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*The People of God*  
Finding the Future in Your Bible

by John Finkbeiner

**26 Keys** That Unlock Prophecy

*The People of God:  
Finding the Future in Your Bible  
26 Keys that Unlock Bible Prophecy*

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## Key #1 -Attention!-

\* \* \*

Standing as erect as I could, I faced my drill sergeant for the first time. Why was I terrified? Why did my knees shake? I must have sensed what was coming. As someone full of himself and a twenty-two year-old college graduate, I was about to be humbled. My egocentric and self-absorbed life was wobbling and about to crash. Duty called and I answered. It was 1969 and I was “called to attention.”

### *Something is stirring*

Something is happening. Uneasiness is creeping into many hearts sending a chill through the body. In our culture, end of the world predictions have found ready listeners. What is going on? Instead of hope, a sense of dread dominates speculations about the future. Our world is about to turn upside down but what does that mean?

Think how it must have been for generations of European Jews. Prior to the events leading to World War II, they lived in relative peace, owned businesses and contributed to their country’s prosperity. Jewish children were educated, married and raised families of their own. Parents had hopes the next generation would have a better life.

But all that changed. Adolph Hitler altered everything. One night, known afterward as “the night of broken glass,” signaled the transition to evil ahead. It was a sign many German Jews ignored.<sup>1</sup>

Hitler used Jews as scapegoats, blaming them for Germany’s troubles. Hatred spewed from the top and spilled into the streets. Death camps were constructed. A “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” was proposed, approved and then implemented.<sup>2</sup>

Had Jewish parents known, would they have kept their children within Hitler’s reach? The chance to exit Germany, Poland, Austria and other European countries began closing in the 1930’s. By the 1940’s, it was probably too late. When it’s time to go, it’s time to go!

### *It’s about the children*

As we remember the plight of World War II-era Jews, prayers are being heard in heaven, prayers for deliverance and help. An



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Indonesian mother prays to Jesus. A Vietnamese father prays to his Heavenly Father. An Indian teen prays to Christ. Hindu fanatics are threatening believers in her village. A Nigerian pastor and Arab Christian pray for courage to stand against a mob of Muslim radicals.

Hate-filled zealots burn homes to ashes; innocent people are attacked with machetes or carted off to prison to be tortured by secret police; some face execution by paramilitary-style radicals in Mexico, Colombia or The Philippines; Sudanese and Pakistani girls are kidnapped from their homes and sold as slaves.

The reason: They are Christians. They worship Jesus as their Savior. They have no place to hide and no legal protection.

Insulated from genuine persecution, Christians in the West seem poised to join their afflicted spiritual family. As freedoms erode, believers increasingly worry. Judges restrict a Christian's right to express faith in public. Police enforce seldom-used zoning laws to restrict in-home meetings. School officials deny students a Christian club. The Ten Commandments, nativity scenes, crosses, and other symbols of our Judeo-Christian heritage, are forbidden by secular judges and disappearing from sight. It is about to become worse.

### *Grounds for optimism*

The difference between this generation and pre-World War II Europe is this: Jews had little warning. After the holocaust, the nation Israel was born. So God's people today should know what's next. We are living in the days predicted long ago in God's Word.

Instead of a future paralysis of fear and despair, Christians have an opportunity to take action. Parents must ready their children for hard times ahead. We should have gratitude to God that our Christian children and grandchildren are not destined to live out their days in a godless culture. Everyone that trusts in Christ to the end will be saved from the day of evil and then live in a new Promised Land.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who trusts fully in Christ but does not survive evil's onslaught, gains Heaven. For those blessed to die for Jesus' sake, death will be gain. To live in the age to come will be a wonderful reward as well.<sup>4</sup>

Please understand that Christ will rescue a great multitude of survivors. How do we know? It is simple: When our returning King reigns in the next age, the kingdom begins with a large throng of happy people. I want my family, and everyone I know, to be among the blessed, joy-filled citizens of Jesus' Millennial Kingdom.

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### *But now the bad news*

Suffering presents a serious challenge. This book does not subscribe to the popular teaching that, by way of rapture,<sup>5</sup> Christians escape global “great tribulation.”<sup>6</sup> It is obvious to all but the uninformed, that our brothers and sisters in major parts of the world are not escaping great suffering. For decades or longer, Christians in many lands have experienced *great tribulation*. Jesus prophesied a future worldwide persecution of unparalleled proportion. It is in our Bible.

How do Christians in the West figure they have a “free pass” from affliction? Do we just assume that we never experience the horrors that other believers must overcome? Why do we think we will escape “Satan’s wrath” while other believers are called to patiently endure it?<sup>7</sup> The answer is, “We won’t!” Full participation is just ahead.<sup>8</sup>

If we understand God’s redemptive purpose in trials, we will not think it strange when they come our way.<sup>9</sup> If we are able to look beyond temporary pain and see permanent reward, as Jesus did, we are more apt to be over-comers with patience and hope.<sup>10</sup>

Pity the Christian that is unprepared for the “*time of great distress*”. It will be as if they woke up in a thin-walled shanty in the cold north in mid-January, without blankets, a warm coat or insulated boots. Someone should have warned them, right? Someone did. His name is Jesus. He told us in prophecy.<sup>11</sup>

### *Pardon the interruption*

The fast moving freight train of evil is very inconvenient. We have things we want to do and places we want to go. If we can make life tolerable, we can settle back, and retire to golf or fish. Yet the train is barreling down on us. We are with our family in the car, parked on the tracks. We better get started. It’s time to move.<sup>12</sup>

Leaving is not always in our plans, but war changes things. I went to college with the hope of earning my degree then making my fortune. Instead, six months after graduation, I was crawling in the mud under machine gun fire in basic training. Instead of an office, I sweltered with my fellow soldiers in the South Vietnam heat.

Heading to Southeast Asia was never on my “to-do list”. Later, reality set in. It was my place in history. A president’s order, a low draft number, a major troop call-up and a war; it pointed me in a direction other than the one I intended.

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As I said, war changes everything. Life's goals go on hold while thoughts turn to other concerns-- like staying alive! Over 53,000 comrades, who made the same trip across the Pacific, came home in coffins; others came back maimed, wounded, imprisoned or scarred. The public's reaction to their return wounded even more. I survived. I owe a debt to those who risked or gave everything.

