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CUNNINGLY DEVISED FABLES

"Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:15-16).

Peter's first letter was written to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit..." (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

Their election was not their doing, but God's: "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). It was God who called them out of darkness, to which Paul also testified in his letter to the Corinthians: "... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:7-10). It is God who, by His Spirit, has revealed His mysteries.

In His second letter Peter repeated that the revelation of God's secrets is God's work alone. He wrote: "... to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:... according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:1-4). It is by God's divine power that He revealed His great and precious promises which had enabled them to escape the corruption that is in the world.

Both of Peter's letters, and Paul's letter to the Corinthians, remind their readers of their privileges: they were "elect", they were "chosen",

they had been "called out of darkness" and had been given the hope of being "partakers of the divine nature".

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul contrasts their privileged position with those who had not been called, by comparing the privilege of one walking in light with one who was walking in darkness: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light... Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness..." (Eph. 5:8-11). "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Peter's demise

Peter realised that, while he was with them to encourage them, it was relatively easy for them to believe, but the time was coming when he would not be with them, and they would need to be fully convinced in their own mind regarding the truths of God's Word. They were to be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asked them a reason" for their hope (1 Pet. 3:15).

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Consequently he exhorted them to believe that what he had told them was not a “*cunningly devised fable*”, but was true, that is, that Jesus truly was the Messiah as evidenced by the events that accompanied His baptism: “*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt. 3:16-17).

Peter exhorted his hearers that after he had died they would remember the things he had told them. Remembering the things he had told them would be a powerful tool, so much so that, towards the end of his letter, he reminded them again to keep them in their minds, and especially to believe that what he had told them was not a whim of his imagination but was a repetition of what God has given to His prophets of old: “*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after 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 the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*” (2 Pet. 3:1-11).

Twenty first century

As “evil has waxed worse and worse” as the end of this age approaches (2 Tim. 3:13), it is important for all of the Lord’s people to keep the promises of the prophets in mind—to remember them—and to remember that they are not fables.

Fables

A fable may be defined as a short story conveying a lesson. That is, the information in a fable is not necessarily fact but imaginary, and that definition distinguishes Peter’s message regarding the situation in the end times. Peter’s message was not imaginary but factual: the flood of Noah’s day, that Jesus was the Messiah, that the events in the world indicate that the end of this kosmos is near, and that the promises of God regarding “*the restitution of all things spoken by His holy prophets*” (Acts 3:20-21) will soon be fulfilled.

Devised fables

Peter assured his readers that the fables that confronted them were not only false but also “devised”. That means they constituted a complex system, whereas the truth that Peter taught was simple: that Jesus’ ministry was foreordained before the foundation of the world, that His ministry was spoken of by all God’s holy prophets, that Jesus came to earth and died as foretold by those prophets, that the present order of things will be removed and replaced with God’s righteous kingdom—a new heavens and a new earth—and that it is “natural” that those who live righteously now will be despised by the god of this world and his followers.

The philosophies now rampant in the world, particularly in the Western world, testify to the accuracy of God’s Word regarding mankind’s attitude towards any divine authority, and hence Peter’s advice to his readers is applicable to Christians today.

Cunningly

The King James Version of the Bible includes the adjective “cunningly” to describe the fables with which Christians would be confronted.

Some English dictionaries define “cunningly” as:

- “the use of clever but false arguments, especially with the intention of deceiving”;
- “Cunning, artifice, craft imply an inclination toward deceit, slyness, and trickery”; and
- “Cunning implies a shrewd, often instinctive skill in concealing or disguising the real purposes of one’s actions: not intelligence but a low kind of cunning”.

However Strong’s Concordance indicates that “cunningly devised” is translated from one Greek word (#4679-sophizō) which is defined as “From G4680; to *render wise*; in a sinister acceptation, to *form “sophisms”*, that is, *continue plausible error*”.

The definition in Strong’s Concordance includes the word “sophisms”, which is defined in some English dictionaries as “the use of clever but false arguments, especially with the intention of

deceiving", that is, a repetition of the definition of "cunningly".

Consequently there is some evidence for interpreting Peter's words to mean that there was some deliberate intention to deceive by the proponents of error in his day. And so one may wonder if there is some intention to deceive by the proponents of error in our day. The significance of that statement is not overlooked: one may propagate error but do so ignorantly, not realising the error, whereas to deliberately propagate error with the intent of leading others astray is quite a different matter.

