to "convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement." It is the Holy Spirit's job to convert sinners. May we never be so proud to assume that God's work is dependent upon us. If we will not allow Him to work through us to do His will, He will find someone else who will. If you don't believe that, just ask the Jews.

The timing of Jesus' return is not dependent on our efforts to spread the Gospel. Neither is it dependent upon our level of spiritual perfection. Look at the verses that talk about the purity of the church. In 1Thes 5:23, Jesus does *not* say, "As soon as the members of the church have fully yielded their will to Me and are wholly pure from sin, then I will return." The verse is not a condition; it is a statement of fact. It is a promise. It is what God will do in His church in the last days. It is not a condition of His return. This verse, along with all the others, says that God will do the work in us, according to His timetable, and through events and circumstances that He will determine. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The pure truth of the matter is that because of the progress of sin and because God's people are increasingly being surrounded and influenced by it, God's people steadily decrease in holiness after each episode of His intervention. Just look at Biblical history. God delivers His people from bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land. There is an initial surge of holiness in the people that quickly wanes as they mingle with the surrounding nations. The whole period of the Judges is a roller coaster ride of rises to holiness when God intervenes and plunges into sin within a generation or two. Then God intervenes and raises Israel to prominence under King David and King Solomon. Within two generations, Israel is on the downslide again. Within a few more generations Judah has fallen as well, and they are delivered into captivity in Babylon. Then God intervenes again and delivers them from captivity, and there is a resurgence of religious fervor and dedication to God. And yet by Jesus' time, the Jews had fallen so far away from God and into sin that they actually crucified the Messiah. As God intervened with the former rain of the Holy Spirit, there was a resurgence of holiness among the Apostolic church. Within a few generations, the church was again almost completely corrupt and the world was plummeted into the dark ages. During the Protestant reformation, there was again a resurgence of holiness, due to God's direct intervention. And yet we know that Protestants will eventually become an image of the Medieval Roman Church. Many are almost there already. In our own Adventist movement, through God's intervention, there was a fervor and zeal for God in our founders that we have never been able to recapture in the present day. We are no nearer to holiness as a church now than we ever have been at any other time in history. But for the soon intervention of God in the world again, we would go the way of all the past movements.

The timing of Jesus' return may indeed be conditional. But it is *not* conditional on the holiness of the church. That would again be putting the burden on our shoulders – not His. No, the timing of Jesus return is not dependent on our holiness, but

rather upon the wickedness of the world. We know that the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land is a parallel of the church's journey from bondage in sin to the Promised Land of heaven. If we look at that model, we find the real reason that Jesus has not yet returned. When God first established His covenant with Abraham, He said that He would give the Promised Land to Abraham's descendants - but not immediately, because "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete".

Gen 15:13-16

13 And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, **for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.**"

Then later, just before Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, Moses told them that it was not because of their righteousness that God was giving the land to them, but because the iniquity of the nations of the land was finally complete. God told the Israelites that they were no more righteous than their forefathers who rebelled against Him the first time they came to the Promised Land.

Deut 9:4-6

4 "**Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you.**

5 "**It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart** that you are going to possess their land, but **it is because of the wickedness of these nations** that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

6 "Know, then, **it is not because of your righteousness** that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, **for you are a stubborn people.**

God wants to drive the point home so clearly that He repeats it three times in a row! Incidentally, one reason that Moses did not lead the Israelites into the Promised Land is because Moses represents the law in the Bible. The law can't get you into heaven. The law can point you in the right direction, and lead you through the desert of sin, but only Joshua (Jesus) can take you into the Promised Land of heaven.

Jesus is not waiting on a perfected church. Rather, Jesus is waiting for the iniquity of the people of the world to become complete. When the people of the world have become so hard of heart that they can no longer respond to the Gospel message, then Jesus will come. He will delay as long as it is possible for even one more person to accept His offer of salvation. Those who are looking for a perfected church as the condition of Jesus' return will be disappointed. It is Jesus' job to clothe His people with righteousness - to cleanse them with His blood. It is our job to cling to Jesus, as the branch clings to the vine, and to lift Him up before others as He draws them to Himself. The Bible tells us that this is the reason why Jesus delays His coming. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." - 2 Pet 3:9. Almost all of the signs of the times confirm this. Almost all of the signs that Jesus gave for His return deal with the wickedness of the world and the proliferation of the effects sin. "As it was in the days of Noah..."; "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot..."; "there will be wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilence..."; "men will be lovers of money rather than lovers of God..."; "because of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold..."; etc., etc. "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him...Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first..." - II Th 2:1-12. If you want to find a sign of Jesus' soon return, look to the wickedness of the world, not to the perfection of the church.

