

Are We Really Living in the End Times? Part 4

God will send to you the Great Advocate, The Holy Spirit. And that is what we celebrate today – a day we call Pentecost – where God poured out a piece of Him – the Spirit of God Himself – into all of us.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is a key part of the trinity that we, as Christians, believe in.

We know of God, the creator of everything.

Then that God, humbled himself and came to earth as a man, died for our sins, giving us everlasting life as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Then after Jesus died, God sent his Spirit to the believers in Christ, and that Spirit dwells inside those that believe today.

Jesus said in the passage Ellie read for us, that shortly God would be sending the Holy Spirit unto them.

It was on a very important Jewish holiday, called Pentecost, that God poured out His Holy Spirit on those gathered there.

Let me read for you Acts 2:1-16; 37-42.

Doesn't that sound great! God sent his Spirit to dwell inside of us as believers. What a great event! But, I've always wondered, how come we don't exchange presents? If this day celebrates God's Spirit being sent to us, how come we don't celebrate it like we do God's Son being sent to us?

I guess Hallmark just hasn't found a way to commercialize it yet.

Because you know that if it was the End of the World, Hallmark would have a card for it.

For the past several weeks we have been discussing End Times Theology. We have looked at different viewpoints of the end times to help us all make up our minds - if we really believe there will be an End Times per say, and if there will be, are we seeing some of those signs now?

One of the main view points we discussed is the Preterist view. Preterists believe that there won't be an End Times. They believe that the End Times mentioned in the Bible was really about the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple in 70 AD and that all of the prophetic scriptures came to pass at that time.

They look at events in the Bible and passages in scripture and say that there is proof the Bible wasn't talking about some final battle between God and Satan that is supposed to take place in our future.

Like our reading today about Pentecost. Peter referenced a passage written by the prophet Joel. The passage he referenced goes like this: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" – and it goes on from there. Preterists look at that and say, Peter was referencing that verse – talking about the last days before the temple was destroyed and the act of the Holy Spirit coming down fulfilled that prophesy on Pentecost.

They look at scripture like that or the symbolism in the Book of Revelation and say, these things have happened.

But the polar opposite view point is called the Futurists view. Futurists believe that the passages in the Bible aren't referencing the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD, but they are referencing the End of the World as we know it.

They look at that same piece of scripture and say that Peter wasn't talking about them right there, but was reciting a prophecy that will happen in the future. Let me read that for you again, but this time I will read the whole prophecy:

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show signs in the heaven above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fires, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Futurists look at this and say that it is talking about some of the signs mentioned in the Book of Revelation about the judgments God will cast upon the earth.

Last week we discussed a couple of the main points from the Futurists view. The first they call “The Rapture.” People who are Futurists typically believe that Jesus will come back in the clouds, there will be a great sound, like a trumpet, and all of those who believe in Jesus will be taken up to be with Him, while still living.

Everyone else who doesn't believe in Jesus when this happens will be Left Behind and have to endure the wrath of God for a period of 7 years. This period they call the Great Tribulation.

Futurists believe that there will be an End Time and that the Bible does talk about the signs of those End Times – and these signs are what we are going to look at today.

So, from a Futurist standpoint, what are some of those End Times Signs?

The first one may apply to some in this room. It comes from **2 Peter 3:3-4**:

“First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’ They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and to the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.”

So one of the first signs of the End Times that Futurists look at is written by Jesus’ main Apostle – Peter. Peter said that in the end times people will scoff at those that are still looking for Jesus to come. Is this not what those with the Preterist view do to those who have the Futurist view?

Let's look at **Matthew 24:5** - where Jesus is speaking about the End Times, "For many will come in my name, saying 'I am the Messiah' and they will lead many astray." Futurists look at that and say, Jim Jones, or David Koresh. Or there are even complete religions out there that teach that if you follow them, you will be god of your own world some day.

Matthew 24:6 talks about wars and rumors of wars. Nation against Nation. Just watch the news for 10 minutes and you see this. Over the past 100 years, more people have died from wars than any other period in history.

But these are all pretty vague right? Wars and rumors of wars, people declaring they are Jesus, scoffers. These have pretty much always happened haven't they? Since Jesus was crucified, I am sure these events have always taken place.

So, what else is there? Why do so many people believe that there are signs pointing to this point in history, more than any other time in history?

Let's look a little closer at some of the prophecies from the Futurists' view:

Matthew 24:14: “And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.”

This scripture speaks about the Gospel of Jesus Christ being spread to all parts of the world before the End Times.