Theory of evolution

Consistent with the above, the currently widely accepted theory of evolution may be regarded as a "plausible error". The characteristics of the various species that comprise the animal kingdom (and in some respects their similarity with the vegetable kingdom such as their reproductive systems and dependence on water and oxygen) contribute to the theory being plausible. However the inability of any human being to consciously observe any changes within one's lifetime requires changes to have taken place over a long period of time, indeed millions of years. And so, while the theory might be plausible on one front, there are many aspects that mankind cannot substantiate, one of which is the length of the time period involved. Any dating system that extends beyond mankind's observed time frame involves extrapolation, that is, estimating the unknown. The conclusions that may be drawn from extrapolation, while being plausible, cannot be regarded as fact.

One example of extrapolation is weather forecasting; predicting the weather tomorrow on the basis of what it has been for the last relevant period or what it has been in the same season in previous years. However when the eventual weather is significantly different from expectations it is frequently regarded as "unseasonal". The determination of the length of time Planet Earth has existed employs extrapolation; not forward looking, but historically, regarding changes that are assumed to have occurred several million years ago. It is not suggested that the theory has been developed specifically with the intention of deceiving but in an honest attempt to explain why mankind is here and what is their destiny. However it is complex science and is in stark contrast to the simple truth of creation as recorded in Genesis and attested by several of the Biblical authors, Peter included: *"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:*

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. 3:5-6).

Bible prophecy

While it is "easy" to criticize others for making assumptions that have not or cannot be "proved", the same principle must be applied to the interpretation of Bible prophecy. All students of God's Word must be prepared to "prove all things" for themselves (1 Thess. 5:21)—that means, to be *"fully persuaded in their own minds"* (Rom. 14:5), regardless of what anyone else might believe, regardless of whether they be an "elder" or someone of "no consequence".

One example of misinterpreting Bible prophecy was the expectation, in the latter years of the 19th century (1895 onwards) that God's kingdom would be established on earth by about 1915, and the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914 temporarily gave substance to that prediction. However God had not revealed some of the features of His plan; that a second world-wide battle would break out some 25 years later (World War 2 in 1939) and that it would be a further 11 years (until 1948) before the nation of Israel would be established.

Likewise the identification of the *"four winds"* (Rev. 7:1) is still undisclosed. About 50 years ago, during the "cold war", there was some thought that maybe they were the four dominant military world powers at that time—United Kingdom, United States of America, France and USSR. They were all heavily armed and able to destroy each other, held back by the realisation that to destroy their enemy would also result in destroying themselves; indeed they were being "held back" by the fear of annihilation. Nevertheless the prediction has not yet been vindicated; whether it will still eventuate is something for all to watch.

Watch

So then, regarding the times God has laid out in His plan, students of God's Word should be content to rejoice in Jesus' words: *"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch"* (Mark 13:32-37). One may wonder about the motivation of those who are not content to be a watcher. The Apostle Paul was forthright: *"... that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ"* (2 Cor. 11:12-13). Do not be confused by a cunningly devised fable.■

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7)

How can Christians be sure that God will answer their prayers? It is not enough to affirm their belief in prayer. Thousands of mothers have believed in prayer and have asked God to protect their sons on the battlefield, only to receive a message that they had been killed. Nor does affirming one's belief in prayer explain why, when a whole nation prays for peace, it often finds itself caught in a whirlpool of war.

On the other hand, there are thousands who are eager to testify that God has answered their prayers for the safety of their boys. Other thousands will testify of the wonderful manner in which God has given them other special blessings they requested. On the basis of experience alone, therefore, it may seem that God answers the prayers of some, yet does not answer the prayers of others.

However that is not in keeping with the Scriptural testimony: *"And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act 10:30-35).* So observation decrees there must be some reason why God seemingly answers some prayers and not others. Understanding that reason helps restore the faith of some whose prayers have seemingly gone unanswered.

Significance

The desire to pray is an acknowledgment of dependency upon a Higher Power. It is an expression of a realization that help from another source is needed. That realisation is not peculiar to Christians: prayer is an integral part of all religions. Some, for example the Islamic faith,

have regulated prayer times which are mandated by the hierarchy. That regimentation is different from the Christian ideal where the Christian is to be ready always to seek God's help: *"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).*

Origin

The universal urge to pray is due to the fact that originally Man was created in the image of God. As a result of Man's fall into sin and death the divine image in his character has been much blurred, in many cases almost erased, yet remnants of it still remain, and one of its manifestations is the urge to pray.

