

A Place Of Safety? (Part 1)

Speculating

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I am going to look, once again, into something that is highly speculative. As long as we remember to keep things in the proper perspective, and realize that there are risky aspects to what we are doing, I think that we are going to be okay. With this understanding—that *we are not* going to put all of our hopes and dreams into something that is speculative—I think we should be able to glean all the vision, instruction, and encouragement we can from these things. It is interesting to look into while, at the same time, not becoming unbalanced fanatics—by making speculative things "our life."

Now the subject we are going to go into is "Fleeing and Petra." Are we really going to do it?

There are some who say there is no place of safety. These people say that the church has been wrong all of these years. It has been reported to me that some have even written to King Hussein, in Jordan, telling them of the Worldwide Church of God's plans. But, brethren, even if somebody did that, it would not be so unusual because we are not the only church that has their eye on Petra. Many, many churches of this world are looking to that area of the world—as a possible place of safety site. And with good reason, because the Scriptures seem to indicate that there is a place of safety and that the place of safety is in Petra.

This is so well known that I have been told (again this is not firsthand information, its secondhand information) that the guides—Bedouin guides, the Jordanians, or whoever—who lead tours in the Holy Land actually use biblical passages to explain the importance (or possible importance)—both historically and what many believe may occur in the future—when they lead the leg of the tour to the area of Petra. Because they know that many, many people coming from many parts of the world—the Christian parts of the world—are interested in these things and that is why they have come. Their interest in Petra has a religious basis to it.

Some people have gone so far as to have bags packed—ready to go at a moment's notice. You have probably heard the well-known case of a Worldwide Church of God member who took in all kinds of goodies (into his house trailer), in preparation for a time of famine (or whatever). Anyway, as he was getting ready, he loaded his house trailer up so much so he would be ready for these things that his house trailer collapsed. Well I do not think that we need to include that in our thoughts regarding this subject. But I do think that we need to think of it in its overall terms—as to the possible impact that it might have on our lives right now. Because if there is a place of safety, then undoubtedly there are going to be qualifications that God has established regarding who is going to go there and who is not going to go there.

This subject is important. It is well known and I think that we need to take some time here to nail some things down. My impression of end-time prophecy is of a well-orchestrated, intricately-timed, interdependent series of events moving toward a very logical and necessary intervention of Jesus Christ. We understand that is not going to occur until man is backed into a corner and forced to admit—at least individually as each person repents—that unless Christ had intervened, "no flesh would be saved alive."

Now what I have just said actually forms the foundation that we are going to build upon—that "no flesh would be saved alive." The New International Version translates that verse in Matthew 24:21: "unless God intervened, no one would survive." I think that the translators understood that what is in the context there is something that is going to affect life *physically*. It is going to be so devastating, so terrifying, so unusual, and absolutely unique in the history of man that *no one* would survive it.

Does such a circumstance require the protection of God? If any of His people are going to survive it, are they going to have to be protected? I think that we can conclude, without a doubt, that somebody is going to have to be protected—otherwise no one will survive.

We are talking about an occurrence that is similar in scope to the flood—except the means of destruction of life is different. Rather than water being the destructive force, it will consist of a series of devastating events that will systematically take life from one part of the earth to the other. Step by step, it moves in a logical sequence of events toward the conclusion—the return of Jesus Christ.

There are a number of factors that need to be considered and I will try to address some of them. I am undoubtedly going to miss some, there are many I undoubtedly do not know. I will address the ones that I do know. I want you to understand that I do not think or feel that I am the last word on this and that I am open to any suggestions that anybody might make in regard to this.

Now some have said that the place of safety is in: Houston, Texas; Pasadena, California; Big Sandy, Texas; Masada; Edom; Moab; Petra; and then there are others who say the place of safety is wherever you happen to be. Now the popular belief in the church has been that the church is going to flee to a place of safety. But the term "place of safety" appears absolutely nowhere in all the pages of the Bible. Neither do these words appear: "the church will flee." It does say "that the woman is given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly to her place." It does say the "that those who are in Judea will flee" but it does not specify exactly who these people are or where they will flee *to*. I think there is no doubt in any of our minds—those of us who are converted—that God does promise protection. The doubts and differences between us have to do with when and where. Will we be protected *where we are* or will it be in "*a place of safety*?"

