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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The Rapture and End Times

When Jesus walked on the earth in human form, He plainly told His disciples that He would depart and then return for them one day. When He did return, He would take them back to heaven with Him (what modern Christians refer to as “the Rapture”). For example, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His eleven faithful apostles:

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again, and receive you to Myself*; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:1-3, emphasis added).

Clearly implied by Jesus’ words was the possibility of His return during the lifetimes of the eleven. In fact, after hearing what Jesus said, they simply would have assumed that He would be returning for them within their lifetimes.

Jesus also repeatedly warned His disciples to be *ready* for His return, again implying the possibility of His return within their lifetimes (see, for example, Matt. 24:42-44).

Jesus’ Imminent Return in the Epistles

The apostles who wrote New Testament letters certainly affirmed their belief that Jesus might return within the lifetimes of their first-century readers. For example, James wrote:

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, *for the coming of the Lord is at hand* (Jas. 5:7-8, emphasis added).

There would have been no reason for James to admonish his readers to be patient for what could not happen within their lifetimes. He believed, however, that the coming of the Lord was “at hand.” Contextually, James wrote at a time when the church had been suffering persecution (see Jas. 1:2-4), a time when believers would naturally long for the return of their Lord.

Similarly, Paul certainly believed that Jesus might return within the lifetimes of many of his contemporaries:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, *that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.* For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.* Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thes. 4:13-18, emphasis added).¹

From this we learn also that when Jesus returns from heaven, the bodies of deceased believers will be resurrected and, along with believers who are alive at His coming, will be “caught up to meet the Lord in the air” (the Rapture). Because Paul also stated that Jesus would bring with Him from heaven those who had died “in Him,” we can only conclude that at the Rapture, the spirits of the heavenly believers will be joined with their just-resurrected bodies.

Peter also believed that the coming of Christ was imminent when he wrote his first epistle:

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, *fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ....The end of all things is at hand;* therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer....but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; *so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation* (1 Pet. 1:13, 4:7, 13, emphasis added).²

Finally, when John wrote his letters to the churches, he too believed the end was near and that the readers of his day might well see Jesus’ return:

Children, *it is the last hour;* and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this *we know that it is the last hour....*And now, little children, abide in Him, *so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming....*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. *We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him* just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 2:18, 28; 3:2-3, emphasis added).

His Delay

Looking back over the last 2,000 years, we realize that Jesus did not return as soon as the apostles had hoped. Even back in their day, there were those who were beginning to doubt that Jesus would *ever* return in light of how long it had been since His departure. As Peter’s earthly life drew to a close, for example (see 2 Pet. 1:13-14), Jesus still had not come back, and so Peter addressed those with doubting thoughts in his final letter:

¹ A few other scriptures that show Paul’s belief that Jesus could possibly return within the lifetimes of his contemporaries are Phil. 3:20; 1 Thes. 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thes. 2:1-5; 1 Tim. 6:14-15; Tit. 2:11-13; Heb. 9:28.

² Other scriptures that indicate Peter’s conviction that Jesus’ could return within the lifetimes of his contemporaries are 2 Pet. 1:15-19; 3:3-15.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:3-10).

Peter affirmed that Jesus' delay was due to His love and mercy—He wants to give more time for people to repent. But He also affirmed that there was absolutely no doubt Jesus would return. When He does, He will come in great wrath.

Scripture is also very clear, as we will see, that Christ's wrathful return will be preceded by years of unprecedented worldwide tribulation and the pouring out of God's wrath upon the wicked. Much of the subject matter of the book of Revelation covers that future period of time. As we will see later in our study, Scripture indicates that there will be seven years of future tribulation. There is no doubt that the Rapture of the church takes place at some point within or near those seven years.

When Exactly Does the Rapture Occur?

A question that often divides Christians is that of the exact time of the Rapture. Some say that the Rapture will occur just before seven years of tribulation, and can therefore occur at any time. Others say that it will occur right at the middle point of the seven years of tribulation. Still other says it will occur at some point after the middle of the seven years of tribulation. And still others say the Rapture will occur at the time of Jesus' wrathful return at the end of the Tribulation.

This issue is certainly not worth dividing over, and all four camps should remember that they all agree that the Rapture will occur at some point within or very near that future seven-year time period. That's a fairly narrow window in thousands of years of history. So rather than divide over our disagreement, we would be better off to rejoice in our agreement! And regardless of what we each may believe, it is not going to change what is actually going to occur.

That being said, I must tell you that for the first twenty-five years of my Christian life, I believed the Rapture would occur prior to the seven-year Tribulation. I believed that because that is what I had been taught, and I also didn't want to go through what I read about in the book of Revelation! As I studied Scripture for myself, however, I began to adopt a different view. So let's take a look together at what the Bible says and see what conclusions can be drawn. Even if I don't persuade you to join my camp, we must still love each other!

The Olivet Discourse

Let's begin by considering the 24th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, a section of Scripture that is foundational in regard to the events of the end times and the return of Jesus. Coupled with the 25th chapter of Matthew, they are known as the *Olivet Discourse*, because those two chapters are the record of a sermon Jesus delivered to some of His closest

disciples³ on the Mount of Olives. As we read it, we'll learn about many events of the end times, and we'll consider what Jesus' disciples, those to whom His discourse was addressed, would have concluded about the timing of the Rapture:

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt 24:1-3).

