



EARTH'S FINAL HOURS

A look at what's just ahead, and how to prepare for it.

Ron Swanson, Th.D.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my parents,
Lloyd and Georgina Swanson, (until we meet again)
my wife, Bev, and my children, Chandra and Shaun.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE	End-Time Chronology
Chapter 1 - pg 08	What Happens When?
Chapter 2 - pg 17	The Rapture of the Church
Chapter 3 - pg 27	Completing the Timeline
Chapter 4 - pg 33	The Two Judgments
Chapter 5 - pg 40	The Last Days According to Jesus
Chapter 6 - pg 49	The Tribulation Period
SECTION TWO	Significant People and Events
Chapter 7 - pg 57	Antichrist: The Man of Sin
Chapter 8 - pg 65	Other Rapture Theories
Chapter 9 - pg 74	Our Forever Home
SECTION THREE	Practical Wisdom for Successful Last Days Living
Chapter 10 - pg 80	The Last-Days Landscape

FORWARD

Twenty-five years have passed since the Lord prompted me to begin an in-depth study of Bible Prophecy. I had been a serious student of God's Word for over a decade at that time, but I'd never shown any interest in Prophecy. None whatsoever. There were *too many views* on the subject for my liking. And, since I had no idea who to trust, I decided it was easier to ignore it altogether. But now, with a Heavenly mandate, I had no choice.

Immediately, I began devouring everything I could find on the subject. And, although I found conflicting views in the material I was studying, I began to discover *keys* that unlocked whole portions of Scripture for me. Bit by bit, the pieces of the puzzle started coming together. To my amazement, I was actually understanding Prophecy!

Little did I know in the beginning what a passion this would become for me. Within a few short years, I would be teaching a college course on Eschatology¹ and holding End-Times seminars – (a “labour of love” that has now spanned over seventeen years.) That Eschatology course, in a large measure, has become this book.

“Fast forward” twenty-five years ...

We live in a season of change. However we might attempt to describe it, it would still be understated. When I came into the Church thirty-six years ago, we *talked* about the Coming of the Lord, but (apart from the rebirth of Israel and the occasional natural disaster) we were hard-pressed to find examples of Prophecy that had been fulfilled in our day. Today, it's nearly impossible to turn on the news without another Prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes.

The world around us is hurtling down a path of transformation at breakneck speed. Every strata of society is flowing in harmony, as if orchestrated by an unseen mastermind. What began decades ago as an erosion of Christian values has since gained momentum! Society has pulled out all the stops, as it races toward the New World Order and the appearance of the Antichrist.

In **Earth's Final Hours**, we'll attempt to paint the “Big Picture” and give you a glimpse of what we can expect in the days that lie ahead. Before we begin, let me remind you that for the Church these are exciting days!

If you've ever wished that you could have lived in the Bible days, I've got news for you. These *are* "Bible days"!

There hasn't been a time like this since the Book of Acts. Think of it! You and I are privileged to be living in the time that Paul called "the climax of the ages"² and Peter referred to as the "restitution of all things"³. God's Grand Finale is unfolding before us! Everything the prophets have spoken will find its fulfillment in *this* hour.

Will there be difficult times? Certainly! Will the church suffer persecution? I think it's inevitable. But, where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.⁴ And, we know that God saves the best Wine for last.⁵

When it comes to "Signs of the Times" and Prophecy in the news, I've chosen to remain (nearly) silent, lest this book be outdated before it goes to print.⁶ My primary purpose is to set forth a chronology of end-time events, *in layman's terms*, so the reader has a clear understanding of what to expect as events unfold on the world stage. My secondary purpose is to outline strategies for successful "Last Days" living.

All around the world, believers are sensing that something has changed. It's no longer "business as usual"! We've moved into a season from which there is no turning back. God's Word and His purposes *will* be fulfilled, and you and I are blessed to be a part of it!

This is not the time to shrink back or hold back! It's time to get serious about the things of God and begin to live like you always *told yourself* you would live when you saw the Day approaching.

The time is now. He's coming! It's just over the Horizon!

Let's be ready!

Even so come, Lord Jesus.

SECTION 1

End-Time Chronology



CHAPTER ONE – What Happens When?



Nearly two thousand years have passed since John wrote the book of Revelation. Yet, the passage of time has done little to remove the cloak of ignorance that surrounds John’s writings. Much of the Church considers Prophecy to be a Mystery too complex for the average Christian to unravel. But, I believe that **every** Christian can understand the Book of Revelation! With that goal in mind, we begin our journey.

Simply stated, Prophecy is “history recorded in advance”. If you’re a sports fan, you’re familiar with “Instant Replays”. Modern technology has given us the ability to “replay” *past* events on our television screens. But, God has the ability to “pre-play” *future* events with perfect accuracy and clarity.

In Isaiah, He declares: *“I alone am God and there is no one else like me. From the beginning I predicted the outcome; long ago I foretold what would happen.”*⁷ The fact is: God sees future events more clearly than you and I see present events. Therefore, we can accept His testimony as true, and face the future with confidence, knowing that what He’s revealed will surely come to pass.

Why Study Prophecy?

As I’ve already stated, the sad fact is: most Christians don’t even *try*. Their initial encounter with the Book of Revelation proved puzzling enough to “cure” them for life. Confused and discouraged they retreated into more familiar territory, like the Gospels, or the Psalms and Proverbs.

If this describes your relationship with Bible Prophecy to date, rest assured, those days will soon be over. As you read the following pages, I believe understanding will come quickly and effortlessly. Prophecy really isn’t that difficult, once you’ve been given a few keys that will open up the Scriptures.

There are three reasons why I believe we need to study Prophecy:

a.) **It's Part of the Bible**

That sounds simplistic, but it's a valid point. Nearly one-quarter of the Bible is Prophecy. If God made Prophecy *that* prominent in Scripture, then He *must* want us to understand it! 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "**All** Scripture (including Prophecy) is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable**". If God thinks something is "profitable", then you and I have no business ignoring it.

b.) **The End Is Near**

When I say, "The End is near" what image comes to mind? I envision an "unkempt, wild-eyed fanatic" holding a placard on a street corner, harassing people as they pass by. (That's certainly not the image I want to portray.) But, the fact is: Jesus *has* promised to return. That means there's *one* generation that can legitimately declare, "This is the End!" I believe *we're* that generation.

*"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.**" (Revelation 1:3)*

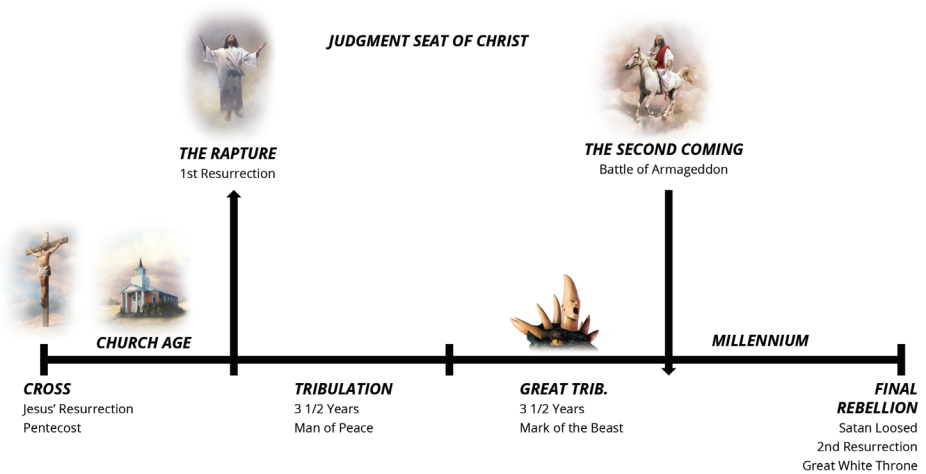
John penned these words two millennia ago, and said, "The time is at hand". If the time was "at hand" in 96 AD, how much closer are we *now*? I believe we are the generation that will live to see the return of Jesus Christ! Therefore, if any generation in history needed to understand Prophecy, it's *this* one! Peter encouraged the Church to be established in "the present truth".⁸ Well, if we're the final generation, then for *us* the Book of Revelation *is* the present truth. When we learn about Prophecy, we're preparing ourselves for things "which must shortly come to pass".⁹

c.) **Bible Prophecy Completes God's Revelation of Himself**

As Hilton Sutton points out in Revelation Revealed, the final Book of the Bible completes God's Revelation of Himself to mankind. In the Old Testament, He was known as the Promised Messiah. In the Gospels, He was the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sin of the world. The Epistles reveal Him as the Risen Lord and the Head of the Church. But, only Revelation unveils Him as the Triumphant Lord!

I believe that's why Satan tries to keep Christians out of the Book of Revelation! If you limit your reading to the Gospels and Epistles, your picture of the Lord will remain incomplete! But, if you'll study the Book of Revelation you'll begin to see Him as the Conquering King of Kings and Lord of Lords, with every enemy vanquished and every knee bowing before Him. I'm confident that if we spent more time looking at *that* picture of Jesus, we'd be less intimidated by our skirmishes with the enemy today!

The figure below illustrates the chronology of end-time events.



This timeline outlines the chronology of End Time events¹⁰. In the rest of this chapter, we'll embark on a "guided tour" of Bible Prophecy. Please understand that in this first chapter, we'll be painting "broad strokes". No attempt will be made to prove each point. We'll examine *only* enough Scripture to introduce the ideas presented. We'll expand on each point (and support these concepts with Scripture) as details are added in subsequent chapters.

(1) The Cross

On the left side of the timeline, you'll see an image of the Cross. (Under the Cross, you'll find Jesus' Resurrection and the Day of Pentecost.) All these events happened in close proximity, and were the beginning of the Last Days¹¹. Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost and proclaimed, "This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel ... in the **last days** I will pour out My Spirit". (If you've wondered if these are really the Last Days, you can be sure they are! They began on the Day of Pentecost.)

(2) The Church Age

The next stop on our timeline is “the Church Age”. Also known as “the Dispensation of Grace”,¹² this is a period in which the Grace of God is extended to “whosoever will”.¹³ This is where we find ourselves on the timeline, at the time of this writing.

(3) The Rapture of the Church

The next event on God’s Prophetic Calendar is the Rapture of the Church.

The belief in a great “catching away” has caused some controversy in the Body of Christ, even amongst those who subscribe to it. Some believe it should be placed in the *middle* of the Tribulation, (as a “Mid-Tribulation” Rapture). Others argue that it belongs at the *end* of the Tribulation period, (as a “Post-Tribulation” Rapture). Personally, I believe it takes place before the Tribulation begins. Consequently, I’ve positioned it as a “Pre-Tribulation” Rapture.¹⁴

In case you’re not familiar with the concept, I’ll take a moment to elaborate. At the Rapture, Jesus appears in the clouds to convey the Church to Heaven.

Paul writes, *“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: 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”*** (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

In the Pre-Tribulation view, the Church is removed prior to the Tribulation period. As the Antichrist wreaks havoc on the earth, God’s children are found safely in His Presence.

As we’ve seen, Jesus descends as far as the clouds, and several things occur in a “moment” of time (1 Cor. 15:52a; 1 Thess. 4:16-18).

- The Christians who have died will be resurrected.
- Believers who are alive at that time will receive their resurrection bodies.

- Both groups will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air.
- We’ll accompany Jesus to Heaven, where we’ll spend the entire Tribulation Period in safety.
- Upon her arrival in Heaven, the Church will go through the Judgment Seat of Christ¹⁵.

Two Phases of the Lord’s Return

It’s important, at this point, that we distinguish between the “Rapture” and the “Second Coming”. The “Rapture” occurs *before* the Tribulation, and is God’s method of removing the Church before His wrath is poured out. The “Second Coming” (or “Second Advent”) takes place *after* the Tribulation. At *that* point, Jesus brings us back to the earth to reign with Him for a thousand years.

So, at the Rapture Jesus comes “**for**” His saints¹⁶. Seven years later, at the Second Advent, He comes back “**with**” us.

Important Terminology

In order to interpret Scripture correctly, we’ll need to be familiar with certain terms. Throughout the New Testament, the Rapture is known as Jesus’ **Appearing**.¹⁷ If you think about it, that only makes sense! Suppose you invited me to an event at your church, and I *wanted* to go, but my schedule was full. I might respond by saying: “I can’t come for the entire event. But, if it’s important to you, I’ll try to make an *appearance*”. When I said I’d make an “appearance”, what did I mean? I meant that I’d show up for a few moments, and then leave.

That’s exactly what happens at the Rapture of the Church! At the Rapture, Jesus isn’t coming to stay. He descends as far as the clouds, and stays *just* long enough to raise the dead and catch His Bride away. This event is known as His “**Appearing**”.

His “**Coming**”, however, refers to His return at the *end* of the Tribulation period, when He will land on the Mount of Olives, set up His Kingdom, and reign from Jerusalem for a thousand years. Understanding the difference between these two events will go a long way toward helping us correctly interpret Scripture.

(4) The Tribulation Period

Once the Church is safely in Heaven, the Tribulation Period begins on earth. The Tribulation is a seven-year period that is divided into two equal sections, each consisting of three and a half years (or 1260 days, according to the Jewish calendar).

The first half is known as the “Tribulation”, while the second half is called the “Great Tribulation”. (What does that tell us about the second half of the Tribulation? It’s worse than the first.)

The reason for that is simple: When the Antichrist appears at the onset of the Tribulation, he doesn’t arrive as a “satanic madman”, but rather as a skilled diplomat! As such, he’ll possess great wisdom and have answers to the world’s most pressing problems.

The first forty-two months will be spent preparing for an attempt at world domination. Once his system of government, commerce, and religion is in place (around the midpoint of the Tribulation), he’ll reveal his true character, introduce the mark of the beast, and demand to be worshipped as God.

From that point, things will deteriorate rapidly. (That’s why the final forty-two months are known as the “Great” Tribulation.) Not only will the world’s inhabitants be dealing with the fury of the Antichrist and the New World Order; they’ll also face God’s Judgment as He pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world.

Revelation describes 28 Divine Judgments that will take place over the seven-year period: The “**Seven Seals**”¹⁸ (things that happen to the Nations), the “**Seven Trumpets**”¹⁹ (things that happen to Nature), the “**Seven Thunders**”²⁰ (John wasn’t allowed to record the nature of these judgments. I have a theory, but really, it’s useless to speculate), and the “**Seven Vials**”²¹ (things that happen to Man).

(5) The Battle of Armageddon

Referring once again to the timeline, you’ll notice the Tribulation *ends* with the Battle of Armageddon. Armageddon takes place on the *final day* of the Tribulation. (We’ll study this Battle, in depth, in Chapter Three.) By the time Armageddon begins, the world will have been in Tribulation a full seven years.

Ultimately, Armageddon is Satan's attempt to wipe out the Nation of Israel. The armies of Antichrist will converge on Israel, (along with a 200-million man army from the Orient)²².

The first half of the Battle will be devastating for Israel! According to Zechariah's prophecy (which we'll examine later), half the city will fall. The women will be raped and the city pillaged. Then, just before the second half of the city falls, God will intervene with a period of supernatural darkness. (The sun won't shine, and the moon and stars won't give their light. The entire world will rest in darkness as people are given one last chance to receive Christ.)

You see, at the Rapture of the Church, it's not too late to get saved. But, at the Second Coming, it is! Once Jesus splits the clouds at Armageddon, it will be eternally too late. That's the reason for the period of darkness. God, in His mercy, gives the world one last chance to repent and turn to Christ. After the period of darkness, Jesus returns.

(6) The Second Coming

When Jesus returns (after the period of darkness), several events transpire.

- He destroys the armies of Antichrist, thus ending Armageddon – (Rev. 19:11-15).
- Satan is bound and cast into the Abyss for a thousand years – (Rev. 20:2-3).
- Jesus divides the "Sheep" from the "Goats". (This refers to the people on earth who were still alive when Jesus returned. The "Sheep" represent believers, while the "Goats" refer to unbelievers.) – (Matt. 25:31-46)

Because there is no further opportunity to be saved, the unbelievers will be swept into hell²³, and the Millennium²⁴ will begin with believers only.

