

DECEPTION

IN THE END TIMES



■ JACK MICHAEL

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A Common Sense Handbook for
Discerning the Signs of the Times

BY
JACK
MICHAEL

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INTRODUCTION

I have never claimed to be an expert on end time prophecy. There are others who know considerably more about that subject than myself.

The fact is, I did not write this book to correct your end time theology, nor to help you categorize, or compartmentalize your end time doctrines. In obedience to God, I wrote the book to alert you about deception in these end times.

Almost certainly, there are portions of the book that will upset some of you. The fact is, I have challenged a number of end time doctrines that were previously thought to be absolutes.

But, just keep this in mind; my motives were not to upset you, but to PROTECT you from deception.

Of course, deception is a big subject. With all the cults, the occult, philosophies, and traditions of men, it would literally take volumes to cover the subject.

The Holy Spirit's direction to me was to focus upon two areas of deception.

FIRST, deception I have observed, or deception that I have been made aware of, in what is called, THE CHURCH.

SECOND, deception which is aimed at young, or immature Christians; those who lack a strong foundation of God's word in their lives.

I have made it a point not to identify by name, pastors, priests, or preachers who may be guilty of propagating deception.

It is true that ministers of the gospel must be accountable, but in the body of Christ, it is also true that we should not be attacking one another, and challenging one another to spiritual duels. As Ephesians 4:3 instructs us, we should be:

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

We ministers of the gospel would be much more effective if we would strive for unity, and oneness of purpose. The strong anointing upon Psalm 133 reminds us:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there (because of unity) the Lord commanded the blessing — life forevermore."

On the other hand, I do not have any problem at all with exposing and attacking deception, and that is what I have focused upon in this book.

If you need to blame someone for the deception, let me suggest that you place the blame where it ultimately belongs; with Satan, the father of lies (see John 8:44).

As I previously indicated, I may not know as much as others about end time prophecy, but there is one thing I do know:

GOD HAS ANOINTED ME
TO WARN HIS PEOPLE
ABOUT DECEPTION.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Throughout the book, there are words or phrases enclosed in parentheses within a quoted portion of scripture. Although these words and phrases are not an actual part of the scripture, they are in fact, explanations or emphases derived from word studies of the scriptures.

DECEPTION IN THE END TIMES

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CHAPTER ONE

FOCUSING ON THE ISSUE

Imagine gathering together a group of born again Christians, almost anywhere in the world, and asking them this question: *"What will be the sign of the coming of Jesus Christ, and of the end of this age?"*

Of course, there are many such signs, but in any group of believers, some would likely answer by emphasizing the migration of the Jewish people back to the land of Israel, and the reestablishing of that nation.

Others might suggest rapidly changing, unpredictable weather patterns; particularly an increase in earthquakes and other types of violent storms.

Some might expound upon the alignment of nations in preparation for the battle of Armageddon.

Others would likely cite the predicted rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Few, if any, would respond as Jesus did when his disciples asked him this same question:

"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It is important to recognize in Matthew 24:3, that the disciples asked Jesus two questions. First, *"...when will these things be..."*, asking about the destruction of the temple (verses 1-2). Second, *"...what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* Therefore, as Jesus answers their questions, he is sometimes speaking of the destruction of the temple, which occurred in 70 AD. At other times, he is referring to things the body of Christ would experience, leading up to, and including the end times.

The immediate response from Jesus, regarding the sign of his coming, reveals a subject area that is seldom mentioned by end time prophecy teachers:

"...Jesus answered and said to them: TAKE HEED THAT NO ONE DECEIVES YOU." (Matthew 24:4).

The Amplified Bible says it this way:

"Be careful that no one misleads you — deceiving you and leading you into error."

Personally, I have become convinced that DECEPTION, accelerating at an ever alarming pace, will be the primary sign of the times pointing to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

And, please notice; when Jesus spoke these words, "...Take heed that no one deceives you," he was speaking directly to his disciples. These warnings are not just addressed to the world, but to the body of Christ as well.

Subsequently, in their accounts of the gospel, Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired by the Holy Spirit to extensively warn us about deception.

Certain scriptures in the Bible are very familiar to us. These scriptures are familiar because we use them. Probably, we have them highlighted or underlined. Maybe we have them memorized.

Then, there are other scriptures that are not very familiar, simply because we have not used them.

Following is a scripture that is currently not very familiar. In fact, I never heard it used until I began to write this book.

"TEST ALL THINGS; hold fast what is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

In the Amplified Bible it says:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast."

I can assure you that as we progress further into the end times, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 will become one of the most familiar, and most used scriptures in the Bible.

It is absolutely essential for every born again Christian to become alert, and be on guard against this imminent onslaught of deception. Not just to generally recognize signs of the times, but specifically:

(1) We must become knowledgeable of the scriptures which warn us of deception, so that we can first guard ourselves from becoming victims.

(2) We must expand our understanding of the scriptures beyond our own personal needs, and become trained to warn others of deception.

(3) And, when necessary, we must be prepared to rescue our brothers and sisters who have already fallen prey.

CHAPTER Two

IS THE RETURN OF THE LORD SOON?

Toward the end of 1979, a Christian friend excitedly approached me. He had a cassette tape in his hand, and a twinkle in his eye. It was like he knew something I didn't know. "*You must listen to this tape,*" he exclaimed!

When I queried him about the subject, he was evasive. "*Just listen to the tape,*" he said. "*You'll be really surprised.*"

The tape was a full 90 minutes long, the recorder clicking off almost as the last words were being spoken. The teaching was extremely complicated, but filled with great expectation and intensity.

The teacher employed numerous Bible prophecies, both from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The teaching was filled with Bible numerology, mathematical equations, and so-called findings derived from computer analysis.

The conclusion to the matter was, this end time prophecy teacher claimed to have discovered when Jesus would return. With great confidence, he proclaimed: "*Jesus will return between 9:00 PM and midnight, Jerusalem time, on April 1, 1980!*"

Of course, April 1, 1980 has come and gone, and Jesus did not return.

HERE IS WISDOM on this matter.

When I encountered this deception, I had been in the ministry for only one year, and that as a book store manager. I knew enough about the scriptures to realize the teacher was violating God's word, but there was also this small fear in me that wanted to hold on to the prediction, just in case.

You see, the perpetrators of deceptive schemes not only make predictions. They also emphasize that if you are not a part of their group, you will miss whatever it is, that they say God is about to do!

I now recognize that many Christians, because of this fear of missing out, will hold on to deceptive schemes, even though they know them to be a violation of God's word.

Here is the major problem; this fear of missing out, no matter how small, has the potential of growing into greater fear.

The leaders of deceptive movements know how to use fear very effectively, even incorrectly identifying it as commitment, or loyalty. This is one reason why young, immature Christians often embrace such movements.

Well, back to my story.

That encounter with deception caused my spiritual ears to perk up, especially after the predicted day and hour had passed.

However, it was just a short time later when I heard a nationally known, end time prophecy teacher predict that the Soviet Union would attack Israel in 1982. This, he said, would trigger the events of the last days, culminating with the return of Jesus.

Of course, the Soviet Union did not attack Israel, and interestingly, there is no longer a Soviet Union.

Then, there was the Jupiter Effect. If I remember correctly, that was a time when certain planets were to line up, potentially causing all sorts of natural disasters and catastrophes.

Quite a number of end time prophecy teachers were proclaiming that the Jupiter Effect was the end of the world, and of course, the time for Christ's return.

Well, the Jupiter Effect came and went, without so much as a ripple, and Jesus did not return.

1988 was a pivotal year for many end time prophecy teachers. Reportedly, it was the year 2000 on the Jewish calendar.

One line of reasoning went something like this:

(1) There were approximately 2000 years between creation and the Genesis flood.

(2) Between the flood and the birth of Jesus, there was another period of 2000 years.

(3) 1988 was the year 2000 on the Jewish calendar, so this made a total of 6000 years.

(4) 2 Peter 3:8 says: "*...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*" So, it was reasoned that the creation, which took six days, was symbolic of the first 6000 years.

(5) Then, because God rested on the seventh day, it was reasoned that the 1000 years following 1988 would be the millennial period in which Christ reigns on the earth.

(6) Therefore, Jesus would have to return in 1988, at the latest.

One end time prophecy teacher went so far as to write a book predicting that Jesus would return on September 11, 12, or 13, 1988.

Someone inquired as to whether I had read this book? "No," I replied, "*there is another book by which I govern my life.*"

That other book is the Bible, and about the return of Jesus, it says:

"...that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36).

A friend telephoned long distance and left a message on my answering machine. She wanted to know my thoughts on this book. She said her pastor was committed to it. They were keeping the church open for prayer on those days.

My first thought was this; if Jesus was returning on one of those days, why waste time opening the church for prayer? Get everyone out in the streets, send people to the Mall, pass out tracts, share the gospel, get as many people saved as possible.

I did not respond to her message until after those dates had passed.

Another minister had a very interesting observation. If Jesus was coming back on September 11, 12, or 13, 1988, why was this author selling his books? Why not just give them away? After all, if Jesus was returning, he obviously would not need the money.

And, despite such obvious errors, THE DECEPTION KEEPS COMING....

It was the summer of 1992. I was in downtown Honolulu, Hawaii, taking care of some ministry business. An attractively dressed lady handed me a professionally printed brochure. The headlines declared: *"God's Judgement Day Is Near. In October Of 1992, Jesus Will Come Again."*

I learned later that the ministry which was spearheading this latest deception had its headquarters in South Korea. Over the next few months, they generated quite a following in Hawaii.

One such disciple lived on the Kona side of the Big Island. She constructed a large sign proclaiming the return of Jesus that coming October, and on a daily basis, boldly displayed it at a busy intersection.

Once again, Jesus did not return as predicted.

Interestingly, on the actual day that this group said Jesus would return, one of the major news networks had cameras on site to record the failure. I just happened to be watching.

Quite frankly, I was embarrassed. The people were all shouting, weeping, singing, praying, and waving their hands in the air. As the time grew nearer, the people got louder and even more dramatic.

Then, sadly, the time came and went, and the people were put to shame. The news media just attributed the whole mess to more stupidity from ignorant Christians.

Later, I heard on the same news network, that the leader of this group publicly apologized for misinterpreting the Bible and leading people astray.

One would think that exposing deception on worldwide television would knock some sense into people's brains, but it was only a few months later that I walked into a book store, and there on the shelf was the latest deception. This newly released book proclaimed 1994 as the end of the world.

I almost cried aloud, "*When will the deception end?*" Then, suddenly, I realized the answer. The deception will not end until Jesus actually returns. Until that time, **IT WILL INCREASE!**

On and on I could go, citing deceptions right up until the day I took this book to the printer. I would have to revise the book on a yearly basis in order to keep up with all the little deceptive messes, but I think you get the point.

Well, this brings us back to our original question: **IS THE RETURN OF THE LORD SOON?**

Just to ask such a question in some churches would be considered as heresy. Didn't Jesus plainly say:

"...Surely I am coming QUICKLY...?"
(Revelation 22:20).

Yes, Jesus did say that, but evidently, his understanding of the word, "QUICKLY," is a little different than our understanding, since he made that statement about 2000 years ago.

Most people are impatient. They want everything right now. I am often shocked, and sometimes frightened by drivers on our nation's highways. They will risk their lives to gain a one car length advantage. Of course, as you already know, impatience also shows up in our Christian lives.

As a kid, I remember attending revival meetings. The evangelist would declare that Jesus could return before the end of the service. Even if he didn't, it was almost certain that he would return before the end of the revival.

The truth is, we have significantly more work to do before Jesus returns. In Mark 16:15, he gave us this commandment:

"...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Did you notice that Jesus said, EVERY CREATURE? We have not yet completed that assignment.

So, is the return of the Lord soon? YES, within the realm of almighty God's infinite understanding. However, within the realm of our finite, often impatient understanding, I believe the answer is NO!

Yes, we need to be ready for the return of Jesus. We need to be enthusiastically and expectantly awaiting his return, but we also need to be working for Jesus as well as waiting for him.

I sincerely hope Jesus will return in my lifetime. If not, I will serve him until the day I go home to Heaven. Before I leave, I will pass on the torch to the next generation. Here is a scripture I have claimed for my life, and for my ministry. Psalm 71:18 says:

"Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come."

So, while we are working, and waiting, listen to some good advice from the mouth of Jesus:

"...It is not for you to know TIMES or SEASONS which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:7).

One of those false predictors said it was true that we could not know the day nor the hour that Jesus would return, but we could know the month.

Listen again to what Jesus said about knowing TIMES and SEASONS. He said:

"...IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW...."

Here is some more good advice from the same source:

"...Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, I am He, and, THE TIME HAS DRAWN NEAR. Therefore do not go after them." (Luke 21:8).

Is that clear enough? Just in case, let me spell it out for you. If anyone says that Jesus is coming back on a particular day, or at a particular hour, or month, or year, or time, or season;

DO NOT BELIEVE THEM,
and
DO NOT FOLLOW THEM!

CHAPTER THREE

SENSATIONALISM AND SPECULATION

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...."
(2 Peter 1:16 NIV).

Several renditions of this alleged incident are floating around the body of Christ. One goes something like this:

Someone received a pay check from a government agency. When they attempted to endorse the check, they found these words on the back: *"Do not cash unless payee can be identified by a mark on their right hand, or a mark on their forehead."*

When the person returned the check, they were informed that it was prematurely released, and that such checks were not to be used until a future date.

This future date is somewhat elusive, depending upon when you heard the story. One account goes back as far as 1984.

The question that looms in my mind is this; does the story have any validity at all? If so, bring forth the person who received the check. Did that person make a copy of the check so we would have some proof?

Let us identify the government agency that issued the check. Has that agency been interviewed? Don't forget the scripture I introduced in chapter one:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (1 Thessalonians 5:21 AMP).

Throughout the years, I have heard many such unconfirmed stories. One end time prophecy teacher announced over the radio, that the stones to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem were already cut, and were being stored in Phoenix, Arizona.

From the same radio broadcast came the report that immense flocks of vultures were migrating from Africa, and settling in the valley of Megiddo, supposedly to eat the flesh of kings, captains, and mighty men after the battle of Armageddon.

Someone in Hawaii passed along this next story. The Russians were drilling a deep, geothermal well. Supposedly, they drilled so deep that they heard screams. The suggestion of the story being, that they had drilled right into hell.

There is one particular story that I have heard repeatedly. Supposedly, a Christian motorist felt compelled to pick up a hitchhiker. Reportedly, the hitchhiker got into the back seat.

As they traveled along, they began to discuss the return of Jesus. The motorist said he believed Jesus would return soon. The hitchhiker then strongly emphasized that Jesus would be returning much sooner than anyone imagined.

The motorist, startled at that strong statement, turned to the hitchhiker, only to discover that he had vanished from the car.

I was surprised to see this story printed in the ministry magazine of a large, well known, international ministry. I was even more surprised that they would publish the story without first confirming its validity.

I have heard this story repeatedly, for more than 10-15 years. What puzzles me is the source of the story. It seems that the person telling the story heard it from one of their friends, who heard it from a reliable source, and this reliable source personally knows someone, who knows the person to whom the event happened.

Some Christian friends spent the better part of two days, making numerous long distance telephone calls all over the United States, trying to locate the original source of this story. Needless to say, they were unsuccessful.