Jesus' disciples wanted to know about the future. They specifically wanted to know when the temple buildings would be destroyed (as Jesus had just foretold), and what would be the sign of His return and the end of the age.

Looking at it in retrospect, we know that the temple buildings were completely demolished in 70 A.D. by general Titus and the Roman armies. We also know that Jesus has not returned yet to gather the church to Himself, so those two events are hardly simultaneous.

Jesus Answers Their Questions

It seems that Matthew did not record Jesus' answer to the first question about the future destruction of the temple buildings, whereas Luke did in his Gospel (see Luke 21:12-24). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus immediately began speaking of the signs that would precede His return and the end of the age:

And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads *you*. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. And *you* will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that *you* are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs" (Matt. 24:4-8, emphasis added).

It is clear from the start of this sermon that Jesus believed His first-century disciples could very well be alive during the events that lead up to His return. Notice how many times He used the personal pronoun *you*. Jesus used the personal pronoun *you* at least twenty times in the 24th chapter alone, so all His listeners would have believed that they would live to see what Jesus foretold.

We know, of course, that every disciple who listened to Jesus that day died long ago. We should not conclude, however, that Jesus was deceiving them, but that He Himself did not know the exact time of His return (see Matt. 24:36). It was indeed quite possible then for those who heard His Olivet Discourse to be alive at His return.

Jesus' foremost concern was that His disciples would not be deceived by false Christs, as so many will be during the last days. We know that the antichrist himself will be a false Christ, deceiving much of the world. They will consider him to be a wonderful savior.

Jesus said that there will be wars, famines and earthquakes, but He indicated that those events are *not* signs of His return, but only "the beginning of birth pangs." It would be safe to say that those signs have been occurring for the last two thousand years. However, Jesus next speaks of something that has not yet occurred.

³ Mark 13:3 names four who were present: Peter, James, John and Andrew. Incidentally, we find the Olivet Discourse also recorded in Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36. Luke 17:22-37 also contains similar information.

Worldwide Tribulation Begins

“Then they will deliver *you* to tribulation, and will kill *you*, and *you* will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:9-14, emphasis added).

Again, had you asked those who originally heard Jesus that day, “Do you expect that you will be alive to see the fulfillment of these things?” they certainly would have answered in the affirmative. Jesus kept using the personal pronoun *you*.

As we just read, after the “birth pangs” will come an event that certainly has not yet occurred, a time of unprecedented, worldwide persecution of Christians. We will be hated by “*all nations*,” or literally, “*all ethnic groups and tribes*.” Jesus was speaking of a certain specific time when that would occur, not a general time over hundreds of years, because He said in the very next sentence, “And *at that time* many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another.”

His statement obviously speaks of the falling away of Christian believers who will then hate other believers, as non-believers can't “fall away,” and they already hate one another. Thus, when worldwide persecution begins, the result will be a great apostasy of many who claim to be followers of Christ. Whether they are genuine or false believers, sheep or goats, *many* will fall away, and they in turn will reveal the identities of other believers to the persecuting authorities, hating those they once professed to love. The result will be the purification of the church all over the world.

Then there will also be a rise of false prophets, one of whom is prominently featured in the book of Revelation as the antichrist's accomplice (see Rev. 13:11-18; 19:20; 20:10). Lawlessness will increase to the degree of draining what little love remains in people's hearts, and sinners will become utterly heartless.

Martyrs and Survivors

Although Jesus foretold that believers would lose their lives (see 24:9) not all apparently will, because He promised that those who endure to the end will be saved (see 24:13). That is, if they don't allow themselves to be deceived by the false Christs or false prophets and resist the temptation to abandon their faith and fall away, they will be saved, or rescued, by Christ when He comes back to gather them in the sky. This future time of tribulation and rescue was also succinctly revealed to the prophet Daniel, who was foretold,

And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life” (Dan. 12:1-2).

Salvation will still be graciously offered even during those days, as Jesus promised that the gospel would be proclaimed to all the nations (literally, “ethnic groups and tribes”), giving one final opportunity to repent, and then the end would come.⁴ It is interesting that we read in the book of Revelation what could very well be the fulfillment of Jesus' promise:

⁴ This promise is often pulled from its context, and it is frequently said that before Jesus will return, we must complete the task of world evangelism. But within its context, this promise is speaking of a final proclamation of the gospel to the entire world just before the end.

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (Rev. 14:6-7, emphasis added).

It is thought by some that the reason an angel will proclaim the gospel then is because by that time in the seven-year tribulation, the Rapture will have occurred and all the believers will be gone. But that is, of course, speculative.

The Antichrist

The prophet Daniel revealed that the antichrist will actually take a seat in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem during the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation and proclaim himself to be God (see Dan. 9:27, which we will study later). It is this event that Jesus had in mind as He continued His Olivet Discourse:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.⁵ And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short" (Matt. 24:15-22).

This is a more specific elaboration concerning the tribulation Jesus had spoken of earlier (see 24:9). When the antichrist declares that he is God from Jerusalem's temple, unimaginable persecution will break out against believers in Jesus. In declaring himself to be God, the antichrist will expect everyone to acknowledge his deity. Consequently, all true followers of Christ will immediately become official enemies of the state to be hunted down and killed. That is why Jesus said the believers in Judea should flee for the mountains without any delay, praying that their escape not be hindered for any reason.