Survivors Entering the Millennium

All of these surviving believers will enter the Millennium, still in their natural bodies²⁵.

For a thousand years, they will continue to marry and conceive children, as Jesus reigns from Jerusalem, demonstrating how this earth *should* have been functioning all along.

The Final Temptation

As they grow older, the children who were *born during the Millennium* will have the opportunity to receive Christ. But remarkably, many of them will not. So, after the thousand years, Satan will be loosed, and will tempt them to participate in one Final Rebellion (Revelation 20:3).²⁶

Many will be deceived and will march on Jerusalem in an attempt to destroy it²⁷. However, *this* time, the battle won't get off the ground. God will end the rebellion with fire from Heaven, and Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire.²⁸

After this event, comes the Second Resurrection.

(7) The Second Resurrection

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the **first resurrection** ...” (Revelation 20:6).

Notice, John speaks of a “first” resurrection. If there’s a *first* resurrection, then it stands to reason that there must be a *second* one! (The first resurrection, you’ll remember, took place at the Rapture of the Church. The dead in Christ were raised and taken to Heaven. But now, 1007 years later, a second resurrection takes place – this time for unbelievers.)

At the second resurrection, the unbelievers (who died through the ages) will be resurrected to stand before the “Great White Throne Judgment” (Revelation 20:11-15).

It’s at this Judgment that they’ll receive their “final sentencing” (concerning the degree of punishment they’ll experience in the Lake of Fire).

(8) The Eternal State

Once rebellion has been extinguished forever, we'll enter "eternity" (or "the Eternal State"). The believers will live with Christ in Glory, while the lost will be tormented forever in the Lake of Fire.

In this chapter, we've established a chronology for end time events. In the following chapters, we'll add more detail and back up each point with Scripture.



CHAPTER TWO – The Rapture of the Church



In the first chapter, we introduced an overview of End-Time events. You may want to take a moment to review the timeline so you'll have the chronology fresh in your thinking. In this chapter, we'll add the specifics, beginning with the Rapture of the Church.

Some people say that we shouldn't believe in the Rapture, since the word "Rapture" isn't found in the Bible. It's true that the word doesn't appear, but that doesn't mean the Rapture doesn't exist. (You won't find the word "*Bible*" in the Bible either, but you *have* one!) The word "Trinity" doesn't appear in the Bible. But, the *concept* is there. Such is the case with the Rapture. The *word* may not appear in the English text, but the *concept* is certainly there.

The term "Rapture" is derived from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "... then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up**". The English phrase "caught up" comes from the Latin word "rapere" which means "to seize" or "to transport from one location to another". *That* concept is found in the Bible repeatedly.

In Acts 8:39, Philip was "**caught away**", and the same Latin word ("rapere") was used. In 2 Corinthians 12:4, Paul was "**caught up**" ("rapere") to the third Heaven. In Genesis, Enoch walked with God: "and he was not; for **God took him**" (Genesis 6:24). God took Enoch from one location and transported him to another. That's exactly what will happen to the Church prior to the Tribulation Period!

(A) THE RAPTURE

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (have died), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep (died) in Jesus will God bring with him. 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 (precede) them which are asleep (have died). 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: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (rapere) together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 – Comments in parenthesis mine)

Our timeline *started* with the Cross. Right now, you and I are living in the “Church Age”. The next great event on God’s Prophetic Calendar is the Rapture of the Church. I believe we’ll be able to understand the Rapture (and its accompanying resurrection) more clearly if we first understand what happens to a believer at death.

What Happens to a Believer at Death?

*“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*

This verse reveals the three parts of man: Man *is* a **spirit**, he *has* a **soul**, and he *lives in* a **body**. Let’s take a moment and define each of those terms.

Your “spirit” is the “real you”. It’s the part that contacts God, the part that was born again when you received Christ. Your “soul” is made up of your mind, your emotions, and your will. Your “body” consists of your flesh and five senses.

At death, the Christian’s spirit and soul leave his body, and are immediately ushered into the Presence of God. Paul wrote, “*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8). So, there is a separation that occurs at death. The believer’s body remains on the earth, while his spirit and soul go to be with Jesus.

What Happens At The Rapture?

*“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which (have died) ... For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep (have died) in Jesus **will God bring with Jesus.**” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

The first thing that occurs at the Rapture is the resurrection of our deceased loved ones. When Jesus descends at the Rapture, He **brings the spirits and souls** of our deceased loved ones with Him. When the Trumpet sounds, their bodies will come out of the grave to be reunited with their inward man.

This reuniting with the body will eventually happen to everyone, whether they're saved or not²⁹. In God's original plan, man was to consist of "spirit, soul, and body". Death has temporarily frustrated the plan of God, but eventually He'll have His way. All men will be "spirit, soul, and body" in eternity.

Three Significant Sounds

*"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: 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." (1 Thess. 4:16-17)*

I want you to notice *three sounds* that are mentioned in connection with the Rapture. First, there's the "Shout".

People often ask if there are any prophecies that need to be fulfilled before the Rapture can take place. Only one: The shout. Personally, I believe the "shout" is going to be "Come up hither". You'll find that phrase used several times in Scripture, as people have been caught away³⁰.

The second sound is the "voice of the archangel". Only *one* archangel is mentioned by name in Scripture, and that's "Michael" in Jude verse 9. No other archangels are named (although others may exist). The archangel who accompanies Christ in the Rapture is not identified. But, the Bible *does* indicate that Michael will be involved in the Plan of God during the Tribulation Period³¹. So, this archangel may, indeed, be Michael. Only time will tell.

The final sound is the "Trump of God". In the Old Testament, the trumpet was used for two purposes. It was used to gather the people together and to summon the troops to battle! At the Rapture, it sounds with both purposes in mind. The believers will be "gathered" in the air, while the angelic host will be "summoned to battle" against the forces of darkness.

The Believers Will Be Gathered

In the Old Testament, when God wanted to bring the people together, the priest would stand on the Temple and blow the trumpet (ram's horn). The sound could be heard for miles, and when the people heard it, all activity ground to a halt.

You and I are currently living in the Church Age, and the order of the day is "work". But on that Day, when the Trumpet sounds, regardless of what we're doing for Jesus, our work will cease and we'll be caught up to be with Him.

That's what the Rapture is. It's a "gathering together" of the saints in the clouds, "to meet the Lord in the air". It's going to be a wonderful day for believers! But, there's a second purpose for the Trumpet blast.

Angels Summoned to Battle

Throughout the Book of Revelation, we see angels involved in the execution of God's judgments (Revelation 8:6-13). The Trumpet that sounds at the Rapture will signify that these angelic assignments are about to begin.

(B) THE FIRST RESURRECTION

*"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...**"*
(1 Thess. 4:16)

By now, I'm sure you've noticed the resurrection that accompanies the Rapture. Yet, Paul is very specific concerning *who* will be resurrected at this time. At the Rapture, only the "**dead in Christ**" are raised. (The bodies of the unsaved dead will remain in the grave for another 1007 years, until the end of the Millennium.³²)

So at the Rapture, *"the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which **we which are alive and remain** shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..."*

Once the dead have been raised, those who were alive at the time of the Rapture will receive their resurrection bodies without having to go through the veil of

death. (Essentially, they'll experience a "resurrection" while they're standing on their feet!) Then, they'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Paul expands on his Rapture/Resurrection teaching in 1 Corinthians 15.

The Rapture is a "Mystery"

*"Behold, I shew you a **mystery**: We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed, In a moment³³, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead (in Christ) shall be raised incorruptible, and we (which are alive and remain) shall be changed."³⁴*

In this passage of Scripture, Paul calls the Rapture a "mystery". Usually, when we think of a "mystery", we think of something that's difficult, if not impossible, to understand. But, that's not what Paul means here.

The Greek word for "mystery"³⁵ was originally used to describe the *secret teachings* of ancient societies, such as the Magi. (The existence of the Magi was well known, but their teachings were not. Their beliefs were *hidden* from the general populace, and the only way to share in their teachings was to join the group.)

That's what the word "mysterion" *originally* meant. But by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, its meaning had evolved. Instead of referring to "hidden" teachings, it now spoke of something that had been "**hidden in the past**", but had "**recently been revealed**".³⁶

There are at least six things that are called a "mystery" in the New Testament. (The Rapture is one, and the Church Age is another.) Whenever you find one of these "mysteries", keep in mind that what you're reading doesn't appear anywhere in the Old Testament. It is exclusively a New Testament doctrine.

As I said, the Rapture is one such teaching. It wasn't revealed to *anyone* until the time of Paul. (You'll understand the significance of this point in Chapter 5, as we study the Olivet Discourse. Just make a mental note of it, and I'll bring it up again.)

Two Groups Involved in the Rapture

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, we were introduced to two groups of people – “the dead in Christ” and “we which are alive and remain”. Both groups are mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 15.

*“Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and **the dead** (in Christ) **shall be raised** incorruptible, and **we** (which are alive and remain) **shall be changed**.”³⁷*

Paul brings out a subtle difference in what will be accomplished in each group. Speaking of those who had **died**, he says, “This **corruptible** must put on incorruption”.³⁸ But, concerning those who were **alive**, he says, “This **mortal** must put on immortality”. What’s the difference?

The word “corruption” refers to dead bodies that had decayed, while the word “mortal” refers to people who were still alive, but were “subject to death” (or “death-doomed”).

Mortal people (alive at the time of the Rapture) will be “**changed**”. Those who have died will have their decayed bodies “**raised**”. But, the result will be the same in each case. Each will receive a body like Christ’s Resurrection body (Philippians 3:21), and “so shall we ever be with the Lord”.

Who Goes In the Rapture?

This has been a source of controversy in the Body of Christ. Some denominations teach a “Partial Rapture” theory, believing that only “sanctified” Christians will be caught up. (According to this theory, Christians who have sin in their lives will *miss* the Rapture, and will be *left behind* to go through the Tribulation.) Personally, I don’t believe that! I believe the Rapture is a sovereign act of God, not a reward for the way we’ve lived.

H.L. Willmington refers to the Partial Rapture theory as a form of “protestant purgatory”. He writes: “Maybe this is what God should do, as it would serve most of us right – but it is not what he is going to do. The Rapture ... includes all believers”³⁹.

I believe in a “Complete Rapture” for several reasons, one of the most convincing arguments being the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The first thing we’ll do, upon our arrival in Heaven, is appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Now, why would God leave the carnal Christians behind, and take only the “spiritual people” before His Throne to be judged? That doesn’t make sense! It seems to me, if *anyone* needs to give an account of their lives and have the “wood, hay, and stubble” burned out, it would be *carnal* ones.

Now, it’s fine to speculate. But, let’s turn to our final Authority. What does the Bible say concerning who goes in the Rapture?

The Word “All” Gives Us A Clue!

*“Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all (die), but we shall **all** be changed.”*
(1 Corinthians 15:51)

We discovered, from 1 Corinthians 15, that the word “changed” refers to those who are *alive* at the time of the Rapture. (The dead in Christ are “raised”, while the living saints are “changed”).⁴⁰ This verse maintains the consistency of that view.)

According to this verse, how many of the living saints will be “changed” in the Rapture? “All” of them! Of necessity, that would include both carnal and spiritual Christians, wouldn’t it? “All” means all.

The same thought is brought out in 2 Corinthians five, where Paul considers the Judgment Seat of Christ. Who will participate in this Judgment?

*“For we must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that **every one of us** may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, **whether it be good or bad.**”* (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Who will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ? We all will! “Every one of us”, whether our works were “good or bad”. That’s the point of the Rapture! To get the whole family before the Throne at one time, so God can honor those who lived for Him, and reward them accordingly.

Carnality may not keep you from going in the Rapture. But, when you consider that upon your arrival, you'll give an account of every idle word you spoke⁴¹, and every deed done in your flesh⁴²; it should be an incentive to live a holy life.

“Getting Raptured” Isn’t the Issue. “Rewards” Are the Issue!

Some say if you aren’t living right, you won’t go in the Rapture. But, Paul taught just the opposite.

*“If ye then be risen with Christ (that is, if you’re born again – Eph. 2:6), seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. **When Christ, who is our life shall appear** (remember, the word “appear” refers to the Rapture), **then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.** Mortify **therefore** your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...” (Colossians 3:1-5 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

Read those verses again carefully. Nowhere does Paul say that you have to “clean up your life” in order to participate in the Rapture. In fact, he says just the opposite! He said, *“When Christ ... shall appear (at the Rapture), then **you shall also appear with him in glory.**” **You shall!***

I don’t see the word “if” in this verse, do you? Paul didn’t place any conditions on the Rapture, other than being “risen with Christ”, through the new birth (verse 1). **The New Birth is the only stipulation Paul ever placed on being included in the Rapture!** There’s no mention of your conduct, until after that fact has been established.

Holy or sinful, spiritual or carnal – if you’re saved, you’re going in the Rapture! In light of that, Paul says, *“Mortify **therefore** your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness ...”*

A lot of folks are teaching this backwards! They’re saying, “If you clean up your life, you’ll go in the Rapture”. But Paul said, “You’re going! **Therefore**, clean up your life.” Again, your sin may not keep you from going in the Rapture. But, sin will make a *tremendous* difference in how you fare at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Another Witness

Not convinced yet? John taught the same thing in his first Epistle.

*“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the **sons of God** (born again), and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, **when He shall appear** (at the Rapture), **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is. And **every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself**, even as he is pure.” (1 John 3:1-3)*

In this passage, John says essentially the same thing. He said that because we’re the sons of God, “...when (Jesus) shall appear, **we shall be like him**”. Again, no conditions are placed upon being changed into His image, other than being a child of God.

If you’re a “child of God”, your future is secure. You *will* be Raptured! And, *because* you have this Blessed Hope, it gives you the incentive to “purify (yourself) even as He is pure”. Your sanctification isn’t the *condition* upon which your glorification rests. Your glorification is the *incentive* for your sanctification.

One Final Argument

Some may argue that in the churches we’ve discussed, the believers were *already* living holy lives. Colosse was a mature church, and John’s epistle was written from Ephesus, a tremendous soul-winning church. Therefore, some say Paul was confident that these believers would be included in the Rapture.

Well, let’s continue our search of the Scriptures. Was anything of this sort written to a church that *wasn’t* living right? Certainly! Take the example of Corinth, the most carnal church in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul is discussing the Judgment Seat of Christ, (which takes place immediately following the Rapture).

*“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; **every man’s** work shall be made manifest: for the day shall (expose) it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try **every man’s** work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath build thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*

If any man's work be burned (that means "all of it"), he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 – Comments in parenthesis mine.)

These verses describe what will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Fire of God will descend on our works, and everything that was sinful (or done from a wrong motive) will be consumed.

At the end of verse 15, Paul discusses a man whose works "went up in smoke". He didn't do *anything right* in his Christian walk. When he gave, he gave from a wrong motive. When he served in the church, he was looking for the praise of men. He didn't do *anything* right! So, when he stood before the Judgment Seat of Christ, *everything* burned. When the smoke cleared, all that was left was his foundation. He completely lost his reward. But, I want you to notice something amazing: *He's there!*

It's not just the spiritual Christians who are Raptured to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Here's a carnal believer who had no rewards whatsoever, but He's there in Heaven to stand judgment. His carnality didn't stop him from participating in the Rapture, but it *did* rob him of the rewards that might have been his, had he lived a separated life.

Who goes in the Rapture? We all do! Every one of us! (2 Corinthians 5:10) God isn't going to amputate part of the Body of Christ, or leave part of Christ's Bride behind. He's going to bring us all before the Throne at one time, where He'll deal with our works together. Once that's completed, we'll be presented to Christ as His spotless Bride.



CHAPTER THREE – Completing the Timeline



We've already established that there's a resurrection **for believers** at the Rapture of the Church. But, did you know there's a resurrection **for unbelievers**, which occurs 1007 years later? A lot of folks haven't realized that.

