

SECRETS *of the* FUTURE

Why So Many Churches? | Part 22



WHY SO MANY CHURCHES?

As United Airlines Flight 93 was plummeting towards its tragic end on September 11 2001, the flight recorder captured the last words of the hijacking terrorists. “Allah is the greatest!” “Allah is the greatest!” The passionate tones continued until the silence of death as the plane slammed into the Pennsylvanian countryside.

This is not the first time religion has motivated hatred and bloodshed. In 1669 Jean Léger, a noted religious historian, printed a series of graphic sketches showing the religious persecution faced by the “heretic” Christians in the Waldensian valleys of Northern Italy.

One of the images depicted by Léger shows a 90-year-old man, Isaiah Grand, captured for his faith and decapitated in cold blood. Other images show women and children torn into pieces or impaled. The bodies were paraded on a stick as a warning to the local community – conform to the Roman church or be killed.

Religion has always been a contentious issue. The ultimate source of passion, enthusiasm and commitment. But also the seedbed of intolerance and violence. Historians have estimated that the Middle Ages church single-handedly killed over 50 million people for belonging to the ‘wrong church’.

The religious world today is more fragmented than ever before. Among the 19 world religions the ***World Christian Encyclopaedia*** estimates a total of 270 separate religious groups. Within Christianity alone there are 34,000 different Christian groups. All claim to be God’s church and possess “the truth”.

Does God have a church today? If so, which is it? Should we even join a church or is it better to remain an independent believer?

In this study guide you will discover a prophecy that describes the history and characteristics of God's true church. This prophecy, found in Revelation chapter 12, makes it very simple to identify God's church for the last days.

Q1

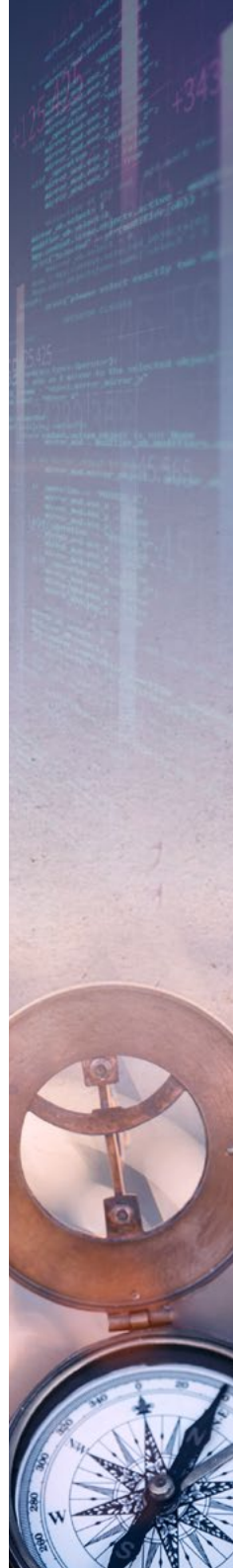
HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO BELONG TO A CHURCH?

Acts 2:47 - ... *And the Lord added to the _____ daily those who were being saved*

An integral aspect of accepting Jesus is to be baptised into His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The church is not perfect. There is a sense of trust and vulnerability in joining a community of human believers – sometimes people get hurt. But, according to God's Word, one of the most important things for you to do is experience church (Hebrews 10:25).

There are three key benefits from being involved in church:

- The church can enhance your spiritual journey
- You can encourage others in their spiritual journey
- The church community and organisation enables a more effective sharing of the gospel



Q2

WHAT SYMBOL IS USED IN THE BIBLE TO PORTRAY A CHURCH?

Jeremiah 6:2 - *I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate*

.....

Throughout the Bible a woman represents a church. A good woman represents God's true church. A prostitute represents an evil church (see 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 17:1-6).

Q3

HOW IS GOD'S TRUE CHURCH DESCRIBED IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Revelation 12:1 - *Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the _____, with the _____ under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve _____*

.....

Here we find the church of God surrounded by the sun, moon and stars – a symbol of the church as the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). The sun represents Jesus (Malachi 4:2). The moon represents the Scriptures that reflect the light of Jesus. The stars represent the leadership of God's church – 12 tribes in the Old Testament church and 12 apostles in the New Testament church.

Q4

WHO ATTEMPTED TO DESTROY THE WOMAN AND HER CHILD AS SOON AS HE WAS BORN?