My guess is that it would be a good idea for believers all over the world to flee to remote places when that event occurs, as it probably will be one that is televised around the globe. Scripture tells us that the whole world will be deceived by the antichrist, thinking he is their Christ, and they will give him their allegiance. When he declares himself to be God, they will believe him and worship him. When he speaks blasphemies against the true God—the God of the Christians—he will influence the entire deceived world to hate those who refuse to worship him (see Rev. 13:1-8).

Jesus promised eventual deliverance for His own people by "cutting short" those days of tribulation; otherwise "no life would have been saved" (24:22). His "cutting short" those days for "the sake of the elect" must be a reference to His delivering them when He appears and gathers them in the sky. Jesus does not tell us here, however, how long after the antichrist's declaration of deity that deliverance will occur.

In any case, we note once more that Jesus left His listeners that day with the impression that they would live to see the antichrist declare his deity and wage war against the Christians. This stands in contrast to those who say that believers will be raptured to

⁵ If the rapture of the church occurs at this precise point in the seven-year Tribulation as some say, there would be no need for Jesus' instructions for believers to flee for their lives because they would all be raptured.

heaven prior to that event. If you had asked Peter, James or John if Jesus would be returning to rescue them prior to the antichrist's declaration of his deity, they would have responded, "Apparently not."

War Against the Saints

Scripture foretells in other places of the antichrists' persecution of believers. For example, it was revealed to John, as he recorded it in the book of Revelation:

And there was given to him [the antichrist] a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. *And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him* (Rev. 13:5-7, emphasis added).

Note that the antichrist will be given "authority to act" for forty-two months, or exactly three-and-a-half years. It is interesting that this is exactly one-half the time of the seven-year Tribulation. It seems reasonable to think that it will be the final forty-two months of the Tribulation that the antichrist will be given his "authority to act," since his authority will certainly be completely taken away from him when Christ returns to wage war against him and his armies at the close of the Tribulation.

Obviously, this "authority to act" for forty-two months speaks of some *special* authority, as the antichrist will certainly be given *some* authority by God during his rise to power. This special "authority to act" could well be a reference to the time he is given to overcome the saints, because we read in the book of Daniel:

I kept looking, and that horn [the antichrist] was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days [God] came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom....And he [the antichrist] will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and *they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time* (Dan. 7:21-22, 25, emphasis added).

Daniel foretold that the saints will be given into the hand of the antichrist for "a time, times, and half a time." This cryptic phrase should be interpreted *three-and-a-half years*, according to a comparison of Revelation 12:6 and 14. We are told in Revelation 12:6 that a certain symbolic woman will be given a place to hide in the wilderness to be "nourished" for 1,260 days, which amounts to three-and-a-half years of 360-day years. Then, just eight verses later, she is spoken of again, and it is said that she will be given a place in the wilderness to be "nourished" for "a time and times and half a time." Thus "time and times and half a time" is the equivalent of 1,260 days or three-and-a-half years.

So the word "time" in this context means *year*, "times" means *two years*, and "half a time" means *half a year*. This unusual expression found in Revelation 12:14 must mean the same thing as it did in Daniel 7:21. Thus we now know that the saints will be given into the hand of the antichrist for three-and-a-half years, the same time that we were told in Revelation 13:5 that the antichrist would be given "authority to act."

I think it goes without saying that both of these forty-two month periods will be identical periods of time. If they begin at the antichrist's declaration of deity at the middle of the seven-year Tribulation, then the saints will be given into his hands for the next three-and-a-half years, and Jesus will deliver them when He appears in the sky and gathers them to himself at or near the close of the seven-year Tribulation. If, however, those forty-two

months begin at some other point during the seven-year Tribulation, then we could conclude that the Rapture will occur at some point before the end of the seven-year Tribulation.

The difficulty with the latter of those two possibilities is that it requires that the saints will be given into the hands of the antichrist *before* they are in danger and need to flee for the mountains at his declaration of deity. That seems illogical.

The difficulty with the former of those two possibilities is that it would seem to mean that the saints will still be on the earth during many of God's cataclysmic and worldwide judgments of which we read in the book of Revelation. We will consider this difficulty later.

Now let's return to the Olivet Discourse.

False Messiahs

Jesus next more fully elaborated to His disciples the importance of not being misled by reports of false Christs:

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (Matt. 24:23-28).

Notice again Jesus' many uses of the personal pronoun *you*. His audience on the Mount of Olives would have expected to live to see the rise of false Christs and false prophets who would perform great miracles. And they would have expected to see Jesus return in the sky like lightning.

Of course, the danger of falling away at that time will be very great, because persecution against believers will be so horrific and false Christs and false prophets will be so convincing due to their miracles. That is why Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples about what would occur just prior to His return. He did not want them to be misled like so many will be. True and steadfast believers will wait for Jesus to return in the sky like lightning, whereas those who are not His true followers will be drawn to false Christs like vultures are drawn to a carcass in the wilderness.

Signs in the Sky

Jesus continued:

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt. 24:29-31).