I feel there are two major aspects to this subject that need to be considered. These two are related. Indeed, they cannot be separated. I call them the "practical" and the "biblical." Now it is not that the "biblical" is not "practical," but to carnal minds, the Bible does not seem practical. It is what God is going to accomplish that makes it practical for Him to separate His people away from the world, even though He could protect them where they are. This is an important aspect of this to consider. It is not what God is *capable* of doing, it is what God's *purpose* is. *That* is going to determine whether there is going to be a place of safety or whether He is going to protect a person where they are. Can we agree that God is able to do both—to protect a person wherever they are, just as if they were in a bubble and completely impervious to what was going on around them?

Did God protect the three young men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—right in the midst of a fire? If we can extend that out—is God's power great enough that He could protect one right in the midst of a hydrogen bomb explosion? Is God limited? I know of two places in the Scripture where it says that there is *nothing* too hard for God. If God created the suns—all those multitude of stars—then is He not capable of protecting us even within the midst of destruction? I think He certainly is. So it is not what God is *capable of doing* that needs to be considered, but what He says *He is going to do*.

Now we are going to begin, as we continue to lay the foundation for this, in Jeremiah. We need these verses because a foundation needs to be laid to understand the times in which this is going to occur.

Jeremiah 30:4-6 Now these are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah. For thus says the LORD: "We have heard a voice of trembling [ominous words, meaning dread and terror], of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see whether a man is ever in labor with child?"

He is setting the stage to help us to understand the times that confront us—just down the road in the future a bit. We are moving toward a time that is *unique* in the history of man—as unique as a man giving birth to a child and being in the throes of labor. Have any of you ever seen that? No historian has ever seen the kind of times that are just around the corner. Unless God has a place of safety for us, then we are going to find ourselves involved in these unique times that are coming.

Jeremiah 30:6-7 "Ask now, and see whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins [or as modern versions say "thighs," you see like he was in a position to give birth] like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? [Scared, terrorized] Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

God is of course speaking of the nations of Israel. They are going to be going through it—we know that for sure because the verse says, "he shall be saved out of it". In other words their protection is not going to come until they have gone through maybe most of it. So they are going to go through it—they are going to suffer through it. Then God is going to intervene—save them out of it. If God will not save them out of it, then what Jesus said in Matthew 24:21 (that they simply would not survive) will come to pass. They will all die in it. It is going to be that bad!

Now we have to put ourselves into this because the church of God is largely located in the nations of Israel. The overwhelming majority of us is in the United States and Canada. So are we consigned to the same fate as Israel in this prophecy because we live in Israel? I do not know about you, but I do not want to go through it. My hope is that God has a place of safety, and that I am worthy to escape. But, I think that you can see that we, as a nation, are facing very terrifying times. I want you to turn with me to the book of Amos just to get a little bit of insight into the kind of unrelenting terror that people are going to go through.

Amos 5:3 For thus says the Lord God: "The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left [90 percent dead], and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

It is almost as if Israel is left without a future. Indeed, unless God intervened, there would be no future for Israel. There would be *no future* for mankind. That is how bad the times are going to be.

Amos 5:18-19 "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, . . .

Can you imagine how terrifying that would be? If you are in a place where a lion is—you are out of your element; you are in the *lion's* element. He has the advantage, he is on home territory, and you

are *in his* territory. *You are* the stranger. *You are* the intruder there. All by itself that is enough to give a person a feeling of insecurity and then comes the *roar* of a lion—your hair stands up on end, your loins begin to quake. "Where was he? Where is he now? Is he creeping up on me? There he is! *RUN*. . .(pant, pant, pant, pant)." You know, you are just out of breath. "Oh I escaped him, I escaped him." And just as you feel safe again. . .

Amos 5:19 . . . and a bear met him!

If that is not bad enough—if a lion is not bad enough—how about a bear? Think you can outrun a bear? A bear can run much faster than you can, especially after you just escaped from a lion. "I'll go up a tree." A bear can come up after you—all several hundred pounds of him, if he wants to. Well, you escape the bear and then. . .

