

A fresh, insightful and hope-filled look at prophecy's keys.

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

By John Finkbeiner

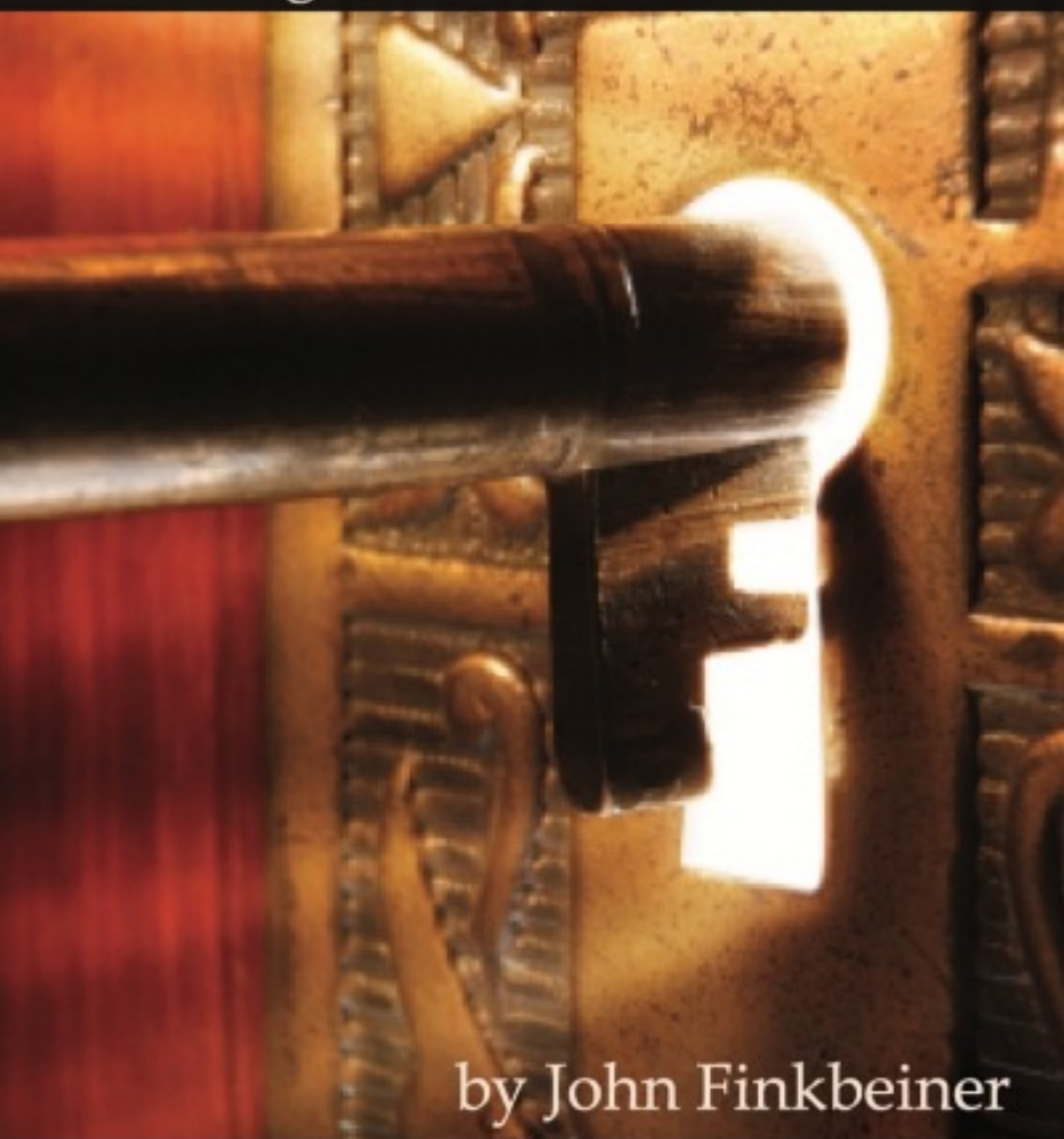
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The People of God

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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PART ONE

Out of Egypt

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

Hosea 11:1

*“I have put my words in your mouth and covered you
with the shadow of my hand—I who set the heavens in
place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to
Zion, ‘You are my people.’”*

Isaiah 51:16

“...for what has been determined must take place.”

Daniel 11:36b

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close in on you like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

-Jesus, Luke 21:34-36

Key #1 *Attention!*

*

Standing as erect as possible, I faced my drill sergeant. I was close enough to feel his angry stare. Why did my knees shake? I must have sensed what was coming. I was about to be humbled. My self-centered existence was about to crumble. Duty called; less than six months after college graduation, I answered. It was 1969 and I had the haircut and wore the uniform of a U.S. Army trainee. Drill Sergeant Butler had my full attention.

Something is stirring

It was Sergeant Butler's job to transform soft civilians, like me, into battle-ready soldiers. Half a world away a war was going on. The fear-inducing man with the round-brimmed hat was commissioned to prepare us to perform our mission then come back home to marching bands, cheering, flag-waving crowds, and a proud family.

This book has a similar purpose. God's desire is to welcome us into our heavenly home with marching bands and a proud family of saints to greet us. Fear helps to get our attention, so we do not foolishly get ourselves killed (*Exodus 20:18-20*). For our survival, it will be necessary to think and act like soldiers.

Something is happening. Uneasiness is creeping into our hearts. Alarming stories find the ears of anxious listeners. Instead of hope, dread dominates many conversations. Our world is about to turn upside down. We are witnessing the end of this age.

Think of the European Jews leading up to World War II, they lived with the anti-Semitism. Then suddenly hatred boiled over in a way the earth had never seen. In November 1938, "Kristallnacht" or "The Night of Broken Glass," a major negative event occurred. Adolph Hitler ordered a retaliation against the Jews for the assassination of a German diplomat. In all, 91 were murdered, another 25 to 30,000 were arrested and placed in camps. Many Jewish businesses were destroyed, and 267 synagogues were set ablaze. It was a sign many Jews chose to ignore. (Source *Wikipedia*)

Absent was an international uproar on the Jew's behalf. In 1939, Western countries like Britain, America and Canada turned away ships with fleeing Jewish refugees. Hitler then had the go-ahead. He

had long blamed Jews for Germany's post-World War I trouble but after Kristallnacht the German Führer's speeches left no doubt of his plan. Construction went into high gear at Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, Auschwitz and Dachau. A "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" (a.k.a. death camps) was prepared for implementation.