Nevertheless there may be millions who never pray, and others who feel they should and have a sense of guilt because they do not.

Seeming partiality

But the issue of God apparently hearing and answering the prayers of some while ignoring the prayers of others remains.

Jesus hinted at the answer to this question in his observations about the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees: *"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:1-8).*

This seeming partiality is a reminder that there are proper and improper attitudes of prayer, as well as correct and incorrect methods. The heathen who spin their prayer wheels may be sincere, but their method is inappropriate.

Substance

The Scriptures also indicate that there are proper and improper things for which to pray. James wrote: “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss*” (James 4:3). It is vitally important to ascertain what is proper to request.

The Purpose of Prayer

There is a divine purpose in prayer, and it is highly important that it be kept in mind if one is to understand why some prayers go seemingly unanswered. It is God who answers!

God did not design prayer as a means of finding out how He should manage His affairs here on earth. He is not looking for the Christian to tell Him what He should do or what He has planned. He has his own fixed plans and purposes, and the Christian’s prayer is the avenue by which they—not Him—learn of His ways for them. As James wrote, prayers that dictate to God what He should do will not be answered in the way the petitioner asks but are examples of “*asking amiss*”. This leads to the matter of substance.

Broad classification of the subject matter

The Scriptures outline various types of prayer.

Consistent with the foregoing, foremost among the types of prayers are prayers of thanksgiving. The Christian must always acknowledge that God is the source of all their blessings, and because of that they lift up their hearts and voices to him in thanksgiving.

There are prayers of adoration; prayers that give recognition to the glorious attributes of God’s character—his wisdom, his justice, his love, and His power. The desire to glorify God should be high on the agenda of the Christian’s prayers because it is the essential ingredient that justifies why one prays to Him and not to another authority. It is God who is overall.

Having got to that point, when Christians seek divine forgiveness they acknowledge that it is by God’s grace that He deigns to help those who petition Him: “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:16). The thought behind coming boldly to the throne of grace is not coming aggressively or demanding attention or consideration, but of frankness, bluntness or assurance. That attitude

is appropriate because “*the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*” (Heb. 4:12-13). As Jesus reminded His disciples, God knows what things His people need before they ask Him (Matt. 6:7-8), and hence to come to Him with any camouflage of insincerity or veil indicates one does not acknowledge that He knows their need.

Specific request for blessing

Nevertheless there are prayers which are requests for certain blessings, or favours.

One example of a request for a specific blessing is Paul’s request for improved eyesight: “*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong*” (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

While it is natural for everyone to desire temporal blessings during their earthly sojourn, such requests must always be made with the realisation that the individual’s eternal spiritual welfare is more important, and which therefore is God’s interest: “*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:26-28). God has called those whom He calls for only one purpose: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your*”

calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:1-7).

Prayer changes things

One quotation that is common in some circles is that "prayer changes things". In one respect that is true, but not because God changes His plans on the basis of the petitions He receives, but because prayer is a moment when the petitioner is once again reminded of their significance in relation to the Omnipotent One (and their relative insignificance in the universe). God is not looking to Christians nor to anyone else for guidance but that His people will look to Him. In other words, the Christian's outlook should be as Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Thy Will Be Done".

In their prayers, God's people should have uppermost in mind and heart the desire that God's will be done in all their experiences. The greatest example of this attitude is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:36-39),

It was God's will that Jesus suffer humiliation and death as the Redeemer and Saviour of mankind. This important feature of the divine plan had been foretold by the holy prophets of the Old Testament: "In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled" (Matt. 26:55-57). Years previously Jesus foretold His death, declaring that it was His Father's purpose for His coming to Earth: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Jesus affirmed His purpose later when he was about to be arrested: "Then Simon Peter having a

sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:10-11).

Suffering with Jesus

The followers of Jesus have the privilege of suffering and dying with him: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:3-6).

Likewise to the Philippians Paul wrote: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29). Thus the Christian is called upon to follow in Jesus' footsteps, and hence it is not God's will to spare them from all hardship. Thus, as with Jesus, the Christian's chief concern should be that the Lord's will might be done in their mortal bodies. The Lord's will might be that for a time they enjoy certain earthly blessings, but the burden of their prayers should not be for their material blessings, but for His will to be done.

