

Even So, Come, Lord Jesus

Reflections on the Second Coming

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Reflections on the Second Coming

by Jonathan Cooper

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Soli Deo Gloria

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Introduction

I first became interested in the study of the Second Coming when I was about 10 years old. Our pastor was preaching through the book of Revelation, and his teachings on the subject was my first real exposure to eschatology. At that time I started reading the book of Revelation but I didn't understand it.

As the years went by I was exposed to a great many different interpretations of end-times events but none of them really made sense to me. Each theory made good points but they all seemed to have glaring weaknesses. I kept coming away with more questions than answers.

It took many years of study to find the answers to my questions – and when I did the answers turned out to be very surprising. The end was not what I expected. For me the turning point came when I read Revelation 20 and realized that it had to be describing events that were still in the future. Once I realized that everything else fell into place.

As I worked through what I believed and why I believed it I wrote a series of essays. This book is a collection of those papers. Whenever there's something I don't understand or want to explore I tend to sit down and write about it. That gives me a chance to put my thoughts on paper and see if I'm making sense.

I suspect that I am not the only one who has many questions about the Second Coming, so I've taken my essays and put them together into a single volume. I hope you find them helpful in your own exploration. This is a subject that takes a lot of time to fully understand but it is well worth the investment. Jesus wants us to long for His return (which is actually the topic of the first essay in this collection). It is my hope that your heart will echo what the apostle John wrote in the next-to-last verse in the Bible: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Jonathan Cooper

The Glorious Appearing

RECENTLY I've been surprised at the sheer number of Christians in the world who are hoping that their Lord will not return. I would never have predicted this, but there are people who call themselves believers who are actually dreading the Second Coming. I could perhaps understand this if they were worried about the fate of their lost friends or relatives, but from what I have seen many of them want the Lord to stay away simply because they like their life and don't want God to mess it up. "I love you, Lord," they say, "but please don't come back. My life is going really well, and if You return and bring an end to this world it will mess everything up. So please just stay away as long as possible."

I know that many unbelievers think this, and that is to be expected. After all, for them the return of Christ is a dreadful, frightening thing – it is, quite literally, the end of their world. But it astonishes me that *Christians* believe this. The very people who should be longing for the return of their Lord are actively hoping that He won't come back at all! How is this loving God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? What kind of whole-hearted devotion tells their loved one that they hope they stay away and never come back? Could you imagine telling your wife "I love you, honey, but my life is so much better when you're out of town. Do you think you could arrange to stay out of town indefinitely?" How loved do you think she would feel?

It's worth noting that this attitude is not found in the Bible. In fact, the Lord actually promises a special blessing for those who long for His appearing:

2 Timothy 4:8: "Henceforth there is laid up for

me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In case there was any doubt, Paul makes it plain that the “appearing” he is talking about is nothing less than the return of Jesus Christ:

1 Timothy 6:13: “I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;
14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Timothy 4:1: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;”

It is quite clear that the special blessing Paul mentions will **only be given to those who long for the return of Christ**. This blessing – a crown of righteousness – will **not** be given to those who do not want Christ to come back, or who do not care one way or the other. There is a *condition* attached to this blessing. I'm sure that some would interpret this “crown of righteousness” to be something symbolic and therefore of no real value, but the Bible clearly depicts it as a real prize that should be taken seriously. (Paul certainly seemed to value it!) It's worth noting that the same Greek word for crown is also found in the following verse, where the crowns are used in Heaven to worship God:

Revelation 4:10: “The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and

worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

If these crowns are just imaginary or symbolic then how are people using them to worship God? How could anyone cast a spiritual crown at the feet of the Father? Don't you need something *real* in order to do that?

The Bible clearly teaches that Christians should be longing for the return of their Savior. This is demonstrated all throughout the New Testament. Take this passage from Titus:

Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;
14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”

Paul told Titus that we were to live soberly, looking for our “blessed hope”. And what is this blessed hope? The “glorious appearing” of our Lord Jesus Christ! Christians should be longing for this, not dreading it. I have to ask: if you love the Lord with all your heart and are longing to be with Him, then how could you *not* be longing for His return? Isn't a disinterest or dislike for the

return of Jesus nothing less than a disinterest or dislike for Jesus Himself? After all, Satan also doesn't want Christ to come back. Should we really be siding with him?

Peter said this:

1 Peter 1:6: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:"

The "glorious appearing" is what puts a final end to our trials. It is a source of great joy, for it is when our faith and trials are turned into praise and glory.

In all of Scripture there is no record of any believer wanting the Lord to stay away. There aren't even any instances of apostles asking Jesus to delay His return so that more lost people could be saved! The constant refrain of the people of God is a longing for the One they love to return. In fact, at the very end of Revelation the apostle John said this:

Revelation 22:20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

This should be the prayer that is on our lips and the longing that is in our hearts. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

One day the Lord will return and take His Church home with Him. For unbelievers it will be a time of unimaginable suffering and judgment, but for His saints it will be a time of tremendous joy. The righteous dead will be raised to everlasting

life and will forever be with Jesus. It will truly be a glorious time
– and something that we should be longing for with all our heart.

The Book With A Blessing

TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE there is only one book in the Bible whose introduction includes a specific blessing for anyone who reads the book. Ironically, this blessing is found in a book that many Christians tend to avoid. That book is the book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

As you can see, God promises to bless those who read Revelation or who have it read to them. There is also a blessing for those who “keep those things which are written therein.” That word “keep” is the Greek word *tereo*, which means “to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard.” In other words, God promises to bless those who read the book of Revelation and who pay careful attention to what it says.

There's something else unique about this book. While the Bible is full of verses that command people to not tamper with God's Word, this is the only book that includes a specific curse for anyone who dares to alter its contents. This can be found at the end of the book:

Revelation 22:18: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Notice the tremendous severity of this curse! This curse isn't directed at those who misunderstand the prophecy or have trouble figuring out what it means. What says is that if anyone tampers with the text of the prophecy itself and removes a portion of it, God will *remove their name from the Book of Life* and condemn them to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. In other words, tampering with Revelation and altering its contents is as great a crime in God's eyes as taking the Mark of the Beast! It's a very serious matter.

God promises to bless those who read Revelation and pay attention to it, and He threatens eternal damnation on anyone who dares to tamper with its text. That tells us that there is something very special about this book. God clearly wants His people to be familiar with what it has to say – after all, that's the whole point of Revelation 1:3!

Yet there are a many people today who simply do not care about prophecy. Some of them say that they are “pan-millennial”, meaning “it will all pan out in the end, so why should I care?” Others say “Well, all of this end-times stuff doesn't really impact the way I live my life, so why does it matter?” There are still others who are simply intimidated by the book and are confused by the *many* different ways it has been interpreted. They see no reason to get mixed up in something that complex and controversial.

So why should we care about Bible prophecy? The simple answer is *because God wants us to care*. We see that right in Revelation 1:3, but that's not the only verse that teaches this. Jesus Himself had this to say when He was asked about matters relating to end-times:

Matthew 24:3: “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.”

Notice that Jesus didn't say “Oh, don't worry about it! All that end-times stuff is going to pan out in the end anyway, and it really doesn't have any practical applications. Just focus on serving God and you will be fine.” That's what a lot of people believe, but that's not what Jesus said! In fact, what He actually said was “Take heed that no man deceive you” – and He then described in great detail the events that would foreshadow His Second Coming. He *wanted* His disciples to know what was going to happen *so that they would not be deceived*, and He wanted them to be watching *because it could happen at any time*:

Mark 13:34: “For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”

Notice that we don't see any trace of Jesus saying “Oh, just don't worry about it. Life is too short to be focusing on things like that.” He actually told His disciples not once but *several times* that they needed to be watching! Saying “oh, it doesn't matter; it will all pan out in the end” is *not at all* the same thing as

understanding end-times prophecy and being watchful for the return of Christ.

Some people say “There's no reason to study all of this end-times stuff. As long as you're ready you will be fine.” That sounds wise, but it is actually a very foolish thing to say. After all, *what are you getting ready for?* According to Preterism, Jesus came back thousands of years ago. According to Post-Tribulationalism, the Church is going to have to endure seven years of Hell-on-Earth. According to Dominionism, the Church is going to conquer the world with the gospel and usher in an age of peace. According to Pre-Tribulationalism, Jesus could return at any moment and remove the Church from the world. There is no such thing as “being ready” in a generic sense. Is Jesus going to come back soon, or is He going to come back in the distant future, or has Jesus already come back, or is He never going to come back at all? Is the Church going to conquer the world, or is the Church going to be removed from the world, or is the Church going to go through the worst period that the world has ever seen? If you don't understand end-times prophecy and have no idea what is true and what is a lie then how could you possibly “be ready”?

Jesus said to be wary because many false Christs would come in His name. If you don't know the truth then how can you tell a genuine Second Coming from a fake one? Do you know enough about the return of Christ to tell the genuine article apart from a fraud? If your knowledge of end-times prophecy is “I'm sure it will all pan out in the end”, then the answer to that question is *no*. People like Harold Camping have destroyed the lives of many people with false end-times prophecies precisely because those people did not understand what the Bible teaches. Other people have actually murdered their own children because they thought the Tribulation was starting and they wanted to save them. People's lives have been utterly destroyed because they did not understand this subject and were led astray by false teachers. If you do not know the truth then you are open to being deceived by the next charlatan who comes along – and don't think that it

can't happen to you. Just because you didn't believe one lie doesn't mean you won't find the next one convincing.

Paul echoes this very same idea. He did not want the Thessalonian church to be ignorant:

I Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Notice that Paul did not tell the Thessalonian church “Hey, don't worry about all this prophecy stuff.” No, what he actually said was “I would not have you to be ignorant.” He *wanted* them to understand the doctrines that surround the Second Coming. Paul, like Jesus, was *against* this “pan-millennial” idea. He wanted them to know what God had to say about the Lord's return and he wanted them to comfort each other with these teachings. In fact, in Paul's second letter to them he repeated that idea:

2 Thessalonians 2:1: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

Paul didn't want them to be deceived by false or erroneous teachings, and he expected the Thessalonians to remember what he had taught them. Each time the Second Coming is mentioned we find God urging us to pay attention and hear what He has to say about it! I find it interesting that one of the last things Jesus does in the Bible is bless those who “keep” (*tereo*) what He had just revealed about end-times prophecy:

Revelation 22:7: “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

(You can almost hear Jesus saying “P.S.: This Revelation stuff is important! Pay attention to it.”)

I've already explained what that word “keepeth” means. God is very clear on this point: He wants us to not only *care* about end-times prophecy but to also pay attention and *understand* it. After all, how can we possibly avoid being

deceived if we ignore the subject altogether? How can churches tell the truth apart from lies if they don't know anything about the subject?

Yes, it's true that Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways. Since God clearly wants His children to understand Revelation, doesn't it seem likely that Satan would go out of his way to spread confusion, doubt, and distrust over this subject? After all, if people aren't paying attention anyway then spreading lies is a great way of suppressing the truth!

It is also true that the Second Coming is not an easy subject. Revelation is not a simple book, and it took years of concentrated effort before I finally understood what it was saying. It was difficult but it was worth it. As the Bible says, "Seek, and ye shall find." If we seek the truth we will find it. That doesn't mean that it will be easy, but we need to remember that we do have help: God has promised to give wisdom to all those who ask for it, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. We're not in this alone. If we apply ourselves then God will be there to help us.

Today is actually a great time in history to begin studying eschatology (the study of end-times) because there are so many great resources available. If you're new to this subject, a great place to start is *Footsteps of the Messiah* by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. He begins by explaining the rules that he uses to interpret Scripture, and he then consistently applies those rules to all of the prophetic passages that are throughout the Bible. He takes each passage, quotes it, applies the rules, and then shows the interpretation. It's a very easy book to read, and it's easy to see how the author arrived at his conclusions.

My point, though, is that there's nothing Biblical or godly about what people call "pan-millennialism." It is *not* God's will for us to adopt a "who cares?" attitude to this subject – or to *any* Biblical doctrine, for that matter. These days it's common for people to say "Let's just stick to the major truths; they're all that really matters." Frankly, God is not amused. The Lord did not give mankind a 3-page booklet that outlined the major truths and

then say “Just stick to these and you'll be fine.” Instead He spent thousands of years writing a 1000+ page book that was filled with all kinds of truths, and He expects us to know and believe *all* of it. This idea that we can ignore most of what the Bible says “because it's not core truth” does *not* come from God. Do you really think that the Lord is up in Heaven thinking “Boy, I sure hope My Church ignores 90%+ of what I had to say”?

Finally, let me close by saying that the study of eschatology is important for another reason as well: without a good working knowledge of the subject there are many Bible passages that just won't make any sense. For example, take this passage:

Matthew 25:1: “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with

him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

This is a pretty well-known Bible story, but people misinterpret it all the time. They approach this passage thinking that they already know what it means, and in doing so they gloss over all of the important points and arrive at an erroneous conclusion. First of all, notice that these 10 virgins (or bridesmaids) are waiting on the bridegroom to come. Right away we have a problem because the Church is always represented as the *Bride*, not as ten bridesmaids. Nor is the Church in danger of being excluded from her own wedding – in fact, it's impossible for the wedding to happen without her! This passage isn't talking about the Church at all. It's actually talking about a very *different* group of people.

Plus there's the odd deal surrounding the lamps. Back in ancient times lamps used oil as a fuel, and in the Bible oil always represents the Holy Spirit. When these 10 bridesmaids started waiting all 10 of them had oil; the problem was that the groom tarried for so long that 5 of them ran out. This presents a huge problem because this story is saying is that half of these people *ran out of the Holy Spirit*. In other words, they originally *had* the Spirit, but they eventually lost Him and were caught empty-handed when Jesus returned. Since they lacked the Spirit at the moment of Christ's return, Jesus left them behind and rejected them.

However, Christians today *can't* run out of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sealed within us and cannot be lost. We can offend the Spirit and grieve it, and we can even ignore the Spirit, but we can't lose it. Moreover, having the Spirit sealed within us means that our salvation is assured and cannot be lost. Christians don't have to worry about doing something wrong, losing the Spirit, and then having to scramble to get saved again; that's not how it

works. All of this is evidence that the story isn't talking about the Church at all, but instead is aimed at a very different group of people in a very different period in history. Once you understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this passage makes a great deal of sense, but without that understanding these verses are a real mess.

(For the record, these verses are actually talking about Tribulation saints. In all of history the only group that has ever been given the Holy Spirit as a permanent gift is the Church. In the Old Testament it was a rare gift that – as in the case of Sampson – was easily lost. When the Church is Raptured things will change. It is not possible for someone in the Church to lose their salvation, but in the Tribulation it *will* be possible. Those who are saved during that terrible time in history will need to hold on to what they have lest it slip away.)

Another passage that seems bizarre is this one:

Matthew 25:31: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: . . .

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? . . .

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: . . .

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

If you don't understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this whole event seems strangely redundant. Is Jesus really going to take all the righteous people out of Heaven and all the wicked people out of Hell and then judge them again? Why would people who were *already in Heaven* be so shocked at what Jesus had to say, and why would the people who had already been burning in Hell be amazed that Jesus was upset with them? It seems rather pointless to judge people who had already gone on to everlasting life or everlasting punishment! Why would He regather everyone just to give a short speech and then send them right back where they came from?

The answer is that there's a great deal more going on here – but that only becomes apparent once you understand all the events that surround the Second Coming. (These verses are talking about judging the *living*, not the dead. This judgment is not the same as the Great White Throne judgment, but that is a

subject for another time.)

Here is an example from the Old Testament:

Isaiah 65:17: “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

At first it's easy to think that this is talking about the New Heaven and Earth that are created after the Great White Throne judgment (which is another set of doctrines that few people are familiar with). However, we have a problem: verse 20 tells us that there are still sinners and people still die. It is true that people are living such a long time that someone who dies at the age of 100 is considered to be just a child, but the point is that *people still die*. Yet the Bible tells us that at the Great White Throne judgment the Lord will put an end to sin and death! So what, exactly, is this passage talking about? (The answer is that this is about life in the Millennial Kingdom – a period in history when things will be very different from the way they are today.)

Here is another odd passage:

Zechariah 14:16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD

of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

Here we see God saying that one day all of the nations of the world will be required to go to Jerusalem every year to worship God and “to keep the feast of tabernacles.” If any nations refuse to go then God will curse them by withholding rain. This is not just unexpected; it is astounding! In all of history nothing like this has ever happened. Just when is this going to take place? How does it fit in with God's plan for history? Is there really going to come a day when the entire world will keep Jewish feasts?

There are answers to all of these questions, but you have to work to find them. Let me close by saying this: those who have a “who cares?” attitude will never find the answers. Those who seek wisdom, however, will find it – and they will also find many amazing truths that they never knew existed. As Christ said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

The God of Prophecy

IF YOU EVER have the misfortune of reading *The Purpose Driven Life*, you will come across this statement:

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, “The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!” (The Purpose Driven Life, p. 285)

That statement is a blatant lie. Jesus did not do that *even one time*. Don’t take my word for it though – see for yourself! Let’s take a look at the time when the disciples asked Jesus about prophetic matters:

Matthew 24:3: “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Now at this point, if you believed Rick Warren, you would expect Jesus to say “Look, guys, don’t worry about it. Just focus on preaching the gospel and everything will be fine.” But if you read the very next verse you’ll discover that Jesus didn’t say anything remotely like that. Instead He said this:

Matthew 24:4: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.”

Jesus then spent the *entire rest of the chapter* talking about matters relating to end-times prophecy – *and He continued the discussion throughout the entirety of the next chapter as well!* So, instead of telling His disciples “Hey, end-times stuff is none of your business!” as Rick Warren claims, Jesus actually spent two entire chapters of Matthew talking about it. Two entire chapters! Let’s also not overlook the fact that the entire book of Revelation is a revelation *from Jesus Christ* that He gave to His Church so they would be aware of prophetic end-times events (Revelation 1:1-3). If Jesus really thought that it was “none of our business” do you think He would have given us an entire book of the Bible dedicated to it?

Jesus did *not* want His disciples to be ignorant of prophetic matters; in fact, He actually wanted them to be very informed so that they would not be deceived. His big concern was that false teachers would come along and tell lies, and people would fall for those lies and be deceived. Jesus wanted His followers to understand end-times prophecy. In fact, Jesus wanted His followers to be constantly watching out for His return. In Mark 13 He repeatedly commanded His disciples to be alert:

Mark 13:32: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

34 For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when

the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”

Rick Warren would have you believe that Jesus didn't even want you to be thinking about His return. He claims that Jesus went around telling people “It's none of your business”. The real Jesus, however, is quite different. He *commanded* His disciples to think about His return and to be watching for it with great alertness.

There is an attitude in the Church today that prophecy isn't very important and that the right thing to do is to be “pan-millennial”. People claim that we just need to live our lives and wait for everything to “pan out”. That attitude, though, is not biblical and does not honor God. It is not a good idea to tell God “I don't really care what you have to say about prophecy; I'm just going to ignore it”.

I urge you to avoid being pan-millennial. Do *not* take a “who cares?” approach to prophecy – or to any Bible doctrine, for that matter. The “who cares?” attitude is exactly why Jesus condemned the church at Laodicea; He absolutely detests it.

Fake Prophecies Versus Real Prophecies

ONE OF THE STRIKING THINGS about the prophecies in the Bible is that they are specific, detailed, and clear. This is very different from the prophecies that are found out in the world. Outside of the Word of God you will find only two kinds of prophecies: those that are vague, and those that are wrong.

For example, Nostradamus is widely considered to be a prophet – but his prophecies leave a lot to be desired. Take this one, for example:

*Seven conspirators at the banquet will cause to flash
The iron out of the ship against the three:
One will have the two fleets brought to the great one,
When through the evil the latter shoots him in the
forehead.*

(<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nos/cen5eng.htm>)

That could mean almost anything! It is impossible to look at that and say “Oh, that means the Emperor of France is going to be assassinated.” This prophecy is utterly useless; you can’t use it to figure out what is going to happen in the future. Your only hope is to wait until something happens and then see if there are any prophecies that could be interpreted to match what just happened.

Another great example of this is the famous “Prophecy of the Popes” by St. Malachy. He prophesied that there would be a certain number of popes between his day and the last pope, who would supposedly be called Peter the Roman. Malachy gave a description of each person who would hold the papal office between his day and Peter the Roman. However, these

descriptions left a great deal to be desired. For example, these are his descriptions of the four popes that would precede Peter:

Pope #108: Flower of Flowers

Pope #109: Of the half moon

Pope #110: From the labor of the sun

Pope #111: Glory of the olive

Does that prophecy convey any useful information? Not really. What people end up doing is examining the entire life of a pope to see if there is anything that could possibly be tied to the prophecy. Did Pope #111 work with olives? Did his family own olives? Did he like olives? Were there olives in his family crest?

The Malachy prophecy is utterly useless. It does not give you any useful advance knowledge about Pope #111. That defeats the entire point of prophecy, which is to *tell you what is going to happen before it happens*.

Biblical prophecies are completely different: they are specific and easy to understand. For example, when God refers to people who have not been born, He does not give us some vague mystical “flower of flowers” prophecy. Instead God calls them *by name*:

1 Kings 13:2: “And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.”

Notice the incredible detail! God didn't just say that *someone* would come along and burn the priests' bones on the altar; He said that *Josiah* would do it. God added that Josiah would not be a random person but would be of the house of David. Centuries later, King Josiah did exactly what God foretold.

God actually *named names* – which is something Malachy avoided doing.

Or take this prophecy, for example:

Ezekiel 29:9: “And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the Lord: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it.

10 Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia.

11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years.

12 And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries.

13 Yet thus saith the Lord God; At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered:

14 And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom.

15 It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.”

That prophecy (which has not yet been fulfilled) is very specific. You can easily tell *what* is going to happen, *where* it is going to happen, and what the *results* are going to be. It is rich in

detail – as are other Biblical prophecies. This passage conveys a great deal of useful information.

As you can see, there is a *huge* difference between Nostradamus saying “someone, somewhere, will do something” and God saying “Egypt will be abandoned for 40 years”. The hallmark of *real* prophecy is rich detail. Only false prophets need to hide behind vague phrases that could be interpreted in a thousand different ways. People who actually *know* the future can afford to be incredibly precise – and that is exactly what God does.

Don’t be fooled by vague prophecies that can mean almost anything. Stick to what is in the Bible.

Bound Him A Thousand Years

SINCE THERE IS SO MUCH confusion and turmoil about matters relating to end-times and the book of Revelation, I thought it would be a good idea to take a moment and explain what I believe and why I believe it. This might be helpful for those who are sitting on the fence, unsure of where they stand.

There are four major interpretations of the book of Revelation. In my opinion, two of these views can be dismissed immediately, leaving just two interpretations to examine. The four views are:

Preterism: This view teaches that the whole book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD, including the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This view is utter nonsense and doesn't deserve to be taken seriously. In order for this viewpoint to be true the book of Revelation must have been written before 70 AD. However, it has been proven beyond any doubt that the book was written in the early 90s. This view has other tremendous problems, which I have discussed elsewhere.

Historical: This view says that the book of Revelation is an overview of all of history from the time of Christ to the Second Coming. The problem is that this interpretation just doesn't work: people's attempts to tie the events in Revelation to real events have failed catastrophically. It is a nice theory but in practice it does not even come close to working.

Amillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is

a symbolic look at the struggles between good and evil in the Church Age. It is called “amillennialism” because it teaches that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth. Instead, the “millennium” is symbolic of the Church Age that we are living in now.

Premillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is a description of what happens during the 7-year Tribulation, and is a literal reciting of events that uses symbolic language. This is the view that believes in the Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, and so forth. This view believes that at the end of the Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ will return to Earth in person, set up a physical kingdom, and reign from Jerusalem as a king for a thousand years.

The only two views that I take seriously are the amillennial view and the premillennial view. Preterism is easy to disprove and is actually silly. Christ has *not* already returned; that is utter nonsense. Likewise, the historical view sounds great in theory but in practice it utterly fails. People simply can't tie the events in Revelation to real historical events; no matter how hard they try they keep failing. That system of interpretation just does not work.

So, between the two possibilities, how do you know which one is right? Is Revelation simply a highly symbolic look at the struggle between good and evil, or is Revelation intended to be interpreted largely literally? Is the millennium symbolic of the age we're living in now, or is it a real thousand-year period to come?

Most people these days are “pan-millennial”. They believe that since “it will all pan out in the end”, it really doesn't matter one way or another. They're content to ignore the entire issue and go on about their lives. Although that may seem wise, I want to emphasize something: the “I don't really care” viewpoint *is not a Biblical stance*. If your response to *any* Biblical truth is “I don't

really care what the Word teaches” then you have a serious problem. The New Testament commands us to watch and be ready; Jesus Himself repeated this several times. Not caring is *not* the same thing as watching and being ready.

Watching and being ready is a far more serious issue than you might think. There are many people out there who are peddling false end-times beliefs that have destroyed the faith of many. Preterists teach that Christ has already returned; if you don't know the truth then how can you refute them? Harold Camping predicted that Jesus would return in May 2012 – and people believed him to such an extent that many sold their houses and their possessions. If you aren't solidly grounded in the truth then how can you refute the Harold Campings of the world? Telling people “your beliefs are obviously stupid” is not a Biblical response. If you have no idea what the truth is then you aren't going to be able to refute anyone. In fact, if you don't know the truth yourself then how are you going to protect *yourself* from being deceived?

I hesitate to mention this, but there is an old conspiracy theory called Project Blue Beam that suggested that the government might try to fake the return of Jesus Christ. I think this theory is utterly preposterous – but it does bring up a point. Satan is the father of lies, and he is quite busy in our age. Jesus warned His followers to beware of false Christs:

Matthew 24:4: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

Jesus warned that *many* imposters would come and claim to be Him. There would be false Christs and false Second Comings. If you don't know the truth then how will you keep from being deceived? Harold Camping proved that many people can't tell the truth from a lie – and remember, Satan and his demons can appear as angels of light. If the devil staged a false

Second Coming, complete with what looked like angels and the appearance of someone who claimed to be Jesus, are you really well-grounded enough to tell the difference between a satanic deception and the real thing? Pan-millennialism is incredibly dangerous because it encourages ignorance, and ignorance has destroyed many lives. You need to know the truth because the truth is the only thing that can protect you.

On top of that, the Bible tells us that we should earnestly desire the return of Christ. If Christ really is the great love of our life and the great passion of our heart then we will long for Him to return and we will be interested in the events surrounding His coming. Telling Jesus “I do love you but I’m just not interested in when you’re coming back; you can stay away forever for all I care” is the *opposite* of passion and does not honor the Lord. If you love somebody you will long to see them; if you don’t want to see them then you probably don’t really care about them at all (or, at the very least, you have a troubled relationship with them).

So how can you decide between premillennialism and amillennialism? It’s a tough question, but I believe there is an answer. The passage that convinced me to take one side over the other was this one:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the

witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

In this scene an angel comes down from Heaven, binds Satan with a chain, and imprisons him in a pit so that he can no longer deceive the nations or cause any harm. He is bound for a thousand years. During that time the people who were martyred for their faith in Jesus are raised from the dead and reign with Christ for a thousand year period that is referred to as "the millennium". Now, premillennialism holds that this should be taken literally while amillennialism says that it should be taken symbolically. So which is it?

Here is what bothered me. The amillennial view says that this thousand-year period is symbolic of the age we are living in *now*. They teach that when Christ died on the cross, He bound Satan and rendered him powerless. In this age the Church is reigning triumphant. This passage is just a highly symbolic look at our time in history.