Many who aren't familiar with the Bible, believe in a "General Resurrection Day". In their theology, God has a fixed amount of time for man to live on the earth. When that time expires, everyone will be raised from the dead and brought before God's Throne for judgment. But, that's not the case. The Bible speaks of *two* resurrection days that are separated by more than a thousand years.

Two Resurrections?

Before we proceed, I want to establish the fact that both saints and sinners will be resurrected. (As I've said, not everyone knows this.) It was God's original plan for man to consist of "spirit, soul, and body". And, that's going to be the case for every man in eternity, whether he's saved or not.

*"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which **all that are in the graves** shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the **resurrection of life**; and they that have done evil, unto the **resurrection of damnation**". (Matthew 5:28-29)*

Jesus spoke of a "*resurrection of life*", in which believers will be raised to live with Him. But, He also spoke of a "*resurrection of damnation*" for those who rejected salvation. Whether a man is saved or not, one day he'll rise to face his eternal destiny.

Years ago, I was witnessing to a young man who said, "I don't need to get saved. I'm *enjoying* my sin! Sure, I might go to hell! But, my body is going to be in the grave, so how can fire hurt me?"

There were several things he didn't understand: First, the Bible teaches that the lost suffer torment in hell, even *apart from* their bodies!⁴³ Then secondly, (as we've seen), one day the unsaved will be resurrected too! Their spirits and souls will be reunited with their bodies, to be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Jesus affirmed this when He said, “... *if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy **whole body** should be **cast into hell*** – (Gehenna, or the Lake of Fire).” (Matthew 5:29)

According to Jesus, *every* man will be resurrected to face his eternal destiny! But, everyone won't rise on the same day. The Bible speaks of two resurrection days, which occur 1007 years apart.

When Do These Resurrections Occur?

We've established that the First Resurrection takes place at the Rapture of the church, (just prior to the Tribulation period).⁴⁴ But, when does the Second Resurrection occur? We'll find our answer in Revelation 20.

*“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the **first resurrection** (referring to the **believers** who were raised at the Rapture): *on such the second death* (the Lake of Fire⁴⁵) *hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years* (during the Millennium)... **but the rest of the dead** (the **unbelievers**) **lived not again until the thousand years were finished.**” (Revelation 20:6,5 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

So, the believers are raised at the Rapture of the Church, but the unbelievers aren't resurrected until after the Millennium. (So, there are 1007 years between the two resurrections: 7 years from the Rapture to the Second Coming, and 1000 years from the Second Coming to the end of the Millennium.)⁴⁶

(C) THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

Now, let's back up and look at the Tribulation itself. After the Church has been caught up to Heaven, the Antichrist arrives on the scene with solutions to the world's most difficult problems.

At first, he presents himself as a man of peace. Daniel 9:27 speaks of a peace treaty that he'll sign with Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation. *"And he shall confirm the covenant with many (Jews) for one week (seven years)..."*⁴⁷ This treaty will be short-lived, however, because in the middle of the Tribulation he'll *break* the agreement. At that time, he'll enter the Jews' Temple, set up his image⁴⁸, and demand to be worshipped as God.⁴⁹

From that moment on, the Jews will be relentlessly persecuted as the Antichrist seeks to extinguish their race. (This persecution will escalate until it reaches its height at the Battle of Armageddon, on the final day of the Tribulation.)

(D) EVENTS SURROUNDING THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

At the Battle of Armageddon, the armies of Antichrist will converge on the city of Jerusalem. Zechariah proclaims:

*"Behold, the day of the Lord (the Second Advent) cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will **gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished (raped); and half of the city shall go forth into captivity ...**"* (Zechariah 14:1-2)

Armageddon begins very badly for Israel. Half of Jerusalem falls! The women are raped and the city is pillaged. Then, just when it looks like annihilation is inevitable, God's going to do something He hasn't done in thousands of years.⁵⁰ God's going to "shut out the lights"! A supernatural darkness will settle over the earth, as people are given *one last chance* to receive Christ.

Jesus set the timing for this event at the end of the Tribulation period. *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall **the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light ...**"*⁵¹

Jesus mentioned the darkness, but Joel reveals its purpose: *"Multitudes, multitudes **in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord (the Second Coming) is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.**"* (Joel 3:14-15)

The purpose of this darkness is to stop all activity worldwide, to give people one last chance to make a decision for Christ.

(At the end of this period of darkness⁵², it will be too late to get saved. So God, in His mercy gives the world one last chance to repent.)

The Second Advent

When the period of darkness ends, and everyone's decision has been made, Jesus will return "like lightning"! The armies of Antichrist will be destroyed with the Sword that proceeds out of His mouth⁵³, as judgment is carried out against them.

"And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem (at Armageddon); Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes (sockets), and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth." (Zechariah 14:12 – Comments in parenthesis mine)⁵⁴

Once the armies of Antichrist have been destroyed, Satan will be thrown into the Abyss.

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit (Abyss) and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:1-2)

Once Satan has been bound, all of the unbelievers will be removed from the face of the earth. (At that point, it's too late to get saved, so the lost will be swept into hell.) Jesus illustrates this in the end-times parable of "the Wheat and the Tares".

*"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom (believers); but the tares are the children of the wicked one (the unsaved); the enemy that sowed them is the devil; **the harvest is the end of the world (age); and the reapers are the angels.** As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world (age). The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his (Millennial) kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:41-42 Comments in parenthesis mine)*

Some have confused this with the Rapture, but in reality, the events are very different.

- At the Rapture, Jesus *Himself* appears to gather us. In Matthew 13, “the reapers are the angels”.
- At the Rapture, the *believers* are removed. But, in Matthew 13, the *unbelievers* are removed.⁵⁵
- At the Rapture, the believers are taken to *Heaven*. In Matthew 13, the unbelievers are swept into *hell*.⁵⁶

Matthew 13 is a picture of the unbelievers being removed at the end of the Tribulation, while the surviving believers enter the Millennium.

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the (Millennial) Kingdom ...”
(Matt. 13:43)

The Millennium

Those believers who enter the Millennium in natural bodies will continue to have children *throughout* the thousand years. As previously noted, some of those children will receive Christ; and some will not. Zechariah 14:16-17 speaks of those who will be disobedient to King Jesus.

*“And it shall come to pass, that **every one that is left** (those who remained on earth after the angels removed the unbelievers) 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. And it shall be, that **whoso will not come up** (those who refuse) of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.”* (Comments in parenthesis mine)

Even though some will refuse to fully submit to Christ’s leadership⁵⁷, the Millennium will be a time of universal peace and prosperity for those who dwell on the earth.

The Final Rebellion

At the close of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed out of his prison. The purpose of his release is to allow him to tempt those who were *born* during the Millennium, but never had a tempter. (The only ones he will successfully recruit are those who rejected the Lordship of Christ.)

At that time, Satan will gather an army, and will lead one final attack on Jerusalem.

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth ... to gather them together to battle.” (Revelation 20:7)

Once more, Satan’s armies will converge upon Jerusalem, but this time, the battle won’t get underway. Fire will descend from Heaven, and Satan’s army will be destroyed (Revelation 20:9). The devil will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10), and all the unbelievers who have lived throughout the ages will be resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment⁵⁸.

After each one has received their appropriate “sentencing” (concerning the degree of punishment they’ll experience in eternity), they will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). At that time, we will enter eternity – or “the Eternal State”.



CHAPTER FOUR – The Two Judgments



We've discovered that there are *two resurrections* found in Scripture: the Resurrection of the Just, and the Resurrection of the Unjust. They are separated by 1007 years, and each is followed by its own "Judgment Day". In this chapter, we'll discuss those Judgments.

The Believers' Judgment: "The Judgment Seat of Christ"

*"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before **the judgment seat of Christ.**" (Romans 14:10)*

*"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ ...**" (2 Corinthians 5:8-10)*

When you hear the term "Judgment Seat", what image comes to mind? If you're like *most people*, you probably envision a courtroom, a Judge sitting behind the bench, and maybe even a lawyer or two. But, that's not the image that Paul intended to portray. The word "Judgment" (in this passage) is derived from the Greek word "Bema", and it was actually borrowed from the ancient Olympics.

In large Olympic arenas there was a *raised seat* on which the judge of the contests sat. That seat was called the "Bema", or the "Reward Seat". At the close of the Games, the winners would assemble before the Bema to receive their crowns. (*That's the image Paul wanted to bring to your mind!*)

The Judgment (Bema) Seat of Christ is not a judicial bench! It's a "Reward Seat"! The Christian life is likened to a "race", and the Divine Umpire is watching each "contestant". Once we "cross the finish line" (at the Rapture of the Church) we'll appear before the Bema to receive our "prize". Simply put: The Bema is not a judgment of the believer's sins! It's a judgment of his *works*, to determine his *rewards*.

When will this Judgment take place? Jesus places it immediately following the first resurrection.

*“Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be **repaid (rewarded) at the resurrection of the just.**” (Luke 14:12-14)*

What Happens at This Judgment?

I remember sitting in Sunday school, listening to our teacher talk about Judgment Day. “Boys and girls, you’d better be careful!” she scolded. “Because God has a giant T.V. screen in Heaven. And, one day, all of your sins will be shown on that screen for all the world to see!”

Even as a young boy, I didn’t want *that!* (I hadn’t committed any “big sins”. But, I was still horrified at the thought!) Well, fortunately for me, she was wrong! That’s *not* what happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Paul describes the scene for us in first Corinthians 3. (Previously I said: “The Judgment Seat of Christ is a judgment of the believer’s **works** to determine his **rewards.**” As we read through this passage, notice how often those two words appear.)

*“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own **reward** according to his own **labour**. For we are **labourers** together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

*“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s **work** shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare (expose) it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s **work** of what sort it is.*

*If any man's **work** abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a **reward**. If any man's **work** shall be burned, he shall suffer loss (of rewards): but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."* (1 Cor. 3:6-15)

Did you notice the words "work" and "reward"? (In case you weren't counting, "work" appeared six times, and "reward" appeared twice.) Clearly, rewards are the issue here.

And, did you see how this Judgment takes place? (There's no courtroom, no gavel, and no judicial bench.) The Fire of God descended upon this man's foundation, and the wood, hay, and stubble burned up. The gold, silver, and precious stones, however, were *purified* and remained.

Here's the good news! There's no indication *whatsoever* that the wood, hay, and stubble were held against him! The Fire consumed them, and he was rewarded for whatever remained. (Isn't God good?)

Praise From God

But the story doesn't end there! Paul continues the narrative into the next chapter: *"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, **I judge not mine own self.**"* (1 Corinthians 4:3)

Of course, Paul judged himself when he needed to repent (as he instructed us to do in 1 Cor. 11:31). But, when it came to rewards, he said: "I don't sit around trying to figure out how I'm going to fare at the Judgment Seat of Christ! I leave that to the Lord, and I keep on serving Him."

He continues: *"I'm not aware of anything that would disqualify me, but that doesn't mean much. The Master makes that judgment. (v. 4 MSG) Therefore **judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels (motives) of the hearts ...**"* (v. 5 KJV)

Now, if we stopped reading right there, I think we'd *all* feel intimidated! Just the thought of God "bringing hidden things to light" and "revealing our motives" is enough to make most of us nervous! But, look at the next phrase: "... and then shall every man have **praise of God**".⁵⁹

The point of this Judgment isn't chastisement or correction! The point is "praise from God"!

A Second Witness

Peter also makes reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ, using the example of an employee who is suffering wrongfully at the hands of his boss:

"Servants, submit yourselves to your masters, showing them full respect — and not only those who are kind and considerate, but also those who are harsh. For it is a grace when someone, because he is mindful of God, **bears up under the pain of undeserved punishment**. For what credit is there in bearing up under a beating you deserve for doing something wrong? But if you bear up under punishment, **even though you have done what is right**, God looks on it with favor." (1 Peter 2:18-20 CJB)

Have you ever experienced this? You've been diligent at work, (even going above and beyond the call of duty). But, your boss misinterprets your actions, and instead of getting a "pat on the back", you get a tongue-lashing! And, when you try to explain, he only gets angrier! At that point, everything in you wants to respond in kind! After all, you did nothing wrong! You're in the right! But, for the sake of your testimony you swallow your pride and let it go. Years pass. That day may have been forgotten long ago. But, it's going to come up again – at the Judgment Seat of Christ!

According to Peter, "This is thankworthy",⁶⁰ or "Worthy of thanks from God"! Think of it! The Judgment Seat of Christ is a time when God says "Thank you" to His people for every sacrifice they've made, and every time they represented Him accurately before the world. This is a far cry from most people's picture of Judgment Day!

It's true that Paul also mentions the component of "giving an account" of our lives before Him.⁶¹ But even then, it's for the purpose of rewarding our efforts, not scolding us for what we've done wrong.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a fearful thing! It's a blessed thing!

The Unbelievers' Judgment: "The Great White Throne Judgment"

The unbelievers' judgment, however, is an entirely different matter! The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".⁶²

When an unbeliever dies, his spirit and soul immediately descend into hell.

"Hell from beneath is excited about you, To meet you at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the chief ones of the earth; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations. They all shall speak and say to you: 'Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us? Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, And the sound of your stringed instruments; The maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you.'" (Isaiah 14:9-11 NKJV)

Several things can be observed from this passage. First, we can determine the *location* of hell. It said, "Hell from **beneath** ..." (Several Scriptures describe hell as being in the heart of the earth.)

Second, we discover that a man's **earthly status** means nothing once he's arrived in hell. The "kings" and the "chief ones of the earth" mourned, "Have you also become as weak as we?"

Psalm 49:16-19 confirms that thought: *"Be not thou (envious) when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth **he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.** (Notice which direction he went. He descended.) *Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well for thyself. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.*" (Comments in parenthesis mine)*

When a person dies without Christ, he descends into hell, where he awaits judgment. At the end of the Millennium, he will be raised (reunited with his body), and brought before the Great White Throne Judgment.

John narrates the scene:

*"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. And I saw **the dead** ("spiritually dead"), **small and great**, stand before God (again, their station*

in life won't matter at this point. The king and the beggar are both bankrupt); *and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life ...*" (Revelation 20:11-12a)

The "Book" and "Books"

You may have noticed that there are several books present at this Judgment. There's a single "book" and a set of "books". Let's see if we can identify them.

The single book is easy to identify. John calls it "the Book of Life". (The Greek word is "zoe" or "eternal life"). Essentially, this is God's "Family Album". It holds the name of every person, throughout the ages, who has received eternal life through Christ.

Now, let's see if we can identify the set of books. "... and the dead were judged out of those things which were **written in the books, according to their works.**" (So, we could call these the Books of Works.)

Why are the unbeliever's works brought up? Because there are *degrees* of punishment in the Lake of Fire. (If everyone's punishment were the same, then what would be the purpose of this judgment?) In one place, Jesus said that damnation would be "*more tolerable*" for some, than for others⁶³. He said some would be beaten with "*few stripes*", while others would be beaten with "*many stripes*"⁶⁴. And, the author of Hebrews declares that some will receive "*sorer punishment*" for what they'd done⁶⁵.

The standard for this judgment seems to be twofold: The sins that were committed, and the degree of light the person sinned against. (The more knowledge a person has, the more accountable he becomes.)

Standing Before the Throne

In verse 13, we witness the resurrection of the lost:

*"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ... (That's their **bodies** being raised. We could as easily say, "and the **grave** gave up the dead which were in it); and **death and hell delivered up the dead** which were in them ... (That's their spirits and souls ascending out of hell, to be reunited with their bodies): and they*

*were judged every man **according to their works** ... (from the books of works). And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:13-15 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

John provides no details, whatsoever, concerning the Lake of Fire. But, clearly, no one in his right mind would want to be a part of it.



CHAPTER FIVE – The Last Days According to Jesus



The Olivet Discourse⁶⁶ is one of the most *comprehensive* Prophetic teachings found in the New Testament. In it, Jesus provides us with a **chronological overview** of end-time events. (Since it follows the same order as our timeline, it should help to reinforce these events in your thinking.)⁶⁷

Before we begin, let me give you an outline of Matthew 24.