Revelation 12:4 - ... And the _____ stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born

.....

Here we find the devil, symbolised by a dragon, working through the power of Rome to accomplish his aims (verses 3,4,9). King Herod, a ruler under Rome, heard about the birth of Jesus and immediately issued a death decree on all the male infants of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16). Jesus and His parents escaped Bethlehem – but the devil did not give up. Ultimately the “dragon” inspired evil men to crucify Jesus on a cross. The good news of the gospel tells us the grave could not hold Jesus. He rose from the dead and completely defeated the devil!



Q5

WHO DID THE DEVIL ATTACK AFTER HE FAILED TO DESTROY JESUS?

Revelation 12:13 - *Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the _____ who gave birth to the male Child*

.....

The devil knows the most effective way to hurt Jesus is to hurt those He loves (ask any parent what hurts more; when they are in pain or when their children are suffering?) The early Christian church suffered greatly at the hands of pagan Rome and millions of people were martyred. Anyone who accepted Jesus knew they could be thrown to the hungry lions in the Colosseum, crucified, burnt to death or even torn in two.

The results were amazing. Instead of destroying God's church, persecution became the catalyst for growth. The Christian character in life and death was such a powerful witness that others were inspired to join the Christian church.

The devil then changed his tactics. The Roman government stopped persecuting the church. It even started to welcome the Christian faith. Through Emperor Constantine Rome began to form a coalition of church and state. Satan decided that if he could not destroy the church he would join it and corrupt it!

Q6

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH DURING THE MIDDLES AGES?

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the _____ comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition*

.....

For the first 300 years, the Christian church remained relatively pure and true to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Once the church formed a coalition with the state, paganism began to strongly influence the church. The traditions, teachings and symbols of the pagan gods came into the church while the purity, obedience and worship of the living God went out of the church.

THE CHURCH FALLING AWAY FROM TRUTH PAGANISM BECOMES TRADITION

321 AD • SUNDAY LAW INSTITUTED

325 AD • EASTER FROM THE BABYLONIAN GODESS ISHTAR

336 AD • CHRISTMAS BIRTHDAY OF BABYLONIAN SUN GOD TAMMUZ

376 AD • POPE BECOMES PONTIFEX MAXIMUS FROM BABYLONIAN CULT

381 AD • MARY WORSHIP

416 AD • INFANT BAPTISM

787 AD • WORSHIP OF IMAGES & SAINTS

813 AD • THE MASS TRANSUBSTANTIATION

1123 AD • CELIBACY OF PRIESTS

1215 AD • ANNUAL CONFESSION TO PRIESTS

1229 AD • BIBLE READING BY LAYMEN FORBIDDEN

1229 AD • POPE CLAIMS SUPREMACY OVER LEADERS

1439 AD • PURGATORY BECOMES DOGMA

1545 AD • TRADITION DECLARED EQUAL TO THE BIBLE

During the Middle Ages, persecution against God's true church was reintroduced. Here the strategy of Satan was to use the church to attack the church! The devil sent a "flood" of armies after those who refused to accept the pagan teachings and practices. Anyone who refused to be part of the Roman church was banished or killed (Revelation 12:15).



Q7

WHERE DID THE TRUE CHURCH GO WHEN THEY WERE PERSECUTED?

Revelation 12:6,14 - *Then the woman fled into the _____, where she has a place prepared by God (v6) ... But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is _____...(v14)*

.....

In 538AD the Roman Emperor Justinian officially made a decree to enforce the power and presence of the Papacy. A failure to join the church resulted in forced removal from the Empire and the confiscation of property. This decree forced the true followers of God to flee the large cities of Europe and move into the mountains and caves of the less populated areas – remote areas in Italy, France, Britain, Switzerland and even the Middle East. It was in these “wilderness” areas that the church could still meet together, worship and study the Bible.

It is important to note that the church of God was still in existence during these times, but not as the official mainstream organisation. The church was “in the wilderness”. It comprised groups of people who remained faithful to God at the risk of persecution and death.



Q8

HOW LONG WOULD GOD'S TRUE CHURCH REMAIN "UNDERCOVER" IN THE WILDERNESS?