First, by some accounts, the Bible has been translated and reprinted into about 2,200 languages or dialects. With groups constantly working on translations, it won't be long before the Bible has been translated into every known language. And let's not forget the missionaries out there proclaiming the Gospel to those in remote areas of the world.

One of my favorite: **2 Timothy 3:1-5** “You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, immoral, wasteful, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power.”

When a Futurist reads that, they say that is happening right now, today. Sure kids have always been disobedient, but never like today. Now kids can sue their own parents. What really speaks to me on this one is how it talks about holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power.

Now more than ever we have people claiming to be “spiritual” but they don’t believe in any god out there. They believe that the power is within them.

The 12th Chapter of Daniel talks about people traveling throughout the world and knowledge increasing. Well, we definitely travel easily enough throughout the world – especially compared to Bible times. How about knowledge?

Because of mass media, and the internet, experts estimate that we double our knowledge about every year. Experts predict that we will double our knowledge even quicker in the coming years. Never, in the history of the world, has information been so readily available to anyone who wants it.

Revelation 9:16 says that there will be an army of 200 million that shows up for the final battle between good and evil. Never before has there been an army this size. The reports today are that China’s military now has 200 million troops.

Now we are starting to get a little more meaningful prophecies. Not as vague as some of those others.

Let’s look a little deeper –

Zephaniah 3:9 Speaking about the End Days – “at that time I will change the speech of the people to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.”

Ancient Hebrew – considered a pure speech – which was spoken during the early Bible days has been dead for over a thousand years as a language. It has been used during liturgical ceremonies, but has not been spoken as a mainstream language for centuries.

That was until a gentlemen named Eliezer Ben Yehuda helped modernize ancient Hebrew in the 1900s, and now it is spoken as a main language by over 6 million citizens of Israel. Many believe this fulfills this prophesy.

Okay, how about **Zephania 3:10** speaking about the End Times: “From Ethiopia my children that are scattered will be calling out to me for help. I will bring them in to me.” In 1991 there was a mission from Israel called Project Solomon that arranged for planes to rescue 20,000 Jews that were trapped in Ethiopia during a change of leadership. They brought them back into Israel.

Jeremiah 23:7 “Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord when it shall no longer be said, ‘as the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt’.” This is referring to the Exodus story with Moses and the parting of the Red Sea - But “As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them. Then they shall return home and live in their own land.”

Several times after Jesus’ death, the Jews were defeated and scattered throughout the lands. In 1948, Israel was declared a state for the first time since they were scattered. Since 1948, Jews from all over the world have been coming home to Jerusalem.

In Israel there is this place where the last great Temple stood. According to Futurists, the book of Revelation and the Gospel of Matthew mention the Antichrist coming and desecrating the temple about 3 ½ years after the Rapture.

But before that can happen, the temple needs to be rebuilt, because it was destroyed in 70 AD. But there is one problem, the most holy of Muslim shrines called the Dome of the Rock, sits right where part of the old temple used to be. Obviously, the Muslims aren't going to give up that spot.

So what then? Maybe never rebuild the temple? Well, there is already a lot of talk about rebuilding the temple on a different site. Or maybe using only a portion of the old area. Some experts believe that the Dome of the Rock isn't actually where the old temple stood, but in an area of the old temple called the Court of the Gentiles. Which means it could stay right where it is because the Court of the Gentiles is a place for non-Jews.

So, if a temple was rebuilt, according to Jewish law, it would have to be purified and consecrated. Part of the purification process is mentioned in **Numbers 19:1**: The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying: "This is a statute of the law that the Lord has commanded: 'Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid'." Then it goes into how to sacrifice the cow etc.

So, if the Jews rebuilt the temple, they would need a red heifer – an extremely rare animal. By most accounts, there hasn't been a red heifer in centuries. By some accounts, one of the reasons the temple hasn't been rebuilt is because there hasn't been a Red Heifer available for the purification process.

In May 1997 the first Red Heifer was born in post Bible history. In March of 2002, another one was born. As of today, there are 3 living Red Heifers.

What is the reason these extremely rare cows have suddenly reappeared? Is it so the future temple can be purified?

So, for the most part, everything is in place that was discussed throughout the Bible. We have the right systems in place, mass media, temple can be rebuilt, red cows, people returning to Israel and speaking an old, presumably dead language, wars and rumors or wars - what else is there?

Well, that brings us to the last sign I am going to discuss – the Mark of the Beast.

Revelation 13:16-17 reads: “He causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark.”