Verses 4-8 – Signs that the Tribulation is about to begin.

Verses 9-14 – The “Tribulation” Period – (The First 3 ½ Years)

Verses 15-26 – The “Great Tribulation” – (The Second 3 ½ Years)

Verses 27-30 – Christ’s Second Coming (at the End of the Tribulation)

The Disciples’ Questions

The scene opens with the disciples enquiring about end time events. (Jesus has just prophesied the destruction of the Temple⁶⁸ and the disciples’ interest has been piqued.) *“And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us:*

Question #1 – When shall these things be?

Question #2 – What shall be the sign of thy Coming?⁶⁹

Question #3 – What shall be the sign of the end of the world (age)?”
(Matthew 24:3)

The disciples asked three questions in this verse. It's important that we understand what they *asked*, so we can correctly interpret Jesus' answers.

(1) When Shall These Things Be?

The disciples' first question had to do with the destruction of Herod's Temple. (Jesus said, "**Not one stone will be left upon another**". And, the disciples asked, "When shall **these things** be?")

As you read through this chapter, you'll find that Matthew doesn't record the answer to this first question. If you want to know what Jesus said concerning the destruction of the Temple, you'll have to refer to Luke's gospel.⁷⁰ (Evidently, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record the answer to Question one, while Matthew was instructed to record the final two. Why would He do that? I believe it was for the sake of clarity.)

You see, if you read the two accounts together (Matt. 24 and Luke 21), it *looks* like they're referring to the same event. But, that's not the case. Luke discusses the *destruction of the Temple* in 70 AD, and Matthew looks ahead to the *Tribulation Period!*

Why do the accounts look so similar? Because they're parallel events! What happened in 70 AD under Titus the Roman General was a *foreshadowing* of what will happen in the Tribulation Period, under the Antichrist. So, the accounts are similar in many respects. Yet, if you look closely, you'll notice the *outcomes* are very different.

In Luke's account, once the persecution is over, the Jews are scattered among the nations⁷¹, (where they'd remain until Israel became a nation in 1948). But at the end of *Matthew's* account, Jesus returns to the earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom.⁷²

So, the first prophecy in this chapter (concerning the destruction of the Temple) was fulfilled in 70 AD, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and is recorded in Luke 21.

(2) What Shall Be The Sign of Thy Coming?

The disciples' second question had to do with the "Coming" of the Lord. (*"What shall be the sign of thy **Coming**?"*)

In an earlier chapter, we discussed two "comings" that are associated with the end-times: The **Rapture**⁷³ and the **Second Advent**⁷⁴. Which of these events do you suppose the disciples were referring to? The Second Advent! (They *couldn't* have been asking about the Rapture, because they didn't know it existed! Remember, the Rapture was a "mystery"! There was no mention of it in the Old Testament, whatsoever!)

The only "Coming" they knew about was Messiah's Coming to set up the Kingdom. That's what they *asked*, so that's what Jesus *answered*.

(Some might argue: "Well, *Jesus* knew about the Rapture! Maybe He gave them additional information that they hadn't asked for." No! It's true that Jesus knew of the Rapture, but He *also* knew that the Father had chosen to keep it a "hidden secret" until the New Covenant had been established.⁷⁵ And, since Jesus only spoke what the Father gave Him to speak, we can be sure that Jesus didn't "leak" any information, before the proper time.)

In this passage, Jesus is answering the disciples' question concerning the *Second Advent*.

(3) What Shall Be the Sign of the End of the Age?

The disciples' final question had to do with the "end of the age". (The KJV says, "the end of the **world**". But, the Greek word is "Aion", which means, "Age".)

Again, we're going to have to rightly divide the Word of Truth. When the disciples asked about "the end of the Age", *which age* do you think they were referring to: the *Church Age* or the *Jewish Age*? They *had* to be referring to the **Jewish Age** because the Church Age was *also* part of the "mystery".⁷⁶ As such, the disciples had no idea it was coming.

(Even after the Resurrection, the disciples *still* weren't expecting the Church Age. As they were standing with Christ on the Mount of Ascension, they asked,

*“Wilt thou at this time restore again the **kingdom** to Israel?”*” They were still expecting Him to establish the Kingdom! It wasn’t until the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, that the disciples finally realized that they were entering a brand new dispensation, called the “Church Age”.)

So, in this third question, they were asking about the end of the *Jewish Age*. According to Daniel 9, the Jewish Age ends with “Daniel’s 70th Week”, or the Tribulation Period.

(Daniel’s prophecy will be discussed later in this book. For now, my point is merely that the disciples had no knowledge of the Church Age. All three of their questions centered on things that were understood by the Jewish people.)

A Chronological Look at End Times

a.) Signs the Tribulation Is About to Begin – v. 4-8

This is the only place in the Olivet Discourse where a reference to the Church Age can be found. For five verses, we catch a glimpse of the closing hours of our dispensation, as Jesus points out “Signs that that the Tribulation is about to begin”. The signs He mentions are: False Christs (v. 4-5), War (v . 6-7a), Famine (v. 7), and Pestilence/Natural Disasters (v. 7).

Interestingly, these four signs correspond with the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” which are released at the onset of the Tribulation. It’s as though Jesus foresees the Horsemen “saddling up” and preparing to ride.

HORSEMAN NUMBER ONE – A False Christ

*“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.”*
(Revelation 6:2)

The rider of the white horse is none other than the Antichrist – (the counterfeit of Jesus Christ.) This rider won’t be released until the Tribulation begins. But, according to Jesus, the *ultimate* False Christ is preceded by the appearance of *many* false Christs.

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

The word “deceive” means “to cause to believe a lie”. (When a person is “deceived”, he’s *convinced* that a lie is the truth.) I think it’s significant, that of all the signs Jesus *could* have discussed, He mentioned deception *first*!

Paul warned of Last Days deception using the strongest of terms:

*“This know also that in the last days, **perilous** times shall come...”⁷⁸* This Greek word (translated “perilous”) is only used one other time in the New Testament. Matthew used it in his gospel to describe two demon-possessed men who were “extremely dangerous”.⁷⁹ That’s the word Paul selected to describe our day! What is it that makes this time period so dangerous? Deception! He continues: “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, **deceiving and being deceived**”.⁸⁰

Personally, I can’t remember a time when deception has been so widespread! It’s everywhere! (We’ll say more about this in a later chapter.) So, how can we keep from being deceived in an “Age of Deception”? Paul gives the answer in verse fourteen: “But continue thou ... in the Scriptures”.⁸¹

The way to avoid deception, in an *Age of Deception*, is to be firmly grounded in God’s Word.

“I Am Christ!”

Jesus continues: *“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, **I am Christ**; and shall **deceive many.**”* (Matthew 24:4)

There are several ways to interpret this verse. (Most likely, they all have an element of truth in them.) The first interpretation is that men would arrive on the scene *literally* claiming to be Jesus Christ. As strange as it may sound, this is happening more and more.

The website of one such leader invites people to “experience Jesus Christ in His Second Coming – in a city near you!” One popular news source reports that 40,000 people a year appear in the Holy Land, claiming to be Christ, or one of His disciples⁸². So, evidently, there *are* “many” who are claiming to be Jesus Christ!

But, is that the primary interpretation of Jesus warning? I don't believe so.

Why not? Well, remember Jesus said that many would come in His name, "saying, I am Christ; and **shall deceive many**". Although "many" are claiming to be Jesus, I don't think "many" are being deceived by it. (If someone walked up to you on the street, announcing that they were Jesus Christ, do you think you'd be deceived? Certainly not! Would your unsaved friends be deceived? Hardly. It's more likely that they'd call the psychiatric hospital!)

So, is another interpretation possible? (An interpretation that would lend itself to vast numbers of people being deceived?) Yes! If you read the verse closely, you'll notice that He didn't say, "Many shall come in my name saying, I am **Jesus**." He said they'd come saying, "I am **Christ**". This opens up a couple of possibilities.

One of the main "mantras" of the New Age movement is "**Christ in you**, the hope of glory". But, their Christ is not *our* Christ! Instead, they speak of the "Christ Principle" that's at work in all of humanity. To the New Ager, Jesus Christ was not the Son of God. He was merely a man who tapped into the "Christ Consciousness" and became part of a Spiritual Hierarchy of Masters. Every one of us, they say, has the potential to tap into this same energy. So, if we take into consideration all of the adherents of the New Age movement, those who claim to be "Christ" increases dramatically, and so does the number of people being deceived.

But, the final application of Jesus' warning opens the door even wider. (*This interpretation explains how even the elect could be deceived.*)

Remember, Jesus said that many would **come in His name** (or **in His authority**) claiming to be **Christ**. The word "Christ" means "the **anointed one**". So, Jesus may have been warning of deceivers that would come in His Name, saying: "I have a special anointing and revelation from God!" But really, they're preaching heresy.

I believe this may be the best interpretation! Many false teachers have appeared in our day claiming such things, and have led many into error! So, how do you keep from being deceived in an Age of Deception?

"Continue in the Scriptures".

HORSEMAN NUMBER TWO – War

*“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**.” (Revelation 6:4)*

The second Horseman released in the Tribulation will be “War”. As a precursor to this, Jesus predicts a time of *ethnic and religious unrest* at the close of the Church Age.

*“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. For **nation (ethnos)** shall rise against **nation (ethnos)**, and **kingdom** against **kingdom** ...” (Matthew 24:7)*

Although Jesus specifically mentions “ethnicity”, the cause of the hostility is much deeper than that! Essentially, it’s a clash between the *Kingdom of Light* and the *Kingdom of Darkness*. The increasing animosity between them at the end of the age, manifests in the natural realm as war.

HORSEMAN NUMBER THREE – Famine

*“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. 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.” (Revelation 6:5-6)*

The Black Horse represents famine. The destruction from the previous two Horsemen causes a widespread lack of food, and hyper-inflation. John gives us a glimpse of how bad things will be, as the Tribulation gets underway.

“And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny.”⁸³

The word “measure” is the Greek word “choenix”. It’s slightly less than a quart, and would feed an average person for one day. In Matthew 20, we’re told that a “penny” was a full day’s wage.⁸⁴ That means inflation will be of such magnitude, that it will take a full day’s wage to feed just one member of the family.

Before this third Horseman rides, Jesus said there would be “famine in various places”.

HORSEMAN NUMBER FOUR – Disease, Death and Destruction

John describes the final Horseman: *“And I looked, and behold a pale horse (chloros – pale green): and his name that sat on him was **Death, and Hell followed with him** (evidently, to swallow up the spirits and souls of those whom Death kills). And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death (“violence” [Phillips]; “disease” [MSG]), and with the beasts of the earth.” (Revelation 6:8 Comments in parenthesis mine)*

The fourth Horseman is really an amalgamation of the previous three. Again, we see war and famine mentioned (“to kill with the sword, and with hunger”). Now, he adds violence and disease to the list.

Concerning the end of the Church Age, Jesus predicts, *“there shall be famines (lack of food) and pestilences (pandemics; diseases we have no cure for), and earthquakes in divers (different) places. All these are the beginning of sorrows (birth pangs).” (Matthew 24:6-8 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

“Birth Pangs”

Jesus gave four signs that would indicate that the Church Age is drawing to a close. When you mention these signs to unbelievers, many times they’ll reply, “Yes, but we’ve *always* had those things!” That may be true, but remember, Jesus compared these signs to birth pangs.

There are two significant things about birth pangs (labor pains). First, the initial pangs don’t mean, “The baby is here!” They mean, “The baby is coming; get ready!” I remember when my daughter, Chandra, was born. When my wife announced that she was in labour, I went scurrying around the house, looking for the car keys. I thought I had to rush my wife to the hospital! But, the initial birth pangs weren’t announcing the *arrival* of the baby. They were a warning that the time was drawing near.

In the same way, these signs act as a reminder that Christ’s coming is drawing close, and it’s time to get our lives in order.

Every time we hear of an earthquake or a war, we should be reminded that time is short.

The second thing about birth pangs is that they get more frequent and more intense as the time of delivery draws near. As we get closer to the end of the Church Age, these signs will become more frequent and more intense. But, that's not a reason to fear. God is in control.



CHAPTER SIX – The Tribulation Period



In the first segment of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus dealt with the closing hours of the Church Age and spoke of the importance of building our lives on the Word. In verse 9, we transition into the first half of the Tribulation Period.

b.) The First Half of the Tribulation – v. 9-14

The King James reads: “*Then shall they deliver you up **to be afflicted***”. But, the Greek New Testament says, “*Then shall they deliver you **into tribulation***”. Verse 9 marks the *beginning* of the Tribulation Period.

Now let’s pause for a moment, and read between the lines. If the *Church Age* ended in verse 8 and the *Tribulation* began in verse 9, when what must have happened between verses 8 and 9? The Rapture of the Church! (While it’s true that Jesus didn’t mention the Rapture, we know enough about End Time events, that we can insert it after verse 8.)

Who Does the Tribulation Primarily Deal With?

When Jesus said, “*Then shall they deliver **you** into tribulation*”, who was He referring to? The Jews! (He was speaking to His *Jewish* disciples.) For the last 2000 years, God has been dealing with a predominantly Gentile Church. But at the Rapture, the earth returns to Jewish time as Daniel’s 70th week begins.

*“Then shall they deliver **you** (the **Jews**) into tribulation, and shall kill you: and **ye shall be hated of ALL nations** for my name’s sake.” (Matthew 24:9)*

Notice the phrase, “Ye shall be hated of *all* nations ...” Up to now, there are several nations which have been sympathetic toward Israel, (largely due to the Christian influence in the world). But, as we draw closer to the end (and certainly, by the time the Tribulation is underway), the world will become more and more intolerant toward Israel, until she doesn’t have a friend in the world.

We see this beginning already. One of the things we've seen in the news (at the time of this writing) is a worldwide push to divide the land of Israel. (Perhaps you've heard of the "Two State Solution".) This may be one of the most significant prophetic fulfillments of our day. The dividing of Jerusalem, according to the prophet Joel, is one of the things that triggers the wrath of God and brings the world to Armageddon.

*"I will gather all nations and will bring them down into the Valley of Jehoshaphat (where Armageddon takes place), and there will I deal with and **execute judgment upon them** for their treatment of My people and of My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and **because they have divided My land.**" (Joel 3:2 Amplified, Comments in Parenthesis mine)*

A search on Google will reveal how widespread this Two-State Solution has become, and how much pressure Israel has been under to comply. (It's also interesting to note the correlation between pressure from the United States to divide the land, and the natural disasters that have immediately *followed* that pressure.) This is the very thing that, in the mind of God, triggers His judgment.

More Deception

*"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And **many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.**" (Matt. 24:10-11)*

So, deception will be a concern during the Tribulation, just as it was in the Church Age. (Sometimes people wonder how it's possible for things to get *so bad* in only seven years. The truth is, they don't! It's a progression that begins in the closing years of the Church Age, and escalates until the Church is finally taken out. Once the "salt and light" are removed, the floodgates will open! And, the corruption that began in the Church Age will rapidly intensify.)

All these things had their *beginning* in the Church Age. The deception that began in the Church Age *escalates* until it reaches its peak in the Tribulation Period.

You'll remember that Jesus warned the Church against deception, and Paul said that our first line of defence was the Word of God. Well, do you suppose the Word that kept us on-track in the Church Age would still work during the Tribulation Period? Of course it would!

If people cling to the Word during the Tribulation, they can avoid deception at that time. But, unfortunately, the majority will not.

Love Will Wax Cold

*“And because iniquity (lawlessness) shall abound, **the love of many shall wax cold.**” (Matthew 24:12)*

Pay particular attention to the word “love”. It’s the Greek word “Agape”, which refers to the *God-kind* of love. So, evidently, this verse is referring to Christians.