That brings up a question: is there anyone who actually believes that Satan has been bound and rendered powerless? Does anyone believe that Satan and his forces of darkness have been neutralized and can no longer deceive anyone or trouble the nations? The apostle Peter sure didn't! Long after Jesus was resurrected, Peter warned the Church that Satan was a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). He didn't believe

that Satan had been bound. The apostle Paul warned us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of darkness, and urged us to take on the whole armor of God so that we can stand against the wiles of the devil. He didn't believe the devil had been bound. This is pretty strong evidence against amillennialism. If the devil hasn't been bound yet then amillennialism can't be true.

There is also the issue that the details don't match up. Amillennialism teaches that when Christ died on the cross He bound Satan. However, in Revelation 20 we see that Satan isn't bound by Christ; instead he is bound by an unnamed angel. Although Christ is mentioned in this passage (the martyrs reign with Christ), *Christ doesn't do the binding of Satan*. On top of that, the passage does *not* say that Satan was bound by the death of the Lamb; instead it says that Satan was bound with a chain. If this passage represented Christ binding Satan at the cross then Christ should have been the one doing the binding and the binding should have been accomplished by His death and His shed blood. But we don't see *any* of that here.

There is yet another big problem. Verse 6 speaks of a resurrection that happens *before* the reigning begins; it says that people who were martyred for their faith *in Christ* will be raised from the dead and reign with Him. In fact, it is *the martyrs* who are doing the reigning, and they start right after Satan is bound. So, then, Satan is bound, the Christian martyrs are raised from the dead, and the martyrs then reign with Christ. This timeline presents a really serious problem for amillennialism because *no one was martyred for their faith in Christ before Christ died*. It's true that there were martyrs in the Old Testament, but they did not believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ because *it hadn't happened yet and people didn't know about it yet*. Even if you claim "Well, it's just a symbolic reference to the Old Testament saints", that still presents a problem: how many Old Testament saints have been raised from the dead and are now reigning on the Earth? It won't do any good to claim that they are reigning from Heaven because *that is not the same thing as being*

resurrected – and, besides, Revelation 5:10 makes it clear that the reigning happens *on Earth*.

For that matter, is the Church reigning over the Earth during this period of history? Not exactly: for most of the past two thousand years the Church has been brutally oppressed, persecuted, hunted down, and slaughtered. Paul says that we and the whole creation are groaning, awaiting our adoption. It is true that God is saving countless people, but it is a bloody process that is full of pain. Christ said “In this world you will have tribulation”, not “in this world you will reign as kings”.

Revelation 20 describes a time when Satan has been neutralized, the dead have been raised, the martyrs are living again, and the righteous are triumphantly reigning over an Earth where evil has been soundly defeated and the powers of darkness are unable to harm anyone. In *no way* does that even begin to describe the age we are living in now. I simply cannot believe we are in the millennium right now; the details are all wrong.

That only leaves one option. If the millennium is a real thing that is going to happen, and if it hasn't happened yet, then it must happen at some point in the future. If it happens in the future then the premillennial view must be true. At some point in the future there must be a time when Satan will be bound, the dead will be raised, and Christ and the martyrs will reign triumphantly over a peaceful Earth.

From that point it's not hard to work out the rest. Although Revelation does contain symbolic language, the symbols it uses are defined elsewhere in the Bible. It's not hard to look them up in the Old Testament and see what it is really talking about. The rest, like the millennium, is literal.

Now, some have argued that premillennialism must be wrong because that interpretation is only about a hundred years old. People claim that for most of history the church has been amillennial. The truth is that the early church was actually premillennial: surviving letters from that period show that in the centuries immediately following Christ the church interpreted end-times and Revelation much as premillennial people do today.

However, when the Catholic Church arose in the 5th century they stamped out that view because Catholicism teaches that it is the fulfillment of the millennium. For more than a thousand years the Catholic church enforced amillennialism on pain of death. It was only with the advent of the Reformation that people began to escape its clutches and go back to what the Bible actually teaches. Shortly after the Reformation (and long before Darby and the 19th century) people began writing about premillennialism again.

You could just as accurately say that the idea that Christ is the head of the Church is a recent view. That view only became prevalent *after* the Reformation. Before the Reformation the Catholic church taught that the Pope was the head of the church (which they still teach today). Many Biblical doctrines appear to be “recent discoveries” because the Catholic Church forced their heretical view on the world for such a long time. After the Reformation, though, people began going back to the Bible.

The reason I am premillennial is because I see it taught in the Bible. It is the only viewpoint that consistently makes sense and doesn't result in bizarre problems. Amillennialism sounds good, but when you look at the details it falls apart. As amazing as it sounds, there really will come a day when Christ will establish an actual, physical kingdom on Earth, centered in Jerusalem. Revelation is not the only book that speaks of it; the Old Testament does as well. That, however, is a subject for another time.

Pre-Tribulation Rapture

WITHIN THE CHURCH TODAY there is a great deal of debate regarding the subject of end-times prophecy. There are some people who believe that prophecy should be ignored entirely. There are others who believe that prophecy is largely symbolic and is not intended to be taken in a literal way. There are others, though, who think that prophecy should *not* be “spiritualized”. They think that it means what it says and we should take the subject seriously.

Today the idea of the Rapture is widely ridiculed. People simply don't believe in it anymore, which is a great tragedy. However, I *do* believe in it. I think that one day, before the Tribulation begins, the Lord will return to Earth and take His Church back to Heaven. This is *not* the same thing as the Second Coming, which happens *after* the Tribulation. The Rapture is a separate event, and is the time when when we will all be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. I believe this happens before Israel signs the seven-year covenant with the Antichrist.

There are a number of reasons why I believe this, but let's start at the beginning. After the Last Supper took place and Judas left to betray Jesus, the Lord told His disciples that He was about to leave them. He told them not to be afraid, though, because He had a reason for leaving them:

John 14:1: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

In other words, Jesus was going away so He could prepare a place for His disciples. Once He finished He would come back and get them so that they could be with Him forever.

In ancient Jewish courtships, after the bride and groom were engaged the groom would leave his bride-to-be and go prepare a home for the two of them to live in. After he completed it he would return for his bride and they would be married. Jesus is doing the same thing for us. It is not for nothing that the Church is called the Bride of Christ.

In verse 28 Jesus tells us where He is going:

John 14:28: “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”

Jesus is going to His father, and one day He will come back and get the Church. Nothing more is said at this point. This is all very straightforward: Jesus left us to prepare a home for us, and one day He will come back and get us. There is nothing complicated about this.

The next passage of interest is found in I Thessalonians:

I Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them

which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

This passage goes into more detail about the time when Jesus will return for His Church. Without repeating everything the passage says, those of the Church who died before the Lord returns will be raised from the dead – their bodies will be brought back to life. (That, after all, is what “resurrection” means. In order to have a resurrection you must first have something that died, and it then has to come back to life. When we die the only part of us that stops living is our bodies. *That* is what gets raised from the dead when Jesus returns.) After the dead saints have been resurrected, the living saints will be transformed. In an instant they will become immortals, and all that is sinful or unclean about them will be banished forever. Next, everyone will meet Christ in the air, after which we will “ever be with the Lord”.

So here we have a picture of what it will be like when Jesus returns for the Church. There will be a resurrection of the dead, a putting on of immortality, and a grand meeting in the air. After this has happened we will “ever be with the Lord”. This passage adds a lot of detail to Christ's return, but it doesn't give us any information about its timing. When does this happen in relation to other end-times events? Based on this passage alone we cannot say, but there are other verses that provide some context for the Rapture.

Incidentally, the word “rapture” comes from verse 17. The phrase “caught up” in Latin is very similar to the word “rapture”. For centuries the only version of the Bible that was available was

the Latin version, and that is where this word came from. When people speak of the Rapture they are merely speaking of the time when the Church will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. (This is why it is unfair to say that the word “rapture” never appears in the Bible. It actually does appear in *Latin* Bibles because it's a Latin word.)

There really should be no debate among Christians about whether or not there will be a Rapture. The Bible is quite clear that one day we will be “caught up” (or “raptured”) to meet our Lord in the air. The only real question is one of timing – when does this happen? Is this the same thing as the Second Coming that is spoken of in Matthew 24 (which happens after the Tribulation), or is this something separate?

The next passage can be found in I Corinthians:

I Corinthians 15:50: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of

sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

This passage also speaks of the resurrection. Those who have believed in Jesus but died before His return will be raised from the dead (meaning, as we said earlier, that their dead bodies will be raised back to life). Next, those who are still alive will be transformed; the mortal will put on immortality and we will be changed. (Some more details about this can be found in the preceding verses, I Corinthians 15:35-49). These teachings are quite clear and are not tied to any particular interpretation of end-times. The verses simply teach that one day the Lord will return and get His church and they will be forever with Him. However, this still does not answer our question: just when does this occur? Does this happen before, during, or after the Tribulation?

First, it should be noted that the Church began on the day of Pentecost and will be completed at the Rapture. Before Pentecost there were Old Testament saints, but none of them were a part of the Church. If you will recall, John the Baptist referred to himself as a friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29); he did not consider himself to be a part of the Bride. John was beheaded long before the day of Pentecost occurred, so although he was saved he was not a part of the Church. The word “church” never appears in the Old Testament, and the reason for this is because the church is a new concept that began after the death of Christ, and not before. There was no such thing as the Church before the day of Pentecost.

As was explained earlier, when the Lord returns at the Rapture He will gather the Church to Himself and the Church will then be gone. Since the Church is being taken to Heaven, they will obviously no longer be on the Earth. It is worth noting that

the Church appears in Revelation 1-3, which takes place *before* the Tribulation, but there is no mention of the Church being on Earth in Revelation 6-18, which takes place *during* the Tribulation. There are saints mentioned in chapters 6-18 but they are never referred to as the Church (just as the saints in the Old Testament are never referred to as the Church). *Nowhere* does the Bible speak of the Church going through the Tribulation.

This, however, is not the strongest evidence that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation. In Luke 21 Jesus says this:

Luke 21:34: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

This passage is one of the strongest evidences for placing the Rapture before the Tribulation. The Lord said that the Tribulation will be a snare to *all* those who dwell on the *whole Earth*. In other words, *everyone who is on Earth will be forced to suffer through it*. However, the Lord tells us to watch and pray so that we can escape this time of suffering that will afflict *everyone on the entire planet*. If it afflicts everyone on the planet with no exceptions, then the only way to escape it is to not be on the planet. If we should pray so we can escape it, then we must be praying that the Lord will come and get us before it happens! This strongly implies that the Rapture will occur prior to the Tribulation and remove the Church from Earth so that we can escape it.

Some people get upset at Christians who teach a pre-

Tribulation Rapture and accuse them of being easy-living Christians who just don't want to suffer or get their hands dirty for Christ. It's worth noting that Jesus *commands* His disciples to pray that we won't go through this period. He *did not want His children to endure it*. Praying to escape the Tribulation is not evidence of a weak will; it is *obedience* to the command of Christ.

There are others who say that “watch and pray” means that only the “worthy” will escape the Tribulation, and all backslid Christians will have to endure it. That is not what Jesus is talking about. The Lord is not going to leave part of His Bride behind for *any* reason. When the Church is complete *all* of it will be brought home. What Jesus is talking about are people who think they are saved but are not. Jesus spent a lot of time warning people to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. All of those who are saved will be in the Rapture, but not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” is among the saved. That is the point.

I Thessalonians expands upon this idea of a pre-Tribulation Rapture:

I Thessalonians 5:1: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and **they shall not escape**.

4 But **ye**, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

First of all, it's important to note that Paul is talking about the “day of the Lord” (verse 2), which is *not* Judgment Day. The “day of the Lord” is a phrase used throughout Scripture that refers to the Tribulation. (Many Old Testament passages talk about the Tribulation, but that is outside the scope of this discussion.) Paul is warning the Thessalonian church that the Tribulation will catch the lost world by surprise and they will not escape. However, Paul goes on to say that the Church is not in darkness and will *not* be surprised. While the world will be caught up in the Tribulation, the Church will not because *it was not appointed to wrath*. In this context the word “wrath” is not referring to Judgment Day (since that is not what's being discussed!) but is instead the wrath that God will pour out upon the world during the Tribulation. The world will have to endure that terrible period of time, but the Church will be spared.

In verse 9 Paul mentions the “hope of salvation”. This is not salvation from our sins – after all, that is *not* a hope. Christ has already forgiven our sins and paid our debt with His own blood. Besides, Paul is not discussing salvation from our sins. The “hope of salvation” is salvation from the wrath that is mentioned in the first verses of this chapter – *the wrath of the Tribulation*. This passage provides clear, direct evidence that God has not appointed His Church to suffer through the wrath of the Tribulation. Instead He will deliver us from it – and since the

Tribulation will afflict *everyone* on the *whole Earth*, He must be planning to take His Church *out* of the Earth before the Tribulation begins. Since the Marriage of the Lamb takes place in Heaven *before* the Tribulation ends (see Revelation 19:7), that is even more evidence that the Church must be in Heaven during the Tribulation. Since the Rapture is what moves the Church to Heaven, the Rapture must happen before the Tribulation.

Another mention of this same idea can be found in Revelation 3:10:

Revelation 3:10: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

In this passage, the Tribulation is the hour of trial that will try everyone that dwells upon the Earth. Notice that this passage does not say that the Church will be kept *safe* during this hour of trial, but that *it will be kept from the hour of trial altogether*. Given that the verse goes out of its way to explain that the Tribulation impacts *all the world* to afflict *everyone that lives on the Earth*, this is more evidence that the Church will not be on the Earth when the Tribulation happens.

Some have said “Oh, that just means the Church will be protected from persecution during that period”. If you read the rest of Revelation you will see for yourself how ludicrous that statement is – God gives the beast the power to make war with the saints and overcome them (Revelation 13:7), and the beast kills *millions* of believers. There is no possible way that “being kept safe” is the same thing as “the antichrist will hunt down all of you and behead you”. The *Church* is kept safe because it's not on the Earth anymore and so it is out of the antichrist's reach. However, all those who come to Christ after the Rapture are not a part of the Church and are not kept safe. Many millions of them will be hunted down and brutally murdered.

How close are we to the Rapture? Well, the Bible teaches that the Rapture can happen at any moment. For example:

Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

The salvation mentioned in this verse cannot be referring to salvation from sins, because that was finished when Christ died in the cross. Salvation from sins is *not* something that we are still looking forward to in the future. Paul is speaking of salvation from the Tribulation and being saved from the hour of wrath that will come upon the whole Earth. *That* salvation is “nearer than when we believed”. The imagery in these two verses depicts something that is drawing closer and is near at hand. You can almost hear Paul saying “It won't be long now”. Nowhere does he say that it's a long way off or that other things must happen first. It can literally happen at any moment. There are no other signs or events that must take place before the Rapture happens.

James 5 also speaks of this:

James 5:7: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth before the door.”

Like Paul, James says that the coming of the Lord is drawing near and he urges us to be patient until Jesus comes. James goes so far as to say that “the Judge standeth before the door”. If He is standing at the door then He is very near indeed! Revelation also makes this same point:

Revelation 22:20: “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Even Jesus says that He is coming quickly! This can only be true if the Rapture happens before the Tribulation. If the Rapture happens in the middle of the Tribulation then it is always at least 3.5 years away. If it happens at the end of the Tribulation then it's at least 7 years away. In neither case is the Rapture imminent. It is only imminent if it occurs *before* the Tribulation.

The Bible does not say exactly when the Rapture will happen. What it does say is that the coming of the Lord is drawing near and we should be sober and watch for it. Amen!

Is Jesus Returning Soon?

Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

ONE OF THE THINGS the Bible tells us is that each day draws us closer to the return of Christ. The Rapture really is closer today than it was yesterday, and we are closer to it this year than we were last year. The big question on everyone’s mind, though, is this: is the Rapture actually going to happen sometime soon, or is it still a long way off?

People have worked very hard to come up with some way to answer that question. Unfortunately, all of their efforts are doomed to failure. The Rapture is imminent, which means that no prophetic event has to take place before the Rapture happens. It is impossible to say “Well, event X happens one week before the Rapture, and event X is about a year away, so that means...” There is no event X. There are no other events that surround the Rapture. It stands alone, all by itself.

The only thing that we know for sure is that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation begins – but we don’t know how much time separates the Rapture and the Tribulation. The Bible never says that Jesus will return exactly one day before the Tribulation starts (although that’s what people seem to believe). God removed Enoch from the world several generations before He sent the Flood – the great judgment that destroyed the planet. But it’s impossible to look at that and say anything definitive. God may remove the Church from the world generations before the Tribulation begins, or He may wait until the last minute. It is

up to Him, and He has not told us His plans.

On top of that, the Tribulation itself is not near at all. There is a long list of things that must happen before the Tribulation begins, and only a couple of them have happened so far. We are decades away from seeing the Tribulation begin, and it may be much further away than that. Despite what you may have been told, end-time events have not been moving very fast.

It would definitely be helpful to know if the Rapture was going to happen next week or if it was going to be delayed for another five decades. However, that is something we *just can't know*. God has not given us the answer to that question; all He has said is that we need to be watching. We need to live with care because it can literally happen at any time.

Jesus said repeatedly that He was coming quickly, but He never said that the Rapture would happen “soon”. Take a look and see for yourself:

Revelation 3:11: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Revelation 22:7: "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:12: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Revelation 22:20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

“Soon” and “quickly” are *two different things*. When Jesus does come He will come with great speed – but He may *not* come soon. Many generations have come and gone waiting on Him, and

our generation may join them. There is no way to tell.

Preachers love to tell their congregations “Jesus is coming soon!” I wish they would tell the truth instead – that it is impossible to know if He is coming soon, and that we need to be ready regardless. The reason we need to be ready is because when He does come He will come so quickly that it will be impossible to have a change of heart and get ready at the last minute. If you are not ready when He comes then you will be left behind. You must be ready *when* He comes.

One thing I have noticed is that when people realize that Jesus may come soon, they start to panic. The ugly truth is that Christians don’t want Jesus to come soon. They want Him to stay away as long as possible so they can live their lives and finish their to-do lists. Many believers (yes, believers!) see the Rapture as an awful event that they would like to put off as long as possible. They consider their lives vastly more important than the return of Christ. As I have said before, this is a terrible attitude that does not honor God. If you are dreading the return of the Man who shed His own blood to save your soul, then there is something very wrong with your walk with God.

Jesus may return soon, or He may not. But regardless, *we must be ready* – and we must stay ready all our lives, even if we never see Him come. We must be prepared and we must never stop longing for His return. Anyone who looks at Jesus and says “Please stay away so I can have as much fun as possible before you drag me off” needs to repent of the hardness of their heart. That attitude tells God that you are in love with the world, not with Christ – and God has some rather harsh things to say about such people:

I John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Remember this: *be ready*, because Jesus is coming quickly. If you are not ready when He returns then you will be left behind, and you will find yourself in a great deal of trouble. He is coming too quickly for you to wait to prepare yourself until He is here.

The Olivet Discourse

WHENEVER A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE happens someone inevitably points to the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 as proof that the earthquake was some kind of fulfillment of prophecy. I don't know how many times I've been told that earthquake activity is a sign that the Tribulation is near. You see it everywhere – blogs, books, sermons, etc.

I believe this is caused by a misunderstanding of the Olivet Discourse. As it turns out, Matthew 24:1-14 is not talking about the period before the Tribulation. What Jesus is describing in those verses is the first half of the Tribulation itself. In other words, Matthew 24 describes the *actual* Tribulation, not the years leading up to it.

Stop and think about it for a moment. In the beginning of Matthew 24 the disciples approached Jesus privately and asked Him a few questions:

Matthew 24:3: “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Today when we read those verses we immediately think about the Rapture, but that would not have been on the disciples' minds. After all, at this point in time the disciples didn't even know that the Church was going to exist, let alone that there would be a Rapture! When Paul mentioned the Rapture for the first time in I Corinthians 15:51 he said “Behold, I show you a mystery.” The word “mystery” is a very meaningful one, and in the Bible it refers to something *that had never been revealed*

before. Christ had alluded to a deliverance “from the wrath to come” but Paul was the first one to expound on the details. The disciples didn't find out about the Rapture until long after the Resurrection.

What this means is that when the disciples asked Jesus “what shall be the sign of thy coming”, they were asking about the Second Coming, *not* the Rapture. It is important to emphasize that the Second Coming and the Rapture are not the same thing. The Rapture happens *before* the Tribulation and removes the Church from the Earth. The Second Coming happens *after* the Tribulation when Jesus returns from Heaven *with* the Church and ends the reign of the Antichrist.

We can see the difference between these two comings illustrated in several passages. First, look at I Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:16: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

This is actually where we get the word “rapture.” In Latin translations of the Bible the phrase “caught up” in verse 17 is the word “rapturo.” When people speak of the Rapture they are talking about the time when the Church will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. As far as I know the idea that we will “meet the Lord in the air” is not seriously disputed among believers. What people do argue about is when this happens and what happens next, but that is a topic I've discussed elsewhere so I won't repeat it here.

The key point is that in the event described in I Thessalonians 4, the dead are raised, the living are changed, and we are “caught up” to “meet the Lord in the air.” Notice also that

Jesus appears to come to Earth *alone*. The reason this is important is because the Bible also describes a very different event where Jesus returns to the Earth *with the armies of Heaven*, full of wrath and ready to wage war:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. ...

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

21 And the remnant were slain with the sword

of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

You can immediately see that this is a very different event from one the described in I Thessalonians 4!

Interestingly, earlier Revelation 19 the Marriage of the Lamb took place in Heaven, between Christ and His Bride the Church (verse 7). Since I Thes. 4:17 describes the time when Jesus comes to Earth to take His Bride *to* Heaven, and Revelation 19 described the Marriage of the Lamb *in* Heaven, then Rev. 19 must take place *after* the Rapture. What we see described in Revelation is the Second Coming that the disciples were asking about – the time when Jesus returns with the armies of Heaven.

Zechariah also mentions this event:

Zechariah 14:3: “Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.”

Needless to say, in Christ's first coming He never stood on the Mount of Olives and broke it in half, creating a giant valley! He did not “fight against those nations.” What the Bible is

describing in these verses has yet to take place.

Do you see the difference between the Rapture (I Thes. 4) and the Second Coming (Rev. 19)? In the Rapture the Lord returns to Earth *alone*, meets the Church *in the air*, and *goes back to Heaven*. In the Second Coming the Lord returns to Earth with the armies of Heaven, *sets foot* on the mount of Olives, and *wages war* against the armies of the antichrist. They are *completely different events*.

Now that a distinction has been made between the Rapture and the Second Coming, we can turn our attention back to Matthew 24. In this chapter Jesus tells His disciples what signs will occur before His Second Coming, and He goes into a lot of detail. The important thing to remember is that everything you see in Matthew 24:4-28 happens *during* the Tribulation. I realize that verses 5-14 are commonly used as evidence that the Tribulation is near, but what they are actually describing are *the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation itself*.

Take a look to see what I mean:

Matthew 24:5: “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

Compare that to the verses in Revelation that describe the Tribulation itself:

Revelation 6:1: “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were

the noise of thunder; one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

Do you see the correlation? Matthew 24:5-7 says the *beginning* of sorrows will be composed of "wars and rumors of wars", and that is exactly what happens in Revelation 6 when the *first* two seals are opened during the beginning of the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:8 says there will be a famine, and that happens when the third seal is opened:

Revelation 6:5: "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

The "penny" mentioned in verse 6 was actually a day's wage. When these events take place, food prices are so high that it takes an entire day's salary to purchase a single measure of wheat! That is a famine of catastrophic proportions.

Verse 12 mentions a "great earthquake" – the sign that

people get so excited about:

Revelation 6:12: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.”

Notice that neither Matthew nor Revelation say “there will be an increasing number of severe earthquakes as the Tribulation draws nearer.” Go back and look – it doesn't say that! All Jesus says is that there will be earthquakes in diverse places (which is completely different from “an ever-increasing number of earthquakes”), but not to panic because *the end is not yet*. In other words, in Matthew 24:6-7 Jesus was actually saying that if you see earthquakes happening, *don't panic!* He was telling the disciples about signs that *should not cause alarm*. Besides this, the earthquakes Jesus mentioned (and Revelation does talk about more than one) happen *during* the Tribulation, not *before* it. There is a huge difference!

Matthew mentions martyrs:

Matthew 24:9: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.”

Revelation 6 does as well:

Revelation 6:9: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How

long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

Matthew says that the gospel will be preached to the whole world, "and then shall the end come":

Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Revelation reports that this happens *during the Tribulation*, just before the end:

Revelation 14:6: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,
7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

Do you see the striking correlation between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6? The events Jesus describes in those first few verses match the events that take place in the first half of the Tribulation – and as I've explained elsewhere, the verses in the second half of the passage *definitely* correspond to the Tribulation. It is at the midpoint of the Tribulation when the "abomination of desolation" takes place, which Jesus mentions in Matthew 24:15, and the rest of the chapter discusses the terrible events of the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). I cannot escape the conclusion that what Jesus is describing in Matthew 24 *is the seven-year Tribulation itself*. He isn't telling them events that are

going to take place *before* the Tribulation; instead He's telling them things that will happen *during* the Tribulation!

The reason He is doing this is because the disciples wanted to know what signs would happen just prior to His Second Coming. When does that take place? *After* the Tribulation. (Look at the passage to see what I mean – the “great tribulation” is mentioned verse 21, and the Lord returns in verse 29-30, “immediately after the tribulation.”) So it makes perfect sense that the Lord would explain the events of the Tribulation to them – events that would certainly indicate that the Second Coming was near, and events that Jesus was the first to reveal. At this time Revelation had not yet been written; in fact, Revelation would not be penned until all of the disciples except for John had been executed.

When Jesus says in verse 34 that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”, He is saying is that the generation that is alive when the Tribulation begins will still be alive when Jesus returns. When Jesus told this to His disciples no one realized this. Jesus was the first one to make it known that the generation that was alive when the Tribulation started would not have died out before the Second Coming.

I want to emphasize this again: when Jesus says in Matthew 24:33 “so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”, He is not talking about the Rapture or the Tribulation. What He is saying is that His Second Coming (which takes place *after* the Tribulation) is near. When He says in verse 36 “But of that day and hour knoweth no man” He is talking about the Second Coming, *not* the Rapture. The Rapture is not even mentioned in Matthew 24! People apply these verses to the Rapture all the time but that is *not* what Jesus was talking about.

Just to make it clear, *before* the Tribulation begins the Lord will come and get His Church and take them home to Heaven. That is the Rapture. Later, at the *end* of the Tribulation, the Lord will come back to Earth *with* His Church and defeat the Antichrist. This is the Second Coming, and *that* is what Matthew

24 is talking about.

So, in conclusion, when you see an earthquake happen, take Christ's advice in Matthew 24:6 and *don't panic*. As Jesus said in that very same verse, “the end is not yet”!

Prophetic Delays

IN JEREMIAH 37 the Lord told Jeremiah that the Chaldeans were going to destroy Jerusalem:

Jeremiah 37:6: “Then came the word of the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah saying,

7 Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh’s army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land.

8 And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire.

9 Thus saith the Lord; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.

10 For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.”

At that time the people were saying “Oh, we don’t need to worry about the Chaldeans. The Egyptians are coming to help us and they will make the Chaldeans leave. Everything is going to be fine.” God told Jeremiah to warn the people that they were wrong. Egypt was not going to be able to save them, and the Chaldeans were going to burn the city.

Immediately after Jeremiah relayed this message, the

Chaldeans left the land because they were afraid of the Egyptians:

Jeremiah 37:11: “And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh’s army,”

Needless to say, this did not help Jeremiah’s credibility. He was promptly arrested and put in prison.

As it turned out, though, events *did* happen exactly as God said. The Chaldeans did come back, and when they returned Egypt was not able to save Israel. The Chaldeans did burn the city with fire and carry off its people. The prophecy came true – but it didn’t come true right away. Instead, in the short run, what happened was exactly the opposite of what God had said. Even though Jeremiah was proven right in the end, current events made it look like he was a false prophet.