Amos 5:19 Or as though he [who just escaped from the bear] went into the house [At last he is safe, four walls around him, good strong walls, brick walls all mortared together. He is inside. The door is locked. "Ha, ha—bear, lion—you are outside."], leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him!"

That is not a very happy picture. I think that God is trying to draw our attention to the kind of times that are coming. They will be *unrelenting* in their terror—to such an extent that unless He intervened—"no flesh would be saved alive." Now we have to put ourselves into this. Is God able to protect us in a time like this? *Yes, he can.*

We will look at a couple of scriptures. David's life was being threatened, when he wrote Psalm 3. His son, Absalom, had rebelled against him and Absalom had been able to secure the allegiance of the larger part of the nation. An insurrection occurred, and David was thrown out of office. David had to flee for his life, with only a loyal cadre of men around him and their families. David had to flee across the Jordan River. David was in the minority; Absalom was the one who had the heart of the people. Absalom, undoubtedly, had most of the army with him as well. So David was in a bad, bad situation. Listen to what David says though:

Psalms 3:5 I lay down and slept [In the middle of all that trouble, David felt secure. David felt tranquil even while surrounded by enemies—a minority whose life could have been squashed out]; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

Now there is the cry of a man who felt that he could be protected at anytime, anyplace. So I do not think that we should ever sell God short. We should *never* underestimate God's sovereignty over His creation.

We might think back on the way God acted on behalf of the Israelites in Egypt. Did He not, after the third plague, spare the Israelites from having to go through the plagues that He brought on Egypt? God made a dividing line; He is able to do those things. What He can do for two million people, He can do for two people. Anywhere, anytime, anyplace—it all depends on what His purpose is. Did God slay 180,000 of the finest soldiers of the Assyrian Empire for Hezekiah and the Jews in Jerusalem? He just made a dividing line between the two of them. Hezekiah went to bed at night; a whole army surrounded him. He got up in the morning; the whole army was dead. The Jews were safe; the Assyrians were dead.

Did God save Noah? The most terrible devastation (in the history of man) took place on the face of this earth while Noah and seven others of his family lived right through it. So God's hand is not short. He can save anybody, anytime, anyplace. It all depends on *His purpose*. Let us look at Psalm 91. A very, very encouraging psalm here.

Psalms 91:1-3 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him I will trust." Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler [An indication there of people making secret plans.] and from the perilous pestilence.

Not only can God spare us from those who are secretly plotting against us, God can also save us from disease, (you see) the pestilence.

Psalm 91:4 He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall take refuge; his truth shall be your shield and buckler.

Now the imagery shifts to warfare and if God wants to get rough with your enemies, He can get rough, like a military man would.

Psalm 91:5-8 You shall not be afraid of terror by night [it does not matter whether it is in the daytime, or nighttime], nor for the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness [you might think back to the Israelites in Egypt and the death angel going through], nor the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.

You see, as a witness, God will sometimes do things like this so that we can *literally* observe His intervention on our behalf, and see with our own eyes, the reward of the wicked. Again a reminder—in spite of Psalm 91, Psalm 3, and many, many other places—we are talking about a time that even the Bible describes as *unique*.

There is none like it; there is no other time in man's history like the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, when this kind of protection that we are talking about here in Psalm 91 is needed. *Never* has it been more needed than it will be at this time we are talking about. Now if it is unique for the world, then it is also unique for the church. That is, it is a time *unique* in God's purpose as well. Now this psalm is a sort of, "if God is for us, who can be against us"?

We are not *of* the world, but we are still *in* the world. Therefore, what happens in the world is also going to affect the church, and the church members, at least to some degree—maybe to a very major degree. I am talking about things like famine; I am talking about things like depression. Are all of you people working right on through this recession (the economic difficulty the United States is going through) without a hitch? You are still making as much money as you always did? None of you have ever been laid off because of what is going on in the United States economically?