Here’s something you need to understand: People can still be saved after the Rapture of the Church! In fact, the Bible speaks of a “multitude” that will come to Christ during the Tribulation Period.⁸⁵

I’ve often wondered how CNN will explain the disappearance of millions of Christians around the world. Several theories have been put forth. Some think it will be blamed on extra-terrestrials (as UFO sightings are on the rise). Others envision a “martial-law” scenario where hundreds of thousands of believers are gathered up and incarcerated. (If that many people were “disappearing” from their homes, it would certainly provide an explanation for the disappearance of innumerable Christians.) Whatever reason the secular media offers, it seems as though the Rapture will be quickly forgotten. The disappearances will fade into distant memory, and the world will go on. But, multitudes will turn to Christ.

Who Will Preach During the Tribulation?

That brings up an important point: If all the Christians vacate the earth in the Rapture, then who will be left to preach the Gospel? There are four primary ways the Message will be proclaimed after the Church leaves.

The first group that will preach in the Tribulation is **the 144,000**⁸⁶. These are 144,000 Jewish Evangelists that will be turned loose on the world at that time. The second company that will spread the Message is **the Tribulation Saints**. (I believe the greatest revival the world has ever *seen* will happen about five minutes after the Rapture, as people realize that the Bible was true after all!)

These two groups minister until Mid-Tribulation, at which time the 144,000 will be caught up to Heaven. In Revelation 14:1, Jesus meets them on Mount Sion (on the earth). Then, in verse three, we see them “before the Throne”, singing a new song! (So, evidently, they had a “Rapture” of their own!)

Once the 144,000 are gone, a third group arrives on the scene. **Angels** make up the third company of “End-Time Evangelists”. (This isn’t the first time that Angels have delivered God’s Message.)

*“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.**” (Revelation 14:6).*

The final group that will preach in the Tribulation, are **the two witnesses** spoken of in Revelation 11:3.

Preached In All the World

*“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.**” (Matthew 24:14)*

This is a classic example of how people take a “Tribulation” verse out of its setting, and apply it to the Church Age. For years, I was taught that the Rapture couldn’t take place yet, because not everyone had heard the Gospel. Our pastor told us to “Hurry up and spread the Gospel, so Jesus can come back”. But, this verse isn’t referring to the Rapture! (Keep it in context!) Jesus is speaking of the Tribulation Period! He’s saying that the Gospel will be preached in all nations *during the Tribulation!*

Think of it! These four groups will be able to accomplish, in seven years, what the Church wasn’t able to accomplish in two thousand! (Of course, we haven’t had the help of the angels.) During those seven years, every nation on earth will hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

c.) The Second Half of the Tribulation – v. 15-26

In verse 15, Jesus moves on to the second half of the Tribulation. The Antichrist has spent the first 42 months preparing for an attempt at world conquest.

He's promoted his religion and his economic policies are ready to be implemented. Now, he's ready to reveal his true character.

The Abomination of Desolation

*“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, (whoso readeth let him understand:) **then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains ...**” (Matt. 24:15-16)*

The “Abomination of Desolation” refers to an event that takes place in the Temple, at Mid-Tribulation. After three-and-a-half years, the Antichrist will break his peace treaty with Israel.⁸⁷ At that time, he'll enter the Jewish Temple⁸⁸, set up his image⁸⁹ and demand to be worshipped as God.⁹⁰

When these events transpire, the Jews are commanded to flee. According to Daniel 11:41, they'll flee to the mountain ranges of Edom, Moab and Ammon. If they remain there, they'll be safe. But, if they leave, they'll be without protection.

The Jews' Flight

*“Then (when the Antichrist sits in the Temple, proclaiming himself to be God) **let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is (resting) on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is (working) in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child (pregnant), and to them that give suck (nursing mothers) in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: **For then shall be great tribulation**** (this marks the second half of the Tribulation period), such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.” (Matthew 24:16-22 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

The next few verses describe the Jews' escape to their places of refuge. Verses 19 and 20 describe things that could hinder their flight. Certainly, pregnant women and nursing mothers would be at a disadvantage. The time of year (“winter”) and the day of the week (“the Sabbath”) could also present some challenges. (Remember, He's speaking to Jews. On the Sabbath Day, they were only allowed to travel a “Sabbath Day's journey”, which is approximately two-thirds of a mile.)

Don't Leave Your Place of Protection

“Then if any man shall say unto you (in the places of refuge), Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold he is in the desert, go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not.” (Matthew 24:23-26)

These verses describe Satan’s attempt to lure the Jews out of their places of safety. False prophets will arise, claiming that Christ has returned! “Great signs and wonders” will accompany their assertion, but the Jews have been warned not to respond.

Ultimately, these verses describe how Christ is *not* coming back! When He returns, it won’t be in a manner that could go unnoticed. Verse 27 says: *“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”*⁹¹

When Jesus returns, it will be “as lightning” in the supernatural darkness (at the Battle of Armageddon). *Every eye shall see Him* (Revelation 1:7). His coming will be impossible to miss.

This Generation Shall Not Pass

*“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: 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. 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. **Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, **this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.** Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24:29-35)***

Many well-meaning Christians have hopelessly misinterpreted this parable! They saw the phrase, “**This generation** shall not pass”, and **they applied it to their own generation!** (Their reasoning went like this: “The Fig Tree represents Israel, and Israel became a nation in 1948. Therefore, the generation that was alive in 1948 is the final generation!”)

Here’s the problem: A generation, in the Bible, (most often) refers to a period of forty years. So, according to *that* theory, the “final” generation was over in 1988! We’re way past that, and Jesus *still* hasn’t returned!

So, where did they miss it? Where’s the breakdown?

They didn’t hear what Jesus said! They missed one small – (yet very significant) – word, and it caused them to misinterpret the passage. Let’s read it again and see what Jesus actually said.

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see ***ALL*** these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, **this generation** shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” (Matt. 24:32-34)

What generation is He talking about? The generation that sees “ALL” of the things discussed in this chapter: The Signs that the Tribulation is about to begin⁹², the First Half of the Tribulation⁹³, and Antichrist in the Temple proclaiming himself to be God!⁹⁴ That will be the final generation!

With that, we conclude our chronological look at end-time events, and Section One of this book.

SECTION 2

Significant People and Events



CHAPTER 7 – Antichrist: The Man of Sin



Apart from Jesus, the Antichrist is probably the most intriguing figure in Bible Prophecy. Even the secular world has shown great interest in this dark figure. Unfortunately, not everything we've believed about this Man of Sin can be backed up by Scripture. In this chapter, we'll examine what the Bible says (and *doesn't* say) about the Antichrist.

Several names are assigned to the Antichrist in Scripture, each one depicting a facet of his character. He's called "the Antichrist" (1 John 2:18), the "Man of Sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3); the "Son of Perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3), the "Lawless One" (2 Thess. 2:8 RSV), the "Beast" (Revelation 13:4), the "Little Horn" (Daniel 7:8), the "Vile Person" (Daniel 11:21), and the "Wilful King" (Daniel 11:36) to name a few. Space won't permit us to examine *every* Scripture that references the Antichrist. But, we'll endeavour to discuss the most important ones.

We've already discovered that when the Antichrist comes on the scene, he doesn't present himself as a satanic madman. He appears on the world stage as a great diplomat, with answers to the world's most difficult situations. This point is substantiated by Daniel 8:23-25.

*"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and **understanding dark sentences**, shall stand up."*

The phrase "understanding dark sentences" has a twofold meaning. It can refer to "**trickery and craftiness**", as the Amplified Bible renders it. Or, it can have a secondary meaning. The same Hebrew phrase is used when the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, and asked him many "**hard questions**" (2 Chron. 9:1). If we focus on the latter definition, then Daniel is telling us that the Antichrist will possess solutions to the world's "hardest questions" and will be able to navigate the most volatile situations.

The passage continues: *“And his power shall be mighty, **but not by his own power** (he’ll be operating by Satan’s power): and he shall **destroy wonderfully** (although he presents the image of a peacemaker, he will also be skilled in war – Rev. 13:4), and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people (Israel). And through his policy (cunning) also he shall cause craft (deceit) to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes (Jesus); but he shall be broken without hand (that is, he’ll be destroyed by the Sword that proceeds out of Jesus’ mouth at the Second Advent).” (Daniel 8:24-25 – Comments in parenthesis mine)*

Facts About the Antichrist

a.) His Entrance Will Be Peaceful: *“And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but **he shall come in peaceably**, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.”⁹⁵*

b.) He Will Be an Oratorical Genius: *“While I was thinking about the horns, another horn, a little horn, came up among them. It uprooted three of the other horns. This horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that **spoke impressive things**.”⁹⁶*

c.) He Sets Forth a Platform of “Change”: *“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** ...”⁹⁷*

d.) He Brings Peace to the Middle East: He will sign a 7-year peace treaty with Israel. But, after three and a half years, he’ll break that treaty, and will proclaim himself to be God.

*“And he shall **confirm the covenant** (peace treaty) with many for **one week** (each “week” of this prophecy represents seven years): and in the midst of the week (after three and a half years) he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate.”⁹⁸*

e.) At Mid-Tribulation, He Walks into the Jewish Temple, and Demands to Be Worshipped as God: *“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;*

*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.***⁹⁹

At that point, the Mark of the Beast will be instituted¹⁰⁰, and those who refuse the Mark will be beheaded¹⁰¹. Those who receive his Mark, however, will be eternally condemned.

“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, 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: 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.” (Revelation 14:9-11)

Questionable Teachings Concerning the Antichrist

At this point, I want to examine a teaching that’s *widespread*, but it may not be factual at all. Why is this important? Aren’t we just splitting theological hairs? Not at all!

You see, the Jews of Jesus’ day were looking for a “Military Messiah”, not a suffering Saviour. So, when Jesus came, (and He didn’t line up with their preconceived ideas), they *eliminated* Him as a possible fulfillment of Prophecy.

In the same way, I fear that there are misconceptions about the Antichrist that may cause people to *miss* the Antichrist when he appears. (“That can’t be him! He doesn’t fit the Biblical description!”) Essentially, I’m bringing these things to your attention in case things unfold differently than we’ve expected.

The point I want to discuss concerns the “empire” that he’ll rule over, as well as his ethnic heritage.

Who Will the Antichrist Rule Over?

If you've been saved for very long, you've probably heard that the Antichrist will rule over a "Revived Roman Empire". (The Roman Empire fell around 476 AD. But, according to this theory, it will be resurrected in the last days, to be ruled by the Antichrist himself.) This theory is derived, primarily, from a passage in Daniel 9. (This chapter can be a little confusing, so I'll try to make this as clear as possible.)

In Daniel 9, the Jews were about to be released from Babylonian captivity. At that time, God revealed to Daniel that there were 490 years left in the "Jewish Age". This 490 remaining years of "Jewish Time" can be divided into three periods:

Period One – 49 Years

From the time the Jews were released, until Jerusalem's walls were rebuilt, would be 49 years.¹⁰²

Period Two – 434 Years

From the **completion of the walls**, to the **death of the Messiah** would be another 434 years.¹⁰³

According to this Prophecy, two significant events would take place at the end of the second period: the death of the Messiah¹⁰⁴ and the destruction of the Temple.¹⁰⁵ Here's where our clue about Antichrist's kingdom comes in. Daniel said that the "people" who destroyed the Temple, would be the *same race of people* that the Antichrist would rule over.¹⁰⁶

We know that Titus, the Roman General, destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. So, since it was the **Romans** who destroyed the Temple, it only made sense that the Antichrist would rule over a Revived **Roman** Empire."

Or, so we thought.

Period Three – 7 Years

By the end of the second period, **sixty-nine** of the seventy weeks had elapsed.

At that time, God put “the Jewish Age” on hold, and inserted the Church Age. Once the Church has been Raptured, God will turn His attention *back* to the Jews, and the final 7 years of “Jewish time” will be completed. This final 7-year period is known as “Daniel’s 70th Week”! (You and I know it as the “Tribulation Period”).

Now, let’s return to the prophecy concerning Antichrist’s future kingdom.

Who Are the Antichrist’s People?

Because Titus was a **Roman** General, many have assumed that the Antichrist will rule over a Revived **Roman** Empire. But, is that true? Or, could there be another meaning to the prophecy?

If you take the writings of the historians into consideration, you’ll find that (even though Titus was a Roman), the vast majority of the “people” who destroyed the Temple were mercenaries from Arab (or “Muslim”) nations.¹⁰⁷ So, that opens up a second possibility. While it’s certainly *possible* that the Antichrist could rule over a “Revived **Roman Empire**”, it’s *just as possible* that he could rule over a “Revived **Islamic Caliphate**”.¹⁰⁸

Let’s take a moment to examine this second theory. Is it possible that the Antichrist could be a Muslim? Is there anything in Islam that would allow us to entertain the possibility? I believe there is! Because of “last days” prophecies (recorded in the Koran and the Hadith), the Muslim world is waiting for a “Saviour”. This Islamic “Messiah” figure is known as the Mahdi.

A Muslim Antichrist?

In his excellent book, [The Islamic Antichrist](#), Joel Richardson points out the similarities between the Koran’s Mahdi, and the Bible’s Antichrist. Without going into great detail, I’ll try to summarize the concept in a few paragraphs. (The following points are summarized from Richardson’s book and the bibliography information is his. I highly recommend that you purchase a copy of his book.)

a.) Islamic tradition states that the Mahdi will be a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, and will share his name.

“The world will not come to pass until a man from among my family, whose name will be my name, rules over the Arabs.”¹⁰⁹

b.) The Mahdi will rule over a revived Islamic Caliphate, as the final Caliph¹¹⁰ of Islam.

“If you see him, go and give him your allegiance, even if you have to crawl over ice, because he is the Vice-regent of Allah, the Mahdi.”¹¹¹

c.) He will create a New World Order and will cause Islam to triumph over all other religions.

“He will reappear on the appointed day, and then he will fight against the forces of evil, lead a world revolution, and set up a new world order based on justice, righteousness, and virtue ... ultimately the righteous will take the world administration in their hands and Islam will be victorious over all the religions.”¹¹²

d.) Armies of Muslim fighters, led by the Mahdi, will march into Israel with black flags, capture it, and the Mahdi will rule from Jerusalem for a seven year period.

Rasulullah [Muhammad] said: “Armies carrying black flags will come from Khurasan. No power will be able to stop them and they will finally reach Eela [the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem] where they will erect their flags.”¹¹³

“Jerusalem will be the location of the rightly guided caliphate and the center of Islamic rule, which will be headed by Imam al-Mahdi.”¹¹⁴

e.) A seven-year peace treaty will be signed between the Mahdi and the Jews, and it will be upheld for seven years.

Rasulullah [Muhammad] said: “There will be four peace agreements ... The fourth agreement will be mediated through a person who will be from the progeny of Hadrat Haroon [Honorable Aaron—Moses’s brother] and will be upheld for seven years.”¹¹⁵

The Prophet said ... He will divide the property, and will govern the people by the Sunnah of their Prophet and establish Islam on Earth.

*He will remain seven years, then die, and the Muslims will pray over him.*¹¹⁶

f.) The vast majority of the world's population will love and accept him.

*"Allah will sow love of him in the hearts of all people. Al Mahdi appears; everyone only talks about Him, drinks the love of Him, and never talks about anything other than Him."*¹¹⁷

g.) He establishes Islam as the only acceptable world religion and outlaws every other religion.

*"Islam will be victorious over all the religions."*¹¹⁸

h.) Those who will not convert to Islam will be killed – particularly Jews and Christians.

*"The Mahdi will offer the religion of Islam to the Jews and Christians; if they accept it they will be spared, otherwise they will be killed."*¹¹⁹

*"The Prophet said ... the last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him."*¹²⁰

i.) He seeks to establish the Islamic Calendar and impose Shariah Law throughout the earth.

*"It is considered a divine command to use a [hijra] calendar with twelve [purely] lunar months without intercalation, as evident from...the Holy Qur'an."*¹²¹

As you read the previous points, perhaps you noticed the similarities between the Islamic "Mahdi" and the Christian "Antichrist". Both are said to: Lead a New World Order, Sign a seven-year peace treaty with Israel, Rule from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Kill Jews and Christians (by beheading), Expand their influence through conquest¹²², and Seek to change times and laws (Daniel 7:25)¹²³.