The images of this section of Jesus' Olivet Discourse would have been familiar to the Jews of His day, as they are images right from Isaiah and Joel that speak of God's final judgment at the end of the world, what is often referred to as "the day of the Lord," when

the sun and moon will be darkened (see Is. 13:10-11; Joel 2:31). Then all the world's inhabitants will see Jesus return in the sky in His glory, and they will mourn. Then Jesus' angels will "gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other," indicating that believers will actually be caught up and gathered to meet Jesus in the air, and it will all happen at the sound of "a great trumpet."

Again, had you asked Peter, James or John at this point in the Olivet Discourse if Jesus would return for them before or after the time of the antichrist and the great tribulation, they would have certainly replied, "After."

The Return and the Rapture

This section of the Olivet Discourse all sounds very familiar to an event of which Paul wrote, one that is undoubtedly the Rapture of the church, yet one which many commentators say occurs *before* the tribulation period begins. Consider the following scripture that we examined earlier in this chapter:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until *the coming of the Lord*, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For *the Lord Himself will descend from heaven* with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and *with the trumpet of God*; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain *shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that *the day of the Lord* will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape (1 Thes. 4:13 – 5:3, emphasis added).

Paul wrote of Jesus coming from heaven with the trumpet of God and of believers being caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It sounds just like what Jesus was describing in Matthew 24:30-31, what clearly occurs after the rise of the antichrist and tribulation.

Moreover, as Paul continued writing about Christ's return, he mentioned the subject of when it would occur, "the times and epochs," and he reminded his readers that they already knew full well that "the day of the Lord [would] come just like a thief in the night." Paul believed that Christ's return and the Rapture of believers would occur on "the day of the Lord," a day when terrible wrath and destruction would fall upon those who were expecting "peace and safety." As Christ returns to catch away His church, His wrath will fall on the world.

This harmonizes perfectly with what Paul wrote in a later letter to the Thessalonians concerning Christ's wrathful return:

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven* with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed (2 Thes. 1:6-10, emphasis added).

Paul stated that when Jesus returned to give relief to the persecuted Thessalonian Christians (see 1 Thes. 1:4-5), He would appear “with His mighty angels in flaming fire” to afflict those who had afflicted them, dealing out just retribution. This hardly sounds like what so many describe as the pre-tribulation Rapture, when the church is supposedly caught up by Christ *before* the seven-year tribulation period begins, and what is normally described as a *secret* appearance of Jesus and a *quiet* catching away of the church. No, this sounds exactly like what Jesus described in Matthew 24:30-31, His return at or near the *end* of the tribulation period, when He catches away believers and pours out His wrath on unbelievers.

The Day of the Lord

Later in that same letter, Paul wrote:

Now we request you, brethren, *with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him*, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that *the day of the Lord* has come (2 Thes. 2:1-2).

First, note that Paul’s subject was Christ’s return and the Rapture. He wrote of our “gathering together” to Him, using the identical words as Jesus used in Matthew 24:31, when He spoke of the angels who would “gather together” His elect from “one end of the sky to the other.”

Second, note that Paul equated those events with “the day of the Lord,” just as He did in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:2. That couldn’t be more obvious.

Paul then continued:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed*, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God (2 Thes. 2:3-4, emphasis added).

The Thessalonian Christians were being somehow misled that the day of the Lord, which according to Paul must begin with the Rapture and the return of Christ, had already come. But Paul plainly stated that it *could not come* until *after* the apostasy (perhaps the great falling away of which Jesus spoke in Matt. 24:10) and *after* the antichrist declares his deity from the Jerusalem temple. So Paul clearly told the Thessalonian believers that they should not expect Christ’s return, the Rapture, or the day of the Lord, until after the antichrist’s declaration of deity.⁶

Paul next describes Christ’s return and His subsequent destruction of the antichrist:

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may 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. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for

⁶ This dispels the theory that Jesus’ words in the Olivet Discourse only have application to Jewish believers who are born-again during the Tribulation because all those who were born again before the Tribulation will supposedly be already raptured. No, Paul told the gentile Thessalonian believers that their Rapture and return of Christ would not occur until after the antichrist makes his declaration of deity, what occurs in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation.

those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (2 Thes. 2:5-10).

Paul stated that the antichrist will be brought to an end “by the appearance of His coming.” If this “appearance” is the same as His appearance at the Rapture mentioned just nine verses earlier (see 2:1), then the antichrist will be slain at the same time that the church is gathered to meet the Lord in the air. Corroborating with this is the record of Revelation chapters 19 and 20. We read there of Christ’s return (see Rev. 19:11-16), the destruction of the antichrist and his armies (see 19:17-21), the binding of Satan (see 20:1-3) and the “first resurrection” (see 20:4-6), in which believers who were martyred during the seven-year Tribulation come back to life. If this truly is the *first* resurrection in the sense that it is the first general resurrection of the righteous, then there is less doubt that the Rapture and Christ’s wrathful return occur at the same time as the destruction of the antichrist, as Scripture plainly tells us that all those who have died in Christ will be bodily resurrected at the Rapture (see 1 Thes. 4:15-17).⁷

Being Ready

Let’s return once again to the Olivet Discourse.

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.⁸ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:32-35).

Jesus didn’t want His disciples to be caught off guard, which was the primary point of the Olivet Discourse. They would know that He was “right at the door” when they began to “see all these things”—worldwide tribulation, the apostasy, the rise of many false prophets and Christs, the antichrist’s declaration of deity, and then even closer to the time of His return, the sun and moon being darkened along with falling stars.