### *Moving beyond the end times*

It is almost time to go. That's what is happening. The time to move out is swiftly drawing near. At work in our spirits is a holy discontent, a longing for a better place-- another land. God is preparing his people for the road ahead. The trip entails a destination beyond the end times. Our journey will take us all the way to our expected end.

Another age is coming into view. We are close enough that we can look across and catch a glimpse. Written on our heart and visited in dreams is the home for which we yearn. The place we are custom-made to live in and enjoy is the New Promised Land! It is where we belong. It is where Jesus Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings.

### *The end of the world?*

Perhaps, like me, you find the news upsetting. Our beloved country is turning into something unrecognizable, something dark and ugly. The land we have called home is unsafe, ungodly and unfamiliar.

Has God pronounced judgment on the planet? (Scoffers mock questions like these.<sup>13</sup>) Are we going the way other corrupted empires have gone throughout history? Or is it as some doomsday prophets say, are we near "the fateful day"- the end of the world? After all, isn't the date the ancient Mayan calendar ends an indicator?<sup>14</sup>

No, the world does not end December 21<sup>st</sup> of 2012, as some predict. Catastrophes may occur but according to Scriptures, the end of life on our planet, as we know it, is more than one thousand years away.<sup>15</sup> After that, for *The People of God*, LIFE begins.

There is no mistaking that *the end of the present age* is on the horizon. It ends on a day and hour known only to the Father. Long ago, Our Creator programmed his universe, setting the precise moment for the floodwaters to cover the earth.<sup>16</sup> Stars and meteorites are presently on course for a collision with earth.<sup>17</sup> God's glory will soon be on full display, and at the precise nanosecond that the Father set at creation.

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*Citizens Elsewhere*

God's Word warns believers about having too much attachment to the present world.<sup>18</sup> Peter advised Roman Christians,

*Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."*

*1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:17*

Living as strangers implies making a minimal investment in a world that is passing. God's chosen people are to live as foreigners, aliens or sojourners. *The People of God* are citizens of another "far away" country. We need to give our attention to getting to our home.

The trip will not be easy, by any means.

*If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*

*1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:18*

The phase that comes next will not be fun. Leaving what is familiar will be all about salvation, survival and destiny-- not enjoyment. Arriving at the place prepared by God will bring unspeakable joy.

*Women and children in the lifeboats*

Stories in the Bible are there for our salvation. Each account offers vital directions on the subject. Every word provides *teaching, correction, rebuke and training in righteousness* so that the man and woman of God *might be thoroughly equipped for every good work*<sup>19</sup>.

Perhaps the most detailed events in the Old Testament are those surrounding Israel or the twelve tribes of Jacob.<sup>20</sup> We need to grasp the significance of the Bible's attention on Abraham, Jacob and the people of Israel: Connect with Israel's history and know the future. If we read about the exodus, for example, "*for teaching, correction, rebuke and training in righteousness,*" we learn about what is in store in the last days.

As we think about the changes at home, imagine how it was for Jacob's offspring. For nearly four centuries, they lived in Egypt as welcomed guests. Life was okay. In their busyness, they probably forgot they were strangers. Egypt was only temporary, a fact God had

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not forgotten. Though they may have lost track of the prophetic calendar, the Lord knew how and when to get his people's *attention*.

It took a famine in Canaan to move Jacob's family into Egypt. Another kind of emergency would send Israel in full flight, back toward Canaan. A transition had to occur to get the Hebrews attention-- a pharaoh with the coldness of Adolph Hitler, took the reins of power.

It is time we consider how to get our women and children to the lifeboats. We are one terrible happening away from an era of tribulation. There is no time to lose. It is April 1912, and we are on the Titanic. The infamous iceberg will soon be behind us.

### *A new, different kind of Pharaoh*

*Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.*

*Exodus 1:8*

When life is good, who wants to leave? When life turns miserable, we start looking for an exit. That is where the new pharaoh came in. The nation's new leader was different from his predecessors. God appointed a wicked ruler. His ordained purpose was to prod the Hebrews out of their comfortable sleep.

With the new regime, life in Egypt changed forever. Regardless how good it had been for Jacob's children before, their stay would never be good again. Like an unwanted guest, Pharaoh intended to make the remainder of the Hebrew's visit in Egypt a painful experience. Until they left, life would evolve from hard to intolerable.

### *Picking a fight*

Egypt's king was uneasy. Inside his borders lived a people so numerous they nearly covered the entire country. The Hebrews had become a nation inside a nation. They never assimilated. They did not adopt the Egyptian's religion. They were never part of the culture. God had preserved them as a unique people, all according to his purpose.

Pharaoh felt threatened. He foresaw the day that the Hebrew people would rise up and join his enemies.<sup>21</sup> As a result, he planned to take their property and make Jacob weak. He subjected them to hard labor. He used Hebrew men as slaves to build his cities. Pharaoh put taskmasters over them, so they would feel the sharp sting of the whip.

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At first, the Hebrews adjusted to their mistreatment. The more ruthlessly they were oppressed, the more numerous they became. Though Pharaoh grew richer, his concerns grew also. Hebrew slaves made him feel strong, but also vulnerable. So, he oppressed them more, until their bondage was more than they could bear.<sup>22</sup>

Because of Jacob's slavery, Egypt grew soft. Wealth increased from the labor of slaves. When the Hebrews left, their slave-based economy collapsed. God had his vengeance for the mistreatment of his people. For punishing his people, Egypt felt the sting of God's whip.

#### *Wake up!*

Denial is in our nature. Imagine the conversation among the Hebrew elders. Many placed their hopes on Pharaoh having a change of heart or a fatal heart attack. In the transition from comfort to bondage, did the leaders believe the hard times would last? I wonder if the Hebrews knew God placed this Pharaoh over them in order to make their love for Egypt grow cold. Maybe this can explain what is happening in Washington D.C., Ottawa, and other capitals with western-style governments. Our love for our country must grow cold.