There is something very similar to this going on today. In the past hundred years there have been several Bible prophecies fulfilled. Israel has become a nation again, and the Jews now possess Jerusalem. However, that’s been pretty much it. For years Bible teachers have been saying that one day Damascus will be utterly destroyed. They have been predicting a massive war between Israel and her neighbors – a war that Israel wins, that lulls Israel into a false sense of peace, and that leads to the Gog-Magog war. Yet despite all these predictions over all these years, *none of it has happened yet*. Israel has been involved in a number of wars, but none of them have been a fulfillment of prophecy. Each prediction has been proven false.

For the past few years there has been a lot of tension in the Middle East. Some people are claiming that this tension will lead to a war that will fulfill prophecy – but we have heard that before. The truth is that no one has any idea what is going to happen next. People keep saying “The end is near!”, but they have been saying that since before I was born.

We are in the same situation that Jeremiah was in. God told Jeremiah the truth: Egypt was not going to save Jerusalem,

and the Chaldeans really were going to take the city. In the end that is exactly what happened – but in the short term the Egyptians did scare the Chaldeans away.

Ultimately, Damascus really is going to be destroyed. Israel will defeat her neighbors. She will enter into a time of peace and become wealthy. The Gog-Magog war will happen. One day the Tribulation will begin. These things will happen – we just don't know when.

It may be that the current situation will lead to a fulfillment of prophecy. It is also quite possible that there will be no war – or that the war will have nothing to do with prophecy. The fulfillment of these various prophecies may still be decades away. It may happen in our lifetimes, or it may not.

The Rapture can happen at any time, but end-times prophecies are a different matter. Fulfillment may not be near, and the Tribulation may not be near either. That means that there is still time for us to work and preach the gospel. We have been given more time than many people expected, and we should use that time as wisely as possible. After all, the day will come when our time will run out – and when that happens our work will be over, whether we were finished or not.

A Secret Rapture?

AS I'VE SPENT TIME STUDYING PROPHECY I've noticed that some people apparently believe in the idea of a “secret Rapture”. What they mean by this is *not* that no one knows when the Rapture will occur (which is quite correct), but rather that when the Rapture happens no one will notice. They seem to think that the Lord will return for the Church and will take them away to Heaven without anyone noticing. The world will simply go on about its business as if nothing had happened.

As far as I can tell, this idea is apparently based on this verse:

I Thessalonians 5:2: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”

There are a number of serious problems with this theory. First of all, this verse is talking about the “day of the Lord”. This is a reference to the *Tribulation*, not the Rapture. We know this because the Old Testament has quite a lot to say about the “day of the Lord”. For example:

Isaiah 13:6: “Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.”

Joel 2:1: “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

Notice that the prophets are talking about a day of “destruction” and a time of “darkness” – *not* a time when the Lord takes His Bride home! According to Joel, this is a period of such great trouble that it will be unlike anything that has ever happened before in all of history. This perfectly echoes what Jesus said in Matthew:

Matthew 24:21: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.
22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

As we discussed previously, what Jesus describes in Matthew 24 (part of which is quoted above) are the events of the Tribulation, which occur just before Jesus returns. When Paul says in I Thessalonians 5:2 that the day of the Lord comes as a “thief in the night”, he is saying that the Tribulation will catch the world off-guard. When Jesus says in Matthew 24:42 that “ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”, He is talking about His return *after* the Tribulation – *not* the Rapture! Remember, the Rapture happens *before* the Tribulation, but the return that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24:30 happens *after* the Tribulation.

So, we can immediately see that I Thessalonians 5:2 isn't even talking about the Rapture. It has an entirely different subject in mind.

We can go further than this, however. The Bible says that the Tribulation will come “as a thief in the night”. When a thief

breaks into a home he catches the homeowners off-guard, because they weren't expecting to be visited by a burglar. However, after the thief has come and gone the owners are *very* aware that someone has been there *because all of their possessions are gone*. Of course, once the thief strikes and carries off your valuables it is too late to do anything about it.

This is what Paul is trying to say. The Tribulation will take the unbelieving world by surprise. They will not see it coming, but they will know when it has arrived because terrible things will start happening. By then, however, it will be much too late to escape it.

The same thing can be said of the Rapture. No one knows when it will happen; it may be soon or it may be many generations away. It will come much like a thief in the night – when it happens it will catch the world by surprise. After it happens the world will know that something must have just occurred to make many people vanished, but it will be too late to do anything about it. The opportunity will have passed.

It is *not* reasonable to think that the Rapture will go unnoticed. After all, millions of people are going to suddenly vanish! How could that go unnoticed? It will probably be the biggest news story of all time – the mass abduction of *millions* of people from all walks of life. The world will know that something *big* just happened. It will come as a surprise, but after it happens there will be nothing *secret* about it.

Will The Rapture End America?

FOR SOME TIME NOW prophecy experts have taught that since America is not mentioned in Bible prophecy, that probably means that America (as we know her) will not be around when the end-times events begin. Since America is around now but won't be around then, these teachers have concluded that something is going to happen that will remove America from the world stage. Some people have speculated that the event that will destroy America is the Rapture.

This idea is an old one, but I think it is wrong. People who promote the idea that the Rapture will end America usually think that America is a Christian nation. The thought process works like this: since America is overwhelmingly composed of Christians, if all the Christians disappeared then that would leave America as a hollow shell of her former self. It would throw the country into such chaos that she could never recover, and she would be an easy target for her enemies.

That sounds great – but it's wrong. According to polling data and research, only a tiny percentage of Americans are actually Christians. Lots of people call themselves Christians, but when it comes to having Christian beliefs and a Christian worldview it is an entirely different story. This country has a staggering percentage of “Christian-in-name-only” believers.

Just how many people are we talking about? Around *eight percent*:

For a long time many of us have followed the work of George Barna, the Christian researcher who knew that there was something wrong when most Americans identified themselves as

“Christian”. Common sense tells us something is wrong with that kind of response because if the majority were truly “Christian” then how could we be experiencing so many moral and spiritual problems today? Why wouldn’t every law passed in America conform to scriptural standards? How could America not obviously be anything other than “Christian” if such a majority claimed to be so? Why would we ban prayer in school, the Ten Commandments from courtrooms, or promote Islamic practices in our schools? Barna realized that he had to narrow the requirements in order to uncover the truth.

He chose to determine who exactly was an “Evangelical” rather than simply a “Christian” because Evangelicals were supposed to be closer to the definition of someone who practiced what they preached rather than merely being a cultural Christian in name only or someone who just “goes to church”. Barna developed a set of criteria he calls “the 9-point evangelical”. Such people are defined according to the following rules:

1. They say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today.
2. They believe when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Christ as Savior.
3. They say their faith is very important in their life today.

4. They believe they have a personal responsibility to share their beliefs with non-Christians.

5. They believe Satan exists.

6. They believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works.

7. They believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth.

8. They assert that the Bible is accurate in all it teaches.

9. They describe God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

In other words, if you ask everyone in a given room if they consider themselves to be a “Christian”, practically all the hands will instinctively go up. If you then ask, “How many of you are ‘Evangelical’ Christians?” the majority drop their arms and only 38% of hands are still in the air. But if you ask everyone to keep their hand in the air to affirm they believe in each of the above nine points as they are read one by one, the end result will be that only about 8% of the room will still be holding up a hand to affirm all nine of the basic criteria.

-- D E Isom

As you can see, these are the most basic of Christian

beliefs, and yet hardly anyone believes them! The country is filled with people who claim to be Christian but who have no love for Christian teachings or doctrine. They may claim that they love God, but their heart is far from Him.

I think this quote puts it well:

There is a YouTube video which depicts what is probably the most mainstream concept of how the Rapture is envisioned to work. It shows a Sunday morning church service where the pastor is preaching about the Rapture to a congregation of a couple hundred when the dramatic sound of thunder takes all but a handful “in the twinkling of an eye”. (1 Co. 15:52) The miserable few who are left behind are dazed and shocked in a now almost empty church as more than 95% of the congregation were instantly translated in the Rapture. At the risk of filling up my email beyond its theoretical capacity, I am going to ask you to consider whether it is really going to happen like that. Do you think everyone currently attending church is going to be snatched up as portrayed in the video? I think it is opposite of that. If I were making the video, 190 people would be sitting there wondering what happened to the 10 or so whose disappearance was so unobtrusive to that Sunday morning service that they begin with a search to see if they are in the bathroom or parking lot.

– D E Isom

I suspect that out of the 300 million people who live in the United States, only 20 to 30 million of them are actually Christians. I suspect that most of them are older people, and many

of them have already retired. I also suspect that few of them work in the government, or hold political office, or are the leaders of corporations. In short, I don't think that very many of them are key players in the nation.

If 30 million people disappeared from this country it would certainly be noticed, but I don't think it would end life as we know it. There would certainly be some initial chaos, but then life would return to normal. To look at it another way: the population of Texas is 26 million people (as of 2012). If the entire state of Texas disappeared it would certainly impact the country, but the country would survive. It would not be The End Of All Things.

On top of that, I strongly suspect that many churches throughout the country would be untouched by the Rapture. They may have one or two members vanish, but other than that their congregations would be left intact. True churches are few and far between, and they are becoming increasingly rare. (If you have ever tried to find a good, Bible-believing church then you know exactly what I am talking about.)

Given how few Americans are actually Christians, it seems unlikely that the Rapture will end America. The Rapture will certainly be noticed, but it will probably not destroy the country. In fact, it is entirely possible that America will be destroyed long before the Rapture happens. Once a nation's sin reaches a critical point, God will judge that nation and destroy it – but that is a topic for another time.

The Two Raptures

ONE OF THE KEYS to properly interpreting the Bible is learning how to keep separate things separate. All too often people take two passages that are talking about two different things and come to the conclusion that they are actually addressing the same thing. This leads to a lot of error.

There are a number of examples that I could give, but the one I want to focus on right now deals with the Rapture. A lot of people don't realize that there are actually two different Raptures. It is very common for people to read verses that are talking about the second Rapture and think that the Bible is actually talking about the first one.

In I Thessalonians the apostle Paul speaks about the first Rapture – the one that takes place before the Tribulation. This is what he has to say about it:

I Thessalonians 4:16: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

At some point before the Tribulation the Lord will return to Earth, raise the righteous dead, and transform living believers into immortals. Then all believers (those who are alive and those who were just resurrected) will be caught up to meet the Lord in

the air. After that Jesus will take us back to Heaven and leave the unbelievers behind on the Earth.

This is what people usually think of when they think about the Rapture. However, this isn't the only Rapture in the Bible. There is a *second* one, and it takes place at the *end* of the Tribulation. Jesus spoke of it on several occasions. For example, the parable of the wheat and the tares speaks of it:

Matthew 13:30: "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Jesus explained the parable as follows:

Matthew 13:39: "The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

In this Rapture (which happens at the *end* of the Tribulation) Jesus does not do any gathering. Instead, He sends out His angels, who gather *the wicked* and cast them into Hell.

After this, the righteous are gathered and enter the kingdom.

As you can see, we are dealing with two very different events here. *Before* the Tribulation, Jesus Himself will gather the righteous (and only the righteous) and take them with Him to Heaven. *After* the Tribulation, Jesus will send angels to gather the wicked and cast them into Hell, and then the righteous will enter His kingdom. They are *two different gatherings*, done by *two different agents*, which take place at *two different times*, with *two different outcomes*.

The big problem is that people confuse them. They read passages where Jesus was speaking about the second gathering (and He spoke of it a number of times), and they mistakenly think that He was talking about the first gathering. This is where the error of the Post-Tribulation Rapture comes from. People read about a Rapture that takes place after the Tribulation and they mistakenly think that it is the only one. They don't realize that there are two different events.

Why are there two different events? Because Jesus is doing two very different things. In the first Rapture, Jesus is gathering His Bride so He can take her to Heaven. He is removing the Church from Earth so that she will not have to endure the Tribulation. However, in the second Rapture, Jesus is cleansing the Earth of the wicked before His Millennial Kingdom begins. The first one is a gathering for protection and rescue; the second is a gathering for judgment and wrath.

When you are reading through the Gospels and you see Jesus talking about a gathering of people, pay close attention to the context. The chance is very good that the Rapture that Jesus is talking about is the second one – the one that takes place *after* the Tribulation. Do not confuse the two, or you will have all sorts of problems.

The Marriage of the Lamb

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT the Church is called the Bride of Christ. I think that sometimes we gloss over this fact, but it's worth noting that the Bible describes the relationship between Christ and the Church in *romantic* terms. Jesus is described as being much more than our Savior; He is also our Husband-to-be. It's an astounding thought! There is a degree of closeness, intimacy, and steadfastness there that I think is too easily overlooked. Christians are not in a master/slave relationship with Christ; they are in a *romance*.

(Now, before you get too excited about that, let me temper this by saying that Christ is marrying the Church as a whole, not each believer individually. In the Old Testament God described Himself as Israel's husband [Isaiah 54:5], so this is not something entirely new. If you think that Jesus is your personal boyfriend then your perspective is wrong. If you want some idea as to how this is going to work, study the Old Testament and look at the way God interacted with Israel. The prophets had a lot to say about this relationship.)

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus *loves* us with an awesome passion and He wants us to love Him back with everything we have. Nothing less could possibly work. *He wants our heart*. He wants to be our deepest love, our greatest joy, and the earnest desire of our heart. Jesus wants us to love Him deeply, passionately, and eternally. Some have called the relationship between Christ and the Church “The Great Romance”. I think there's a lot of truth in that.

David Baumann, a friend of mine, was once asked to summarize the Bible into three short sentences. This was his ten-

word response: “Boy loves girl. Boy loses girl. Boy gets girl back.” It is so easy to get caught up in works and obedience (both of which are very important) and lose sight of the fact that *we are loved* – tremendously and passionately. Not because of what we've done but because the Lord has chosen to delight in us. How many times do we end up trying to earn His love instead of just resting in it?

It is worth noting that Jesus referred to Himself as the Bridegroom:

Matthew 9:14: “Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

There is an interesting thing about being called a groom: it means that you are destined for a wedding *that is still in the future*. Christ is destined for a wedding with His Church. It hasn't happened yet but it will happen one day. At that point Christ will be the Husband and the Church will be the Wife.

Christ's love for His Bride can clearly be seen on the cross, where He suffered and died in our place. He loved us so much that He *gave His life* for us. Why? So that He might wash away our sins and make us pure and holy:

Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such

thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

His desire to purify His Bride and wash away her sins was so great that He *died* for her. Paul expanded on this, saying that part of his ministry was driven by the desire to help get the Bride ready for her Husband:

2 Corinthians 11:2: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

I realize that this concept of a heavenly marriage can be difficult to understand. That might be why God gave us the institution of human marriage. Some may say that calling the Church the Bride is just a bit of symbolism, but I think it's actually the other way around. I believe that the marriage union between a man and a woman (as blessed as it is) is actually symbolic of the future union that will exist between Christ and His Church. It offers us a starting place to begin to understand the kind of relationship that we will eventually have with God.

In other words, human marriage is like a shadow. We can look at shadows to get an idea of what the real thing looks like, but the shadow alone can never provide a complete picture. Likewise, we can look at human marriage to get a glimpse at what our relationship with Christ is going to be like in the future. Human marriage is the symbol; the union between Christ and the Church is the real thing.

Paul called this a great mystery:

Ephesians 5:31: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

John the Baptist also spoke of this. Interestingly, he did not consider himself to be a part of the Bride. Instead he believed that he was simply a friend of the bridegroom:

John 3:28: “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”

The reason for this is because the Church did not begin until the day of Pentecost. Since John the Baptist died before that day came, he was never a part of the Church. The only believers who will be a part of the Bride are those who lived during the Church Age. The saints who live before and after that period are still saved, but they are not part of the Church.

All of this raises a key question: when does the marriage take place? I believe Revelation provides the answer. In chapter 19 we read this:

Revelation 19:6: “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.”

When does this happen? Well, let's back up a bit. In Revelation 4 we read that the apostle John was asked to come up to Heaven to witness “things which must be hereafter”:

Revelation 4:1: “And after this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”

After this a great many things take place – things that happen in chronological order. First we're told that the Lamb is worthy to open the “book”. This is sung by a great crowd of people who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb:

Revelation 5:9: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.”

After this the seals are open. Revelation 6:1 has the opening of the first seal, 6:3 has the opening of the second seal, 6:5 has the third seal, and so on. In Revelation 8:1 there is a moment of silence in heaven, followed by seven angels that blow seven trumpets. In Revelation 13 we are told of a beast and his war against the saints:

Revelation 13:7: “And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world.”

More events happen, and then the famous Mark of the Beast appears:

Revelation 13:15: “And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

After this there are plagues and vials of wrath. Babylon is judged, and falls:

Revelation 18:1: “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

We're almost there! In the next chapter we read this:

Revelation 19:1: “And after these things I heard

a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God:

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.”

In verse 7 of this chapter we read of the “marriage of the Lamb”. What all of this means is that the Marriage of the Lamb occurs *at the end of the Tribulation* – after the judgments are poured out, after the Mark of the Beast appears, after Babylon falls, and after the Beast is judged. The place of the marriage is *Heaven*, where the Church (the Bride) was brought when the Rapture happened, which took place before the Tribulation period began. The marriage happens *before* Jesus returns to Earth at the end of the Tribulation.

This is a very long quotation, but look at all the things that happen *after* the marriage of the Lamb:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

...

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and

against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

...

20:1: And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

...

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place

for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

21:1: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”

The Marriage of the Lamb happens in Heaven toward the end of the Great Tribulation. On Earth there is great suffering under the reign of the beast and the false prophet, but in Heaven there is great rejoicing because “the marriage of the Lamb is come”. After the marriage has been made the Lord will return to Earth with the armies of Heaven to crush the beast and the false prophet, bind Satan, and reign on Earth with His saints for a thousand years.

When the thousand years have expired Satan will be set free for a season, but his final attempt to defeat God will be crushed. He and all his followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The Great White Throne judgment then takes place and death itself is defeated once and for all. The old universe will then pass away and the Lord will create a new one – a perfect world. At this point (and notice all the events that happen before this promise is made!) we are given this awesome promise:

Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

One thing I would like to point out: if the Marriage of the Lamb takes place in Heaven during the end of the Tribulation then *the Church must be in Heaven when that happens*. After all, the marriage cannot take place without the Bride! The Lord only returns to Earth to crush the beast and the false prophet *after* the marriage. This is more evidence that the Rapture happens well before the end of the Tribulation – after all, if the Church was still on Earth then there could be no wedding.

I would like to leave you with a final question: are you looking forward to this coming Marriage? If you are a follower of Jesus that is alive during the Church Age then you have much to look forward to! The day will come when your relationship with Christ will change dramatically. Right now we can now only get a glimpse of what our future will hold, but I do know that it will be beyond any hope or expectation that we can possibly have. We have something tremendous to look forward to! Let us not forget that promise in the stress of our everyday lives. After all, this world might offer many joys but none of them can compare to the day when the Bride will become the Wife.

The Purpose of the Tribulation

IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE in the book of Matthew, Jesus told His disciples that one day the world would undergo a time of “great tribulation”. He went on to say that this period was going to be so terrible that if He did not cut it short, *every last living thing on Earth would die*. Jesus said that the distress and horror of those days would be worse than any event in all of history – even worse than the Flood, which wiped out all of mankind except for eight people.

Just what is the purpose of this terrible period? Well, in Daniel chapter 9 we find this intriguing passage:

Daniel 9:20: “And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God;

21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

23 At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”

In verse 24 the angel Gabriel told Daniel that seventy “weeks” had been set aside. This is one time when I must take issue with the King James translation of the Bible. The word in verse 24 is not the Hebrew word for week, which is *shavuot*. The verse instead uses the word *shavuim*, which simply means “sevens”. It does not refer to seven *days* but seven of *something*. It is like the English word “dozen”. When someone says “dozen” it tells you that they are talking about twelve items, but without more information that is all you know. A better translation of verse 24 would be 70 *sevens*. In this context the item being counted is years. 70 sevens therefore refers to 70 periods of seven years, or 490 years.

At this point you may be wondering what this has to do with the Great Tribulation. As we will see in a moment, the Tribulation is the last “seven” in that group, or the 70th period of 7 years. A better title for this paper might have been “The purpose of the 70 sevens”, but I have a feeling that would have confused just about everybody! The title is still accurate, for the last 7 years is assigned the same purpose as the first 483 years.

In verse 24 the angel tells us that a period of 490 years had been set aside for “thy people”. Since the angel was talking to Daniel and since Daniel was a Jew, the people the angel is talking about must be the Jews. This is further emphasized by the fact the verse mentions “thy holy city”. Taken together, “thy people” must be the Jews and “thy holy city” must be Jerusalem. I see no reason in the text to interpret this any other way.

The angel then lists a number of reasons why God has set aside this period of 490 years:

- To finish “the” transgression
- To make an end of sins
- To make reconciliation for iniquity
- To bring in everlasting righteousness
- To seal up the vision
- To anoint the most Holy. (The Hebrew indicates this is a place, not a person.)

It's worth asking: whose transgressions are being finished? Whose sins are ended? Whose iniquity is being reconciled? I think the answer must be **Israel**. Verse 24 does not say “This period has been established for the whole world”; it specifically points out *Israel* and *Jerusalem*. *They* are the ones being targeted. When this period of 490 years is over, Israel's transgression will be finished, her sins will be ended, and her iniquity will be reconciled.

It's worth noting that verse 24 specifically says *the* transgression. This is not an accident of translation; the Hebrew text has a definitive article here. The angel is talking about a *specific* transgression that will be finished. I believe that transgression is Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. Throughout history Israel has rejected her Messiah, and she continues to rebel against Him to this very day. However, Zechariah foresaw a time when that would change:

Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in

Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”

This passage speaks of a future time when the Jews and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the very same people mentioned in Daniel 9:24!) will realize that they rejected their Messiah and will mourn over Him with great anguish. This will happen at the very end of the 490 years. Israel will realize what they have done and will turn back to God. Their rebellion will come to a final end and, as Gabriel said, their sins will be finished:

Jeremiah 21:31: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

This passage closely echoes Daniel 9:24. It speaks of a new covenant with *the house of Israel*. It is very important to realize that this passage is *not* directed at the Church, which didn't even exist at the time. Jeremiah 21:31 does not say “I will make a new covenant with all people”. It specifically lists *Israel* – not

once, but twice (verse 31 and 33). I have seen people apply this passage to the Church but I do not think that is valid. (I realize the book of Hebrews quotes this verse, but to whom was the book of Hebrews written? Why, to the *Hebrews*. In other words, to the Jews. There are some promises in the Bible that are specific *to the Jews* and that do not apply to the Church as a whole. But that is a topic for another time.)

What we see here is that when this period of time is over Israel's iniquity will be forgiven, her sins will be forgotten, and *all* of the Jews will know the Lord. Notice that verse 34 really does say “they shall *all* know me”. Paul made this same point in Romans chapter 11.

So, what we see in Daniel 9 is that 490 years have been set aside to bring an end to Israel's rebellion against God. Gabriel, however, has more details to share:

Daniel 9:25: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

This verse says that the Messiah will appear 483 years (that's 69 periods of 7 years each) after the decree goes out to rebuild Jerusalem. This period of time broken into two parts – the first period of 49 years is followed by a second period of 434 years. It should be noted, as a matter of historical fact, that after the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem it took 49 years to rebuild that city (which you can read about in the book of Nehemiah). Then, 434 years after Jerusalem was rebuilt, the Messiah was crucified. There were exactly 483 years from the time the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem until the death of Christ on the cross. (As an aside, when the Bible mentions years in prophecies it uses 360-day years. A detailed discussion as to

why that is the case is outside the scope of this discussion, but I wanted to mention it.)

Had the Jews been paying attention they would have known exactly when the Messiah would die. However, they weren't paying attention, and the consequences of that ignorance were very severe:

Luke 19:41: “And when he [Jesus] was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,
42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.
43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,
44 And shall lay the even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; **because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.**”

Jesus says that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed because the Jews did not know “the time of thy visitation”. They should have realized that Jesus was the Messiah, but they didn't. They ignored the very clear prophecy in Daniel that specified *exactly when Christ would come*. There should have been nothing unexpected about His arrival.

As an aside, this is one reason why liberal scholars hate the book of Daniel – they reject the very idea of prophecy. For years they claimed that the prophecies it contained must have been added centuries later. (It's amazing how the Bible *must* be wrong simply because it disagrees with somebody's theory. What kind of logic is that?) This theory was disproven when copies of the book of Daniel were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls – copies that predated the birth of Jesus by *centuries*.

Daniel 9:26 goes on to say that the Messiah would be killed at the end of the 483rd year:

Daniel 9:26: “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

Notice that it says “after 62 weeks”. Keep in mind verse 25 says there will be 7 weeks that are followed by 62 weeks. The 7 weeks (or 49 years) were the rebuilding of Jerusalem; after those years were finished the 62 weeks (or 434 years) took place. The Messiah died 69 weeks later (or 62 weeks + 7 weeks), which is 483 years. Once again, this is all made much harder to understand because the King James Bible incorrectly uses the word “week” instead of “sevens”.

What all of this means is that when Jesus died (but “not for himself”, as verse 26 points out – He died for *us*, to pay for *our* sins), 483 years of the 490-year period had taken place. Just as verse 26 prophesied, after Christ died and rose again the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. However, Christ's death stopped the clock. After his death the final 7 years of that 490-year period did not happen. There is a gap between the “cutting off” of the Messiah and that last period of 7 years – a gap that is filled by the Church. The Church exists entirely within that gap; it was born on the day of Pentecost (which took place *after* Christ died, and thus after the 483rd year happened), and it will disappear in the Rapture, which removes her from Earth before that final period of seven years takes place.

The next verse talks about this missing “week”:

Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for **one week**: and in the midst of the

week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

Here we find our missing period of 7 years. It begins when “he” (not the Messiah this time, but the Antichrist) confirms “a covenant with many for one week”. In other words, the Antichrist signs a seven-year treaty with “many” nations, of which Israel is a part. (Isaiah 28:15 calls this a “covenant with death”.) This period of 7 years is the 7 years of the Tribulation. In the middle of this period (or 3.5 years into it) the Antichrist will stop the sacrifices that are being made in the third Temple, will walk into its Holy place, and will declare himself to be god. (This is discussed in 2 Thes. 2:3-4.) After that things will get *really* bad *really* fast – in fact, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 that when the people of Israel saw this take place they should run for their lives. The last half of the Tribulation will be *far* worse than the first.

At the time this paper was written, only 69 of the 70 “weeks” have taken place. There is only one “week” left – the 7 years of the Tribulation. As we've just pointed out, what starts that last period of time is not the Rapture of the Church but the signing of a treaty with the Antichrist. So far that has not yet occurred, but I believe we are approaching that moment. Each day brings it closer.

The reason there is a gap between the 69th and 70th “weeks” is because Israel rejected her Messiah. Their rejection of Jesus caused a number of things to happen, which Paul discusses extensively in Romans. Of special interest is Romans 11:

Romans 11:11: “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.”

12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?”

We see that “through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles”. The Lord used their rebellion and hardness of heart to save the Gentiles. However, their blindness is temporary:

Romans 11:25: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Israel is blinded right now, but that will only last until “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”. I have heard it said that the word “fulness” in this verse is a nautical term that refers to having enough people to sail a ship. In other words, the idea was that you had to have a certain number of sailors on board before you could safely leave the shore and head out to sea. This verse seems to imply that the Church will contain a specific number of people, and as soon as she is completed the Lord will take her home and Israel will begin her final “week”.

The purpose of the Tribulation, then, is to *bring Israel back to God*. The Lord wants to put an end to Israel's rebellion and bring her back to Him. To do this He set aside 490 years. The Tribulation is the last of those years, and it will begin after “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” and the Church has been brought home to Heaven.