### ***Perfect Timing***

Actually, the Bible indicates that God has always known exactly when Jesus would return. God knew the exact day that Jesus would come to die the first time, and He knows exactly when He will come the second time. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, **but the Father alone.**" - Matt 24:36. God has always known exactly when Jesus would come, both the first time and the last. More than just knowing when, He has actually determined the times.

Dan 2:20-21

20 Daniel answered and said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him.

21 "And **it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings**; He gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding.

Hab 2:3

3 "For the vision is yet for **the appointed time**; it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for **it will certainly come, it will not delay**.

Acts 1:7

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know **times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority**;

Acts 17:26

26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined their appointed times**, and the boundaries of their habitation,

Notice in the texts above that God not only knows the epochal events of human history, but He has actually "appointed" or "fixed" those times "by His own authority." Those who advocate the theory that Jesus return is conditional on either the church finishing the work of spreading the Gospel to the whole world, or upon the church becoming sinless, have failed to acknowledge both the foreknowledge and sovereignty of God. Many of God's promises are conditional. But when they are, He usually makes that fact very clear. However, God's prophetic declarations are very rarely conditional. That is because of a combination of His foreknowledge and His sovereignty. God determines the timing of the great epochs of human history by intervening at critical moments. He chooses the moments to intervene on the basis of His foreknowledge. This is not predestination. This does not deny the fact that God has given man free will. Man's free will is at the very heart of the Great Controversy. It was to preserve free will as an indispensable component of true love that caused God to allow the grand experiment of the Great Controversy. In order to preserve free will, God elected not to destroy Satan the moment that he sinned. In order to preserve free will, God confined Satan to the planet Earth and allowed him to tempt Adam & Eve. Yet we must not carry God's estimation of free will to the extreme end that we ignore His foreknowledge and His sovereignty. God did not intend for Adam & Eve to sin. God did not cause them to sin. But He knew that they would, and so he devised the plan of redemption before He even created the world.

God does not make men's choices for them – He does not force them to make particular choices – but He does very commonly force them to make a decision. God often creates circumstances that force men to make a choice, one way or the other. In this way, God determines the great epochal events of history, by deciding when to intervene on the basis of His foreknowledge. God knows the human heart. He knew from the beginning that it would take 6000 years for sin to run its course. He knew exactly at which points to intervene in order to show the great extent of His love, mercy and grace. It is as if God is observing a car going down a highway toward a distant city. God knows how fast the car is going, and He knows how far it is to the city. He also knows the intent of the driver - that he will not be persuaded to turn off the road or to slow down. God doesn't take over control of the car, unless the man asks him to. But God does know exactly where the car is headed and when it will get there, based on its present course and rate of travel. In the same way, the whole course of human history is laid open before the omniscient eyes of our God. He has calculated with divine precision the rate of our fall into sin. And in His mercy, he has chosen moments along that path to place detours to slow the progress so that as many as possible will have every opportunity to choose the way of salvation. Let's look at a couple of examples of where God has foreknown the circumstances and used that knowledge to choose times to intervene.

When God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan, He knew two things. First He knew that the Israelites would have to go into bondage for many years in order for them to learn the consequences of their sinful nature and to see the extent of God's deliverance. He also knew exactly when the sin of the Amorites would reach a point from which there would be no return – a point where every single person would be so immersed in sin that no one would respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in their lives. God timed these events so that they would coincide, and then He acted to bring the events to pass.

Gen 15:13-16

13 And God said to Abram, "**Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.**

14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

16 "**Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.**"

Exod 7:2-4

2 "You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

3 "But **I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.**

4 "**When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts,** My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt **by great judgments.**

Exod 12:41

41 And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, **to the very day,** that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

Deut 9:4-6

4 "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but **it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you.**"

You can see that God picked the timing of the deliverance based on when the iniquity of the Amorites would be complete. Actually, He chose to intervene 40 years prior to the time when Amorites would have filled their cup to the brim with iniquity, because He also foreknew that the Israelites would rebel against Him and wander in the wilderness for 40 years as a result. How, though, did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Did God make Pharaoh's decision for him? No. In another verse, we see that Pharaoh made his own decisions. "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go." - Exod 8:32. Pharaoh made a series of decisions that progressively – step by step – hardened his heart more and more against God. God created the circumstances. God sent Moses to Pharaoh and gave him the words to speak. God performed the miracles as a testimony to Pharaoh. At any point, Pharaoh was free to reverse course and yield his will to God. But God foreknew what kind of man Pharaoh was. He knew what Pharaoh would choose when faced with those circumstances. That is one reason that God chose that moment to intervene. Just like the Amorites, the iniquity of the Egyptians was also complete, and God used that occasion to bring them under judgement and to deliver His people.