Beside denial, another danger is apathy. The apathetic care little about freedom-- that is until they lose it. Jesus describes a world of apathy prior to his return. In the days of Noah, just before the flood, *people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage right up until Noah entered the ark.* Before it rained fire, Sodom carried on life as usual.<sup>23</sup> They, too, ignored the warnings. So it will be again.

Another related killer is lethargy. Lethargy is a sleep-induced state of mind. At least, if one is apathetic or in denial, they are awake, sort of. There is no hope for sleepers when vigilance is mandatory.

On the voyage to Tarshish, Jonah slept below deck while the storm raged. The wind and rain threatened to break the ship to pieces, drowning crew and passengers alike. Until they woke him, Jonah was undisturbed. He was oblivious to the imminent catastrophe above.<sup>24</sup>

When the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, it's not time to nap. Post watchmen on the wall! At the sound of their alarm, we need to take flight. Travel light. On the mountain of God, all we need will be provided. But we must move quickly. Others may doze, be listless or look like frozen statues, but God's people cannot share their fate.

*The People of God will be ready. Their lamps are trimmed and burning.* They are sober, vigilant and alert rather than apathetic, in

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denial or lethargic. They recognize their enemy, Satan, does not sleep. He prowls about, day and night, *seeking those whom he may devour.*<sup>25</sup>

Denial, apathy and lethargy want to cover our minds like a cozy blanket. We cannot let them. Stand watch and pray.

*“Wake up, O sleeper,  
rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”*

*Ephesians 5:14*

### *King Croesus*

In the ancient world, Croesus (pronounced *cree-sus*), the Lydian king (560-c547BC), ruled from the city of Sardis. In its early days, the waters that flowed near Sardis were rich with gold. The gold from the mountain-fed streams gave this king legendary prosperity--thus the once popular phrase “as rich as Croesus.”

Fabulous wealth was not the only reason Croesus and Sardis were famous. The city’s capture and defeat by the Persians (c547BC) was a classic example of denial, apathy, and lethargy. A false sense of invulnerability led to Sardis’ downfall: a trait sure to be repeated in the last days. In a single day, Croesus and Sardis went from riches, splendor and luxury, to utter disaster.

Situated high over the plain below, Sardis was approachable only on three well-fortified sides. A sheer, fifteen hundred foot vertical wall protected the city on the remaining side. When the Medeo-Persians attacked, a soldier discovered that the unguarded wall was climb-able. He led an assault force into the open city. Sardis quickly surrendered. The same scenario was repeated hundreds of years later but by a different enemy. Sardis would go to sleep again.<sup>26</sup>

Lack of vigilance was about to overtake the Church in Sardis.

*“I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. **But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come.**”*

*Revelation 3:2-3*

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One of the dangers of living in an economically strong nation, and trusting in our pensions, retirement accounts, jobs and financial security is that we are easily lulled to sleep. Western nations have long been as *rich as Croesus* and so have many of their churches. Yet many of them are dead. Jesus says to these, “*Strengthen what remains... and repent.*” If they will not, sudden disaster is their fate!

#### *430 years to the day*

God told Abram when four hundred years were complete his descendants would leave the country where they were slaves.<sup>27</sup> When Pharaoh ordered Jacob’s family out, doubtful anyone among the two million belonging to Jacob was sad to go. Severe mistreatment was all the motivation necessary to flee Egypt. Pharaoh and slavery drove the Hebrews into the desert and toward the Promised Land.

Slavery also gave the Hebrews survivability. Harsh treatment made them wiry, lean and able to cope with the conditions they would face along the way. Without the rigors of slavery, how could they endure the heat and the wilderness? Hardship will toughen us, also.

Do we know our prophetic calendar? Scripture informs us that Israel dwelled in Egypt 430 years *to the very day*.<sup>28</sup> Could this “very day” reference to the length of time God’s people were in Egypt indicate a set timetable for a coming major event? Understand that this is not an end of the world prediction. What I believe the Bible is suggesting by this is an exact day for a massive exit for *The People of God* from North America, similar to the Hebrews’ exodus from Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The Pilgrims arrived off North American shores November 21, 1620. They first set foot on the land that would become Plymouth, Massachusetts, March 21, 1621. Could the Pilgrims arrival nearly 400 years ago, be a warning signal or a coincidence?

Why did God cite the exact day that Israel left Egypt? Why was it 430 years to the very day and not an odd number of days or years or a fraction of a year? I do not believe it is accidental. Could the soon exodus of a large righteous remnant from North America be all it takes to ignite global evangelism? Might the persecution causing God’s people to flee the West be the catalyst for the worldwide preaching of the gospel? Would exiting believers, either in chains or in flight, leave behind a spiritual void that paves the road for the beast’s rise to international prominence and power?<sup>30</sup>



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Does America have prophetic significance? I used to scoff at the suggestion, but not now. God recently reminded me of the historical uniqueness of this continent. There has never been anything like America, nor could there ever be again.

Think of North America in relation to the Biblical term, “the nations.” America, for instance, has been “a melting pot” of hundreds or thousands of ethnic groups into one people. Printed and stamped on U.S. currency is the Latin “*e pluribus unum*.” It means, in effect, from several (nations) comes one (nation). The term “American” may incorporate any ethnic or religious group that can come to mind.

It all began November 11, 1620 with the Mayflower Compact. While harboring at Cape Cod, the Pilgrims created the Compact as a statement of purpose. In it they declared and affirmed that they came, “for the Glory of God” and “the advancement of the Christian faith.”

Others followed suit, enduring like dangers and hardships. They settled on this continent for freedom’s sake. They sought to worship God free of a king’s interference or control from oppressive religious authorities. Some came on a mission to spread the gospel.

There has never been a nation as dedicated to liberty, at home and abroad, as the United States. But the light of salvation through Christ grows increasingly dim in the West. The beacon of freedom and Christian truth has sent its beams around the globe. When the lamp of God no longer casts its rays from this continent, darkness will reign.

An approaching major negative event will single out Bible believing Christians as the enemy—a repeat of the “night of broken glass.” All will be different for the family of God from then on. After a season of persecution and mistreatment, God’s people will go in sorrow to lands from which their ancestors came. By God’s hand, “the children of light” will leave and set out for “the glory of God.” They will go to the ends of the earth for “the advancement of the Christian faith.”