However, directly after telling them of signs that will precede His coming by a few years, months or days, He then told them that the *precise* time of His return would remain a mystery:

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Matt. 24:36).

How often this scripture is quoted out of its context! It is usually quoted to support the concept that we have *no idea* when Jesus will return, because He could return at any time and rapture the church. Yet within its context, that is not at all what Jesus meant. He had just made quite an effort to insure that His disciples would be ready for His return by telling them of many signs that would occur just before He returned. Now He simply tells them that the exact day and hour will not be revealed to them. Moreover, Jesus was obviously not referring in this passage to His supposed *first* return before the seven-year Tribulation begins, when the church supposedly would be secretly raptured, but of His

⁷ Some say that this resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20:4-6 is actually the *second* part of the *first* resurrection, the resurrection that occurred during Christ’s *first* return at the Rapture. What warrant is there for this interpretation? If the resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is actually a second resurrection, why wasn’t it called “the second resurrection”?

⁸ Although those who heard Jesus that day may have thought that their generation would be the generation to see all those things take place, we know they weren’t. Thus we must interpret Jesus’ words in 24:34 to mean that all those things would happen in one generation, or perhaps that the *race* (as the word *generation* is sometimes translated) of Christians (or Jews) would not pass away until all those things take place.

return at or near the end of the Tribulation. That is not debatable from an honest look at the context.

His Return—A Complete Surprise?

An argument that is often used against the idea of the Rapture occurring near or at the end of the Tribulation is that such a return would not be a surprise as Jesus (supposedly) said it would be, because such a return could be anticipated by the events of the Tribulation. There must be a pre-tribulation Rapture, they say, otherwise the believers would not need to be ready and stay alert as Scripture says they should, knowing that it could be seven years or more before Jesus returns.

Against this objection, however, is the fact that the entire point of Jesus' Olivet Discourse was to insure that His disciples would be ready for His return at or near the end of the Tribulation, and He revealed to them numerous signs that would precede His coming. Why is the Olivet Discourse punctuated with so many admonitions to be ready and to stay alert even when Jesus knew that His return had to be at least several years away from the time He originally spoke those words? *Apparently Jesus believed that Christians need to be ready and stay alert even if His return is still years away.* The apostles who in their letters admonished believers to be ready and stay alert for Jesus' coming were only imitating Jesus Himself.

Additionally, those who believe that it is only a pre-tribulation Rapture that justifies any admonitions to stay ready have another problem. According to them, Christ's first return precedes the end of the Tribulation by seven years. So Jesus' first alleged return really can't happen at just *any* time—it must happen exactly seven years before the end of the Tribulation. Thus in reality, there is no need to expect that Jesus will return until world events are in place to begin the seven years of Tribulation, events that can certainly be anticipated and ascertained.

Most who subscribe to a pre-tribulation Rapture, if they are honest, will say that they know Jesus will not return today or tomorrow due to the political situation in the world. There are still prophesied events that must be fulfilled before the seven years of the Tribulation can begin. For example, as we will soon learn from the book of Daniel, the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years, and that will mark the beginning of the Tribulation. Thus the Rapture, if it occurs seven years before the end of the Tribulation, must occur when the antichrist makes his seven-year agreement with Israel. Until there is something on the political horizon that will make that scenario possible, there is no need for pre-tribulation Rapture theorists to expect that Jesus will return.

Moreover, for those pre-tribulation Rapture proponents who believe that Jesus will also return at the *end* of the Tribulation, that means the exact day of Jesus' alleged second return could be calculated. Once the Rapture occurs, what Jesus said only the Father knows, could be calculated just by counting ahead seven years.

Again, from what Jesus actually did say, He clearly did not want His return to be a complete surprise. In fact, He *wanted* it to be anticipated by certain events of the Tribulation. Simply put, Jesus did not want His disciples caught off guard, as would the world. He continued His Olivet Discourse:

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will

be left.⁹ Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (Matt. 24:37-44)

Again, Jesus' obvious concern was that His disciples be ready for His return. That in fact, was the primary reason for everything He said before and after this point in the Olivet Discourse. *His many admonitions for them to stay ready and alert are not so much of an indication that His return would be a complete surprise, but an indication of how difficult it will be under the adversity of the time to remain ready and alert.* This being so, those who are expecting an any-time, pre-Tribulation Rapture, thinking they are more ready than other Christians, may actually *not* be ready for what they may well face. If they expect no tribulation and then find themselves in the midst of worldwide persecution under the reign of the antichrist, the temptation to fall away may overwhelm them. Better to be prepared for what Scripture actually teaches will occur.

And again, if you asked Peter, James or John when they could expect to see Jesus return, they would have told you of all the signs that Jesus told them would occur just prior to His return. They would *not* have expected to see Him before the tribulation period or the rise of the antichrist.

A Thief in the Night

Notice that even Jesus' "thief in the night" analogy is contained within the context of His revealing many signs whereby His disciples would not be caught off guard by His return. So the "thief in the night" analogy cannot be rightly used to prove that none should expect to have *any* idea of when Jesus will return.