Frequently, I minister in The Kingdom of Tonga, an island nation in the South Pacific. During one of my visits, I arrived shortly after the departure of several men from New Zealand, who were very possibly false prophets.

These men prophesied a lot of things which caused fear in the body of Christ, as well as political unrest in that nation. When their prophecies failed, they were exposed, and deported, but they left behind them a trail of confusion.

One thing they did, was try to convince the Christians in Tonga that "*bar codes*," which appear on consumer products, was the mark of the beast. As a result, Some of the people were afraid to buy the products they needed.

Perhaps "*bar codes*," or other devices which monitor the flow of finances could be contributing to the eventual implementation of the mark of the beast. However, let's maintain scriptural accuracy, and not allow our imaginations to run wild. The word of God clearly reveals the following:

"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark: ON THEIR RIGHT HAND or ON THEIR FOREHEADS, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." (Revelation 13:16-17).

Listen carefully; do not allow anyone to put a mark on your right hand, or on your forehead. Revelation 14:9-10 says:

"...If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

However, you don't need to worry, nor be fearful about bar codes that appear on laundry detergent, toilet paper, candy bars, or any other consumer product.

In the body of Christ, and elsewhere, there is a great increase in the number of people claiming to have experienced "after death," or "out of body" encounters.

A number of books have been written, explaining these encounters. Some were secular best sellers, and their contents are suspect. Others were written by Christians, who said they went to heaven and talked with Jesus.

I believe such a thing can happen. In John, chapter 11, we have the account of Lazarus being brought back from the dead after four days. If a born again Christian is brought back from the dead, I don't know of anyplace they could be brought back from, except heaven.

Despite these facts, we should never establish doctrinal beliefs on what someone said they saw or heard during one of these encounters. Even if someone says, *"I went to heaven, and Jesus told me this, or told me that,"* we still should not establish our doctrinal beliefs on that information.

I am as curious as the next person. I enjoy hearing accounts of people traveling through a long tunnel, seeing great lights, visiting a beautiful country, seeing famous people, and talking with Jesus. I honestly believe some of these stories are credible, because I know those involved to be godly people of integrity.

However, our doctrinal beliefs should be established upon God's written word, THE BIBLE, rather than these supernatural encounters. Otherwise, we will open ourselves to all kinds of deception.

Interestingly, certain people who said they went to heaven and talked with Jesus, also specifically stated that Jesus told them they would not experience physical death again before he returned. I wonder if some of those people have since died?

Every so often in the body of Christ, and also in the world, there arises a new fascination with angels.

I definitely believe in angels. I cannot think of anyone I would rather have on my side during a crisis. I am amazed at the story in 2 Kings 19, when ONE ANGEL killed 185,000 of Judah's enemies in one night.

But, once again, even though I believe some of these present day encounters with angels are credible, we still cannot establish our doctrinal beliefs on what someone claims to have seen, heard, or experienced during an angelic visitation.

In conclusion, we Christians must be people of truth and integrity. We should not be spreading sensational, speculative, unconfirmed stories around the body of Christ.

Pastors, and all ministers of the gospel must be especially careful. 2 Corinthians 6:3 admonishes us:

"We (give no offense in anything), put no obstruction in anybody's way, so that no fault may be found and [our] ministry blamed and discredited." (AMP).

If these little, sensational, speculative stories are eventually proven to be false, ministers who are spreading them around could be classified as deceivers. Their credibility as a minister of the gospel could be harmed.

Be very careful about so-called "after death," or "out of body" encounters. Let me remind you that a certain book written about such encounters; a book that has no scriptural foundation, and is contrary to the Bible; has sold millions of copies, thereby deceiving many!

Personally, if I should experience a God ordained, supernatural visitation, I will share it as the Holy Spirit leads me, as an encouragement to God's people. However, I would be hesitant to use that encounter to build a doctrinal foundation into people's lives.

And, about those angelic visitations; may I also remind you that cults, which are now world religions, have been founded on false, angelic visitations!

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (1 Thessalonians 5:21 AMP).

CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNS AND WONDERS

"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show GREAT SIGNS AND WONDERS to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:24).

I enjoy reading about the miracles of Jesus. I rejoice even more when someone is the recipient of a modern day miracle from the hand of God. The truth is, I love to experience the reality of God's power.

And, when considering such things as signs and wonders, healings and miracles, I obviously prefer to attribute such workings to the power of God.

Unfortunately, in these end times, one must be very cautious about such things. Many signs and wonders will not be from God. Jesus Christ himself, the greatest worker of miracles, clearly warned us about false christs and false prophets, and said they would show great signs and wonders.

Permit me to say this in another way. *"False saviors, and other deceivers, who claim to speak for God, will arise, offering false hope."* Sadly, many people will follow after the false hope, because of the signs and wonders.

Some of you may be wondering about something, *"Will such signs and wonders be genuine, authentic miracles?"*

Very likely, they will fall into the same category as the signs and wonders which will be perpetrated by the Antichrist. Listen to this explanation in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, from the Amplified Bible:

"The coming [of the lawless one, the Antichrist] is through the activity and working of Satan, and will be attended by great power and with all sorts of [pretended] miracles and signs and delusive marvels — [all of them] lying wonders."

These lying signs and wonders may be demonic manifestations, or simply illusions, but they will all have one thing in common; ultimately, they are a lie!

A number of years ago, a phenomenon occurred in a small village in Yugoslavia. Six young people claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary.

According to these young people, this visitation continued to occur each evening. The news spread like wildfire, and for many years literally millions of pilgrims flocked to this village, hoping to experience God.

Interestingly, none of the pilgrims were able to see anything, or confirm that anything was happening. Supposedly, Mary appeared only to these six young people.

Even the priests who were in charge could not confirm that these young people were actually seeing something.

Yet, the pilgrims kept coming, some of them paying large sums of money to travel long distances, just to be in the presence of these six young people, and hopefully, to experience something supernatural.

Perhaps these young people just made up the whole story to achieve fortune and fame. Then again, perhaps they were truly seeing something.

If so, what they were seeing was a familiar spirit (*a spirit that is familiar with someone who was formerly alive*). We are warned about such from Leviticus 19:31:

"Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits, do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."

In Isaiah 8:19, God further instructs us:

"...when the people [instead of putting their trust in God] shall say to you, consult for direction mediums and wizards who chirp and mutter, should not a people seek and consult their God? SHOULD THEY CONSULT THE DEAD ON BEHALF OF THE LIVING?" (AMP).

Well, through the years certain things transpired in Yugoslavia. For one, those six young people grew up into adults.

For another, the nation of Yugoslavia was torn apart, and divided by civil war. Consequently, pilgrimages have become a bit more difficult, and a little less desirable.

But, you didn't think Satan was going to give up on showing forth his lying signs and wonders, did you?

I clipped an interesting article from a national newspaper. The headline read as follows:

100,000 MAY TURN OUT TO SEE VIRGIN MARY

The article explained that the Virgin Mary has reportedly appeared on the 13th of each month since 1990, to a farm owner in Conyers, Georgia. If you're wondering about the location of Conyers, it's just a short distance from the city of Atlanta.

The devil is making it more convenient to experience lying signs and wonders!

During this event, people have claimed to see a cross in the sky. The more devout believers claim that when Mary appears to this farm owner, the sun spins on its axis, shooting beams of light into the house.

One pilgrim stated, *"You experience a deep inner peace, and go back changed."*

So, what exactly is wrong about these so-called visitations from Mary, and why do I classify them as lying signs and wonders? Simply this, in Matthew 4:10, Jesus said:

"... You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve."

In these two previous cases, worship was diverted away from God, and directed toward other things. In particular, worship was directed toward an apparent apparition of the Virgin Mary, as people clamored to give homage to someone other than God.

By the way, Mary is no longer a virgin! Mark 6:3 clearly reveals that she had other children after Jesus was born:

"Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us...?"

Of course, some will complain at me, and explain that these so-called visitations, "*Only serve to draw us closer to God.*"

Listen to me, we need to clearly understand WORSHIP. Plainly stated, it means: TO GIVE FLATTERING ATTENTION TO SOMETHING. Remember, Jesus said:

"...You shall worship the Lord your God and HIM ONLY you shall serve!"

Jesus also clearly emphasized:

"...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6).

Lying signs and wonders are likely to increase, so remember this; no matter how convincing they may appear to be, they are lying signs and wonders if they:

(1) Divert worship (*devotion, attention*) away from God alone.

(2) De-emphasize a relationship with Jesus Christ by giving homage to other persons (*including so-called saints*).

(3) De-emphasize a relationship with Jesus Christ by placing an importance on so-called spiritual objects (*statues, beads, paintings, shrines, etc.*).

CHAPTER

FIVE

SHALL WE REBUILD THE TEMPLE?

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

During my lifetime, I have heard quite a lot of teaching on end time prophecy.

One particular doctrine that many end time teachers emphasize is a necessity for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt.

They point out that the scriptures say the man of sin, the son of perdition (*better known as the Antichrist*), will sit as God in the temple of God. So, in order for this to happen, the temple must be rebuilt.

Supposedly, the temple will be rebuilt exactly as God originally instructed King Solomon; instructions which are recorded in the book of 2 Chronicles.

Of course, most notable would be the reconstruction of the inner sanctuary, also known as the MOST HOLY PLACE.

This MOST HOLY PLACE would then be separated from the area which is called the HOLY PLACE by a huge veil woven of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen thread (see Exodus 26:31-33).

Behind this veil, within the Most Holy Place, would be the Ark of the Covenant.

Most importantly, just above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, covered by the wings of cherubim, would be the presence of God (see Exodus 25:22).

I have heard it explained that during the Tribulation, the Antichrist will take over the rebuilt temple, exalt himself as God, stop the daily sacrifices that were destined for God, and demand worship for himself.

But, let me remind you of something. Our opening scriptures do not say the Antichrist will sit as God in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. They do not say he will sit in a duplicate of Solomon's temple. The Bible says he will sit as God in THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

Next, let me examine with you, three very important questions. To set the stage, let us imagine that the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt, and to the exact specifications as God originally instructed Solomon.

First question: WOULD GOD DWELL IN THAT TEMPLE?

Then, let us imagine that the actual Ark of the Covenant has truly been found, as is often rumored in end time prophecy circles, and let us imagine that it is placed within the Most Holy Place.

My second question: WOULD GOD ONCE AGAIN RESIDE JUST ABOVE THE MERCY SEAT, COVERED BY WINGS OF CHERUBIM?

Finally, let us also imagine that animal sacrifices are once again offered, and let's imagine the High Priest taking the blood of those animals into the Most Holy Place.

My third, and most important question: WOULD GOD ACCEPT THE BLOOD OF THOSE ANIMALS AS AN ATONEMENT FOR SIN?

Of course, the answer to all three of those questions is a resounding NO!

Should the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt, even to the exact specifications given to Solomon, God would not dwell in it. Matthew 27:50-51 reveals the following:

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...."

The presence of God departed from the Most Holy Place on that day, and under the New Covenant, the Spirit of the Lord no longer dwells in a temple made with men's hands.

The Apostle Paul confirms this fact as he was preaching Jesus to a group of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at Athens:

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." (Acts 17:24).

Secondly, if the actual Ark of the Covenant were found, it would be of no spiritual significance. God would not dwell above the mercy seat, covered by the wings of cherubim.

The Ark of the Covenant was an article of the Old Covenant. Now, under the New Covenant, the Bible says of the church as a whole, and of every individual believer:

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Most importantly, if animal sacrifices were once again offered, even to the letter of the Mosaic Law, their blood would not be acceptable to atone for (*or cover*) the sins of the people. Hebrews 10:26 makes this fact abundantly clear:

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains A SACRIFICE for sins."

Hebrews was initially written to Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Christ. So, the knowledge of the truth in the above scripture, is the knowledge that only the blood of Jesus can wash away sins.

Sinning willfully refers to turning back to the Old Covenant, after understanding the truth of the New Covenant.

Consequently, should someone return to the Old Covenant, *"...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins."* The blood of animal sacrifices, that temporarily covered sin, is no longer acceptable in God's sight. Speaking of Jesus, Hebrews 10:12 tells us:

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins FOREVER, sat down at the right hand of God."

This brings us to a milestone as far as answering our initial question: SHALL WE REBUILD THE TEMPLE?

Perhaps the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Ezekiel, chapters 40-48 speak of a temple, giving precise descriptions and measurements.

The problem is, a Bible prophecy can often fall into three categories: (1) has been fulfilled, (2) is being fulfilled, or (3) shall be fulfilled. Therefore, it is difficult to establish an exact time frame for most prophecies.

Also, Bible prophecies frequently have a spiritual meaning, as well as a physical meaning.

So, whether or not the temple will be rebuilt is questionable. Even if it is rebuilt, God will not dwell in it. Therefore, IT WILL NOT BE THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

Perhaps, as many end time teachers predict, the Antichrist will enter into some type of false covenant with Israel as the end times culminate, but you should keep this point in your mind: the Antichrist will not be anti (*or against*) Judaism. He will be AGAINST CHRIST.

While we are placing all of our efforts on figuring out when and how the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, the Antichrist may be deceptively rising up in the real temple of God.

And, what is the real temple of God?
THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRE-TRIBULATION, POST-TRIBULATION CONTROVERSY

"...And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be CAUGHT UP TOGETHER with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...." (from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

I can remember a time when almost everyone in the traditional, evangelical vein of Christianity was settled in their minds regarding the rapture of the church.

The rapture would occur immediately prior to the beginning of the seven year period known as, The Great Tribulation.

To disagree with that doctrinal position could have branded someone as a heretic. Very few dared to teach a doctrinal stance contrary to a pre-tribulation rapture.

In recent years, however, quite a few ministers of the gospel have questioned the concept of a pre-tribulation rapture, and now teach an opposite view.

I am not referring to far-out, eccentric souls, who have wandered away from the mainstream of Christianity. Rather, I am speaking of well respected, godly people who are solidly committed to the doctrines of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, there has developed in the body of Christ, two camps. One side holding rigidly to a pre-tribulation rapture, while the other is preparing Christians for a post-tribulation rapture.

Verbal battles have periodically broken out between the two camps. Obviously, each accuses the other of being deceived.

While many Christians have aligned themselves on one side of the fence, or the other, I decided to listen to both sides.

Post-tribulation proponents argue that Matthew 24:22 proves that the ELECT will be on the earth during the tribulation.

"...unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

However, those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture explain that the ELECT, spoken of above, refers to the Jews only, and does not apply to the body of Christ.

Post-tribulation adherents are diligent to expose the fact that the word, "*Rapture*" does not appear in the Bible. They further explain that the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture is not scriptural, but was created from a vision, which a woman in England claimed to have received prior to the turn of the nineteenth century.

Those favoring a pre-tribulation rapture strongly emphasize our Heavenly Father's care for his people. God would not leave us here to suffer The Great Tribulation.

But, those holding rigidly to the post-tribulation position explain that God will use The Great Tribulation as an instrument to separate the wheat from the tares (*or to identify the true Christians*).

So, on and on the controversy rages. Books have been written, tapes have been made, and seminars have been conducted. Both sides insist that they are right.

Well, after carefully listening to, and examining the views of both camps, I have come to a startling conclusion: I DO NOT KNOW THE ANSWER!