WAKE UP! It is near departure time-- but where do we go? Is there an escape? Yes, but now we must prepare to exodus our Egypt.

**ATTENTION!** (Nothing grabs our attention like suffering. It turns thoughts to God and to our future in the next age. It makes us want to go forward no matter how great the cost. There is a war to fight.) *Right-FACE! For-waaard MARCH!*

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Discussion:

- Do you remember when you first left home? What were the circumstances? What was the Lord's purpose in moving you?
- Where do you consider home to be? What makes it home? How attached are you? What would it take to get you to leave?
- What should our role be in today's world? Should we try to turn back the clock in order to recapture the good old days or prepare self, family and others for the future?
- Why did God allow the Hebrews to suffer mistreatment as slaves for so long before "coming down from heaven to help"? (*Exodus 3:7-10*)

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<sup>1</sup> On November 9-10, 1938, in retribution for the assassination of a German diplomat, Hitler ordered violent reprisals on German Jews. The "night of broken glass" or "crystal night" saw the murder of 91, the arrest and internment in concentration camps of 25,000 to 30,000, in addition to the destruction of Jewish property including 267 synagogues set ablaze.-  
*Wikipedia*

<sup>2</sup> Since other nations, including America, refused the diplomatic offer of a large contingent of Jewish immigrants, Adolph Hitler then arrived at the decision called "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" supposedly after a meeting in 1941. If no one wanted the hated Jews, he would dispose of them himself. For two decades, leading up to "The Final Solution," it had been the openly expressed goal of Hitler to rid the Aryan nations of Jews.

<sup>3</sup> *Revelation 20:1-6*

<sup>4</sup> *Philippians 1:21*

<sup>5</sup> *Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1*

<sup>6</sup> "Rapture" applies to the "gathering up" of believers together with living/deceased saints to meet the returning Lord Jesus Christ in the air (*1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:12-18*). See Chaps. 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> The term "Satan's wrath" is given to the prophetic season when God grants authority to Satan's appointed ruler to inflict terrible suffering on God's people. *Daniel 7:21, 8:23-26, 11:33-36*

<sup>8</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:12*

<sup>9</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-16*

<sup>10</sup> *Hebrews 12:1-3*

<sup>11</sup> *Matthew 24:25*

<sup>12</sup> *Matthew 24:15-20*

<sup>13</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:3*

<sup>14</sup> Much attention is currently paid to the Mayan Indian calendar. It purportedly stops on the day of the winter solstice 2012. There was no mention by the

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Mayans, however, that it signified the end of the world. The Hollywood movie “2012” and the History Channel’s TV special, “*Is 2012 the year the cosmic clock finally winds down to zero days, zero hope?*” were produced from this speculation and a number of other doomsday scenarios and myths currently being circulated in our culture.

Source: Fox News.com, “*Mayan Year 2012 Stirs Doomsday Scenarios,*” October 10, 2009

<sup>15</sup> *Revelation 20:7-10*

<sup>16</sup> *Genesis 1:1-8, 7:11-12*

<sup>17</sup> *Revelation 8:8-11*

<sup>18</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> John 2:15-17*

<sup>19</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17*

<sup>20</sup> *Genesis 32:28* gives the account of God changing Jacob’s name to Israel. Jacob’s descendants became known in Egypt as the Hebrews (Abiru). God gave Jacob the name Israel, his chosen nation.

<sup>21</sup> *Exodus 1:9-10*

<sup>22</sup> *Exodus 1:11-14*

<sup>23</sup> *Luke 17:26-29*

<sup>24</sup> *Jonah 1:1-6*

<sup>25</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8*

<sup>26</sup> From William Barclay, THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN, Vol. 1, The Daily Bible Series, pp. 113-115

<sup>27</sup> *Genesis 15:13*

<sup>28</sup> *Exodus 12:40-41*

<sup>29</sup> The army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon swept into Judah and took the rebellious nation captive in 597BC, and again in 586BC. The last was devastating to Judah for its royal city, Jerusalem, and its most holy place, Solomon’s temple, were both left in ruins. Many died by the sword yet many survivors among the Jews went into exile. There, in Babylon, they lived, multiplied and prospered for seventy years. This was all according to the prophecy that God gave his servant, Jeremiah (sp. *Jeremiah 29:4-11*).

<sup>30</sup> *Luke 21:24*

## Key #2 -The Plan-

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Never forget, you and I live in a war zone. If we lose sight of that fact, we will not understand what is happening. We may assign blame to God<sup>1</sup> for the casualties if we fail to remember we are living on the field of battle. When you think about it, war explains a lot.

*Genesis 3* and *Revelation 12* are good places to start. They help us settle on the fact that there is a powerful, threatening real-life enemy. Near the Bible's beginning and end, God raises the curtain separating dimensions to reveal a menacing invisible foe. The serpent that deceived Eve is the same evil being who commands the forces of darkness. No truce or treaty with this enemy will work-- only victory.

By the way, the woman's "seed" will one day crush Satan's head.<sup>2</sup> According to the Apostle Paul, Satan will be crushed under the saints' feet.<sup>3</sup> ("Saints" is another term for *The People of God*.) What Paul wrote will soon take place. It all fits with Christ's words:

*They overcame him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.*

*Revelation 12:11*

### *The Master's strategy*

Because his Kingdom and Glory are under assault, the Lord has declared war. Our God is a Warrior King! He has a Battle Plan for victory. His plan is no secret. He conceived it in the High Council of Heaven before anything came into being. The end game, *first revealed to the prophets, is unveiled in these last times for our sake*.<sup>4</sup>

*Before going to war, every worthy commander has a plan of battle. Our King is no exception. His plan is for what happens at the end of this age. When Christ comes, he will rescue his people. Then Our Lord and King will take vengeance on all those who mistreated them and rebelled against him. Destiny dictates the complete destruction of God's foes at the Battle of Armageddon*.<sup>5</sup>

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### *An old man*

One of the early battles was over an old man and his barren wife. As is usually the case with the war we are in, individuals are the battlefield. The couple at “ground-zero” in this key conflict were Abram (later Abraham) and his wife Sarai (later Sarah).