This is another reason why I do not believe the Church will go through the Tribulation. The focus of those last 7 years is on *Israel*, not the Church. It is Israel who rejected her Messiah while the Church accepted Him. There is every reason for Israel to go through the Tribulation, but there is no reason for the Church to do so – especially if she reaches her full number *before the Tribulation begins*. After all, the blinders are only removed

from Israel *after* the Church is completed. If the Bride is complete then why leave her here? It's worth noting that the Church did not appear on Earth until Pentecost, which is after the first 69 “weeks” had taken place.

Yes, there will be people saved during the Tribulation – Israel, for example. But they will not be a part of the Bride any more than Old Testament saints were part of the Bride. They were part of the Wife of Jehovah, but that is a topic for another time.

Of course, the Tribulation will serve one other purpose. It can be found in many places throughout the book of Revelation:

Revelation 9:20: “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

During the Tribulation the Lord will pour out awful judgments upon the Earth to punishment mankind for their sins. People everywhere will realize what is going on, but as the verse says they will refuse to repent. Instead of abandoning their sins they will try to hide from God:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Right now we live in an age of faith. We believe in Jesus even though we have never seen Him. The day will come, however, when all that will change. The Lord will pour out incredible, supernatural wrath upon entire planet in such a way that everyone will realize the Most High God is angry. When the wrath of the Lamb begins no one will question what is happening or why it is occurring. And yet, despite all this, many will continue in their rebellion and refuse to believe the truth. Instead of repenting, people will continue to gnash their teeth and curse God.

Many people will be saved during the Tribulation – but others will refuse to believe and will be lost forever. Israel, however, *will* be saved, for God will put an end to her sin and will give her a new heart.

The Events of the Tribulation

THE BOOK OF REVELATION contains a lot of information regarding the seven-year Tribulation. However, Revelation can be difficult to read and even more difficult to understand. In order to make things more clear I would like to summarize this information and present a brief outline of the events that will take place. I realize that entire books have been written about this subject, but my goal is simply to offer a quick and simple summary.

For the purposes of this paper I am only going to focus on what Revelation says about the Tribulation. I realize that the book talks about a lot of other topics as well (such as the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State), but I will save those subjects for another time.

The First Half of the Tribulation

The Tribulation begins when the Lamb (which symbolizes Jesus) opens seven seals. Each one of these seals contains judgments, which are usually called the Seal Judgments. We'll talk about those in a minute, but first there is one other item to discuss:

Before the First Seal: the two witnesses begin their ministry. This isn't mentioned until much later in Revelation, but since their ministry spans the entire first half of the Tribulation it seemed like a good idea to mention this now. The Lord will appoint two

witnesses who will preach the gospel:

Revelation 11:3: “And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.”

There has been a lot of speculation about who these two witnesses might be, but since the Bible doesn't actually tell us I will leave that subject alone. What we *are* told is that they will prophesy for 1,260 days, which is the same as 42 months or three-and-a-half years. During that period they will proclaim the gospel. God will give them great power so that no one can stop them:

Revelation 11:5: “And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.”

6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.”

People will try to kill these witnesses, but they will fail. All those who seek to harm them will be killed by being burned to death. They will be a voice of truth, and the antichrist will be unable to silence them until their ministry is complete.

During the course of their ministry a great many things will happen. In Heaven Jesus will begin by opening the seven seals:

The First Seal: the Antichrist launches his war. We can see that here:

Revelation 6:1: “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder; one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”

The person on the white horse is the antichrist. At the beginning of the Tribulation the antichrist will start a war and begin conquering other nations.

The Second Seal: a world war begins. The war that the antichrist started will quickly turn into a full-scale world war:

Revelation 6:3: “And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.”

What started out as a smaller conflict will blossom into a war that will consume the entire planet. Peace will be taken from the Earth and the nations of the world will attack each other.

The Third Seal: global famine. The world war will trigger a worldwide famine, and food prices will skyrocket:

Revelation 6:5: “And when he had opened the

third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”

The penny mentioned here is actually a day's wage. Food prices will increase so greatly that it will take an entire day's wage just to buy a single measure of wheat. The global war is coupled with a terrible global famine.

In Bible times, oil and wine were often used as medicines. It is possible that although there will be a terrible famine, there will be medical help readily available.

The Fourth Seal: hundreds of millions of people die. The world war will result in the death of 25% of the planet's population:

Revelation 6:7: “And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”

Given that the world's population is currently 7 billion people, that would mean that almost *two billion people* will be killed. The passage goes on to explain that they will die as a result of military conflict, by starving to death, and by wild animals

(which tend to enter human-populated areas whenever there is a massive famine that robs them of other food sources).

The Fifth Seal: intense persecution of Christians. During the Tribulation many people will come to know the Lord. However, they will be intensely persecuted, and a great many of them will be killed:

Revelation 6:9: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

All throughout the Tribulation Christians will be massacred in huge numbers, and this starts at the very beginning of the Tribulation period.

As an aside, there are people who believe that the Rapture takes place in the middle of the Tribulation. They say that the first half of the Tribulation is a time of peace and harmony, and the real horrors don't begin until after it is halfway over. Therefore, God doesn't take the Church home until then.

The reason I have trouble taking this viewpoint seriously is because the first three years of the Tribulation are *not* a time of peace. As we've seen, soon after the Tribulation begins *a billion people are killed*, and countless *millions* of Christians are

executed for their faith. In fact, after the sixth seal is opened even the *lost* will realize that the time of God's wrath has come! If God is going to rescue the Church from the time of His wrath then the Church will need to be raptured *before* the Tribulation begins, not after it's already started.

The Sixth Seal: a terrible earthquake. All throughout the Tribulation God sends earthquakes to judge the nations. This particular earthquake, although terrible, is actually not as bad as one that happens later in the Tribulation. Still, it is devastating:

Revelation 6:12: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

The earthquake will be so bad that “every mountain and island” will be moved. The catastrophic 2011 earthquake in Japan managed to move the entire island of Japan a few inches. This earthquake, however, will move more than just Japan; it will move *everything*.

Along with the earthquake are other devastating signs: the sun will stop shining for a period of time (just as happened in ancient Egypt during the plagues), the moon will turn red, and there will be a devastating meteor shower. All of this will convince mankind that God is angry with them and is pouring out His wrath:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
17 **For the great day of his wrath is come;** and who shall be able to stand?”

As I said earlier, we can clearly see that the first few years of the Tribulation are *not* years of relative peace and happiness. Things will be so bad that people will *beg to be buried alive so that they are hidden from the face of God*. Everyone, from the mightiest king to the lowliest slave, will be in abject terror of the awful judgments that God is pouring out on Earth.

The 144,000 Witnesses: There is one more seal to be opened, but before Jesus opens the seventh seal there is a pause. God will use this time to anoint 12,000 Jews from 12 different tribes:

Revelation 7:4: “And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.”

After these people are sealed so that the antichrist cannot harm them, they will be sent to preach the gospel to the whole world. God will mightily bless their efforts, and as a result millions of people will be saved:

Revelation 7:9: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and

tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

However, these new converts will be executed by the antichrist:

Revelation 7:13: “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The preaching of the 144,000 witnesses will result in a tremendous harvest, and millions of people will come to believe in Jesus. However, these new converts will not live long because the antichrist will ruthlessly hunt them down and kill them.

After this has happened the Lord will open the seventh and final seal...

The Seventh Seal: seven trumpet judgments. The seventh seal contains within it seven other judgments, which are usually called the trumpet judgments:

Revelation 8:1: “And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.”

The trumpets will be sounded, one by one. (Incidentally, so far we are *still* in the first half of the Tribulation.)

The First Trumpet: one-third of the world's forests are burned to the ground. We see that here:

Revelation 8:7: “The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.”

God used hail on a number of occasions in the Old Testament to perform judgments, and here we see Him doing it again. In this case the reign of hail and fire will wipe out every bit of grass, along with one-third of the world's forests. The first trumpet will cause major damage to the world's forests (to say nothing of all those who will die in the fires).

The Second Trumpet: one-third of all sea life dies. That is found here:

Revelation 8:8: “And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;
9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”

While the first trumpet was a land-based judgment, this one is focused on the sea. When the second trumpet sounds a third of the sea will become blood (just as the Nile became blood

during the plagues of Egypt), a third of all sea life will die, and a third of all ships will be destroyed.

The “great mountain burning with fire” may be some sort of meteor, or it might refer to something supernatural. Whatever it is, the effect it has on the ocean is clear and devastating.

The Third Trumpet: one-third of all fresh water is contaminated. Whereas the previous judgment was against the sea, this one is against mankind's fresh water supply:

Revelation 8:10: “And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;
11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”

It appears that a meteor will fall to the earth and contaminate one-third of the rivers and other sources of water. This will cause a tremendous loss of life.

So, up to this point, one-third of the world's oceans have been destroyed, one-third of all forests have been burned to the ground, and one-third of mankind's fresh water supply has been poisoned. I do not know how many people will die as a result of this, but it is surely a tremendous number – and that doesn't even count all the people that are executed for becoming Christians.

The Fourth Trumpet: one-third of the Earth's supply of light is removed. During this time something will happen to block out a large amount of light:

Revelation 8:12: “And the fourth angel

sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.”

As we can see, one-third of the light from the sun, moon, and stars will be blocked. This makes the days and nights noticeably darker. The passage does not say how long this lasts, or if the effect is permanent. What we do see is that the Lord will systematically devastating the environment: the oceans, the land, the rivers, and even the sunlight are cursed by one-third.

However, as bad as things have been up to this point, things are about to become tremendously worse:

Revelation 8:13: “And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!”

The Fifth Trumpet: an army of demons is set free. So far the earth has been plagued with war, famine, hail, earthquakes, and devastating ecological disasters. All of that pales in comparison to what will come next, when God will set free an army of imprisoned demons in order to torment mankind:

Revelation 9:1: “And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were

darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.”

Keep in mind that these are not actual locusts, but demons. We know this because the locusts have a king:

Revelation 9:11: “And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.”

However, Proverbs actually says that real locusts *don't have kings*:

Proverbs 30:27: “The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;”

Who is the king of the creatures? A demon named Apollyon. Who opened the door to the bottomless pit? An angel that fell from Heaven – in other words, a demon. It's worth noting that the bottomless pit is a place where demons are imprisoned. These are not insects, but demons – an immense army of demons. These demons are told to harm only those who are not saved. So they begin tormenting mankind:

Revelation 9:5: “And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment

was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

When these demons “sting” someone they inflict terrible, excruciating pain that lasts for five months. This pain is so great that people will try to kill themselves *and they will fail*. People will desperately long to die so that they can escape the unbearable pain *but they will not be able to die*.

But the demonic invasion is not over yet...

The Sixth Trumpet: demons execute one-third of mankind.

Keep in mind that by the time this takes place, the effects of global war will have wiped out 25% of mankind. These demons will kill 33% of whoever has managed to say alive up to this point:

Revelation 9:13: “And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

14 Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

15 And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.

17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions;

and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

18 By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

19 For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.”

The world's population is around 7 billion people. Earlier a quarter of these people were killed, so that left 5.25 billion people. If one-third of these survivors are executed, then that means the world's population is down to 3.5 billion people. These two judgments alone have seen the death of *half* of the world's population. Billions of people have died – and we are still in the first half of the Tribulation!

What this passage pictures is a massive army of 200 million *demons*. These are not Chinese soldiers, nor are they humans beings. This is a demonic army that is controlled by four demons. They have been imprisoned for a long time, waiting for the day when they would be set loose to kill nearly *two billion people*. The demons will use fire, smoke, and brimstone to slaughter people in horrific numbers.

It is terrifying to imagine an army of demons ravaging the entire planet, killing people by the millions, but that is what is going to happen. One might imagine that many people would cry out to God for forgiveness and mercy, but that is not the case. Instead people simply harden their hearts:

Revelation 9:20: “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:
21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor

of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

The Second Half of the Tribulation

Believe it or not, we are only now just getting to the second half of the Tribulation.

The Death and Resurrection of the Two Witnesses: The ministry of the two witnesses only lasts for the first half of the Tribulation. When that period is over the antichrist will kill them and the world will rejoice over their death:

Revelation 11:7: “And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.”

8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

9 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.

10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.”

The dead bodies of the two witnesses will lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three days, while the entire world will look at the

bodies (presumably on live TV) and rejoice. Their rejoicing will be cut short, however, because God will resurrect them:

Revelation 11:11: “And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.

12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.”

After they ascend into Heaven the Lord will send an earthquake that will devastate Jerusalem (which is under the antichrist's control at this point):

Revelation 11:13: “And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

In that earthquake a tenth of Jerusalem is devastated and 7000 people will die.

Satan is Cast From Heaven: A lot of people think that this particular event happened before mankind walked on the Earth, but that is not the case. This actually happens at the midpoint of the Tribulation:

Revelation 12:7: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

As soon as Satan and his demonic army is cast out of Heaven he will begin waging war against the Jews, which brings us to our next point...

The Conquest of Jerusalem: After the sixth trumpet sounds, but before the seventh and last trumpet sounds, there is a pause in the action as Jerusalem is conquered:

Revelation 11:2: “But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”

This verse tells us that the Gentiles will conquer Jerusalem and control it for 42 months, or three-and-a-half years. In other words, the Gentiles (meaning the antichrist, since he is the world ruler at this time) will control Jerusalem for all of the second half of the Tribulation. This is convincing evidence that we have finally entered the second half of the Tribulation.

Incidentally, this conquest is part of the antichrist's effort to exterminate the Jews. Satan will try very hard to wipe out the race that produced the Messiah:

Revelation 12:13: And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the

wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Because of the intense persecution that will arise, God will divinely protect the Jews by bringing them to a hiding place in “the wilderness” and sheltering them there for three-and-a-half years. Enraged, the devil will turn his attention to persecuting Christians.

The Death and Resurrection of the Antichrist: At some point during the middle of the Tribulation, the antichrist will be killed and then miraculously resurrected. This will cause the entire world to worship Satan:

Revelation 13:3: “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed; and all the world wondered after the beast.

4 And they worshiped the dragon which gave power unto the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and

power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.”

The only ones who will not worship him are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Everyone else will be deceived.

God will allow the antichrist to continue for 42 months, or three-and-a-half years. This represents the entire second half of the Tribulation – the same period when the Gentiles will control Jerusalem, and the same period when the Jews will be hiding in the wilderness. In the first half of the Tribulation the antichrist will wage a world war; in the second half he will control the world. In fact, God even gives him the power to overcome the saints, and he will kill them in large numbers:

Revelation 13:7: “And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.”

This is when the 144,000 witnesses will be murdered. Their ministry, like that of the two witnesses, only takes place during the first half of the Tribulation.

The False Prophet and the Mark of the Beast: It is at this point that the false prophet begins his work:

Revelation 13:12: “And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."

Here we see that the false prophet will do amazing signs and miracles in order to convince everyone to worship the idol that he set up in the Temple in Jerusalem. He will then go further and force everyone to take the famous Mark of the Beast, which is either the antichrist's name or the number of his name (666). The only ones who will not do this are those whose names are written in the Book of Life. Everyone else will take the Mark and be damned forever.

Once a person takes the Mark it is too late for them, because it is an unforgivable sin. No one who takes the Mark or who worships the beast can be saved. That is the point of no return:

Revelation 14:9: "And the third angel followed

them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

The Seventh Trumpet: God takes over control of the world.

After all of the judgments that have happened one might expect the seventh trumpet to consist of more horrors, but instead something unexpected will happen:

Revelation 11:15: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Keep in mind that at this point Jesus has not yet returned to Earth; the Second Coming is still some time away. But despite this, when the seventh trumpet sounds the Lord's reign over the Earth begins. The angel is very clear about this: "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ". The twenty-four elders (which represent the Church) echo this:

Revelation 11:16: "And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell

upon their faces, and worshiped God,
17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God
Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come;
because thou hast taken to thee thy great power,
and hast reigned.”

When these things are said the antichrist will think that he is still ruling over the world, but his days are numbered. The Lord Jesus Christ has assumed control and will begin putting events into motion that will result in the antichrist's defeat.

The Lord will appoint seven angels to pour out seven vials of wrath upon the Earth:

Revelation 15:1: “And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.”

The vials are:

The First Vial: painful sores. The first vial (or bowl, as they are sometimes called) of wrath will cause terrible, painful sores to appear on all those that took the Mark of the Beast:

Revelation 16:2: “And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshiped his image.”

No Christians will be affected, but all those who worshiped the Beast will be infected with this painful disease.

The Second Vial: all sea life dies. Earlier we saw a judgment

where one-third of all aquatic life was killed. Here God will wipe out the rest of it:

Revelation 16:3: “And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.”

At this point there will be no sea life left anywhere on Earth. All of the oceans will have become blood, and everything in them will be dead.

The Third Vial: all fresh water becomes blood. In an earlier judgment one-third of the world's freshwater supply was poisoned. Here *all* of the world's freshwater supply will be turned to blood:

Revelation 16:4: “And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.”

Notice that the passage does not say that they became *as* blood, or that they looked like blood, or that they turned red. This verse says that they actually *became blood*. There is a specific reason for this:

Revelation 16:5: “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.”

In other words, those who are left on the earth have

proven their bloodthirstiness by killing millions upon millions of Christians, so as punishment God has turned their entire water supply into blood. Since they desired the blood of His children, God has given them blood to drink.

But God is still not done. This is only the third vial; there are still more.

The Fourth Vial: scorching heat. In an earlier judgment we saw that something blocked out one third of the world's sunlight. Here we see the reverse. Something will happen to the sun that will cause it to become far more active:

Revelation 16:8: “And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.”

The sun will become a great deal hotter and will scorch men with unbearable heat. In return they will not repent, but will instead blaspheme God with an even greater intensity.

The Fifth Vial: painful darkness. After mankind blasphemes God for sending scorching heat, God will send darkness over the kingdoms that are controlled by the antichrist:

Revelation 16:10: “And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not

of their deeds.”

This darkness will apparently be connected with pain, because we see mention of pains, sores, and people gnawing their tongues. Yet there will be no repentance; people will simply hate God even more.

The Sixth Vial: the Euphrates river is dried up. This might seem strange after what just happened in all of the other vials, but there is a reason for it:

Revelation 16:12: “And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

In other words, the Euphrates river will be dried up so that the battle of Armageddon can take place. The Lord will gather the whole world together for one great battle – a battle that Jesus will fight *in person*. When the armies of the world gather together to wipe out the Jews that have been hiding in the wilderness, they will encounter something they did not expect: the returned Jesus

Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Seventh Vial: the worst earthquake of all history. Earlier in Revelation we saw a devastating earthquake, but that quake was nothing compared to this one:

Revelation 16:17: “And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.”

This earthquake will be so great that it will level all of the mountains, move every island out of its place, and destroy all the cities of the world. It will be the worst earthquake to ever happen in all of history. The loss of life that this will cause is surely staggering!

However, there is another part of this as well:

Revelation 16:21: “And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.”

As if the earthquake itself had not done enough damage, it will be followed by a hailstorm that is so terrible that each stone will weigh around *seventy pounds*. Imagine an unending reign of giant boulders falling out of the sky, causing untold property damage (if there is any property left standing at this point!) and killing massive numbers of people.

Babylon is Destroyed: During the Tribulation the antichrist will rule over the world from the rebuilt city of Babylon. For a time this city will wield awesome power and wealth. However, at the end of the Tribulation the Lord will judge the city and bring it to ruin:

Revelation 14:8: “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

This is talked about much more extensively in chapter 18:

Revelation 18:2: “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

...

8 Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

...

17 For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,

18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!

19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in

thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

There were several points that I wanted to emphasize. First, it's clear that at the time of the Tribulation the city of Babylon will be a tremendously rich and important city. Verse 17 tells us that she had “great riches”, and verse 23 says that her merchants “were the great men of the earth” and that she deceived the nations. Today the modern city of Babylon is little more than a tourist attraction, but one day it will become the premier city of the world.

The other point I want to bring out is that the destruction of Babylon is complete and total. In a single hour the city will be destroyed, burned to the ground, and become a place where only demons dwell. No one will ever live in it again and the city will never be rebuilt. It will be violently destroyed because of the role it played in slaughtering untold millions of Christians. God will judge the city and bring it to an end.

The Marriage of the Lamb: Toward the end of the Tribulation the Marriage of the Lamb will take place, where the Bride of Christ (the church) becomes the wife of Christ. We find this mentioned right after the city of Babylon is burned:

Revelation 19:7: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

While the Earth is reeling under the wrath of God, a great Marriage is taking place in Heaven. Of course, in order for this

wedding to take place the entire Church must be in Heaven at the time. This is more evidence for a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

The Second Coming: After the Marriage has happened the Lord will return to Earth with the armies of Heaven:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

The antichrist will gather all the nations together for the great battle of Armageddon (which is something we saw when the sixth vial was poured out). The antichrist is expecting to wipe out the last remnant of the Jews, but instead he will face Jesus Christ Himself:

Revelation 19:19: “And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered

together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

21 And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

When antichrist attacks Jesus, the Lord will single-handedly wipe out him and his armies. The antichrist and false prophet will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire. Although Jesus will have the armies of Heaven with Him, He will not use them; He does all of the fighting Himself. His Word is enough to defeat them all.

After this happens the Lord will bind Satan for a thousand years, which is a topic we will look at a bit later in this book.

The Timing of the Tribulation

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE who teach that the Tribulation is just a few months away. While I do think we are in the last days, I find it very difficult to believe that we are actually that close to the Tribulation. According to the Bible there are still many prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation can begin, and some of these require years to accomplish.

I would like to take some time to explore the events that must take place before the Tribulation. It is my hope that this will give people a better understanding of where we are in the prophetic timeline.

The Psalm 83 Battle

During the past century a number of important end-times prophecies have been fulfilled. For example, Israel has re-emerged as a nation after many centuries of dispersion, and the Jews have regained control over the city of Jerusalem. Both of these events had to take place before the Tribulation could begin. After all, how could the Antichrist sign a seven-year agreement with Israel if Israel did not exist? However, there are several other events that must take place before that infamous covenant can be signed, and one of them is the conflict described in Psalm 83.

In that chapter we find Asaph telling God that nations are lining up against Israel, putting His people in grave danger:

Psalm 83:1: “Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.

2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.

3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.”

These enemies want nothing less than the complete destruction of Israel. They are hoping to invade the land and destroy it so that she will no longer be a country. We can see this in the following verse:

Psalm 83:4: “They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.”

The nations that want to wipe Israel off the map are listed in the following verses:

Psalm 83:5: “For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:

6 The tabernacles of **Edom**, and the **Ishmaelites**; of **Moab**, and the **Hagarenes**;

7 **Gebal**, and **Ammon**, and **Amalek**; the **Philistines** with the inhabitants of **Tyre**;

8 **Assur** also is joined in with them: they have helped the children of Lot. Selah.”

The reason this is interesting is because verse 5 clearly says that *all* of these nations have banded together to destroy Israel, but this didn't happen in ancient times. Israel wasn't threatened by an alliance of those nations until the modern era.

It's true that there are no longer nations with those names, but these names and groups can be traced through history. Ishmael, for instance, is the patriarch of Saudi Arabia. The Hagarenes would be the descendents of Hagar; today we call them Egyptians. Moab was the patriarch of what is now central

Jordan, and Ammon was the patriarch of what is now northern Jordan. (Moab and Ammon, of course, are the “children of Lot” that are mentioned in verse 8.) Gebal is now northern Lebanon, and Tyre is southern Lebanon. What used to be Philistia is now the Gaza Strip. Assur is Assyria, which we now call Syria. The tabernacles of Edom refers to the Edomites, who used to live in what is now Southern Jordan. Their descendents became the Palestinians.

To line them up, the nations in verses 6-8 are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinians. Are these nations currently opposed to Israel? Yes – and this is actually a new development! Until very recently Egypt was at peace with Israel, bound by a treaty and led by a man who honored that treaty. Recently, however, there has been a revolution in Egypt that changed the political landscape. A 2009 poll revealed that 95% of Egyptians have an unfavorable opinion of the Jews – as do 97% of Jordanians and Palestinians and 98% of Lebanese. Egypt is rapidly becoming an enemy of Israel – just as the Bible prophesied.

Do these nations wish to wipe Israel off the map, as foretold in Psalm 83? Yes. Have these nations banded together and launched an all-out war against Israel? Not yet – but at some point before the Tribulation begins they will. Given the turbulence in the Middle East and the deep hatred for Israel that exists in that region, it is not hard to imagine a war breaking out sometime in the near future.

If you read the passage itself you will notice that God's response to this invasion is not recorded here. However, it can be found elsewhere. The Lord told Jeremiah that He would destroy those who tried to remove Israel from her land:

Jeremiah 12:14: “Thus saith the Lord against all mine evil neighbors, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah

from among them.”

In Isaiah we find that Syria – one of the nations listed in Psalm 83 – was singled out for destruction:

Isaiah 17:1: “The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Here we see the Lord promising to destroy Damascus so thoroughly that it will no longer be a city. The nation of Syria will be crushed, her cities forsaken, and her land used as pasture. So far these Scriptures have not yet been fulfilled; Damascus is still the capitol of Syria and has been inhabited for thousands of years. You can still go there today, if you wish, but one day it will be destroyed and turned into a ruined heap. This is almost certainly the Lord's response to Asaph's prayer in Psalm 83: when Syria attacks Israel she will be destroyed and her capitol will be turned into ruins.

It should be noted that Israel does not go through the war unscathed. In fact, she is seriously harmed in the attack:

Isaiah 17:4: “And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.

5 And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

6 Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel.”

Israel will be seriously wounded; verse 6 likens her to an olive tree that has been shaken until only a few olives remain in the uppermost branches. But she will survive and her enemies will be devastated. All of this will be done so that men will have respect for the Lord:

Isaiah 17:7: “At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.”

8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.”

It is verse 7 that makes me think the Psalm 83 war might be the point at which God turns His attention back to Israel. After all, verse 7 calls God the Holy One *of Israel*. Other passages refer to God as the Most High God or the Lord over all the Earth, but here God is specifically linked to Israel (and not to the Church!). Isn't it possible that by the time this war happens God will have turned His focus back to Israel *because the Church has been completed and brought home*? If (and I say if) that is the case then the Rapture may be much nearer than we think.

Of course, Syria was not the only nation involved in the attack. The Ammonites (modern Jordan) have a surprise in store for them as well:

Jeremiah 49:1: “Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the Lord; Hath Israel no sons? Hath he

no heir? Why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities?

2 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the Lord.”

When the dust settles, Jordan will be destroyed and Israel will move in and take over. Edom (the Palestinians) will not fare any better:

Jeremiah 49:17: “Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof.

18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith the Lord, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it.

19 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? For who is like me? And who will appoint me the time? And who is that shepherd that will stand before me?

20 Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord, that he hath taken against Edom; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the latest of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitations desolate with them.”

Nor will Saudi Arabia (here referred to as 'Dedan') be

spared:

Jeremiah 49:8: “Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan: for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will visit him.

9 If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? If thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough.

10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbors, and he is not.”

Obadiah goes on to say that the entire house of Esau will be completely destroyed, leaving no survivors:

Obadiah 1:17: “But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.”

Egypt will be devastated and abandoned for *40 years*:

Ezekiel 29:10: “Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia.

11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be

inhabited forty years.

12 And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries.

Some people think that the desolation of Egypt will continue on through the Tribulation and into the Millennial Kingdom, and that may be the case. However, if all of this is fulfilled before the Tribulation begins (and there is no way to know if that is the case) then that means the Tribulation is more than 40 years away, since we need time for Egypt to be made desolate, then re-inhabited, and then partially settled by Israel. As is often the case in dealing with prophecy, the events are easy to understand but the timing and sequence is a great challenge to figure out.