Jesus emphasized this point when he said to his disciples that while they were abiding in him and his words were abiding in them, they could ask in prayer whatever they desired, and it would be granted unto them: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:7-8). That might seem like an assurance that Christians are privileged to ask God for anything, but that is not so; the condition is "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you". To abide in Christ means to be a member of His body, He being the Head: "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:19-23). Prayer is a privilege! ■

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10)

John's vision recorded in Revelation 7:9-10 poses several questions, some of which are:

- Who will constitute the great multitude;
- Where are they;
- How did they achieve this status;
- What is their purpose?

Interdependency

The answer to any question might be influenced by the answers to the other questions, and in reverse might influence the answers to the other questions. For example, the answer to "who they are" might depend on "where they are", and "where they are" might influence one's answer to "how they achieved their status".

Deduction required

There does not seem to be any Scripture that specifically answers these questions, and so any conclusion is a deduction involving other Scriptures. For example, when they achieve their status and position depends on what is meant by the "great tribulation" from which they have come (Rev. 7:14). The question is whether the great tribulation mentioned in this verse is the same as the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:21: "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be*".

It is not claimed that the considerations presented in this article are definitive, but that they provide some points for others to consider as each one strives to more clearly understand the details of God's plan, and specifically what might lie ahead for all people.

The starting point

As mentioned above, it is realised that the question one answers first has the potential to affect the conclusions one may deduce for the other questions. Nevertheless one has to start somewhere, and so this article begins with who will constitute the great multitude?

Who

The first point considered in trying to identify who constitutes the great multitude is that they are of human origin: "*of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*" (verse 9).

Further they have come from "*all nations*",

whereas those who comprise the 144,000 come from "*all the tribes of the children of Israel*" (Rev. 7:4-8). Thus it may be concluded that the great multitude may be the "heathen nations" that will be given to Jesus as His reward: "*I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*" (Psa. 2:7-8).

When

Regarding the time of the tribulation, there are other references to "tribulation" which may be reasonably interpreted to mean that the tribulation to which Revelation 7:14 refers will, at that time, be past.

For example Romans 2:8-9: "*But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile*". The tribulation mentioned in those verses may be interpreted as the tribulation experienced by evil doers during their present lifetime, that it is a conflict of conscience.

Where

The great multitude stands "*before the throne, and before the Lamb*". At first glance that statement may be interpreted to mean they are in heaven because God's throne is in heaven: "*Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool...*" (Act 7:48-49). However is there a time element involved?

Another point that may be considered to support the great multitude being in heaven is that the risen Jesus is now seated in God's throne, so God and His risen Son are both in heaven. Jesus went to heaven when He was resurrected: "*Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11).

However those who sit with Him are those who have "overcome"—"*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" (Rev. 3:21). There is no mention of the great multitude being overcomers or sitting with Him in His throne: they "stand before the throne"—they do not sit in the throne—and, according to Strong's Concordance, "before" is translated from the Greek *enōpion* which means "in the face of" (literally or figuratively).

The throne

Jeremiah 3:16-17 opens the door for another understanding of the whereabouts of the throne. Jeremiah 3:16-17 reads: "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart". The time setting for this prophecy is when Israel has cast off the rituals of the Law Covenant: "they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind...". At that time "they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it". There are several points in this prophecy that bear on the great multitude.

The first relates to when the prophecy will be fulfilled. Quoting again from Jeremiah 3: "the ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it neither shall that be done any more". This aspect of Jeremiah's prophecy indicates that it refers to a time when the Israelites will cast off the Law Covenant. The original commandment to Israel was for them to keep it forever: "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Exod. 31:16). In large measure the Israelites today still keep the requirements of the Law Covenant.

"They shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD". Does this expression mean that, in the broad spectrum of Biblical terminology, Jerusalem maybe be regarded, at some time in the future, as being where God's throne will be?

Such a proposition may be deemed to comply with Isaiah 2:1-3: "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and

say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem".

"All the nations shall be gathered unto it "

This expression may be aligned with Zechariah 8:22-23: "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you".

It is noteworthy that it is to Jerusalem that the nations will come, and hence is it plausible that the great multitude will also come to Jerusalem to worship "before the throne"; in other words, will the great multitude be on Earth?

Multitude

The number comprising the great multitude is so great that no man can number them: are they the whole world of mankind, "people from all nations, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb..." (Rev. 7:9)?