Both Paul and Peter used Jesus' "thief in the night" analogy when they were writing about "the day of the Lord" (see 1 Thes. 5:2-4, 2 Pet. 3:10). They believed the analogy had application to Jesus' wrathful return at or near the end of the seven-year Tribulation. Interestingly, however, Paul told his readers, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief" (1 Thes. 5:4). He correctly interpreted Jesus' analogy, realizing that those who were alert to the signs and obediently following Jesus were not in the darkness, so that Christ's coming would not catch them by surprise at all. For them, Jesus would *not* come like a thief in the night. Only those in darkness would be surprised, which is exactly what Jesus taught. (See also Jesus' use of the "thief in the night" phrase in Rev. 3:3 and in 16:15, where He uses it in reference to His coming at the battle of Armageddon).

From this point on in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus repeatedly admonished His disciples to be ready for His return. At the same time, He also told them how they could be ready, as He recited the parables of the unfaithful slave, the ten virgins, and the talents, and then foretold the judgment of the sheep and goats (all worth reading). In almost every case, He warned them that hell awaited those who were not ready for His return (see Matt. 24:50-51; 25:30, 41-46.) The way to be ready is to be found doing God's will when He returns.¹⁰

⁹ It doesn't really make any difference if the person who is suffering judgment in these examples is the one taken or the one left to remain, as is often debated. The point is that some will be ready for Christ's return and some will not. Their readiness will determine their eternal destiny.

¹⁰ Clearly, for Jesus to warn His closest disciples of not being ready at His return, there existed the possibility of their not being ready. If He warned them of the penalty of eternal punishment for not being ready because of sin, then it was possible for them to forfeit their salvation because of sin. How this should speak to us of the importance of holiness, and the folly of those who say that it is impossible for believers to forfeit their salvation.

Another Objection

Some object to a Rapture near or at the end of the Tribulation on the basis that biblically, the righteous are never punished with the unrighteous, proven by such examples as Noah, Lot, and the Israelites in Egypt.

Indeed, we certainly have good reason to believe that the righteous will not suffer God's wrath during the seven-year Tribulation, as that would stand in contrast to many biblical precedents and promises (see, for example, 1 Thes. 1:9-10; 5:8).

Jesus, however, foretold of the great tribulation that the righteous will suffer during that time. It will be not at the hands of God, but at the hands of the unrighteous. Christians are not exempt from persecution—they are promised persecution. During the seven-year Tribulation, many believers will forfeit their lives (see Matt. 24:9; Rev. 6:9-11; 13:15; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Many will be beheaded (see Rev. 20:4).

Thus, if every believer in a certain nation is martyred, there will be nothing to prevent God's wrath from falling on everyone in that entire nation. And certainly if there are believers within a nation, God is able to protect them from His judgments as they fall on the wicked. During His judgments upon Egypt in Moses' time, He proved that. God wouldn't even let a dog bark against an Israelite, while judgment after judgment fell on the neighboring Egyptians (see Ex. 11:7). Similarly, we read in the book of Revelation of stinging locusts that will be released to afflict the wicked people of the earth for five months, but they are specifically not permitted to afflict the 144,000 Jewish bond-servants who will be sealed with a special mark on their foreheads (see Rev. 9:1-11).

The Rapture in Revelation

Nowhere in the book of Revelation do we read of the Rapture of the church, and neither do we read of any other appearance of Christ except the one mentioned in Revelation 19, when He comes to slay the antichrist and his armies at the battle of Armageddon. The Rapture is not written as occurring even then. The resurrection of Tribulation martyrs, however, is mentioned as occurring in that same time period (see 20:4). Because Paul wrote that the dead in Christ will rise at Christ's return, which is the same time the church will also be raptured, this, along with other scriptures we've already considered, leads us to believe that the Rapture will not occur until the end of the seven-year Tribulation, depicted in Revelation 19 and 20.

But there are other views.

Some find the Rapture in Revelation 6 and 7. In Revelation 6:12-13, we read of the sun becoming "black as sackcloth" and of stars falling from the sky, two signs that Jesus said would immediately precede His appearing and His gathering of the elect (see Matt. 24:29-31). Then, a little later in chapter 7, we read of a great multitude in heaven from every nation, tribe and tongue who have "come out of the great tribulation" (7:14). They are not mentioned as being martyrs as is another group just one chapter earlier (see 6:9-11), leading us to speculate that they are raptured rather than martyred—believers who are *rescued* out of the great tribulation.

It is certainly right to assume that the Rapture will occur sometime soon after the cosmic events depicted in Revelation 6:12-13, simply because of what Jesus similarly said in Matthew 24:29-31. We are given no conclusive indication, however, as to when the cosmic events of Revelation 6:12-13 will actually occur during the seven years of the Tribulation. If the events described in Revelation 6:1-13 are sequential, and if the Rapture occurs right after 6:13, it would lead us to believe that the Rapture will *not* occur until after the appearance of the antichrist (see 6:1-2), worldwide war (see 6:3-4), famine (see 6:5-6), death of one-fourth of the earth by means of war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts (see Rev. 6:7-8), and many martyrs being made (see Rev. 6:9-11). Certainly all of those events described

could occur *before* the end of the seven-year Tribulation, but they could also describe the entire seven-year period, placing the Rapture at the very end.