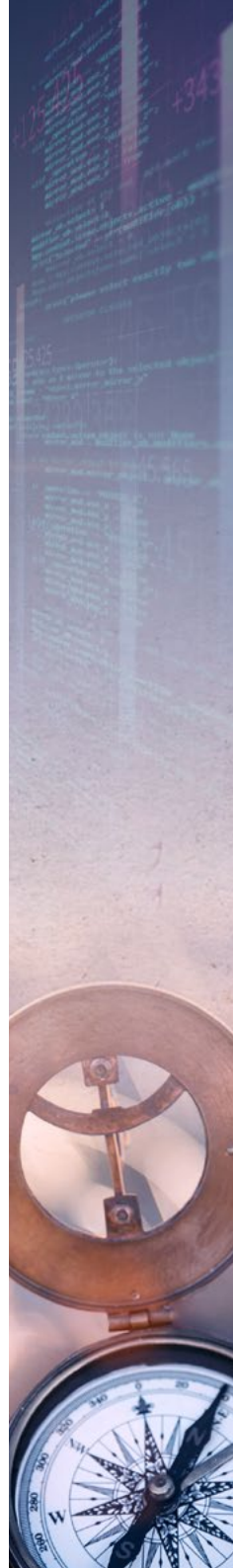
Revelation 12:6,14 - ... *that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days (v6) ... where she is nourished for a _____ and _____ and _____ a time, from the presence of the serpent (v14)*

.....

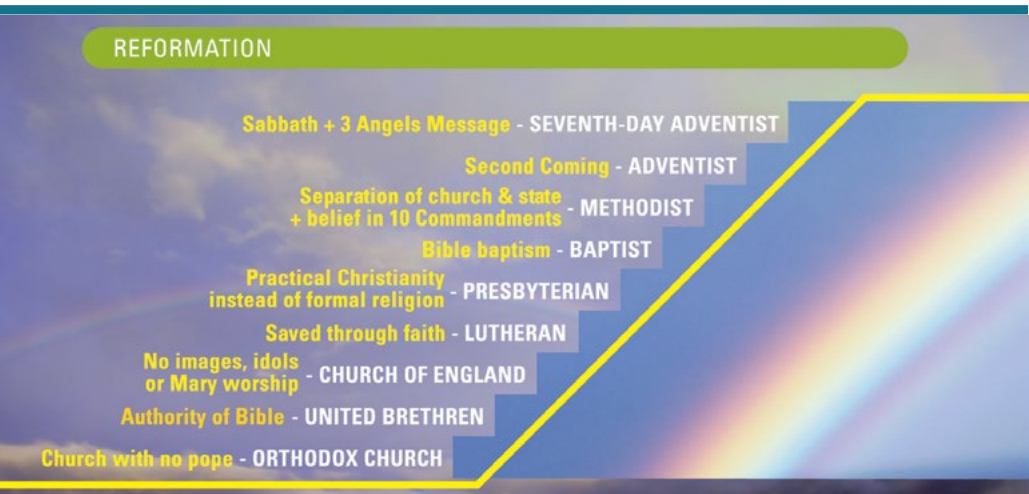
The prophecy predicted a period of 1,260 years in the wilderness for God's church. This prediction was perfectly fulfilled when the church went into hiding through the Dark Ages from 538 to 1798 (see study guide "Who is the Antichrist?" for more details on these dates).

Prior to the fall of the Papacy a movement began that revolutionised the Christian church. A passion for truth emerged in the lives of men such as Martin Luther, John Wycliffe, John Calvin and John Huss. The Bible was translated into the common language and people understood Bible prophecy and the gospel of Jesus. The Papacy rejected this movement as "heresy" but the spark for the "Reformation" was lit. The slow process of exiting the wilderness had begun.

Below is a list of teachings and churches that emerged as a result of the Reformation. You will see how each church built on the truths of previous churches. The revelation of truth was progressive. This is one



reason why there are so many Christian churches today. The spirit of the Reformation continued throughout the world until the church of God was established for the last days – a church that returned to all the original teachings of the Christian church.



Q9

WHAT IS THE DEVIL’S ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD’S CHURCH IN THE LAST DAYS?

Revelation 12:17 - *And the dragon was _____ with the woman, and he went to make _____ with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*

.....

The devil is especially angry with the “rest of her offspring”, or in other words the church of the last days. Over the last 2,000 years Satan has had the time and experience to refine his tactics. He is full of deceit and evil as

he declares an all out war upon God's final church. The devil will do his best to deceive and discourage as many of God's people as possible because he knows that time is short and this is a war that he will ultimately lose!