Revelation 21:2-3 reads: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God". Is it possible the vision relates to the multitudes on the earth being "before the throne", that is before Jerusalem; which at that time will be "God's throne"?

Their qualifications

Finally, one interpretation some have given to the qualifications of the great multitude is that, after being called by God, they have failed to "make their calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10), that is, they have failed to be "more than conquerors", whereas those who "live and reign with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6) are "more than conquerors". "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). Should that be the case, the concept of being "before" the throne and not "in it" should be an inspiration.■

DANIEL'S PROPHECIES

"And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent..." (Daniel 10:11)

The article below may be deemed a superficial overview of the prophecies God gave to Daniel and which Daniel recorded. And rightly so because it does not address the deeper mysteries recorded in the book of Daniel, such as the identification of, and the contest between, *"the king of the south and the king of the north"* recorded in chapter 11. Neither does it dictate specific dates because historical records seem to differ regarding some dates, the differences perhaps being due to commentators and historians ascribing different events to be the beginning or end of a prophesied era. However some dates are mentioned, trusting they are sufficiently accurate to give a chronological outline of the major players recorded in some of Daniel's prophecies.

Nevertheless the article is presented here because of Peter's exhortation: *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets... knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after 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 the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:1-4).

Additionally, even an elementary knowledge of the prophecies recorded in the Bible is a privilege that God has revealed to those whom He has called (1 Cor. 1:9), the *"natural man"* not being privileged to understand them: *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:14).

For example, Peter's prophecy *"that there shall come in the last days scoffers"* is manifestly true in the general community in Australia in 2017. Not only is there little faith in the coming of the Messiah, there is little faith in any of the prophecies contained in the Bible. Hence refreshing one's mind regarding even the elementary prophecies helps resist the atheism that currently bombards believers.

Daniel

Daniel was *"a man greatly beloved"* (Dan. 9:23; 10:19), to whom it was given to *"understand the words that I speak unto thee"* (Dan. 10:11).

Daniel's prophecy is the foundation for much of the understanding God has given to His people regarding the events that have occurred in the world during past centuries. Such understanding is not the result of any human skill or wisdom but, as it was with Daniel, *"God gave them knowledge... and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan. 1:17).

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

Chapter 2 records Daniel interpreting one of King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams: *"The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart"* (Dan. 2:27-30). Daniel did not take any credit for his understanding of this vision but attributed his understanding to God: *"Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his"* (Dan. 2:19-20).

Daniel was given several other visions additional to the understanding of the dream God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 7 records one such vision. However the meaning of that vision was not revealed to Daniel: *"Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart"* (Dan. 7:28).

Prophecy concealed

In similar vein Chapter 12 records Daniel being instructed to *"... shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased"* (Dan. 12:4). Consistent with this edict, the secrets of the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar and which Daniel interpreted were not revealed until many centuries later, and might still be in process of being revealed.

Israel

Some knowledge of the standing and history of the people broadly known as "Israel" is necessary to appreciate the significance of the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar. The nation of Israel is God's chosen people: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you..." (Deut. 7:7-8).

In spite of being God's chosen people, Israel did not remain faithful to Him: "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them..." (Joshua 7:11). Their waywardness continued for centuries, and God told another of His prophets—Jeremiah—that He would punish Israel by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar: "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon... which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying... ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:1-9). God revealed to Jeremiah that He was going to use Nebuchadnezzar to punish Israel, and hence God calls Nebuchadrezzar "my servant".

God also revealed to Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar would take Israel captive to Babylon and that they would be captive there for seventy years: "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:11-12).

The captivity prophesied by Jeremiah is recorded in the book of Chronicles: "Against him

came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6-7).

Symbolisms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream

The connection between these historical events and the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar is entwined in the symbolism God used in the dream He gave Nebuchadnezzar. The dream was an image of a man that was composed of several parts; the various parts represented four world empires.

The first empire was the Babylonian Empire (approximately 605-539 B.C), represented by the head of gold: "This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory... And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold" (Dan 2:36-38).

Nebuchadnezzar's empire—Babylon—would be replaced by a succession of empires: "And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise: (Dan. 2:39-40).

The identity of the second and third empires was revealed to Daniel in a different vision, recorded in Chapter 8. The second kingdom would be the empire of Medo-Persia, represented by the breast and arms of silver, which existed from approximately 539 to 331 B.C..