I also came to another conclusion: **NOBODY ELSE, FOR CERTAIN, KNOWS THE ANSWER!**

Then, I came to a wonderfully peaceful realization. It is perfectly acceptable if I do not know the answer. Let me recall a scripture I used in chapter two. Jesus said:

"...It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:7).

Once again, let me magnify a portion of that scripture in your mind, **"...IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW...."**

Now, I realize that some Christians get all charged up about these issues. They are firmly committed to their position, and they fervently let you know about it. Nevertheless, it is still a fact that no one, for sure, knows all the answers.

I once heard a fellow minister share a testimony. He had been in the ministry the same length of time as myself, so I listened very carefully. He shared that when he first entered the ministry, he was a lot smarter than he was now. Then, he knew everything. Now, he didn't know so much.

I can relate to that. In the beginning of my ministry, I had perfect understanding of all the events of the end times, and had them all neatly compartmentalized. Now, I'm not so sure about things.

Interestingly, there are Christians who do not believe in a rapture at all. I asked an internationally known Bible teacher, who held such a stance, to explain his views.

He referred to Matthew 24:40-41 which speaks of two men in the field, and two women grinding at the mill. The Bible says, "*...one will be taken and the other left.*"

His explanation; the unbelievers will be taken, and the saints left!

There are also Christians who question the validity of a specific, seven year period known as The Great Tribulation. They cite the fact that the church has experienced great tribulation from its inception.

Also, let us not forget that there are places in the world where Christians are currently experiencing persecution because of their faith. Such believers might laugh in your face if you tried to explain to them about The Great Tribulation.

They could cite numerous examples of Christians being mocked, beaten, shunned, discriminated against, imprisoned and even killed. In their way of thinking, there could be no greater tribulation.

Sometimes, they add a little comment, "*You American Christians are just worried about losing your comfortable lifestyle.*"

As I previously emphasized, no one for sure has all the answers. When we get to Heaven, I believe all of us will discover that our understanding of the end times was at least incomplete, if not wrong.

Consequently, if we become dogmatic and immovable in our doctrinal beliefs on the end times, and insist that everybody believes exactly as we do, it may some day get us into serious trouble.

If end time events do not happen, or unfold exactly as we have insisted, we may be charged with, and found guilty of being a deceiver!

This area of end time prophecy is a fertile ground for deception. This is true because much about the end times has not yet been REVEALED, simply because it has not yet been FULFILLED.

Someone once handed me a brochure on behalf of their church. It stated that not all born again Christians would be taken in the rapture. Of course, the brochure also strongly inferred that you should belong to this particular church, if you wanted to be sure about being taken.

Fortunately, God has a way of getting us back on track. When Jesus said to his disciples, "*...It is not for you to know times or seasons...*," it was in response to their questions about the fulfillment of prophecy.

"...Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus answered them, and us, with the major emphasis he wants in our lives:

"...It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...." (Acts 1:7-8).

There is one thing about the end times that I know for sure:

"...God did not appoint us to WRATH, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Much of what is depicted in the book of Revelation is the wrath of God. Christians are not destined to receive God's wrath. Listen to this scripture which speaks of the second coming of Jesus:

"And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus WHO DELIVERS US FROM THE WRATH TO COME." (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Romans 5:9 explains why we will be delivered from the wrath of God:

"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from WRATH through Him."

Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture would insist that these facts prove the church will not be on the earth during The Great Tribulation, because we will be delivered from God's wrath.

However, let's recall a time when God demonstrated his wrath against Egypt, and against the gods of Egypt. He did so with his people, Israel, still in the land, and he powerfully demonstrated his ability to shield and protect his people.

"And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land. I will make a difference between (or, put a division between) My people and your people...." (Exodus 8:22-23)

The Lord Jesus will definitely deliver us from God's wrath. Perhaps he will rapture us out of the world just prior to The Great Tribulation. If so, great.

On the other hand, if he leaves us in the world, and puts a division between us and those destined to receive God's wrath, that's fine with me also.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SPIRIT OF INTIMIDATION

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7).

The New International Version says, *"...God did not give us a spirit of timidity...."* But, let's look a little deeper; what exactly causes fear and timidity?

The answer: INTIMIDATION.

I am convinced that one of the strong deceptions Christians will face in the end times is a spirit of intimidation. An evil spirit that brings fear and timidity, because of the potential events of the end times.

Concerning the end times, Luke 21:26 says:

"Men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth...."

I would hope this scripture is speaking of unbelievers, but undoubtedly, Satan will try to put the same fear upon believers.

In the last chapter, I clearly stated that I do not know if the return of Christ will be pre-tribulation or post-tribulation, but here is an interesting observation. When I have suggested to believers, just the possibility of being here on the earth during The Great Tribulation, I have often noticed intimidation come upon them. They become timid and fearful about the events of the end times.

I remember a certain *"tele-evangelist,"* end time prophecy teacher coming over to Hawaii. He held meetings every Sunday afternoon for several weeks in the ballroom of a large hotel in Waikiki Beach.

Due to extensive television advertising, large numbers of church people flocked to the meetings after they had attended their regular church services earlier in the day.

This teacher shared some traditional teachings on the end times, but mostly, he created fear and timidity in the people.

He declared that we were very close to the end. Sooner than we realized, things would become very difficult. He specifically talked about the necessity to store up food, because no one would be able to buy or sell unless they had the mark of the beast.

Quite conveniently, a certain salesman of freeze-dried foods was traveling with this end time prophecy teacher. This salesman just happened to have available, a neatly packaged, two year supply of freeze-dried foods that would fit nicely under your bed.

A great number of people purchased those packages. Years later, people asked me, "*Brother Jack, what should I do with this food?*" I told them to eat it.

Jesus never instructed us to store up food. To the contrary, he said:

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap NOR GATHER INTO BARNS; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

Obviously, it is not wrong to preserve foods, and store them for later use. But, you do not have to store up food, because you are fearful of the end times.

Millions of Christians in this world do not have the financial capability to store up years of food. Many literally trust God to: "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

For a moment, let's imagine that you have a two year's supply of food stored up, and let's imagine that your neighbor does not have any food stored up.

Let us further imagine that we are in the last days, and things have become very difficult. Will you sit quietly, and secretly in your house, selfishly eating your stored up food, while your neighbor starves?

If you are truly a Christian, you will do as Jesus commanded, *"for I was hungry and you gave Me food..."* (Matthew 25:35).

Soon, all that stored up food would be gone, and everyone would be reduced to trusting in God.

This same prophecy teacher was also advising everyone to turn their savings into gold. *"Our currency will soon be worthless,"* he declared. *"Only gold will retain it's value during the end times."*

At this particular time, the price of gold had skyrocketed, almost doubling in value. This teacher was proclaiming that almost certainly, the price of gold would continue to increase, and double in value again.

Quite conveniently, a gold investment broker just happened to be traveling with this teacher. A number of people turned large sums of currency into gold, making a handsome commission for the broker, and perhaps for the teacher also.

Well, the price of gold did not increase, it went down. One Christian lady told me she lost a bundle of money on that deal.

Obviously, it is not wrong to make an investment, even in gold. But, you should not do so because you are influenced by a spirit of intimidation.

Again, the vast majority of Christians in the world do not have the capability to turn large sums of currency into gold. What money they do have, they need to live on a monthly, weekly, or even a daily basis. Do you think God will abandon such people just because they don't have gold in the end times?

From the Bible, let's look at some of the events of the end times; events that could cause fear in people's lives.

Then, also from the word of God, let's discover God's promises and provisions for his people, despite these difficulties.

FAMINE

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines...." (Matthew 24:7).

If faced with difficulties such as famine in the end times, what will we do? How will Christians survive?

Well, if you want to survive, I suggest that you begin developing your faith and confidence in the word of God. Listen to God's provision for us:

"The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and IN THE DAYS OF FAMINE THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED." (Psalm 37:18-19).

Interestingly, experts on world hunger tell us that the amount of food produced each year is enough to feed twice the population of the world. There is no shortage of food. What we have is a problem with waste and food distribution.

If you're ever faced with famine, trust in God. He knows how to distribute things in your direction. In Psalm 37:25, David says:

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."

After the flood, God made a promise to Noah. In Genesis 8:22, he said:

"While the earth remains, SEEDTIME AND HARVEST...shall not cease."

Should you ever be in desperate need of food, plant a crop. It will grow.

PESTILENCES

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences...." (Matthew 24:7).

Pestilences refers to diseases that are contagious or infectious. Also those which could be categorized as an epidemic or a plague.

Pestilences are often characterized by a rapid, severe, and malignant course, with an ability to overcome the body's defensive mechanisms.

Well, look around you. The AIDS virus has killed literally hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. If what we are being told by the experts is true, we have only seen the so-called, "*Tip of the iceberg.*"

The Zaire strain of the Ebola virus has demonstrated the devastating capability to wipe out entire segments of a population.

Legionnaires disease periodically, and mysteriously appears, striking down victims without warning, killing dozens before it can be contained.

And, as we progress further into the end times, pestilences are likely to increase and become more widespread.

So again, the question is put before us; how are we Christians to respond when confronted with the potential dangers of infectious pestilences?

Shall we quarantine ourselves, and hide in sterile communities, where hopefully, we will not be touched by epidemics?

Or, will we continue to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, and "...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15).

If you are willing to trust in God, he has made provision for your protection. Listen carefully to his instructions:

"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust. Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from THE PERILOUS PESTILENCE." (Psalm 91:2-3).

From the same Psalm, the Bible says:

"You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of THE PESTILENCE THAT WALKS IN DARKNESS...." (verses 5-6).

Notice again verses 2-3 above. They refer to, "...the perilous pestilence...." In the margin of one of my Bibles it says: RAGING EPIDEMIC.

Also notice verses 5-6 above. It says, "...the pestilence that walks in darkness...." Darkness can refer to obscurity; something that is not readily understood. A disease perhaps, for which there is no cure.

Regardless, God's word instructs us, **"YOU SHALL NOT BE AFRAID...."** Even in the midst of a raging epidemic, the Lord assures us:

"A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you." (Psalm 91:7).

I was asked to visit a person in the hospital who was infected with AIDS. The first thing he wanted to do was give me a big hug in appreciation for visiting him.

Initially, I was hesitant. I could sense that spirit of intimidation trying to influence me. Instead, I made the decision to trust in God's word.

I returned his embrace, and as James 5:14-15 instructs me, I anointed him with oil in the name of Jesus Christ, laid my hands upon him, and prayed for his healing.

I am sorry to say that he didn't receive healing, but I am pleased to report that he did receive Jesus Christ as his Savior, and experienced the forgiveness and cleansing of his sin.

Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to every creature. He did not say we should minister only to those who are well, lest we put ourselves at risk.

Do not permit that deceptive spirit of intimidation to hinder you from obeying and living God's word.

EARTHQUAKES

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places." (Matthew 24:7).

As we continue in the end times, we will apparently face a continued increase in earthquakes, violent storms, and volatile, rapidly changing weather patterns.

Despite this potential, Christians still must not be intimidated. God has provided for our safety and protection. Listen to the wordage in the following scriptures:

"No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep (or guard) you IN ALL YOUR WAYS." (Psalm 91:10-11).

When earthquakes and other disasters strike, even if there is advance warning, most people are not prepared. I've heard interviews by the news media in the wake of natural disasters. People say things like, *"The storm came so suddenly, we weren't able to save anything. We barely escaped with our lives!"*

The time to develop your confidence in God's word is now, before disasters strike. Psalm 4:8 offers us this assurance:

"I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Look a little deeper into that verse. It says God makes us DWELL IN SAFETY.

What is most frequently destroyed by storms? The answer, of course, is homes, or we could say, dwelling places.

Notice also, that God is not just able to protect us in our dwelling places; he is able to give us such assurance that we can, *"...lie down in peace, and sleep...."*

WARS

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." (Matthew 24:6).

Despite the tireless efforts of idealistic politicians, and the prayers of so-called world religious leaders, there will be no peace on earth until Jesus returns.

In fact, as we progress further into the end times, the intensity of warfare, and the widespread effects of warfare are likely to increase.

Some of you are probably wondering, *"What about the Lord's commandment in Psalm 122:6. Doesn't that verse indicate that peace on earth is possible?"*

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you." (Psalm 122:6).

A Jewish Bible teacher taught me that the most accurate understanding of the Hebrew word, "*Shalom*," is a heart peace. Therefore, when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, our main emphasis is not peace from warfare between the Jews and Arabs. Our main emphasis is peace of heart.

Peace of heart within the multiracial inhabitants of Jerusalem could only come as a result of receiving Jesus as Messiah, and Savior. In other words, when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, we are praying for a spiritual revival to begin in that city.

Getting back to our subject; what are Christians to do if ordered to serve in the Armed Forces? How do we react when our fathers, husbands, sons, and yes, even our mothers, wives, and daughters are shipped off to fight in foreign wars?

We must continue to live by faith. The Psalmist David once wrote the following:

"Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident." (Psalm 27:3).

"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them." (Psalm 34:7).

I especially appreciate God's provision in Psalm 3:3:

"But you are A SHIELD AROUND ME, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head." (NIV).

I served a combat tour of duty during the Vietnam War. I was a 2nd Lieutenant, infantry platoon leader in the United States Marine Corps. Because of both firsthand experiences, and events which developed around me, I was acutely aware of God's supernatural protection upon my life.

The battlefield is an excellent place to witness and lead people to Christ. Soldiers who previously had no interest in spiritual matters are suddenly praying, reading the Bible, and open to hearing the gospel.

In this day and age, and certainly as we progress further into the end times, we face the threat of international terrorism, which can potentially bring the devastating effects of warfare to our very doorstep.

But, not even the potential of terrorism should hinder us from accomplishing God's purpose for our lives. God's word says:

"You shall not be afraid of the terror by night...nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday." (Psalm 91:5-6).

I travel quite a lot in my ministry. Prior to getting on airplanes, or any other public transportation, I ask God to send his angels ahead of me, and stop any potential act of terrorism or violence. Hebrews 1:14 says:

"Are not the angels all (servants) ministering spirits, sent out in the service [of God for the assistance] of those who are to inherit salvation." (AMP).

Occasionally, I find Christians who are fearful of flying. With confidence in God's word, I tell them, *"If you want to be sure of arriving safely, book the flight that I'm on!"* I have made the decision to trust in God's word for protection and safety.

PERSECUTION

Some of the most unevangelized areas in the world are those controlled by the Muslim religion. For the most part, the body of Christ has failed to concentrate on evangelizing these areas.

The reason, I am convinced, is that same spirit of intimidation. To put it bluntly, we are fearful of persecution.

We offer excuses, and provide detailed explanations about how difficult it is to lead Muslims to Christ. But, let's not deceive ourselves. The underlying cause of our failure is often fear of persecution.

And, let's continue to be honest. No one relishes the thought of experiencing persecution. I have often wondered with amazement at the words of Jesus:

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12).

Evidently, one must experience some sort of special anointing during persecution to fully understand those words.

Regardless of whether persecution is viewed as positive or negative, the responsibility to fulfill The Great Commission is yet before us. We must not allow a spirit of intimidation to hinder us.