The time to leave Europe was before November 1938. By 1939, the exit doors were closed. When it's time to go, it's time to go!

Recalling the fate of World War II-era Jews, prayers of "Lord, save us from our enemies!" are being heard in heaven from within Nigeria, Laos, parts of India, China, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, across North Africa and the Arab world.

Pleas span the globe and they come from Christians who honor Jesus as Savior and Lord. They come from saints who have nowhere to hide and who receive no government protection.

Western Christians may again be ignoring the plight of others, yet they are one major negative event from joining those being persecuted. As religious freedom erodes and hate for Jews and Christians grows like a malignancy under the surface, believers worry about their children. It may be time to leave, but where is it safe for believers to go?

Grounds for optimism

The difference between this generation and pre-World War II Europe is that then Jews had little warning. After the Nazi holocaust, the modern nation of Israel was born. Since we have a repeated pattern from history and warnings from prophecy, God's people should know what will happen next. We are living in days that were foretold long ago.

Instead of surrendering to fear, Christians have a short time to act. The dire news belongs to the wicked rather than those who follow Christ. We, however, must be ready to have our faith tested.

We should be grateful that our children and grandchildren will not grow old in a godless world, yet it will take parents thinking like soldiers. Those who fail to study the prophets will be uninformed. Prophecy is given by God so we will not only survive but thrive. Why needlessly die? Our attention is necessary. The truth of God's Word is our salvation.

But now the bad news

Suffering presents a considerable challenge. Jesus warned that before he returned, his disciples would experience an unequalled level of distress on a global scale (*Matthew 24:21-22, Luke 21:23*).

As to future testings and trials, why do many Christians believe they will escape promised trials? Will we avoid “Satan’s wrath” while many must patiently endure it? It is written: God will grant authority to Satan’s ruler who will rage, yet only for a set time (*Daniel 7:21, 8:23-26 and 11:33-36*). Decreed is great hardship for the saints. To reign with Christ, we must suffer with Him (*2 Timothy 2:12*).

If we see God’s purpose in our trials, we will be empowered to endure them. Do not think it strange if you suffer for Jesus’ sake (*1 Peter 4:12-16*). If we look beyond the temporary—as our Lord did—and see the reward, we will over-come with patience.

Pity those unprepared for a “*time of great distress*.” It will be like waking from a bad dream and finding it was no dream at all. If God revealed it in Scripture, then we have no excuse for being unprepared (*Matthew 24:25*).

A fast-moving train of evil is approaching. We have places we want to go and things we need to do. We have funds set aside for a holiday and for retirement. We can take life easy, yet the engine’s whistle gets our attention. We are sitting in our car with our family on the tracks. Maybe it is time we start to move (*Matthew 24:15-20*).

Leaving is not always in our plans, but times change. My after-college plan was to go into business and make a lot of money. Instead, of an air-conditioned office, I was sweating with my fellow soldiers in South Vietnam’s energy-sapping humidity.

Southeast Asia was never on my list of favorite places. Later, I realized how privileged I was to have served. (No regrets.) A president’s order, a low draft number, a major troop call-up and a war; God led me in the direction I needed to go.

War disrupts life’s plans. Dreams go on hold while more important matters take priority—like survival! Over 53,000 who followed a path like mine, came home in flag-draped coffins. Others were maimed, wounded, drug-addicted or a casualty in other ways. The reaction of some to their military service created other hard-to-heal wounds. I thank God that I survived, and do not bear these scars.

Moving beyond the end times

It is almost time to go. At work is a holy discontent, a longing for a better place—another land. God is preparing his people for the great challenges ahead. Our destination lies beyond this present age. Our journey will bring us to the “Conflict of the Ages” then to the other side, and to our expected end.

Another world is coming into view. We are so near in time we can catch a glimpse. Written on our hearts is the land for which we yearn. We were created for life beyond this age, the New Promised Land! It is where Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings. Then, as if it were all a vision, our glimpse starts to fade.

Perhaps you are upset by today’s news. Our beloved nation is almost unrecognizable. It appears corrupt, dark and ugly. It is no longer safe, godly or lovely. Has God pronounced judgment? The influential argue that technology and science are paving the way for a better tomorrow, but how can that be true? The same optimists build bunkers and warn about killer robots. Scoffers mock of the Bible’s predictions (2 *Peter* 3:3). Are we going the way of past nations? As some doomsday forecasters ask, “Are we on the precipice?”

No, life does not end. War and catastrophes will occur but, according to Scripture, we are in transition. Another age awaits (*Revelation* 20:7-10). For God’s saints, it will be almost heaven.

The end of the age is near. Long ago, God programmed his universe. The moment for the flood in Noah’s day was ordained. Massive objects were set on a collision course with our planet (*Revelation* 8:8-11). God’s sovereignty, power and glory will soon be on full display.

We are warned not to form worldly attachments (1 *John* 2:15-17). Peter counseled the Roman believers,

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

1 Peter 1:17

Living as strangers implies investing minimally in what is passing and the maximum on what is ahead. Saints belong to another place much different than anything on the map. We should focus on our future home, though by no means will our trip be easy.

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

1 Peter 4:18

The next phase will test us. Leaving what is familiar will mean salvation, survival, serenity and love. Arriving at the place prepared by God will bring joy to every weary traveler.

Women and children in the lifeboats

Stories in the Bible have more than one purpose. They inspire and offer a path to follow. They provide *teaching, correction, rebuke and training in righteousness* so that God's people *might be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The most detailed accounts in the Old Testament involve Israel or Jacob's twelve tribes. Consider the significance of God's promises to Abraham, Jacob and the people Israel. Connect with their history and we will understand the future. If we read of the exodus from Egypt, looking for *teaching, correction, rebuke and training in righteousness*, we will be better prepared for what is coming.