Medo-Persia was succeeded by Greece which was represented by the belly and thighs of brass (approximately 331-168 B.C.).

Finally a fourth empire would arise which is not named and which is represented by "legs of iron and feet part of iron and part of clay". (Dan. 2:33). It is further described in verses 40-42: "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet

were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken" (Dan. 2:40-42).

Fulfillment

The kingdom of Babylon was overthrown by Darius Cyrus, king of Medo-Persia: "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he (Nebuchadnezzar) away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah... to fulfil threescore and ten years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me..." (2 Chron. 36:20-23).

Greece

The Medo-Persian empire was overthrown by Greece, commanded by Alexander III of Macedon, commonly known as Alexander the Great. When Alexander was broken the empire was divided into pieces, in stark contrast to the *en masse* changes that had occurred previously.

The end time

Secular historical records confirm that the Biblical prophecies given to Daniel regarding Medo-Persia and Greece were fulfilled. However the secret of the fourth empire is not attested with the same surety.

Isaac Newton (1642 -1726 A.D.) believed the fourth empire was the Papal dominion, and that it would have a life span of a "time, times and an half" (Dan. 12:7). Newton concluded, from "his observations" (God's revelations to him), that there was still about a century remaining before the empire would be dissolved. Such a revelation was indeed "miraculous" and testifies to the fact that God is the "revealer of secrets" (Dan. 2:47).

In 1789 the French revolution broke out and in 1799 the Pope was taken prisoner by Napolean. The time had come for God to reveal to several Protestant expositors that the prophetic visions He had given to Daniel had been fulfilled, and in the nineteenth century they began to preach that the return of Christ—His "second coming" or "second advent"—was near. Such preaching gave rise to what is commonly known as the "Adventist movement" and the "Miller movement". God was gradually revealing His plan. Although the dates they preached for the "second advent" were not precise, these early reformers and

expositors fulfilled the purpose God planned for them. Nevertheless the inaccuracies in the chronology have led some expositors to discard all the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel.

The stone cut out

While there is general agreement among secular historians regarding the succession of the empires of Medo-Persia and Greece, there does not seem to be the same conviction regarding verses 34 and 35: "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:34-35). Indeed, even at this time, God might not have fully revealed the details of the prophecy.

The stone will firstly break all the empires—"the brass, the silver and the gold"—into small pieces until they are blown away by "the wind", and then it will grow to fill the whole earth: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. 2:44-45).

One question is whether the "braking in pieces" is still in progress. Perhaps the fragmentation of Jugoslavia in 1991-92 into seven nations—Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia—is evidence that the nations are still being broken down. On the other hand some students of God's Word believe that a study of chronology suggests that the "times of restitution" (Acts 3:21) have begun.

Whichever viewpoint one takes, the extent of the new order will be world wide, as prophesied also by Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass... he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:9-10). The extent of the kingdom will indeed be world wide.■

PREACH THE WORD: REPROVE

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of the task that confronted Timothy when Paul left him at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) was to reprove wayward believers: "... 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; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

The objective of any corrective action must be to enhance the defaulter's spiritual welfare: "... we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying" (2 Cor. 12:19). However in spite of one's best intentions, any "counselling" has the potential to cause animosity, and so Paul wrote to the Corinthians before he visited them the second time: "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing" (2 Cor. 7:8-9).

Meekness

In order to minimise animosity all correction must be undertaken in a spirit of meekness: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Notwithstanding correction must be given in a spirit of meekness, there are occasions when forthright action is required: "This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13),

Partiality

All action must be undertaken without partiality: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons... if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:1, 9). One's judgement must not be swayed by the esteem others might ascribe to the offender.

When and where

The time and place when any advice is given must be chosen to ensure the outcome will be edifying. Jesus said: "Moreover if thy brother

shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17). Jesus told His disciples that, sadly, there would be situations when the congregation should be apprised of the matter; Paul faced that reality and instructed Timothy accordingly: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

Truth

It goes without saying that, as well as complying with the criteria mentioned above, all efforts to correct another must be factual and based on the Scriptures: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). The objective must be to let the truth effect the reproof and not any personal feeling or antagonism: "But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13). The Word of God must be the weapon: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The reproof is effective when it convinces the offender to change their heart condition: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Act 2:37).

Paul gave Timothy a challenging task!■

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