Isaiah reports that Egypt will be terrified of Israel, and the Israelites will possess five Egyptian cities:

Isaiah 19:17: “And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

18 In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction.”

Let's turn our attention back to Psalm 83. There we saw Asaph praying for deliverance on behalf of Israel, and in these passages we see the Lord's response. While Israel will be greatly harmed in the attack, she will survive while her attackers will be ruined. The descendents of Esau (which would include Edom and

some of the Palestinians) will suffer the most, for none of them will survive. The Lord's name will be magnified.

This will open up a new era of peace for Israel as she will no longer be surrounded by enemies that long for her destruction. Over time she will recover from the devastation of that war and will rebuild until she has expanded her borders and become a wealthy and powerful nation. At that point the invasion described in Ezekiel 38 will take place, which is what we will investigate next.

All of this brings up a number of important points:

- Israel is going to be invaded by a coalition of her neighbors. This war is currently brewing but it hasn't happened yet. It must occur before the Tribulation begins.
- When this war finally happens the Lord will deliver Israel and give her the land of her enemies. However, she will be devastated in that war. It will take her time – perhaps years – to recover. Her recovery must be complete before the Ezekiel 38 invasion, which means Israel must be rebuilt before the Tribulation can begin. This is going to take a lot of time.
- In the war Damascus will be wiped off the face of the Earth. It will not be inhabited again. This also must happen before the Tribulation starts.
- Over time (perhaps years, perhaps decades) Israel will become a wealthy and peaceful nation. At this point the next big event will happen: the Ezekiel 38 invasion.

The Ezekiel 38 Invasion

In Ezekiel 38 we are told that a coalition of nations will

invade Israel. The reason they invade her is because she is a wealthy nation and they want to plunder that wealth. They see that Israel is at peace and they believe that she will be an easy target.

As you can see, none of this is true of Israel today. No one is threatening Israel because of her wealth; instead they are threatening her for religious reasons. Israel is not a fabulously wealthy nation, nor is she a nation at rest. She is surrounded by nations that want to wipe her off the face of the Earth, and must maintain constant vigilance in order to survive. Israel is *far* from being at rest, and is actually on the verge of destruction (which fits well with Psalm 83).

Before Ezekiel 38 can take place, Israel must undergo *dramatic* changes. Somehow she has to take over her neighbors, remove all threats against her, become a peaceful nation, and acquire tremendous wealth. That is going to take time. It's quite possible that it could take years or even decades. It seems highly unlikely that Israel could make this transition in a matter of months.

On top of this, the nations that invade Israel in Ezekiel 38 are just beginning to form their relationship. The nations are:

Ezekiel 38:1: "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him,

3 And say, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

4 And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armor, even a great company with bucklers, and shields, all of them handling swords:

5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Lybia with them; all of them with shield and helmet:

6 Gomer, and all his bands, the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee.”

So who are these people? As we've discussed before, it's possible to trace these groups through history and tie them to modern nations. The nation of Persia is now called Iran. Ethiopia and Lybia have not changed their names. Gomer and Togarmah are modern-day Turkey. Meshech is modern-day Georgia (the country, not the state!), and Tubal is modern-day Turkmenistan. Gog and Magog represent Russia.

Today we can see that Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Lybia are beginning to form an alliance. However, conditions are not yet right for this battle. As we've said before, Israel has to be a nation *at rest* before all of this happens:

Ezekiel 38:10: “Thus saith the Lord God; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought:

11 And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

12 To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.

13 Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil?

Hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey?
To carry away silver and gold, to take away
cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?

14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say
unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God; In that day
when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt
thou not know it?"

Once again, notice that Israel is described as a land "at rest", with people that "dwell safely" and "without walls". Currently Israel is *not* at rest and her people do *not* dwell safely. Instead they are bombarded with rockets, and their lives are in constant danger from terrorist attacks. They have even gone so far as to erect *walls* to protect them from the Palestinians! One day all of that will change and Israel will become a land "without walls", but that hasn't happened yet.

The Lord goes on to describe the details of this invasion:

Ezekiel 38:15: "And thou shalt come from thy
place out of the north parts, thou, and many
people with thee, all of them riding upon horses,
a great company, and a mighty army:

16 And thou shalt come up against my people of
Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in
the latter days, and I will bring thee against my
land, that the heathen may know me, when I
shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their
eyes.

17 Thus saith the Lord God; Art thou he of
whom I have spoken in old time by my servants
the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in
those days many years that I would bring thee
against them?

18 And it shall come to pass at the same time
when Gog shall come against the land of Israel,
saith the Lord God, that my fury shall come up

in my face.

19 For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel;

20 So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.

21 And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother.

22 And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, and overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

23 Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Here the Lord promises to fight against the armies of Gog with "great hailstones, fire, and brimstone". The Lord is going to personally destroy the armies of Gog and, in so doing, magnify His name among "many nations". He will not only rescue the nation of Israel, but He will demonstrate that He is God in a manner that is plain to everyone.

But God is not finished yet:

Ezekiel 39:1: "Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the

chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

2 And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel:

3 And I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand.

4 Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.

5 Thou shalt fall upon the open field: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God.

6 And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am the Lord.”

The Lord promises to devastate Gog's army to such an extent that only 1/6th of it will remain. He will demonstrate His power by crushing them in the mountains of Israel. But He is still not done:

Ezekiel 39:7: “So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.”

Here the Lord says something very important: God is going to use this battle to reveal Himself *to the Israelites*. As I've explained elsewhere, the nation of Israel is currently blinded to her need for Jesus. Paul said that this blindness would last until the Church was completed, at which time God would turn His attention back to the Israelites. Here we see God doing exactly

that – He is beginning to remove the blinders from Israel, showing them and the world that He is God. At this point God's people is said to be *Israel*, not the Church. That is why a number of scholars believe that the Rapture will occur before this conflict takes place. If God is ministering to Israel and making His holy name known to *His people Israel*, then that is strong evidence that the Church is no longer around.

But there is still more. This is the key point I want to bring out:

Ezekiel 39:8: “Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken.

9 And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years:

10 So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God.”

Verse 9 is tremendously important – it says that the people of Israel will burn the invaders' weapons as fuel for *seven years*. The reason this is important is because halfway through the seven-year Tribulation the Jews will be attacked by the Antichrist and start running for their lives. The armies of the world will surround Jerusalem and sack the city. At that point the Jews are *not* going to be burning weapons while they try to fight off the entire planet; instead they're going to be *using* them!

This tells me that the Ezekiel war must take place at least 7 years *before* the midpoint of the Tribulation – or, to put it another way, the burning must begin at *least* 3.5 years before the

Tribulation starts. If this is true then when the Ezekiel invasion takes place the Tribulation is still at least three-and-a-half years away.

All of these events are beginning to add up to a significant amount of time. The Psalm 83 battle may be short but it will take quite some time – perhaps years – for Israel to recover from it. After that the Ezekiel 38 battle must take place, and there must be at least 3.5 years between the end of that battle and the start of the Tribulation. These two passage alone could easily require ten, twenty, or even thirty years to fulfill – and that doesn't take into account Egypt's 40-year desolation! As of 2013, it seems *highly* unlikely that the Tribulation is just a few months away.

One-World Government

The next prophetic step after the Ezekiel invasion is the establishment of a one-world government. I think this will happen *after* the Gog-Magog battle, because when that battle takes place the Earth is still divided into a multitude of nations. After all, it isn't the one-world government that invades Israel; instead it is a coalition of independent nations such as Russia, Iran, and so forth. (As a side-note, if the Rapture takes place before the Gog-Magog invasion, then that means the one-world government is established *after* the Rapture.)

The book of Daniel tells us that one day a kingdom will conquer the entire world:

Daniel 7:23: “Thus he said, the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.

24 And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise.

after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.

25 And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

The passage says that one day the "whole earth" will be conquered by a kingdom, which shall then be divided among ten kings. After these ten kings "another shall arise" that will subdue three kings. This "another" is the Antichrist. We see this from verse 25, where he makes war against the saints for three and a half years ("a time and times and the dividing of a time"). That perfectly matches the description in Revelation of what the Antichrist will do starting midway through the seven-year Tribulation.

What I want to draw your attention to is the time it will take for all of this to happen. Right now there are roughly 195 countries in the world. One day someone will violently conquer the entire planet (note the use of "devour", "tread it down", and "break it in pieces"). This kingdom will then be divided among ten kings, meaning that ten people reign over the entire planet (not just over Europe, so I don't believe the European Union is a valid match for this prophecy). *After* this, another person arises who puts down three kings and becomes the Antichrist.

This is going to take time. How long will it take to conquer the planet? How long will it take for the conquered planet to be divided among ten kings? Plus, keep in mind that the Antichrist doesn't appear until *after* all of that happens – and since *the Antichrist* is the one who signs the seven-year treaty that begins the Tribulation, *the Tribulation can't start until after he is on the scene and is in a position of power*. It could easily take years, if not decades for all of this to play out.

Babylon

The next issue to consider is the matter of Babylon. In Revelation 14:8 we are told that the great city of Babylon has fallen:

Revelation 14:8: “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

This is brought up again a few chapters later:

Revelation 16:19: “And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.”

Revelation 17:5 depicts Babylon as a woman who is drunk with the blood of the saints, but later on that same chapter makes it clear that it is discussing an actual city:

Revelation 18:2: “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

And later:

Revelation 18:9: “And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,
10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come.”

The reason I bring this up is because there are many people who believe that Babylon is symbolic of some other city, such as Rome. However, I believe that the Bible is referring to the actual city of Babylon. The reason I think this is because of what Jeremiah prophesied concerning the destruction of Babylon:

Jeremiah 50:24: “I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord. ...
39 Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited forever, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.
40 As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.”

As we can see, God said that He would judge Babylon to the point that no one would ever inhabit the city again. It would be abandoned *forever*. The problem is that this hasn't happened yet. Today the ancient city of Babylon has been rebuilt, courtesy of Saddam Hussein. Its ruins have been reconstructed and the site

has been reopened. In fact, the United States is spending \$600 million to build a 100+ acre embassy in Babylon. People are living there again and the city is coming back to life – and yet God said “it shall be no more inhabited *forever*”.

I believe that the total destruction and subsequent abandonment of Babylon is still in the future. The city is being rebuilt and will one day become the capitol of the world. Then, during the Tribulation, God will judge the city and it will be completely destroyed, never to be inhabited again. (You can read about this in Revelation 18:21-24.)

How does this impact the timing of the Tribulation? Well, let's go back to Revelation. Look at how these verses describe the city of Babylon:

Revelation 18:15: “The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

16 And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

17 For in one hour so great riches is come to naught. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,

18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!”

In this passage Babylon is said to be the greatest city on Earth (“what city is like unto this city!”). It has fantastic wealth and unbelievable grandeur; it is the envy of the world and gave many people great wealth. Modern Babylon, on the other hand, is not “decked with gold and precious stones”; in fact, it's little more than a tourist attraction. It will take time – perhaps decades – for

Babylon to be transformed into the mightiest and grandest city the world has to offer. To say that all this is going to happen before May 2011 seems highly unlikely. It's far more probable that it will take place over the course of many years – perhaps decades.

Elijah

In Malachi we are told that Elijah will return before the Tribulation begins:

Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

Here we can see that Elijah will return to Earth *before* the “day of the Lord”, which is the term the Old Testament used to describe the Tribulation.

Some people claim that Elijah is going to appear in the first half of the Tribulation. They claim that this period is a time of relative peace, and the true horrors do not begin until the Tribulation is halfway over. However, that is the case. As was discussed earlier in this book, during the first half of the Tribulation *half of the world's population will be slaughtered*. The first part of the Tribulation is a time of great horror. Look at what Revelation 6 has to say:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every

bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

As you can see, we are told that “the great day of his wrath is come” – and this is quite early in the Tribulation! This is long before the Antichrist enters the Temple and declares himself to be God – and yet “the great day of his wrath” is already come.

If Elijah is going to appear before the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” then it seems highly likely that he will appear before the Tribulation begins. There is no way to know how far in advance he will appear; it may be days, weeks, months, or even years. But he must appear soon enough to allow him enough time to complete his ministry.

Personally I think he will appear after the Ezekiel 38 invasion. That invasion is what God uses to start turning the hearts of the children of Israel back to Him. If Elijah is a part of God's ministry to the Israelites then that would be the perfect time for him to appear. By the same token, Romans tells us that God will not turn His attention back to saving Israel until after the Church is complete and taken home. If the Rapture occurs before the Ezekiel invasion, then means by the time Elijah arrives the Church will probably be gone.

The Rapture

I have already talked about the case for a pre-Tribulation Rapture, so I won't repeat it here. The bottom line is that the seven-year Tribulation begins when Israel signs a covenant with the Antichrist, but the Antichrist can't be revealed or rise to power

until the Church is gone. This means that the Rapture must take place before the Tribulation and the rise of the Antichrist. For reasons I've explained previously, I believe that the Rapture will happen before the Gog-Magog invasion. This means that as long as the Church is still here, the Tribulation is years away. There is going to be a gap between the Rapture and the Tribulation, and that gap could measure in years or even decades.

Conclusion

As we've seen, there are many things that must take place before the Tribulation can occur. Israel must be invaded, devastated, and rebuilt. She must be transformed from a nation under siege to a wealthy nation at peace. The ancient city of Babylon must be rebuilt and become the premier city of the planet. The Israelites must spend seven years burning the weapons left behind by the Gog-Magog invasion. A one-world government must rise, the Rapture must take place, and the Antichrist must rise to power.

How long is it going to take? No one really knows. It may take a few decades, or it could take as long as a century. There is no way to know in advance. We will just have to wait and see.

Since God turns His attention back to Israel during the Gog-Magog invasion, it seems likely that the Rapture will happen before that battle takes place. What we don't know is how much time will pass between that invasion and the start of the Tribulation. What if the rebuilding of Babylon, the rise of the one-world government, and the ministry of Elijah all happen *after* the Church is gone? If that is the case then there could be *decades* between the disappearance of the Church and the start of the Tribulation – perhaps even an entire generation. The Church may be here for many more years, or we might just have a few hours left. What we do know is that Jesus is coming for us and He wants us to be ready and waiting when He returns.

Salvation in the Tribulation

AT SOME POINT IN HISTORY the Rapture will occur. Although no one knows *when* it will happen (despite what certain people may try to tell you!), the fact remains that it *will* happen. When it finally does take place, Jesus Christ will return to Earth and take the Church to Heaven. The saints who died during the Church Age will be resurrected, and those who are still alive will be transformed. (The saints who died before the Church Age will not be resurrected until later.)

When this monumental event happens there will be many people who will suddenly vanish – and there will be an even larger number of people will be left behind. Some have argued that no one who is left behind can be saved, but that is not true. In fact, many people will come to know the Lord after the Rapture takes place. This is made clear from passages such as this one:

Revelation 7:9: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . .

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of

great tribulation, and have washed their robes,
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Here we see a tremendous number of people in Heaven who come from “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues”. These people “came out of great tribulation”. In other words, they were saved *after* the Rapture and were martyred during the Tribulation. If millions upon millions of people are saved after the Rapture, then salvation clearly does *not* end when the Church disappears.

One reason why some people have thought that salvation might not be possible is because of this passage:

2 Thessalonians 2:8: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

In this passage Paul is talking about the antichrist. He says that when the antichrist appears “God shall send them a strong delusion” so that everyone who refused to believe the truth would believe the antichrist's lie and be lost forever.

As we have already seen, this passage does not mean that salvation is impossible after Jesus comes for His Church. Instead,

it is actually talking about something else. During the first half of the Tribulation the Lord will anoint 144,000 Jews to spread the gospel to everyone on the planet. (Right now that is the job of the Church, but after the Church is gone the Lord will appoint others to do it.) The antichrist will be unable to stop these witnesses until their task is done. After they have completed their mission the Lord will send an angel to fly over all the world and repeat the gospel one more time. By the time this happens everyone alive will have heard the good news. There will be no one left who has not heard about Jesus.

That is when the Mark of the Beast will appear. Those who hated the truth and rejected the gospel will take the Mark, and in doing so they will be damned forever. However, those who loved the truth and accepted Christ will be saved. They will most likely be martyred for their faith, but in losing their life they will gain everlasting life.

Salvation will be possible in the Tribulation, but it will be more difficult than it is now. The price will be higher, and those who are saved after the Rapture will not have some of the benefits that the Church currently enjoys.

To understand why, let's back up and look at the Old Testament. Here is something to think about: how was Abraham saved? Did he believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as we do today? Of course not! Abraham didn't know about any of those things. He probably knew that God was going to send a Savior to redeem mankind, but in Abraham's day God had revealed very little about this coming Messiah. The oldest books of the Old Testament were not written until centuries after Abraham died, and the most explicit prophecies about Christ are in Isaiah, which was not written until *long* after Abraham's death. Keep in mind that even Christ's disciples didn't realize that He was going to die – and this was despite the fact that *Jesus Himself told them about his impending death*. They had no understanding of what we today consider to be the gospel – that the Messiah would live a perfect life, that He would die for the sins of mankind, and that He would raise from the dead. If the

disciples didn't understand it then I think it's pretty safe to say that Abraham didn't understand it either.

Besides, the Bible tells us exactly what saved Abraham:

Romans 4:3: “For what saith the scripture?
Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto
him for righteousness.”

Now think about this: what did Abraham believe? Did he believe that Jesus would die and then rise again on the third day? Nope. What he *did* believe was God's promise that he would have a son. Belief in that promise is what saved him.

Why did that save him? Because salvation has always come about by faith in God. We believe what God has told us, and that faith saves us. However, the *content* of that faith has changed throughout the millennia as God has revealed more truth to mankind. God has always required us to *believe what He has revealed*. God told Abraham that he would have a son and that one of his lineage would go on to be a blessing to all mankind (a reference to the Messiah that Abraham probably understood). Abraham believed it, and that faith saved him. That was all it took. Abraham was indeed saved through faith. He had faith in the promise that God made to him.

Today we know a great deal more than Abraham did. We know who Jesus is and what He has done, and God requires us to believe it. We are still saved by faith and by believing in God's promise, but since we know more about that promise, God requires more of us. “To whom much is given, much is required.” We have always been saved by faith in God and never by our own works, but surely it is obvious that Abraham knew less about the gospel than we do today. God didn't require Abraham to believe in things that had not yet been revealed to mankind. What God *did* require was for Abraham to believe what God *had* revealed – and that is still what God requires today.

Another key difference between Old Testament believers and the Church is that the Church has the Holy Spirit. There were

a few people in the Old Testament who had the Spirit, but it was a very rare gift, and those who had it were in constant danger of losing it.

This may seem bizarre, but it's really not. The verses that talk about this are well-known. The problem is that we just don't stop to consider what is being said. For example, take a look at this:

John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

Jesus told His disciples that if He didn't go away then the Holy Spirit wouldn't come. However, since He was leaving He would send the Holy Spirit to minister to us. This happened on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:1: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

This is the day that the Church was formed, and it began by the appearance of the Holy Spirit. Today each believer is filled with the Spirit from the moment they are saved. In fact, Paul tells us that any person who does *not* have the Spirit is not saved at all:

Romans 8:9: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in

the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

Today all Christians have the Holy Spirit, and there is nothing we can do to lose it. We may fall into all kinds of terrible sin and we may deeply grieve the Spirit, but it is still sealed inside us. That was not the case in the Old Testament. The gift of the Holy Spirit that Christ gave us is a special gift that is unique to this age.

First of all, notice that Christ said that the Comforter *would not come unless He left*. It's hard to get more plain than that! The disciples weren't filled with the Spirit until Pentecost. We have the Comforter *because Christ left*. Those who were alive before He came did not have it, except in a few rare cases.

It is true that there were some exceptions. There were definitely people in the Old Testament who were filled with the Spirit. Samson is one example:

Judges 14:5: “Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

6 And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.”

However, notice that verse 6 says “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him”. The Spirit was not with Samson all the time, as it is with us; instead it came and went as necessary. Samson was also in danger of losing the Spirit if he ever cut his hair – a fact that he eventually discovered:

Judges 16:20: “And she said, The Philistines be

upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.”

As I said earlier, few people in the Old Testament had the Holy Spirit, and those who did have it were in constant danger of losing it through sin. Even King David worried about losing the Spirit after he sinned with Bathsheba:

Psalm 51:11: “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”

Today we don't have to worry about losing the Holy Spirit. The Lord has given it to everyone in the Church as a free gift, and it cannot be lost through sin. But in the days of the Old Testament it was not like that. In that dispensation very few people were given the Spirit, and those who had it were forced to be very careful lest the Lord take it from them.

Let me give one more example before I move on. While the Israelites were wandering around the wilderness there was a time when the Holy Spirit descended upon a whole group of people at once:

Numbers 11:25: “And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.”

Joshua heard about this and asked Moses to put a stop to it. What Moses said in response is very interesting:

Numbers 11:28: “And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men,

answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.
29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!"

In other words, Moses said "Stop it? Absolutely not! In fact, I wish all of God's people had His Holy Spirit." Back then having the Spirit was a priceless privilege that was easily lost. Today, however, that is not the case. Moses' wish was granted: today we all have the Spirit. I don't think we fully realize what an awesome gift that really is.

What does this have to do with the Tribulation saints? Well, as I said earlier, the Holy Spirit was a gift that was given specifically to *the Church*, and at the Rapture the Church will disappear. There will still be people saved after the Rapture, but they will not be a part of the Church and they will not have the Spirit sealed within them as we do. Just like Samson and King David, they will have to be very careful lest they lose the Spirit.

Jesus warned about this very fact in the parable of the ten virgins:

Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

This parable has been widely misinterpreted. Despite what you may have been told, it has nothing to do with the Church. Whenever the Church is referred to symbolically it is always depicted as *the bride*, not as 10 bridesmaids. After all, when the bridegroom comes He is not going to marry 10 bridesmaids; He is going to marry the Bride! Another important point is that the bride *cannot* be excluded from *her own wedding*, nor is the bride in danger of missing the bridegroom. The whole reason the bridegroom returns is to get the bride and take her away, and there is no danger that he is somehow going to miss her entirely and end up marrying no one. The wedding literally *cannot* happen without her. Finally – and most importantly – oil is symbolic of the Spirit, and the Church *cannot* run out of the Holy Spirit no matter what it does. This parable simply *does not apply to the Church* in any way, shape, or form.

This passage is actually talking about those who are still alive on the Earth at the end of the Tribulation. While many Christians will be martyred during that terrible period of time, there will be some who will survive. When Jesus returns to Earth at the end of the Tribulation He will judge those who are still alive. Those who kept the faith and still had the Spirit will be

saved, but those who grew weary and lost it will be damned. Some people will allow their faith to run out, and when Jesus suddenly returns there will be no time to quickly repent and seek forgiveness. Jesus is warning them to hold on to what they have despite the terrible trials that are going to happen, because their salvation literally depends on it.

To us, living in the Church Age, this seems bizarre. After all, once we are saved we cannot be lost. We don't realize that the gifts of the Holy Spirit and of "once saved always saved" are very special gifts that were given *to the Church* and were not extended to others. As we've already seen, the Old Testament saints were in constant danger of losing the Spirit, and the Tribulation saints will face the same danger. The Tribulation saints will face an additional challenge as well, in the form of the Mark of the Beast.

One thing the Bible is very clear about is that if you take the Mark of the Beast you will be damned forever. This is an unforgivable sin. Taking the Mark gets you a one-way ticket to eternal damnation:

Revelation 14:11: "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

There are no exceptions to this policy. Once you do this you cannot change your mind or decide to come back to God. It is an absolutely final decision. In fact, the Bible emphasizes that the only ones who will be saved out of the Tribulation are those who did *not* take the Mark:

Revelation 15:2: "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the

harps of God.”

Today, in the Church Age, once we are saved we are sealed forever and we cannot be lost. Christians can commit all kinds of terrible sins (and, sadly, they do), but it does not and cannot affect their salvation. In the Tribulation it will be different. True believers will have to demonstrate their faith by not taking the Mark of the Beast. Anyone who takes it – no matter how much they might regret it later – *will* be damned, because there is no forgiveness for it. Plus, as we saw earlier in the parable of the ten virgins, true believers will have to hold on to their faith until Jesus returns. Those who let it slip away will be lost.

Now, I am not saying that in the Church Age we are saved by grace and in the Tribulation people are saved by works. That is not the case at all. What I am saying is that Tribulation saints will have to demonstrate their faith by not taking the Mark and by holding on to their faith until Jesus returns. This will not be an easy thing to do: the whole planet will be ruled by the antichrist and besieged by armies of demons. Believers will be hunted down and brutally murdered. It will be a horrible time to be alive. Things will become so bad that Revelation says that Christians who get killed during this time will actually be better off than the ones who are still alive, because the dead will finally have peace.

Why is there such a difference between the Church Age and the Tribulation Age? Because circumstances have changed. Today, in the Church Age, we live in a time of faith. We believe in Jesus even though we have not seen Him. Thomas refused to believe until he had seen the risen Lord with his own eyes. We don't have that luxury: we have to accept the Bible's account and believe that it is true. We don't have constant physical proof of God.

However, that wasn't always the case. When the Israelites left Egypt they had a pillar of cloud to follow by day and a pillar of fire by night. At Horeb they actually heard the voice of God Himself. Later, when the Temple was built, the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies once a year and communicate with

God Himself, in person. God actually had a street address, and people could use the Urim and Thummim to ask God specific questions and get specific answers. (I know we have prayer today and I don't want to downplay that, but imagine if God had an address that you could write to and immediately get back written responses.) In that dispensation you didn't need nearly as much faith because the proof of God was everywhere.

In the Tribulation the proof of God's existence will be *even greater*. Remember, by the time the Tribulation happens the Rapture will have already taken place. The entire planet will have seen Jesus Christ come to Earth, resurrect the dead, and remove the Church. This is probably something that will be broadcast on live TV for all the world to see. (The History Channel will probably make specials about it.) Which do you think requires more faith: believing in Jesus now, or believing in Jesus *after you saw Him return in person, raise millions of dead people, and rapture millions more into the sky?* In the Tribulation God's presence will be so obvious that every last person on Earth will be aware of it:

Revelation 6:15: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Do you see that? Every single person – from the mightiest king to the lowliest slave – realizes that the day of the Lord's wrath has come and is deeply afraid. *No one* doubts God's existence or power. No one questions what is happening. There are no atheists.

The point I'm trying to make is that the Church Age is a special time with special privileges. Although life in the Tribulation will be far more difficult than life is today, those who live during that period will have far *more* proofs of God's existence and power than we do today. In the Church Age we don't have constant supernatural proof of God's existence that convinces every last person on Earth. But those who *do* believe now are blessed, because we have the Spirit and we can never be lost. In the Tribulation it will be obvious that God is real, but those who wait until then to believe will miss out on some benefits of believing now. Losing one's faith – and succumbing to the Mark of the Beast – will be genuine dangers. In this dispensation there are no sins that can cost us our salvation, but there will be during the Tribulation. It will be a different time.

The bottom line is that it will be possible to be saved after the Rapture happens, and millions of people will do so. However, it will be a very difficult and horrible time. Those who are saved will have to be careful to keep holding on to the Spirit, keep living in faith, and keep resisting the Mark of the Beast. Those who endure to the end shall be saved, but those who don't will be lost forever.

Babylon

IN GENESIS 10 we find a man by the name of Nimrod:

Genesis 10:8: “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.

10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

The Bible describes Nimrod as “a mighty one in the earth” and as “a mighty hunter before the Lord”. However, there is a great deal more to the story. Nimrod was not like Esau, who was a mighty hunter of wild animals; instead he was a depraved hunter of *men* who fought the Lord and did many terrible things.

The name “Nimrod” comes from the Hebrew word *marad*, which means “rebel”. (Some people think that Nimrod might actually be his title instead of his name.) History tells us that Nimrod was an evil tyrant who hated the Lord and who spent his life fighting him. This is how the ancient Jewish historian Josephus described him:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah -- a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to

believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny -- seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers. (Ant. 1: iv: 2)

As you can see, Nimrod was driven by a passionate hatred for God. He was angry at God for destroying the ancient world in the Flood and was determined to do three things: turn men away from God, get his revenge, and build a tower so tall that if God sent another Flood He would not be able to destroy mankind a second time. Nimrod was a rebellious, powerful king who had no fear of God whatsoever.