Those who have experienced severe persecution often declare that the power of God to protect, and deliver, is in greater manifestation during times of persecution.

A fellow minister once suggested that the greatest surprise we will have when we get to heaven is, *"The power of God that was available to us, that we did not use!"*

Even when faced with persecution, we must be bold to trust in God, and operate with the spiritual authority Jesus has given us. In Luke 10:19, Jesus said:

"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over ALL THE POWER OF THE ENEMY, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Fear of persecution is one aspect of Satan's deceptive power, but he also uses a misunderstanding about persecution to further intimidate Christians. I am referring to the mistaken notion that believers are supposed to just lie down, and ENDURE PERSECUTION.

You may have to endure persecution for a time, but listen to the following:

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21).

When his disciples were facing imminent persecution, Jesus said:

"...I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...BE WISE AS SERPENTS and harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16).

A few verses later, Jesus said:

"When they persecute you in this city, FLEE TO ANOTHER...." (Matthew 10:23).

The commandment that Jesus gave us is not: GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND GET PERSECUTED.

Our assignment is one of authority and power, "...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15).

In some cases, this assignment could include, OVERCOMING PERSECUTION. Jesus said to his disciples, and to us:

"...they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist." (Luke 21:12-15).

DEATH

For many Christians, fear goes beyond persecution, and includes the possibility of dying, or becoming a martyr for the sake of the gospel.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." (Matthew 24:9).

Again, Satan has intimidated the body of Christ. Jesus said, concerning his life:

"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I HAVE POWER TO LAY IT DOWN, and I have power to take it again...." (John 10:18).

About now, some of you are saying, *"Brother Jack, that scripture was referring to Jesus laying down his life, not to us."* Yes, I know, but let's remember that Jesus also said:

"...he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." (John 14:12).

Here is my point; a Christian martyr is not someone who gets trapped like a rat in a corner, and then gets unwillingly killed. A Christian martyr is someone who is willing to lay down their life for the sake of the gospel, whether or not they actually lose it.

Toward the end of his ministry, the Apostle Paul said:

"...I AM READY not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13).

If God wants you to be a martyr for the sake of the gospel, I believe he will tell you. In Acts 9:16, the Lord said, referring to the Apostle Paul:

"...I WILL SHOW HIM how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

In addition, I believe God gives special grace to those who are called as martyrs, to enable them to victoriously pass through what would appear to be an ordeal.

The following verses of scripture used to puzzle me:

"You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But NOT A HAIR OF YOUR HEAD SHALL BE LOST." (Luke 21:16-18).

I didn't understand how someone could be killed without a hair of their head being lost? Now, I understand that God's supernatural grace is upon those whom he has called to be martyrs.

In the meantime, unless you are sure God has called you to be a martyr, then continue living by faith in God's word, and continue overcoming every obstacle facing you, including death.

Despite those glowing testimonies we sometimes hear about the great things God accomplished through the death of one of his saints, I still think we are more valuable to God as a living sacrifice, than we are as a dead one!

In conclusion, the end times may prove to be very difficult. However, it will not be a time for Christians to hide in the mountains.

It will not be a time to establish fenced in, clandestine, Christian communes.

This should be our finest hour. The end times will provide an opportunity for the world to witness God's supernatural power, provision, and protection over our lives.

In the face of extreme danger, many lost souls could be drawn to us. It should be a time for reaping a great harvest for the kingdom of God.

Do not permit a spirit of intimidation to deceive you with fear or timidity. Listen to these instructions from the Amplified Bible:

"And when you hear of wars and insurrections – disturbances, disorder and confusion – do not become alarmed and panic-stricken and terrified; for all this must take place first, but the end will not [come] immediately." (Luke 21:9).

As Jesus commanded us in Matthew 5:16, we must continue to be light in the midst of darkness, right up until the end:

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS and glorify your Father in heaven."

CHAPTER EIGHT

MY, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DRAGON!

"...Satan himself masquerades as AN ANGEL OF LIGHT, so it is not surprising if his servants also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. [But] their end will correspond with their deeds." (2 Corinthians 11:14-15 AMP).

In the last chapter, we concentrated on Satan's deceptive tactics of intimidation. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us that Satan gives the appearance of a roaring lion, attempting to shock us, or startle us with fright.

But, also in Satan's arsenal of tactics is the very subtle capability to appear as an angel of light; often shining forth with great beauty and appeal.

In other words, if Satan cannot deceive you with fear and intimidation, he will try to deceive you with beauty.

When the Olympic Games were held in Atlanta, Georgia, I was greatly astounded by the Opening Ceremonies. As usual, the ceremonies burst forth with great fanfare; an elaborate pageantry, supported by light, sound, color, and a cast of thousands.

So, what was the problem? The first thing that happened in the Opening Ceremonies was a summoning, or calling forth of the spirits of the five continents.

Perhaps the organizers did not realize that very likely, there is a real spirit over the five continents. Then again, **MAYBE THEY DID REALIZE IT.**

Ephesians 6:12 speaks to us about spiritual warfare, but also about rank, or hierarchy within the spirit realm:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against PRINCIPALITIES, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

That word, **PRINCIPALITIES**, refers to a chief or magistrate within the spirit realm.

We have such an example in the book of Daniel. Daniel was fasting and praying about a matter, but had not yet received an answer from God. When the answer came, it was brought by an angel, who said:

"...Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But THE PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF PERSIA withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia." (Daniel 10:12-13).

At that time, Cyrus was king of Persia. The angel who brought God's answer was obviously not referring to Cyrus when he said, *"...the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me...."* Even mighty kings and conquerors in those days were no match for an angel of the Lord.

The angel was obviously referring to a spirit being; a principality over the kingdom of Persia.

Getting back to the Olympic Games; by summoning the spirits of the continents, the organizers of the Opening Ceremonies transcended the world of pageantry, and actually invited principalities, and ultimately Satan, to preside over the games.

Ephesians 4:27 clearly warns us:

"Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil – give no opportunity to him."
(AMP).

Now, strangely enough, a great many Christians were completely oblivious to this deceptive ploy of the devil, and chalked up the whole thing to harmless pageantry.

So, the question is, why would Satan have an interest in masquerading himself as an angel of light in such pageantry?

Of course, Satan wants to perpetrate his deception in every segment of society, but at the Olympic Games, I believe he was after something much larger.

Specifically, I believe Satan is working hard to gain the allegiance of a particular segment of the world's youth. I'm referring to young athletes, and the millions of young people who religiously follow them.

For decades, Satan strived to gain the allegiance of Rock and Roll musicians, and ultimately, the millions of young people who idolize them, and embrace their philosophy.

At first, it seemed harmless, appealing, even beautiful. Now, due to the influence of Satanic inspired words and music, our society is reaping the real intent of Satan's scheme. We see abominable things taking place, like high school teenagers murdering their classmates to earn their way into hell.

Famous athletes are equally idolized by their fans. Young people clamor to get their autographs. They try to identify with the athletes by paying exorbitant prices for endorsed clothing. When young people compete at a lesser level, they try hard to imitate their favorite player.

Now, listen carefully to the following; through the Opening Ceremonies, the devil gained a foothold at the Olympic Games.

If this deceptive, spiritual emphasis is allowed to continue in the Games, it will be only a matter of time before athletes begin to chant, and call upon spirits to help them gain a competitive edge.

Already, the level of competition has become intense to the very limit of human endurance. If an athlete thought they could gain a competitive advantage by calling on a spirit, there is no doubt in my mind that many would do so.

Should famous athletes begin to call upon spirits for a competitive edge, literally millions of youth people would eagerly, and blindly follow their example.

I first shared this potential concept of athletes calling upon spirits via my ministry newsletter. Likely, some of the readers questioned the validity of what I wrote.

Then, I received a letter from friends who are missionaries in the Micronesian island nation of Yap. They said, "*No, it would not surprise us to see athletes call upon spirits to help them gain a competitive edge. In Yap, the practice of calling upon spirits to help in athletic competition is well known, and has been actively practiced for a long time.*"

They further shared that one particular village, though small, is traditionally known for being fierce in war. In this village, there is a stone which is marked for every war and skirmish won by their warriors.

It is also believed that the village spirit resides in this stone.

Prior to competing with other villages, the modern day, warrior athletes from this village gather around the stone to call upon the spirit.

This village has been the basketball and volleyball champions in Yap for years running.

There is a great desire among young people to excel in athletic competition. All the fame and money makes both amateur and professional athletics a very appealing vocation for those who are good enough.

Please understand, I am not against athletic competition. I enjoy watching and participating in sports as much as anyone.

However, as we progress further into the end times, athletes must be on guard against the schemes of the devil. Satan will be hard at work, making the world of sports increasingly beautiful and appealing.

There is no doubt in my mind that the devil would eagerly dispatch his demons to assist those who are willing to exchange their soul for athletic greatness.

Christian parents, if you have young children participating in youth basketball, baseball, football, soccer, hockey, tennis, or whatever, teach them at an early age to depend upon the Lord, and to boldly give God the glory for their successes.

I pray that we will not lose another generation of young people to the devil's appealing schemes, which ultimately end in destruction.

Another warning to parents. Each new generation of teenagers is introduced to a more blasphemous style of rock music than the former generation. Some of you have unsupervised teenagers who are listening to lyrics that mock God, demean the Bible, and blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

Satan's campaign of beautification is not limited to the world of sports. Have you noticed that fortune telling, which was once a dark, sinister practice on the wrong side of town, has now become respectable?

Psychics are now touted as wonderful, gifted people, who genuinely love and care for their clients.

Glowing testimonials fill our television screens from those who have supposedly been helped by this new breed of fortune tellers.

But, God is not impressed. His word is as clear, and valid as the day it was written. In the Old Testament, as God instructed his people to trust in him, he said:

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord...." (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Did you notice that God puts psychics and fortune tellers in the same category as those who offered their children as a burnt sacrifice to false gods?

And, have you ever thought about the word, ABOMINATION? It refers to something that is highly esteemed by man, but is utterly disgusting to God.

Now, maybe you're thinking, *"Surely, a Christian would never seek direction for their life from a psychic."*

Actually, you would be shocked if you discovered how many Christians call those psychic telephone networks. You would be equally surprised if you knew how many Christians read, and religiously follow daily horoscopes.

Some do it out of ignorance, because they are immature Christians. Others know better, but still do it because of their cultural background.

So, exactly what is wrong with seeking direction from a psychic? Simply this, God wants his people to trust in him; not some smooth talking soothsayer, who claims to have made contact with the spirit of your dead grandmother.

In Isaiah 8:19, the word of God says:

"And when they say to you, seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?"

No matter how fancy the devil dresses up the world of psychic phenomenon; no matter how refined it seems to become; no matter how many celebrities rave about it; God still says in Leviticus 19:31:

"Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."

The day is coming when Satan will be exposed for the deceiver and liar that he is. I can assure you, his eventual demise will not be beautiful, nor will it be appealing:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of THE DRAGON, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while ...The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Revelation 20:1-3, 10).

In the meantime, as the world rushes headlong into the tumultuous last days, Satan will be working harder than ever to appear as an angel of light. Gone are the days that the devil is seen as a red beast, with huffs, horns, and a pitchfork.

THE DRAGON IS DRESSING UP TO CONVINCE YOU THAT HE IS ACTUALLY BEAUTIFUL.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SIN OF COMPLACENCY

"He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame." (Proverbs 10:5).

On November 9, 1989, God spoke a word of prophecy to me. At the time, I was watching a television newscast with great astonishment as the Berlin Wall was being torn down.

Only a day earlier, border guards could have shot anyone trying to escape from communist East Germany into free West Germany. Over 190 people had lost their lives attempting such an escape.

Yet, on this historic day, the Berlin Wall was literally being torn down, and people were passing unhindered from communist East Germany into West Germany.

While glued to my television, watching this amazing event, God spoke a significant word to me. A word, which I believe God wanted the entire body of Christ to hear. The word was as follows:

"In the coming months, and continuing in the coming years, the walls of repressive governments other than East Germany will be torn down."

As I meditated upon what I had heard, God spoke yet another word:

"Due to the walls of these repressive governments being torn down, there will be an unprecedented time of freedom for the body of Christ to take the gospel message into previously restricted nations."

In the following months, and over the ensuing years, I watched with amazement as these words of prophecy were fulfilled before my eyes.

Yet, I knew God wanted to speak more than a word of knowledge. He also wanted to speak a word of wisdom, and thus, steer the body of Christ into a specific course of action.

Accordingly, the Lord reminded me of Proverbs 10:5:

"He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame."

Unfortunately, many Christians have a tendency to sleep during such opportunities for harvesting souls. There is too much COMPLACENCY in the body of Christ.

Complacency is: *"The satisfaction with things as they are, and an unawareness of dangers or deficiencies."*

Yes, it's true that missionary agencies have made progress in Eastern Europe, and it's true that many nations of the world, which were once closed to the gospel, are now experiencing revival. However, the opportunities which the body of Christ have taken, are small when compared with the opportunities that are available.

American Christians, in particular, hear testimonies about churches that have been established in the capital cities of former Soviet Bloc countries, and they rejoice, assuming that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached in that nation.

They forget about thousands of smaller towns and villages, dotted across the vast countryside, located down every road and highway, and spread out over millions of isolated square miles.

They are oblivious to the millions of lost souls in these areas, and the necessity to train indigenous ministers of the gospel to reach out to their own people.

This is deception.

Satan desires to lull the body of Christ to sleep. He wants to keep us distracted, occupied, worried, or burdened down with the cares of life, so we will not have time to concentrate on aggressively spreading the gospel.

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus emphasized:

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Sometimes, if I emphasize the above scripture, Christians have a puzzled look on their face, as if to say, *"I thought that task was already completed. Haven't those big television ministries already fulfilled that scripture?"*

One Christian brother told me Matthew 24:14 was completely fulfilled in the first century, when the Apostle Paul and others took the gospel to what was at that time, the known world.

When I inquired about the millions of unsaved people currently on the earth, his response was, *"Oh, those people are just the descendants of those who rejected the gospel in the first century."*

In his way of thinking, since the forefathers rejected Christ, their descendants would do the same. Therefore, it was a waste of time to take the gospel to them.

This also is deception.

Too many Christians, when confronted with The Great Commission, are just too busy with their careers, with their families, with building a bigger house, or preparing for retirement. What little spare time they have is devoted to leisurely pursuits.

Christians in America are especially lackadaisical. This is partially understandable because we have churches in every community; church programs that minister to every need; book stores with Christian literature available on every conceivable subject; Christian videos with preaching, teaching, music, drama, and even comedy; Christian radio and television stations that broadcast the gospel 24 hours a day, and Christian singers who perform concerts for huge crowds in sold out arenas.

As a result, it seems like the gospel has already been preached in all the world. Now, we're just waiting around for Jesus to return at any minute.

This too is deception.

The truth of the matter is, we have not fulfilled The Great Commission. We're not even close. Missions agencies worldwide have identified upwards of 2 billion people who are still unreached with the gospel.

These unreached people are scattered throughout the earth into more than 14,000 people groups, many of whom are Muslim.

Mormons and other deceptive cults are sending out more and more missionaries, while much of the true church of Jesus Christ is wallowing in complacency.

No doubt, some of you are wondering, *"Is it really necessary for every little group of people to hear the gospel before Jesus comes back?"* Listen as the Apostle John describes a future scene in heaven:

"And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9).