You *are* being affected by what is going on. You are in it. How about wars? Do wars just pass Christians by? No they do not. How about inflation rather than depression? How about hurricanes? How about tornadoes? What about earthquakes—those of you in Southern California? Everybody else's house shakes, but your house does not? How about floods? We could go on and on. I think that you can get the point here though. With this thought in mind, let us go back to I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation [a better application of that word, for us, would be "trial."] has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

"Common to man" means that the trials that come to Christians are the same as come to all men. Now as we live life we find that (in most cases) these trials are unavoidable. They just happen. It is happening in the world, we are part of what is going on in the world and so those things affect us and they are unavoidable. God says that He will provide "a way of escape." I should not use the general article "a." It says in my Bible "*the* way of escape". There is *one right way out* of each trial that comes. There may be other optional ways, but what Paul is saying is that there is "a way" or "the way." Now we want "*the way*"—the one that God provides for man. And the imagery, given here, is that of an army trapped during a battle, but suddenly a mountain pass opens up before them to provide them a way out of their dilemma. Now that is what the apostle Paul uses to illustrate how Christians escape the trial.

Again we want to emphasize here that the Christian is going through it as well. There is a reason for that. The trial God provides is good for the Christian to go through. He wants to see what our reaction is going to be to it. Are we going to avail ourselves of "a way of escape" that might be provided by ourselves or by the world, or are we going to submit to "*the* way of escape" *He* will make available to us? You can be sure that "the way of escape" is *always* going to involve the use of faith. God is testing our response to His declarations, His promises of faithfulness (that is God's faithfulness), and He wants to see whether or not we are going to respond because God is faithful. Which way will we go?

Let us contrast Psalm 91 with another series of scriptures beginning with Isaiah 26. Notice the context.

Isaiah 26:16 Lord, in trouble have they visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.

Think about the Tribulation, think about the Day of the Lord, think about the nations of Israel being right in the midst of the trouble. God's chastening is on them.

Isaiah 26:17-19 As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs [when she draws near the time of her delivery], so have we been in Your sight, O Lord. We have been with child, we have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind [vanity, you see]; we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Your dead shall live. . .

Look at the time element—a resurrection is being spoken of here. When does the resurrection occur? At the blowing of the seventh trump. You see the context here, the time element—we are talking about the same time in Isaiah 26 (as Jeremiah 30:4-7). The time of Jacob's trouble. Now, a resurrection.

Isaiah 26:19 Your dead shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust: for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

Now, verse 20 reflects back on something that is occurring (or even before this thing is occurring).

Isaiah 26:20-21 Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.

Very interesting. "Come, my people, enter your chambers." Think about Revelation 12. "She flies to her place." "*Enter your chambers.*" Reflect back upon Israel and Egypt. Reflect upon the Passover night—when the Death Angel went through. Where did Israel go for protection? They went into their chamber, into their house, and they closed the door behind them. They were safe there because the blood was on the door. But they had to wait until the Death Angel went through. As long as they were in their house (under the blood), as long as they were in their chamber, they were safe. All you have to do is think about the time element. The time element is what we call "the end" and God is going to put His people into their chamber.

Now what is interesting is that this can actually happen, let us say, twice. It can happen to the church even before the Tribulation begins. As we know from the book of Hosea, God begins to intervene in the history of Israel after the Tribulation is past and as the Day of the Lord begins. He says after "two days" Israel begins to come under the protection of God so that they are not wiped out (see Hosea 6: 2). They are beginning to go into "their chamber" for protection as well. So this can apply dually. It can apply to the church—before the Tribulation begins—it can apply to Israel just as the Day of the Lord is beginning.

Now I said we are going to compare that with Psalm 91. You see, God chose to say in Psalm 91 that *He is fully capable of protecting anybody, anywhere at anytime.* But what is God's purpose? What does He say that He is going to do? You see we are going to begin to track this down now. So here is an opening scripture that indicates that God is going to take His people into a separate place—"their chamber." So yes, He is capable of doing that—protecting His people anywhere—but His Word indicates that He is not going to do it that way. He is going to take them into "their chamber."

Now let us go to the book of Daniel. I think we can agree that Daniel is speaking about the time of the end here. Let us start in chapter 11, so we understand the time that he is talking about.

Daniel 11:35 And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time. [Okay, there is the time.]

In verse 40, it uses the words, "time of the end" again.

Daniel 11:40 At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through.

Daniel 12:1-2 At that time [The time of the end. The time, within the context, of the end of chapter 11] Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a

nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

We have here a clarification that His people are going to be "delivered." "At that time your people shall be delivered"—at the time of the end. And it is going to be those people whose names are written in the Book of Life. Now this word "delivered" is very interesting because it can mean "slip away, escape." Some are going to "*slip away*," they are going to escape. Parallel this with Isaiah 26: 20-21. What we are seeing here are indications of separation, of segregation of some of the people of God. Now, again (just as in Isaiah 26), it is tied in context to the resurrection in verse 2. But, it does not clarify how much these people have gone through before being delivered. There could be a time gap between verse 1 and 2, and some could be delivered at different times—though still in the context of the end time. Before we leave this, I want you to notice how similar the wording is to Jeremiah 30:4-7, Isaiah 26, Matthew 24:21—" *a time that never was before.* "

Let us go to Malachi. Again, another end time prophecy. You will see these scriptures just dovetailing together beautifully.

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; and so a book of remembrance was written before Him. . .

Before this gets out of my mind, we saw a book mentioned in Daniel 12. The people whose names were in the book were the ones who were going to be delivered, who were going to slip away, who were going to escape. Now we find here a further detailing of the characteristics of these people; they feared the Lord, they spoke often to one another.

Malachi 3:16 . . . for those who feared the Lord, and who meditate on His name.

That word "meditate" is a little bit more closely related to our English word "esteem" or "honor." These people fear God and they honor Him, they esteem Him.

Malachi 3:17 "They shall be Mine," said the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them [That is so clear. A time of tremendous trouble is coming and people with certain characteristics are going to be spared.] as a man spares his own son who serves him."

I just wanted to pull that in and help you to see that in context with other scriptures that are talking about the same period of time. Now let us turn to that famous chapter, Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:15-22 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and those with nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter, or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time [Jeremiah 30, Isaiah 26, Daniel 12], no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect's sake those day will be shortened."

Now how is it going to be shortened? Is God going to lessen time than would normally come? I think that is also a part of the explanation. I think the inference, though (right within the context), is that God will stop short what is occurring—lest everybody be killed. If He allowed the events that were taking place to continue, everybody would die. So, when He stops the event, time (in a sense) stops right there—at least as far as this event is concerned.

Now to whom are the pronouns referring to here? Verse 15, "Therefore when *you*." Verse 16, "Then let *those*." Verse 17, "Let *him*." Verse 18, "Let *him*." Verse 19, "But woe to *you*." And on and on it goes. The pronouns refer to those who understand the prophecies and are alive at the time these things are taking place. Now how many people are involved here? Well, it is unspecified.

One thing is clear. There is no doubt that, in this prophecy, deliverance involves a flight (fleeing—at least to those who are around Jerusalem during its unprecedented distress). Now in this case, to flee in no way implies flying. The verb here is *pheugo* and it means to flee, it means to escape danger. There is no indication of anything other than escaping by running—shoe-leather express.

Now the context of the chapter is *literal* and *physical*. It is not *figurative* and *spiritual*; it involves physical survival worldwide, though the prophecy itself focuses on Jerusalem. It is worldwide because verses 21 and 22 make it very clear "that no one would be saved alive." He means worldwide—not just that nobody would be saved alive in Jerusalem. We are talking about a worldwide occurrence, so it involves physical survival worldwide. It is so bad that even the elect would die, except for God's intervention. Now I want you to notice—this may not seem all that important, but it is important—that God, through His servant Jesus Christ, says "don't stay in the midst of the trouble. *Get out.*"

Considering the time that we are talking about, Psalm 91 would have to be modified to apply it directly to us, because our understanding from other portions of God's Word, is that He expects us to get out—to flee, apparently to some designated place called "your chamber"; "her place." So it involves segregating ourselves away from something. And I think that we can also understand that we will have help from God in segregating ourselves as I Corinthians 10:13 would indicate. He makes a way of escape through which His people can go, just as He did for Israel. He opened up the Red Sea so that they could go through and escape. They walked to safety—they had to flee the Egyptian army. But, God opened up a way of escape. He intervened.

Let us go back to Luke 21. I think all of us understand that Luke 21 is the parallel to Matthew 24.