God's final church

Q10

WHAT ARE THE IDENTIFYING MARKS FOR GOD'S FINAL CHURCH?

Revelation 12:17 - *And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the _____ of God and have the _____ of Jesus Christ*

.....

The prophecy of Revelation 12 outlines the history of God's church since the time of Christ. The chapter ends with a comment on the church at the end of time. A church referred to as the "rest" or "remnant" of her offspring. This is the final church that represents Jesus and his truth in the closing moments prior to the return of Jesus.



God has provided a number of clear characteristics to enable us to easily identify this church. The Seventh-day Adventist church believes that God has His saved people in all churches. However He specifically raised up the Seventh-day Adventist movement to represent Him and His final message in the end times. The key passages that identify God's final church are found in Revelation 12 and 14. Let's take a look at the evidence.

Clue 1 – It will rise after 1798 (Revelation 12:6,14)

The visible church of God remained in the wilderness until 1798. After that time, God would bring His church out of obscurity and enable it to be a global representation of His love and truth.

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church can trace its beliefs back through the church in the wilderness to the early Christian church; however it visibly emerged during the mid 19th century and was officially organised in 1863.

Clue 2 – It will believe in the original teachings of the Christian church (Revelation 12:17)

The King James Version of the Bible translates the phrase "rest of her offspring" as the "remnant" (Revelation 12:17). A remnant of material used for making clothing is the end piece of cloth and usually just a small piece. It is also the same colour and pattern as the original cloth. Here we find God's final church with the same practices and teachings as Jesus and the original Christian church.

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church has continued the Reformation. Through a philosophy of taking the Bible and the Bible only as the rule of faith, it has restored all the major truths from the original Christian church.

Clue 3 – It will be based on Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel (Revelation 14:6,12)

The foundation for the final church will be the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Jesus will be presented as the ultimate destination for any spiritual journey and the answer to all of life's challenges.

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church believes salvation is 100% based on the sacrifice and merits of Jesus. Jesus is the centre of every aspect of the Adventist message – even Bible prophecy is presented as the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1). All reference to obedience and the Ten Commandments is done in the context of love and worshipping Jesus.



Clue 4 – It believes in all of God's Commandments, including the Sabbath (Revelation 12:17, 14:12)

God's church is a Commandment keeping church. This means it is also a Sabbath keeping church. The church of God believes that God's law is a reflection of His



character and anyone who truly loves Jesus will want to keep His law.

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church teaches and keeps all of God's Commandments, including the seventh day Sabbath of the Bible.

Clue 5 – It will preach the final warning message to the world (Revelation 14:6-12)

Just before a global flood, Noah was raised by God to preach a clear and dramatic warning message – “The world will soon be destroyed. Get into the Ark!” At the end of time God has inspired a movement to also preach a specific message. This message is found in Revelation 14:6-12 and will be preached to a world that is facing destruction at the Second Coming of Jesus.

This unique message focuses on the “everlasting gospel” and has three aspects:

1. Worship the Creator God and give Him glory because the judgment has begun (Revelation 14:7)
2. Babylon has fallen (Revelation 14:8)
3. Avoid the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:9-11)

Any church which is God's final church will be preaching this vital message.

Evidence: The Three Angels Message of Revelation 14:6-12 is the focus of the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission. The message is clear: The judgement of God began in 1844, the memorial to the Creator God is the Sabbath (keep the Sabbath), come out of the false religious network of Babylon and avoid any form of false worship – including the mark of the beast.

Clue 6 – It will teach that death is a peaceful rest until the resurrection (Revelation 14:13)

The final church preaches a message about death that protects people from the deceptions of supernatural spiritualism in the last days. Death is a sleep and there should be no communication with the dead through spiritual mediums.

Evidence: One of the most important teachings within the Seventh-day Adventist church is the concept of death as a sleep. At death the person remains in the grave until the resurrection.

Clue 7 – It will be a global movement preaching all over the world (Revelation 14:6)

The church of God will be preaching the final message to “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6).

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church is actively involved in over 220 countries, virtually every country of the world. There is a global commitment to ensure the message is preached by all means possible, including satellite and the internet, to every pocket of the planet.