Just before God delivered His people into the Promised Land, He instructed them pronounced blessings from Mount Gerizim and curses from Mount Ebal. These represented the blessings they would receive if they followed Him and the curses they would receive if they chose instead to turn their backs on Him. Then he plead to them through Moses to make the right choice.

Deut 30:19-20

19 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live,** you and your descendants,

20 **by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him;** for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Yet, despite the free choice God gave to the people, He foreknew that they would choose to turn away from following Him. He told Moses that He would be forced to send them into captivity. He also promised deliverance from captivity. Later, he disclosed through Jeremiah exactly how long He determined that they would be in captivity.

Deut 31:16

16 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and **this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land,** into the midst of which they are going, **and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.**

The second example that we will look at is God's timing in sending Jesus the first time. God determined in advance the exact time when Jesus would be baptized and the exact year, month, day, and hour that Jesus would die. Jesus would be the sacrificial Lamb that would be slain at the ninth hour on the day of Passover. Some statements made by Jesus indicate that it may even have been a year of Jubilee. ("I have come to set the captives free and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord." Etc.) The year was a year when the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on the weekly Sabbath, making the event a High Sabbath. God revealed the timing of the events through Daniel and through the typical Passover service. Notice in the following passages, that Jesus knew His place in prophetic time, and that the time had been predetermined by God. God knew how long it would take for the Israelites to lapse into sin after their deliverance from captivity in Babylon. He knew how long it would take for their sin to be complete. Based on this foreknowledge, He determined the exact moment that Jesus would begin His public ministry and the exact moment that He would be crucified. Notice particularly in these

passages that the Jewish leaders wanted to avoid executing Jesus during the festival for fear of creating riots. But God had already ordained that the Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sin of the whole world on the day of Passover. God created the circumstances that caused this to occur. He did not make the members of the Sanhedran choose to kill Jesus. In fact some, such as Nicodemus, made a different choice. But God foreknew the hearts of the Jewish leaders. He knew how they would react when confronted by the sinlessness of His Son. The series of events demonstrates God's foreknowledge and His sovereignty.

Dan 9:24-27

24 "**Seventy weeks have been decreed** for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.

25 "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

26 "Then **after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off** and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but **in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering**; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

Matt 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but **up to seventy times seven**."

Gal 4:4-5

4 But **when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son**, born of a woman, born under the Law,  
5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

John 2:4

4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? **My hour has not yet come**."

John 7:8

8 "Go up to the feast yourselves; I **do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come**."

John 7:30

30 They were seeking therefore to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, **because His hour had not yet come**.

John 8:20

20 These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, **because His hour had not yet come**.

John 13:1

1 Now before the **Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father**, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

Mark 14:1-2

1 Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off; and **the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him**;

2 for they were saying, "**Not during the festival, lest there be a riot of the people**."

John 17:1-2

1 These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, **the hour has come**; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee,

2 even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life.

You can see that God not only foreknew the time of Jesus first coming, and of His death, He actually determined when they would occur. Based on His foreknowledge of the state of men's hearts, God determined when and How He would intervene.

In like manner, God has determined exactly when Jesus will return. God Himself, based on His foreknowledge of when wickedness will have reached a critical mass in the world, will intervene to cause the final scenes of earth's history. He will send the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit to cause the Gospel to go to every last living person on the planet, and to pierce the hearts of those who will hear and respond. He will cause supernatural disasters that will polarize the unconverted of the world through fear. He will loose the bonds of Satan and His minions and allow them to have final sway over the finally impenitent. He will execute the punishment of the Seven Last Plagues. He may even, at some point, purify the church by growing perfect faith within them. Incidentally, faith grows in the exact same way that hardness of heart grows – based on our response to the circumstances that God either causes or allows. The response of faith to small situations yields a stronger faith that will respond in kind to larger challenges. The Little Time of Trouble will grow the faith that we need to face what comes after. The greatest time of trouble the world has ever seen will require the greatest faith that anyone has ever had – and will result in still yet greater faith. We will study some of these great themes as we delve deeper into the book of Revelation. For now, suffice it to show that God has determined the moment of Jesus' return based on His foreknowledge of the state of sin in the world.