In Abram God found the faith he requires. At that time, faith was in short supply. With the exception of Job, no one since Noah trusted God like Abram.

Although he was a great chieftain with an army of 318 men<sup>6</sup> along with a large household of servants, flocks and herds, Abram remained without an heir. This was Satan’s doing. He was ninety and his wife, Sarai, was eighty-- both well beyond childbearing age. Despite all their wealth, they had no children. Her barren womb was a source of heartbreak. Money could not buy God’s blessing of a son.

In *Genesis 15*, the Lord told Abram that he found great pleasure in him. God made a promise; Abram would have a son. The heir he longed for would come from his own body. Then God took Abram outside to look at the clear night sky. Lifting Abram’s head, God showed his servant myriads of celestial lights. He then told Abram that his descendants would number as many as the stars. *Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*<sup>7</sup>

### *Here’s what I’m going to do-- God*

One day Abram fell into a *dark and dreadful sleep.*<sup>8</sup> In a vision, he was shown part of the war-- his and ours. Abram felt the terror of pain, the closeness of the world’s dark powers.

Whether in a dream or awake, God spoke to Abram,

*“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.”*

*Genesis 15:12-14*

God revealed his plan to Abram because he believed. He always tells his servants his plans beforehand.<sup>9</sup> They pass it on word-for-word. Servants with whom God has this special relationship have a name, *prophets*. Abram was faithful in repeating God’s words and visions exactly as he received them so he earned his title of prophet.<sup>10</sup>

## *Finding the Future in Your Bible*

### *A country not their own*

Though God's servant probably knew it was Egypt, the name, Egypt, was unspoken in Abram's *dreadful vision*. Earlier, Abram went to this land in the south during a famine. The circumstances were identical to conditions two generations later when grandson, Jacob, moved his family south, to Egypt, to escape famine in Canaan.<sup>11</sup>

There was food there, and a place to live, yet only for a season. God did not allow Abram to stay. Going there for food and remaining four hundred years was the destiny of Jacob's sons; the fourth generation of Abram's descendants.

Abram's dream was dark and dreadful for a reason. No one wants to see their descendants suffer or view images of distant offspring undergoing severe hardship. Most labor so following generations will have a better life. We would hate to know that our kin would become slaves. Yet God promised slavery. He also told Abram, through it all, he would be *his shield and very great reward*.

Something good would come from his descendant's mistreatment. The seed or offspring of Abram would come out of their bondage *with great possessions*.

According to the Battle Plan, after centuries of living as strangers and years of oppression, a mighty people would come forth-- a nation belonging to God. They would have an army and act as God's strong arm, bringing his judgment on Canaan's corruption.

### *A promised land*

Who is receiving this plan from God? Again, it is an old man with no son for an heir, a nomadic tribesman, a stranger living in a strange land. The Lord told Abram, a *wandering Aramean*,<sup>12</sup> that his reward would only come later. Abram believed every word!

The promise, however, was not for Abram as much as it was for his offspring, specifically, the generation of Jacob's twelve sons.

***"In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."***

*Genesis 15:15-16*

If the sin of Sodom was any indication of Canaan's wickedness, the Amorites sin had to be detestable.<sup>13</sup> Included in "The Battle Plan"

### *The People of God*

was the future destruction of the wicked Amorites. Their judgment was still hundreds of years away, yet God promised their judgment by the sword of Jacob's sons. God could have laid waste to the Amorites as he did Sodom. Instead, He chose to replace them in the land with His people, Abram's offspring Israel.

#### *The full measure of wickedness*

On the wicked, judgment is already declared. How far their destruction is in the future, we do not really know. Apparently, the world's sin has not yet reached its full measure but it has to be close.

The wicked will appear to enjoy their forbidden pleasures and luxuries right up to the end. When the appointed judgment comes, they will feel the double-edged sword of *the rider on the white horse*.<sup>14</sup> Their land and possessions will remain; all left as a gift to God's people.

*A little while and the wicked will be no more;  
though you look for them,  
they will not be found.*

*But the meek will inherit the land  
and enjoy great peace.*

*Psalm 37:10-11*

#### *A seal of guarantee*

To seal the promise, God made a covenant with Abram.

*On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river [or Wadi] of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates- the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."*

*Genesis 15:18-20*

What happened to the different "ites"? In time, they all disappeared. God gave the land to Abram's descendants through the line of his grandson Jacob. The land is a legacy only to those who first had to endure slavery. The offspring that shared in the fellowship of suffering in Egypt would receive a bountiful land for their consolation.

Collectively, the tribes named after Jacob's sons became Israel. The land boundaries God promised in *Genesis 15:15-16* nearly matched Israel's boundaries when David ruled-- almost, but not quite.

### *Finding the Future in Your Bible*

Was God mistaken when he promised Abram that the land of his descendants would extend to the great river Euphrates (on the other side of Syria in modern day Iraq)? No other nation received a land grant by God for their possession. Israel's territory declined under David's successors. Eventually, Israel lost its nation status and became a dispersed people known to God alone.

In May of 1948, the impossible happened. *Dry bones took on flesh.*<sup>15</sup> The modern Jewish state, Israel was born in a partial fulfillment of God's promise. The Yom Kippur War, October 1973, solidified Israel's boundaries from Sinai (Egypt) to the Golan Heights (Syria). Yet, to date, Israeli territory has not extended as far as the Euphrates.

It may seem like God failed to keep his promise. Israel's enemies occupy territory given to Jacob's descendants. Satan battles hard for this prophecy to remain unfulfilled. His efforts are all futile.

There are no prophecy errors in God's Word, only our limited ability to understand. What God said, God meant! Jacob's family will live in the Promised Land *and* with the boundaries God described to Abraham. Fulfillment is still future. When God restores the kingdom to Israel, it will surpass David and his son Solomon's glory. As earth's King, God's Son will set the boundaries to all nations except Israel's. The Father established those thousands of years ago.

When the measure of the world's sin reaches the maximum level, the wicked will be displaced and then destroyed. Until then, the Lord is preparing *a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood- a people belonging to him.*<sup>16</sup> Before receiving great possessions, God's chosen people are first subjected to persecution and slavery.