Adding some weight to the idea of the Rapture occurring *before* the end of the seven years is the fact that Revelation describes two sets of seven judgments after Revelation 8: the “trumpet judgments” and the “bowl judgments.” The latter of these two is said to finish God’s wrath (see 15:1). Just before the bowl judgments begin, however, John sees “those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass” (15:2). These victorious saints *could* have been raptured. On the other hand, they could have been martyred. Scripture doesn’t tell us which. Moreover, we don’t know if 15:2 bears any chronological relationship to the scenes described near it.

Another fact found in Revelation that may add weight to the idea of the Rapture occurring before the end of the seven years is this: At the occasion of the fifth “trumpet judgment” recorded in Revelation 9:1-12, we are told that the stinging locusts will be permitted to hurt only those who “do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4). The only ones of whom we are told will have that seal are 144,000 descendants of Israel (see Rev. 7:3-8). Thus it seems that all other believers will have to be raptured before that fifth trumpet judgment; otherwise they would not be exempt from the power of the stinging locusts. Additionally, because the locusts will hurt people for five months (9:5, 10), it is thought that the Rapture must occur at least five months before the end of the seven-year Tribulation.

There are, of course, ways around this logic. Perhaps there are others who are sealed and are simply not mentioned in Revelation’s condensed synopsis. In any case, if this does prove that the Rapture occurs prior to the fifth trumpet judgment, it also indicates that there will be one group of believers who will *not* be raptured before the release of the stinging locusts—the 144,000 specially-marked descendants of Israel. Yet they will thankfully be protected from being harmed by God’s wrath as it is manifested by those stinging locusts.

The conclusion to all of this? I can only conclude that the Rapture occurs either *near* the end or *at* the end of the seven-year Tribulation. Believers need not fear suffering God’s wrath, but they should be prepared for severe persecution and possible martyrdom.

The Tribulation Period

Let’s spend some time looking a little more closely at what Scripture teaches about the seven-year Tribulation. How do we arrive at a figure of seven years as being the length of the Tribulation? We must study the book of Daniel, which, besides the book of Revelation, is probably the most revealing book of the Bible relative to the end times.

In the ninth chapter of his book, we find that Daniel is a captive in Babylon with his fellow Jews. While studying the book of Jeremiah, Daniel discovered that the length of Jewish captivity in Babylon would be seventy years (see Dan. 9:2; Jer. 25:11-12). Realizing that this seventy-year period was almost completed, Daniel began to pray, confessing the sins of his people and asking for mercy. In response to his prayer, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and revealed Israel’s future right through the time of the Tribulation to the return of Christ. The prophecy contained in Daniel 9:24-27 is one of the most amazing in Scripture. I’ve quoted it below along with my bracketed comments:

Seventy weeks [these are obviously weeks of years, as we will see, or a total of 490 years] have been decreed for your people [Israel] and your holy city [Jerusalem], to finish the transgression [*possibly* the culminating act of Israel’s sins—the crucifixion of their own Messiah], to make an end of sin [*probably* a reference to Christ’s redemptive work on the cross], to make atonement for iniquity [*no doubt* a reference to Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross], to bring in everlasting righteousness [the beginning of

the earthly reign of Jesus in His kingdom], to seal up vision and prophecy [*perhaps* a reference to the end of the writing of Scripture, or to a fulfilling of all pre-millennial prophecy], and to anoint the most holy place [*possibly* a reference to the establishing of the millennial temple]. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem [this decree was made by King Artaxerxes in 445 B.C.], until Messiah the Prince [the Lord Jesus Christ] there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [a total of 69 weeks, or 483 years]; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress [that is the rebuilding of Jerusalem, previously destroyed by the Babylonians]. Then after the sixty-two weeks [that is, 483 years after the decree of 445 B.C.] the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing [Jesus will be crucified in 32 A.D., if we calculate by the Jewish calendar of 360 days per year], and the people [the Romans] of the prince who is to come [the antichrist] will destroy the city and the sanctuary [a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Titus and the Roman legions]. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he [the “prince who is to come”—the antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [Israel] *for one week* [or seven years—this is the Tribulation period], but in the middle of the week [at about three and a half years] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations [when the antichrist sets himself in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, calling himself God; see 2 Thes. 2:1-4] will come one who makes desolate [Jesus will return], even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate [the defeat of the antichrist by Jesus] (Dan. 9:24-27, emphasis added).

490 Special Years

From the decree of 445 B.C. by King Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, God allocated 490 special years of future history. But those 490 years were not sequential; rather, they were divided into two segments of 483 years and seven years. When the first 483 years of that allocated time were completed (on the year Jesus was crucified), the clock stopped. Daniel probably never would have dreamed that the clock would stop for what is now almost 2,000 years. At some point in the future, that clock will start up again and run for seven final years. That final seven years is referred to, not only as “the Tribulation,” but also as “Daniel’s seventieth week.”

Those seven years are divided into two periods of three-and-a-half years. At the midpoint, as we just read in Daniel’s prophecy, the antichrist will break his covenant with Israel and “put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.” He will then, as Paul told us, seat himself in the Jerusalem temple and declare that he is God.¹¹ That is the “abomination of desolation” to which Jesus referred (see Matt. 24:15). That is why believers in Judea should “flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:16), as that marks the beginning of the worst tribulation the world has ever witnessed (see Matt. 24:21).