As we digest the world's recent changes, imagine how life was for Jacob's offspring. According to *Exodus 1*, centuries passed in Egypt with the Hebrews as welcomed guests. In their busyness, they had forgotten they were strangers. They did not recall the word given to their forefathers, yet God did not forget. He knew when and how to arouse Israel's *attention*.

It took a famine to move Jacob to Egypt. Another major crisis would send them back to Canaan. A transition was necessary. It would require a Pharaoh with an evil heart.

It is almost time for women and children to board the lifeboats. The day of disaster is approaching. Imagine it is April 15, 1912, and we are on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, the premier luxury-liner of its day. It was reputed to be unsinkable. Many of the wealthy were on board, so it had to be safe.

The night was clear and the seas calm, but the infamous iceberg was behind them. The future belongs to the people of God who know what comes next. The arrogant laugh at the prospect of doom. Hope belongs to the saints headed for the lifeboats.

A new, different kind of Pharaoh

The winds of change are blowing and taking the experts by surprise. Politics is an example. Who could have guessed the ups and downs of the last decade? It is *God who sets up kings and deposes them (Daniel 2:21)*, and that includes pharaohs. As it is now, it was in the time before Moses.

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 it becomes a trial, we search for a way out. That was the reason for the new Pharaoh. Egypt's ruler was different. God had appointed a wicked king to motivate the Israelites to leave.

Life changed forever. Regardless how good the past may have been, Jacob's children would never again be secure. Pharaoh intended to make each new day painful for Israel. Their stay would go from bad to intolerable.

Egypt's king was determined. In his land lived an alien people so numerous they presented to him a threat. A nation inside a nation, they had never assimilated, nor did they adopt Egypt's religion. Like Jews through the centuries, God had preserved the uniqueness of his people.

Pharaoh saw a time when the Hebrews would join his enemies (*Exodus 1:9-10*), so he made them a stench to him. He seized their property. The Israelites were forced into hard labor building Egypt's cities of Pithom and Ramses (*Exodus 1:11*). Pharaoh placed harsh taskmasters over them. As they worked, they felt the whip. That surely got their attention.

But the more they were oppressed, *the more they multiplied and spread (Exodus 1:12)*. The Hebrews adjusted to their mistreatment. Some must have thought the hard times would surely pass, yet life for God's people became harder. As Pharaoh's anxiety increased, so did the cruelty. Only then did Israel begin to cry out to God, for their burden was great (*Exodus 1:11-14*).

During Israel's slavery, the Egyptian people grew soft. Prosperity was a big benefit of the free labor, but when the Hebrews left, the nation's economy collapsed. Through the many plagues on men and animals, God enacted vengeance. Egypt felt the sting of God's whip.

Wake up!

Denial is part of our fallen nature. Picture a scene with the Hebrew elders: Some argued that Pharaoh would have a change of heart, others prayed he would die and be replaced by a kinder, gentler king. While they descended into slavery, did any believe it would last? Did they know God had placed this Pharaoh over them to create the exodus? Maybe this explains the squalor, the corruption of power, the drug deaths and the spilled blood of the innocents. If we are to exit, our love for what we have called home must grow cold.

Related to denial is apathy. The apathetic do not want to take any responsibility. They care little about their freedom until they lose it.

Prior to his return, Jesus described a world of apathy. 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 (Luke 17:27)*. Before raining fire on Sodom, life had become routine. Warnings were ignored. The Lord promised it will be like that again.

Another killer is lethargy. Closely related to the others, lethargy is a numbness, a sleep-like state. When vigilance is called for, there is no hope for sleepers.

On his voyage to Tarshish, Jonah slept below deck while the storm raged. The sea threatened to break the ship apart and claim all onboard. Until the crew woke him, Jonah was oblivious to what they faced on deck (*Jonah 1:1-6*).

When the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, it is not the time to nap. Post watchmen on the wall! When the bugle sounds, take flight. Travel light, since on the mountain of God all will be provided.

The saints will not share the fate of the lethargic. They are sober, vigilant and alert, not apathetic or in denial. They recognize that their enemy, Satan, does not sleep. Day and night the devil prowls about *seeking those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8)*.

Like a warm, cozy blanket, denial, apathy and lethargy numb the senses. We cannot let it happen. We must 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. It is said the waters nearby flowed with gold from the mountain-fed streams. Gold made the king legendary, thus the phrase “as rich as Croesus.”

Fabulous wealth was not the only reason Croesus and Sardis were known to historians, the city’s capture and defeat by the Persians (c547 BC) provided a classic example of apathy. A sense of invulnerability led to their defeat, then Sardis quickly fell into ruin. Situated high over the plain below, the city was approachable only from three fortified directions. From the remaining side, a 1500-foot (approx. 305 meter) vertical wall gave protection.

When the Persians attacked, it was discovered that ascent on the unguarded cliff was possible. The soldier who made the discovery led the assault. Sardis quickly surrendered. Hundreds of years later their capture from the same unguarded cliff was repeated. While their enemy prowled about, Sardis had been asleep again.

Lack of vigilance was about to overtake the Church in Sardis. In Christ’s judgment on the church, the glorified Christ said,

*“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

A great danger from living in a strong, prosperous nation is that all are easily lulled to sleep. The West has long been as *rich as Croesus*. Many Christians are slumbering. Jesus warns, “*Strengthen what remains... and repent.*” If the rich do not take heed, sudden disaster will overtake them!

430 years to the day

When Pharaoh finally ordered Jacob’s family to go, it is doubtful any were reluctant. Their trials and tribulations were reason enough to bid Egypt good-by. Pharaoh’s determination to increase their misery and diminish their population quickened their step as they disappeared into the desert.

A motivation to leave a slave's life behind was not all they had propelling them forward; the Hebrews received another benefit. Harsh treatment had made them wiry, lean and capable of giving what the wilderness demanded. Without slavery, could they have endured a hot, dry desert? As a demanding drill sergeant prepares his troops, so hardships toughen God's people. It is necessary so they will prove to be overcomers.