#### *Another terrifying vision*

Not all of God's promises to Abram were fulfilled in four or five hundred years.<sup>17</sup> Some await the end of the next age, known as the Millennium. The Millennium is the third and last age of death and time.

The Prophet Daniel had a vision similar to Abram's. It, too, was like a bad dream. Daniel was "terrified", "frightened", "disturbed", and "deeply troubled" by what he saw.<sup>18</sup> (The parallels with Abram's dark vision are unmistakable.) One like the latter Pharaoh would appear. He had eyes like those of a man but he was not a man in any ordinary sense. He spoke boastfully as if consumed with pride. Does that sound similar to what we know of Satan, God's enemy?



## *The People of God*

Egypt was the furnace of affliction for God's people, Israel. The whole earth will be a white-hot furnace of affliction for *The People of God*, those destined for Christ's coming Kingdom.

Look at Daniel's disturbing vision:

*As I watched, the horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.*

*Daniel 7:21-22*

Pharaoh declared war on the Hebrews at God's appointed time. Another pharaoh (i.e. the horn) was waging war against the saints *and defeating them*.<sup>19</sup> Daniel's vision deeply troubled him. But what did the vision mean? To clarify, God gave it another way:

*He [the king from the fourth beast kingdom] will speak against the Most High and **oppress his saints** and try to change the set times and the laws. **The saints will be handed over to him** for a time, times, and half a time.*

*Daniel 7:25*

Like Pharaoh, the boastful king in Daniel's vision oppresses the saints. He attempts to change God's decrees and his appointed times. God showed Daniel that this trial would last for *a time, times and half a time*. Through this vision, we see again God's people subjected to the mistreatment of a ruler like Pharaoh for three-and-a-half Hebrew years.

### *The Plan for victory*

As dark and dreadful as Daniel's vision was, there is more to the story. Read the prophecy below and think of the Hebrews as an example. Consider hardship's purpose already discussed.

*But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. **Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High.** His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.*

*Daniel 7:26-27*

### *Finding the Future in Your Bible*

The end of the age comes with a darkness that leaves God's people deeply troubled and greatly oppressed. Afflictions, like those that fell upon the Hebrews in Egypt, will fall on *The People of God*. But after the evil passes, the *kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. And He will reign forever and ever.*<sup>20</sup> Saints will come out with great possessions. Jesus will receive the kingdom promised to him by the Father. The beloved of Christ will belong to him; the beloved Christ will belong to the saints.<sup>21</sup> They are each other's permanent reward for faithfulness.

Daniel had more unsettling visions of the end. In each, God reiterated the message: great distress was coming upon the saints. After that, the Kingdom would be theirs, forever and ever.<sup>22</sup>

#### *The inheritance*

Certain Middle Eastern traditions have continued for thousands of years. With respect to the transfer of property, it is much the same today as it was in Jesus' day. Land is rarely, if ever, offered for sale to the public. It stays in families and passed to succeeding generations as an inheritance. The oldest son may labor like a hired man, but at his father's death, he inherits the majority, if not all, of the estate. There is a condition: the son must labor for the good of what will one day belong to him.

So, too, in the coming age, only faithful workers in God's household receive possessions. The saints will labor as servants and endure the affliction of a bond slave yet one day all will change. They will take their inheritance as sons and daughters of the Father. Promised to *The People of God* is a certain hope of a bright and prosperous future--<sup>23</sup> if they *endure patiently to the end* that is.<sup>24</sup>

\*

## *The People of God*

### Discussion:

- From this chapter, what did you learn about the Battle Plan against Satan? From Abram and Daniel's vision, what is the future of the kingdom of darkness as opposed to the future of the Kingdom of Light?
- Can we avoid the creeping shadow of evil in this age any longer than temporarily? Why must we eventually encounter evil and great wickedness? Why would we want to?
- Something bad had to happen before something good. What experiences have you had similar to this part of God's Battle Plan?
- What have you heard about the saints in the last days that conflicts with Daniel's disturbing visions. What is in store for *The People of God* during a three-and-a-half year period at the end? Compare with Jesus' prophecy in *Matthew 24:9-25*

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- <sup>1</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:3*
  - <sup>2</sup> *Genesis 3:15*
  - <sup>3</sup> *Romans 16:20*
  - <sup>4</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:16-20*
  - <sup>5</sup> *Revelation 16:14*
  - <sup>6</sup> *Genesis 14:14*
  - <sup>7</sup> *Genesis 15:6*
  - <sup>8</sup> *Genesis 15:12*
  - <sup>9</sup> *Amos 3:7*
  - <sup>10</sup> *Genesis 20:6-7*
  - <sup>11</sup> *Genesis 12:10*
  - <sup>12</sup> *Deuteronomy 26:5*
  - <sup>13</sup> *Genesis 19:12-13*
  - <sup>14</sup> *Revelation 19:11-21*
  - <sup>15</sup> *Ezekiel 37:21*
  - <sup>16</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:9*
  - <sup>17</sup> *Genesis 22:15-18*
  - <sup>18</sup> *Daniel 7:7, 15, 28*
  - <sup>19</sup> *Revelation 12:17*
  - <sup>20</sup> *Revelation 11:15*
  - <sup>21</sup> *Song of Songs 2:4*
  - <sup>22</sup> *Daniel 8:23-27, 11:33, 12:1*
  - <sup>23</sup> *Jeremiah 29:10-14*
  - <sup>24</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:11-12a*

Key #11  
-Gold n' Stuff-

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Take a leisurely Saturday drive on your average residential street and what do you see? If it is late spring or early summer, you will probably see a "Yard Sale" or two. Maybe it is a "Garage Sale" but it is all the same idea: Clean the junk out of the house, the gifts we did not care for, the toys gathering dust and other items that outlasted their usefulness and sell them cheap.

Most Americans love yard sales. It is hard to say who is happier: the one making some money selling their trash or the buyer who found a bargain. Ironically, the prize they found at the sale may be stored for years then deemed trash again. Then buyer becomes seller and the garage sale cycle continues.

*Watch out!*

What is the root of our love of things? The answer could be one of several: First, we have discretionary funds that we often use to buy on impulse-- stuff we want rather than things we need. Second, advertising constantly conditions the public to believe they "need" something they really do not. Last, but not least, shopping is a feel-good experience, buying makes us feel empowered.