Luke 21:20-22 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains [an added detail], let those who are the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

The times are so bad at this point, He says do not even come down and get your clothes. I always wondered (for a long time), how a person could do that? How could a person not come down off his housetop and go through his house; and on the way through, pick up some clothing? But one day I discovered that the way the homes were built in Jerusalem made it entirely possible to run from one housetop to another because they butted up against one another. The top of the house was built flat and the people used it in the same way that we would use a patio. In the cool of the evening they went to the top of their house and they sat there and talked to their neighbors across one rooftop to the other rooftop.

So if a person was on the top of his house when the time came to get out of Jerusalem, he could literally run from housetop to housetop to housetop to housetop without even coming down on the street for a long, long period of time. Cannot do that in the U.S. and Canada. But, nonetheless, does it not put into your mind a sense of urgency? If indeed you happen to be there then, you would have to flee for your life.

Now the question always arises, "was this fulfilled during the period that the Temple was destroyed there in 70 AD?" It is interesting when one looks (apart from the Bible) into church history—not necessarily *true* church history; we will call it "secular church history," where people call themselves Christians—these people left a record of events that were occurring. The church historian, Eusebius, had this to say regarding the true church (which he thought that he was a part of) in Jerusalem during the period between 66 AD and 70 AD:

That it [meaning the church] was instructed to leave Jerusalem and take up residence in one of the cities of Perea.

Now the church did not flee in the sense that is given in Matthew 24. But it migrated from Jerusalem to one of the cities of Perea. We know that city was—Pella.

Pella is not in a wilderness area, we will get to that later. Pella is one of the cities of the Decapolis. You have probably read of that word. I believe it is in Matthew, I am not real sure. Decapolis means ten cities; there were ten small cities in the area of Perea, right around the Sea of Galilee. It is not in the mountains, though it is near some. The church probably left somewhere in late 69 AD. If they had left earlier than that, they would have run headlong into Vespasian's army, because Vespasian's army was stalled in fighting in the area of Galilee. Right around 69 AD, Vespasian was recalled to Rome where he was crowned Emperor. Vespasian's son Titus took over the army and came down on Jerusalem. Now by moving his army toward Jerusalem, it became safe for the church to migrate away from Jerusalem.

Josephus records that on the Day of Pentecost, while a great multitude of people were in the Temple, they heard a voice say, "let us go or get hence"—and so they left in an orderly way *without* urgency (without the kind of urgency that Matthew 24 shows where "you do not even come down off your housetop") and migrated to the area of Pella. We are going to see that is the exact opposite direction indicated in the Bible concerning where the place of safety is located. So we would have to conclude that what happened there—in the time period of 66 to 70 AD—was a "type" of the church being removed to a place of safety, so that it could survive. However, it was not what Jesus was talking about for the end time church—where some leave with such urgency that they *do not even come down into their house* for their clothing, but flee for their lives.

In Matthew 10 is some general advice:

Matthew 10:22-23 "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake [Jesus is speaking]. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Again I just wanted you to see that, so that you will understand that though God is capable of the kind of salvation—the kind of deliverance—that He indicates He will give to His people in Psalm 91, His general advice to His people is to: "flee, get out, get away from the trouble." Even though God

could protect one there in the midst of trouble, still God gives this general advice to flee; and I might remind you that David—who was the author of Psalm 3 where he said that he felt safe surrounded by ten thousand people—was fleeing when he wrote it.

This in no way denigrates God, and in no way makes for a "cowardly Christian" when they flee persecution or maybe certain death, demanding that God save them under this horrible circumstance. We have to understand that God places responsibilities on us. I feel certain that, as we take His advice—to *flee*—He will "open up the mountain" before us so we can go through the path that He makes clear for us.

Now let us go back to the book of Revelation as we begin now to focus in on another aspect of this sermon.

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

I read this verse because it is the last verse in the message to the church at Ephesus and there is no indication of fleeing, no indication of protection, and no indication of an "end-time event." Let us go to the next one, in verse 11, the last verse to the church at Smyrna.

Revelation 2:11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Again similar to Ephesus. Let us go to the next one in verse 17, the last verse to the church at Pergamos.

Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

Again, there is no indication of the "time of the end," fleeing, or anything of that nature. Let us go on to Thyatira in verse 25 where we begin to see a bit of a difference in the closing part of the message.

Revelation 2:25-26 "But hold fast what you have till I come. [The first indication of a church group that might be around when He returns.] And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end."

Not the person's end (which it might be interpreted as, and that is a possibility). When we think of it, within the context of what the book of Revelation is all about, it is about the "*time of the end*." I think that the number one application here is—there might be people who are in the church, having God's Spirit, alive at "the end," the Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord—people who are part of these people that God classifies as Thyatira.

Sardis:

Revelation 3:3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch [here we have "end time" terminology], I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. . .

That is "end time" language to those who are part of Sardis.

Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:10 "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world."

Now hey, was God only talking to a little congregation in the city of Philadelphia, in Western Asia Minor? Or was He talking to a group of people that are scattered over the whole world? If these people are not scattered over the whole world, why did He mention the whole world? It is because it concerns people who are "Philadelphians," around the whole world. Now if this does not fit into Jeremiah 30, Isaiah 26, Daniel 12, and Matthew 24, I do not know what does. We are talking about a group of people who are at the "time of the end."

Revelation 3:10-11 ". . . to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! [other end time language] Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."

Laodicea:

Revelation 3:18-19 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire [Ah, interesting language here], that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

Is that end-time language? I certainly think it is. Again when we view it within the context of the book, He is saying, "I am so close (in terms of time)—when this group of people exists, that I'm right at the door."

Revelation 3:20 "If any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." [Indicating a very intimate relationship.]

What do we have there? We have two full eras and at the very least, two remnants of two other eras that are existing at the end, but only one of the four is delivered from the hour of trial.

We need to connect the testing that is mentioned in Revelation 3:10 with I Corinthians 10:13.

Now what about the Laodiceans? Well, prophecy tends to show that the Laodiceans will die proving their loyalty and their zeal to God. Let us turn to Ezekiel 5.

Ezekiel 5:1 "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, and take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair."

I want you to note that God's instruction to Ezekiel was that he was to shave his head and beard and then it was to be precisely divided. It was not just a matter of, "well divide it into three piles." No, He told Ezekiel to use balances and I think what He wanted here (since no other information is given) is for each of the piles to weigh exactly the same amount. So we have a very precise division or separation of the hairs of his head, which of course you understand represent the population of the nations of Israel.

Ezekiel 5:2-3 "You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw a sword out after them. You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment."

Now I think the "them" from the context has to be the last of the third, those that he is to scatter in the wind. So we have one pile here, one pile here, another pile here. That third pile he takes and throws it. However before he does it, he just takes a small number of that pile and holds it back and he puts it into the folds of his garment, or (as we might say) into his pocket. Then what remains, he throws up into the air and it just gets blown away. Now we understand this of course means that it represents those people being blown into all nations, being scattered in captivity.

Ezekiel 5:4, 12 "Then take some of them again [the "them" here refers to the small number that he took from that third group. So now he takes the ones out of his pocket and puts it into the palm of his hand, the hair that is there and then he takes some of that and he throws it into the fire] and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From from there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel. . . . One-third of you shall die in the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them."

Now here is what I think. We are talking here about the nations of Israel. I said earlier that most of the church is in the nations of Israel, primarily the United States and Canada. I believe the "small number" taken from the third group, which goes into captivity, and is thrown to the "four winds"—represented by the hair that he puts into his pocket—represents the church, showing a *measure* of protection. However, he then takes from that group [a part], and throws it into the fire. Now hair is the most flammable part of the body, and surely, brethren, it must indicate death.

Now you can connect this with the fifth seal of Revelation 6: the martyrdom of the saints. You can connect it with Revelation 3 and those people who are represented by the hair put into Ezekiel's pocket, which remained there. These are the Philadelphians who are kept from the hour of trial that comes upon the whole earth. The group that he took out from his pocket and threw into the fire (and therefore burned up—consumed in the fires of tribulation) represents the Laodicean church. It surely seems to indicate that very few, if any, of them are going to survive through the tribulation. Five segregations, five separations are indicated here in Ezekiel 5, but only one very small amount is protected in the fold of his skirt.