The similarities are uncanny! But, based on a popular interpretation of Daniel 9, we've been *conditioned* to look for a Revived *Roman* Empire. So, when the European Union was formed, we thought we'd seen the fulfillment of prophecy. The Antichrist's Empire was in place! All we were waiting for was its leader.

But, given the fact that the European Union has *far* surpassed the prophesied "ten nations", and that Muslims worldwide are waiting for a restored Caliphate (and an individual who is the *mirror-image* of the Biblical Antichrist); and given the fact that they've been commanded to pledge their allegiance to the Mahdi when he comes, (and turn their kingdoms over to him, as the Bible says they'll do for the Antichrist), I think the *Islamic* interpretation of Daniel 9 becomes the favored interpretation.

For me, it answers a lot of questions. I couldn't fathom why leaders of nations would willingly abdicate their kingdoms and turn them over to a dictator (as Revelation 17:12-13 predicts). But, it's easy to understand why *Muslim* leaders would turn their kingdoms over to the *Muslim* Messiah.

I never understood why the Antichrist would *behead* those who refused to submit to his rule (Rev. 20:4). (Who beheads *anybody* anymore – other than Islamic extremists?) But, beheading is the prescribed penalty for rebellion against the Caliph.

When you add that to the recent news (regarding the so-called "Arab Spring"), and the re-establishing of the Caliphate (by ISIS), and the setting in of a Caliph¹²⁴, (as well as the announcement of a proposed five-year plan for world domination), I think the truth is evident! We're standing on the brink of the Rapture of the Church and the appearance of the Antichrist.



CHAPTER 8 – Other Rapture Theories



So far, we've studied only the *Pre-Tribulation* view of the Rapture. Before we proceed, I want to discuss some *other End-Time theories* that are held within the Body of Christ. (Not everyone agrees on these things!)

Some argue that the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is a relatively new doctrine; one not held by the Early Church. They claim that the "Pre-Trib" view was the invention of a man named John Darby, who lived in the 1800's. But, quotes can be found among the writings of the Early Church Fathers, which indicate their "*knowledge of*" (if not their "*belief in*") a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Cyprian (Bishop of the church in Carthage who lived from AD 200-258), wrote: "Do you not give God thanks ... **that by an early departure you are taken away, and delivered from the shipwrecks and disasters that are imminent?** Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, **which snatches us hence, and sets us free from the snares of the world** and restores us to paradise and the kingdom."¹²⁵

Ephraim was a deacon in the church in Syria (338 AD), who later became the Bishop of Nisibis. He pleads: "Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and **prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ**, so that he may draw us from the confusion which overwhelms the world ... **For all the saints and the elect of God are gathered, prior to the Tribulation that is to come**, and are **taken to the Lord** lest they see that confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."¹²⁶

I don't want to leave the impression that *all of the Church Fathers* believed in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. (There were debates *then*, just as there are *now*.) But, the argument that this position was "invented" in the 1800's is absolutely unfounded.

Other End-Time Views

Other Eschatological views include the:

a.) “Mid-Tribulation” Rapture Position – This view holds that the Church will remain on earth for the *first half* of the Tribulation, but will be **removed at Mid-Tribulation** before God’s wrath is poured out.

b.) “Post-Tribulation” Rapture Position – Those who subscribe to the “Post-Tribulation” view believe that the Church will **remain on earth through the entire seven-year period**. (In this view, the church is caught up to meet the Lord on the final day of the Tribulation; only to do a U-turn and come back down with Him at the Second Advent.)

c.) “Preterism” – A third theory that’s gaining popularity in our day is the Preterist view. This position states that **the majority of the Bible’s Prophecies have already been fulfilled**, (including those in the Book of Revelation).

“Full Preterism” holds that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD fulfilled *all* of the end-time prophecies in the Bible, including Jesus’ Second Coming. “Partial Preterism” holds that *most* of the prophecies were fulfilled in 70 AD (including the appearance of the Antichrist, the Tribulation Period, the Mark of the Beast, and more). Some Partial Preterists allow for a future return of the Lord to the earth, but details vary on the specifics of that return.

What About Preterism?

Preterism is based on certain statements (in the Gospels) which *seem* to point to a First-Century fulfillment of Prophecy. One example (which we’ve already discussed) is Matthew 24:34 – “Verily I say unto you, **This generation** shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”. The Preterist assumes that Christ was referring to His own – First Century – generation, when He said, “**This generation** shall not pass”.

Another significant verse is Matthew 16:28: “Verily I say unto you, There be **some standing here, which shall not taste of death**, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

To the Preterist, this verse presents a problem because all those individuals are dead, and the Second Advent hasn't occurred yet. So, rather than make Jesus a false prophet, they've chosen to assign a "First Century fulfillment" to the entire body of Prophecy, including the Second Coming.

But, is that really what Jesus intended to communicate? Was He *really* saying the Second Coming would take place in the First Century? Or, is there another explanation?

"Seeing" the Coming Kingdom

Look at Jesus' words one more time: "*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they **SEE** the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*" (Matthew 16:28 – *Emphasis mine*)

The answer is found in the word "see". The most common word for "see" ("blepo") means, "To see with the physical eye". But, that's not the word we find here! Instead, Jesus chose the word "eido" which means, "to see *in a vision*".¹²⁷

That definition opens up several possibilities! One person that was "standing there" (that didn't taste of death until he saw a vision of the Second Coming) was John! You can read about his vision in the Book of Revelation!¹²⁸

That's *one* explanation. But, it can't be the full meaning of the verse, because Jesus spoke in the plural when He said, "There be *some* standing here". So, He must have been referring to others as well. So, who *else* saw a "vision" (or a "type") of the Second Coming?

If you have your Bible in front of you, you'll notice that Matthew 16:28 is the last verse in the chapter. Now, if you'll look at the first word of chapter 17, you'll find it's the word "and". "And" is a connecting word! So clearly, the narrative wasn't complete. So, let's pick it up again in Matthew 16:28 and keep reading into Matthew 17.

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see (in a vision, a type, or a shadow) the Son of man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother (those were the "some" that Jesus was referring to), and bringeth them up into an high

mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light ... (the Transfiguration was a type of Jesus Coming in His Glory, at the Second Advent). And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him."

What's the significance of Moses and Elijah? Some believe they will be the "two witnesses" of Revelation 11. (If you look at what the two witnesses have the power to do, that's very possible.)

*"These have power to shut heaven, **that it rain not** in the days of their prophecy (3.5 years) ..."129*

Do you remember anyone in the Old Testament who prayed, and it didn't rain for three and a half years? Elijah!

*"... and have **power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."***

Who do you know – from the Old Testament – that turned water into blood, and brought plagues upon the Egyptians? Moses! If Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses, then it only adds to the type of the Second Coming.

*"As they came down from the Mount, Jesus said, Tell the **vision** to no man."*¹³⁰ Jesus called it a vision! So, the "others" that "saw a vision" of the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom were Peter, James, and John.

In Matthew 16:28, Jesus wasn't predicting a First-Century fulfillment of the Second Coming! He merely stated that "some among them" would see a *type* (or a *vision*) of the Second Coming. That promise was fulfilled in the very next chapter.

But, that's not my only reason for rejecting the Preterist position. As you read through the Book of Revelation, you'll find *many* things that weren't fulfilled in 70 AD., including the **28 Judgments** and the **bodily return** of Jesus Christ. (I don't remember hearing about 65-pound hailstones falling in 70 AD¹³¹, or a five-month period in which no one died¹³².)

I realize that some might try to "spiritualize" the plagues, but you can't spiritualize the Second Coming of Christ!

On the Mount of Ascension, the angels promised a physical return of Christ to that very same spot¹³³. That promise has to be literally fulfilled.

All in all, there are too many flaws in the Preterist position for me to subscribe to it.

Why I Hold to the Pre-Tribulation Model

That explains why I've eliminated the Preterist theory. But, what about the other positions? Do the Mid-Tribulation and Post-Tribulation theories have merit? Why have I chosen to stand with the Pre-Tribulation model? Here are some reasons:

1.) The Pre-Tribulation Model Is Based on a Literal Interpretation of Scripture

J. Dwight Pentecost states: "Pretribulation rapturism rests essentially on one major premise – the literal method of interpretation of the Scriptures. As a necessary adjunct to this, the pretribulationist believes in a dispensational interpretation of the Word of God. **The Church and Israel are two distinct groups with whom God has a divine plan.** The church is a mystery, unrevealed in the Old Testament ... This mystery program must be completed before God can resume His program with Israel and bring it to completion. These considerations all arise from the literal method of interpretation."¹³⁴

Simply stated, the Pre-Tribulation Model allows us to take God's Word literally. Instead of "spiritualizing" the Second Coming, and other events of the Book of Revelation (as the Preterist view does), it allows for the literal, bodily return of Christ to the Mount of Olives as the Scriptures declare.

2.) Daniel's Seventy Weeks Demand Such an Interpretation

*"Seventy weeks are determined upon **thy people** and upon **thy holy city** ..."*
(Daniel 9:24a)

It's clear from this verse that all seventy of Daniel's "weeks" have to do with the Jews and Jerusalem. Since the first sixty-nine weeks dealt exclusively with the Jewish nation, it stands to reason that the final Week (the Tribulation Period) would deal with the Jews as well.

This brings up an important point: God is not finished with Israel! Some End-Time teachers believe in a “Replacement Theology” which states that God has *permanently* set Israel aside, and has replaced her with the Church. Nothing could be farther from the truth! (Paul made this *very* clear in Romans 11.) Israel and the Church *both* have a place in the economy of God, and God will fulfill His promises to each one respectively. When the Church is removed, God will once again turn His attention toward Israel for the fulfillment of Daniel’s seventieth week.

3.) The Church is Conspicuous by Its Absence

If you’re a diligent student of God’s Word, then it’s likely you’ve noticed that the Church is absent for thirteen chapters of the Book of Revelation.¹³⁵

The Church is the main theme of chapters 2 and 3. Then, in chapter 4, the Church is pictured in Heaven surrounding the Throne. Although the church isn’t mentioned *by name* in chapter four, that “great multitude” could only be the Church!

Notice they’re wearing “crowns”, and that they “cast their crowns” before the Throne.¹³⁶ The Greek word (*stephanotos*) refers to the **Victor’s Crown** that’s awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The fact that people *have* these crowns must mean that the Judgment Seat of Christ has taken place, (and by extension, the Rapture as well). That places the Rapture at the beginning of chapter 4.

Once the Church has arrived safely in Heaven, the Tribulation begins. (Revelation 6 marks the *onset* of the Tribulation Period with the release of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. The first horse is ridden by the Antichrist himself.) After this brief mention of the Church in chapters 4-5, she is not mentioned again until she returns with Christ in Revelation 19.

4.) The Lack of Tribulation Instructions for the Church

No instructions are given to the Church concerning how to go through the Tribulation Period. However, instructions *are* given to the Jews.

*“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (**whoso readeth, let him understand:**) **Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.**” (Matthew 24:15-16)*

When Jesus preached this message on the Mount of Olives, He didn't say: "Whoso **readeth** let him understand". (Can you imagine how strange that would sound in the middle of a sermon?) Notice, those words are in parenthesis. Matthew *added* that phrase to instruct the Jews who will read this *during the Tribulation*.

If the Holy Spirit thought it was important to tell the *Jews* what to do in the Tribulation, wouldn't He have done the same for the Church, if the Church were going to be on earth during that time? The lack of "Tribulation Instructions" for the Church implies that she is absent from that time period.

5.) The Doctrine of Imminence

The Pre-Tribulation model is the only position that allows for the Doctrine of Imminence, (the belief that Christ could return at any moment).

The Mid- and Post-Tribulation positions eliminate the possibility of Christ's *imminent* return, simply due to the fact that the Tribulation hasn't started yet. If we believe that the Church has to go through *any part* of the Tribulation, then Christ can't *possibly* return today. Therefore, His return is not imminent.

The Partial Preterist position also eliminates this doctrine since, in *that* theory, Christ can't return until the Church has put all of God's enemies underfoot. All of His enemies are *not* underfoot at this time, therefore, it's impossible for Christ to return today.

6.) The Scriptures Seem to Teach a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

*"And you know what **restrains him** (the Antichrist) **now**, so that **in his (proper) time he will be revealed**. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only **he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way**. Then that lawless one will be revealed ..."* (2 Thess. 2:6-8 –NASB Comments in parenthesis mine)

This may be the most *convincing* evidence for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture! The Holy Spirit, through Paul, sets a time frame for the Antichrist's appearance. According to this verse, there is something **hindering** the Antichrist's coming, (holding him back, so he won't appear prematurely). But, when the time is right, the Restrainer will be *removed*, and *then* the Antichrist will be released onto the world stage.

The question arises: “Who (or what) is the Restrainer?” (There are actually three theories on this point.)

Human Government

Some believe that human government is the “Restrainer”. But, this theory is easily dismissed. If human government is the Restrainer, then before the Antichrist can come on the scene, *all of man’s governments* must cease to exist. (When Paul said the Restrainer would be “taken out of the way”, he used a word that means “to completely remove”.)

Since the Antichrist is a *politician* and rules over a *kingdom*, I think it’s obvious that human government won’t be terminated. Therefore, we can eliminate *it* as being the Restrainer.

The Holy Spirit

A second theory says that the Holy Spirit is the Restrainer. (This theory fails for the same reason as the previous one.) If the Holy Spirit were the “Restrainer”, then He’d have to be *completely removed from the earth* before the Antichrist’s appearance.

But, we’ve learned that the Tribulation Period will be a time of great evangelism.¹³⁷ If the Holy Spirit were gone, how would anyone get saved? He’s the *agent* in salvation! (He convicts people of sin¹³⁸, He draws them to Jesus¹³⁹, and He causes the new birth to take place¹⁴⁰.) With Him out of the picture, salvation would be impossible!

One final thought, (and this clinches it for me): With the Tribulation about to begin and the Church safely in Heaven, Revelation 5:6 speaks of the Spirit of God Who was “**sent forth into all the earth**”. Clearly then, the Holy Spirit will not be removed.

The Church

The only remaining possibility for the Restrainer, then, is the Church. Let’s see if the Church qualifies.

*“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only **he who now restrains** (hinders) **will do so until he is taken out of the way.** (2 Thess. 2:7)*

Two facts are brought out in this verse: The Restrainer “hinders” evil, and he will be “taken out of the way”. Does the Church meet those two qualifications? Certainly it does!

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus called the Church “the salt of the earth”. In the natural, salt does three things. It flavors¹⁴¹, it preserves¹⁴², and it **hinders**.

In Bible times (when one nation conquered another), the Victorious nation wanted to *make sure* that its foe would never rise to power again. So, they’d spread salt over the countryside to ensure that the land couldn’t produce crops (Judges 9:45). That salt “hindered” growth wherever it was spread.

In the same way, by its very presence, the Church hinders the growth of the kingdom of darkness. That would explain why evil is not equally restrained in every place. Wherever the Church has gone in power, evil is hindered from operating freely. But, in places where the Church is not strong, evil has free reign. So, the Church meets the first qualification for the Restrainer. It hinders evil.

The second qualification for the Restrainer is that it will be “taken (completely) out of the way”. That *removal* is called the Rapture! The Church is the Restrainer!¹⁴³

Now, look at verses 7 and 8 again: *“And you know what restrains (the Antichrist) now, so that in his (proper) time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only **he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. THEN that lawless one will be revealed ...**” (2 Thess. 2:6-8 –NASB)*

Notice the progression: The Church is removed and **then** the Antichrist is revealed. Mark it down: The Antichrist *can’t* be revealed until the Restrainer – the Church – is removed.¹⁴⁴

Those are the reasons why I believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.