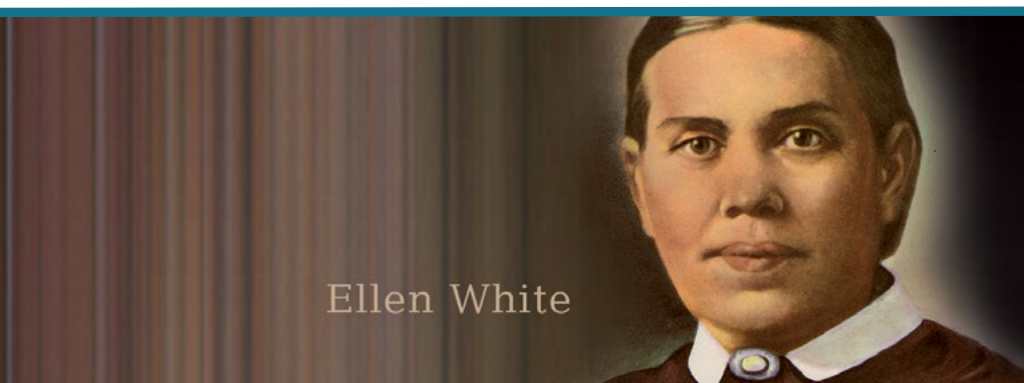
Clue 8 – It will believe in the words of the prophets and have the gift of prophecy (Revelation 12:17, 19:10)

God’s church has always placed complete confidence in God’s Word. The Bible is the centre and foundation for all understanding of truth. God’s final church will also have a strong commitment to prophecy. Prophecy is vital and provides an understanding of God and our future. The final church of God will be identified as having the “testimony of Jesus” – a symbol that represents the “spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 12:17,



19:10). Any church that is God's church of the last days will have a specific spiritual gift – the gift of prophecy.

Evidence: The Seventh-day Adventist church believes in the Bible and the Bible only as the foundation for truth. An important aspect of Bible truth is prophecy. Within the church God raised up a special messenger, Ellen G White, as one of the pioneers of the church. God gave to this lady a special gift, the gift of prophecy, to help guide the church. The writings of Ellen White do not replace the Bible. They do not add to the Bible. They simply support and uplift the Bible. The Bible remains the heart and foundation of the faith and the Bible predicts that the final church will have the gift of prophecy.



Q11

HOW MANY CHURCH ORGANISATIONS DOES JESUS DESIRE TO HAVE ON THIS EARTH?

Ephesians 4:4,5 - *There is _____ body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism*

.....

The last thing God wants is hundreds of religions. It is a tragedy that there are so many churches with different teachings, practices and lifestyles.

God wants one church – a church that is based on three pillars of truth: Jesus Christ, the Word of God and the Ten Commandments.

Q12

GOD DESCRIBES THE CONFUSED SYSTEM OF RELIGION IN THE LAST DAYS AS “BABYLON”. WHAT INVITATION DOES JESUS MAKE TO THOSE OUTSIDE HIS FINAL CHURCH?

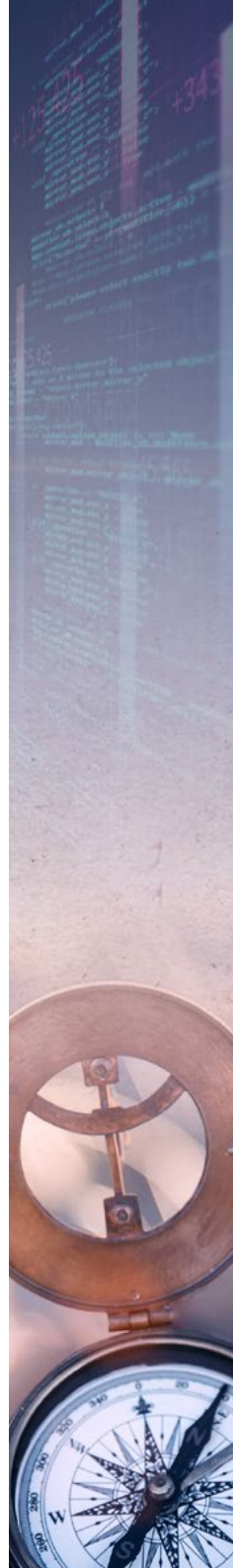
Revelation 18:4 - *And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come _____ of her _____ people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues”*

John 10:16 - *And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will _____ My voice; and there will be _____ flock and one shepherd*

.....