For years there has been speculation of what that mark could be. That everyone had to have it or you couldn't buy or sell anything without it. In some ways it sounds like a bank account – especially if we were in a cashless society.

So imagine this – let's say there isn't cash anymore. Realistically, we probably aren't that far from a cashless society. With credit cards, debit cards, the internet, now you can even use your cell phone to send money. As technology increases, cashless will probably be the easiest way to buy or sell.

But still, that wouldn't fulfill the scripture about the mark of the beast. A cashless society? Doesn't there have to be something on your forehead or your right hand according to the Futurists view?

In the past few years a new technology has come out which is called RFID. It stands for Radio Frequency Identification Device. They have many purposes right now. They help prevent theft in department stores. They let a purchasing manager know when his order has arrived. They are even inserted under the skin in our pets to give an animal hospital information if our pet is found somewhere.

Think about this: What if they could put a device inside of us that would hold our medical records and next of kin information and it could be retrieved if we were found unconscious somewhere – like in a car accident. The doctors would know exactly who we were, any allergies to medications, and they would know who to contact.

No longer any need to worry about fake passports as the device could simply be scanned and they would know that you are legal. It could help put a stop to illegal immigration. Think about it – if an employer had to scan your device before hiring you, it would automatically check the database with Homeland Security and you would know immediately if the person was illegally in the country.

Now what if that device also carried our credit card and bank information? People couldn't steal our credit card numbers anymore because they would be imbedded in us. The only way to use it would be to wave the device over a machine that was made to scan it and then automatically money was removed from your bank account to make the purchase. So no more identity theft either.

It can even double as your keys for your car! No more losing your keys.

Now what if we had that device planted somewhere easily accessible, let's say in our hand or on our foreheads for easy scanning.

Sounds like science fiction, right? (Ned, would you show the next picture?)

It is being tested throughout the world. There is a bar in Europe testing it out for payment. The picture you see here is of a young man who injected himself with RFID tags and he opens his car doors and his house with them.

Many people believe that since money is the root of all evil, that our society could eventually be convinced to have these RFID tags inserted into their hands. No more keys, no more credit cards, no more cash.

Now, is RFID the mark of the Beast? The sign of being a follower of Satan? I don't know. But, many futurists *and conspiracy theorists* believe so. And they are scared because, from a Futurists view, the Bible says that all who receive this mark will be condemned to Hell because all that receive the mark of the Antichrist will worship Him.

That's a lot to swallow in one day isn't it?

We're at the point that we have to make up our own minds if we choose to. I invite you to Pray about it and ask the Holy Spirit to help guide you to the truth.

But no matter what view we end up taking: A Preterist view that all of these signs are garbage for the most part. That all prophetic scripture was fulfilled in 70 AD with the destruction of the Jewish Temple – and that there isn't going to be some Antichrist, but the beast talked about in scripture was the Roman Emperor of their day.

or, if you take a Futurist view that there will be an end to the world, and maybe, just maybe we are living in those times,

or if our beliefs will fall somewhere in the middle,

It is important for us to always remember – that we shouldn't get wrapped up in it. We shouldn't spend countless hours looking for the Antichrist or looking at the signs of the End Times. If we do, then the quest for the answers about the End Times becomes an idol. We stop focusing on the Grace of God and we only focus on what will happen next – like we would if we were watching a good mystery movie on TV.

If you hold the Preterist view and think that the End Times have already come and gone 2,000 years ago, don't take your eyes off Christ. Remember him in your heart, always. And as you are out in the world doing things, ask yourself now and then, if the Futurists are right, and Christ came back right this second, what would he find me doing? What would he find me thinking?

If you hold the Futurists view and you do believe that Christ will come again in the near future, remember that he did say that he will come like a thief in the night. No advance warning. Nobody knows the day or the hour he will return. So be prepared.

Which means have your heart always ready for Christ. But don't stop going to work, don't stop paying your bills, and don't stop loving each other because you think he will be coming for us tomorrow. Remember, people for 2,000 years have been thinking the same thing. Not everyone gets to see the Glory of the Coming of the Lord firsthand.

Or maybe you live your life the best you can, following Jesus' example and you don't worry if there will be an End Days. Maybe it happened already, maybe it will happen in the future. Either way, you live your life with your heart focused towards God, always.

No matter what view you have – try not to get overly wrapped up in it. Enjoy God for the gift of eternal life he has given us all and enjoy his gift of Grace.

As Jesus said, "Do not let your Hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

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