Dan 8:19

19 And he said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at **the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end.**

Dan 11:27

27 "As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and they will speak lies to each other at the same table; but it will not succeed, for **the end is still to come at the appointed time.**

Dan 11:35

35 "And some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure, **until the end time;** because **it is still to come at the appointed time.**

Dan 11:40

40 "And **at the end time** the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen, and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through.

Ps 75:2-3

2 "**When I select an appointed time, it is I who judge with equity.**

3 "The earth and all who dwell in it melt; it is I who have firmly set its pillars. Selah.

Acts 17:31

31 because **He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world** in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Matt 24:22

22 "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; **but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.**

2 Pet 3:9-10

9 The **Lord is not slow about His promise,** as some count slowness, **but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

10 But **the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.**

## **A Three-fold Application**

Thus far we have looked at two methods of dealing with the issue raised by Revelation's declaration that "the time is near" and "behold I am coming quickly" despite and intervening period of 1900+ years. We have discussed some of the problems and the merits associated with our traditional historicist interpretation. We have also looked at some of the problems associated with treating the prophecies as conditional. We will not directly address either preterism or the popular forms of futurism that exist today. You will see some elements of futurism woven into the proposed solution. However, we should be very careful to distinguish them from the popular form of futurism that comes packaged with dispensationalism. There is more than enough denominational literature in print refuting dispensationalism, so it is not necessary to reiterate the points here. Suffice it to say that the dispensational approach is not valid, with its dependence on literalism, the dichotomy between

“Israel” and the church, and the secret rapture. In order avoid confusion with the futurism that is packaged with dispensationalism, we will refer to elements of the proposed solution as having an eschatological application. This idea will become clearer as we proceed.

Let's consider the possibility that many of the prophecies of the book of Revelation have a three-fold application. They have a literal, or typical, application in Biblical history. They have a more symbolic application that has unfolded throughout the Christian era, as suggested by historicism. And they also have an eschatological application that is more literal according to timelines and circumstances, but at the same time being symbolic of deeper spiritual truths. Of the three applications, the eschatological is both the most complete fulfillment of the prophecies and also the one that is of most significance to those of us who are living on the very threshold of eternity. Let's expound upon this idea and look at some other Biblical examples that apply this same principle.

First lets specify some basic assumptions used in analyzing this issue. First, for the reasons discussed earlier, we will assume that the prophecies are not conditional. In other words, we will assume that God described a series of events that would precede Jesus return, and that those events could not have occurred in the years immediately following the revelation to John. The Bible suggests that God not only foreknew the moment of Jesus' return, but he also chose that moment since before time began. Secondly, God chose the date of Jesus return based primarily on when He foreknew that the wickedness of the world would have reached a point of critical mass. Thirdly, since God foreknew that there would be 1900+ years before Jesus would return, He did not deliberately deceive the Apostle John in saying that the time is near. This would suggest that the best explanation of the phrase, “the time is near”, is given to us in the synoptic apocalypse passages of Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Jesus tells us in these passages that we will know when “the time is near” based on when we witness the signs He described.

Matt 24:32-34

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;  
33 even so you too, **when you see all these things, recognize that He is near**, right at the door.  
34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Luke 21:31-32

31 "Even so you, too, **when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.**  
32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

So Jesus was not deliberately deceiving John when He said that the “time is near”. He also, however, could not have told John in simple and straightforward terms that Jesus' return would be 1900+ years in the future. A parable in Matthew 24 discusses the likely result if men had known in advance that Jesus' return would be so distant.

Matt 24:48-51

48 "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,'  
49 and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards;  
50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,  
51 and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.

