

## DANGEROUS NONSENSE #3

In last month's issue of *Living Waters* we dealt with the failure to understand the scriptures. We now turn to a specific part of the scriptures, that is, the general attitude that we cannot understand prophesy. However, the Apostle Peter states: "We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which we do well to pay attention, as a light shining in a dark place...no prophesy was made by the act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet. 1:19, 21).

Dangerous Nonsense: We cannot understand the prophesies of the Bible. John opens the book of Revelation with these words: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near." If this book and other biblical prophesies cannot be understood then how are we "blessed" when we read and hear, and how can we "heed" the things written if they are beyond our understanding? Paul Boyer, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, in his book *Prophets of the Apocalypse*, estimates that there are some eight million biblical prophecy buffs today. Their message is captivating and their writings are being gobbled up from bookstores all over the nation. With boldness and apparent precision these contemporary religious prognosticators flood the airways and pulpits with their ridiculous and sometimes downright funny predictions of the fulfillment of prophecy in our day."

Is there any way the serious Christian can, despite all the self-proclaimed prophets and their bestselling books, come to an understanding on how to view biblical prophecy? The best way to understand Scripture is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. They are their own best interpreters. How are we to understand such statements of Jesus in speaking of the judgment of God upon Jerusalem in Matthew 24:29 that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken?" Or the prophesy in Revelation 6:12-14: "there was a great earthquake, and sun became black as sackcloth and the moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth...and the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places?" When we read of the prophesies in the Old Testament of God's judgments upon the nations we find the prophets using a prophetic imagery depicting a collapsing universe to vividly describe his coming judgments. Prophesying the fall of Babylon, Isaiah wrote: "the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not shed its light...I will make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken from its place" (Isa. 13:10, 13). God's judgment of Edom is described as "all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all the hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine or as one withers from a fig tree" (Isa. 34:4). Amos foretold the doom of Samaria in these words: "And it will come about in that day declares the Lord God, that I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight" (Amos 8:9). Ezekiel predicted the judgment on Egypt by God saying: "and when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken their stars, I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the

shining lights of the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness in your land" (Ezek. 32:7,8). The New Testament uses the same stirring language and figurative imagery the prophets of the Old Testament used in describing the judgments of God. We must point out that none of these events *literally* took place. The prophetic terminology used in the New Testament would be readily understood by the people of that day who were familiar with this prophetic way of describing God's judgment.

A familiar passage that has been interpreted in various ways by commentators can be understood by examining the Old Testament prophecy from which it is taken is Acts 2:19,20. Peter is quoting from Joel chapter 2 concerning what will happen before the day of the Lord comes. We have little trouble understanding verses 17 and 18 concerning the coming of the Spirit, but verses 19 and 20 give us some difficulty. "And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come." To understand this verse, we need to consult Joel 2:28-32 from which the prophesy is taken. Peter quotes Joel verbatim through half of verse 32, which states: "for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls." Peter, in using this scripture to explain the happenings of that day, saw no need of quoting these words, but they give us an explanation of the whole passage. Who were the ones "on Mount Zion and Jerusalem" who would "escape?" Jesus said in Matthew 24:15,16 that when they saw the events of the destruction of Jerusalem beginning to take place "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" and Luke 21:21: "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city." Joel is prophesying that some would escape this destruction. So, the conclusion is that Acts 2:19,20 is referring, in the prophetic language of the Old Testament, to the destruction of Jerusalem. The great glorious day of the Lord was the end of the Old Covenant system.

Applying this principle to the book of Revelation may help us better understand how to view prophecy. There is nothing in the book of Revelation that is not mentioned in other scriptures, and much of Revelation can be explained by comparing it with these scriptures. For example, In Daniel 7 he is given a vision of four beasts. These beasts are said to be four kings (ver. 17) or kingdoms (ver. 23). They were seen in the king's vision of a great statue in chapter 2. Three of them are identified and called by name: Babylon (2:38), the Medes and Persians (8:20) and Greece (8:21). The fourth kingdom is not named but it follows the Grecian empire in history so it must be Rome. If they are so identified in Daniel can we not conclude the beasts of Revelation are also kingdoms? John sees two beasts in Revelation and one of them is identified as a false prophet (a religious kingdom). The two kingdoms in power now were Rome and apostate Judaism. (If we accept the fact that the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem and not in 90 AD). We can identify the harlot woman in chapter 17 and 18 by comparing scripture with scripture. The woman is called "Babylon the Great" and is described with the words "whore, abominations, naked, oil, fine linen, decked, silk, fine flour, crown, jewels, gold, silver, mother, blood, filthiness

and fornication.” These exact same terms are used in Ezekiel 16 and 23 to describe Jerusalem under the judgment of God. Also, the woman is called “the great city” (Rev. 16:19; 17:18, 18:10, 26). “The great city” is identified in chapter 11:8 as “where the Lord was crucified.” This means the woman, the great city, was Jerusalem. Sometimes the prophesy itself will give us an understanding of its meaning. (As Daniel was told the beasts represents four kings). The seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are said to be seven churches and the angels (messengers) of the churches (1:20). The lake of fire is said to be the second death (20:14) the city in chapter 21 is said to be the bride, the wife of the Lamb (ver.9).