Did you notice; there will be people in heaven from EVERY TRIBE?

The slow progress of Bible translation reveals the huge amount of work yet to be done. The following, approximate figures were obtained from reliable sources.

There are more than 6,000 languages in the world, but less than 300 languages have an adequate translation of the Bible.

Approximately 1,500 other languages have a translation of the New Testament, or a translation of certain portions of the Bible, such as one of the gospels.

Some languages may not need Bible translation. The people speaking them are bilingual (*they can speak and read another language*). Other languages have become extinct (*or, no longer spoken*).

But, listen to this challenging statistic. Around 800 languages have been identified as having a definite need for translation; languages spoken by people who cannot use any other translation of the Bible. We are talking about people for whom, **THE WORD OF GOD DOES NOT EXIST**.

Experts tell us that even with increased technology, it could take more than **FIFTY YEARS** before all people groups have just a portion of the Bible. Obviously, it will take considerably longer to put a complete Bible into the hands of all people groups.

Again, you may wonder, *"Is it really necessary for all these languages to have a complete, or even partial translation of the Bible before Jesus returns?"*

I don't know the answer to that specific question, but this I do know; Revelation 5:9 reveals that there will be people in heaven from **EVERY TONGUE**.

And remember, Jesus commanded us, *"Go therefore and **MAKE DISCIPLES** of all the nations...."* (Matthew 28:19). He did not say to make a quick trip through the area, and conduct an evangelistic crusade.

It is difficult to make disciples, without at least a portion of the Bible.

Listen carefully, when you hear those glowing reports from television ministries, explaining how their programs are being beamed up to satellites, and then beamed into every nation on earth, rejoice that we have such technology to spread the gospel.

Then, let your imagination travel into hundreds of remote, desert regions, and dense jungles. Let your imagination move forward into large Third World cities, or one of the ever increasing number of refugee camps, both teeming with over population, poverty, and illiteracy.

You see, the fact that television signals are beamed into your area, will not benefit you, if you do not have a television set.

Even if you have a television set, it will not benefit you, if you have no electricity.

Even if you have a television set, and electricity, the television programs will not minister to you, if they are broadcast in a language you do not understand.

It is past time for Christians to shake off complacency. I am fully convinced that every born again Christian should either:

- (1) BE A MISSIONARY, or
- (2) SUPPORT A MISSIONARY.

Too often, Christians respond to such statements by saying, *"Oh yes, we agree. In our Wednesday evening church services we always pray for the missionaries."*

No, I am not talking about praying for missionaries; I am talking about supporting them with your money. Most missionaries have learned how to pray for themselves. How do you think they survived all those years with very little, or in some cases, no support from the body of Christ?

A missionary from Papua New Guinea shared a disturbing story with me. He was ministering in the United States, trying to raise funds to go back to the mission field.

In one particular church where he was invited to minister, the pastor was anxious to show him their new church facility that was under construction. Oddly enough, the existing church was not full, and was totally adequate for their needs. Regardless, they were building this new, multimillion dollar, state-of-the-art church.

The pastor constantly talked about the new facility, and took the missionary on daily visits to inspect the progress. At the same time, he showed very little interest in the missionary's work.

According to the missionary, the cost of this new, unneeded church facility could have supported every missionary in Papua New Guinea for the next 10 years.

It is a fact that we will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

"So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12).

Maybe I'm wrong, but at the judgement seat of Christ, I believe each of us will be accountable for the following two matters:

(1) WHAT DID WE DO TO ASSIST IN FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION?

(2) HOW DID WE DISTRIBUTE THE FINANCES GOD ENTRUSTED INTO OUR HANDS?

In conclusion, let me issue one of two challenges to every reader of this book:

(1) GO. *"...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

In churches where I minister, people frequently come up to me at the end of the services, and explain that God has called them. They tell me about the anointing that is upon their life, and share all the words of prophecy they have received.

The immediate question in my mind is: *"WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GO?"*

(2) SEND. *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach UNLESS THEY ARE SENT...?"* (Romans 10:14-15).

Not everyone is called to serve God in full-time ministry. Not everyone is called to be a missionary. However, those who are not called to go, are definitely called to send those who are called to go.

Jesus called twelve, original disciples. Many others, whom he did not specifically call, helped to send them.

*"...Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were **HELPING TO SUPPORT THEM OUT OF THEIR OWN MEANS.**" (Luke 8:1-3 NIV).*

The thrust of missions is changing. It is now recognized that the training, and sending out of indigenous ministers is often more effective than sending out so-called white missionaries into dark continents.

I myself am a missionary, specializing in short-term missions. The focus of my ministry is twofold: (1) Laying a foundation of God's word into the lives of Christians, and (2) The training of indigenous pastors and ministers to reach their own people.

In addition to the emphasis on short-term missions, my ministry gives financial support to a Vietnamese pastor.

As a Marine Corps, Infantry Platoon Leader in the Vietnam War, I once took away from the resources of that nation. Now, I am giving back to the Vietnamese people by sending forth one of their own to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ask God how and where he wants you involved in fulfilling The Great Commission. Do not allow the deception of complacency to influence your life.

The Lord Jesus will definitely put you to work. It was he who once lamented to his disciples:

"...the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." (Matthew 9:37)

As we progress further into the end times, I believe we will continue to see the walls of repressive governments being torn down. I believe the body of Christ will have other opportunities of freedom to take the gospel into previously restricted nations.

So, please remember the admonition of the Lord, *"...he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame."*

But, *"He who gathers in summer (during the harvest) is a wise son..."*

...or, a wise daughter!

CHAPTER TEN

THE GREAT APOSTASY

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition."

According to the above scriptures from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, two events will take place before the second coming of Jesus.

One event is the revealing of the man of sin, the Antichrist. The other, which we will be concentrating on in this chapter, is **THE FALLING AWAY**.

In the New International Version of the Bible, it says, "*...that day will not come until **THE REBELLION OCCURS...***"

In the Amplified Bible, it says, "*...that day will not come except **THE APOSTASY COMES FIRST...***"

Apostasy is a defection from the truth, a revolt, a falling away from the faith. The phraseology, "*...**FALLING AWAY...***," is not implying that an accident has occurred. What the Bible is talking about is rebellion.

With that in mind, carefully consider the following facts:

(1) Our opening scriptures are written to Christians, not non-Christians, because they begin by saying, "*Now, brethren...*"

(2) Consequently, the warning in these scriptures, "*Let no one deceive you by any means...*," is directed to Christians.

(3) Specifically, the warning is about a coming time of apostasy.

Obviously, unbelievers will be involved in The Great Apostasy. From the origin of the gospel until now, the unrighteous have organized, and led revolts against the truth.

However, I am also convinced that the coming Great Apostasy will be so powerful, that even Christians will get caught up in deception, and swept away into apostasy.

Think about it; an unbeliever can revolt against the truth, but only a Christian could truly DEPART FROM THE FAITH.

To become a Christian, one must be SAVED THROUGH FAITH. Afterwards, the Bible instructs us to LIVE BY FAITH (Ephesians 2:8-9, and Hebrews 10:38).

An unbeliever, who has not exercised faith in God, and therefore, has not entered into the faith, could not possibly fall away from the faith!

I realize that within the body of Christ there are believers who rigidly hold to a doctrine of eternal security. Regardless, I am convinced that our opening scriptures contain warnings, not to the world only, but to Christians as well.

I also believe God anointed me to alert the entire body of Christ about deception, not just certain groups. While writing this book, I would often ask, *"Heavenly Father, how should I word this section, so as not to alienate any of your people?"*

I believe the Holy Spirit gave me a word from the Lord on this matter:

"When you come across scriptures that contain warnings to my people, leave them alone. Don't tamper with them; don't try to explain them in such a way that they line up with your doctrinal understanding. I put those warnings in my word for a purpose. LEAVE THEM ALONE."

Now, maybe you are wondering about something? *"What type of Christian could become so deceived that they would fall prey to The Great Apostasy?"*

May I remind you of the words of our Lord Jesus, from Revelation 3:15-16, which he spoke to CHRISTIANS in the church at Laodicea:

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (NIV).

Apparently, apostasy will have its full expression during the time of the Antichrist. Our foundational scriptures seem to link together both events.

If, as I suggested in chapter five, the Antichrist rises up within the body of Christ, rather than a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, this would explain God's strong warning to his people about apostasy.

However, now is the time to become alert. 1 John 4:3 reveals that the spirit of the Antichrist is already at work:

"And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 4:1, gives us deeper insight into this matter:

"Now the Spirit expressly (plainly, clearly) says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."

Did you notice what will cause people to depart from the faith? They will GIVE HEED to deceiving spirits.

Being more specific, they will give their attention to deceiving spirits, change what they believe to doctrines of demons, and become rebellious against the truth.

Since this is a very serious matter, is it possible to identify specific warning signs, or specific doctrines of demons that could cause someone to depart from the faith? Fortunately, yes. Looking further into that same portion of scripture, it says:

"...giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Those scriptures give us four specific warning signs. Let's take a closer look.

WARNING SIGN #1 SPEAKING LIES IN HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy is pretense, or playacting; pretending to be someone, or something that you are not.

For example, when the Antichrist is revealed, he will pretend to be the answer for the world's problems. In time, he will pretend to be God. In reality, he is neither.

Therefore, since the spirit of the Antichrist is already at work in the world, it is no mystery that cult leaders influenced by that spirit always claim to have the answers for the needs of mankind.

Some of the more brash, cult leaders, influenced by that spirit of antichrist, have already claimed to be God.

Here is simple wisdom. Jesus Christ has already provided all the answers for the needs of mankind. Anyone speaking contrary to the doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ, is speaking LIES IN HYPOCRISY.

WARNING SIGN #2 HAVING THEIR CONSCIENCE SEARED WITH A HOT IRON

Our conscience helps us to distinguish between what is good or bad; what is sin, and what is not sin; what pleases God, and what does not please God.

Having one's conscience seared with a hot iron is to become insensitive to sin.

Obviously, false religious leaders and emerging cult leaders, who are influenced by the spirit of antichrist, will already be in this condition. The question is, how can immature or unsuspecting Christians guard themselves against this condition?

Listen carefully to the following; having one's conscience seared can be caused by the following three step process.

FIRST: The failure to honestly confess our sins to God on a consistent, daily basis, allowing sin to build up in our lives.

The practice of confessing our sins to our Heavenly Father, and by faith receiving his forgiveness and cleansing, is one of the greatest freedoms every child of God can experience. 1 John 1:9 assures us:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

SECOND: Making excuses for sin, or attempting to justify sin in one's life. This could also involve hiding, or trying to cover up sin. Proverbs 28:13 warns us:

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

THIRD: A person just accepts sin, and it becomes a part of their life. They are no longer sensitive to the Holy Spirit; they are no longer responsive to correction from the word of God. Their conscience is seared, as if someone scorched it with a hot iron.

Listen to the following scriptures from 2 Timothy 4:3-4. I believe they provide us with an accurate description of someone whose conscience has been seared as with a hot iron:

"For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions." (AMP).

WARNING SIGN #3 FORBIDDING TO MARRY

For centuries, certain religious orders, in violation of the word of God, have denied their ministers the right to get married.

As we move further into the end times, look for other groups to forbid marriage; not only to their ministers, but to all who are involved with them.

It will all sound very spiritual. They will cite the urgency of the times, and misuse verses like 1 Corinthians 7:29, "*...the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none.*" But, don't forget, forbidding to marry is a doctrine of demons.

Forbidding to marry could also apply to the deterioration of biblical, moral behavior in our society. The philosophy of the world says it is acceptable for men and women to live together and become sexually involved without marrying.

Unfortunately, this thinking creeps into the church. Unmarried couples insist on living together, and try to explain that God understands their special situation. At the same time, they ignore the unchangeable principles of God's word, which instruct us about the sanctity and fidelity of marriage.

Forbidding to marry could also apply to the pressure in our society to accept homosexuality as normal. Despite that pressure, Romans 1:26-27 still says:

"...God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women EXCHANGED the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error...."

Homosexuals insist that God created them as "gay" or lesbian, but the Bible says they, "...EXCHANGED the natural use for what is against nature...", literally meaning they changed one thing into another.

The important issue here is not equal rights for homosexuals. We are dealing with an issue of much greater importance; the eternal destination of their spirit and soul. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 still says:

"...DO NOT BE DECEIVED. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor HOMOSEXUALS, nor SODOMITES, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

BIBLE DEFINITIONS (from the above verses):

(1) HOMOSEXUAL (or, a Catamite) - A boy kept for purposes of sexual perversion.

(2) SODOMITE - One who copulates with a member of the same sex.

Forbidding to marry could also apply to the equal rights movement among women. Some hard line feminists hate all men, and are committed to the idea that women are better off without men. Despite these hard line positions, the Bible still says:

"And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Genesis 2:18).

WARNING SIGN # 4 ABSTAINING FROM FOODS

In the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, the Lord required the children of Israel to abstain from certain foods.

Also, in today's society, certain people prefer to eat so-called healthier diets, which often involves abstaining from foods.

This is fine, but among Christians it must be a matter of personal preference, not a matter of doctrine.

Redemption is not obtainable through nutrition, but only through the blood that Jesus shed for the cleansing of our sins.

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17).

Someone once told me the Holy Spirit led them to become a vegetarian, and to abstain from all animal by-products.

Sorry, but that was not the Holy Spirit. As we discovered from 1 Timothy 4:1-3, it was a deceiving spirit. Verses 4-5 from the same chapter explain why it is unnecessary to abstain from foods:

"...everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (NIV).

These scriptures reveal that even the food we eat can be purified, and set apart for our nutrition by our faith in God's word, and by our prayers of thanksgiving.

If eating meat would cause us to be rejected, or disapproved of in God's sight, then Jesus was in trouble. We know for a fact that he ate fish (Luke 24:42-43), and we also know that he ate lamb, because he ate the Passover with his disciples.

Also, let's not forget; when Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them, "...eat such things as are set before you." (Luke 10:8).

In addition to the biblical warning signs previously discussed, I also see an attitude in our society which is becoming more and more prevalent. An attitude which I believe can affect people's spiritual well being, and could eventually lead them into apostasy.

The attitude, and subsequent actions I am referring to, is that of QUITTING.

Increasingly, employees fail to show up for work. If they quit, they don't bother to give notice to their employer. Sometimes, they just walk off the job and never come back.

I asked an employer what they desired in an employee. Job resumes emphasize such things as qualifications or experience. Their response; "*Just someone who will come to work!*"

Similarly, in today's society, if married couples do not agree on every issue, or if they don't have all their little demands met, they just quit.

Married couples used to work out their problems. Now, they just quit.

Unfortunately, this attitude of quitting gets into the church. People get offended at the pastor, or they get mad at another church member. Some think they have progressed beyond what the church has to offer, and some just get lazy. As a result, they quit.

Hebrews 10:25 warns us about such attitudes and actions:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Over the years, I have been privileged to minister in quite a number of churches. Some I return to on a fairly regular basis. As a result, I get to know the people.

Sometimes, I miss seeing someone in the congregation, and ask the pastor about them. There was a time when the answer would be something like, *"Oh, they decided to attend another church."*

More and more, however, pastors are saying things like, *"They don't go to church anymore."*

All too frequently, pastors even tell me that people have gone back into the world, and have resumed a lifestyle of sin.