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ekklesia” which means “called-out ones”. God has His saved people within all churches, people who love Him and are living up to the spiritual light they have. But as we approach the end of time Jesus calls His people into “one flock” – His final church of the last days.

Soon there will only be two global religions. One will worship and obey Jesus Christ. The other will worship and obey the religious powers of the world. Now is the time to hear the call of Jesus and choose God’s last day church.





One flock, one shepherd

Three Points to Remember:

- An essential aspect of being a Christian is becoming an active member in God's church
- God has always had His church throughout history
- The Seventh-day Adventist church is God's church for the last days

The Story:

On the first day of training, everyone knew the World War II medic, Desmond Doss, was different. Not only did he kneel beside his bed to pray, he also read his Bible every day. Doss refused to carry a weapon and would never train or work on the Seventh-day Sabbath (although he did heal on the Sabbath, just as Jesus did). His fellow soldiers ridiculed Doss. They teased him and harassed him. Doss felt like he was alone, with everyone against him. At one point, one of his officers tried to get him discharged on the basis of mental illness.

It wasn't long, however, before this Sabbath-keeping soldier was seen as a God-send. Time after time Doss braved enemy fire in Okinawa to treat and save wounded soldiers. Even with snipers aiming their guns at Doss, he still went into the heat of battle. Despite being hit by a grenade, he carried over 50 wounded soldiers to their safety. Desmond Doss became the only non

combatant to receive the United States Medal of Honour during WWII. Doss honoured God by being obedient to His Commandments, even when the going was tough. He saw obedience as an important part of loving Jesus and Doss would rather die than break one of God's Commandments.

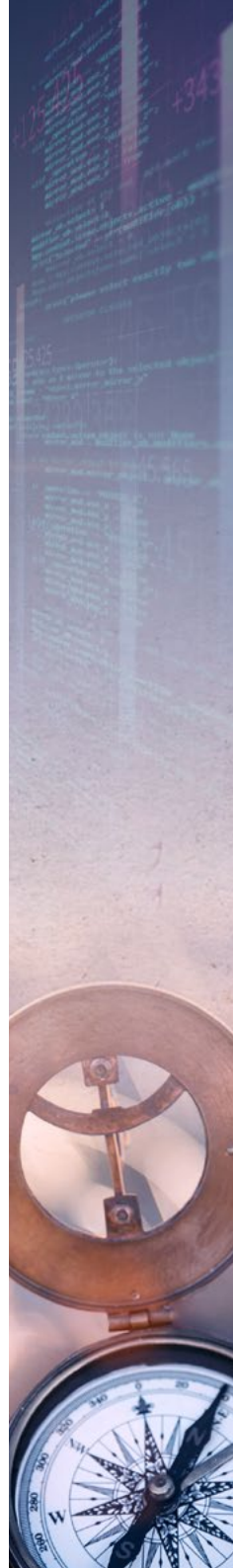
Desmond Doss was in the minority. He stood for God through ridicule, torment and possible death. If you join God's true church you too may face opposition. What can you learn from this story to help you in your decision for Christ?

Relational questions:

1. What would you say to someone who thinks that it doesn't matter what you believe, or which church you belong to, as long as you are a good person?
2. How important is God's church to you? Why do you think the church is so important to God?
3. If you decide to join God's church what do you think will be the response by the devil? How will he try to hurt and discourage you? How can you prepare for his attacks?

Your response:

Jesus loves you and He is calling you to join Him within God's end time church. Is it your decision to join this church and become a part of sharing God's final message to the world? _____





LIVING LIFE *to the* FULL

Would you like to reach the age of 100 and enjoy every moment of it? You'll learn about longevity and the keys to a happy and healthy life in Part 23 of the Secrets of the Future series. Call or email Hope Channel to continue your journey.



HopeChannel

Secrets of Prophecy® is the property of
HopeChannel - Copyright © 2011

Text: Neale Schofield

Design: Storysmiths

Images: Phil McKay, iStock

Print: Signs Publishing Company

Scripture taken from the New King James
Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas
Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights
reserved.



discover@hopechannel.com



discover.hopechannel.com
hopechannel.com/learn



[/hopedigital](https://www.facebook.com/hopedigital)



[@hopechannel](https://twitter.com/hopechannel)



1300 300 389 (AU)
0800 55 1844 (NZ)