CHAPTER 9 – Our Forever Home



When I got saved in late 70's, one of the accusations leveled against the Church, was that we were "too heavenly minded to be any earthly good". We took that to heart and made adjustments, but we adjusted too far! In the decades that followed, the Body of Christ focused almost exclusively on this life. Rarely did we hear a sermon on Heaven, or sing about the *Age to Come*, as we'd done in time past. Instead, our focus became our temporal blessings and living our best life now! Heaven, at best, was an afterthought.

Such was not the case with the early church! Their minds were filled with thoughts of eternity, as they carried out their earthly mission. When Paul spoke of having a "**desire**" to depart and be with Christ, he used a word that's translated elsewhere as "lust".¹⁴⁵ In another place, he proclaimed that he would "**much prefer** to leave (his) home in the body" to be present with the Lord.¹⁴⁶ The writer of Hebrews "**longed for**" a better country¹⁴⁷, and Peter "**looked forward**" to the New Heavens and the New Earth.¹⁴⁸

Clearly, the early Church lived in anticipation of their Heavenly home. If we don't, perhaps it's because we've believed some lies about Heaven.

Lies About Heaven

The first lie people believe about Heaven is that it will be boring. I've had people ask me, "Why would you want to go to Heaven and be bored forever?" The truth is, Heaven will be anything *but* boring!

Heaven can't be boring because *God* isn't boring! He's the Author of everything we find enjoyable: Music, humor, adventure, love, and fellowship. All these things find their origin in God. When we arrive in Heaven, I believe we'll discover that we haven't even scratched the surface of God's creativity.

In the Book of Revelation (speaking of the world to come), Jesus proclaims, "Behold, I make all things new".¹⁴⁹ In the Greek, it reads, "Behold, I make things

perpetually new". In other words, things won't remain static in eternity. Just when you think you "have a handle" on your new environment, God's going to come up with something you never thought of before. Something creative, new, and exciting! You won't be bored with your surroundings, because God will *keep on* making things new. There's no limit to the creativity of God! Heaven won't be boring because *God* isn't boring.

Secondly, Heaven won't be boring because your *friends* won't be boring. (Neither will you, by the way!) Eternity will be spent in fellowship with your loved ones, and saints from every generation.

Next, you won't be bored in Heaven because all your *possessions* are there. The things you have in this life are not your possessions. You don't get to keep any of this! Your real treasures are in Heaven!¹⁵⁰

Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place **for you**" (John 14:2). Your mansion is designed "for you". God knows your likes and dislikes, and He's custom-designed something that will thrill your heart! In short, Heaven will be the fulfillment of everything your heart has longed for, that never came to fruition on the earth. Heaven will be far from boring!

Never-Ending Church?

Another lie we've believed about Heaven, is that it will be a *never-ending church service*. (We've had help believing this one!) I've seen worship leaders stop in the middle of their set to rebuke the congregation: "You might as well get used to this!" they've said. "**It's all you'll be doing** in eternity!"

One popular song speaks of imagining a time "**when all I will do**, is forever, forever worship you". But, is that true? Is worship the *only* thing we'll be doing? Certainly not! God didn't create you to be one-dimensional *here*, and you won't be one-dimensional *there*!

Certainly there will be *times* of worship! Isaiah 66:22-24 speaks of those times: "*For as **the new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. 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. **And they shall go out from there ...***"

Did you see it? We don't stay in the Throne Room forever! We "go out from there" to do other things! Heaven is more than a Throne-Room. It's a City with trees, and rivers, and streets, and mountains, and gates, and buildings, and gardens! (Jesus and Paul both mention the "Paradise of God"¹⁵¹. The word "paradise" refers to an "enclosed garden".) In this life, I'm a "city person", and my wife enjoys the country. Our forever home will be the best of both worlds, with a beautiful City and a lush countryside to enjoy.

What Will We Do In Heaven?

Another thing that will continue into eternity is our service to the Lord. (Work is not part of the curse! Adam worked *before* the fall, and we'll continue to work after the curse is removed.) We were made to work, and accomplish, and conquer!

Someone wisely observed that there are two things that make life worthwhile: love and work. In eternity, there will be an abundance of both. I believe Heaven will be a place of dreaming and accomplishing! But, unlike our present experience, there will be nothing to hinder our results. It will be "fruitfulness without the frustration"! And, we'll have the joy of knowing that what we accomplish will last forever.

Not only will we serve; we will also *be served*. This is difficult to fathom! But, in Luke 12:37 Jesus said, "*Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say to you, that **he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them***".

The "lord" in this story is Jesus Himself! He'll serve us, as He rewards us for a job well done.

As we've already seen, worship will continue to be a part of the new order. But, it will be experienced on an entirely new level. For the first time, we'll experience worship with no hindrance from the flesh. The internal war will finally be over!

In this life, "the flesh drives against the spirit, and the spirit drives against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). But, in eternity that will be a thing of the past! No one's flesh will get in the way! No one will be "dragging his feet". There will be 100% participation, as everyone enters in with loving abandon! We'll be present in the Throne Room, surrounded by a myriad of angels! Millions of saints and "faith heroes" will engage in face-to-face worship, as faith has finally become sight.

In addition, Jesus indicates that we'll enjoy rich fellowship in Heaven. He encouraged us to use our money to "make friends" (win souls), so that when money is a thing of the past, **our friends would welcome us into their eternal homes** (Luke 16:9).

So, evidently, you'll visit my mansion, and I'll visit yours! No doubt, joy and laughter will be part of our fellowship for Jesus said, "Blessed are ye that weep now; for **ye shall laugh**" (Luke 6:21). Laughter is a godly thing, and we'll enjoy it for eternity!

How Big Is Heaven?

That depends on what you mean by the term. Up to now, I've been using the word "Heaven" generically. But specifically, we'll be living in the New Jerusalem. We'll also have access to the New Heavens and the New Earth. God's original intent was for man to live on earth, and that goal will ultimately be realized.

"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. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:1-2)

A new earth is going to be necessary, because the first earth is going to pass away. (God redeems a lot of things, but the earth is not one of them.) This earth, and the works that are in it, will be burned up. Peter describes the event.

*"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.** Seeing then that all these things shall be **dissolved**, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 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?** Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3:10-11)*

What will the new earth look like? I don't believe it's unlike the earth we live on now. (If it were going to be radically different, why would He still call it "earth"?)

John makes no reference to the size of the new earth, but he *does* give us the dimensions of the City. According to Revelation 21:16, the City is going to be 1500 miles square. (Notice how that's phrased: He didn't say it's "fifteen hundred square miles"; he said it's "fifteen hundred miles square". The City stretches fifteen hundred miles in every direction, including "up".)

In terms of "square mileage", the City will be two-and-a-quarter *million* square miles, per level. (I realize it's useless to speculate concerning how many levels might be in the City. But, I'm going to do it, anyway!) If God placed the levels a mile apart – that means there will be fifteen hundred levels!

We won't go into a lengthy description of the City. But, one thing is worth mentioning. John spoke of a 216-foot high wall made of "jasper". According to Thayer's Lexicon, the Greek word may have been more accurately translated as "diamond".¹⁵² If that definition is correct, can you imagine the *colors* as the Glory of God shines through the streets of transparent gold, and reflects off that diamond wall?

The New Jerusalem is going to be a beautiful place! Don't miss it for the world.

SECTION 3

Practical Wisdom for Successful Last Days Living



CHAPTER 10 – The Last Days Landscape



*“This know also, that in the **last days**¹⁵³ perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (2 Tim. 3:1-5)*

In these five verses, Paul describes the final generation and “sets the backdrop” for the Last Days. The times are described as “perilous” (“dangerous” or “hard to deal with”). Ultimately, the *times* will be hard to deal with, because *people* are going to be “hard to deal with”.

The first characteristic ascribed to the final generation is “Self-Love”. Essentially, this is the key to the entire list, because all of the other attributes flow out of this one. (Self-love is what *drives* the covetousness, the boasting, and the pride!) So, Paul exposes the *root* of the problem, and moves outward from there. (Most of this list is readily understood, so I’ll only comment where necessary.)

*“Men shall be **lovers of their own selves**, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.”*

The next few terms will need some explanation: When he says they’ll be “without **natural affection**”, the Greek word means “without family loyalty”. This speaks of a time when family members feel little allegiance toward one another. As a result, the family unit begins to disintegrate.

The list continues: “*Trucebreakers* (a manifestation of the lack of loyalty), *false accusers* (the word here is “diabolos” – a name for the devil himself. Rather than being Christ-like, they’re taking their cues from the enemy), *incontinent* (without self-control), *fierce*, *despisers of those who are good*. (Increasingly, those who take a stand for Biblical principles will be despised).

Traitors, heady (this means, “reckless, rash, or headstrong”), *highminded* (swollen with conceit), *lovers of pleasure **more** than lovers of God.*”

Notice, it didn’t say that they *didn’t* love God. They just love pleasure *more*! That means, Paul might even be describing the *Christian* culture of the day. (Ultimately, he’s revealing the condition of the secular world, but Christians can be influenced by the world around them.)

This is the world into which the Antichrist appears. It’s a wild, dangerous, and unpredictable world. Add to that Jesus’ predictions of wars, ethnic unrest, famine, pestilence (disease), and natural disasters; and it sets the stage for a very dangerous existence.

So, how do we live a successful Christian life, in that kind of a spiritual wasteland?

Five Strategies for Successful Last-Days Living

Strategy #1 - Return to Your First Love

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus addresses the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. Some believe that these churches represent different periods of church history, (with Ephesus representing the early church and Laodicea depicting the Last Days’ church). While there may be *some* truth to that theory, I believe it’s flawed, in that many of the principles are universal and touch *every* period of church history. There are lessons we can learn from every church Jesus addresses. (In fact, the greatest “Last Days” lesson may come from the very first church.)

Ephesus was a “busy” church. Jesus commended the church for her work ethic, but corrected her focus. The truth is: Ephesus worked diligently **for God**, but left little time for a relationship **with God**. In some measure, I think that describes *our* generation – desiring to accomplish and conquer, but lacking in intimacy. The lesson we learn from Ephesus is: Return to your first love!

The safest place we can find ourselves in the Last Days is radically in love with Jesus! Think about it! In an age where sin is running rampant, “loving Jesus” provides the power to resist temptation.¹⁵⁴ In an hour of persecution, our love for Jesus holds us steadfast, (even permitting us to lay down our lives for our faith, if it need be)!

Walking hand-in-Hand with the Master – in a place of loving obedience – is where we need to be in the Last Days.

Strategy #2 – Hold Fast to the Basics

We’ve already seen that deception will be a significant problem in the Last Days. But, Paul tells us how to “stay on track” amidst the error.

*“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, **deceiving**, and being **deceived**. **But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned** and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:13-15)*

This may be Paul’s finest counsel for living in the Last Days: “**Continue** in what you’ve **already learned**”!

Let me make this as plain as possible: The Holy Spirit is telling us (ahead of time) that **He’s not going to reveal any “new truth”** in the Last Days, to “correct” what the Church has been teaching since its inception. (That means the trend you’re seeing in that direction is not of God.)

There’s been so much of this in recent days! Men have arisen proclaiming that there is no hell. (Or, if hell *does* exist, it will be virtually empty because “love” is going to win out in the end!) Others are proclaiming a “Hyper-Grace” message that confuses “obedience” with “legalism”, and presents a God Who is always pleased with you, no matter what you do. Another stream of the Body of Christ sees truth as “emerging”, and another rejects the idea of “penal substitution”, opting to believe in a God who never *was* offended at sin, and a human race that never *was* lost! These teachings fly in the face of essential Christian doctrine!

We even have new “translations” of the Bible that have removed the concepts of hell, judgment, and morality. (One such translation encourages single Christians to find a regular sex partner to “avoid frustration”, in place of Paul’s command to *marry* in order to “avoid fornication”. God help us!)

An age of deception is not the time to embrace a new version of Christianity! (Although we have multitudes doing just that). No, we’ve been commanded to

“**Continue** in the things (we’ve) learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom (we’ve) learned them”.

Don’t be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Stay the course! Time is short! Hold fast to what you already know from God’s Word. Don’t abort your belief system! And, don’t turn your ears away from hearing the Truth!

The State of the Church

Second Timothy 3 describes the condition of the **world** in the days before the Rapture. But, Second Timothy 4 reveals the state of the **Church**.

“For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching [for **something pleasing and gratifying**], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another ... chosen to **satisfy their own liking** and to **foster the errors they hold.**” (2 Timothy 4:3 Amplified, emphasis mine)

This is a picture of the Last Days Church! It’s a Church that no longer tolerates wholesome instruction, but is looking for something new and appealing. We used to call this “Cafeteria Christianity”. (Approaching the Bible with the same attitude we’d have in a cafeteria. “I’ll take *that* and *that*! And, a little bit of *that*! But, I don’t fancy *that*! I believe I’ll *pass* on that, thank you!”)

In this verse, they were looking for something “pleasing and gratifying” that would “satisfy their own liking” and “foster the errors they hold”. And, when they turned their ears away from the truth, Satan was more than willing to turn them unto fables!

I’ll say it again. Don’t abort your belief system! Stay with the foundational truths of God’s Word! In an Age of Deception, it’s the safest place to be!

Strategy #3 – Stay in Faith

Psalm 91 contains some wonderful promises of protection: “*He who dwells in the **secret place** of the Most High shall remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty [Whose power no foe can withstand] ... A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, **but it shall not come near you.***”

*Only a spectator shall you be [yourself **inaccessible in the secret place** of the Most High].”¹⁵⁵*

What tremendous promises! But did you notice, they’re conditional? Not every Christian is going to experience this! It’s only for those who dwell in the “Secret Place”. What’s the “Secret Place”? I believe it’s the place of **Faith in God’s Word**.

Look at it again! In verse 1, God offers the Promise of Protection. When the Psalmist sees it, he immediately begins to receive it.

“I will **SAY** of the Lord, He is **MY** Refuge and **MY** Fortress, **MY** God, and in Him I [confidently] **TRUST!**”¹⁵⁶

Listen! It’s not enough to know that God is *a* Protector! You need to receive Him as *your* Protector! You need to speak God’s Promises over your life, and exercise your faith! In Ephesians, Paul called this the “**shield**” of faith!¹⁵⁷ As we speak God’s Word, and claim His Promises, His Word forms a *shield* around us that the enemy can’t penetrate!

As we approach the end of the Church Age, things are going to get increasingly difficult. But, we can be confident, knowing that our God is our Deliverer!

Strategy #4 – Increase Your Church Involvement

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and **so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**” (Heb. 10:25)*

Most of us have read this verse for years. But, how many of us realized that it specifically relates to the Last Days? The same Bible that warned of “perilous times” prescribes “increased church attendance” as our safety net.

It’s much easier for the enemy to deceive (and “pick off”) an individual believer, than it is for him to destroy the whole church. No matter how mature you feel you are, you still need a godly pastor to speak into your life, and correct you when you need it. Your flesh may prefer to stay home and watch the service on the Internet, but you can’t develop a healthy spiritual life that way.

It's in a loving Christian community that you'll find yourself instructed, challenged, and cared for. And safe.

Strategy #5 – Stay Informed, But Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

*“Men’s hearts failing them **for fear**, and **for looking** after those things which are coming on the earth ...” (Luke 21:26)*

It's interesting that Jesus connects “fear” and “focus” in this verse. (We see that connection all the way through the Bible!) When the armies of Israel focused on Goliath, they were paralyzed with fear! But, then David came along and refused to be intimidated! He looked past Goliath's size and saw the opportunity! (Was there risk? Sure! But, these are the times when heroes are made!)

Church, listen! If we focus on the world around us, we'll find ourselves becoming fearful. But, if we'll keep our eyes on Jesus, (and trust in Him), we'll be free to take our place in the greatest revival this world has ever seen! Let me tell you something: God is not about to be “outdone” by the devil in this hour! The devil may be “turning up the heat”, but where sin abounds, Grace does much more abound!

Much more.



Final Words



In this chapter we've addressed some of the "dangers" of Last Days living! But, I want to leave you with the same thoughts that *started* our journey.

For the Body of Christ these are exciting days! If you've ever wished that you could have lived in the Bible days, I've got news for you. These *are* "Bible days"!