That in itself is an astonishing thing. The Lord had just shown His awesome power and wrath by *destroying the entire world in the Flood* – a fact that Nimrod knew but did not take to heart. Everyone who rebelled against God had died; the only ones who survived were God's servants. The rebels may have thought that they were stronger than God, but the Lord showed them how utterly powerless they really were. God had clearly demonstrated how *futile* it was to rebel against Him. It is simply not possible to gain victory over God – and yet Nimrod did not care. He was determined to be just like the rebels who lived before the Flood, even though those rebels had fought God *and lost*.

It is an amazing thing that men who knew about the Flood still chose to rebel against God. The Flood did not strike fear into their hearts; in fact, *it only made them hate God even more*. God had proven that He was stronger than man, but Nimrod did not care. He was determined to fight an all-knowing, all-powerful

God. Nimrod saw that men feared God and was determined to draw men away from Him.

This is not the first time that men have chosen to wage war against God, and it would not be the last. Throughout history God has poured out His wrath upon those who hate Him, and yet people respond by deciding to rebel even more. Despite the fact that rebelling against God is hopeless, men *still* refuse to repent and be saved. They cling to their sin and rebellion all the way to the bitter end. Men were like this when history began, and they will still be like this when this Age draws to a close:

Revelation 16:9: “And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.”

In Revelation we see the same mindless rebellion that drove Nimrod. During the Tribulation the Lord will pour out terrible judgments upon the Earth. When God clearly demonstrating His wrath and power in a way that no one can deny or ignore, men will *still* refuse to repent. Instead of seeking forgiveness and grace they will instead curse God. Nimrod cursed God for judging the old world in the Flood; these men will curse God for judging the modern world in the Tribulation. It is the same sad story – men deliberately choosing God's wrath over God's mercy and grace. God offers forgiveness, but they will not take it. Their hatred for God is so great that they would rather curse God and die.

Nimrod's desire to rebel against God by building a tower was more than just words. As Genesis 10:10 points out, Nimrod founded Babel – the city made famous for its tower that was supposed to reach Heaven itself:

Genesis 11:2: “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

The city of Babel was founded as an act of rebellion against God. In fact, some have called it the first organized rebellion against God. Cain had rebelled against God, but he was just one man; there is no evidence that he led a movement. Nimrod was quite different: his goal was nothing less than the corruption of all mankind.

Nimrod founded the city of Babel and was determined to make a name for himself. He was going to build an empire that was dedicated to fighting God. Babel was not simply another city; it was an act of defiance against the Lord Himself.

Although he was determined to thwart God's plan, he did not succeed. His city of Babel did not grow into a worldwide empire that dominated the world and stamped out worship of God. The Lord saw what was going on and decided to stop it:

Genesis 11:5: “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6 And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they

left off to build the city.

9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

Notice how easy it was for the Lord to put an end to this scheme! Once again, mankind discovered that trying to rebel against God was fruitless. God is simply too great; He cannot be defeated. No city or power or scheme of men can possibly overthrow Him. He is far above our reach and has infinite power and wisdom. Nimrod was trying to thwart God by building a tower too tall for any flood to overcome, but the Lord did not send another flood. Instead God simply confused the languages of man, and that was that. Since men could no longer communicate with one another they were scattered abroad. The great tower at Babel was abandoned and left unfinished.

(As a side-note, notice that the Lord said “let *us* go down” – a reference to the Trinity. There are many times in the Old Testament when God refers to Himself in plural form. The Jews reject the concept of the Trinity, but despite their protests the Trinity is found in both the Old *and* New Testament.)

It is important to realize why God decided to intervene. Verse 6 tells us that “nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do”. Mankind was determined to build a kingdom that was in direct opposition to the Most High God. They were going to form a one-world government that would rule over the planet in the name of wickedness. God realized that if He did not stop them *they were going to succeed*, so He intervened. Mankind was planning on creating a tyrannical empire that spanned the entire globe, and which was headed by one wicked person who hated God. They almost succeeded – but God stopped them.

But they were not stopped forever. You see, the story of Babel did not end on the day that God confused the language of

men. Babel is just another name for Babylon. Nimrod did not just found a city; he started a civilization. Although the tower was abandoned, Babylon itself did not disappear; it continued to grow in power until it became a major civilization that conquered much of the ancient world. The book of Revelation tells us that one day Babylon will actually succeed in taking over the entire world. There *will* be a one-world government headed by an evil man of incredible wickedness – a man known as the antichrist. Nimrod's dream will come to pass and it will endure for a short while, until Jesus Christ returns and destroys it once and for all.

It is important to realize that Babylon is more than just a city or an ancient civilization. There are two sides in this universe: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Babylon is the sum of everything that is in rebellion against God. You might say that Babylon *is* the kingdom of this world. (Some have described history as a tale of two cities: Jerusalem, the city of God, and Babylon, the city of this world.) Babylon may no longer be a world power, but it was never really defeated. Saddam Hussein rebuilt the city of Babylon and it endures to this day. As the years go by its power will increase until it dominates the entire planet – and then God will judge it, just as the book of Revelation describes.

Before getting into that, however, we need to take a quick history lesson. Babylon is mentioned many times throughout Scripture. For example, during Israel's conquest of Canaan, Achan was led into sin when he saw a *Babylonian* garment:

Joshua 7:20: “And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:
21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.”

When this event happened Joshua had just started leading the children of Israel into battle against the Canaanites. They had conquered Jericho and moved on to Ai, a city that was so small and weak that Joshua paid little attention to it. When he sent his army against it, however, his army lost; Ai defeated them and killed 36 Israelites. Joshua inquired of the Lord and found out that God had removed His blessing from them because one of the Israelites had sinned. All of the spoil from Jericho was supposed to go to the Lord, but Achan kept some of it for himself. This sin caused the Lord's favor to be removed from Israel and they began to lose battles; they did not win another battle until Achan was put to death.

It is interesting that Achan was tempted by a *Babylonian* garment. Achan was led astray by the kingdom of this world, and it destroyed him. The Bible strictly warns us to not love this world or the things that it contains:

1 John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Achan loved the things of Babylon more than the things of God, and it cost him his life.

This is far from the only time that Babylon brought grief to Israel. When the evil king Ahaz rebelled against God, the Assyrians came and settled men from *Babylon* into Israel:

2 Kings 17:24: And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.”

Later, of course, Babylon would completely conquer Israel

and relocate its entire population. Israel rejected God, so God gave them over to the kingdom of this world.

The good King Hezekiah was also ensnared by Babylon. Hezekiah had been gravely ill, but he cried out to God and the Lord healed him. After his recovery a group from *Babylon* came to pay their respects. Hezekiah responded by boasting about his wealth and showing them what a great and powerful king he was:

2 Kings 20:12: “At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

13 And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.”

You may recall that King Nebuchadnezzar also made the mistake of boasting about his greatness. That did not end well for him, and this did not end well for Hezekiah:

2 Kings 20:14: “Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.

15 And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

16 And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the

word of the Lord.

17 Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.

18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

19 Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?"

Do you see how Hezekiah simply did not care? He didn't cry out to God and ask Him to forgive his pride and arrogance. The king did not intercede on behalf of Israel as Moses had done on countless occasions. Hezekiah was so self-centered and hard-hearted that the warning of God's coming judgment meant nothing to him! The fact that Israel would be conquered, his own sons would be enslaved, and many people would be killed made no impression on him at all. In fact, in verse 19 he even calls it "good"! All he cared about was himself. "Things will be good in my time; who cares what will happen to my children? If they're going to be brutally murdered by Babylonians, well, hey, that's not my problem."

Hezekiah had been a good king but he was led astray by the things of this world. He cared about his money, his power, and his glory; he wanted to make sure that things were good for *him*. He had fallen in love with the things of this world and wanted to make sure that the Babylon king respected him. The wrath of God was of no concern to him whatsoever.

Isaiah's dire prophecy came true. Years after Hezekiah died, King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel and hauled its men away to Babylon:

2 Kings 24:24: “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him.”

Judah rebelled against Babylon, but the rebellion did not go well. In the days of Jehoiakim's son, Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged Jerusalem. When the city fell he destroyed the temple, sacked the city, and hauled away its treasure and people to Babylon:

2 Kings 24:10: “At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.

11 And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it.

12 And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

13 And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said.

14 And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

15 And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

16 And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.”

God had warned Israel repeatedly that if they rebelled against Him He would hand them over to their enemies, but they did not listen. Moses warned Israel about this before they even set foot in the promised land, and prophet after prophet repeated the warning of Moses. It was all to no avail: Israel refused to serve God, so He handed them over to Babylon. Since Israel loved this world more than it loved God, the Lord handed them over to it.

But Babylon was not left unpunished. God promised to put an end to them:

Isaiah 13:19: “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.”

Interestingly, *this prophecy has never been fulfilled.* When God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah the cities were utterly destroyed in a matter of moments, and all of their inhabitants were suddenly killed. Babylon, however, did not suffer that fate; instead it was gradually abandoned over a period of centuries. In fact, the city still existed in the days of Peter. The apostle mentioned it in one of his letters and said that there was a congregation of believers there:

I Peter 5:13: “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.”

Some have tried to claim that this was a code-word for Rome, but that is not the case. There is no evidence that Peter ever visited Rome; when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans he greeted a very long list of people who were there (Romans 16), but Peter was not mentioned. It is much more likely that Babylon simply meant Babylon – especially since the city was still inhabited at that time.

Besides this, Isaiah 13:20 says that after Babylon is judged it will never be inhabited again, and that is something else that has never happened. In 1983 Saddam Hussein rebuilt the city of Babylon directly on top of its old site. In May of 2009 the site was reopened for tourism, and today it is a tourist attraction. The ancient city lives again.

The reason this happened is because the city's final judgment is still in the future. Isaiah's prophecy will come true during the Tribulation. Toward the end of that seven-year period the city of Babylon will be destroyed:

Revelation 18:1: “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

By the time this happens the city of Babylon will be far more than a mere tourist attraction. All nations and kings will

have become entangled with her, and she will have given many merchants great wealth. Babylon will be in a position of great political and economic power. Yet, despite its power, it will be destroyed in a single day and a single hour – just as Isaiah foretold:

Revelation 18:8: “Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.
9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,
10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.”

Notice how Babylon is called a “great city” and a “mighty city”. For more than a thousand years there was no city of Babylon; there were only ruins. Now the city of Babylon lives again, just as the Bible foretold. As the Tribulation draws near we can expect Babylon to grow tremendously and amass great wealth and power. It will once again become a mighty city that rules over the entire world – just as it did in ancient times. In fact, it will become the greatest city on the planet:

Revelation 18:17: “For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,
18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!”

In the cosmic struggle between the city of God and the city of this world, the city of this world will be utterly destroyed. God will avenge His people:

Revelation 18:20: “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

Long ago Nimrod founded Babylon in an attempt to defeat God and set himself up as king. Near the end of the Tribulation the Lord will utterly destroy the city that he created and put an end to the rebellion that he started. As Revelation says:

Revelation 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become

the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and
he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Amen!

The Mark of the Beast

EVERY TIME someone suggests creating a national ID card or implanting computer chips into people, someone invariably mentions the Mark of the Beast. The truth is that these fears are completely unfounded. While there may be perfectly good reasons to oppose both of these things, claiming that they are the Mark of the Beast is not one of them.

Here is why. In order for an implanted computer chip to work it has to carry enough information to uniquely identify each person. This is actually why people have proposed the idea – instead of carrying around a wallet that could get lost or stolen, you could simply use this chip instead. The people at the store would scan your chip in order to find out your identity and your account information.

The key here is that in order for it to work each chip has to have a *unique* id number. This is very important so I'm going to repeat it: the *only* way to tell people apart is to give each person a *different number*. That is how credit cards work: if everyone had the same number then there would be no way to tell people apart. It doesn't matter if the ID card is a piece of plastic that you carry in your wallet or is a computer chip that is embedded into your hand; in order for it to work each chip must contain *different* information.

However, the Mark of the Beast *is the same for everyone*. Take a look at these verses:

Revelation 13:15: “And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the

beast should be killed.

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark to their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that hath the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

This is the only passage in the entire Bible that describes the Mark of the Beast. Verse 17 says that the Mark can be one of three things: **a mark** (which is not described), **a name**, or **a number**. If it is a name then it is the name of the beast; if it is a number then it is 666. But one thing it clearly says is that *it is the same name, number, or mark for every single person*. When a person takes the Mark he does not get his own unique number. The purpose of the Mark is *not* to identify each person (which is what the computer chips and ID cards are all about) but to show that the people who took the Mark have rejected God and have sided once and for all with Satan. Therefore, **ID cards and computer chips cannot be the Mark of the Beast because they have different numbers, while the Mark of the Beast is the same for everyone.**

Do you see the difference? Even if society gets to a point where cash is no longer used and you have to have a debit card to buy and sell things, that is still not the Mark of the Beast because those cards will be different for each person.

Do Not Take the Mark

I am not trying to say that the Mark of the Beast is

unimportant or should be taken lightly. My goal is to help people understand what it *is* and what it *is not*. The Mark is actually an extremely serious thing. The Bible clearly states that anyone who takes the Mark *cannot be saved*:

Revelation 14:9: “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb;

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

Those who take the Mark will be tormented day and night forever and ever with fire and brimstone. It lists no exceptions for those who took the Mark and later regretted it. Those who take it are rejecting God in a way that *cannot be undone*. It is an unforgivable sin. Once you take it you are guaranteed an unbearable eternity of torment in the Lake of Fire. God is very clear about this.

Just in case that passage wasn't clear enough, Revelation also says this:

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received

his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

As you can see, the only people who will be saved during the Tribulation are those who never took the Mark. Once you take it you are forever lost. In fact, it will be so bad that Revelation 14 goes on to say this:

Revelation 14:12: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

Verse 12 is referring to what was just mentioned in the previous few verses (9 through 11, which I quoted a little earlier). When the Mark of the Beast appears people will be given a stark choice. If they take the Mark then they will be forever lost – there is no turning back. The only way to be saved is to refuse to take the Mark, refuse to worship the beast, and refuse to worship his image. This publicly tells the world that you have chosen to side with Jesus. However, doing this will be a crime punishable by death. No one can buy or sell without the Mark and anyone who does not have it will be executed. That is why verse 13 says that those who are dead in the Lord are blessed; they no longer have to worry about resisting the unbelievable temptation to take the Mark. Their work is done.

For those of you who are worried that you might one day take the Mark without realizing it, let me say that as of 2013 the Mark is still years away. You see, the Mark doesn't appear until the second half of the seven-year Tribulation. We know this because the Antichrist doesn't declare himself to be god until 3.5

years into the Tribulation:

Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

For reasons I explained earlier in this book, the one “week” refers to a period of 7 years and is also known as the Tribulation. In the middle of this period the antichrist will put an end to the sacrifices that are going on in the Third Temple (which has not even been built yet). When this happens he will declare himself to be greater than God:

Daniel 11:36: “And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done.”

That is when Revelation 13:15 takes place. Since he has declared himself to be god, he commands everyone to take the Mark and executes all those who do not. Therefore, there can be no Mark of the Beast until the Jews build the Third Temple, the Jews sign the seven-year covenant with the Antichrist, the Antichrist breaks that covenant, the Antichrist defiles the Temple, and the Antichrist declares himself to be greater than God.

Christians who are alive during the Church Age don't have to worry about any of this because they will not be on Earth during the Tribulation. *No member of the Church will ever be tempted to taking the Mark.* It will not appear until we are long

gone.

The next time someone suggests implanting computer chips into people, please don't compare it to the Mark of the Beast. The chips (or ID card) would have to be different for each person, and that is the *opposite* of the Mark, which is the same for everyone.

“No one knows”

WHENEVER SOMEONE comes up with a new theory about when the Rapture might happen, it's not uncommon for someone to say “Well, the Bible says no one knows when the Lord will return so we shouldn't be speculating about it.” I'd like to take a moment to address that criticism.

The verses that the critics quote can be found in two places in the Bible. Let's take a look at them:

Matthew 24:36: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37 But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not

have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

This passage states that no one knows the day or hour of the Lord's return. However, it is critical to understand that the Lord is *not* talking about the Rapture here, but instead is talking about His return *at the end of the Tribulation*.

There are a couple details that make this clear. First, this entire passage is a response to three questions that the disciples asked Christ. These questions can be found earlier in the chapter:

Matthew 24:1: “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

As can be seen, the disciples asked three questions: when would the Temple be destroyed, what sign would happen just before the Lord returned, and what would be the sign that the world was about to end? The disciples asked these questions because they believed the destruction of their Temple would be a part of the end of the world. As it turned out, they were wrong.

In response to these questions, Christ started talking about the Tribulation. We know that Matthew 24 is not talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (which is when the Temple was actually destroyed) because of what He told the disciples to

be expecting. Many of the signs He mentioned *still* have not happened to this very day. For example:

1. The Abomination of Desolation

Jesus told His disciples that before He returned the “abomination of desolation” would be set up in the Holy Place of the Temple:

Matthew 24:14: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)
15 Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:”

This is a reference to Daniel 9:26, which says:

Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

In this passage Daniel is talking about the Tribulation – the last 7 years of the 490-year period that had been set aside to finish Israel's sins and bring the Jewish nation back to God. The Antichrist will sign a seven-year peace treaty with Israel (the phrase “one week” is symbolic for seven years), and in the middle of those seven years he will break the treaty and stop the sacrifices in the Temple. In fact, he will go even further and

install himself in the Temple, declaring himself to be God:

2 Thessalonians 2:3: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

None of these things happened in 70 AD. Israel did not sign a seven-year peace treaty with the Antichrist. Although the Temple was destroyed, the Antichrist did not install himself in the temple and declare to the world that he was Almighty God. That has yet to happen.

2. The Great Tribulation

Jesus said that before He returned there would be a time of “great tribulation”:

Matthew 24:21: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.
22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

This time of trouble will be the worst thing the world has *ever* seen. Nothing worse ever happened before it and nothing worse will ever happen after it. In fact, it is so bad that if it was not shortened *no flesh* would be saved – in other words, if God

did not cut it short *every living thing on Earth would die*.

Needless to say, that has not happened yet either. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD it was a time of great trouble, and approximately a million Jews were slaughtered. However, it was *not* the worst thing that ever happened in all of history. In fact, it was not even the worst event to ever happen to the Jews – during the Holocaust 6 million Jews were killed, or nearly 2/3rds of the world's Jewish population.

As you can see, this sign has not happened either.

3. The Sign of the Son of Man

Immediately before Jesus returns a special sign will appear in the sky:

Matthew 24:30: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, ...”

This has also not happened yet. No one even knows what the “sign of the Son of man” is. It certainly has not appeared in the sky and caused all of the nations to mourn.

4. The Return of Christ

After all these things have happened, the Lord would return with power and great glory:

Matthew 24:30: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see

the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

This has not happened yet either. Jesus has not yet returned to Earth.

5. The Gathering of the Elect

After Jesus returns He will send his angels to gather up the elect. This is *not* the Rapture (which happens before the Tribulation and which does not involve the angels) but is a separate event, where the nations are gathered together for judgment:

Matthew 24:21: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.”

This has not happened either. The elect are still on Earth. This trumpet has not sounded.

The point of all this is that when the disciples asked Christ what the sign of His coming would be, He basically told them this:

- There would be wars and rumors of wars (v6)
- There would be famines and earthquakes (v7)
- Christians would be persecuted (v9)
- There would be the abomination of desolation (v15)
- There would be the worst time of trouble the world has ever seen and will ever see (v21)
- The sign of the Son of man would appear in heaven, causing all the nations to mourn (v30)

- And *then* Christ would return.

In other words, Christ spent the whole chapter talking about His return *after the end of the seven-year Tribulation*. When Christ said in verse 36 that “of that day and hour knoweth no man”, He was talking about His coming *after* the Tribulation. At the end of the Tribulation the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky, and at some point after that Christ will return. The exact timing of His return is unknown – it could be hours, days, or weeks. There's no way to know.

The key point here is that *Christ is not talking about the Rapture of the Church*. The Church is never mentioned in the entire chapter. We already know that the Church will not be on Earth during the Tribulation – they will be raptured out first. Jesus is telling those who are left behind what to expect during the Tribulation and how they will know that their Lord is about to return.

Therefore, people who use the “no one knows” verse to attack those who theorize about the Rapture are mistaken because *this verse is not talking about the Rapture*. This can also be seen in the other place where this is discussed – Mark 13:32-37. Mark 13 is almost a copy of Matthew 24 (you can read it for yourself and see what I mean). Once again, the focus of the “no man knows” statement is Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation. These passages don't even mention the Rapture.

In fact, when the Bible does talk about the Rapture it goes so far as to say that it should *not catch us off-guard*. For example, look at this passage:

I Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so we shall ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

5:1: But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”

(As a side-note, there are people who claim that the word “rapture” is not found anywhere in the Bible. However, the word rapture comes from the Latin word *rapturo*. If you take the phrase “caught up” from verse 17 and translate it into Latin, do you know what word you get? That's right, *rapturo*! So saying that the word “rapture” does not appear in the Bible is wrong for two

reasons: (a) it's a Latin word, so of course it won't be found in an English Bible, and (b) if you translate these verses into Latin it actually *does* appear.)

In this passage it is clear that Paul is talking about the Rapture. Verses 16 and 17 talk about the Lord returning, the resurrection of the dead, the transformation of the living, and our going to always be with the Lord. With that context in mind, Paul says in verse 3 that this event will take the world by surprise. However, in verse 4 he says that it will *not* take the Church by surprise. Look at that verse again:

I Thessalonians 5:4: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

Paul actually comes right out and says that the Church *should be expecting the Rapture*. It should not catch us by surprise. In fact, in verse 6 Paul commands the Church to be sober and *watch for it*.

So, then, the idea that “no one knows when Christ will return, so therefore we shouldn't speculate about the Rapture” is wrong for several reasons. First, when Christ said that He was talking about His return at the end of the Tribulation, not the Rapture of the Church. Second, Paul *commanded* the Church to be watching for the Rapture so that it doesn't catch us off-guard. The world will be caught off-guard, but the Church should see it coming.

Sadly, I think that many people in the Church are not looking for the Rapture. If they even think about it they see it as something that will happen a very long time from now, if it ever happens at all. There is no expectation that it could happen soon. When it happens I believe that it will take many people completely by surprise – even though it shouldn't.

Ezekiel Foretold Israel's Rebirth

THERE IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT SIGN that we haven't discussed yet, and that is the rebirth of the nation of Israel. After all, the “man of sin” can't sign a covenant with Israel if Israel doesn't exist as a nation! The rebirth of Israel in modern times is absolutely critical; without her none of the end-time prophecies can be fulfilled. Many people consider the rebirth of Israel to be the key indicator that we have entered the last days.

As it turns out, the Bible actually prophesied when Israel would be reborn. This can be found in Ezekiel 4:

Ezekiel 4:1: “Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:

2 And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.

3 Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity.

5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou

bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

7 Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it.

...

13 And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them."

In this passage God used Ezekiel as an object lesson. The Lord was going to punish Israel for 430 years (390 years + 40 years), and to illustrate this God commanded Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days. This was done as a sign to the house of Israel, but the Israelites paid no attention to the warning. Instead of repenting they hardened their hearts, and God's judgment came upon them. As foretold, they were carried into captivity and spent the next 70 years in exile.

Even this, however, did not teach them anything. Since they did not repent, the Lord only allowed a small remnant of the Jews to return to Israel in 536 BC. The rest of the nation remained scattered abroad, as the Lord had threatened in verse 13.

When the Jews returned home only 70 of the appointed 430 years had taken place, which still left 360 years. However, the fact that the Israelites did not learn their lesson during the first 70 years of punishment activated this provision of the Mosaic Law:

Leviticus 26:23: "And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;

24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins."

This says that if God punished the Israelites and they refused to repent then God would multiply their punishment by seven. $360 \text{ years} \times 7 = 2520 \text{ years}$. Since the Bible uses 360-year days in its prophecies, that would equal 2,483.8 of our calendar years. (The math: $2520 \text{ years} \times 360 \text{ days} = 907,200 \text{ days}$. $907,200 \text{ days} / 365.25 \text{ days per year} = 2,483.8 \text{ years}$.) So, if you add 2,483.3 years to the spring of 536 BC (keeping into account there was no year 0, only 1 BC and then 1 AD), you get the spring of 1948. (Math: $1948 + 536 = 2484$.)

When did Israel become a nation again? On May 14, 1948. This time, however, more than just a small remnant has returned to the land; there are now millions of Jews living in Israel, and more continue to move there as time goes on. This process will only accelerate as the time of Christ's return draws near. The Lord is calling His people back to their promised land.

On top of this, Israel became a nation in a *single day*, just as the Lord foretold through Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:7: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.

8 Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? Saith the Lord: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? Saith thy God."

It seemed an incredible thing that Israel would become a nation again in a single day, but that is exactly what happened.

The Land Given To Israel

HERE IS AN INTERESTING question: just how much land did God give to the Israelites? We see in Genesis chapter 17 that God gave them the entire land of Canaan:

Genesis 17:4: “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

This passage, however, does not define any boundaries. We can see in verse 8 that the land was given to Israel “for an everlasting possession”, which is a topic I've extensively explored elsewhere. But just how large a territory did this represent?

We can find part of the answer in Genesis 15:

Genesis 15:18: “In the same day the LORD

made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:”

Here God answers the question in very explicit terms: the Israelites were given all the land that was east of the Nile and west of the Euphrates river. This is quite a lot of territory and include parts of modern Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the entire Sinai Peninsula. The promised territory is roughly 1500 miles wide! That verse doesn't tell us how far north or south the territory goes, but we at least have some east-west boundaries to work with.

To put this into perspective: modern Israel currently covers 8000 square miles. At its narrowest point the country is less than *ten miles wide*. The territory that God promised to give Abraham, however, is *125 times larger!*

How will they get this territory? God will give it to them. Currently this land is occupied by the enemies of Israel, who are plotting to destroy her from off the face of the Earth. In the near future they will form a large coalition and launch a major war against her, which was prophesied in Psalm 83. God will then judge the nations that attempted to destroy her and will give Israel their land.

Ultimately, however, Israel will probably not possess this entire territory until the Lord returns. I believe these will be the boundaries of Israel during the Messianic Kingdom, but that is a subject for another time.

A Possible Old Testament Rapture Verse?

THE OLD TESTAMENT does not have very much to say about the Church. It also has very little to say about the Rapture. When people discuss the Rapture and defend that doctrine, they always use passages from the New Testament. The apostles had a lot to say about that teaching, but the Old Testament does not.

The reason for this has to do with the topic of dispensations. Simply put, people in the Old Testament lived under the Mosaic Law. They were not a part of the Church, and they did not face the possibility of being raptured. God did not teach them about those mysteries because they did not apply to them. However, when Christ died He ushered in a new dispensation. In this new age, the Mosaic Law was ended and a new system was put into place. Since things were different, God spoke through His servants and told them what the Church needed to know. Since the Rapture *does* apply to the Church, God revealed it to us and told us what to expect.

However, it is possible that the Old Testament does mention the Rapture. There is a passage in Isaiah that might be talking about it. That passage can be found here:

Isaiah 26:19: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the

indignation be overpast.

21 For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”

This part of Isaiah (chapters 24 – 26) is talking about end-times events. Isaiah 24 speaks of the Day of the Lord. Isaiah 25 speaks of a time when God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. As you can see, Isaiah 26:19 speaks of a resurrection, and verse 21 speaks of a time when the Lord will judge the world for its sin.