The Apostle Paul gave us such an example in 2 Timothy 4:10, as he wrote about a member of his missionary team:

"For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world...."

This attitude of quitting is exactly the opposite of what God desires in his people. God desires that we be dependable, faithful, forgiving and peacemaking.

Satan, to the contrary, will be putting pressure on you to quit. It may start with your job, relationships, or your marriage. In time, however, Satan will pressure you to: quit going to church, quit praying to God, and quit believing in God's word.

Remember, apostasy is a process that is brought to fruition by deception. Without fully realizing what is happening, you could be departing from the faith, and ultimately, become a casualty of The Great Apostasy.

Allow these following two words to be magnified, and forever ingrained in your consciousness: DON'T QUIT.

Admittedly, this next passage of scripture is quite controversial, but I would be remiss if I failed to include it in this chapter.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they FALL AWAY, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Again, that phrase, "...fall away...", is not implying that an accident has occurred. This verse speaks of apostasy.

Although apostasy is birthed because of deception (*deceiving spirits*), it manifests itself as rebellion, a defection from truth, or a revolt against the faith.

Obviously, there is the possibility that someone could become so hardened, and so rebellious, that it would be impossible to renew them again to a place of repentance.

Do not misunderstand me; I am not referring to the misconstrued doctrine that a person can be repeatedly saved and lost, depending upon their weekly performance. In the above verses of scripture, the writer of Hebrews speaks of an impossibility; a condition from which there is no return!

With that sobering possibility in mind, I remind you on the following page of the words of wisdom which God gave to me in an earlier portion of this chapter:

"When you come across scriptures that contain warnings to my people, leave them alone. Don't tamper with them; don't try to explain them in such a way that they line up with your doctrinal understanding. I put those warnings in my word for a purpose. LEAVE THEM ALONE."

No doubt, one of the most necessary and essential ministries in the end times, will be a ministry of rescue and restoration.

Not just restoring Christians who have fallen due to immorality, or ministers of the gospel who have fallen because of other unethical practices (see Galatians 6:1).

I am speaking specifically of rescuing those who are in danger of succumbing to The Great Apostasy.

Consequently, I conclude this chapter with the following words of admonishment from the Apostle John, to the now defunct church at Sardis:

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." (Revelation 3:2).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ANOTHER GOSPEL

In Galatians 1:8-9, the Apostle Paul forever alerts, and warns the body of Christ about so-called salvation messages, other than the original gospel of Jesus Christ:

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach ANY OTHER GOSPEL to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches ANY OTHER GOSPEL to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

As we progress further into these end times, I believe we will encounter hundreds of strange, new doctrines that are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because such doctrines (*or teachings*) fall into the category of deception, there will often be a fine line between them and truth.

Many deceptive teachings are initially formulated from selective portions of the Bible, to give them credibility, then interwoven with other so-called experiences, or books of divine revelation.

As a result, new Christians, or those lacking a strong foundation of God's word, could easily fall prey to one of these subtle doctrines, and end up in a dangerous cult.

Even though false doctrines frequently progress to the point of becoming totally bizarre, ranging from ancient mythology to intergalactic aliens and spaceships, recent history has taught us that emerging cult groups are often populated with young, zealous, immature Christians.

So, how can Christians, young and old, mature or immature, avoid deception that appears to be the truth?

I have been told that the most effective method of detecting counterfeit money is to become familiar with real money. Then, if an attempt is made to pass counterfeit money, it is quickly recognized because of the familiarity with real money.

I believe the same principle can be applied to guard ourselves from the myriad of deceptions which are being perpetrated by weird cult groups, false religions, and the New Age Movement.

On the other hand, you could devote yourself to studying the teachings of the numerous cult groups, and false religions of the world, in order to contrast them with true Bible doctrine.

Unfortunately, such an endeavor would probably take longer than a lifetime, given the innumerable amount of weird doctrines floating around the world. Obviously, this would take away from doing what is most needful; the study of God's word.

I believe the best way to guard against deception is to apply the counterfeit money principle. Become so familiar with the truth of God's word, that we will recognize what is false. Accordingly, I want to teach you some important KEYS, that will enable you to identify false teachings.

Cult groups, or false religions, whether they are classified as New Age philosophy, "*Doomsday Anxiety*," or whatever, will all have one thing in common.

THEY WILL ALWAYS VIOLATE ONE OR MORE ASPECTS OF THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

DEFINITION: Deity - "*Characteristics of the divine nature of God, or characteristics of the supreme being of God.*"

Following are key elements of the deity of Jesus Christ:

The Pre-existence of Jesus Christ with God, the Father

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-2, 14).

Jesus said: "...O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17:5).

The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14).

"Behold, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which when translated means God with us." (Matthew 1:23 AMP).

The Sinless Life of Jesus Christ

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15).

"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth." (1 Peter 2:22).

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people." (Matthew 4:23).

"...Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst...." (Acts 2:22).

The Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ.

"Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24).

"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Hebrews 9:28).

The Blood of Jesus Christ for the Remission of Sins

Jesus said: "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28).

"...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (from Revelation 1:5).

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7).

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ

"...Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen...!" (from Luke 24:5-6).

"And He said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:38-39).

The Exaltation of Jesus Christ to the Right Hand of the Father

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." (Mark 16:19).

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11).

"...It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." (Romans 8:34).

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

"...Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).

"...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The Equality of Jesus Christ with God, the Father

"Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father – cause us to see the Father, that is all we ask; then we shall be satisfied. Jesus replied, Have I been with all of you for so long a time and do you not recognize and know Me yet, Philip? Any one who has seen Me has seen the Father...." (John 14:8-9 AMP).

Jesus also said: *"I and My Father are one."* (John 10:30).

On the next page, listen carefully to the errors of those who have preached another gospel, and as a result, have established world religions:

Mormons say Jesus and Lucifer were brothers. According to their doctrine, Jesus obeyed the Father, and became a god, but Lucifer disobeyed the Father, and became Satan. To the contrary, Jesus said:

"For God so loved the world that He gave HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

Muslims say there is one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet. To the contrary, the Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:5:

"...there is one God and one Mediator (one who reconciles, or communicates) between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

One Saturday morning, members of a certain false religion (*that preaches another gospel*), knocked upon my front door.

They pretended to be concerned about the deterioration of family values, but their real agenda was proselytizing.

After they departed, I was asking God for wisdom about my encounter with these people. The Lord's answer was clear:

"Just another in a long succession of false religions, past, present, and future, who are futilely trying to prove that Jesus is not God."

CHAPTER TWELVE

GIFTS OF THE FLESH

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).

I firmly believe in the manifestation, or gifts of the Holy Spirit as they are sometimes called.

The manifestation (*literally, expression or exhibition*) of God's Holy Spirit operating in and through yielded servants of the Lord, enables us to more effectively minister to the needs of others.

Years ago, I was seeking God about a very important decision; whether or not to leave the United States Marine Corps after ten years of service, and enter the ministry.

God spoke a sure word of prophecy to me through one of his servants; a word of prophecy that provided the confirmation I needed. Over the years, that prophecy has continued to give me encouragement and strength. The Apostle Paul once said to his spiritual son, Timothy:

"This charge (or command) I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them (the prophecies) YOU MAY WAGE THE GOOD WARFARE." (1 Timothy 1:18).

My wife has been the recipient of gifts of healing, which followed precise words of knowledge about her condition at the time.

God's gifts of grace have been a great blessing to us. I appreciate the Holy Spirit manifesting himself through servants of his choosing, ministering to our needs.

Unfortunately, a disgraceful type of deception periodically rears its head within the body of Christ. Deception in the form of counterfeit spiritual gifts.

I am not referring to counterfeit gifts that are satanic or demonic in origin, but rather, trickery or illusion perpetrated by those calling themselves servants of Christ.

I recall several well-known, television evangelists employing electronic devices by which they received information about people in their crusade audiences.

Apparently, the people were filling out prayer requests, and the information on the request forms was being relayed to the evangelists, who were then speaking forth the information as though it was a word of knowledge from the Holy Spirit.

I remember being quite skeptical while watching a broadcast sponsored by one of these evangelists. He was calling out the full names of people, their address, their telephone number, and even their doctor's name.

Quite a few Christians believed these evangelists had a mighty anointing from God. They were amazed at what seemed to be exact words of knowledge. Sadly, all they had was a clever, deceptive scheme.

In time, their scheme was uncovered, and they admitted to receiving information by electronic means. However, rather than repenting, they tried to justify their actions. Their explanation; they were just trying to help the people by igniting their faith.

Real faith, Bible produced faith, does not come from premeditated deception.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17).

One of these evangelists instructed all who desired to lose weight to bring a salt shaker to the next service.

Supposedly, he was going to pray an anointing upon the salt, and as the people salted their food in the coming days, they would supernaturally lose weight.

This is not only deceptive, and a lie, but is shameful behavior from someone calling himself a servant of God.

In another incident, a friend received a letter from a large, evangelistic association. Inside was a plastic glove.

The recipient was instructed to put the glove on their hand, write the biggest check possible to this ministry, and mail both the check and the glove back to the evangelist.

Upon receiving the check, the evangelist promised to put his hand into the glove. This, he said, would be the equivalent of laying his hand upon the person, and as a result, they would receive whatever miracle they needed.

I was astonished at the guile of this evangelist. I was even more astonished that Christians would be so gullible as to respond. Such practices are manipulative, fraudulent gimmicks, employed for the sole purpose of raising money.

Not that it would be of any significance, but I doubt that this evangelist invested the time to place his hand into every glove, and pray individually over each response.

Once, I was preparing to anoint a lady with oil, and pray a prayer of faith for her as we are so instructed in James 5:14-15.

She asked if the oil was pure, olive oil from the Holy Land? Some ministry had probably sent her a vial of olive oil from the Holy Land in response to an offering. Now, she believed such oil possessed greater power than just ordinary oil.

The fact is, anointing oil, regardless of its origin, is not holy, nor does it contain any power. Yes, the oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, but in this biblical principle, the power of God is manifested, because of **OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD.**

What is my point in all this? According to our opening scriptures, the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts **AS HE WILLS.** He does not respond to clever, manipulative schemes of the flesh.

As we continue in the end times, and deception increases, it will become more and more necessary to discern what are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit, and what are counterfeit gifts of the flesh.

Enormous financial resources will be required to complete the work of The Great Commission. We cannot afford to have funds siphoned off into so-called ministries that are building their own kingdom, rather than the kingdom of God.

Christians must learn to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in their giving, rather than having their emotions manipulated.

Many illegitimate ministries, influenced by Satan, or motivated by their own greed, will be trying to divert finances away from the real work of spreading the gospel.

This brings up an extremely important question. Every so often in the body of Christ, there arises a new wave of strange, or unusual manifestations. Normally, there is a great rush among certain segments of charismatic Christians to embrace these manifestations. *"God is doing a new thing,"* they declare.

The question is, how can we determine what are legitimate manifestations of the Holy Spirit, what are false manifestations of another spirit, and what are manifestations of the flesh?

I am sure you agree; when something new is manifested, we must have some means of distinguishing between what is genuine, and what is false. Otherwise, we open the door to all kinds of deception. Once again, let me remind you of that vital scripture from our opening chapter:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (1 Thessalonians 5:21 AMP).

One way we can test and prove that which is good is by listening to those who are, without question, genuine prophets of God. Amos 3:7 says:

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."

The problem is, there are a multitude of differing opinions about who is, and who is not a genuine prophet of God.

Consequently, the safest, surest way of testing whether manifestations are from God, is with the Bible, God's written word.

For the record, 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 lists nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit:

- (1) The word of wisdom,
- (2) The word of knowledge,
- (3) Faith,
- (4) Gifts of healings,
- (5) The working of miracles,
- (6) Prophecy,
- (7) Discerning of spirits,
- (8) Different kinds of tongues, and
- (9) The interpretation of tongues.

We also know from Acts 8:18-20, that the ability to minister the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a legitimate manifestation. In verse 20, the Apostle Peter identifies such as, A GIFT OF GOD.

The spiritual gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Corinthians 12:28 are actually offices of ministry, more so than they are manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 12:6-8, and 1 Peter 4:9-10, we find eight additional spiritual gifts:

- (1) Prophecy,
- (2) Ministry (*or serving*),
- (3) Teaching,
- (4) Exhortation,
- (5) Giving,
- (6) Leading,
- (7) Showing mercy, and
- (8) Hospitality.

The above are sometimes referred to as motivational gifts, because they become a part of the believer's personality through the work of the Holy Spirit.

When these so-called motivational gifts are exercised, they are considered to be manifestations of the Holy Spirit, because they involve one believer building up, or edifying other believers.

This brings us to a crucial question. In the Bible, are there any strange, or unusual manifestations?

Actually, there are quite a number of strange, and unusual things that happened to people when the Spirit of the Lord came upon them. We will look at a few of these strange, or unusual manifestations.

(1) In Judges 15:14-15, we read about Samson breaking new ropes with which he had been bound, and killing a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. The Bible says he was able to accomplish this feat because, "*...the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him....*"

Under the New Covenant, the killing of our enemies is not a valid manifestation of God's Spirit. Christians are not instruments of God's judgement (see Luke 9:51-56). The judgement of God, by Jesus Christ, is reserved for a set time (see Acts 17:31).

(2) In 1 Kings 18:46, the Bible says the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah, the Prophet. As a result, he ran ahead of King Ahab's chariot from Mount Carmel to the entrance of Jezreel (*about 22 miles*).

(3) In Acts 19:11-12, the Bible says, "*...God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.*"

(4) There is the experience known as, "*Falling under the power of God.*" Although this manifestation is controversial, the Bible is full of accounts where people fell when they came into contact with the presence, or power of God.

One such account is Revelation 1:17, when Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos. Notice, the Bible does not say John bowed at Jesus' feet in reverence. It says he, "...fell at His feet as dead...."

So, what about such things as dancing and laughter?

Dancing is not listed as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and is probably just a response from the human emotions, due to experiencing the presence of God.

Regardless, dancing is acceptable to God. Psalm 150:4 says, "*Praise Him with the timbrel and dance....*"

Regarding laughter, some years ago, I set aside a time of prayer specifically about the experience known as "*Holy Laughter.*" The Lord spoke to me from Acts 3:19, that this was simply one of those, "*...times of refreshing...from the presence of the Lord.*"

The key for spiritual leaders is to allow such things within the restraints established by God. 1 Corinthians 14:40 instructs us:

"Let all things be done DECENTLY and IN ORDER" (or, at the appropriate time).

Clearly, without a consistently reliable standard to test unusual manifestations, we could open a wide door to deception.

The Bible is our most reliable standard. If manifestations cannot be backed up by God's written word, do not accept them.

Let me also say a strong word about how to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit to others: CLOSELY OBEY GOD'S WORD.

As an example, one of the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ is the laying on of hands (see Hebrews 6:1-2).

I heard about a group of Christians instructing their trainees not to lay hands upon people when they were ministering to them. Instead, they were teaching them to minister to others by way of their AURA.

The aura, a so-called sensory stimulus surrounding all living beings, was supposed to be about 1/2 inch from touching them.