Had mankind known that Jesus' return would be so long in the future, the urgency of the Gospel message would have been critically hampered. The Second Coming of Christ is the blessed hope. Just as the Jews were constantly expecting the Messiah to come ever since they were in captivity in Egypt, so Christians have constantly been expecting His return. That expectation of an imminent return is what keeps hope alive. And in one regard, His return is never more than a lifetime away – for as soon as we fall asleep, our next waking moment will be that of Christ's return. Morris Venden was once speaking about his dad. His father apparently met with a sudden death. He said that one day his father will rise up out of the ground and say, “I knew I would live to see Him come!” You see, for Morris Venden's father, as for countless other thousands of people, it will be as though Jesus has returned between the two blinks of an eye. Now, let's look at some examples from the Bible of prophecies that have multiple applications.

## ***Elijah***

First let's consider Malachi's prophecy about Elijah. Elijah was an actual, literal person. Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return as a forerunner of the Messiah. "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD." - Mal 4:5.

Jesus indicated that the prophecy about Elijah would have a double fulfillment – once at Jesus’ first coming, and once again just before His Second Coming. The first fulfillment was in the person of John the Baptist, who came “in the Spirit and power of Elijah”, and proclaimed a similar message. But Jesus also said that Elijah would come again. The “Elijah” that will come before Jesus’ Second Coming will be the 144,000. These people, under the power of the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit, will proclaim a message of repentance to prepare the world for the second advent of the Savior. This is described in Revelation chapters 7 and 11. Look at the following passages:

Matt 17:10-13

- 10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"  
11 And He answered and said, "**Elijah is coming and will restore all things;**  
12 but I say to you, that **Elijah already came**, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."  
13 **Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.**

Luke 1:13-17

- 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and **you will give him the name John.**  
14 "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.  
15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb.  
16 "And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.  
17 **"And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah,** to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Rev 7:1-4

- 1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.  
2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,  
3 saying, "**Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**"  
4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, **one hundred and forty-four thousand** sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

(Note that the 144,000 are not the only ones who are saved. Verse 9 of the same chapter describes a great multitude that no one could number who came out of the Great Tribulation and who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. A great multitude is saved, but the 144,000 are the people who are specially commissioned by God to take the Elijah message to the world to prepare the people for Jesus’ return.)

Rev 11:3-6

- 3 "And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and **they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days**, clothed in sackcloth."  
4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.  
5 And if anyone desires to harm them, **fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies;** and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.  
6 **These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying;** and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

In this last passage, Revelation uses descriptions from Biblical history of Moses and Elijah to describe the work of the 144,000. Elijah caused it not to rain in Israel for 1260 days. Later, when Ahab sent companies of soldiers to capture him, fire came out of heaven and devoured them.

You can see that the prophecy about Elijah had a historical type in the actual person of Elijah, one historical fulfillment in the person of John the Baptist, and a final eschatological fulfillment in the 144,000. In another sense, the people who kept Bible truth alive during the 1260 years of Papal supremacy also had the Spirit and power of Elijah. So this represents another possible application of the same prophecy.

## *The Early & Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit*

These passages speak for themselves. Given our assumptions and current line of reasoning, consider the following texts:

Joel 2:23, 28-32

23 So rejoice, O sons of Zion, and be glad in the LORD your God; for He has given you the early rain for your vindication. And **He has poured down for you the rain, the early and latter rain as before.**

28 "And **it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;** and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

29 "And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 "And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

31 "The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

32 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered;

Acts 2:14-21

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words.

15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

16 but **this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:**

17 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, '**That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind;** and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

18 Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.

19 'And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.

20 'The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.

21 'And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Rev 18:1-5

1 **After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.**

2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues;

5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

"The great work of the Gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. **The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the Gospel, are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close.**" – GC 611.

"It is with earnest longing that **I look forward to the time when the events of the Day of Pentecost shall be repeated** with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, '**I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with glory**' [Rev 18:1]." – 6BC 1055.

"At no time in our experience can we dispense with the assistance of that which enables us to make the first start. **The blessings received under the former rain are needful to us to the end.**...As we seek God for the Holy Spirit, it will work in us meekness, humbleness of mind, and a conscious dependence on God **for the perfecting latter rain.**" – TM 507, 509.

The former and latter rains were literal rains that fell in Israel at the beginning and end of the growing season. Joel's prophecy revealed a spiritual application. Peter said that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. However a close look shows that the prophecy was not completely fulfilled, because some of aspects (v.19-20) applied specifically to the end time, when the prophecy would receive its final and most complete fulfillment. Ellen White confirms this line of thought. And she adds a perspective that the former and latter rain applies also to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer throughout the Christian era.