Verse 20 is the verse that might be speaking about the Rapture. If you look at the entire passage it is easy to see how this might be a Rapture verse. Verse 19 speaks of a time when there will be a resurrection of the dead. After this resurrection, God will take His people and hide them “until the indignation be overpast”. God wants to protect His people because He is going to punish the world for its sins, and He doesn't want His people to face His wrath.

That is the same sequence of events that we find surrounding the Rapture in the New Testament! When Jesus returns He will raise the dead, then He will take His Bride back to Heaven so we will be spared the Tribulation. During the Tribulation God will pour out His wrath upon the world for its sins, and at the end of that time He will return to the Earth with His Bride.

Given the details of the passage itself and the context of the surrounding chapters, it certainly seems like a possible fit. The similarities are remarkable.

The Millennium

IN REVELATION 20 there is a passage that speaks of a thousand year reign of Christ. Those ten verses have been the subject of tremendous debate over the years. For the most part this passage has been interpreted in one of two ways. Those who are **premillennial** believe that the thousand year reign is literal and that one day Jesus will return to Earth, set up a kingdom, and reign as King over the nations for a thousand years. On the other hand, those who are **amillennial** believe that the passage should be interpreted symbolically. They teach that Christ's kingdom is purely spiritual. To them the very idea of Christ reigning as a political king over the Earth is bizarre and unbiblical.

What I'd like to do is take a careful look at the passage. Before I begin, however, I want you to read this passage for yourself in its entirety. The passage can be found in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw

the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until **the thousand years** were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7 And when **the thousand years** are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

And now let's begin!

The Binding of Satan

I would like to start by looking at the first three verses of the chapter:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

In these verses we are told that an angel comes down from Heaven. This angel (which is given no name and does not appear to be an archangel) binds Satan and locks him in the bottomless pit. While Satan is locked in that pit he is unable to deceive the nations anymore, and he is trapped there for a thousand years. After that thousand years he is set free, but we'll get into that later.

These verses are often interpreted symbolically. Those who are amillennial teach that this refers to the death of Christ on the cross, and that when Christ died Satan was bound. They believe that the millennium is currently going on as we speak (in other words, “millennium” is just another word for this age of history) and that the phrase “thousand years” is just symbolic for a long span of time.

I find this explanation to be very problematic. First of all, the passage says that an *unnamed angel* bound Satan, not the Lamb that was slain. If Jesus bound Satan then why doesn't

Revelation 20:1 say that? Why does it attribute this act to someone else? More importantly, though, I find it *impossible* to believe that Satan is currently bound and unable to deceive or harm anyone. That is certainly not what the New Testament teaches! Look at what Peter wrote:

I Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”

Did Peter say that the devil had been bound by Christ's death and was unable to deceive anyone? Did he teach that we have no need to worry about Satan because his days of deceiving people were over? Far from it! Peter warned us to be sober and vigilant, for the devil was “seeking whom he may devour”. Peter was certainly not under the impression that the devil had been bound and rendered harmless. James echoed Peter's concern:

James 4:7: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Once again, you don't see James saying “Don't worry about the devil – he's incapable of doing any harm”. Revelation 20:2 specifically says that Satan is *bound*, and yet I Peter 5:8 says that he “walketh about”. If Satan “walketh about” then he is not currently bound, which means Revelation 20:1-3 is still in the future.

There are also chronological reasons for believing that the binding of Satan is still in the future. In Revelation 4 the apostle John is told this:

Revelation 4:1: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice

which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”

John was told that he was about to see things “which must be hereafter” – in other words, *things that had not yet taken place in his day*. Part of this vision included the binding of Satan. Therefore, the binding of Satan could *not* have happened at the cross because Revelation was written decades *after* Christ died and rose again, and yet at the time John was given the vision it had *not yet occurred*.

It's worth noting that a great many things take place between Revelation 4 and Revelation 20. These events appear to happen in chronological order. If you read through those chapters (and I will not quote them all here!) you will see that things follow a progression. For example, in Revelation 6 the first seal is open, and then the second seal is open, and so forth. Revelation 7 then starts with the phrase “and after these things”. Event follows event. There is nothing in the text to indicate that we are viewing things out of sequence. In fact we can see a progression, as the two prophets preach and are then killed, only to rise again (Revelation 11); as the beast rises to power and prevails against the saints (Revelation 13); and as Babylon falls (Revelation 18). Revelation 20 takes place *after* all of these things. To say that the binding of Satan happened at the cross would mean that Revelation 4 through 19 happened before the crucifixion, which is silly. At that point John isn't seeing things “which must be hereafter”; he's seeing things that happened decades earlier. It just doesn't make sense.

But there is one thing in particular that I want to draw your attention to. In Revelation 19 we are told that the marriage of the Lamb has finally come:

Revelation 19:7: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the

Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”

As we discussed earlier in this book, all throughout the New Testament the Church is called the Bride of Christ and Jesus is called the Bridegroom. In Revelation 19 we learn that the long-awaited marriage finally takes place in Heaven. After the marriage the Lord Jesus Christ returns to Earth with the armies of Heaven:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

...

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

This passage says that the Lord returns with the armies of Heaven to judge the Earth *after* the marriage of the Lamb takes place. Immediately after this is Revelation 20, in which Satan is bound in the aftermath of Christ's victory over His enemies on Earth. This means that Satan is bound *after* the Bride of Christ becomes the Wife of Christ. It is worth nothing that the New Testament calls the Church the *bride*, not the *wife*. The Church can only be called the Bride if the marriage has not yet happened! These events, then, *must* still be in the future.

To look at it a different way: if Revelation 20:1-3 really is talking about the death of Christ on the cross, then that would mean the Marriage of the Lamb occurred *before* the Church even existed! How is that possible? How could the bride be dressed in the righteous acts of the saints *before the saints even existed and performed any righteous acts?* It doesn't make any sense. If that was the case then the New Testament should have referred to the Church as the Wife of Christ, but that never happened.

I believe this passage should be interpreted plainly. After the Marriage of the Lamb the Lord Jesus Christ will return to Earth with a great army and defeats the army of the Beast (which you can read about in Revelation 19:11-21). After this Satan will be bound for a thousand years, during which time he is unable to deceive the nations or do any harm. He is completely removed from the scene.

I have heard people say that this passage must be symbolic because it is impossible to bind Satan (a fallen angel) with a chain, but I do not find that argument convincing. After all, this is not the first time that the Bible refers to binding fallen angels with chains. There is this passage as well:

Jude 1:6: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

In this verse Jude tells us that certain fallen angels have been put in prison and are held captive *in chains* until Judgment Day. (Despite what you might think, not all fallen angels wander the world as demons; some have been imprisoned. Why some are imprisoned and others are not is beyond the scope of this discussion.) In Revelation 20 we see that Satan gets the same treatment: like the fallen angels of Jude 1:6, he also is bound in chains. It would appear that it *is* possible to bind angels with chains.

Is Satan currently bound, unable to cause any harm? Of course not! No one actually believes that – not even the apostles themselves. It does not fit the chronology of Revelation or the world that we see around us. The amillennial claim that Satan is bound and unable to cause trouble any more is simply wrong. This is a future event, not a past one.

The Thousand Years

It is common to hear people argue that the thousand-year reign is symbolic of the present Church Age (the time between Pentecost and the return of Christ). However, I do not think that the evidence supports this. If Revelation 20 is symbolic of the Church Age then that means that Satan is bound, the marriage of the Lamb has already happened, and the Lord has (in some symbolic sense) already returned with the armies of Heaven to defeat Satan. I find that impossible to believe. I think it makes far more sense to read the text as it is: after the Lord returns, Satan is bound and Christ establishes a kingdom that lasts a thousand years.

Some have argued that the thousand years should be interpreted symbolically because of what Peter said:

2 Peter 3:8: “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a

thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

If you'll notice, however, this passage uses symbolic language. It clearly says that one day with the Lord is *as* a thousand years. Revelation 20 contains no such symbolic language! Look at how many times it says that this period will last *a thousand years* – not that it will seem like a thousand years, or will be “as” a thousand years, but will be *one thousand years long*:

Revelation 20:2: “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,
3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

In both verses it clearly says “a thousand years”. There is no hint in the passage that this time period is symbolic. But we're just getting started:

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.
5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,”

In six verses the phrase “thousand years” occurs *six times*. I don't see how it could have been made any plainer that this is a literal period of time! To look at it another way: if this passage was meant to be taken symbolically then it would have been easy to say “as a thousand years” or “was like a thousand years”, but it doesn't say that. However, if the thousand-year period was meant to be taken literally then *how could the writer have possibly been any more clear?*

I believe the thousand year period should be interpreted as a thousand year period. In other words, it is called a thousand-year period *because it lasts for one thousand years*. I see no reason in the text itself to interpret it any differently.

The Kingdom

After Satan is bound we see a kingdom established:

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a

thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

We can clearly see that Christ is reigning for a thousand years ("they lived and *reigned with Christ* a thousand years"), but who is reigning with Him? Verse four says that the people reigning with Christ were people who were martyred for the cause of Christ. Verse 5 states that these people were *raised from the dead* so that they could reign with Christ. If the millennium is symbolic of the Church Age then this makes no sense at all. Have the martyrs been resurrected so that they can reign with Christ during the Church Age? Of course not! The resurrection is still in the future, so the fulfillment of this passage must still be in the future as well.

Once again, this is clearly talking about something that hasn't happened yet. Here we see martyrs, raised from the dead, reigning with Christ *on Earth*. Just in case we missed it, the idea of reigning with Christ is first mentioned in verse 4 and then repeated in verse 6. The author wants to make it very clear that these people are *reigning with Christ*. This, of course, means that *Christ is reigning over the Earth*.

As an aside, lest we think that only martyrs are reigning in the millennial kingdom, we find these verses much earlier in Revelation:

Revelation 5:8: "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors,

which are the prayers of saints.

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

I believe that the 24 elders who are singing this song are symbolic of the Church. This is because they identified themselves in verse 9 – this group was *redeemed by the blood of the Lamb*. Their members come from *every nation*. What term does the Bible use to describe the leaders of the Church? “Elders”. It’s also worth noting that I Chronicles 24 divides the priests into 24 different divisions that together represent the whole priesthood; 24, then, is a symbolic number that is used to represent an entire group. Given how the elders are described, 24 elders are almost certainly symbolic of the whole Church. (As an aside, some translations have “redeemed them” instead of “redeemed us” in verse 9. I believe the manuscript evidence supports the use of “us” over “them”.)

Notice what these elders (who are symbolic of the entire Church) are claiming: they say that God has made them kings and priests and they will reign *on the Earth*. Not “reign on the New Earth that will be created after Judgment Day”, but reign on the Earth itself. God will one day turn His children into kings, and they will reign with Jesus over the nations. When the Lord returns He will put the Earth under new management – *His* management. Our job will be to reign with Him.

To many people the idea that Christ will reign as an earthly king is a shocking, unbiblical idea. The idea seems too strange to be true. Some would say that this passage *must* be symbolic because the very idea of Christ reigning on Earth is just too bizarre – and yet this very idea can be found in other places throughout the Bible. For example, the Lord's prayer hints at it:

Matthew 6:9: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Notice what verse 10 says – the Lord specifically commands His disciples to pray that His kingdom would come *to Earth* so that His will would be done *on Earth*. That sounds a lot like a plea for Jesus to return and reign as King! This could be interpreted spiritually, but it could also be talking about something else. After all, the Lord did make this promise:

Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

That verse echoes a passage from Psalms:

Psalm 37:10: “For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Ask yourself: just when is this going to happen? When will the meek inherit the Earth as Jesus promised? After all, this world is going to be destroyed:

2 Peter 3:12: “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”

Revelation 21:1: “And I saw a new heaven and a

new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”

It's possible that the verses are talking about the New Earth that Jesus creates after the Great White Throne judgment, but it's worth noting that Psalms 37:11 does not say “the meek will inherit a different earth” or “God will one day make a new planet for the meek to live on”. Both Psalm 37 and Matthew 5 seem to be talking about *this* planet – and if so, at what point are the meek going to inherit it? They certainly haven't inherited it yet! Revelation 20 is a good fit. The meek will inherit the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace right after Satan is bound and Jesus reigns as King of Kings over the nations. That is when Christ's promise will be fulfilled.

But those passages are just hints; there are other verses that are far more explicit. Look at what Christ told His disciples in Luke:

Luke 22:28: “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.

29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

The Lord promised His disciples that they would reign with Him – specifically, that they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. This goes right along with Revelation 5:10 and Revelation 20:6. The disciples were clearly promised “a kingdom”, as it says in verse 29. If the kingdom was purely spiritual then this would have been a great place to tell that to the disciples, but there is no hint of that. It's true that the Lord once told Pontius Pilate “my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), but I believe there is a great deal of Scripture that teaches

that one day His kingdom will reign *over* this world. All things will be put under the dominion of Christ.

How do we know this? Well, right before the Lord ascended into Heaven He was asked a question:

Acts 1:6: “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

Notice that when the Lord is asked this question He doesn't say “No, no, you misunderstand. My kingdom isn't physical – it's purely spiritual. You've got it all wrong.” Instead He says this:

Acts 1:7: “And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”

Jesus actually confirms that He will “restore again the kingdom”, but He tells His disciples that it's not for them to know when that will happen. But there are other passages that are even more explicit. For example, take a look at Isaiah 60. Here the Lord addresses Israel:

Isaiah 60:9: “Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee.

10 And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favor have I had mercy on thee.

11 Therefore thy gates shall be open

continually: they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.

12 For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.”

Has this happened yet? Do all the nations of the world serve Israel, as it says in verse 12? Has God destroyed the nations that would not serve her? Absolutely not! Israel is currently *oppressed* of all nations. She is universally despised. She is surrounded by nations that wish to see her completely and utterly destroyed. The fulfillment of this passage is clearly still in the future, and the millennial kingdom is an excellent candidate for its fulfillment. But the passage gets even better:

Isaiah 60:14: “The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

15 Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.”

None of this has happened yet. Israel is despised and hated, not loved and adored. What the Lord speaks of in Isaiah 60:15 has not yet been fulfilled. But there is still more to this passage! Not only does the Lord promise Israel great honor, but He also promises her great wealth and peace:

Isaiah 60:17: “For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers

peace, and thine exactors righteousness.

18 Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”

Is Israel today a place where violence is unheard-of? Absolutely not – but one day that will be the case. Lest we think this prophecy will happen before the Lord returns, He adds something that is astonishing:

Isaiah 60:19: “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.

20 Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.

21 Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

22 A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time.”

In the future the sun and the moon will not light the land of Israel because *the Lord* will be the source of light. This means that *the Lord Himself will be dwelling in the land of Israel*. This means that all of these verses will be fulfilled after the Second Coming – which makes perfect sense if the millennium is literal and not symbolic. After Christ returns and binds Satan He establishes His kingdom, and in doing that He grants Israel honor, wealth, and peace.

I realize that this passage has strong parallels to the New Heaven and Earth that are mentioned in Revelation 21, but I don't think that's what this is talking about. I say this because verse 12 speaks of the Lord crushing all nations that don't serve Israel, and verse 14 talks about forcing those who despised Israel to bow at her feet. In the New Heaven and Earth there is no more death, sorrow, or pain, and all evil has been done away with forever. This means that there would be no one left to despise Israel and there would be none that would refuse to serve the Lord and His Kingdom! So if there are still nations in rebellion then that means this must take place *before* the Great White Throne judgment, which occurs before the New Heaven and Earth are created. I think Isaiah 60 is a picture of what the millennial kingdom will be like.

But it is not the only picture. Isaiah 65 says this:

Isaiah 65:17: “For, behold, I create new heaven and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold I create Jerusalem rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die a hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and

mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.”

At first glance this passage seems to be talking about the New Heaven and Earth that are mentioned in Revelation 21 (especially given what verse 17 says!), but I don't believe that's the case. I think this is actually a picture of the millennial kingdom, because verse 20 clearly says that *people still die*. The passage illustrates how long people will live by saying that someone who dies at the age of a hundred will be considered a child. This tells me that death has not yet been defeated. However, Revelation 21:4 says that in the New Heaven and Earth *there is no more death* (or sinners, for that matter). Therefore this passage must be talking about something else. If verse 20 had instead said that “There shall be no more death” then that would be one thing, but all it says is that people will live for a long time and then die. There is a tremendous difference between living a long life and *never dying*.

If this is not speaking of the New Heaven and Earth of Revelation 21 then when does it take place? It's certainly not happening right now! I think this is another picture of the millennial kingdom.

This passage may be talking about it as well:

Micah 4:1: “But in the last days it shall come to

pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

4 But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.

5 For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

6 In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted;

7 And I will make her that halteth a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even forever.”

This is another passage that has not yet been fulfilled. It's hard to imagine that this world will ever become a place where nations no longer wage war with each other, but that is the future God has planned for us. This passage speaks of a time when “the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion” – in other words, a

time when the Lord reigns as King in Israel! He will “rebuke strong nations afar off”, put an end to war, and bring lasting peace.

I don't think this is talking about the New Heaven and Earth of Revelation 21 because in verse 3 the Lord rebukes nations. After the Great White Throne judgment all evil, sin, and death will be done away with forever. There will be no need to rebuke anyone because anything that was evil was cast into the lake of fire. I believe this passage is speaking of the millennial kingdom.

There are other chapters that also speak of the millennial kingdom, but I think I have made my point. The coming reign of Christ on Earth is a major topic that can be found all throughout the Old Testament – in fact, nearly all of the prophets had something to say about it. It is not a crazy idea that suddenly appeared out of nowhere at the end of Revelation.

The Last Battle

After the thousand years is over we are told that Satan “must be loosed a little season”:

Revelation 20:7: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, God and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from

God out of heaven, and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Here we see the final end of Satan. After the thousand years “are expired” Satan is set free. He then goes all over the world and deceives the nations, creating a rebellion against King Jesus. He deceives many people, forms a massive army, and uses it to surround Jerusalem. However, the army never stands a chance. Fire comes down out of Heaven and consumes them all. Satan is then cast into the Lake of Fire, which puts a final end to his wickedness.

It is amazing to me that Satan was able to gather such a large army. At this point King Jesus had ruled over the world for a thousand years. There had been a millennium of peace, joy, and harmony. In this kingdom there are many immortals – the Church, the Old Testament saints, and the Tribulation saints have all been resurrected and inhabit the globe. There are also many mortals – those who survived the Tribulation and went on to have families. The Lord said in Luke 20:35 that the resurrected neither marry nor are given in marriage, so the repopulation of the world will be left to the Tribulation survivors. These people will live in a world populated by the saints from the Old and New Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and many others will be wandering around. Jesus will be reigning as King from Zion! For all intents and purposes the mortals who are born during this period will be living by sight, not by faith. Today we live in a world that is full of fear and doubt, but the millennial kingdom will be nothing like that.

Despite all this, at the end of the thousand years a massive number of mortals will rebel against King Jesus and attempt to destroy Jerusalem – a city inhabited by *immortals* and reigned over by *God Himself!* That is madness. Why would they do this?

I think it is a testament to the evil heart of man. Even

living in a perfect world is not enough to turn sinful men into righteous saints. The environment cannot remove evil from the heart of man – only Christ can do that. Apart from Him we can do nothing. Given the chance, a great many mortals will fall away from God and rebel, and will be destroyed in the last battle.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Technically this has nothing to do with the millennial kingdom, but it is a part of Revelation 20 and I wanted to finish out the story. It amazes me that many people interpret Revelation 20:11-15 literally but refuse to interpret Revelation 20:1-10 the same way. The text itself gives no reason to interpret the first 10 verses one way and the last 5 verses another way. It is a single narrative.

We are told that after the last battle, when Satan is defeated and thrown forever into the Lake of Fire, there is a final judgment. Now, the saints already know that they have nothing to fear. In fact, all of the saints that died during the Tribulation are raised from the dead at the beginning of the millennial kingdom so that they can reign with Christ. This is called the “first resurrection”:

Revelation 20:5: “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.
6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

(The Church is not included in this resurrection because they were raised from the dead at the Rapture.) The only people

who aren't raised from the dead are the lost. They are left in Hell until the judgment begins:

Revelation 20:11: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell we cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

It's worth noting that those who stand before God are “the dead” (verse 12). At this point the Old Testament saints, the New Testament saints, and the Tribulation saints will all have been resurrected, so none of them would be in the category of “the dead”. (For the record, the New Testament saints were resurrected in the Rapture and the Old Testament and Tribulation saints were resurrected in the “first resurrection” that is mentioned in Revelation 20:6.) There is no reason to think that the Church will face this judgment – the passage is clear that it only impacts *the dead*. Remember, at this point *all* the unrighteous people are dead because they just tried to invade Jerusalem and fire came down out of Heaven and consumed them. At this point in history there are no non-Christians who are still alive.

It is possible that the righteous who die during the millennial kingdom will face this judgment; I don't know. But I don't believe that anyone who accepts Christ during the Church Age will be involved. They will not be included in "the dead" because by then they won't be dead anymore! Besides, verse 6 clearly says that those who are included in the first resurrection are "blessed and holy" and that the "second death" has no power over them.

The criteria for surviving the Great White Throne judgment is simple: if your name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life then you will be freed and will enter into everlasting life. If your name is not found then you will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where you will be tormented day and night forever and ever. This is when death itself is done away with forever. After this judgment nothing else will ever die. The reign of death is put to an end.

It should be noted that Hell is *not* the final resting place of the unrighteous. Hell is emptied for this judgment and Hell itself is actually cast into the Lake of Fire (verse 14). Those who rejected Christ as their Savior will not be cast back into Hell; instead they will be cast into the Lake of Fire (verse 15). In other words, *no one will spend eternity in Hell*, but sadly, many will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Why will this happen to them? Because they refused to accept God's offer of forgiveness. God was willing to pardon their sins, but they were not interested. They were unwilling to ask Jesus to save them. If you refuse God's offer of mercy then you will face His wrath.)

The story does not end here! Revelation 21 talks about a new Heaven and Earth that is created after death is done away with, and all suffering and pain has been put to a final end. But that is a topic for another time.

As a final wrap-up, this is how I believe events will play out:

- One day soon the Lord will return for His Church. All Christians who died between Pentecost (when the Church began) and the time of the Rapture will be resurrected. All living Christians will be translated so that they will never see death. The Lord will then take them with Him to Heaven.
- Some time after this the Tribulation will begin – a terrible seven-year period of judgment. The Lord will pour out His wrath upon a wicked world. He will also use these judgments to bring Israel back to Him. (One of the key purposes of the Tribulation is to turn Israel's heart back to God.)
- During the Tribulation the Marriage of the Lamb will take place in Heaven. The Bride of Christ will become the Wife of Christ.
- At the end of the Tribulation the Lord will return with the armies of Heaven and put an end to the Beast and the False Prophet. Satan will be bound for a thousand years and the Lord will establish a kingdom on Earth, where He will reign from Zion. At this point the Tribulation saints and Old Testament saints will be resurrected.
- During the Tribulation more than half of the world's population was killed. The world will be repopulated by Tribulation survivors. Jesus Christ will live on this planet, along with the Old Testament saints, the Church, and the resurrected Tribulation saints.
- After the thousand years are over Satan will be set free and will deceive the nations into launching a final attack against God. When he brings his armies to Jerusalem, fire will come out of Heaven and consume them. Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire, finishing his reign of terror.
- The Great White Throne judgment will then take place.

Only the dead will be there. The only people who will be dead at this point in history are those who died during the millennial kingdom and those who were killed in the last battle against God. All those who rejected Jesus (whose names are not found in the Lamb's Book of Life) will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Death itself is done away with.

- After these things the Lord will destroy the current Heaven and Earth and create new ones. This will be a place that will never see death, pain, or suffering; it will be a perfect world that will last forever. The Lord will reign from the New Jerusalem, making His dwelling place with men. This is where the righteous will spend eternity – on Earth, as subjects of King Jesus.

We have a great deal to look forward to! The Second Coming is not the end of time but is actually the start of a breathtaking new chapter. The world will not always be a place that is filled with doubt and evil, for a King is coming who will put everything right. One day the meek will inherit the earth and delight themselves in an abundance of peace. I am very much looking forward to that day.

Sabbath Worship in the Millennium

HERE IS SOMETHING that is not widely known. One of the things the New Testament makes clear is that right now, in the Church Age, people do not have to keep the Sabbath day holy. If you want to honor a day as being holy then you are free to do that, but if you don't then you are free to do that as well. We have the freedom to do as we please:

Romans 14:5: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks."

This is why it is no longer a sin to work on Saturday, or to mow your lawn on Saturday, or to buy and sell things on Saturday. In the Old Testament these actions were crimes punishable by death, but that is no longer the case. We now have freedom in this issue.

However, in the Millennial Kingdom things will be different. It appears that on the Sabbath, everyone will gather together to worship God. We find this interesting fact at the very end of Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:23: "And it shall come to pass, that

from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord.

24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

The passage is pretty clear. From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, “all flesh” will come and worship before God. Just to be clear, the Sabbath is a reference to *Saturday*, not Sunday. In the Church Age we are free to worship on any day that we please, but in the Millennial Kingdom the day of worship will apparently be Saturday.

Verse 24 is also quite startling. *All flesh* will gather together to worship God – and all flesh will also look upon the tormented souls in Hell, who are tormented day and night forever and ever. In other words, people will worship God and witness His holy judgment. Don’t take my word for it – it’s right there in the passage! You can read it for yourself.

It’s certainly something to think about. We tend to forget that each dispensation has its own set of rules, and that some rules differ from dispensation to dispensation. This is yet another example of that. Before the Church Age men were required to keep the Sabbath holy. During the Church Age men were free to keep any day holy or to keep no day holy. During the Millennial Kingdom men will keep the Sabbath day as a day of worship. There are some rules that never change, but there are other rules that *do* change, and we need to be mindful of that.

Preterism

PRETERISM TEACHES that the New Testament prophecies regarding the end of the world and the Second Coming were fulfilled in 70 AD during the destruction of Jerusalem. Preterists believe that the book of Revelation has already been fulfilled. This is how Wikipedia defines preterism:

Preterism is an interpretation of Christian eschatology which holds that most or all of the biblical prophecies concerning the End Times refer to events which have already happened in the first century after Christ's birth. The system also claims that Ancient Israel finds its continuation or fulfillment in the Christian church at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The term preterism comes from the Latin *praeter*, which is listed in Webster's 1913 dictionary as a prefix denoting that something is "past" or "beyond." This signifies that either all or a majority of Bible prophecy was fulfilled by 70 A.D. Adherents of Preterism are sometimes known as Preterists.

Preterists fall into two camps. **Full preterists** believe that *all* prophecy has been fulfilled, including the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Final Judgment. They believe that there is no unfulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible and that *all* of Revelation has already happened. They base their theory on this verse:

Matthew 24:34: “Verily I say unto you, **This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.**”

They believe that “this generation” refers to the generation that was alive when Christ spoke these words. Since Christ talked about the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21), the Second Coming (Matthew 24:30), and the final judgment (Matthew 24:31), they believe that all of those things must have happened to that generation. (That's right – they believe that Jesus Christ has already come back.)

Partial preterists find it difficult to believe that the Second Coming and the final judgment have already happened. They teach that the *real* Second Coming and final judgment are still in the future and that Matthew 24 was talking about something else. Both views agree, though, that most of the prophecies in the New Testament were fulfilled in 70 AD and that the pre-millennial beliefs regarding the Rapture, Tribulation, and Antichrist are a lot of nonsense.

For the purposes of this paper I'm going to focus on why I disagree with *partial* preterism. If you are a *full* preterist and honestly believe that the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, and the final judgment has already happened then there's probably nothing I could say that would change your mind. I just can't take that view seriously.

So let's get started!

Dates

Preterism teaches that Revelation foretells the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In order for this to be true the book of Revelation must have been written *before* 70 AD. However, the overwhelming weight of evidence suggests that the book was

written decades *after* 70 AD – specifically, around 96 AD.