There hasn't been a time like this since the Book of Acts. Think of it! You and I are privileged to be living in the time that Paul called "the climax of the ages" and Peter referred to as the "restitution of all things". God's Grand Finale is unfolding before us! Everything the prophets have spoken will find its fulfillment in *this* hour.

It's here! He's coming! It's just over the Horizon!

Even so come, Lord Jesus.



A Prayer to Receive Christ



If you want to be sure that your sins are forgiven, pray this with me:

"Lord, I'm a sinner. I'm sorry for my sin, and I'm willing to turn from my sin. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe He died for my sins, and rose again. Right now, I receive You, Jesus, as my Lord and my Savior. Come into my life. I choose to follow You from this day forward. Thank you for washing my sin away, and giving me a home in Heaven. I pray this in Jesus' name ... amen."

APPENDIX A – Seven Dispensations

A careful study of God's Word will reveal that God has divided "time" into seven "compartments" called "dispensations". A dispensation is "a period of time, in which God dealt with man in a certain way". Of course, God Himself never changes (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), but the way He has *approached* and *taught* man has varied in each dispensation.

1. The Dispensation of Innocence: From creation to the fall of Adam
2. The Dispensation of Conscience: From the fall to the Flood of Noah
3. The Dispensation of Human Gov't: From the flood to the call of Abraham
4. The Dispensation of Promise: From Abe's call to the Captivity in Egypt
5. The Dispensation of the Law: From the Exodus to the Cross
6. The Dispensation of Grace: From Pentecost to the end of the Tribulation
7. The Dispensation of Divine Gov't: The Millennium (Reign of Christ)

It's interesting that each of these dispensations begins with the blessing of God, and ends with the failure of man

- Innocence ended with man's fall into sin.
- Conscience ended with (nearly) universal corruption – (Gen. 6:5).
- Human Government ended with the Tower of Babel.
- Promise ended with God's people enslaved in Egypt.
- The Law ended with man killing his Creator.
- Grace will end with the Tribulation Period.
- Divine Gov't will end with the Final Rebellion – (Rev. 20:7-9).

APPENDIX B – Outline of the Book of Revelation

Throughout this book, I made several references to how the Book of Revelation is organized. To help you in your personal study, I've included an outline of the Book. A key verse in Chapter One gives us a "mini-outline" of the Book. Jesus instructed John to "write the **things which thou hast seen**, and the **things which are**, and the **things which shall be hereafter**". (Rev. 1:19)

This gives us the outline of Revelation in a nutshell. First, John records the "things which (he) has seen". (This refers to the vision of Jesus, as recorded in chapter 1.) Next, John transcribes "the things which are". (This speaks of the state of the seven churches as recorded in chapters 2 and 3.) Finally, John describes the "things which shall be hereafter". This refers to the prophecy of the Last Days (as chronicled in chapters 4 through 18).

After John has introduced the Book (in the first five chapters), he looks at the Tribulation period from six different vantage points.

Once he's unfolded the Tribulation in this way, he concludes with a description of the Second Advent, the Millennium, and the Eternal State.

A. John's Introduction

Chapter 1 – The things John had seen. (The vision of Christ.)

Chapter 2-3 – The Letters to the Seven Churches

Chapters 4-5 – The Rapture and the Scene Before the Throne

B. Six Different Views of the Seven Year Tribulation

The Seven Seals – (6:1-8:5) – Things which happen to the Nations

The Seven Trumpets – (8:6-11:19) – Things that happen to Nature

Satan's Ongoing Attacks Against Israel – (Chapters 12-14)

The Seven Vials – (Chapters 15-16) – Things that happen to Man

Religion in the Tribulation Period – (Chapter 17)

World Economics during the Tribulation Period – (Chapter 18)

C. The Conclusion

Chapter 19 – The Second Coming

Chapter 20 – The Millennium

Chapters 21-22 – The Eternal State

End Notes:

1. The study of the End-Times.
2. Eph. 1:10 Amplified
3. Acts 3:21
4. Rom. 5:20
5. John 2:10
6. For video teaching on the Signs of the Times, contact our ministry office
7. Isa. 46:9 Good News Bible
8. 2 Peter 1:12
9. Revelation 1:1
10. This is the Pre-Tribulation Rapture model. Other viewpoints will be discussed later in this book.
11. Acts 2:14-17
12. A “dispensation” is a period of time in which God deals with man in a certain way. There will be a total of seven dispensations in human history. For more information, refer to Appendix A.
13. Revelation 22:17
14. Other Rapture theories will be discussed later in this book.
15. This Judgment will be discussed in Chapter Four.
16. The term “saint” simply refers to believers. Every born again Christian is a saint (1 Cor. 1:2).
17. Colossians 3:4, 1 Timothy 6:14, 2 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:8, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 1:7, 1 Peter 5:4, 1 John 2:28 and 1 John 3:2
18. Revelation 6:1-8:5
19. Revelation 8:6-11:19
20. Revelation 10:3-4
21. Revelation 15:6-8
22. Revelation 9:14-16; 16:12
23. Matt. 13:39-42
24. This is a term which refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.
25. Death may still occur during the Millennium, but it will be rare, as longevity will have been restored. Isaiah 65:20

26. Please note that it is only those who were born during the Millennium (and rejected Christ) who are tempted at this time. The Church is not included in this temptation.
27. Revelation 20:7-9
28. Revelation 20:10
29. John 5:28-29
30. Revelation 4:1; 11:12
31. Daniel 12:1
32. Revelation 20:5a
33. The Greek word refers to a period of time that is so small it cannot be divided any further.
34. 1 Corinthians 15:51
35. Musterion
36. Several newer translations bring this out. Colossians 1:25-26 in Williams' Translation says: "That I might prove among you the universal message of God, the open secret (musterion), covered up from the people of former ages and generations,
37. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52
38. 1 Corinthians 15:53
39. The King is Coming, by Dr. H.L. Willmington, (c) 1973, 1981 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois. p. 15
40. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52
41. Matthew 12:34
42. 2 Cor. 5:10
43. Luke 16:23
44. 1 Thessalonians 4:16
45. Revelation 20:14
46. The unbelievers have a Judgment they'll face as well. The Great White Throne Judgment will be discussed in chapter 4.
47. Each "week" in Daniel's prophecy represents a seven-year period.
48. Revelation 13:14-15
49. 2 Thessalonians 2:4
50. This is reminiscent of the ninth plague in Egypt: the Plague of Darkness.

51. Matthew 24:29
52. See also Isaiah 13:9-11
53. Revelation 19:11-15
54. Some believe that this verse is referring to nuclear warfare. But, the Scriptures are clear. This is something that God does, apart from man. (God doesn't need a bomb to split the atom!) Jesus speaks a Word, and Antichrist's armies are destroyed.
55. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather OUT of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity."
56. "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."
57. This is why He rules with a rod of iron. Revelation 12:5
58. The believer's judgment is called the "Judgment (Bema) Seat of Christ". The unbeliever's judgment is called the "Great White Throne Judgment".
59. 1 Corinthians 4:5
60. 1 Peter 2:19 KJV
61. Romans 14:12
62. Hebrews 10:31
63. Matthew 10:15
64. Luke 12:48
65. Hebrews 10:29
66. Matthew 24-25
67. To avoid redundancy, some verses of the Olivet Discourse will be omitted.
68. "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. 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." (Matt. 24:1-2)
69. Remember the difference between the "Appearing" (Rapture) and the "Second Coming"
70. Luke 21:20-24
71. "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)
72. "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. (Matthew 24:30)

73. His "Appearing"
74. His "Coming"
75. 1 Corinthians 15:51
76. Rev. 1:20
77. Acts 1:6
78. 2 Tim. 3:1
79. Matt. 8:28
80. 2 Timothy 3:13
81. 2 Timothy 3:14a-15a
82. Holy Land Overwhelmed with "Messiahs",
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/577180.stm
83. Revelation 6:6
84. Matthew 20:2
85. Revelation 7:9,13-14
86. Revelation 7:4-8
87. Daniel 9:27
88. Of course, this necessitates the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple. Since Antichrist's entrance into the Temple doesn't take place until mid-Tribulation, the rebuilding of the Temple could take place even after the Church is gone. It's possible that this could be part of the peace treaty.
89. Revelation 13:15
90. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4
91. Matthew 24:27
92. Matthew 24:4-8
93. Matthew 24:9-14
94. Matthew 24:15
95. Daniel 11:21
96. Daniel 7:8
97. Daniel 7:25
98. Daniel 9:27
99. 2 Thess. 2:4

100. Rev. 13:16-18
101. Rev. 20:4
102. Daniel 9:25a
103. Daniel 9:25b
104. Daniel 9:26a
105. Daniel 9:26b
106. The King James Bible calls them “the people of the prince that shall come” the “prince”, of course, being the Antichrist.
107. Tacitus described the armies as containing “a strong contingent of Arabs, who hated the Jews with unusual hatred”. (Tacitus, *The History*, New Ed., bk.5.1 Josephus spoke of upwards of 60,000 Muslims who made up the armies which destroyed the Temple. (The Complete Works of Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* or *The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 3.) Several prophecies speak of God’s wrath coming against the enemies of Israel (at His return), and the warnings are always directed at the Muslim nations. Numbers 24:14,17-20 – Moab, Edom, Seir. Ezekiel 30:1-5 – Egypt, Cush [Sudan], Put [Libya and N. Africa], Lud [Turkey] and all Arabia. Zephaniah 2:8-9, 12-13 Assyria (Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq). All of these nations are Islamic (Adapted from Joel Richardson’s book, The Islamic Antichrist)
108. Historically speaking, the Turkish Empire was the seat of the Islamic Caliphate. In 1923, the Caliphate was officially abolished, but Muslims worldwide await its restoration.
109. [Tirmidhi Sahih, Sunan Abu Dawud, (Sahih), vol. 5, p. 207; also narrated by Ali B. Abi Talib, Abu Sa’id, Umm Salmah, Abu Hurayra].
110. A “Caliph” is the leader of the Caliphate. “Caliph” means “successor” and the title is given to the person who is to be Muhammad’s representative, his voice, and the embodiment of his values.
111. [Ibn Maja, Kitab al-Fitan #4084 as quoted in Kabbani, *Approach of Armageddon?*, 231.]
112. [Al-Sadr and Mutahhari, *The Awaited Savior*, prologue, 4, 5.]
113. [Tirmidhi as quoted in Zubair, *Signs of Qiyamah*, 42, and Abdullah, *Islam, Jesus, Mehdi, Qadiyanis, and Doomsday*, 54.]
114. [Izzat and ‘Arif, *Al Mahdi and the End of Time*, 40.]
115. [Tabarani, as related by Hadrat Abu Umamah, as quoted in Zubair, *Signs of Qiyamah*, 43, and Abdullallah, *Islam, Jesus, Mehdi, Qadiyanis, and Doomsday*, 55.]
116. [Tabarani, as related by Hadrat Abu Umamah, as quoted in Zubair, *Signs of Qiyamah*, 43, and Abdullallah, *Islam, Jesus, Mehdi, Qadiyanis, and*

Doomsday, 55.]

117. [Al-Burhan fi Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir al-Zaman, as quoted by Yahya, <http://www.endoftimes.net/08mahdiandtheendtimes.html>.]
118. [Al-Sadr and Mutahhari, *The Awaited Savior*, prologue, 4, 5.]
119. [Amini, *Al-Imam Al-Mahdi*.]
120. [Sahih Muslim, Book 041, Number 6985.]
121. [Dr. Waleed A. Muhanna, "A Brief Introduction to the Islamic (Hijri) Calendar," available online at http://fisher.osu.edu/~muhanna_1/hijri-intro.html.]
122. Revelation 13:4
123. As previously mentioned, the Muslims have their own calendar and Shariah Law. The Mahdi will seek to institute both. In this he will fulfill the Biblical prophecy as he seeks to change "times" (the calendar) and "laws" (Shariah).
124. At the time of this writing, it remains to be seen whether this Caliphate will be accepted by the Muslim world as a whole. At the very least, it reveals the Muslim world's desire to restore the Caliphate. It's unlikely, in my opinion, that the present Caliph (leader) will be the Antichrist. But, if this Caliphate stands, then the "empire" is being restored, and all we're waiting for is the appearance of the Man of Sin.
125. Cited In: Grant Jeffrey, *Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of the Nations*, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Waterbrook Press, 1992, p. 89. (Emphasis mine).
126. Cited In: Mal Couch, *Dictionary of Pre-Millennial Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Kregel Publications, 1996, p. 345. (Emphasis mine).
127. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody, Massachusetts, © 2009, p. 173, definition 1a
128. Revelation 19:11-16
129. Revelation 11:6
130. Matthew 17:9
131. Revelation 16:21 (Amp) – "And great hailstones, as heavy as a talent [between fifty and sixty pounds ... fell from the sky ..."
132. Revelation 9:6
133. Acts 1:11
134. *Things To Come*, by J. Dwight Pentecost (c) 1958 by Dunham Publishing Co., Printed by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530. p. 193.
135. The Church is not mentioned in Revelation 6 through 18.

136. Revelation 4:4,10
137. Matt. 24:14
138. John 16:8
139. John 6:44
140. John 3:5
141. Job 6:6
142. In the days before refrigeration, meat was rubbed with salt in order to preserve it.
143. Some may argue that the Church is the Bride, and therefore it couldn't be addressed as a "he" (2 Thess. 2:7). But, the Church is also the Body of Christ. In that light, it's perfectly acceptable to refer to the Church as a "he".
144. Even if the Holy Ghost were the Restrainer, this principle would hold true. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would never leave us. So, if God were going to remove the Spirit, He'd also have to remove those in whom the Spirit dwells (since we can't be separated)! And, the Church would still be Raptured before the Antichrist was revealed.
145. Philippians 1:23
146. 2 Corinthians 5:8 CJB
147. Hebrews 11:16 CEB
148. 2 Peter 3:13
149. Revelation 21:5
150. 1 Peter 1:4
151. 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7
152. Thayer, Joseph H., Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (ninth printing), Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009, p. 296
153. The Greek word is "Eschatos" which refers to the very last of the "last days" – the days just before the Rapture of the Church.
154. John 14:23-24
155. Psalm 91:1,7-8 Amplified
156. He believed the Promise in his heart, and confessed it with his mouth! That's the operation of faith! Romans 10:9-10.
157. Ephesians 6:16

EARTH'S FINAL HOURS

We live in a season of change. However we might attempt to describe it, it would still be understated. When I came into the Church thirty-six years ago, we talked about the Coming of the Lord, but (apart from the rebirth of Israel and the occasional natural disaster) we were hard-pressed to find examples of Prophecy that had been fulfilled in our day. Today, it's nearly impossible to turn on the television without another Prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes.

The world around us is hurtling down a path of transformation at breakneck speed. Every strata of society is flowing in harmony, as if orchestrated by an unseen mastermind. What began decades ago as an erosion of Christian values has since gained momentum! Society has pulled out all the stops, as it races toward the New World Order and the appearance of the Antichrist.

In "Earth's Final Hours" You'll Discover:

- *The Chronological Order of End-Time Events*
- *Who Will Participate In the Rapture*
- *Whether a True Believer Can Miss the Rapture and Be "Left Behind"*
- *The Role of the AntiChrist in Bible Prophecy*
- *Practical Wisdom for Successful Last Days Living*
- *And Much Much More!*

All around the world, believers are sensing that something has changed. It's no longer "business as usual". We've entered into a season from which there is no turning back.

Join as we journey into the future and discover what lies ahead during "Earth's Final Hours".

Dr. Ron Swanson is a graduate of Rhema Bible Training Centre, in Tulsa, Oklahoma and holds a Doctorate in Theology from Victory Bible College. Ron has been in full time ministry since 1990, and currently serves as the Dean of VBCI in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, where he lives with his wife (Bev) and his two adult children, Chandra and Shaun. Dr. Ron teaches the Bible in an enjoyable and practical manner, and has the ability to make difficult truths simple.



Ron Swanson, Th.D.