## *The Destruction of Jerusalem*

Matt 24:1-2, 15-22

1 And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? **Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.**"

15 "Therefore **when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),**

16 **then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;**

17 let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house;

18 and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak.

19 "But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days!

20 "But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath;

21 **for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.**

22 **"And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.**

Luke 21:5-6, 20-22

5 And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said,

6 "As for these things which you are looking at, **the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down.**"

20 **"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand.**

21 **"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains,** and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city;

22 because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

**"The Savior's prophecy concerning the visitation of judgment upon Jerusalem is to have another fulfillment,** of which that terrible desolation was but a faint shadow. In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of the world that has rejected God's mercy and trampled upon His law." GC 36.

The pattern is evident when comparing the scriptures above. Actually, there are a number of passages in Old Testament books by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel about the first destruction of Jerusalem which apply as well to its destruction in AD 70 as well as the destruction of the world at the end of time. There are similar passages in all of those books, as well as the book of Revelation that, apply also to the fall of Babylon.

Isa 21:9

9 "Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs." And one answered and said, **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground."**

Jer 51:44-45

44 "And I shall punish Bel in Babylon, and I shall make what he has swallowed come out of his mouth; and the nations will no longer stream to him. **Even the wall of Babylon has fallen down!**

45 **"Come forth from her midst, My people,** and each of you save yourselves from the fierce anger of the LORD.

Rev 14:8

8 And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."**

Rev 18:1-5

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!** And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 **"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality,** and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

- 4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "**Come out of her, my people**, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues;  
5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

The Jews of Jesus' day could have said that the prophecies of Babylon's fall had already been fulfilled when the Medo-Persians invaded. But John shows that Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies will have another eschatological fulfillment. Actually, there are a great number of prophecies in the books of the Old Testament prophets that have an end time application. Just as "Babylon" and "Israel" and "Jerusalem" and "Egypt" have eschatological applications, so also may the "Edom" and "Tyre" and "Moab" of the Old Testament prophets. Once we discover that prophecies may have multiple fulfillments, it opens up our eyes to the eschatological application of many prophecies that we have considered to be fulfilled already, but for which the fulfillment seems somehow incomplete. Consider this following example. It is a prophecy that we all know has been fulfilled by Jesus' first coming. But read the complete prophecy and decide if there are parts that do not seem to completely fit that application.

Num 24:15-25

- 15 And he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, and the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,  
16 The oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered.  
17 **"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth.**  
18 **"And Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies, also shall be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly.**  
19 **"One from Jacob shall have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city."**  
20 And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said, "Amalek was the first of the nations, but his end shall be destruction."  
21 And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, "Your dwelling place is enduring, and your nest is set in the cliff.  
22 "Nevertheless Kain shall be consumed; how long shall Asshur keep you captive?"  
23 And he took up his discourse and said, "Alas, who can live except God has ordained it?  
24 "But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim, and they shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber; so they also shall come to destruction."  
25 Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.

We know that part of this prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus first coming. But parts do not fit that application. Perhaps these parts have an eschatological application as well. It is reminiscent of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Parts of that may have applied to the early rain at Pentecost, but not all of them did. Some parts clearly applied specifically to the last days.

### ***The Signs of the Times***

Jesus listed some specific signs that would immediately precede His return. Among those were a great earthquake, the stars falling or losing their light, and the sun and moon being darkened. Look at the myriad of times that these same predictions were made in the scriptures in association with the coming of the Messiah.

Joel 2:10

- 10 Before them **the earth quakes**, the **heavens tremble**, **the sun and the moon grow dark**, **and the stars lose their brightness**.

Joel 2:30-31

- 30 "And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire, and columns of smoke.  
31 **"The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.**

Joel 3:14-15

- 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.  
15 **The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.**

Isa 13:9-10

9 Behold, **the day of the LORD is coming**, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.

10 For **the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light.**

Amos 8:9

9 "And it will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That **I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight.**

Matt 24:29

29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,**

Luke 21:11

11 and there will be **great earthquakes**, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors **and great signs from heaven.**

Rev 6:12-13

12 And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was **a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;**

13 and **the stars of the sky fell to the earth**, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

Rev 8:5

5 And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and **an earthquake.**

Rev 11:13

13 And in that hour there was **a great earthquake**, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Rev 16:18

18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was **a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.**

There are actually many more similar scriptures, but this sampling should suffice to make the point. However, we should notice something else as well. The prophecies above have a number of applications. Look at the first application in the following verses.