We know this because Irenaeus told us this in his work *Against Heresies*, which was written in the mid to late 100's. Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who in turn studied under the apostle John. Irenaeus testified that book of Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 – 96 AD. There are others who testified of this date as well. Even more significantly, *no one suggested an earlier date for hundreds of years*. The oldest manuscripts and letters say that Revelation was written decades *after* 70 AD.

But there is more. Note this passage in Revelation:

Revelation 2:13: “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even I those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”

Antipas was the bishop of Pergamum, the very church to whom this letter was written. In this passage the martyrdom of Antipas is seen as a *past* event. When did Antipas die? He was martyred by Domitian in 92 AD. Since Antipas died *before* Revelation was written, and Antipas died in 92 AD, the book must have been authored *after* 92 AD.

But that's not all! John testified that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the vision:

Revelation 1:9: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and

the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asian; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

...

19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;”

Why does this matter? Because John was exiled to the isle of Patmos by *Domitian*, who reigned from 81 – 96 AD. If John received the vision on the isle of Patmos then he couldn't possibly have written it before 70 AD because he wasn't exiled to Patmos until long *after* 70 AD!

In my opinion this alone is enough to conclusively refute preterism. Revelation can't possibly be foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem because by the time the book was written its destruction was old history. It's an open-and-shut case. But there are many other reasons to seriously doubt preterism.

Church History

Preterism teaches that the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed. This brings up an important question: is that what the early church believed? The answer is no. The list of people in the early church who believed that Revelation had not yet been fulfilled is actually quite long. To quote one site:

Second, all Christian writers in at least the first two centuries of the church were futurists, not

preterists. Even most partial preterists will concede this point. Am I to conclude that they all were wrong, that the Holy Spirit has now revealed something to us that He did not reveal to them? People such as Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch and one who was personally acquainted with the apostles themselves; Papias, the bishop of Hieropolis (across the valley from Colossae), a friend of the apostle John; and Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna and another person who knew the Apostle John, were strong futurists. Did they misunderstand what they had been taught? Ignatius writes to Polycarp and urges him to "Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes . . ." (Chapter 3). The Epistle of Barnabas, written around 100 A.D., anticipated the coming of the Antichrist and the return of Christ (Chapter 4). Polycarp writes "He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead" (Epistle to the Philippians, chapter 2). Papias writes that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead when the personal reign of Christ will be established on the earth (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 39). Justin Martyr who lived from 110 to 165 A.D. writes: "But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare" (Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 80). Irenaeus states that those who heard Jesus teach testified that Jesus taught a future literal millennial reign

on the earth, a time when the earth will yield a richness unimagined. Irenaeus goes farther to state that the coming of Christ will be preceded by the Antichrist reigning 3 and 1/2 years in Jerusalem, setting Himself up as God Himself. Irenaeus also tells us that there there will be 6,000 years of this earth before Jesus returns and sets up His thousand year reign. Irenaeus states all of this in the second century A.D.

Even closer to the apostles, Clement of Rome, who may have been the Clement mentioned in Philippians 4:3, and who probably was with Paul at Philippi, expected the return of Christ. The preterists and partial preterists will argue that Clement wrote before 70 A.D., because he speaks about sacrifices being offered in Jerusalem. But most scholars disagree and date Clement's letter around 90 A.D. In any event, the unbroken view of those closest to the apostles and those who had a reason to understand what the apostles taught on the subject were all futurists. There is not a preterist among them.

(taken from
<http://truthsaves.org/doctrine/preterist.shtml>)

The point of all this is that if Revelation, the Second Coming, the Tribulation, and all the rest were fulfilled in AD 70, it is *astounding* that the early church missed it entirely. Even people who *studied under the apostles themselves* believed that it had not yet been fulfilled! If preterism is true then that is really quite shocking. I think the reason the early church was not preterist was because the apostles did not teach them preterism – and the apostles did not teach them preterism because preterism is not true.

The Olivet Discourse

As we've already mentioned, preterists believe that the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 has already taken place. Let's take a look at this passage and see what it actually says.

First, Matthew 24 states that before the Lord returns the gospel will be preached to all nations:

Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Was the gospel actually preached in *all* the world, to *all* nations, before 70 AD? That seems unlikely; even *two thousand years later* the gospel *still* hasn't been preached in all the world! There are countless groups that have not yet been reached.

Jesus also mentioned something called the “abomination of desolation”:

Matthew 24:15: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)
16 Then let him which be in Judea flee into the mountains:”

Here Christ talks about something terrible that was going to stand in the Holy Place of the Temple. The disciples would have instantly understood what He meant because this had happened before. During the Maccabean Revolt (168 BC – 135 BC) Antiochus IV Epiphanes outlawed Jewish sacrifices, pillaged

the temple, and set up altars to Greek gods inside the Temple. A statue of Zeus was actually placed on the altar itself. Not only did he loot the Temple, but he repurposed it for the service of false gods.

Some have said that the “abomination of desolation” that’s mentioned in Matthew 24:15 is a reference to the Maccabean revolt, but notice that Christ commands His disciples to be *looking for it*. He depicts it as a *future* event – a sign they need to be watching for. This tells me that the fulfillment of that prophecy was still in the future when Christ gave it.

This creates a problem for preterists because when the Romans invaded Jerusalem in 70 AD they didn’t repurpose the temple, they destroyed it. They did not set up altars to false gods in its Holy Place. The events that Christ described simply did not happen at that time.

But there is more. Look at what the next verses say:

Matthew 24:21: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

Do you see what Christ said? He told his disciples that this period of “great tribulation” (which preterists say is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD) is the worst event to ever happen *in all of human history*. Nothing worse would *ever* happen. This means that it was a bigger disaster than World War II or the Holocaust. It was even worse than the Flood that wiped out the entire planet! Are we supposed to believe that the destruction of one Middle Eastern city in 70 AD is the most terrible, epic disaster that the world has ever seen?

Christ actually goes on to say that if He did not divinely step in and put an end to the “great tribulation”, it would

actually kill *every living thing on the planet*. Jesus actually said “except those days should be shortened, there should **no flesh** be saved”. Were the lives of every single living creature on Earth put in grave danger when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD? Absolutely not. Not only did it not imperil the entire planet, and not only was it not the worst event in world history, but it wasn't even the worst event in *Jewish* history. Yes, one million Jews died when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, but *six* million Jews died in the Holocaust, which wiped out 2/3rds of their entire population.

In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD wasn't even as bad as the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In 586 BC the Jews were scattered all over the world, and they were *still* scattered in 70 AD. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD it was devastating, but Jews continued to live in Jerusalem after that until the Bar Kochba rebellion of 136 AD. Plus, in 70 AD the Jews had synagogues and local populations all over the world – unlike 586 BC, where their civilization was basically destroyed.

By no stretch of the imagination can you say that Matthew 24:21-22 has been fulfilled yet. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD does not even come close to fitting the description of “the most terrible epic disaster in all of history”.

The passage goes on:

Matthew 24:29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather

together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Notice that verse 29 says that these things will happen *immediately* after the tribulation of those days. This is why full preterists teach that the Second Coming and the Final Judgment happened in 70 AD – after all, if verses 5 through 28 happened in 70 AD then it's only consistent to say that the rest happened back then as well, since verse 29 does use the word “immediately after”. Partial preterists realize how ridiculous it is to say that the Second Coming and final judgment have already happened and so they distance themselves from this, saying that “immediately” doesn't actually mean “immediately” or that this is talking about a *different* Second Coming. Some say that Christ *did* come back in 70 AD, even though no one actually noticed (despite the fact that verse 30 makes it pretty clear *everyone* will notice).

To me this is just more evidence that preterism doesn't make any sense.

Nero

The New Testament is very clear that there will be an Antichrist; Revelation has a lot to say about this. Preterists teach that these passages are all speaking of Nero. As evidence they offer the fact that in Latin his name adds up to 666. However, there are problems with this theory.

First of all, Nero's name only adds up to 666 if you use his Latin name. The New Testament, however, was written in *Greek*, and Nero's name doesn't add up to 666 in Greek. When the early church speculated about the identity of the Antichrist (because they didn't believe in preterism!) they used the *Greek* alphabet, not the Latin one.

But that is a minor point. 2 Thessalonians 2 offers a detailed description of what the Antichrist is going to do. Let's

compare that to the life of Nero:

2 Thessalonians 2:3: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

...

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming;

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Here we find out that the Antichrist is going to go into the temple of God and proclaim himself to be God. This is a reference to the “abomination of desolation” that Christ mentioned in the Olivet discourse.

Did Nero do this? Absolutely not. In fact, he never even *visited* Jerusalem! On top of that, Nero committed suicide in 68 AD so he wasn't even *around* in 70 AD. He didn't march to Jerusalem with his armies (as the Scripture says the Antichrist will do) in order to take over the Temple and sit in its Holy Place. None of that happened. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, *nobody* did that. No one in 70 AD even came close to matching the

biblical description of the Antichrist.

But there is more. Revelation itself talks about what the Antichrist (which it calls “the beast”) will do:

Revelation 19:19: “And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

In 70 AD did the “kings of the earth” make war against Jerusalem? No – only the Roman Empire did. Did *Nero* make war against Jerusalem in 70 AD? No – he was dead at the time. Was Nero cast alive into the Lake of Fire? No – he committed suicide. Did the Roman army battle the armies of Heaven and lose? No – the Roman army sacked Jerusalem and destroyed it.

It's worth noting that 2 Thessalonians teaches that when the Lord returns He will immediately *defeat the Antichrist* (2 Thes. 2:8). But in 70 AD there was no Antichrist, and the details of the battle don't come close to matching the events described in Revelation – all of which is more evidence against preterism.

Must Shortly Come To Pass

Preterism rests its entire argument on this passage:

Revelation 1:1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his

servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

They teach that “must shortly come to pass” means the events in Revelation must have happened long ago, when the book was written. After all, almost two thousand years has gone by since the book was written! How could that possibly be “soon”?

This is actually a very good point – in fact, it's their strongest argument. The problem is that whenever the Old Testament talks about the coming “great tribulation” (which it often refers to as the Day of the Lord) it *also* uses words like “soon” and “near,” even though the events were at least centuries away:

Ezekiel 30:1: “The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Howl ye, Woe worth the day!

3 For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen.”

Joel 1:15: “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.”

Joel 2:1: “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and

sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

Notice that Joel makes it plain that he is speaking about a very special event – the “Day of the Lord” will be unlike anything anyone has ever seen. Nothing like it has ever happened before and nothing like it would ever happen again. This exactly matches the description of the “great tribulation” that Christ spoke of in Matthew 24:21, which preterists say must have happened in 70 AD because Revelation uses the phrase “the time is at hand”. And yet in *Joel's* day it was *also* said to be “at hand” – centuries before Christ was born in Bethlehem! To use preterist logic, since it was “at hand” in Joel's day does that mean that the things Christ spoke of happened centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Of course not!

If these were the only passages that said the “Day of the Lord” was near, that would be enough to show that the preterist interpretation of Revelation 1:1-3 is wrong. But there are others. In fact, whenever the Old Testament talked about the “Day of the Lord” it was very common for them to say that it was at hand:

Obadiah 1:15: “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”

Zephaniah 1:7: “Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he

hath bid his guests.”

Zephaniah 1:14: “The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.”

I think I've made my point. This time of great trouble (or “tribulation”) that Christ spoke of in Matthew 24 was actually talked about extensively in the Old Testament by the prophets. It was common for them to say that it was at hand, just as is repeated in Revelation. In other words, the prophets of God have said that the “great tribulation” is near for *centuries*.

How can that be? I realize preterists don't like this passage, but the answer can be found in 2 Peter 3:

2 Peter 3:7: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But **the day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the

works that are therein shall be burned up.”

These verses tell us that God seems time differently than we do. To Him the passage of a thousand years is like the passage of a single day. From God's vantage point very little time has passed since these prophecies were given.

Preterists object to that use of this passage, but notice verse 10. What is Peter talking about? Why, he's talking about *the day of the Lord*. He's addressing this very issue! Other people were also wondering why the Lord said He was coming soon when so much time had passed without anything happening. Peter explained that in God's view of things it hadn't been very long, and the reason He has been waiting is because He is “not willing that any should perish.” He wants to give men an opportunity to repent and be saved. I think this passage is *highly* relevant to the discussion.

Habakkuk has this to say:

Habakkuk 2:3: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

I think that sums it up pretty well.

There is a great deal more I could say about preterism but I think I've made my point. I believe preterism does a very poor job of interpreting the Scriptures and is completely wrong. Preterism simply fails the evidence test. For these reasons and many others it cannot be the correct interpretation of end-times prophecy.

Surviving the End of the World

[Editor's note: This section doesn't directly touch on eschatology. The reason I've included it is because if the Lord does not return soon it's quite likely that the world as we now know it will end. There are a number of things that could cause a sudden, dramatic collapse of our country, or perhaps the whole world. If the Lord tarries and the Church is left behind to survive in a shattered world, how should it behave? How does one survive the end of the world? That is what this section is all about.]

RECENTLY I've seen a lot of people predicting that the world, as we know it, is about to end. People may no longer walk the streets carrying signs saying “Repent – the end is near!”, but that message is still being proclaimed in blogs, websites, news articles, and even on television.

Some of the theories are utter nonsense. For example, one person suggested that the BP oil spill in the Gulf would trigger an explosion of all the oil buried beneath the ocean, which would in turn blow up the whole planet and cause a mass extinction event. That had zero chance of happening, and as it turned out it did not happen. The oil spill was certainly a disaster, but it did *not* kill every last person on the planet.

Other theories are more plausible and should be taken more seriously. For example, some people have pointed out that our electrical grid is vulnerable to solar flares. The power grid in the United States depends upon around 350 high-voltage transformers. These giant machines alter electrical voltages so that electricity can be transmitted over long distances. (Without them you'd have to live right next to a power plant. It is very difficult to efficiently transfer electricity over hundreds of miles.)

These units weigh more than 100 tons and take years to build. If a solar flare were to destroy them (or even take out just some of them) it would shut down the nation's power grid for years. Can you imagine what life would be like without electricity? Estimates suggest that the damage would be in the trillions of dollars and around 60% to 90% of the country's population would die.

What is the risk of a solar flare of that magnitude happening? As it turns out, solar activity peaks every 22 years. In the most recent cycles the high-energy particles and X-rays from the Sun have either missed Earth, just barely grazed it, or were too weak to do any damage. However, in 1859 and in 1921 massive storms *did* strike the Earth. At the time they had little impact because there was no power grid in 1859, and in 1921 the grid was in its infancy. But if the 1859 or 1921 storms were to hit today then our grid would go down and we would all die. In 1859 it didn't really matter if people had power or not because nearly everyone lived on farms, and the farms didn't need power to operate. That is not the case today. Going without power for even a single day is a huge inconvenience; if the power was shut off *forever* it would be more than just inconvenient – it would be fatal.

There is no way to tell if a massive solar flare is in our future. What is not disputed is that our planet has been hit by massive solar flares in the past, and one day it will be hit by them again. Our power grid has not been hardened to survive such an event. If it happens our grid will go down and it will not come back up. What happened in 1859 and 1921 will eventually happen again. It may not happen in the next few years and it may not happen in the next decade. It may not even happen in our lifetimes. But it *could* happen at any time, and if it did happen then the world as we know it would end.

Another possibility is terrorism. If a terrorist were to obtain a nuclear weapon, put it on an inexpensive cruise missile (the type that can be purchased for ~\$100,000 on the black market), and fire it off the coast of the United States (so it

wouldn't even have to be smuggled into the country), they could detonate the nuke around 20 to 25 miles above the nation. That would produce a massive electromagnetic pulse that would have the same effect as a massive solar flare – the power grid would go down, it would not come back up, and we would all die. Our electronic equipment (like our cars and computers, for example) has not been hardened against an EMP and would not survive.

There are already several rogue states with ties to terrorism (like Iran and North Korea) that either have nuclear weapons or will have them in the near future. It also may be possible to obtain nuclear weapons on the black market; some Russian nuclear facilities are not particularly well-guarded and many nukes been “misplaced”. An EMP-causing nuke could be launched tomorrow, or it might not ever happen. But, like a rogue solar flare, it could happen at any moment and end our civilization.

Yet another possibility is inflation. The government has been spending tax dollars in a way that has never been seen before in history; we now have administrations that spend *trillions* more than it actually receives. To put that number into perspective: if you spend \$1000 per day you would have spent \$365,000 by the end of the year. If you spent \$1000 per day starting in 0 AD and wanted to spend a billion dollars, it would take you until the 28th century to do so. If you wanted to spend a trillion dollars you would have to go through that process *999 more times*. A trillion dollars is an unbelievable amount of money! A trillion one-dollar bills, laid end-to-end, would reach from the Earth to the Sun – a distance of *93 million miles*. It is an unfathomable number. In the Milky Way galaxy there are “only” around 400 billion stars. There aren't even a trillion stars *in the entire galaxy*.

The reason the government can spend that much money is because other countries are willing to lend it to us. Nations like China are willing to take what amount to IOUs from our government. We get their money and they get interest and a promise that we'll pay them back someday. At some point it will

become impossible to pay the interest on the money we owe. Some nations such as Japan are already in that position; Japan's national debt is 200% of its GDP (meaning Japan owes *twice* what the *entire country* can produce in a year), and over 60% of their budget is spent paying the interest on that debt – and that is with an amazing interest rate of just 0.05%! It doesn't take a genius to realize that at some point interest rates will go up, the country will default, and the Yen will become worthless.

The same thing could happen here. All it would take is for China to wake up one day and say “You know what? The US has \$95 trillion dollars in unfunded liabilities and debt. I'm going to sell off my bonds and invest my money in a country that isn't spending like drunken sailors.” At that point the market would become flooded with dollars (which would make them nearly worthless) and the purchasing power of the dollar would drop to zero – a process known as hyperinflation. Overnight the savings of millions of Americans would be wiped out, their 401ks would become worthless, and Americans would find themselves unable to purchase anything. This would be followed by massive unemployment, societal collapse, rioting, and death.

All it would take is for one major holder of our debt to decide to invest their money somewhere else, and that could happen tomorrow. If it did then the house of cards would collapse and our country would be destroyed. We would become a third-world nation virtually overnight.

Of course, that might not ever happen. A solar flare might not ever happen. An EMP terrorist attack might not ever happen. Things may just keep on going as they are now, day after day, year after year – just as they have for the past century. Yes, the world might end this afternoon, but the chances are it won't. (At least, that's what we hope.)

I'm sure there are other doomsday scenarios out there but let's stick with these. Let's say that, for whatever reason, you believe that the end of the world is imminent. You've read the reports and you've seen the writing on the wall. Now I'm not saying that any of this is likely; personally I think there's no way

to know what the future holds. Anything is *possible* but that does not mean that anything is *likely*. But, for the sake of the argument, let's say you are convinced that it's all about to come crashing down. What do you do?

This is obviously a little different from being afraid that your teenage son might total your car. You can't just go buy "end of the world" insurance. How do you respond to a threat of that magnitude? Is there a way to "hedge your bets" so that you can survive the end of civilization itself?

Believe it or not, there are actually Biblical principles that we can apply to this. I think the most striking one can be found here:

Matthew 6:34: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

In other words, Jesus told us to not worry about tomorrow. Just focus on today and tomorrow will take care of itself. I will admit that seems like really bizarre advice. Does Jesus actually *mean* that?

Apparently so! Look what Jesus said in the verses just before that one:

Matthew 6:25: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment?
Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;
they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in
all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the
field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into
the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O
ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall
we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or,
Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles
seek) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye
have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be
added unto you."

In what is one of the most astonishing passages in the entire Bible, Jesus actually commands His followers to “take no thought for your life”. He *commanded* them to not worry about the future – to not be concerned about food, water, or clothing. In fact, Jesus actually chided His disciples for their lack of faith, pointing out that God knew they had needs and was more than able to provide for them! As verse 33 explains, Jesus wants us to be focused on just one thing: serving God. When our focus is on building God's kingdom He will supply us with whatever we need. As Jesus pointed out, the birds don't sow crops or harvest fields but God still feeds them. We can trust God to feed us as well.

Now this doesn't mean that there won't be suffering; 11 of the 12 apostles died a martyr's death. Jesus told us that in this life there would be tremendous hardships. He never said life would be easy – in fact He said it would be painful, difficult, and full of trials. *But God does not want us to worry about tomorrow.* God is

bigger than tomorrow; He knows what's coming and He will take care of us. We don't know what the future holds but we do know Who holds the future – and that's really all we need to know.

This seems to fly in the face of reason. After all, isn't that just being irresponsible? Even Proverbs 22:3 says “A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” What we forget is that God wants us to hide ourselves *in Him*. God wants to be our strong tower, our mighty refuge, and our defense. 2 Chronicles says this:

2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”

Do you see that? It is so easy to forget that *God wants us to put our trust in Him*. That's not just a cute phrase that we recite on Sunday mornings; God actually wants us to trust His ability to take care of us. He wants us to believe that when times are tough God will be there. He doesn't want us to think “Well, tough times are coming but I've got it covered.” He wants our thought to be “Tough times are coming but God will take care of me. I'm going to stay focused on serving God and let Him deal with the future.”

People think that the phrase “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse, but it's not. To us that may seem irresponsible. After all, shouldn't we at least try to do something? I've seen many people recommend stockpiling a six-months' supply of food and water, or investing heavily in silver and gold. While I'm not against taking precautions it's worth nothing that the Bible has a different take on things. It doesn't seem to think that silver or gold is of much value when the world is ending:

Proverbs 11:4: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.”

Lest we think that this is talking about the Great White

Throne judgment, Ezekiel expounds further on this topic:

Ezekiel 7:19: “They shall case their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.”

You might be thinking “That doesn't make any sense! Surely having lots of money stored away would be a great asset when civilization is collapsing!” Proverbs gives us a hint as to why this doesn't work:

Proverbs 13:8: “The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.”

In other words, if civilization has collapsed and you are the only person around who has food, water, and money, what do you think is going to happen? Do you think your neighbors are just going to sit around and starve to death while they watch you eat? It's much more likely that they'll try to kill you and take your food from you. Having food when no one else has food is very similar to painting a big target on your head that says “Shoot me”. Even if you have guns and are able to keep your neighbors at bay, it's unlikely that you'll be able to keep a squadron of soldiers at bay. Someone is going to find out that you have food, and then large numbers of highly-armed people are going to come and seize it.

As far as gold goes – sure, it seems like a great investment now, but what do you think will happen if hyperinflation hits? In 1933 the United States government made it illegal for people to own more than \$100 worth of gold. Anyone who had stockpiles of gold were forced to exchange it for paper money. This law was not repealed until 1974. If the government was broke and had

nothing to spend but worthless paper money, do you really think they wouldn't pass that law again? All they'd have to do is pass a single law and then – bam! – they can legally confiscate all your gold. So yes, owning gold *could* help in the day of disaster – right up until someone decides to steal it.

Interestingly, the Bible does not depict stockpiling things in a very flattering light. It's true that in the case of Joseph stockpiling food on a national basis led to millions of lives being saved. However, the key there is that Joseph *wasn't stockpiling food for himself*; he was doing it for the benefit of entire nations. Individuals who stockpile things for their *own* benefit are routinely criticized in the Bible. For example, look at what James says:

James 5:1: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.

3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.”

“Heaping treasure together for the last days” is something that James is *criticizing*. It's not listed as an admirable trait. Jesus illustrated this in a parable:

Luke 12:16: “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater: and there will I

bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

What did this person do that so angered God? When the Lord blessed him with great wealth the man didn't give it to the poor to help them – instead he decided to stockpile it all for himself so that he could lead an easy, comfortable life. Jesus said that the Christian response was to be quite different. Notice what He says in this passage:

Luke 3:9: “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.”

Jesus warned the people that bad times were coming. However, when people asked Christ what to do about it He didn't say “If you have two coats, keep one as a spare because it's going to get ugly out there.” Instead He told people to *give away their spares*. If they had two coats they were told to give the second one to someone who needed it *right then*. If they had extra food they weren't supposed to store it up – they were to find a hungry person and feed them. That is not a stockpile mentality.

It's very rare for God to save people by having them store up huge quantities of food and water ahead of time. The only examples that come to mind are Noah (in which the whole world was destroyed by water and Noah had to live on a boat for a year), and Joseph, who we've already mentioned. In both of these cases the purpose of the stockpiles were to save the lives of *others*; in the case of Noah it was to ensure the survival of the human race. However, in other cases the Lord Himself provided in times of great distress. Elijah didn't survive the drought by having lots of food stored up; instead God sent *birds* to feed him, and when that failed He sent him to a widow who had *one cup of flour left*. That one cup of flour miraculously fed three people for *months*. The Israelites wandered around in the desert for 40 years, and they survived because God rained down food from Heaven for them. How much food did He send? Just enough to meet their immediate need.

God wants us to lead radically different lives. Jesus said this:

Matthew 6:19: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus does not want us to lay up great fortunes here on Earth – in fact, He strictly prohibited it. He wants us to invest our time, money, and energy into God's kingdom. If we have more than we need then God wants us to give it to people who need it. God does not want us to be distracted by what may or may not happen tomorrow; instead God wants our focus – and our heart – to be centered on serving Him. God wants us to *trust Him* when it

comes to what might happen tomorrow. Don't worry about it; don't fret about it; don't wonder where your next meal will come from. God knows you need food and He will provide.

The question is, if something bad happens and the world as we know it comes to an end, who are you going to be looking to for deliverance? Are you thinking “Well, I've got all these things prepared so I'll be fine” or “God will take care of me”? Are you depending on yourself to get through it or are you looking to God?

This doesn't mean that you'll survive. A lot of Christians died when Rome was sacked. A lot of Christians died in the Black Plague and in the two World Wars. But God wants us to trust Him with our future and with our lives. While we are here on Earth He will watch over us, and when our work is done the Lord will bring us home. Above all He wants us to trust *Him*, not ourselves. As Paul said:

Philippians 4:19: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

The question is, do we really believe that? When the power grid is down, and our cities are burning, and the grocery stores have no food, and our homes are empty – when it comes right down to it, do we *really* believe that God will supply all our needs, or do we think that it's all up to us?

That Being Said...

I know someone is going to read this and think “Well, if the Lord is going to supply all my needs then I'm not going to go to work anymore! I'll just sit at home and let food rain down from the sky.” Or “If God will supply all my needs then I'm not going to take my medication anymore. God will just miraculously heal

me.” Or “If God will supply all my needs then I don't need to use my umbrella. God will miraculously move the rain so I don't get wet.”

I hope you realize how foolish that is. There is a *tremendous* difference between trusting God to meet your needs and refusing the deliverance that God has already provided. When it's raining you can use an umbrella – God has provided you with a way to avoid getting wet. Expecting God to do something miraculous when He's already provided you with a solution is just being insulting. At the same time, expecting God to miraculously heal your broken leg when you can just go to the doctor and get it treated is insanity – God has provided doctors and hospitals. The same goes for jobs – if you have one then God has already given you a way to put food on the table. Rejecting God's deliverance just because you'd rather be provided for in some other, more comfortable way is foolish. It dishonors God.

The “end of the world as we know it” is quite another matter. While you can take all sorts of precautions (and I have no problem with that) it must be realized that, honestly, there's very little you can do. The gold, food, and water you stockpile can all be taken from you. Angry mobs could storm your house and kill you. *Lots* of things could happen that could defeat your best preparations. The chances are good that no matter what you do, if something happens that wipes out 90% of the country's population, you are going to be a part of that 90%.

But God doesn't want us to worry about it. He knows we have needs, He knows what they are, and He is more than able to take care of them. God wants us to say “Lord, my future is in Your hands. I'm going to keep serving You and let You deal with tomorrow.” There is tremendous peace in giving our tomorrows to God and spending our todays following Christ. There's very little we can do about tomorrow, but there's a lot God can do about it. Let Him handle it.