We began this study together ‘way back in November of last year. While I have in no
way covered the subject fully, we will draw the curtain on it tonight and turn to other
subjects. Next Wednesday night, I will start the new series:

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT:

And we will follow the colon with such subjects as
- The Virgin Birth of Jesus
- The Security of the Believer
- Divine Healing
- Christian Warfare
- Salvation Alone Through Christ
- The Work of the Cross
- The Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- The Christian and Finances
- And many other subjects.

What does the Bible teach about each of them? There is a strong commandment given
to us in the Word: 1 Peter 3:15  **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be
ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that
is in you with meekness and fear:** It is not enough to know WHAT you believe; you
must also understand WHY you believe it. This is a discipline known as apologetics. It
is vital to the believer’s spiritual health.

WHAT SHOULD WE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS BE LOOKING FOR TODAY?

Years ago, one of the great teachers of prophecy summarized the future in this way:

**A good many years ago I went on a river boat excursion for a young people’s outing
and picnic.** We were planning to have a singspiration and a devotional time on the
back part of the boat that evening on the way home. **However nature intervened. We
were not very far along our way when it got dark and began to sprinkle and the
sprinkle turned to rain, and then the rain turned into a downpour.** Needless to say, it
broke up the meeting. The pilot didn’t seem to mind a bit. He just kept that boat
going on up the river. We began to wonder how we would get to our destination.
Some of us made our way toward the bridge and got close to the door of the pilot’s
cabin where he was standing at the wheel, guiding the boat. As we looked out, we
could not see a thing. The shore line was obliterated. Several little pinpoints of light
ahead of us were all that we could see. Someone asked the pilot how he knew where
he was going and how we could get to our destination. He replied, “You see that light
up there?” Yes, we could see that. He said, “You see that one up there?” Yes, we
could see that one, too. Pointing, he said, “Now there’s a third one over there, to the
left.” Our eyes followed and could see that also. He explained, “I’ll keep going up
this river until those three lights merge together as one light, and when I get those three
lights to come together like that, then I know that I am opposite the harbor where I
want to go. There they will have an auxiliary lighting system on the shore to get us
in.”

I’ll go until the lights merge as though they were one, and then I’ll know that we are near
our destination.

Jesus Himself gave us strong hints at what those “merging lights” would be. Let’s take
another read of His prophecy:

Matthew 24:1-14  KJV

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him
for to shew him the buildings of the temple. [2] And Jesus said unto them, See ye not
all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon
another, that shall not be thrown down.

On the next page is a picture I took this April near the southwest corner of the Temple
Mount (where Herod the Great built the massive second Temple. You will note piles
of massive stones which were thrown down from summit by the Romans in 70 A.D.,
just as Jesus said would happen. Note how the roadway was destroyed by the falling
stones. There can be little question that Jesus walked along that road. It is important
to note that Jesus prophesied the stones of the Temple itself would be thrown down,
not the retaining wall that still stands to this day (the wall on the upper right of the

[3] And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately,
saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming,
and of the end of the world? [4] And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed
that no man deceive you. [5] For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ;
and shall deceive many. [6] And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that 
ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. [7] 
For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall 
be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. [8] All these are the 
beginning of sorrows. [9] Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill 
you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. [10] And then shall 
many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. [11] 
And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. [12] And because 
iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. [13] But he that shall endure 
unto the end, the same shall be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom shall be 
preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Jesus gave us definite signs that lead to the Rapture:

- **Deception** (the Apostle Paul warned against this very thing in his “last will and 
testament”: 2 Tim. 4:2-4 KJV Preach the word; be instant in season, out of 
season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. [3] For 
the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their 
own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; [4] And 
they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto 
fables.

- **Nations warring against each other.** World War I (1914-1918) was supposed to 
be the war that would end all wars. In my nearly 8 decades of life, there has 
ever been one single day in which there has not been a war going on somewhere.