When they came into contact with the person's aura, they were told to move their hands along the contour of the person's body, staying in contact with their aura, but not touching them. Reportedly, this was a more effective way of ministering to people.

I do not know where such foolishness comes from. It sounds like something that was birthed out of the New Age Movement.

Listen carefully; there is not a more effective way of ministering than that which was taught, and demonstrated by Jesus.

On numerous occasions, Jesus laid his hands upon people when he ministered to them. In Mark 16:17-18, he so instructs us:

"And these signs will follow those who believe: in My name...they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Additional references for laying on of hands include: Acts 8:17, Acts 9:17, Acts 28:8, and 1 Timothy 4:14.

Let us go a step further in this matter of understanding how to minister to others. In 1 Corinthians 2:4, the Apostle Paul said:

"...my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but IN DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT and of power."

When we Christians minister to others, the manifestation that comes forth should be, *"...in demonstration of the Spirit..."*, not in demonstration of our flesh.

The Holy Spirit may lead us to employ visible techniques (see Acts 21:10-11), but I have observed ministers of the gospel do things that were a bit too theatrical. In fact, I have seen ministers do some things that were downright spooky.

Listen carefully; demonstrations of the flesh are immature. They take away from God receiving all the glory, because they draw attention to ourselves.

I think ministers use such techniques, because they are afraid that there will be no demonstration of the Holy Spirit. They put on their own little demonstration, so the people will think God is moving.

In case you haven't figured it out, this also is deception!

In conclusion to this chapter, here is wisdom for those of us who are pastors, or ministers of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 7:2, Paul pleads with the people:

"Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one."

Every genuine minister of the gospel has a great desire that people will receive their ministry with open hearts. We spend countless hours in prayer and preparation; then stand before people with messages we sincerely believe the Lord himself has imparted to us.

The Apostle Paul has provided us with wise counsel regarding the receptiveness of God's people toward us:

(1) WRONG NO ONE, (2) CORRUPT NO ONE, (3) CHEAT NO ONE.

WRONG NO ONE challenges us not to do anything which would be wrong in God's sight. Do not violate the principles of God's word when ministering to others.

CORRUPT NO ONE warns us not to defile anyone by improper moral influence. Do not cause another person to sin.

CHEAT NO ONE instructs us not to manipulate, or wrongly take advantage of others financially.

Speaking of cheating people, while I was writing this book, I received in my mail, a slick looking, religious brochure, trying to sell me holy water from the Jordan river.

There is nothing holy about water from the Jordan River, or water from any other source. Revelation 15:4 tells us:

"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For YOU ALONE ARE HOLY."

This brings another defrauding scheme to my remembrance. Some years ago, a so-called ministry was selling splinters of wood, with the strong suggestion that they came from the original cross upon which Jesus was crucified.

Even if the splinters did come from the original cross, they would be of no spiritual significance. Our faith is not in a wooden cross, but in the blood that Jesus shed for the remission of our sins.

ENOUGH OF THIS DECEPTION!

Every minister of the gospel, every ministry declaring itself to be Christian, and indeed, every individual Christian should strive for the time when they can declare with a clear conscience:

I HAVE WRONGED NO ONE,
I HAVE CORRUPTED NO ONE,
I HAVE CHEATED NO ONE.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RECOGNIZING FALSE PROPHETS

"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." (Matthew 24:11).

I believe in the ministry of the prophet. I strongly disagree with those who claim that the ministry of the prophet no longer functions in today's church. There are no biblical grounds for declaring that the office of the prophet has passed away, or is no longer needed in the church.

I can point to six specific times when servants of God, operating in the office of the prophet, spoke significant words into my life from the mind of the Lord.

Each time, those words of prophecy confirmed what God was doing in my life. They gave me both assurance and strength to move forward with my ministry. I thank God for genuine prophets who are anointed to enrich our lives with timely messages from the mind of the Lord.

Unfortunately, where there is the true, Satan will see to it that there is also the false.

From our opening scripture, Jesus said MANY false prophets will rise up. He did not say a few, weird, doomsday eccentrics will rise up, but nobody will listen to them.

No, Jesus said there would be MANY, and he said they would DECEIVE MANY.

From where do you think these false prophets will rise up? From gambling halls, nightclubs, or houses of prostitution? From dark alleyways in our large, inner cities?

Strangely, one place from which they will rise up, is from within the church. In Acts 20:29-31, the Apostle Paul warned the elders of the Ephesian church:

"...after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse (misleading) things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

In these end times, it is essential that Christians have the discernment to quickly recognize false prophets.

This then, is the major task set before us in this chapter. How can we recognize those who are false prophets, since they will obviously be declaring themselves as true prophets?

Fortunately, the scriptures provide us with clear instructions on this matter. In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus said:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

Notice that Jesus emphasized, "...**YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS....**"

Now, perhaps you're wondering about something, *"Doesn't the Bible say we can recognize a false prophet by whether or not their prophecies come to pass?"* Yes, in the Old Testament, the Bible does say:

"When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or prove true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." (Deuteronomy 18:22 AMP).

Of course, this principle is still valid, but listen to the following. In his teachings, Jesus often upgraded the understanding of the people. Obviously, we should allow him the privilege of doing that.

Because of the danger of this matter, I believe Jesus has given us some upgraded information about how to recognize false prophets. He said:

"...YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS...."

In these fast changing end times, when the Bible says, *"...many shall run to and fro..."* (Daniel 12:4), we may not have the time to wait six months or a year to see if someone's prophecy comes to pass.

By then, a false prophet may have destroyed people's lives, and moved on to repeat his deception elsewhere.

So, Jesus emphasized that we would recognize a false prophet by **THE FRUIT IN THEIR LIFE**, not by the authoritative sound, or eloquent style of their so-called prophetic utterances.

A false prophet would obviously be eloquent, persuasive, and authoritative with their words. This is why Jesus emphasized that we should examine their character.

If I was a pastor, and someone just showed up at my church, promoting themselves as a prophet, I would say to them, *"Welcome to our church. Sit right here on the front row for about six months until I get to know you. Then, if I am certain that you are truly a prophet of God, I will allow you to prophesy into the lives of God's people."*

Let us look deeper into this matter. We normally portray Matthew 7:15-20 as one subject, and then move on to Matthew 7:21-23 as a separate subject. I believe these portions of scripture are actually one subject. Listen, as we begin with verse 20, and proceed through verse 23:

"Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many (false prophets) will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

These false prophets said they had prophesied in the name of Jesus. They said they had cast out demons, and done many wonderful works in his name.

But, please notice; **THEY SAID THEY HAD DONE THESE THINGS.** Jesus never said they did them. Jesus just said:

"...I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Look a little closer. Jesus said, **YOU PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS (or iniquity).** He did not judge them by the words of their mouths, but by the fruit of their lives.

Remember, **YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY WHAT THEIR LIVES PRODUCE.**

Having laid a scriptural foundation, let us proceed with identifying the **SPECIFIC FRUIT**, or characteristics by which we can recognize false prophets.

2 Peter, chapter 2 is perhaps our best source of information for recognizing false prophets. I strongly urge you to study that chapter in depth. It contains considerably more information than I am able to cover in this book.

However, beginning on the following page, I will discuss six specific areas that the Holy Spirit highlighted to me during my study of that chapter.

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET

#1 - Secretly Bringing in Destructive Heresies

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." (2 Peter 2:1).

Heresy can be defined as: *"Self-willed opinions, which are exalted and substituted for submission to the truth."*

One must be especially alert to detect heresy, because it can originate from truth. Being more specific, heresy can be birthed when a scripture, or a portion of scripture is removed from its context.

DEFINITION: Context - *"A weaving together of words. The parts of a discourse that surround a word, or a passage, and can throw light upon its meaning."*

After the scriptures are removed from their context, personal opinion either adds to, or takes away from the original intent of the scriptures. Thus, they are no longer truth, but become a self-willed opinion.

If you hear preaching or teaching that is questionable, be quick to ask the Lord for wisdom on the matter, *"Do the scriptures really say what I am hearing?"*

Some Christians are afraid to question something a preacher, or a priest has said, but remember, the Bible so instructs us:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (1 Thessalonians 5:21 AMP).

The Bible says false prophets will bring in heresies SECRETLY, but here are some warning signs:

(1) Ultimately, false prophets desire for people to follow them, rather than following Jesus. They intend to draw away disciples after themselves.

(2) Heresy causes divisions and leads to the formation of sects. Beware of little groups who separate themselves from the mainstream of the body of Christ.

(3) Beware of individuals who claim to have received new revelations, or deeper truths. Can these so-called deeper truths be backed up by the written word of God?

(4) Avoid groups that are elite in their attitudes, and exclusive in their actions; those who declare themselves as the one, true church.

(5) Do not follow those who suggest that you become their disciple, more than they INSIST that you become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Remember, the scriptures specifically identify heresies as DESTRUCTIVE.

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET #2 - Covetousness

"By covetousness they will exploit you (or, take advantage of you) with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." (2 Peter 2:3).

Covetousness is the desire to have something that belongs to another. It could be money, possessions, someone's wife or husband, position, or many other things.

In the case of a false prophet, it will most likely be covetousness for another's position of spiritual authority.

As a Bible teacher/missionary, I have had the privilege of ministering in a lot of churches. When I have that opportunity, I submit myself to the pastor. I build him up in front of the congregation. I encourage the people to support their pastor.

The false prophet will not have such an attitude. They covet the pastor's position of authority. By reason of their alleged office of the prophet, they will strive to turn things so that the pastor is in submission to them.

If the false prophet cannot supplant the pastor's position of spiritual authority, the next step will be to draw away disciples from the congregation, thereby causing a division in the church.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, pastors should be very cautious about who they allow to minister in their church. Just because someone shows up at the church, and declares that they are a prophet, is no reason to put them in the pulpit at the next service.

We need to learn a lesson from one of the good characteristics of the church at Ephesus. Revelation 2:2 says of them:

"...you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars."

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET #3 - The Lust of Uncleanness

"...who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness...." (2 Peter 2:10).

Uncleanness speaks of defilement, or contamination, and specifically refers to the act, or process of defiling. In other words, **LEADING OTHERS INTO SIN.**

Look long enough, and deep enough into the false prophet's life, and you will discover a lifestyle of sin.

And, not just sin in the life of the false prophet alone, but especially, you will find a deceptively persuasive lifestyle that entices others into sin.

I repeat again; do not be too hasty to receive someone as a prophet. Wait until you have observed the fruit in their life. As we will discover in chapter fifteen, this is a deadly serious matter.

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET #4 - They Despise Authority

"...who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and DESPISE AUTHORITY...." (2 Peter 2:10).

False prophets do not have a teachable attitude. They demand to be heard, but are unwilling to listen. They insist on being in control.

We already learned that false prophets are covetous, especially for positions of spiritual authority. This explains why they despise authority. They insist on being the authority.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, during a 1990 outreach to Tonga, I arrived shortly after some false prophets had been deported from that island nation.

Upon their arrival in Tonga, these men had asked a local pastor for protection, supposedly because their lives were in danger. So, everywhere they went, these men were accompanied by Tongan bodyguards from this particular church.

Rather than ministering to (*or serving*) the church, these false prophets cleverly manipulated the church into serving them. Without realizing what was happening, the pastor was already submitting to them.

If their lives were truly in danger, then let them trust God for protection!

A good test for exposing false prophets is found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 14:

"...Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a REVELATION, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification...Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge." (verses 26 and 29).

Ultimately, false prophets would not be willing for their prophecies to be judged, or questioned. That would require submission to another's authority.

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET #5 - Speaking Evil of Dignitaries

"...they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries." (2 Peter 2:10).

Dignitaries can literally refer to angelic beings, but this word also applies to people of prominence, or to people who occupy positions of importance.

This could be heads of state, members of congress, parliament, the police force, and many others. It could also apply to pastors, or ministers of the gospel, for they occupy positions of spiritual authority.

False prophets are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries; they have no respect for authority. They criticize those who are in authority, making them look bad in the eyes of those they are trying to deceive. Then, they exalt themselves as the authority to whom everyone should submit.

In sharp contrast to speaking evil of dignitaries, listen to these instructions from 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

"...I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, FOR KINGS AND ALL WHO ARE IN AUTHORITY, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET #6 - They Attract Unstable People

"Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls...." (2 Peter 2:14).

False prophets cannot deceive stable, mature Christians. They might be tricked initially, but Christians who have a strong foundation of God's word in their lives will quickly recognize deception.

As a result, false prophets are always surrounded by unstable souls; those whom Ephesians 4:14 describes as:

"...children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

When false prophets come, they bring confusion. While they remain, they create more confusion. When they depart, someone must straighten out the messes they leave. To the contrary, the word of God tells us:

"For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Let me conclude this chapter with the following personal observations.

In the body of Christ, we sometimes have overly zealous, or egotistical people who attempt to operate as a prophet, even though they are not called to that office of ministry.

I would not immediately classify such people as false prophets.

Sometimes, they are young Christians, who are genuinely sincere, but have not yet discovered their place of ministry in the body of Christ.

Sometimes, they are Christians who have discovered their place in the body of Christ, but they are not satisfied with it. Consequently, they are attempting to be someone God has not called, nor anointed them to be.

Initially, their influence may not be as detrimental as that of the false prophet. Nevertheless, any self-deluded attempt to prophesy into another person's life can still be harmful. It is a serious matter to speak in the name of the Lord, while at the same time, imparting confusion, or misdirection into a person's life!

I have observed some of these self-appointed prophets. They scramble about in confusion, trying to manipulate people with their so-called prophecies. However, since they do not have an anointing from God, their attempts to prophesy are in the flesh, and rather quickly, they embarrass themselves.

As I previously indicated, I would not immediately classify such people as false prophets. However, unless some changes are made, they are definitely candidates to become false prophets.

I think you will all agree; we have had enough of self-appointed prophets. It is time for all believers to dethrone egotism, humble ourselves before God, and find our rightful place in the body of Christ. Then, as Psalm 100:2 exhorts us, we need to: *"Serve the Lord with gladness...."*

A word of advice to all Christians:

"Find yourself a good church that has a vision to reach the world, and a pastor who teaches the pure word of God, and lives it. Settle down in that church, submit yourself to the pastor's spiritual authority, and be an asset to the kingdom of God, rather than a problem."

Hebrews 13:17 further instructs us:

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

You will not find many people who are willing to watch out for your soul. To the contrary, you will find a lot of people who want to use you, take advantage of you, or get something from you.

A good pastor, however, will watch out for your soul, and in the process, keep you from being deceived by a false prophet.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

"Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4).

The above verses specifically identify THE LAST DAYS, and reveal that scoffers will cast doubt upon the return of Jesus.

These scoffers will walk according to their own lusts (*or desires*). They will have their own agenda, based upon their own beliefs, and they will try to prove their point by seating in the seat of the mocker.

"All things continue as they were," they will declare. *"The prophets are dead, and their voices are silenced. Peter and Paul, and those other apostles who said Jesus would soon return are also dead. Since that time, nothing has happened."*

Please understand, a scoffer is not just some old, ignorant, drunken sinner, living a wild life, and overtly serving the devil.

A scoffer is frequently someone who is intelligent by the world's standards, and by means of their intellect, they ridicule and mock what they perceive as ignorant.