Do we know God's prophetic calendar? The Lord told Abram that when 400 years were complete, his offspring would leave the place where they were enslaved (*Genesis 15:13*). Scripture reports that Israel stayed in Egypt 430 years *to the very day* (*Exodus 12:40-41*).

As the "5 Major Rules for Interpretation" suggest, if we look for the near/far prophetic applications, could the *very day* reference in *Exodus 12:40-41*, provide a clue for a soon-to-be event? I believe the "*exactly to the very day*" is significant. This specific information alerts God's people to a future mass exodus from North America.

Nebuchadnezzar's army swept through Judah and Jerusalem, leaving God's temple and the city in ruins. A remnant was taken captive and led into exile. The Babylonians put many others to the sword. No sooner had the Jews adjusted to captivity than a letter arrived. Through Jeremiah, God told his people to bless their captors, then, when seventy years were complete, they would return to their country (*Jeremiah 29:4-11*). It happened just as the Lord said. After seventy years, the Persian king Cyrus granted Jews the freedom to go back to their land (*Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, 45:13*).

The Lord declares that He is the Almighty, *the first and the last, the beginning and the end* and that He is sovereign. Prophecy confirms this. Before anything comes into being, God will announce it through his prophets (*Isaiah 42:9*).

The Sovereign Lord does nothing without first revealing his plans to his servants, the prophets.

Amos 3:7

Why did God promise Abram an exact number of years before his descendants would leave Egypt? Why was it precise and not an odd number or a fraction of a year? Could this mean an exodus and scattering of a remnant from North America happens exactly 400-430 years from a certain historic event like the Pilgrim's arrival? As with

England's Dissenters, might America's corrupt religious leaders persecute God's saints, like wicked religionists did the Pilgrims? Or will foreign armies drive them out of their homeland (*Luke 21:23-24*)?

Does the United States have prophetic significance? I used to scoff at the idea, but no more. I have since been reminded of the uniqueness my country possesses. Think of the U.S. in Biblical terms as "the nations." Stamped on U.S. coins and currency are "*e pluribus unum*," the Latin for "from more or many (nations) comes one."

Did the prophetic clock start to tick on November 11, 1620, with the Pilgrim's onboard signing of the Mayflower Compact? Harboring off Cape Cod, they created a statement of purpose. In it they affirmed they had come to the New World "*for the Glory of God*" and "*the advancement of the Christian faith*."

Will it be four hundred (*Genesis 15:13*) or 430 years (*Exodus 12:40-41*) or something in between? How long will it be before God's people find themselves back to "the nations"? At the appointed time, it must happen! First, a new ruler, one like the *wicked, stern-faced king* of *Daniel 8:23* will ascend to power to prepare and motivate saints for their trip. When it is time to go, God's people will not resist.

The light lit by our spiritual fathers grows dim. From America's shores, the beacon of freedom and truth has sent its beams around the world. When this nation no longer shines salvation's light, then great darkness will descend on the earth.

WAKE UP! It is near departure time—but where do we go? Is there an escape? Yes, but for now we must prepare to *endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ Jesus* (*2 Timothy 2:2*).

ATTENTION! (Nothing grabs our attention like pain. It turns our thoughts to God and to what comes next. It stirs hearts to go forward no matter how difficult or great the cost.) *For-waaard MARCH!*

*

Discussion:

- Do you recall when you first left home? What do you think God's purpose was in moving you?
- Where do you consider home and why? 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 recapture the good old days or prepare self, family and others for a challenging future?
- Why do you think God allowed the Hebrews to suffer long before "*coming down to help*"? (*Exodus 3:7-10*)

*The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.*
Psalm 33:10-11

*In him we were also predestined according to the plan of
him who works out everything in conformity with the
purpose of his will...*

Ephesians 1:11

Key #2 *The Plan*

*

Earth has always been a war zone. Lose sight of that and prophecy ceases to become relevant. It is foolish to blame God for the casualties when it is the enemy who seeks to kill, maim and destroy. If we think about it, war explains a lot. Rule #1 is "Know the enemy." Rule #2 is "Know who is on your side."

Genesis 3 and *Revelation 12* are the best places to start. They give background to what is happening. They introduce our powerful real-life foe. Near the Bible's beginning and end, God lifts the curtain that separates the opposing sides and those in the middle. The serpent that deceived Eve is the same being who leads the powers of darkness. No truce with this enemy; there is only victory or defeat.

In *Genesis 3:15*, we are promised the woman's "seed" will one day crush Satan's head. According to Paul, Satan will be crushed under the saint's feet (*Romans 16:20*) ("Saints" is a synonym for the people of God or those in the middle of the conflict.)

It fits with another prophecy:

*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 the Lord's Kingdom and Glory are under constant assault, the fight rages on. Our God is a Warrior King! He has a sovereign, Battle Plan for victory. He has declared it in His Word. Regarding His plan, it was *first revealed to the prophets, and is unveiled in these last times for our sake* (1 Peter 1:16-20).

Before going into battle, every commander devises a strategy. Our King is no exception. When Christ comes, he will rescue his people from the hand of the devil. Then, after all are saved, He becomes the Avenger. Those who mistreated his saints are destined for destruction (*Revelation 16:14*).

One of the Bible's early battles involving Satan was over an old man and his barren wife. (People are often the battlefield.) Abram (later Abraham, the father of our faith) and his wife Sarai (later Sarah) were Ground Zero, the center of the action.

In Abram God found the man that was required (*Genesis 15:6*). In his day, faith in the Lord was in short supply. None since Noah, Abram's ancestor, had been as well prepared for his crucial role—God's servant Job being an exception,

Though Abram had a trained army of 318 men (*Genesis 14:14*), and a large household of servants, flocks and herds, he lacked an heir. The barren womb of Sarai was a source of heartbreak. Infertility was Satan's doing. Abram was ninety and his wife, Sarai, eighty—both well beyond child-bearing years. Only God could grant an heir.