- **Persecution of believers.** Today, in every region of the world, Africa, Asia and 
even in the Americas, persecution of Christians is growing. History emphatically 
teaches that when religious minorities are first marginalized within a society, then 
targeted for attacks without notice from the free societies around the world, a 
purge is the next logical step in the mind of extremists. For example, more than a 
decade ago, Christians in Iraq worshiped in relative peace. Even under the brutal 
dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, they faced no greater threat to their freedom than 
the general population of Iraq. But now Iraq ranks third on the world watch list as 
one of the most brutal places for expression of the Christian face. In our country, 
we do not see out-and-out persecution; however, MARGINALIZATION of 
believers in the U.S. is on the increase.

- **The love for Christ among many Christians will grow cold.** This week I attended 
the district presbytery meeting of Pen Florida in Lakeland. A report chilled me:
the concern for global missions among Assemblies of God pastors is diminishing. And total missions giving across our fellowship is dropping alarmingly. Where is this deception coming from? Pastors - especially younger ones.

ISRAEL

Other tell-tale sign warnings of the Rapture are taking place in our lifetime. One of the primary ones was the return of the Jews to their own homeland in Israel and its becoming a recognized state in 1948.

In Genesis, God made it clear to Abraham that He gave the land many call Palestine to the Jews as their inheritance. For nearly 70 years now, Israel has endured wars and hatred of nations to become one of the most modern countries on our planet. LOOK FOR CONTINUED AND INCREASED HATRED OF THE JEWS AND OF ISRAEL IN PARTICULAR. Jesus said, Matthew 24:32-33 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: [33] So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Israel is certainly a very recognized “bud” on that tree.

Keep your eyes on Israel as we approach the day of the Rapture.

RUSSIA

Ezekiel 38 and 39 teach that Israel will one day be viciously attacked by a coalition of nations headed by Russia (Gog/Magog). What has happened in Russia in the last hundred years is astounding. In 1917, the czarist government of the Romanoffs was cast aside by the Communist revolution headed by Lenin. Lenin died and was entombed in a mausoleum in Moscow’s Red Square in 1923. I have visited his corpse on several occasions through the years and he looks pretty good for being almost 150 years old.

After Lenin came the vicious Joseph Stalin who died in 1953 and then came a series of Russian leaders. One of them was Mikhail Gorbachev who along with our President Ronald Reagan engineered the “detente” that ended the cold war between our nations. Followers of Jesus were able to penetrate the former Soviet Union with the Gospel, opening hundreds of Bible-believing full-Gospel churches. I spent two Februaries in Siberia in that very pursuit. I was allowed to video-tape a dozen or so one-minute Byline TV shows in the very Kremlin itself. Then along came Vladimir Putin who is now in his second six-year term as President of Russia. His attitude toward the “west” and toward Israel has hardened severely. He is not friend of that nation but bends over backwards to assist radical Muslim states. His attitude could be an ingredient in the coming boiling
cauldron in the Middle East.

The question has to be addressed, “Why would massive Russia have any designs on tiny Israel?” The riches of Israel, especially in the areas of agriculture and hi-tech, would be an attractive bait to any peoples not believing the Bible. The rise of Russian influence among Muslim states is a significant sign that the coming of the Lord may be very near.

ISLAM

The Babylon of prophecy is a topic of great debate today. In Revelation 18, Babylon the Great is portrayed in both religious and political dimension. Ancient Babylon, led by its then-leader Nimrod, was punished by God for its rebellion against His edicts after the great flood to cover the earth with civilization. Instead, the Babylonians attempted to build a massive tower, a headquarters if you will, reaching toward the sky (not to go to the moon or stars) but to defy God by centralizing its locale. With few short exceptions, Babylon (Iraq) has never sought to please God. Out of that part of the world came Mohammed and his false teachings of Islam. Today over 1.5 billion people are enslaved by its power. God’s punishment to this part of the world will be nothing short of awesome:

Rev. 18:1-19

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. [2] And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. [3] For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. [4] And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. [5] For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. [6] Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. [7] How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. [8] Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. [9] And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, [10] Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city
Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. [11] And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: [12] The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, [13] And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. [14] And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. [15] The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, [16] And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! [17] For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, [18] And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! [19] And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Here is Babylon’s obituary, already penned by God Almighty: Rev. 18:21-24

And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. [22] And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; [23] And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. [24] And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

While the Church (in general) sleeps, the disciples of Mohammed increase their hold through ISIS and other hellish groups, slaughtering innocents, and causing havoc around the world. Remember this: no nation has ever voluntarily bowed to Islam. History records that it is a religion that has grown by the SWORD and not by LOVE or REASON.

THE SLEEPING CHURCH
This is perhaps the most terrifying indicator of all. 1 Tim. 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; and 2 Peter 2:1-2 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

Chapters two and three of Revelation contain Christ’s personal message to the seven church of Asia (within about 100 miles of each other in western Turkey). But much more that, they were given to the seven general ages of His church, the last of which was Christ’s warning to the church at Laodicea (our time, this generation). Note it carefully:

Rev. 3:14-22

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; [15] I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. [16] So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. [17] Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: [18] I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. [19] As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. [20] Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. [21] To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. [22] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Most of us have seen the poignant painting of Jesus standing at a door and gently knocking for admittance. It is usually thought that He is knocking at the heart of some sinner somewhere. Not so. He is KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF HIS OWN CHURCH! This is a church that professes to be the Church of the Living God, the Bride of Jesus Christ, and Jesus is on the OUTSIDE having to seek admission.

In my decades of ministry I have seen a lot of changes in the church, in general. Some of them have been healthy and favorable. Others have not. Several of those changes that
cause me great concern include:

1. THE DUMBING DOWN OF CHRISTIANS REGARDING THE BIBLE AND THEIR FAITH.

In both music and message, all too often churches seek the lowest common denominator for its constituents. Many of its songs are ditties rather than majestic musical expressions to our Creator. Many of our messages are political, economic or social rather than the pure Word of the Bible. In our own fellowship, fewer and fewer of our churches have any vision for world missions and the lost. They are caught up in their programs, their buildings, their denominations and not the lost for whom Jesus died on the Cross. Speaking of the cross, I have had pastors tell me, "We have taken the cross down from our church; it causes too much negative feedback from people coming into the sanctuary. Too much offense to them!" Can you even imagine it? Alleged full-gospel churches and pastors remove the cross because it causes offense? There are liberal evangelistic churches right here in our county who have removed the cross. Can you imagine how God feels about that?

2. NO STATED PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY. Ours, as you well know, for it’s emblazoned on the front of the sanctuary, is REACH / TEACH / SEND.

REACH - do everything we can to get the gospel message of Jesus and the cross to every person around her and around the world.

TEACH - make the Bible the focal point around everything we do. I want the people here to know the Bible! That’s where FAITH originates.

SEND - send our people across the nation and around the world as missionaries and witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The closer we draw to the Rapture of the Church, the worse it’s going to get. Yes, there are those who declare that because of churches the world population will get better and better and Earth’s civilization will become so holy and desirable that Jesus will want to return just to live here. Sadly, the Bible teaches something radically different: 2 Tim. 3:1-7 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. [2] For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, [3] Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, [4] Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; [5] Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. [6] For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, [7] Ever learning, and never able to come to the
knowledge of the truth.

From this lengthy study, I pray several things have happened to each student:

1. A growing knowledge of the Word and what it actually says

2. A growing awareness of eternity and the fact that life as we know it is drawing to a close. Jesus is coming. An old chorus teaches:

   He’s coming soon / He’s coming soon
   With joy we welcome His returning
   It may be morn / it may be night or noon
   We know He’s coming soon!

Next Wednesday: the new series begins: WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT: