

# THE PERFECT AND COMPLETE GOSPEL OF BOTH COMINGS OF JESUS CHRIST:

## RECLAIMING ESCHATOLOGY IN PENTECOSTAL PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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### Abstract

This article is written to encourage a return to a position firmly entrenched in traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic eschatology that includes both comings of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel. It develops the concept of the “Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ,” identifying it as an emphasis in both historic Christianity in general and Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in particular. And in light of Oral Roberts’ vision received in August 2004, the article concludes with an exhortation to reconsider this proclamation in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

### Introduction

In mid-August of 2004, at eighty-six years of age, Oral Roberts received a vision from God at his home in Newport Beach, California. In this vision, he heard a loud “explosion” in the Spirit, and saw a vision of “fire, cloud, vapor, and smoke” (reminiscent of Peter’s rendition of

Joel 2:30 in Acts 2:19). Initially, it was “exploding over America,” and then became “diffused, spread throughout the whole earth.” Then, he was told that the understanding of the vision was a “wake-up call about the Second Coming”—that neither the church, nor the world, is ready for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Specifically:

Most people on the earth have no idea that my Son Jesus Christ is going to come a second time. He’s going to come first in that Second Coming in the air to catch away My people, My bride, the saints, to catch them up off the earth and into the heavens where I will meet them in the clouds, in the Rapture of the saints. And, I’ll take them back with me to heaven before the Antichrist rises and before Armageddon comes . . . . Armageddon will follow. And signs will come in the sky and in the earth, and blood and fire and destruction, as Antichrist has risen.<sup>2</sup>

Thus according to the vision, the church has not been fully doing its job by proclaiming the second coming of Jesus Christ in conjunction with preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This vision brings up many concepts that are studied in a typical course on biblical eschatology (study of the end-times’/last days’ events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ).<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the following eschatological topics were addressed by the vision: the second coming of Jesus (and all events surrounding it, or the *Parousia*),<sup>4</sup> the rapture of the Church, the Antichrist, the tribulation, and the battle of Armageddon. While these concepts may be addressed separately and more specifically in a course of study on biblical eschatology and/or in books by expert scholars on the subject,<sup>5</sup> they will not be the central theme of, nor specifically addressed by, this article. The main purpose of this article is to focus on the concept of preaching and teaching both comings (advents) of Jesus Christ as part of the gospel. It is to this purpose that we now turn.

## **The Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup>**

The concept of the “Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus” appears to *be implied* in the Great Commission, “Go therefore

and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, *I am with you always* [*Lit. all the days*], *even to the end of the age* [emphasis added]” (Matt 28:20).<sup>7</sup> However, this Perfect/Complete Gospel is *explicitly stated* in Philippians 1:6 (NLT): “And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again [emphasis added].” In this verse, Paul explains the triune entirety of the Gospel of salvation:

- 1) “God, who began the good work”—justification: new creation of the Christian in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:20–30; 10:8–13; 2 Cor 5:14b–18a), based on the atonement at Jesus’ first coming (Isa 53);
- 2) “will continue his work”—sanctification: becoming perfect, holy, or Christ-like by the process of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1–17; 12:1–2; Gal 5:22–23; 1 Thess 5:23–24), which happens between Jesus’ first and second comings;
- 3) “until it is finally finished”—glorification, when Christians receive their new spiritual bodies, like Jesus did at his resurrection, and their salvation is completed (Rom 8:18–25; 1 Cor 13:12; 15:20–24, 50–55; 1 Thess 4:13–18), at Jesus’ second coming.

Therefore as in a marriage, where “two become one” (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6), and in conjunction with humanity’s triune nature (1 Thess 5:23) in the image of the triune God of the Bible (Gen 1:26–27), this triune Perfect/Complete Gospel cohesively unifies Jesus’ first coming (for redemption, reconciliation, and restoration—the atonement) with his second coming (for the rapture/resurrection of the Body of Christ, 1 Cor 15:50–55; 1 Thess 4:14–18) into the complete salvation of the Body of Christ (both corporately and individually). Both comings are explicitly “married” in the liturgical church calendar, when the two become one in the season of Advent. Philip Schaff expounds, “After Gregory the Great the four Sundays before Christmas began to be devoted to the preparation *for the coming of the Lord in the flesh and for his second coming to the final judgment. Hence they were called ADVENT Sundays* [emphasis added].”<sup>8</sup> This is confirmed by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter, dated 14 February 1969:

Advent has a *twofold character*: for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which *the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered*; and likewise when, by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to look forward to *Christ's Second Coming at the end of time* [emphasis added]. For these two reasons, Advent is a period for devout and expectant delight.<sup>9</sup>

This concept is also addressed by the liturgical, tripartite “Prayer of Thanksgiving” (or the “Mystery of the Faith”): “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.”<sup>10</sup> The last part of this saying is specifically remembered by Paul (in 1 Cor 16:22), John and Jesus (in Rev 22:20), and the early church every time it celebrated Holy Communion, by exclaiming: *Maranatha*—Lord Jesus, come!<sup>11</sup> And finally, the Perfect/Complete Gospel is connected with Christians being in relationship with the “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,” the “Author and Finisher,” Perfecter and Completer of all creation—the triune God of the Bible (Isa 41:4; Heb 12:2; Rev 1:8). With that as a general introduction, let us delve a bit more specifically (biblically and theologically) into this concept of the Perfect/Complete Gospel.

## Biblical and Theological Understanding

This Perfect/Complete Gospel was intimated and patterned in the Old Testament by the “Creation Week” (Gen 1:1–2:3, including the Hebraic idea of seventh-day rest—sabbath), as well as the concepts of promise, deliverance, covenant, law, and kingship theology.<sup>12</sup> These concepts were confirmed through the Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; Israel’s biblical feasts or festivals (Lev 23); and theophanies or christophanies (e.g., Gen 18; Gen 32:22–32; Exod 3–4; Josh 5:13–15). And finally, the Perfect/Complete Gospel was foretold by Old Testament prophets through various kingdom of God and first and second coming of Messiah prophecies (e.g., Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–12, 61; Dan 2:31–45; 7:13–14; 9:20–27; and Mic 5:2–5).<sup>13</sup> Note that these prophecies cohesively speak of both comings of the Messiah (Jesus).

In the New Testament, this Perfect/Complete Gospel was initiated by Jesus himself and taught to his disciples nearly two thousand years

ago via: direct teaching (i.e., Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 17:20–37, 21; John 14:1–28); the parables about the Kingdom of God (e.g., Matt 13); the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4); the “Words of Institution” at the Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29; 1 Cor 11:23–26); and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20).<sup>14</sup> After Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, James, Paul, Peter, the writer of Hebrews, Jude, and John<sup>15</sup> then taught Jesus’ Perfect/Complete Gospel to the early Christian church.<sup>16</sup> A good way of describing the totality and importance of the role of Scripture in addressing the Perfect/Complete Gospel is put forth by Herschel H. Hobbs:

The preaching and writings of the *Old Testament prophets* focused always upon the promised *incarnation of God in Jesus Christ* as the event in history that would give purpose to their utterances. So also the proclamations of the *New Testament preachers and writers* point ever to the *second coming of Jesus Christ* [emphasis added] at the culmination of history as that “one far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves.” There is no book or message in the New Testament which does not expressly declare or imply the return of our Lord as that “blessed hope” of those whose trust is fixed in him.<sup>17</sup>

Next, the Perfect/Complete Gospel will be broken down to its basic theological components.

In theological terms, the Perfect/Complete Gospel is based on the combination of two theological concepts: eschatology/teleiology and gospel. As mentioned above, the word “eschatology” derives from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning “the extreme, most remote spoken of place and time, the last”—the study of last things, end times, or final events surrounding the second coming (*Parousia*) of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> This concept is further refined, and probably more appropriately communicated, by understanding the meaning of the Greek words *telos* or *teleios* as, “fulfillment, *completion*, *perfection*, goal, whole, full, entire, or *perfect*, *complete* [emphasis added].”<sup>19</sup>

The word “gospel” is understood from two Greek words: *euangelion*, meaning “a good message, good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ”; and *martyreo/martyria*, meaning “to witness/a witness.”<sup>21</sup> Taken together, the

two words mean, the “good news” or witness about Jesus Christ coming to redeem and restore humanity back from sin into right relationship with God.<sup>22</sup> From the understanding and combination of these two theological concepts of teleology and gospel comes the theological idea of the Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus. Next, this Perfect/Complete Gospel concept will be traced throughout church history.

## Historical Understanding

The early church believers understood this concept of the Perfect/Complete Gospel at the moment they made the choice to follow Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, Savior, and Lord. At that time, this decision was a matter of life and death—there was a very real possibility that a new Christian could be martyred for his or her faith at any time in that first-century AD Roman world. According to Larry D. Hart, traditionally, a confession of faith accompanied the prayer of salvation, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit at each Christian’s salvation experience in the early church. The most simple of these confessions was “Jesus is Lord” (see Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 12:3; and Paul’s expanded version in Phil 2:6–11). There was also the gospel encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 and what would become the Apostles’ Creed (later expanded by the Nicene [ca. fourth century AD] and Athanasian [c.a. AD 500] Creeds).<sup>23</sup> These early Christians further understood the “blessed hope” that Paul mentions in Titus 2:13 to be consolidated into the final phrase of the paragraph talking about Jesus in the Nicene Creed: “He . . . will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [*telos*].”<sup>24</sup> Thus in the early church, the Perfect/Complete Gospel can be clearly seen.

This Perfect/Complete Gospel continued to be taught by the early church fathers in conjunction with expectation of the imminent return or second coming of Jesus. Brian E. Daley explains further, “The history of eschatology in the *Patristic age* . . . cannot be separated from the whole development of *early Christian reflection on the mystery of salvation in Jesus* [emphasis added].” In addition to this were the baptismal creeds of the early church, coupled with the sacraments of baptism and the

Eucharist as promises and “types of symbols of the life of the world to come.”<sup>25</sup> Next, we turn to the Medieval Church Period.

With the start of the Medieval Church Period (approx. AD 500), there remained a steady stream of belief in the Perfect/Complete Gospel that ran throughout the Medieval Church Period, flowing primarily from the newly established creeds of the church, the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and isolated Post-Nicene Fathers until the beginning of the eighth century AD. After that time, the stream began to dry up, become isolated, and there remained a huge void in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel during this period throughout Christendom.<sup>26</sup>

This void in teaching began to be refilled just prior to, through, and after the Protestant Reformation through the writings of several mainline Catholic and Protestant theologians (e.g., Joachim of Fiore [1135–1202], John Wycliffe [1324–1384], Martin Luther [1483–1546], Francisco Ribera [1537–1591], and John Wesley [1703–1791]).<sup>27</sup> This then gave rise to eschatological theologies and Christologies, which in turn gave birth to the Plymouth Brethren and Dispensationalism in England, the Dispensational Baptists and Presbyterians, Bible Prophecy Conferences, Bible schools, and newsletters/magazines in the mid-to-late nineteenth century both in England and the United States.<sup>28</sup> And finally in the twentieth century, all this resurgence, coupled with the American Pentecostal Revival that occurred at the turn of the century, gave rise to the rebirth of the Perfect/Complete Gospel as a central doctrine in the founding of several American churches: A. B. Simpson’s (1843–1919) Christian and Missionary Alliance (1897) and his fourfold Gospel of Christ as savior, sanctifier, healer, and coming Lord;<sup>29</sup> the Assemblies of God (1914);<sup>30</sup> and Aimee Semple McPherson’s (1890–1944) International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1923) and her Foursquare Gospel of Jesus as the Savior, Baptizer in the Holy Ghost, Divine Healer, and the Coming King.<sup>31</sup> Also during the early 1900s, the following Pentecostal churches taught the fivefold Gospel or full Gospel of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king: Church of God in Christ (1897, reorganized in 1907); Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (1910); and the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1911).<sup>32</sup> Note that this fourfold

or fivefold Gospel concept aligns exactly with the trifold Perfect/Complete Gospel of Philippians 1:6, with the two (fourfold) or three (fivefold) middle “folds” (outlined above) being combined as one and acting as part of the sanctification process.

This resurgence in the teaching and preaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel then became a central doctrine in many American churches, evangelical tent meetings, revivals, and crusades in the late 1940s and 50s, so much so that it became a central part of both Billy Graham’s and Oral Roberts’ ministries. Later in the 1950s, and then into the 60s and 70s, this resurgence flooded the Church through such well-known evangelists, theologians, and writers as George Eldon Ladd,<sup>33</sup> Oral Roberts,<sup>34</sup> Hal Lindsey,<sup>35</sup> and Charles Ryrie.<sup>36</sup> This trend has continued until the present time through such evangelists, theologians, and writers as John F. Walvoord,<sup>37</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost,<sup>38</sup> Billy Graham,<sup>39</sup> Pat Robertson,<sup>40</sup> and Norman Geisler.<sup>41</sup> Also, Herschel H. Hobbs wrote the article, “The Gospel of the Blessed Hope”<sup>42</sup> (mentioned above); C. Raymond Holmes completed his master’s thesis, “Preaching the Gospel of the Parousia,”<sup>43</sup> from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective; and J. Christiaan Beker wrote a book entitled *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God*.<sup>44</sup> From this historical view of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, we now take a look at the current view of the concept.

## Current Status of Understanding

According to many theologians, the church today, especially the western church, appears to be living in the Laodecian Period (Rev 3:14-20) of the Church Age (the time between Jesus’ first and second comings). They believe that this Laodecian Period is the last period of the Church Age just prior to the second coming of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> Although there are pockets of revival around the world, this end-time church appears to fulfill the Laodecian description contained in the book of Revelation as follows: looking inward versus outward; being rich, self-sufficient, and complacent; and becoming lethargic and lukewarm by allowing secular humanism, moral compromise, and the social gospel to infiltrate its own body (the very body of Christ), while actually being wretched and



miserable, and poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). The answer to this plight is found in the following verses of Revelation 3:18–20, in the form of an invitation by Jesus:

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by the fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me* [emphasis added].

This solution is also highlighted in Revelation 1:1–3 and 19:10 in relation to Jesus’ second coming: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place . . . . Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; *for the time is near . . . worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” [emphasis added].<sup>46</sup>

All of this has led to the melding of the Perfect/Complete Gospel with “aggressive dispensationalism,” as initiated by Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). This also coincided with the Charismatic Movement (or renewal) of the late 1960s into the early 1980s, which has continued in different forms and in different locations into the twenty-first century. However, gradually, the emphasis has shifted from the Perfect/Complete Gospel to just eschatology or “eschatomania” (eschatomania refers to an intensive preoccupation with the prophetic passages or details of the Bible, eschatological charts, prophecy studies, end-times predictions and preaching, etc.).<sup>47</sup> Over the last thirty years or so (the Postmodern Era), there has been a steady decline in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel in the churches specifically where it was a central, foundational doctrine (or critical core belief), and generally in teaching the doctrine throughout Christendom worldwide.

Additionally, let us look at the antithesis—what many call Satan’s false gospel. In these days of New World Order, New Age,

post-modernism, relativism, and the meteoric rise of radical Islam as a world religion, truth seems to be individually relative, deceptive heresy is taught as truth, the love of many has grown cold, and most people are lovers of self and pleasure rather than lovers of God (see Matt 24:12; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1–7; Jude 17–19). This culture has not taken place in a vacuum, but in an exponentially increasing explosion of knowledge, communication, and transportation, as foretold by the prophet Daniel some 2,500 years ago (Dan 12:4) since the rebirth of the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948.<sup>48</sup> This, in and of itself, is a fulfillment of eschatological biblical prophecy (Isa 66:7–9; Ezek 37:15–28; Amos 9:15). Yet, this new global experience still gives evidence of humanity's innate interest in its spiritual nature, which was born, and then died (with the original sin/fall of humanity), in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3). Humanity is still longing to be in right relationship with its Creator as originally designed (Gen 1:26–2:25). And by God's grace, there remains "faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13), to allow each person to reconcile that relationship with God (2 Cor 5:19)!<sup>49</sup>

Therefore today there is a critical and very-present need for discerning truth from error and the Perfect/Complete Gospel of the kingdom of God from the false gospel of the kingdom of Satan.<sup>50</sup> This may be contextualized by the parable of the wheat and weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43). In this parable, Jesus talks about both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness coexisting and growing unhindered, side-by-side, until the "end of the age" (vv. 39–40).<sup>51</sup> This typifies that in every generation since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), God has placed the opportunity to choose to be in relationship with him (kingdom of God), or to choose to believe Satan's lie ("to be like God"—Gen 3:5), and go one's own way (kingdom of darkness). Keeping in mind that the preaching and teaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ and making disciples of all nations (or fulfillment of the Great Commission issued nearly two thousand years ago by Jesus himself) is the last sign to be fulfilled before the return of Jesus (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10), this journey of the Perfect/Complete Gospel down through history, compared to Satan's plan of deceit, heresy, and false

religions (in light of the parable of the wheat and weeds), has led the Church to “such a time as this” (Esth 4:14)—at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

As stated and outlined above, the church’s focus has shifted in the past thirty years or so from teaching and preaching Jesus’ second coming as an integral part of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, to focusing only on the apocalyptic eschatological aspect of the end of the world. In relation to this phenomenon, there has been a major decline, up to the point of a near void, in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel in most of its foundational churches (or in any church for that matter), much less sharing that Perfect/Complete Gospel with and making disciples of a lost and dying world. This void is prevalent in most of the western church pulpits (even in the denominations/churches where the Perfect/Complete Gospel was a central doctrine in their genesis) and, consequently, also in the layperson’s presentation of the gospel to the people he or she meets in everyday life. This seems to be confirmed by the vision Oral Roberts received from the Lord in August 2004 (cited at the beginning of the article).

As the signs and birth pangs signaling the Lord Jesus Christ’s second coming increase in frequency and intensity (Matt 24:4–8; Mark 13:5–8), and as the world approaches the completion of the final sign to be completed before Jesus’ second coming (the gospel being preached throughout the whole earth—Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10), there should be a commensurate, increased sense of imminency and urgency to teach and preach the Perfect/Complete Gospel. However, this noticeable decline in teaching and preaching of it appears to have an inverse relationship to the exponential increase of Satan’s promulgation of deceptive and heretical lies, doctrines, and cults in this Postmodern Age. In light of the pervasiveness and this exponential increase of Satan’s last days’ deceptive heresies and false doctrines (which are being propagated as truth), and as the church moves toward the completion of the Church Age and the second coming of the Lord

Jesus Christ, the author sees this void as a chink in the armor of the church in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:15). If there ever was “such a time as this”—to reinstitute the teaching and preaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, to make disciples of all nations—it is now, in order to fulfill Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:10, Luke 24:47, and Romans 16:26. And thus, the Church may say with all honesty and sincerity, *Maranatha*, come Lord Jesus! Amen.



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## Notes

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4 Zodhiates, “*parousia*,” 1123–24.

5 See Norman L. Geisler, “Part 8,” *Systematic Theology: In One Volume* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011); Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006); Hilton Sutton, *The Book of Revelation Revealed: Understanding God’s Master Plan for the End of the Age* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1995); William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future*, 1st paperback ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964).

6 The term The Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ comes from the refined title of the author’s doctoral work: David K. Hebert, “The Need for Teaching the *Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ* [emphasis mine] in the Twenty-First Century, Especially as We See the Day of His Parousia Approaching,” (D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa [UNISA], 2009).

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- 13 Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 57–152.
- 14 Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 153–258.
- 15 Jas 5:3, 7–9; Rom 8:18–24; 1 Cor 15; Eph 1:3–14; 1 Thess 1:3, 9–10; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:8–11; Titus 2:11–13; 1 Pet 1:3–12; 2:4–10; 4:1–7; 2 Pet 1:11, 16, 19; 3; Heb 9:12–28; 10:37–12:2, 26–7; Jude 14–23; 1 John 2:14–3:3; and Revelation.
- 16 Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 259–346.
- 17 Herschel H. Hobbs, “The Gospel of the Blessed Hope,” *Christianity Today*, 23 December 1957, 13.
- 18 Zodhiates, “*eschatos*,” 661–2.
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(Jude 11–13, 18–19; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Thess 2:3–4; Rev 3:20), last period before the end of the Church Age and Jesus, who is standing at the door, returns for His Body—1960 to the Rapture of the Church.

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49 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 1.

50 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 1.

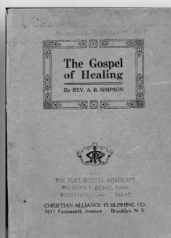
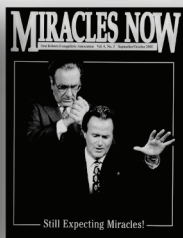
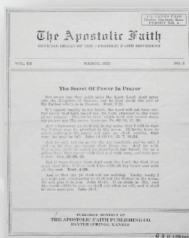
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