In *Genesis 15:1*, the Lord told Abram he was his shield and his *very great reward*. He then promised that his servant would have a son. The heir Abram longed for would come from his own body. Then God took his servant outside to look at the night sky. Lifting his head, Abram heard his offspring would number as the stars. *Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (15:6).*

Later, a *dark and dreadful sleep* came over him (*Genesis 15:12*). In a vision, Abram was shown a small but important part of the war—his and ours. He felt dread. It was the presence of evil.

Whether in a dream or awake, God said,

"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 let Abram in on his plan because he believed. It is the Lord's pattern to reveal his intentions to his servants (*Amos 3:7*). His servants then pass it on to other reliable servants. Since Abram recorded his visions and God's words for future servants, he earned the title "prophet" (*Genesis 20:6-7*).

A country not their own

Though Abram knew, Egypt was unspoken in the *dreadful dream* (*Genesis 15:13-14*). Earlier, in *Genesis 12*, he took his household

there to escape famine. Circumstances were nearly identical when, later, grandson Jacob moved his family to Egypt (*Genesis 47:27*).

For Abram's household, food was provided in Egypt, yet for only a short season. Remaining 400 years was in the plan for Jacob's sons (the fourth generation of descendants).

The dream, in *Genesis 15*, was more like a nightmare. No one wants to see their children's children enslaved. Most work and save so the succeeding generations will have it better. We would hate to see family living under the heavy burden of slavery, yet that is what God promised. The vision, however, did not end there. Abram's offspring would be freed from their bondage and come away *with great possessions (Genesis 15:14)* and land of their own.

According to God's Battle Plan, centuries of living as strangers in a strange land and years of oppression, would produce a mighty people, a nation belonging to God. They would act as the Lord's strong arm, bringing judgment on the wicked Canaanites.

Who received God's plan in *Genesis 15*? It was an old man without a son for an heir or land of his own. The Lord told a *wandering Aramean (Deuteronomy 26:5)* that his reward would come later. God's servant believed every word! The promise was also for his offspring Jacob (Israel), not the father but for his descendants.

"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 Sodom's condition was an indication of Canaan's wickedness, the Amorites had to be deplorable (*Genesis 19:13*). Included in "The Battle Plan" of God was the Amorites' judgment. It was centuries away, yet God promised Abram that his offspring's sword would destroy the Amorites, then give them the land of Canaan forever.

The full measure of wickedness

For the wicked, their judgment has long ago been declared. Exactly when, will soon be revealed. The world's sin has not yet reached its full measure.

For now, the wicked appear to prosper from their evil deeds. They will enjoy forbidden pleasures and revel in their godless lives. When the appointed time comes, they will feel God's wrath. Their possessions will remain, but only as an inheritance for 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.*

Psalms 37:10-11

God made a promise to his servant 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 nations on the above list? They vanished like smoke. God gave their land to Israel. As a consolation, the faithful whose fathers suffered hardship in Egypt would receive a bountiful land, for themselves and for their children.

The boundaries God promised in *Genesis 15* were nearly realized during David's reign, but Israel's expansion ceased under Solomon, his son. Foreign brides and alliances with pagan rulers (practices forbidden by the Lord) put an end to God's blessings on Israel.

Only one nation has received a land grant directly from God, but that nation, Israel, could not hold it together. Because of sin, the tribes of Jacob and their territory split, then diminished under David's successors. Eventually, they all became strangers in other lands.

In May of 1948, a phenomenal miracle occurred. *Dry bones took on flesh (Ezekiel 37:21)*. The Jewish state of Israel was formed in partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The Yom Kippur War in October 1973 expanded Israel's boundaries from Sinai (Egypt) to the Golan Heights. It is still expanding to include control over the Golan Heights. Their territory does not yet extend from the Wadi in Egypt to the Euphrates River, but God has promised; therefore, we know it will happen.

According to God's decree, Israel's enemies still occupy territory belonging to Jacob's offspring. Satan still fights for these parcels of land, yet his efforts will become futile.

There are no errors with God. The problem is in our inability to understand. What God said, He meant! Jacob's descendants will live in the Promised Land *and* enjoy it forever. Complete fulfillment is still future, but when God restores the kingdom to Israel, it will surpass the glory of David and Solomon (*Acts 1:6-7*). By God's direction, Joshua assigned the boundaries for the tribes of Israel. As creation's Lord, Jesus will determine them for all other nations.

When sin reaches the limit that God sets, the wicked will be displaced. Taking their place will be *a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood—a people belonging to him (1 Peter 2:9)*. Before receiving great possessions, these saints must endure mistreatment.

Another terrifying vision

Not all of God's promises to Abram were fulfilled in four or five hundred years (*Genesis 22:15-18*). Some await the Millennium or end of the age to come. It is the third and last age of sin and death.

Prophet Daniel had a vision like Abram's. It, too, was like a bad dream. Daniel was "terrified," and "deeply troubled" by what he saw (*7:7, 15 and 28*). Parallels with Abram's dark vision are unmistakable. A ruler like Pharaoh will appear. He will speak boastfully as if consumed with pride. Does that sound like Satan, or the Antichrist?

Egypt was the furnace of affliction for God's people, Israel. At the end of this age, the world will be a white-hot furnace of affliction for those destined for the Kingdom.

Read 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

At God's appointed time, when the Israelite's time was almost up, Pharaoh declared war. In the same way, the little horn of *Daniel 7:8* will emerge at the end of this age. At the pre-ordained moment, he will walk on the world scene to wage war against the saints *and defeat them (Revelation 12:17)*. No disciple should be surprised.

What did the vision of the little horn mean? So everyone might understand, God presented it to Daniel again:

*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 king in Daniel's vision uses his power to oppress the people of God. He tries to change God's set decrees and appointed times but will not succeed. The angel showed Daniel that the saints' trials would last for *a time, times and half a time*. We interpret this to mean they will endure no more than three-and-a-half years of great distress.

The Plan for victory

As terrifying as Daniel's vision was, there is more. Read below and think of the Hebrew's example before the exodus. Consider again their hardship's purpose and be encouraged.