To some, going to the mall is like an addict getting a *fix*. A term for this common contemporary malady is *Shop-a-holic*.

Jesus warns:

*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

*Luke 12:15*

Materialism-- which is what the Lord was describing-- is by no means harmless. Just because materialism, like sexual immorality, has been absorbed into our society, we dare not think of it as benign. It is not. A controlling desire to acquire more things is a malignant disease.

The Bible warns *The People of God* not to fall for this form of greed. Life is not a game of *"He who dies with the most toys wins!"*

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Christ's message is the opposite: He who dies with the most stuff stands a very good chance of being a big loser.

The winnowing fork will again separate the wheat (i.e. *The People of God*) from those who evaluate life based on possessions.

### *Discontent*

Several crucial trials were behind the people of Israel. God's winnowing fork separated the complainers, the fearful, the rebellious, all idolaters and the sexually immoral. Death forever kept the chaff that departed Egypt from the rest of God's treasured possession that entered the Promised Land. They were "invited," but because they fell short of God's righteous standard, they were not "chosen".<sup>1</sup>

No one enters Christ's Kingdom who does not first wholly obey the King. Achan is a tragic example. Of all the stories of what might have been, his is one of the saddest. He came so far only to fall short. *Joshua 7* is where we find Achan's tragic tale. If we have hopes of one day making the grade, we dare not miss the point of this account.

Considering what this descendant of the tribe of Judah and his family previously survived and experienced, Achan's outcome is nearly unthinkable. Why would a man to whom God had offered so much, trade it all for a little gold and stuff?

Upon reflection, the reason may seem obvious: What God offered Achan was not good enough. This Israelite was not content with what the Lord had provided, nor was he satisfied with what He promised. He wanted what was God's. Greed is rooted in discontent.

### *Marching orders*

Before Israel stepped inside the fallen Jericho, God said::

*The seventh time around, when the priest sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD ... **But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.**"*

*Joshua 6:16-17a, 18-19*

### *Finding the Future in Your Bible*

Victory over Jericho belonged to God alone. No Israelite had to fight. Swords were unnecessary. The city did not fall by military might. There was no risk of life or limb. All the Israelites had to do was obey.

God's people marched around the city. On the seventh time around, on the seventh day, it collapsed. The large-stoned walls of Jericho did not fall outward but inward crushing its defenders under their own swords and shields.

Since the victory belonged to the Lord alone, he had every right to everything inside-- the gold, silver and articles of bronze and iron. Jericho's riches were sacred or devoted to God. Jericho was the first fruits of what was to come. One-by-one other fortresses in Canaan fell before Israel. The gold and stuff of the other cities would be theirs to possess, but not Jericho's riches.

#### *Question of ownership*

In reality, everything in Jericho belonged to the Lord anyway. Everything is His.<sup>2</sup> The word or term "lord" has to do with ownership. Jesus is Lord of all-- meaning He is the rightful owner of all there is. As King over all the earth, the silver and gold are the Lord's.<sup>3</sup> At best, we are stewards over our Lord's possessions.

Jericho's gold, silver and articles of bronze came from the Lord's mines, yet the city's pagan citizens ignored the rightful owner. They used their treasure to worship Mammon, the god of gold n' stuff. The Lord's plan would remedy this travesty. Jericho was condemned. Its valuables would return to him to whom they belonged. The city's gold n' stuff would finally be used for its true purpose, worship of the Living God.

Also at work was God's ownership or Lordship over his people, Israel. The order not to touch any of the devoted things was a test. For clarification, the command came with a warning. Israel was God's possession.<sup>4</sup> As such, they must be completely obedient. Each man and woman had to be put to the test or how would they know who belonged to the Lord or who belonged to his enemy, Satan.

#### *The cost*

Nothing has changed. Israel's test was identical to the one given Adam and Eve. God gave one prohibition, "...*you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*"<sup>5</sup> That tree belonged to God alone. Other trees were for his stewards to enjoy. The fruit from

## *The People of God*

the tree in the middle of the garden was devoted to the Creator. Touching and eating was punishable by death.

All things-- including our lives-- are the exclusive property of our Creator. The desire to possess what is not ours is the root of "lust" or "covetousness".

We know the rest of Adam's story. Through the ages, his act has been repeated multitudes of times. *Do not touch. Do not take and eat.* Then lust conceives and brings forth death.

This was Achan's downfall. His story is a preview.

*But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, **took some of them.** So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.*

*Joshua 7:1*

### *Lust of the eyes*

Under the illusion that no eyes could see him, Achan "stumbled onto" some stuff. He was set-up by his enemy. Seduction became impulse. Impulse hatched an evil plan. Becoming richer than he was already became this son of Judah's fatal attraction.

*People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

*1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:9-10*

Sin entered the camp. Blessing quickly turned to cursing. When Israel went off to fight a weaker foe, they were roundly defeated. It was just as the Lord said. If anyone took anything devoted for worship, the entire nation would suffer the consequences.

Undefined grief descended upon Israel like a summer storm. When Joshua received the report of his army's loss, he fell on his face before the Lord in agony. As the enemy's spears pierced Jacob's warriors, a stabbing grief came on the camp. It was because of Achan's disobedience to the Lord's command.

God showed Joshua the source of their grief. *There was sin in the camp.* A cancer had to be removed. The remedy was this: both devoted things and offender must be destroyed.

### *Finding the Future in Your Bible*

Who among the Israelites would commit such a terrible offense? Where were the sacred objects? It was an opportunity for the winnowing fork to put on a public display.

*“In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man. He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him.*

*Joshua 7:14-15a*

The Lord winnowed. It revealed Achan’s fully conceived lust. Jacob’s privileged descendant would forever remain separate from the rest of God’s people.

#### *Remorse*

The culprit, Achan, was forthright in his confession.

*Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver [about five pounds weight] and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels [about one and a quarter pounds], I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”*

*Joshua 7:20-21*

In a modern court, Achan’s full disclosure and remorse would probably result in leniency. We can relate to his weakness. The robe was stunning. Who could resist? Compared to all Jericho’s plunder, one may think the silver and gold found in Achan’s possession hardly deserved mention. God noticed. He commanded that Achan must die.