Matt 27:45

45 Now from the sixth hour **darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.**

Matt 27:50-53

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and **the earth shook**; and the rocks were split,

52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Almost all of the signs were fulfilled at the crucifixion. There was a great earthquake. The earth and heavens were shaken. The sun grew dark. But this was not the only time. Josephus tells us that all of the signs were fulfilled in a seven-year period of time just prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Likewise, we know that these signs were fulfilled in advance of the great advent awakening in the Lisbon earthquake, the dark day, and the falling of the stars. But that was not the end of it. There will be a final application of those signs immediately before Jesus returns.

### ***The Messages to the Seven Churches***

The Messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation Chapters 1-3 are a great example of how the prophecies of Revelation may have multiple applications. First, the messages could have applied to the seven literal churches to whom they were addressed. Historical evidence suggests that those seven churches did exhibit many of the characteristics that are described in the letters. Secondly, the Seven Churches describe the seven ages of the Church from Apostolic times until Jesus return. The last church is the Laodicean church, or the “people under judgement” from its Greek derivatives. Finally, the Seven Churches have an eschatological application. They describe the characteristics that will exist in the worldwide church just before Jesus returns. Some will have lost their first love. Others will be cast in prison, but will be faithful unto death. Some will be putting stumbling blocks before the sons of “Israel”. Others will be tolerating spiritualism and immorality. Some will be sleeping and will need to be awakened. Others will be persevering in God’s word and committing deeds of brotherly love. And finally, some will think that they are rich and have need of nothing, when they are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. The same description applies first to the seven literal historical churches, then to the seven ages of the church through history, and finally to the seven characteristics that will be evident in the church of the last days.

There are those who have seen only the historicist application of the prophecy. Some of the more extreme have concluded that the SDA church is the only true church, and has therefore become the church of Laodicea in these last days. These folks seem to lose sight of the mission to spread the Gospel. They focus their attention instead on cleansing the church and rebuking it for its sin. Seeing the eschatological application of the prophecy helps to prevent this kind of attitude from forming.

### ***The Antichrist***

There are also a number of prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, with support throughout the rest of the New Testament, that talk of a 3-1/2 year (42 months / 1260 days) period of persecution of God’s people by the Antichrist. This had an initial application in the life of Jesus, when he ministered for 3-1/2 years, and was tormented by Satan Himself, as well as the Jewish leaders, the whole time. The second application of this prophecy was the rise of the papacy during the dark ages. But that is not the end of it. The beast with the deadly head wound will rise up again at the end of time. It will be the papacy ascending once again to power. Notice in Revelation Chapter 13 that the beast is given authority to act for 42 months. Well, that verse comes after the verse that says the beast’s fatal head wound was healed. This 1260 day period happens after the wound is healed. This time though, it is most likely 1260 literal days, and not 1260 years as during the dark ages.

Rev 13:3-5

3 And **I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed.** And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;

4 and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

5 And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; **and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.**

### **Summary**

The Introduction and Conclusion of the book of Revelation are extremely significant parts of the book that are commonly overlooked when interpreting its messages. These two sections, however, establish the central theme of the whole book and define its scope and context. Both the Introduction and the Conclusion identify Jesus’ Second Coming as Revelation’s central theme. Yet the Introduction and Conclusion also leave us with an intriguing paradox. They declare that, “the time is near” and that Jesus is “coming quickly [soon]”, while leaving us with a subsequent 1900+ year interval to deal with. How we deal with this apparent contradiction will affect how we interpret the rest of the book of Revelation. In this paper, we have very briefly dealt with some of the strengths and the problems associated with the historicist approach to this dilemma as well as those involved with treating the prophecies as conditional. Finally we have analyzed a possible method which allows for multiple applications of the same prophecy. We derived this principle from several Biblical examples, including the following:

1. Elijah
2. Early / Latter Rain
3. Destruction of Jerusalem
4. Signs of the times
5. Letters to Seven Churches

As we continue with our study of the book of Revelation, we will see how this principle applies to the rest of the prophecies it contains. Of the many applications that a single prophecy can have, the Biblical examples show that the eschatological application is the most complete and the most significant for us who are living in the last days of Earth's history. We are witnessing the advent of the eschatological application of the prophecies of the Bible and of Revelation. This is the PRIMARY and most significant application of the prophecies and is the central theme of the book.