*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

The last days opens with a darkness that leaves God's people deeply troubled. Afflictions, like those the Hebrews endured, will begin to fall on the people of God. After the set time when evil prevails, *the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. And He will reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15)*. After great hardship, the saints gain their inheritance and their reward of great possessions (*Zechariah 14:12-14*).

Jesus will receive the kingdoms of this earth that were long ago promised by the Father. The beloved will belong to Christ and He to them (*Song of Songs 2:4*). They become each other's reward.

Daniel had more unsettling visions, but God reiterated his plan. Yes, great distress was coming, but afterward, the Kingdom will belong to the saints *forever and ever* (*Daniel 8:23-27, 11:33, 12:1*).

The inheritance

Middle Eastern traditions have lasted thousands of years. With respect to property, it is much the same today as it was in Jesus' day. Land stays within families. The eldest may labor like a hired man, but at his father's passing he inherits the estate. He must work for the good of what will be his and that of his heirs.

In the coming age, only sons who remain faithful in God's household receive an inheritance. Saints must labor as servants, often enduring the hardships of a bond slave, but one day all that will change. Offered to God's people is the hope of a bright future, that is "if" (a condition) they *endure patiently to the end* (*Jeremiah 29:10-14, 2 Timothy 2:11-12*).

*

Discussion:

- From this chapter, what do we learn about the Battle Plan? From Abram and Daniel's vision, what is the future of the kingdom of darkness as opposed to the Kingdom of Light?
- Can we hold back the creeping shadow of evil in this age any longer than temporarily? Why must we face wickedness?
- Something bad must happen before something great occurs. What bad experience have you had that you know worked out for the good?
- What have you been taught about God's saints during the last days that conflicts with Daniel's vision? What is in store for God's people as we approach the end of the age? Compare your conclusions with Jesus' prophecy in *Matthew 24:9-25*.

*All these blessings will come upon you and accompany
you if you obey the LORD your God;*

*You will be blessed in the city
and blessed in the country.*

The fruit of you womb will be blessed...

Deuteronomy 28:2-4a

*You will know that your children will be many,
and your descendants like the grass of the earth.*

Job 5:25

A large population is a king's glory...

Proverbs 14:28a

*"When the Son of Man comes into his glory, and all the
angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.
All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will
separate the people one from another as a shepherd
separates the sheep from the goats."*

Jesus, Matthew 25:31-32

Key #11

Gold n' Stuff

*

Choose any warm Spring Saturday. Take a leisurely drive down a residential street of an American middle-class neighborhood. You will probably notice a "Yard Sale" or two. Maybe it is a "Garage Sale" but no matter what it is called it means the owner is clearing his house of junk. This could be clothes no longer worn as well as unused gifts, all selling at bargain prices.

Most Americans love yard sales. It is hard to determine who is happier: the one receiving cash for their trash or the buyer with a bargain. Ironically, the buyer's prize may be stored and sit there until they become the seller and continue the cycle.

Watch out!

Why our love for stuff? The answer might be our discretionary funds and habit of impulse buying. People with lots of money purchase what they want rather than need. Perhaps we have been conditioned by advertisers who say we "must have" their product. Others find shopping to be a stress-relieving, "feel-good" experience. To some, shopping is like a fix to a "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 was what the Lord described above. According to Him, it is not harmless. It has become part of our culture, so we fail to see it for what it is. An overwhelming desire to acquire more is a temptation that must be resisted.

The Bible warns God's people not to give in to greed. Life is not a game of "He who dies with the most toys wins!" Christ's message is the opposite: He who dies with the most will lose. The winnowing fork will separate the saints from those who measure their life according to the abundance of their possessions.

Crucial trials were part of the past for the Israelites. Gone were complainers, the fearful, the rebellious, all idolaters plus the sexually immoral. Of those departing in the exodus, death kept many from

their inheritance. Chaff and wheat were *called* to leave Egypt and enter Canaan, but not all were *chosen* (*Matthew 22:14*).

No one enters Christ's Kingdom without proving their obedience. Obedience must be tested. Achan is a tragic example. Of all the stories of what might have been, his may be the saddest. Achan made it so far, only to stumble at the finish line. In *Joshua 7* is where we find his tragic tale. We better pay attention if we have hopes of hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant."

After overcoming much, the Israelite Achan fell for the lie that his misdeed was done in secret. Why would anyone offered so much, like Achan, throw it away for a little gold and stuff?

The reason may become obvious. Achan was not satisfied with what God promised. Greed is rooted in discontent. It wants no delay in personal gratification. Achan, like Lucifer, desired that which belonged to God; therefore, a share in the Land was insufficient.

Marching orders

Before Israel set foot inside 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

Six times God's people marched around the city. On the seventh trip around, on the seventh day, Jericho collapsed. The large-stoned walls fell inward crushing the city's defenders.

Since victory belonged to the Lord alone, He had sole claim to the spoils: the gold, the silver, the bronze and the iron. Jericho was the first fruits of all the conquered Canaanite cities. One-by-one their fortresses fell before the men of Israel. The gold and stuff of all the other cities would be theirs, but not Jericho's riches. The first fruit of the cities was devoted to God (*Joshua 6:16-19*).

Jericho was the Lord's anyway. Everything is His (*Psalm 24:1*). "Lord" implies ownership. Jesus is Lord of all, meaning He is the rightful ruler of all creation (*Revelation 3:14*). As King over all the earth, all silver and gold belong to him and the cattle on a thousand hills are his as well (*Haggai 2:6-8, Psalm 50:10*). At best, we are caretakers or stewards over God's possessions.

Jericho's gold came from the Lord's mines, yet their citizens gave praise to idols. They worshiped their wealth instead of their Maker (*Luke 16:13*). The Lord's plan would remedy this. Jericho would be turned into rubble. The city itself would be destroyed. Its valuables would be returned to the One to whom they belonged. The gold n' stuff would return to its true owner.

At issue, was God's Lordship over his people. The order not to touch the devoted things was a test of love. The command came with a warning (*Joshua 6:18*). Israel was God's possession, so obeying was a must (*Deuteronomy 7:6*). Each man would come to know to whom they belonged. Could any claim loyalty that was never tested?