If you attended a secular college, you likely remember professors who attempted to discredit the Bible. Some of these end time scoffers will no doubt come from the ranks of the so-called intelligentsia.

I believe these scoffers will also come from the religious community. I am talking about liberal pastors and so-called religious scholars who attempt to weaken the power of the gospel in order to justify their own beliefs, or their own lifestyles.

No doubt, the number of such scoffers will greatly increase as we progress further into the end times. So, once again, I must remind you of 1 Thessalonians 5:21:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (AMP).

So, just what type of agenda will these end time scoffers have? I believe the Lord has given me insight into these matters.

In the so-called Developed Nations of the world, there will be a greatly increased emphasis on saving the earth. An army of environmentalists will rise up, lamenting the dangers of pollution. An increased urgency will be heard about saving trees, rivers, the oceans, etc. There will be great concern about such things as Global Warming, and the destruction of the Ozone Layer.

Liberal churches, and religious groups will get caught up in the urgency of these matters, and lose sight of, *"...the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."* (Titus 2:13).

At the same time, there will be a great push to explore new worlds (*planets and moons*). The hope of many will be the potential of colonizing these new worlds in order to save the human race from what they call a dying planet (*the earth*).

To even mention something as trivial, and mythical as the return of Jesus will be considered a ridiculous waste of time.

Christians will be accused of having *"ostrich like"* characteristics; *"Heads buried in the sand,"* while the earth is dying.

But, let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3).

On the day Jesus departed this world, his disciples were given further assurance about his return:

"...while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, WILL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11).

As previously stated in chapter six, I do not know if the rapture of the church will be Pre-tribulation or Post-tribulation, but here is something I do know. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord."

My Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not listen to scoffers who mock the things of God that are precious to us, and attempt to rob us of hope.

The truth of the matter is, the hope of these intellectual, end time scoffers will be dashed. Listen to the following words from Jesus, and imagine the hopelessness and panic of those who have put their hope in saving the earth, or colonizing new worlds:

"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers (might and ability) of the heavens will be shaken." (Luke 21: 25-26).

On the following page, Matthew 24:29 provides a further explanation about the powers of the heavens being shaken.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

To those who know the Lord, there will be no panic. Jesus said to us:

"...when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." (Luke 21:28).

As you can well imagine, the second coming of Jesus Christ will be an exciting, dynamic, powerful event. Those who know Jesus as their Savior will be changed:

"Take notice! I tell you a mystery – a secret truth, an event decreed by the hidden purpose or counsel of God. We shall not all fall asleep [in death], but we shall all be changed (transformed) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the (sound of the) last trumpet call. For a trumpet will sound, and the dead [in Christ] will be raised imperishable – free and immune from decay – and we shall be changed (transformed)." (1 Corinthians 15: 51-52 AMP).

Of course, 1 John 3:2 reveals the most exciting change that we will experience:

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He (Jesus) is revealed, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, for we shall see Him as He is."

Are you ready for some more exciting news? Not only will we be changed, but the earth will also be changed. Listen to these astounding words from Zechariah, the Old Testament prophet:

"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south...And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and half of them toward the western sea (the Mediterranean Sea); in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—the Lord is one, and His name is one." (Zechariah 14:4, 8-9).

Normally, end time prophecy teachers concentrate on such things as the Rapture, the Tribulation, and Jesus fighting against the enemies of Jerusalem, but God has led me in a different direction for this book.

I believe the Holy Spirit has instructed me to concentrate on the great changes that will take place to the earth when Jesus returns.

Did you hear what will happen? The Mount of Olives will split in two, and living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and the Dead Sea on the east.

As a result, Ezekiel 47:8-10 says:

"...This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many."

From En Gedi to En Eglaim identifies the area where the waters will be healed. This is the Dead Sea.

Have you ever been to the Dead Sea? I have. There is nothing alive in it, not even vegetation. Reportedly, the salt content is 33%, compared to 2% in the oceans.

Yet, the Bible says, "...*There will be a very great multitude of fish....*"

This great healing will begin when our Lord Jesus Christ returns, and will continue throughout his Millennial reign on the earth. The scriptures say, "...*in both summer and winter it shall occur...and EVERYTHING WILL LIVE wherever the river goes.*" (from Zechariah 14:8 and Ezekiel 47:9).

In other words, JESUS WILL SAVE THE EARTH.

Here is more good news. We who are born again shall reign with Christ upon this earth during the Millennial period. Listen as the saints of God sing to the Lord Jesus:

"And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and WE SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH." (Revelation 5:9).

Rather exhilarating times, wouldn't you say? It would be quite stupid of us to allow a bunch of scoffers or mockers to influence and deceive us.

Now, here is the greatest news of all. No matter how many scoffers there are, and no matter how much scoffing they do, JESUS IS STILL COMING BACK.

Romans 3:3-4 speaks of the Jews who rejected Jesus, but the scriptural principle applies to everyone, including scoffers:

"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar...."

So, rejoice, people of God. JESUS IS COMING BACK. In Revelation 22:12, he said to us:

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE ULTIMATE DANGER OF DECEPTION

Some of you may be thinking, *"Is there really any harm in predicting the return of Jesus? After all, when the date comes and goes, everyone realizes that it was just a mistake."*

Perhaps you are also wondering about those sensational, speculative, little stories that are spread around the body of Christ, *"Is there really any danger in sharing such stories? One must admit, they generate a little stimulation."*

And, even if pastors teach their people a certain sequence of end time events, as if those events were set in concrete, is there really a problem? Everything they teach may not be exact, but as the old song says, *"We'll understand it better by and by."*

And, even if deception increases like wildfire, and dangerous cults abound, with reports of aliens from other planets bringing us a more correct gospel, are we Christians really facing any grave danger?

The answer; a resounding YES!

We frequently quote 2 Timothy 2:15. From the King James Version, it reads:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Of course, this is a familiar scripture, but what initially motivated the Apostle Paul to write such words to Timothy? Normally, we preach entire sermons on that verse alone, but let's continue with verses 16-18, and find out why Paul wrote these words:

"But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some."

Here is an interesting observation. The actions of Hymenaeus and Philetus were so severe, that both their names, and their error are recorded in God's eternal word.

Specifically, the Bible says they had, "*...strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past....*"

Very likely, Hymenaeus and Philetus were saying that Jesus Christ had already returned, and the dead in Christ had been resurrected. Consequently, there was no longer any hope in Christ.

Probably, they were also teaching that the only hope people now have is to follow after their teaching, whatever that was.

The error of these two deceivers was so serious, and so dangerous, that the last phrase in 2 Timothy 2:18 says, "*...THEY OVERTHROW THE FAITH OF SOME.*"

In the New International Version of the Bible, it says: "*...THEY DESTROY THE FAITH OF SOME.*"

Here then, is the ultimate danger of deception: **SATAN FULLY INTENDS TO DESTROY YOUR FAITH.**

The real issue here is not about foolish predictions pertaining to Christ's return, or those sensational, speculative, little stories, or debates about pre-tribulation and post-tribulation. Those things are just a means to an end. Satan's real intentions are to steal your faith. He intends to destroy your confidence in God's word.

So, how do we guard ourselves from being deceived, and ultimately against the devil's attempts to destroy our faith? Let us continue reading in 2 Timothy, chapter 2. Verse 19 says:

"Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Do you want to guard yourself against deception? The answer is to have a solid foundation of God's word in your life.

There will be a lot of strange doctrines floating around in the end times. Only a solid foundation of God's word will insure stability in your life. You won't be running off after so-called deeper truths.

Also, during these end times, there will be a lot of false messiahs rising up; people who appear to have all the answers for the world's problems. Jesus said:

"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:24).

With a solid foundation of God's word in your life, you won't be fooled. You will remember that Jesus also said:

"Therefore if they say to you, Look, He is in the desert! do not go out; or Look, He is in the inner rooms! do not believe it." (Matthew 24:26).

With a firm foundation of God's word in your life, you won't be deceived when false prophets speak. You will not be tricked by their eloquent and convincing speech. The strong foundation of God's word in your life will cause you to quickly recognize that:

"...those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16:18).

Now, listen carefully to the following; when you are going through one of those, "*Storms of life,*" deception has its greatest opportunity to invade your life.

During such times, negative, run away thoughts can leave you spiritually weak, and vulnerable. "*Why is this happening to me,*" you ask? "*What did I do to deserve this trouble? Doesn't God love me anymore?*"

A strong foundation of God's word will enable you to recognize the deception, and stand in faith against the storm. Your life will reflect the words of Jesus, on the next page, from Matthew 7:24-25:

"...whoever HEARS these sayings of Mine (God's word), and DOES THEM, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock (a solid foundation): and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

Finally, with a solid foundation of God's word in your life, you will be able to assume the responsibility of a spiritual leader, and stop deception before it gains a foothold. From the Amplified Bible, Titus 1:9-11 lists these qualifications for a spiritual leader:

"He must hold fast to the sure and trustworthy Word of God as he was taught it, so that he may be able both to give stimulating instruction and encouragement in sound (wholesome) doctrine, and to refute and convict those who contradict and oppose it — showing the wayward their error. For there are many disorderly and unruly men who are idle (vain, empty) and misleading talkers and self-deceivers, as well as deceiving others. [This is true] especially of those [who have come over from Judaism] of the circumcision party. Their mouths must be stopped, for they are mentally distressing and subverting whole families by teaching what they ought not to teach, for the purpose of getting base advantage and disreputable gain."

Looking again at 2 Timothy, chapter 2, the scriptures also provide instructions to spiritual leaders about rescuing those who have fallen prey to deception:

"...avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

A solid foundation of God's word will equip you to practice that essential verse of scripture which I have repeated throughout this book:

"But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast." (1 Thessalonians 5:21 AMP).

You will not be swayed, nor overcome by deception. Instead, your life will reflect the words of the Psalmist, David:

"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I SHALL NOT BE MOVED." (Psalm 16:8).

In conclusion, let me remind you that much of Satan's deception is aimed directly at young, immature Christians, who lack a strong foundation of God's word in their lives. Therefore, let me add the following words of exhortation:

"My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, start today to build, or add to that solid foundation of God's word in your life. Let God teach you, train you, and use you in these end times. Let your delight be in God, and in his word. This world has nothing of enduring quality to offer you."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE GREATEST DECEPTION

At the least, being deceived causes us embarrassment. I can remember times in my life when I was tricked, or fooled. Even though some of those incidents were a long time ago, I still get embarrassed when I think about them.

AT THE WORST, being deceived can cause you to make a wrong decision about your eternal destiny! Obviously, you need to make such a decision without the interference of deception.

I CANNOT IMAGINE ANY GREATER DECEPTION THAN THAT OF FAILING TO RECOGNIZE JESUS AS THE CHRIST.

Once, Jesus questioned his disciples, *"...Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* (Matthew 16:13).

His disciples came up with a variety of answers. They said, *"...Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* (Matthew 16:14).

So, Jesus got even more specific, and personal with his questioning, *"...But who do you say that I am?"* (Matthew 16:15).

Simon Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, answered, *"...You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:16).

This prompted a revealing response by Jesus. One which is applicable to every human being:

"...Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah (son of Jonah), for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17).

Please notice; Jesus didn't say Peter's answer was due to the influences, or the opinions of other people.

He did not indicate that Peter arrived at this conclusion due to scientific theories, or because of scientific analysis.

Neither did he suggest that Peter was biased by religious traditions, passed down from one generation to the next.

Jesus said, MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN HAS REVEALED THIS TO YOU.

There are some things that you just cannot work out in your mind. Flesh and blood do not have the capability to figure them out. Things like:

- (1) "*Why am I here?*"
- (2) "*Is there a God?*"
- (3) "*What is the right path to God?*"

If you try to decide such things on your own, you will likely end up deceiving yourself. When we human beings attempt to figure out such weighty matters on our own, we are not very flexible. We tend to make decisions in favor of what is most comfortable to us.

On the other hand, if you allow someone else to make such decisions for you, you are completely vulnerable, not only to deception, but very possibly to destruction.

I am sure that you are aware of bizarre cases in recent history, where cult leaders have deceptively, but convincingly guided unsuspecting people to untimely deaths.

Perhaps you also need a revelation (*or spiritual enlightening*) from God.

You see, it all comes down to the fact that Jesus made a rather narrow, intolerant claim. He very clearly stated:

"...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6).

Non-Christians frequently get upset at that statement. *"How could Jesus be so arrogant,"* they ask? *"How could he claim to be the only way to God?"*

Yet, the fact is, Jesus did make such a claim. So, if you are struggling with this issue, like Simon Peter, what you need is a revelation from God.

Interestingly, a revelation from God is possible. In Jeremiah 29:13, God says:

"...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

So, exactly how is this seeking, and searching for God accomplished? The preceding verse, Jeremiah 29:12 gives us the following instructions:

"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you."

Are you serious about this matter of avoiding deception? Do you honestly need a revelation from God on the matter of your eternal destiny?

If your answer is yes, on the next page is a prayer; a prayer designed to help you avoid deception, and make a decision in favor of truth.

"Heavenly Father, I call upon you in the name of Jesus Christ.

I do not want to be deceived about my eternal destiny.

The Bible says your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, willingly died on the cross to save me from my sins.

The Bible says the blood he shed has the power to wash away my sins, and give me a right standing before God.

The Bible also says you raised Jesus from the dead, and he is alive right now.

Furthermore, the Bible says Jesus will come to dwell within me by his Spirit, if I extend to him an invitation.

Heavenly Father, I desire to know the truth about these matters. I am sincerely seeking, and searching for truth with all my heart.

Thank you for listening to me, and revealing the truth to me.

AMEN."

Other books by Jack Michael include:

The Best Way To Know God's Will

The Christ Conspiracy (*novel*)

Will God Supply All Your Needs?

Bearing Fruit In Old Age

(*co-authored with Randolph Ewers*)

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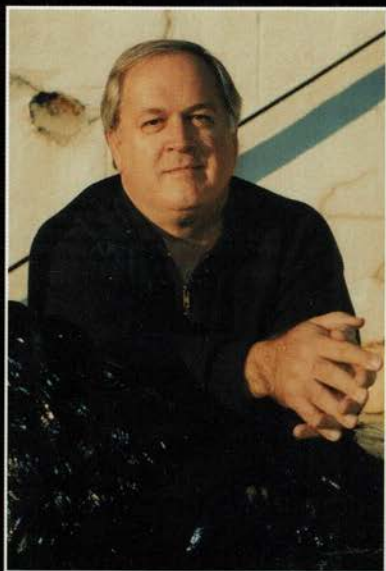
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"What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" When the disciples asked Jesus this question, his immediate response revealed a subject area that is seldom mentioned by end time prophecy teachers.

"And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you!"

I am convinced that DECEPTION, at an accelerated pace, will be the primary sign pointing to the return of Christ. And, much of that deception will be aimed directly at the church.

It is with these thoughts in mind, that I present to you, A COMMON SENSE HANDBOOK FOR DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.



Jack Michael is a foundation builder. His ministry can best be described by 1 Corinthians 3:10: *"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it..."* As a Bible teacher, his teaching has been described as clear, understandable, and practical. As an author, his books and writings have been described as easily readable, yet firmly conveying the message of God. As a missionary, God has given Jack a unique vision to minister to the diverse peoples who inhabit the islands of the world.

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