God's Promise to the Nations

All the Families of the Earth Will Be Blessed

Because of Israel's unique place in God's story, a significant amount of the end time drama revolves around God resolving Israel's situation and fulfilling Israel's promises. That is why it is so key that we understand both Israel's promises and Israel's covenental crisis. However, Israel's story is also part of God's story for the nations. God began His plan with Abraham out of His desire to save the nations.

Therefore, we must also understand God's promise to the nations and how it also sets the stage for end time events. The Bible describes what the fulfillment of this promise looks like and that helps us to understand the end-time church and the role it plays in God's redemptive plan.

Paul tells us the promise made to Abraham is God's great promise to release salvation among the nations:

...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3)

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:8)

The nations were not an afterthought to God, and the salvation of the gentiles was not God's new idea after Israel failed in her covenant calling. God made His promises to Abraham in order to save the nations. Just as the New Testament is not the end of Israel's story, it is also not the beginning of the story of the nations. This is why Paul reminded the church in Ephesus, which was composed primarily of gentiles, God had them in His mind before the foundation of the world:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Ephesians 1:3–5)

Abraham's three promises are tightly woven together. As redemptive history unfolds, all three promises also become interdependent on each other. The nations cannot receive the knowledge of God and salvation apart from God's work through Israel. At the same time Israel's salvation depends on a witness that will come from the nations. God has made us all

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1 See Romans 9:4-5.
interdependent so that we all embrace humility. Jesus came both to confirm - we could also say “guarantee” - the promises made to the Jewish patriarchs and so that the gentiles would glorify God for His mercy:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” (Romans 15:8–9)

God’s promises to Israel and the nations are so deeply connected the redemptive plan unites Jew and gentile into one body. Paul refers to God’s plan to bring together Jew and gentile as the “Mystery of Christ:“

remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:12–16)

how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:3-6)

God’s plan to fulfill Abraham’s promises includes fulfilling distinct promises to Israel, but also involves bringing Jew and gentile together in one body. Because Israel and the gentiles are one family in Jesus, it means we will receive the promises made to us together, as a family, at the same time. The end time church is God’s fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham about the nations. To understand what the fulfillment of that promises looks like, we need to see what the Bible says about the end time church.

God’s Desire for the Nations

The Old Testament authors understood God’s desire for the nations in a measure. Isaiah declared that “it was not enough” for Messiah to receive Israel as His only reward. When you read the Old Testament you can feel God’s desire for the nations:
“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. (Psalm 2:6-8)

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! (Psalm 67:1-5)

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. (Psalm 86:9)

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:1-3)

They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the Lord they shout from the west. Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One.. (Isaiah 24:14-16)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isaiah 42:1)

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, (Isaiah 42:6)

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:22)

he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord. And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. (Zechariah 2:10-11)

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:11)

The book of Jonah is an example of God’s deep desire for the nations. God sent Jonah to preach to the most wicked nation that Jonah could imagine, and Jonah was frustrated
because he wanted to see Assyria punished and he knew God would show Assyria mercy if they repented:

And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. (Jonah 4:2)

God’s final statement to Jonah reveals God’s deep heart for the gentiles - even the ones considered most wicked:

And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:10-11)

While the Old Testament focuses primarily on Israel’s story, it also makes it clear that God also has the nations in mind. This becomes even more clear in the New Testament. When Jesus commission the disciples, He sends them to the nations:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Paul describes God’s great plan to save the Gentiles and bring them to fullness:

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (Romans 3:29-30)
Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25)
For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” (Romans 15:8-12)
The Church Will Come to Maturity

In Ephesians, Paul predicts that God’s activity in the nations will produce a mature church:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (Ephesians 4:11–13)

Paul’s prediction is profound: the church will come to the knowledge of God, mature manhood, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is where the church is going and what must be accomplished in the church before Jesus will return. It is the reason Jesus died:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

Paul identifies several things that Jesus’ suffering will accomplish for the church. It sanctifies the church. The word sanctifies means set apart for a special purpose and includes the idea of holiness. It cleanses the church. In the same way that ancient Israelites would wash themselves ceremonially to be clean to approach God, Jesus’ words cleanse the church so that we can approach God. Jesus will present the church to himself in splendor without spot, wrinkle, or any kind of imperfection.

Paul uses the analogy of marriage to describe Jesus’ relationship to the church, and uses that analogy to describe Jesus’ work in the church. He will bring the church to maturity because He died in order to have a church that is holy and without blemish. John the Baptist used this same analogy when he described Jesus as a Bridegroom and used a wedding analogy to describe his ministry of preparing the people for Jesus:

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. (John 3:29)

When we think of a bride and a wedding, we think of a mature and beautiful woman who has taken every effort to be attractive to her bridegroom. The same is true of the church. Jesus died so the church can be mature and beautiful - a partner fit for Him. This is why this kind of language is used throughout the New Testament:

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (Ephesians 1:4)
For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)
he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (Colossians 1:22)

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” (Revelation 19:7–9)

The Father wants to give His Son a bride from the nations as a reward for His suffering. Because He is a good father, this reveals a lot about the end time church. The end of the age is the time when the church will be mature and ready to be joined with Him forever. This is why Jesus’ return is compared to a great wedding celebration. Jesus is not returning for a bride that is barely surviving; He is returning for a mature church that the powers of hell cannot overcome:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

All of this is part of what it means for the nations to be blessed. We have far underestimated the glory that God is going to put on the church. The Bible even promises when we see Him we will be like Him.

who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:21)

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

Jesus’ work in the church is going to prepare a people to receive a body as glorious as His body, because when Jesus returns He will receive a bride prepared to be a suitable partner for Him for all eternity.

No matter what immaturity we may see in the church now, the Bible promises a mature church will emerge. The church consists of both Jew and gentile so this is a promise for all people groups, but it has profound implications for the church in the nations. The Old Testament predicted that a day would come when all Israel is saved and holy, but the New Testament expands that promise and predicts Jesus will have a people, both Jew and gentile, who are mature at His return.
The end time church is unoffended, deeply loyal to Jesus, and living with great anticipation of His return.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:11)
And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Revelation 15:2–4)

The book of Daniel also describes the end time church:

He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. (Daniel 11:32–33)
And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

There will be a people who know their God will stand firm in the face of the Antichrist and “take action.” They will instruct many people and cause them to also understand the Word of God. There will also “turn many to righteousness.” This is a description of a church that is persecuted by the Antichrist, but also a church that is actively proclaiming the Word of God, engaged in God’s activity, and turning many to righteousness. Daniel sees an end time church that is missional, mature, and causing many to come into the kingdom.

The biblical description of the end time church is stunning. It is mature and unoffended. It is deep in love with Jesus and worshipping God for all His mighty deeds, even in the middle of great tribulation. It is faithful and loyal to Jesus even unto death. None of these predictions minimize the great trials, persecution, suffering, conflicts, and tests the end time church will face. The Bible predicts many end time saints will lose their lives because of their faithfulness to Jesus. However, suffering and faithfulness unto death is not a sign of a weak church – it is one of the signs of a vibrant, mature church strengthened by revival during the rule of the Antichrist.

Global End Time Revival
The book of Revelation describes God’s great promise to bring salvation to the gentiles and how it is fulfilled through an end time revival in the nations. The salvation of the nations, like Israel’s national salvation, is associated with the return of the Lord:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, (Revelation 5:9)
After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (Revelation 7:9)

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. (Revelation 14:6)

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Revelation 15:4)

All this is evidence the gospel is being preached through the nations during the end times all the way to the return of Jesus and His judgments. Missions will be ongoing even during the reign of the Antichrist. The Scripture repeatedly predicts a global harvest, but the book of Revelation is the only book that shows us the results of that harvest. This is because the final harvest comes in during the end times.

Revelation 7 describes the scope of the end time revival that brings God’s promise to fulfillment:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”…Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-10, 13-14)

In Revelation 7, John encounters a great multitude no man can number. The elder asks John where this multitude comes from because it is very important that John knows who these people are to understand God’s end time activity. Because John does not know where this multitude has come from, the elder tells him that these are the saints who came out of the great tribulation. Most commentators believe these are the martyrs of the great tribulation,
but regardless of whether John sees only the matters of the great tribulation or the entire end
time church, the message is profound.

John saw a massive number of people - a multitude “no one could number.” Many people
tend to assume the end time church will barely survive, but John sees something complete
different. He sees an enormous end time church that can only be the result of a great harvest
beyond anything we have seen so far in history. We don’t know how many people it will be,
or what percentage of the earth’s population it will be but it is clearly substantial. As a point of
comparison, in Revelation 9:16 John described an army of 200 million so the fact that no one
can number this multitude means it is an incredibly large group of people.

Not only does John see an enormous church, he also records this church comes from every
tribe and tongue. That means the end time harvest is global. When God brings His promise
to fulfillment, there will not be a single people group or nation who are not represented.
Revival will sweep the earth and touch every people group. Something unprecedented must
happen to produce the multitude John sees.

This end time revival is so profound it will result in some of Israel’s greatest enemies
becoming fully devoted to Jesus and in partnership with His purposes. Isaiah 19 predicts a
dramatic transformation in nations who have historically been Israel’s enemies:

In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the
earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and
Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:24–25)

The fact that this harvest happens during the rule of the Antichrist is astounding.
The End Time Harvest

The Great End Time Harvest

Harvest language is all throughout the New Testament. Recognizing this language and how the New Testament authors used it is key to understanding the Bible’s prediction of a great end time harvest.

John the Baptist described Jesus as the one who would harvest the earth:\(^3\)

\[ \text{His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.} \ (\text{Matthew 3:12}) \]

Jesus described His second coming as the time of harvest:\(^4\)

\[ \text{He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’} \ (\text{Matthew 13:24-30}) \]

In Jesus’ parable the end of the age is the great harvest for both righteousness and wickedness. Evil will reach its climax during the end times, but this is also the time the church will come to fullness. Both happen at the same time which makes the end of the age a spectacular time unlike any other time in human history. When we neglect either harvest we end up with an unbiblical view of the end times.

Jesus also used a fishing analogy to describe the end of the age. He describes the end of the age as the time when the nets are full and it is time to “harvest” the fish caught.

\[ \text{“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the} \]

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\(^3\) See also Luke 3:17.

\(^4\) See also Mark 4:26-29.
good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age...
(Matthew 13:47-49)

The book of Revelation describes the great harvest of the earth and once again we see the harvest of both the righteous and the wicked.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia. (Revelation 14:14-20)

Understanding Israel's agricultural cycle also helps us understand why the biblical authors expected an end time harvest. Ancient Israel's agricultural calendar began in the fall with what were called the early rains. These rains ended the dryness of summer and produced a harvest of things like nuts and tree fruits. The early harvest sustained the people and the early rains softened the ground so it could be worked to produce a later harvest. In the spring the late rains would come. They were much heavier than the early rains and they brought in the greatest harvest. This is when the primary staples like wheat and barley were harvested. The two rains and two harvests were connected. Without the early rains there was not food to sustain the people and the ground was not prepared for the subsequent work. Without the early rains, the later rains would fall on hard, dry ground and destroy everything. The later rains depended on the early rains, but the later rains were much heavier and brought a much larger harvest. This larger harvest marked the end of the growing season.

The biblical phrase “firstfruits” is used to refer to the first part of the harvest after the early rains. Paul uses that metaphor to describe the present gift of the Spirit that we enjoy as “firstfruits” compared to what we will enjoy when we are resurrected from the dead and receive all the benefits of our salvation. Paul understood what we have not as the “early harvest” and he expected the greater “late harvest” to come at the resurrection which comes at the return of the Lord.5

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And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23)

The apostles used Israel’s cycle of harvest to describe what God was doing in their generation and this created expectation for a great harvest that would occur at the end of the age when the church came into maturity. This is why Paul and James both referred to the early church as a “firstfruits” of the harvest that was coming:

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:18)

The early church understood that an early rain of the Spirit had produced an early harvest and that a later rain would be required for a later harvest. The idea of an early harvest without a second, greater harvest or an early rain without a harder, heavier later rain would have been very confusing to the first century church. They were experiencing “early rains” and an “early (firstfruits) harvest” and this meant later rains and a later harvest would come at the end of the age.

It is critical to understand Israel’s harvest cycle to properly interpret what the apostles believed about the end of the age. This cycle of harvest is the key to understanding the book of Acts and its implications for the end time move of God. Peter’s perspective of harvest is what caused him to describe the outpouring of the Spirit as a manifestation of Joel’s prophecy:

But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (Acts 2:16–17)

Joel predicted an outpouring of the Spirit accompanied by the deliverance of Israel and dramatic end time signs in the earth. None of these things happened in Peter’s generation and yet Peter clearly saw a connection between Acts 2 and Joel’s prophecy because of Joel 2:23:

“Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. (Joel 2:23)

In Joel 2:23, Joel reminded his readers the Lord gives abundant rain in the form of early and later rains with accompanying early and later harvests. Peter recognized what was happening Acts 2 as an early rain and early harvest of what was coming. What happened in the book of
Acts was directly connected to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy because it began with an outpouring of the Spirit and resulted in a harvest both in Israel and among the gentiles. However it is clearly not the fulfillment of all that Joel prophesied. As Joel prophesied there must be an early rain and then a later rain. The key to understanding how Peter connected the day of Pentecost with Joel’s prophecy is realizing Peter understood Pentecost as an early rain that pointed to a much harder later rain.

The book of Joel and the book of Acts interpret each other. The book of Joel speaks of the early rains, but focuses primarily on the end time outpouring of the Spirit and God’s end time judgments. The book of Acts is the opposite. It speaks of the end time outpouring and end time judgments, but focuses primarily on the early rains and early harvest of the church.

In the same way early rains produce a smaller harvest and prepare the ground to receive the later rain, so also the work that God began in the book of Acts has produced a harvest in the nations and prepared the nations to receive the harder later rains. However, God’s harvest in the nations is incomplete until a final rain, which is much greater in scope than Acts 2, falls and produces a much greater harvest than what the first century church experienced.

Using the agricultural calendar of Israel as an analogy, God’s work in the Old Testament was like Israel’s dry summer. That dry summer ended with the early rains of the Spirit which produced an initial harvest. This is what began on the day of Pentecost. It began a season of planting and harvesting (Peter refers to this as the broader “last days”) which is leading to a time when God releases the great later rains which bring the later, and bigger, harvest to maturity.

James used this analogy of early and later rains, and early and later harvests, to summarize God’s work in the time between Jesus’ first and second coming:

*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. (James 5:7)*

We live after the early rain, but before the late rain and we are called to labor in the nations to prepare for the late rain and the great harvests. The book of Acts describes the early rain and harvest that provides a picture of what the final harvest will look like. The book of Acts describes a regional outpouring of the Spirit, but the end time outpouring of the Spirit is global. Acts describes a regional harvest among Jews and gentiles in the Roman Empire, but the end time revival produces a global harvest from every tribe and tongue. Acts is a pattern we can use to understand what the Bible predicts about the end time revival. The early rains on the day of Pentecost did not fulfill Joel’s prophecy, but they are part of Joel’s prophecy that an early rain would come. Acts 2 is a small picture of the coming outpouring of the Spirit that will fulfill Joel 2.
The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a guarantee the later rains would come. If Jesus’ ascension into heaven produced the early rains and an early harvest in the nations, how much more will His return to earth produce the later rains and the greater harvest? The labor of the church for 2,000 can be compared to the labor of a farmer preparing the ground of harvest. Just as the early rain in ancient Israel enabled farmers to labor for the great harvest, so also the outpouring of the Spirit we enjoy enables us to work for a great coming harvest.

The Bible repeatedly describes the ends times as the time when the harvest is gathered in of the earth. Unfortunately some in the church have seen the end times only as a time of unsurpassed trouble, but biblically it is also the time of harvest. With the modern explosion of population in the earth, a global revival could easily produce more Christians on earth than are in heaven and this makes sense of the passages that describe God harvesting His people from the earth.

The Bible compares the mature end time church to a bride prepared for a wedding. It is not an accident that Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding and the people’s response to the miracle is a prophetic statement for us. God’s best things are to come. He has saved the great outpouring and harvest for the end of the age:

…“Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” (John 2:10)

Even Israel’s full salvation will not come until the fullness (harvest) of the gentiles (nations) comes in:

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25)

The harvest of the nations is predicted throughout the Bible, but the harvest from the nations is only seen in the book of Revelation.6 To understand the end times correctly, we must understand it is a time of harvest. Not only will Israel come to salvation at this time, the harvest from the nations will also be gathered in.

The Power of God and the End Time Church

As we saw earlier, the Bible predicts a coming second Exodus – a time when God delivers His people in power and does something so dramatic it causes people to no longer refer to Him as the God of the Exodus.7 If God is going to release His power in the nations on behalf of

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6 See Revelation 5:9; 7:9.
Israel in a way that far exceeds what He did in the Exodus, it has significant implications for how we understand what God is going to do in and through His people.

The story of Israel and the nations is deeply intertwined because Israel and the nations become one people under the leadership of Jesus. Jesus has brought together Jew and gentile into one body and grafted the gentiles into Israel, and when He releases His power in this way it will affect every part of His body. The promise of a second Exodus means all God’s people will experience an unprecedented demonstration of God’s power — Jew and gentile.

We can hardly imagine God releasing His power in modern times in the way He did during the Exodus. God demonstrated His absolute control over creation and in the process destroyed the most powerful empire in the earth. Yet, the Bible tells us that God’s end time activity will be so profound it cannot be compared to the Exodus. God released His power in the ancient Exodus on behalf of His people, and He will also release His end time power on behalf of His people.

In the book of Acts as opposition increased against the gospel, God released supernatural power to advance the gospel. This is a pattern that helps us to understand the end time church. If God released unusual power to establish the church amidst Roman opposition, how much more will He release great power on the church to resist the most evil man in history and Satan’s great rage?

Revelation 11 gives us a small picture of the power God will release during this time in history:

> And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. (Revelation 11:3–6)

Though the two witnesses in Revelation 11 are mysterious, the message is clear: God will release dramatic power on His people during the end times to accomplish His purposes. They will be in Jerusalem as a statement of God’s commitment to Israel. These two witness will “prophecy” accompanied by power. In the same way the end time church will proclaim the gospel with unusual signs and wonders. This is why Jesus predicted that “greater works” were available for the church:

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8 See Romans 11:17; Ephesians 2:12-13.
“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)

We looked closely at Revelation 12 in a previous section. It not only describes the intensity of the end times, it also reveals quite a bit about the church in the end times:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Revelation 12:10-12)

The end time church will be marked by martyrdom because they will “love not their lives even unto death.” This is a statement of maturity. The situation on the earth will be severe because the devil will have great wrath because he realizes his time is short. However, at the same time the earth suffers the effects of Satan’s end time rage, heaven rejoices because the salvation and power of God are being released. God will release power and glory to match Satan’s rage.

Isaiah also tells us God’s glory will rest on His people in the middle of the end time trouble:

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. (Isaiah 60:2)

All of these promises have massive implications for how we think about the end time church. The church in the end times is never presented as a tiny remnant barely surviving. The end times is a climax of both negative and positive dynamics, and by examining everything the Bible says about the end time church, we can easily conclude God will release the most powerful signs and wonders at the end of the age.
The End Time Church

Extravagant Worship and Prayer

The Bible repeatedly predicts extravagant worship and prayer will be a key characteristic of the end time church. This is another biblical indicator of the maturity and size of the end time church and we should be familiar with it. Only a great end time revival of the kind Revelation 7:9 describes could produce the extravagant worship and prayer the Bible predicts.

Worship and prayer are normal in the church, but the end time church will be marked by worship and prayer on an unusual scale with a global scope. This expression in the church will be so profound that it challenges the Antichrist. Some verses highlight worship and other verses highlight prayer, but together these passages give us a description of the end time church.

Worship can be described as agreement with who God is while prayer be defined as agreement with what God wants to do. When we look at the end time songs and prayers of the church they contain both of these elements. Over the last several decades, we have increasingly seen worship and prayer come together in the church as a single expression that celebrates who God is and agrees with what He wants to do in the earth. This is a foreshadowing of the end time church.

One of the most striking predictions of the end time church in Revelation 20 is that a day will come when the Spirit and the bride say come:

*The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” (Revelation 22:17)*

That single phrase “come” encapsulates a global cry for the return of Jesus. That cry is not unique to the book of Revelation. The Bible repeatedly describes a global cry that will emerge on the earth before Jesus returns. This global cry will be one of the most vivid expressions of God’s triumph over Satan. In the garden, Satan convinced man to reject God. However, a great cry is going to erupt in the earth. It will be a cry of agreement with God’s activity in the earth, a cry of invitation for God to return to the earth, and a cry of desire for the Son of God to return.

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The church will take its place in the nations as one human voice and invite the Son of God to take over the earth. What makes this cry even more majestic is that it will come during the darkest hour of history. It will reach its climax during the reign of the Antichrist and it will be a beautiful, global expression of love and devotion to Jesus. It will be the cry of a bride who is no longer content with separation from her bridegroom. It is one of the Father’s great gifts to His Son and Jesus will answer that cry with His majestic return.10

The Psalmist commands the nations to sing in light of the Lord’s return which tells us the Lord’s return will be welcomed with joyful and extravagant singing among God’s people. These Psalms are instructions to be obeyed, but they are more than that. They are prophecies of a global church who will sing about the coming of the Lord.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm 96:7–13)

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98:4–9)

The prophets also describe extravagant worship in the nations. Isaiah tells us quite a bit about the end time church in Isaiah 24:

The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish…Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left…The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it…Desolation is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done. They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over

the majesty of the Lord they shout from the west. Therefore in the east give glory to the 
Lord; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. 
From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One...
(Isaiah 24:4, 6, 7-9, 12-16)

Isaiah 24 makes a powerful description. First Isaiah describes the deep darkness that will 
cover the earth during the reign of the Antichrist. Songs will cease. Celebration will cease. 
Even the powerful people of the earth will suffer. In the middle of this unparalleled time of 
trouble and great darkness, Isaiah predicts that songs will suddenly erupt in the nations. 
Isaiah predicts songs will come from the very ends of the earth declaring the glory of God in 
the midst of the darkest hour of human history.

Isaiah’s prophecy is a profound statement of the end time church’s maturity. The Antichrist 
will not be able to overcome this church. They will challenge him by releasing their songs, 
and God will use these end time songs to release courage across the nations. The fact that 
these songs are heard across the earth means the end time church is a significant force in the 
earth. This is the great multitude that John cannot number in Revelation 7:9. When no one 
else has hope, they will have hope. When no one else sings, they will sing proclamations of 
the beauty of God.

Isaiah predicts this end time expression of extravagant worship again in Isaiah 42:

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to 
the sea, and all that fills it, the coastslands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its 
cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the habitants of Sela sing for 
joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and 
declare his praise in the coastlands. The Lord goes out like a mighty man, like a man of 
war he stirs up his zeal; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against 
his foes. For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; 
now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains 
and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the 
pools. (Isaiah 42:10-15)

Isaiah commands the nations to sing from the very ends of the earth and associates 
extravagant worship with the return of the Lord. Isaiah 42 tells us that Jesus’ return is a 
response to a cry of worship and intercession on the earth. Jesus will release His own cry that 
is described as a “woman in labor.” The strength of Jesus’ response tells us quite a bit about 
the strength of the church’s cry. God cries out in His strength because the church has cried 
out in hers.

In both Isaiah 24 and 42, Isaiah predicts extravagant worship and prayer connected to the 
return of the Jesus that will reach a climax during the rule of the Antichrist. This end time

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11 See Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1; Joel 2:2; Matthew 24:21.
church will not only be a witness in the nations, but it will also be a strength to Israel. Isaiah summarizes this in Isaiah 62:

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give...On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth...Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.” And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken. (Isaiah 62:1-2, 6-7, 11–12)

Isaiah 62 is a message for the end time church. God’s will not be silent with regard to the future of Jerusalem because the nations are going to see the glory and wonder of His salvation in Israel. When God says He will not be silent, He is inviting us to not be silent either. We are to be like watchmen. Watchmen look for what is coming. We know what is coming because of the Scriptures. In light of those Scriptures, we are to cry out and give the Lord “no rest” until He fulfills His promises.

In Isaiah 62:11-12, God commands the nations to declare His promises to Israel. This is part of the calling of the end time church in the nations. God will not be silent, so we will not be silent. He cannot rest until His purposes are accomplished and He invites us to raise up a sound that will not allow Him to rest. This is an invitation to intercession - God is asking the church for intercession that will not stop until He accomplishes everything He wants to do.

This is in invitation to us to play a deep role in God’s fulfillment of His promises. God wants to release His end time deliverance in response to our prayers. God does not give this kind of invitation unless He knows His people will respond to it. Therefore the invitation of Isaiah 62 is ultimately a prophecy of the mature church. A time will come when the earth is filled with ceaseless intercession that will not stop until God fulfills all that He has spoken. This end time church will agree with God’s purposes for Israel and ask God to fulfill them and in the process, be a witness to Israel as well of the faithfulness of her God.

Malachi also predicts that God will receive extravagant worship from the nations:

“For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:11)

God’s intension is that worship will fill the nations and that His name would be great in every place. He is not willing to surrender any part of the earth. Worship will fill every part. He is
also unwilling to surrender any part of the day. God predicts worship will fill the nations in an extravagant way—something beyond far beyond an hour here and there.

The context of Malachi 1 makes this prophecy even more profound. Malachi 1 describes Israel’s failure to operate as a priestly people. God provokes Israel in this chapter with the prediction that He is going to establish worship and priestly ministry in all the nations. This statement reveals two key things about the end time church.

First, the worship of the nations is connected to the recovery of Israel’s priestly calling. By being a priestly people in the nations, the church will play a part in God’s plan to call Israel back to her priestly calling. This is part of what Paul refers to as God’s plan to provoke Israel through the gentiles.\(^{12}\)

Second, it means that Israel’s priestly ministry is a prototype of what God is going to raise up in the nations. The worship ministry God established in Israel was extravagant. It went day and night. It was the central function of the nation. In the same way, the ministry of worship and intercession will become central in the church. It will be extravagant. It will be night and day, just as it was in Israel. The risen Jesus is not worthy of less adoration than He was in the Old Testament.

The entire nation of Israel was priestly,\(^ {13}\) just as the entire church is priestly,\(^ {14}\) but specific individuals within Israel made the maintenance of night and day worship their full-time, primary vocation. In the same way, there will be people in the church who maintain night and day worship and prayer as their full-time vocation. We have had full-time Christian workers throughout history and it will take full-time singers and musicians to fulfill what the prophets have predicted.

In Luke 17:22-37 Jesus answers questions about His return and describes how dramatic that day will be:

> For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. (Luke 17:24)

He then gives a parable with instructions on how to prepare for His return:

> And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by

\(^ {12}\) See Romans 11:11.

\(^ {13}\) See Exodus 19:6.

\(^ {14}\) See 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.
In the parable, Jesus highlights the constant intercession of a widow looking for justice. She will not stop so she continues to ask an unwilling judge for what she wants until she gets it. Jesus ends the parable with the question, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Faith, in this context, is the consistent intercession of the widow. Luke tells us the point of the parable is that we should always pray and not lose heart, and in the parable, Jesus puts a priority on extravagant intercession as the means of preparing for His return.

The second main point is that we will get what we ask when we come in confidence. Jesus knows that it will seem at times as if God is not listening or answering. He knows the end time church will especially face this temptation when they see the Antichrist rise to power. However, His message to the church is to keep asking with confidence that God will answer. Jesus ends the parable with an invitation for the end time church. He is looking for a mature church operating in faith and the parable gives instructions to the church on how to be the church Jesus will find when He returns.

Jesus also asked us to pray earth would become like heaven:

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

When John is caught up in Revelation 4-5, he sees the glory of God in the midst of an extravagant expression of intercession and worship. He sees the living creatures cry out because of the glory of God and elders who carry harps (music) and bowls full of the saints’ prayers (intercession). John’s glimpse into heaven in Revelation 4-5 gives us a picture of what Jesus asked us to pray for, and when the Father’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, the earth will be filled with worship and prayer in the same way heaven is.

Paul labored among the gentiles to see a great expression of worship erupt in the nations. In Romans 15 he quoted Old Testament passages\(^\text{15}\) describing Israel’s worship ministry and applied them to the gentiles because he understood the centrality of worship in ancient Israel was meant to be a pattern for the church.

\(^{15}\) See 2 Samuel 22:50; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 18:49; 117:1.
For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” (Romans 15:8-12)

This is God’s ultimate goal for world missions. We are called to do more than evangelize and plant churches. We are called to labor to see extravagant worship in the nations. John Piper summarizes the mission of the church with his well-known statement in his book on missions:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.  

Because Jesus died for the worship of the nations, we can be guaranteed that history is building to a moment when the nations release extravagant songs of praise. The prophets predicted it and the apostles labored for it. When the book of Revelation describes every tribe and tongue, they are in the place of worship and intercession:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10)

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9-10)

The message is clear. The mature church in every tribe and tongue will emerge in the end times and when it emerges it will release a profound cry. That cry will be global and come from every people group. It will declare the beauty and majesty of Jesus and function in a priestly identity before the Lord. The book of Revelation is emphasizing that there are primary characteristics of the end time church because this is what the church will look like when it reaches every tribe and tongue.

The book of Revelation also tells us the intercession of the church will set God’s end time activity into motion:

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And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. (Revelation 8:3–5)

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! (Revelation 15:3)

Extravagant prayer is captured in heaven and combined with God’s activity to set His end time plan in motion. John was given this vision to give us courage to obey Luke 18. When it seems like our prayers are not being answered, God is collecting them and they will play a part in releasing His activity. The end time church is confident singing songs of worship and celebration and interceding for God’s purposes. These passages give us a picture of the end time church in order to provoke us to confident, bold intercession.

God’s end time deliverance is dependent on a praying church because He is committed to producing that kind of church. That is why Jesus gave us the parable of Luke 18. If we obey that parable, we become the church of Revelation 8. This does not mean we are to specifically pray for God’s end time judgments, it simply means consistent intercession in agreement with God will set His activity into motion.

Songs and prayers naturally come to human beings, so when the Bible predicts extravagant worship and prayer it is predicting something beyond what we currently consider to be “normal.” The prophets predicted something with a global impact during the reign of the Antichrist. They predicted a sound that could not be silenced when all other human songs will go silent. They heard songs that would give hope to the nations, describe the glory of God, and strengthen Israel during the end time crisis. The prophets saw something extravagant, global, mature, and impossible to ignore. They heard and predicted a global cry - something we have not yet seen or heard. It will take a mature church to resist the Antichrist and release these kinds of songs during the end times. That church will be significant enough that the nations will be provoked by their songs.

God's Plan to Establish Night and Day Prayer

When God began His redemptive plan with Israel the first thing He did, before He brought them into a land, was to establish a worship ministry at the very center of the nation. He put priests in place, not simply to manage sacrifices, but to maintain night and day worship. He

17 Symbolized by the daily burning of incense, lamps, and the showbread. See Exodus 25:30, 37; 30:1.
called the entire nation, not only the vocational priests, to be a priestly nation. This emphasis on worship is a foreshadowing of God’s ultimate intention for the church.

King David was the greatest King of Israel and one of the primary prototypes of the Messiah. God loved David’s heart so much that He made an unconditional promise that Messiah would be David’s Son. David’s burden for night and day worship and the presence of God among His people is one of the reasons David is referred to as a man after God’s heart. Before he was a king, David was a shepherd who spent a lot of time alone taking care of the animals. David used this time alone to minister to God and compose songs. Though David was a shepherd and a king, he was a priest at heart and that is what qualified Him to be Israel’s greatest king. When David became king he was driven by a desire to build a “resting place” on the earth for the Lord’s presence:

Remember, O Lord, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured, how he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, “I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.” (Psalm 132:1-5)

Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. (Acts 7:45-46)

Our deepest desire and longing is for the return of Jesus so that God would dwell physically on the earth among His people. Until that day comes, God dwells among His people in the context of night and day worship. David understood this and this is why the most unique characteristic of David’s rule was what we refer to as “David’s Tabernacle” a worship sanctuary where David took the Ark of the Covenant, which represented God’s presence among His people, and he put it in a tabernacle and set in place singers and musicians to sing night and day about the glory of God.