All things, including our lives, are the exclusive property of our Creator. Desiring to possess what is not ours is "sin." We know the first man Adam's story. Through the ages, his covetous act has been repeated millions of times. *Do not touch. Do not take and eat.* Then desire, when it conceives, *gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death* (*James 1:15*).

Nothing has changed. Israel's test was like Adam's in the garden. God gave him one restriction, "...*you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (*Genesis 2:17*). That unique tree belonged to God alone. Its fruit was devoted. All other trees were for his stewards, but the tree in the middle of the garden was the exception. Unlawful taking was punishable by death, so death came to us all. Because of Achan's sin, innocent men lost their lives, as we shall see. It is God's pattern.

Achan's downfall caused Israel's fall.

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

Achan “stumbled onto” the devoted things (*Hebrews 4:13*). The devil’s trap was set. Seduction became an impulse and an evil plan was hatched. Becoming richer than he was became a 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 Timothy 6:9-10

Sin entered the camp and, with it, God’s curse. When Israel went off to fight the weaker army of Ai, they were roundly defeated. It was as the Lord said: If anyone took the stuff devoted to me, the entire camp would suffer (*Joshua 6:18*).

Grief descended upon Israel like a flood. When Joshua heard the report from Ai, he fell on his face before God. Wailing and weeping swept the camp, all due to one man’s disobedience. *There was sin in the camp*; the cancer had to be removed. God’s remedy was to take the stolen things, plus the offender, his family, his animals and all his possessions, outside the camp and destroy them.

Who would commit such an unfaithful act? Where were these sacred objects? It was another opportunity for the winnowing fork to teach the people the penalty for stealing from God.

“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 objects of Achan’s lust were revealed by the Lord. Judah’s privileged son would forever be separated from God’s people, along with his family and his stuff. Achan, the culprit, was forthright.

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 Babylon, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them

and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

Joshua 7:20-21

In many modern courtrooms, Achan's full disclosure and remorse might result in a judge's leniency. Who cannot relate? The robe was stunning. Who could resist having it? Compared to the rest of Jericho's plunder, the silver and gold in Achan's possession hardly deserved notice. God noticed. Since a little yeast leavens the whole loaf, the Lord commanded that Achan die.

The gamble

To Achan, the gold and stuff were coveted. He weighed the silver and gold carefully—two hundred shekels and fifty shekels of gold. Before taking the devoted things, he also considered the *risk vs. reward*. Achan decided for risk. Was his prize worth his soul? Was it worth the loss of thirty-six of Israel's finest soldiers (*Joshua 7:3-5*)? Was it worth his family and all his possessions?

Covetousness is at the root of gambling. Achan took the risk by gambling he could have what the Lord prohibited. What are the odds of winning by disobeying God?

Gambling is in the blood of most cultures. There is sports betting, poker and other card games. There are licensed casinos with slots, blackjack and roulette, state and national lotteries, racetrack wagering, the stock market, church bingos and “cash bash” as well as many more. The “gaming industry” rakes in billions while wrecking thousands of lives. We are being set up and all will suffer for it.

What is coming will test everyone for greed, every man, woman and child. It will be our final exam before the 1000-year reign of Christ. The winnowing fork is ready. Gamblers beware!

Jesus was subjected to God's love test. In the wilderness, Satan offered three chances for Christ to fail. With any temptation, he hoped to disqualify Jesus from being the Savior of the world. If only the enemy could incite greed, then earth's kingdoms would be his.

One of the devil's temptation 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 gamble and the ultimate garage sale. Satan offered the world's gold and stuff in exchange for a little worship. If worshiped, the son of man would receive 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 sharply rejected the offer by rebuking the devil. Had He accepted humanity would be without hope. Had Jesus opted for personal gratification there would have been no cross and we would remain lost in our sins. Christ knew the earth was his by right, if only He proved faithful as a Son. Had Jesus the self-control of Achan, he would have opted for the temporary. He would not have waited for his inheritance. We would be adrift in our misery.

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 residing in a fine home in Canaan, Achan's ashes lay under a heap of rocks. The camp was cleansed by the fire. The purging satisfied God's anger. If Achan's greed is the stuff we hear about daily, what should we then expect from God?

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 beautiful robes from Babylon will seduce in the last days. The whole of Babylon the Great, with its wealth and luxuries, will lead many astray. People will be *lovers of themselves, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God* (2 Timothy 3:2, 4). No one residing in Babylon will be content with what they have. They will crave gold n' stuff, and, find it in abundance. They will be unaware of the cost until it is too late.

Our Lord has warned all willing to listen.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Mark 8:36

The pursuit and worship of the god Mammon is quickly reaching its climax. Because of exposure to the great riches of Babylon, many Christians are set to follow in Achan's footsteps. They will risk eternal salvation for a chance at fleeting wealth.

One last test

Before we settle into the next age, the Lord has a sobering warning. “Do not take *the mark of the beast!*” (*Revelation 13:16-17*). Disobedience is not an option.

Without the ability to buy or sell, people will find themselves with a choice: Will they totally depend on God? Will they succumb to hunger pangs and fear, then bow to the beast for food? The winnowing fork separates all who will worship Mammon. Like Achan, those worshiping gold n' stuff will perish (*Psalms 37:18-20*).

The beast's mark is permanent! It is like an owner's brand, an unchangeable tattoo. For its wearers, the mark is a death sentence just as Babylon's robe was for Achan (*Revelation 14:9b-11*).

What more is necessary? Even with this account in their Bible, many will yield to covetous desires. Those who take the mark will burn alongside the things they craved. Their bodies will lie under the smoldering rubble, while their souls head for the pit.

Men and women who obey God live forever! (1 John 2:15-17). Those who reject *the things of this world* (i.e. the gold n' stuff devoted for destruction) pass the love test.