#### *The gamble*

To Achan, the gold and stuff were valuable enough to covet. Achan weighed the silver and gold carefully—two hundred shekels and fifty shekels each. How costly? Before stealing the devoted things, he weighed it out, *risk vs. reward*. Achan took the gamble and lost.

Was Achan’s theft worth his soul? Was it worth the death of thirty-six men?<sup>6</sup> Was it worth the loss of his family and all he owned?



### *The People of God*

Covetousness is at the root of gambling. Achan gambled that he could have what God prohibited. It cost him everything. What are the odds of winning by disobeying God? Zero is the answer.

Gambling is in our culture's blood. We have sports betting, poker playing along with other card games, licensed casinos with slots, blackjack and roulette, state and national lottery, racetrack wagering, church bingos and "cash bash". The "gaming industry" rakes in billions while, at the same time, wrecks thousands of lives. We are being set-up and society suffers the consequences.

What is coming will test the obedience of every man and woman for greed. It is the final exam before entering the Millennium. The winnowing fork is ready to winnow out all gamblers like Achan.

#### *The love test*

As much as anyone in history, Jesus was subject to the love test. In the wilderness, Satan offered our Lord three opportunities to fail. He hoped to be Jesus' winnowing fork. If only he could disqualify the Son, the rightful heir, by causing him to fail one test, then earth's kingdoms would be his. One of his temptations involved gold and stuff.

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

*Matthew 4:8-9*

It was the ultimate garage sale; the world's gold and stuff, in exchange for worship. If Satan was worshiped, in exchange, Jesus would have earth's temporal riches.

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

*Then the devil left him...*

*Matthew 4:10-11a*

Unlike Achan, Jesus rejected Satan's offer. Had Jesus not refused, there would be no savior for humankind. Had Jesus opted for immediate gratification, there would have been no cross. Christ knew it was all his at the end of the age. Had Jesus the impulse controls of Achan, he would have chosen the temporary over the permanent. He would have not waited for his inheritance. We would still be in our sins.

*Finding the Future in Your Bible*

*Heap of rocks*

Achan, his sons and daughters, the robe, the silver and gold; everything that belonged to him, including his cattle, donkeys and sheep, were taken outside the camp.

*Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day.*

*Joshua 7:25b-26a*

Instead of living in a home in Canaan adorned with gold n' stuff, Achan's ashes rested under a heap of rocks. The camp was cleansed by Achan's death. Fire turned God's anger from Israel. Achan died for the kind of greed and thievery we read about today on a regular basis.

*More rubble*

Fire, destruction and rubble (stones) will clean the earth again.

*Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:  
death, mourning and famine.*

*She will be consumed by fire,  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.*

*When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,  
O Babylon, city of power!  
In one hour your doom has come!"*

*Revelation 18:8-10*

More than just beautiful robes of Babylon, in the last days the whole of Babylon the Great, with its wealth and luxuries, will seduce many Achans. People will be *lovers of themselves, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*<sup>7</sup> No one in Babylon the Great will be content with what they have. Their desire will be to possess what is not theirs to have. They will crave gold n' stuff and, finding it in abundance, will have a continual lust for more.

The covetous spirit, the pursuit and worship of Mammon, is quickly approaching the saturation point. Because of our exposure to

## *The People of God*

great riches, many are set to turn from the path of eternal salvation in pursuit of “here today and gone tomorrow” wealth and luxuries.

### *One last test*

Before we settle into the New Promised Land in the next age, the Lord has a sobering warning. Disobedience is not an option. The command to remember before we receive our reward is “Do not take *the mark of the beast!*”<sup>8</sup>

Without the ability to buy or sell, the Lord’s people will find themselves with a tough choice. Will we totally depend on God? Will we succumb to fear and bow to the beast for food? The winnowing fork separates all who give in and serve Mammon. Like Achan, those who worship the god of gold n’ stuff will be pierced with many griefs.<sup>9</sup>

The beast’s mark is permanent! It is like a livestock brand-- an unchangeable sign of ownership. For the mark wearers, it is every bit the death sentence as Israel’s was for stealing devoted gold n’ stuff.<sup>10</sup>

What more warning is necessary? Even so, many will yield to their covetous desires for the gold n’ stuff of Babylon the Great. Those who take the mark in order to buy and sell will perish. They will burn to ashes amidst the objects they craved. Their bodies will lie under the smoldering rubble.

Men and women who obediently perform the will of God live forever!<sup>11</sup> Those who refuse to lust after *the things of this world* (i.e. the gold n’ stuff devoted for destruction) pass the love test.

The trainer puts the treat in his hand and raises it to shoulder level. His command is “Stay!” His dog sits with all eyes on his master. Tail wagging again, he hears his master’s firm voice, “Stay!” The animal is anxious for what he might have yet remains obedient.

Then the dog hears, “Okay boy” in a relaxed tone.

Immediately, he leaps into the air and takes the food from his happy master’s hand. Both master and dog receive their reward for obedience. It is the joy of discipline and delayed gratification’s reward.

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Discussion:

- Does materialism affect only the rich or middle-class but poor, too? What is behind our desire for more, better and shinier stuff?
- Why did all Israel suffer because of Achan? Is it unique that a nation pays for the sins of one man? *2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 24:10-17*
- If the history of Israel instructs us as to what the Lord will do in the last days, what temptation must we face if we are to live and reign with Christ? Why do you think most in our culture will choose to worship Mammon?
- Is God opposed to things or is the worship of them what angers him? (*Romans 1:25, Exodus 20:4-6*) Where do you come closest to crossing the line? What is behind the pursuit of God's people for a simpler lifestyle?

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<sup>1</sup> *Matthew 22:14*

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms 24:1*

<sup>3</sup> *Haggai 2:6-8*

<sup>4</sup> *Deuteronomy 7:6*

<sup>5</sup> *Genesis 2:17*

<sup>6</sup> *Joshua 7:3-5*

<sup>7</sup> *2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:2, 4*

<sup>8</sup> *Revelation 13:16-17*

<sup>9</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:6-10*

<sup>10</sup> *Revelation 14:9b-12*

<sup>11</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> John 2:15-17*

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