What we must understand about David’s tabernacle is that it was a prophetic expression of God’s intention. David was demonstrating something that would come in the future. There were no sacrifices in David’s Tabernacle only night and day worship. It was an expression of a new reality that was coming, and that new reality has a New Testament expression.

The reformers in Israel who came after David understood the significance of this worship ministry and reestablished it as part of their reforms. John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray, and the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray because of how central it was to

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19 See 2 Samuel 7:8-17.
21 See Psalm 9:11, 22:3; 65:1; 102:21; 147:12.
who Jesus was. When the church began, there was night and day worship at the temple and the early church in Jerusalem valued the ministry happening at the temple. The book of Acts shows the early church gave a primary place to corporate worship and prayer. Paul instructed the churches to sing spiritual songs to each other and labored for an expressive, singing church. All of these were prototypes of what is coming and the end of the age is the time when God brings the fulfillment of the types and shadows of the Old Testament.

The Mature Church and the End Time Crisis

We can hardly anticipate all that was in God’s heart and mind when he gave Abraham the promise to bless the nations in Genesis 12:3. That blessing is described throughout history and it will come to pass before the age ends. Just as we can hardly anticipate the glory of Israel’s salvation, so we can hardly anticipate the glory that is coming on the mature church.

The end times is both a time of glory as the church comes to maturity and also a time of unparalleled crisis when the Antichrist takes the stage of human history. To have an accurate picture of the end times cannot underestimate either one of these themes.

Some have underestimated the glory of the mature end time church. When we do this, we miss what the Bible says about the church, the Antichrist dominates our thinking and we become driven by fear with no faith for what God will do in the middle of the end times. This is why we have examined what the Bible says about the end time church.

Others focus only on the church and do not soberly consider what the Bible says about the end time crisis. It will be an unparalleled time of trouble. When we think of the massive crises throughout history none of them come close. This one will exceed them all. The prophets use dramatic language to describe what will happen so we will be prepared for it. We cannot ignore or minimize what the Bible says:

They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. (Isaiah 13:8)

Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labor; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I cannot see. (Isaiah 21:3)

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26 See Romans 15:8-11; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.
Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it. (Jeremiah 30:6–7)

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. (Daniel 12:1)

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light. (Amos 5:18)

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, (Zephaniah 1:15)

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (Matthew 24:21)

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Revelation 12:12)

We cannot soften the blows of these verses. Something is coming that goes beyond every crisis history has experienced up to this point. It will be the final conflict between God and His enemies for the salvation and restoration of the earth.

However, in the middle of this crisis, God will have a people. They will be mature and unoffended. They will know their God, have understanding about the end time crisis, stand firm, and take action.

…the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand… (Daniel 11:32–33)

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

The end times will be unprecedented in their trouble, but it will simultaneously be a time of missions. The church will not only be resisting, the church will be active in God’s work. The gospel will expand even during the reign of the Antichrist.

The Church - God's Embassy on the Earth

Paul describes the church as God’s “ambassadors” because our citizenship is in heaven. Paul’s analogy of the church as a people of ambassadors is one of the best ways to understand the Kingdom of God in this age. Each church is an embassy of another kingdom.

See 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 6:20; Philippians 3:20.
We live in the kingdoms of this world, but we represent another kingdom. In the same way that a country’s embassy is not the fullness of that country, but a representation of it, so also the church in this age is not the fullness of the kingdom, but it points to the kingdom that is coming.

An embassy is not the fullness of the country it represents, but when you visit that embassy you encounter the values of the country it represents. You hear the language of that country and experience its cultures. The embassy is a place where you can encounter a representation of another country. It is not the fullness of that country, but it is an outpost of that country working on its behalf in the midst of a foreign country.

In the same way the church in this age is not the fullness of the kingdom. However, the church is a valid expression of the kingdom. It is part of the kingdom and when people come into the church they experience the values and the power of the kingdom the church points to. Our assignment in this age is to build as many “embassies” of the coming kingdom as we can. The church is a place in this age where people can taste the kingdom that is coming. It is God’s provision for the nations during the end times. Through the church the nations will experience the power of the coming kingdom and be invited to resist the Antichrist and declare loyalty to the coming King.