The trainer puts the coveted treat in his hand and raises it to shoulder level. His command is "Stay!" His dog sits with all eyes on the master. Tail wagging again; she hears her master's firm voice, "Stay!" And she stays. The animal is anxious yet remains obedient. Then the dog hears, "Okay, girl, JUMP!"

Immediately, she leaps into the air and takes the biscuit from her happy master's hand. Both master and dog receive their reward. It is the joy of discipline, delayed gratification's wonderful prize.

*

Discussion:

- Does materialism affect only the rich, or are the middle-class and poor subject to the pain of wanting? What is behind our desire for more, or better and shinier stuff?
- Why did all Israel suffer because of Achan? Is it unique that a nation pays for the sins of a few or one? (*2 Samuel 24:10-17*)
- If the history of Israel instructs us about the last days, what temptation must we face if we are to dwell with Christ? Why might most in our culture choose to worship Mammon?
- Should it concern us that many of our youngest generation cite becoming rich as their future goal? What does this imply?
- Is God opposed to things or is it their worship that angers him? (*Romans 1:25, Exodus 20:4-6*) Where do we come closest to crossing the line of worship? What is behind the pursuit of a simpler lifestyle among many of God's people?

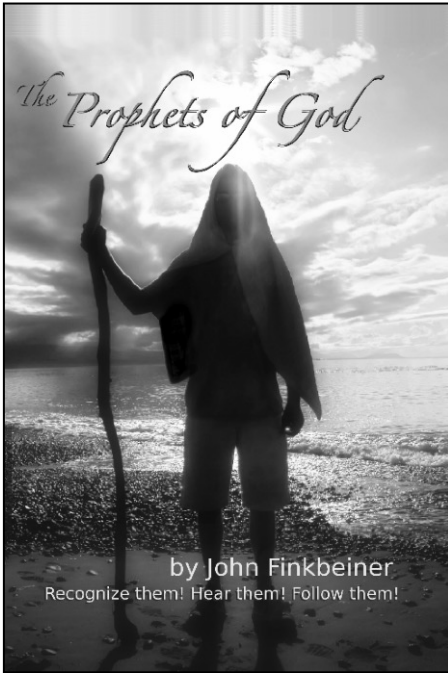
How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

Psalm 133:1

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:1a, 2-3

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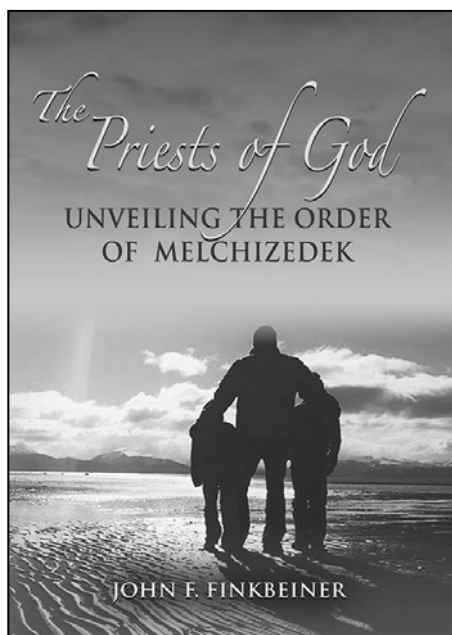
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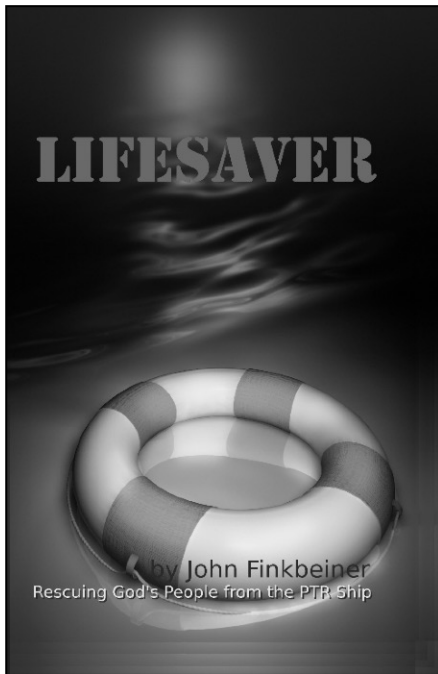
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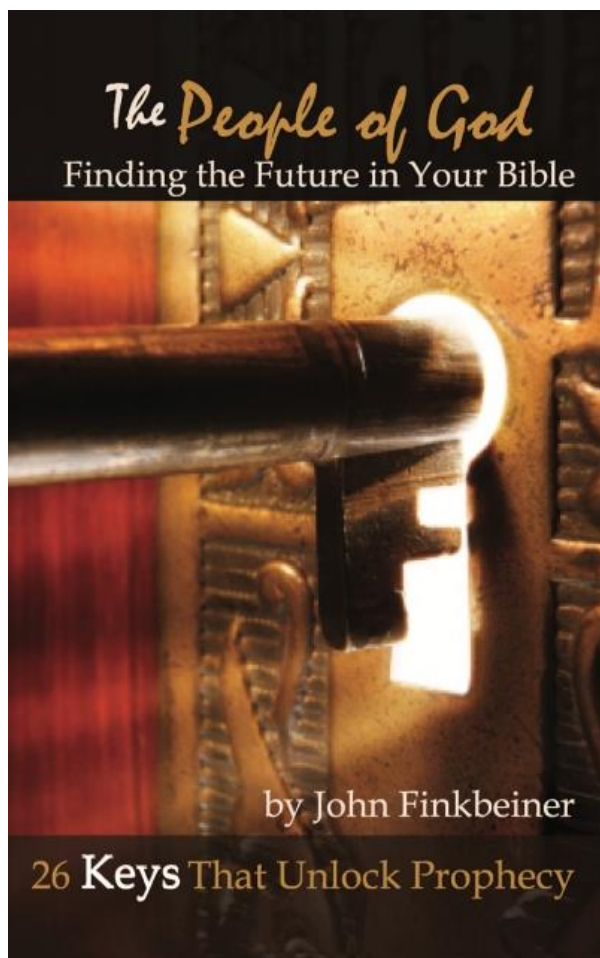
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