Dangerous Nonsense: The Rapture Theory: The “rapture” was not preached by the church until 1830. What brought it about was a young Scottish girl, Margaret McDonald went into a trance and described a vision in which she claimed to have seen the saints leaving the earth at the return of the Lord. Her “revelation” was recommended in a book written by R.N. Norton and printed in London in 1861. Prior to this time the church, all the way back to the apostles, had never preached of an “escape rapture theory.” It was from this that the modern doctrine arose. A preacher by the name of Edward Irving preached the doctrine to the Plymouth Brethren where John Darby endorsed his view of the rapture. Two prominent preachers, C.H. Mackintosh and C.I. Scofield (whose Bible notes popularized the new theory and is still relied upon today as proof of the rapture). Darby and Scofield, along with Clarence Larkin and his charts, began to teach this new theory. In the early 1900’s it reached a peak in popularity, and has been a part of the religious scene since. It is very popular among Fundamentalist and Prophecy preachers. The heretical *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHay is a prime example.

The word “rapture” and how it is used in Scripture: The term “rapture of the church” or “rapture of the saints” is not found in Scripture. In fact, the word “rapture” never means the removal of Christians from the earth. The Greek word for rapture is “*harpazo*” which means to “snatch up” or “to be caught away” is used at least 14 times in the New Testament, but never applied to the “snatching away of the church” as taught by the rapturists, although it is used one time about the saints being caught up. (We will note I Thess. 4:15-17 which is prime teaching of those who believe in the rapture because the word “*harpazo*” is used to refer to the saints, but will in no way validate the theory). Here are a few Scripture where the word “*harpazo*” is used: John 10:28, 29: “I give them eternal life and no one is able to snatch (rapture) them out of my hand...no one is able to snatch (rapture) them out of the Father’s hand” John 10:12: “(the shepherd) sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches (raptures) them and scatters them” John 6:15: “So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take (rapture) him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain alone. Matthew 13:19: “When one hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches (raptures) away what has been sown...” Acts 8:39: “And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught (raptured) Philip away.” II Cor. 12:3,4: “And I knew such a man (who) was caught up (raptured) into Paradise.” Jude 23: “save others, snatching (rapturing) them out of the fire” Acts 23:10: “the commander ...ordered the troops to go down and take away (rapture) Paul from them by force.” Matthew 11:12 “And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take (rapture) it by force” Rev. 12: 5: “and her child was caught up (raptured) to God and His throne.”

Now pay attention to I Thessalonians 4:16, 17: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God and the dead will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up (raptured) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” There are numerous divisions among those who advocate a rapture theory but one thing they all have in common is that the church “will be raptured (caught up) out of the world into heaven where they will join all the saints who have died and gone to heaven. A popular theory is that they will stay with the Lord in heaven for seven years, while the world goes through “the great tribulation under the reign of the antichrist, than Jesus will return with them, destroy the antichrist, and set up his kingdom in Jerusalem and reign on earth for a thousand years. This means that there is the whole theological system built around the doctrine of the rapture. Note this one point in I Thessalonians 4:17 which destroys this whole doctrine of the rapture. Paul, in the last phrase of the verse, says “and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” He says nothing about being taken to heaven for seven years, or taken to heaven at all. Any other scripture used to try to prove this is twisted to try to prove the rapture. He simply says from the time of his coming and our being caught up to meet him we will be with him. Now note that we will be “caught up to *meet* the Lord in the air, not be taken away with him.” Just because you “meet” a person doesn’t mean you are going away with them. This meeting the Lord in the air is what Paul refers to in Colossians 3:4: “When Christ is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” This takes place “in a moment in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor 15:52). We are his body (Eph. 1: 22, 23) so naturally when he (the head of the body) appears in glory, his body will appear with him.

But what about those whom “God will bring with him who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (I Thess. 4:14)? Are they not those who have died and gone to heaven, and the ones raptured into heaven for seven years? Notice the words “even so.” This connects “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again” with “God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” That is, if we believe Jesus rose again *even so*, in the very same way God brought him from the dead by resurrection, He will bring with him by resurrection those who are asleep in Jesus. This is proven by the way as the words “even so” are used to mean “in the same way” in other passages: John 3:14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so* must the son of man be lifted up.” John 5:21, 26: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life *even so* the son also gives life to whom he wishes...For just as the Father has life in Himself, *even so* He gave the son to have life in himself.” Gal. 3:5, 6: “Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith? *Even so* Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Rom. 5:18, 19: “through the transgression of one there resulted condemnation to all men, *even so* through one act of righteousness there resulted justification to all men...for through the one man’s disobedience many were made sinners *even so* through the obedience of one man, many will be made righteous.” Thus, as God raised Christ from the dead, *even so* we will be raised.

This is a dangerous nonsense and gives millions of people a false idea of God, His word, and our purpose as the church. The best way to understand scripture is not the works and sermons of noted preachers, but the scriptures themselves. Let scripture interpret scripture.