It is possible that the “Judean flight” was symbolically seen by John in his vision, recorded in the twelfth chapter of the book Revelation. If so, the Judean believers will find a special place of safety prepared for them in the wilderness where they will be “nourished” for exactly three-and-a-half years, the remaining period of the seven-year Tribulation (see Rev. 12:6, 13-17). John foresaw Satan’s rage over their escape, and his subsequent war with the rest of those who “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17). That is why I think it would be a good idea for believers all around the world to run for safety in remote locations when the antichrist declares his deity in Jerusalem.

¹¹ This indicates to us, of course, that the Jerusalem temple must be rebuilt, as currently, there is no temple in Jerusalem (as of the year 2005 when this is being written).

Daniel's Last Revelation

One other interesting passage from Daniel that we have not yet considered is found in the final thirteen verses of his amazing book. They are words spoken by an angel to Daniel. I have quoted it below along with my bracketed comments:

Now at that time Michael [the angel], the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time [this would be the same distress of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:21]; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued [this could be a reference to the Judean flight or the rescue of believers at the Rapture]. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt [the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked]. And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. [After their resurrection, the righteous will receive new bodies that will shine with God's glory.] But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." [The amazing advances in transportation and knowledge over the past century are seemingly fulfilling this foretelling.]

Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river, and the other on that bank of the river. And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be until the end of these wonders?" And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time [three-and-a-half years according to the deciphering revelation of Rev. 12:6 and 12:14]; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed. [Just as Daniel 7:25 told us that the saints would be given into the hands of the antichrist for three-and-a-half years, here it seems obvious that they are the final three-and-a-half years of the seven years of Tribulation. The end of all the events spoken of by the angel will occur when "the power of the holy people" is "shattered."] As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. Many will be purged, purified and refined [through tribulation, no doubt]; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. [This should not be interpreted to be the time *between* those two events, because they both occur in the middle of the seven years. Rather, it should be interpreted that from the time those two events take place, it will be 1,290 days until *something* very significant occurs at the end. 1,290 days is 30 days more than three-and-a-half years of 360-day years, a time-period that is repeatedly mentioned in prophetic scripture of Daniel and Revelation. Why this extra thirty days is added is a matter of speculation. To add to the mystery, the angel next told Daniel:] How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! [So now we have another forty-five days of mystery.] But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again [Daniel's own promised resurrection] for your allotted portion at the end of the age" (Dan. 12:1-13)

Obviously, something very wonderful will happen at the end of those extra 75 days! We'll have to wait and see.

We know from reading the final chapters of Revelation that there are many events that apparently occur soon after Christ's return, one being the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, concerning which an angel told John, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). Perhaps this is the same blessing referred to by the angel who spoke to Daniel. If so, that glorious supper will occur about two-and-a-half months after Jesus returns.

Perhaps those seventy-five days are filled with other things that we know will occur according to what is written in the final chapters of Revelation, such as the casting of the antichrist and the false prophet in the lake of fire, the binding of Satan, and the setting up of the administration of Christ's worldwide kingdom (see Rev. 19:20 – 20:4).

The Millennium

The *Millennium* is a term that refers to the time when Jesus will personally reign over the entire earth for a period of one thousand years (see Rev. 20:3, 5, 7), which occurs after the seven-year Tribulation. Isaiah foresaw Christ's governmental reign over the earth almost three thousand years ago:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and *the government will rest on His shoulders*; and His name will be called...Prince of Peace. *There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore* (Is. 9:6-7, emphasis added).

Similarly, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that her Son would reign over a never-ending kingdom:

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; *and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end*" (Luke 1:30-33, emphasis added).¹²

During the Millennium, Jesus will personally reign from Jerusalem's Mt. Zion, which will be raised in elevation above its present height. His rule will be one of perfect justice for all nations, and there will be peace over the whole earth:

In the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war (Is. 2:2-4).

¹² This scripture illustrates how easy it can be to make a wrong assumption about the timing of prophetic events by misconstruing what scripture actually says. Mary could have easily and logically assumed that her special Son would be reigning on David's throne within a few decades. Gabriel told her she would give birth to a son who would reign over the house of Jacob, making it sound as if Jesus' birth and reign would be two seamless events. Mary would never have imagined that there would be at least 2,000 years between them. We also should be cautious of making similar assumptions as we try to interpret prophetic scripture.

Zechariah predicted the same:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her." Thus says the Lord, "I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts will be called the Holy Mountain"Thus says the Lord of hosts, "It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one will go to another saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will also go.' So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord." Thus says the Lord of hosts, "In those days ten men from the nations of every language will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech. 8:2-3, 20-23).

The Bible teaches that believers will actually be ruling and reigning with Christ during those one thousand years. Their level of responsibility in His kingdom will be based upon their faithfulness now (see Dan. 7:27; Luke 19:12-27; 1 Cor. 6:1-3; Rev. 2:26-27; 5:9-10; and 22:3-5).

We will be clothed in our resurrected bodies, but there apparently will be natural people living in mortal bodies who will populate the earth at that time. Furthermore, it seems that the longevity of the patriarchs will be restored, and that wild animals will lose their ferocity:

I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred. And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed....The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain. (Is. 65:19-20, 25; see also Is. 11:6-9).

There are many references to the future Millennium in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. For further study, see Is. 11:6-16; 25:1-12; 35:1-10; Jer. 23:1-5; Joel 2:30-3:21; Amos 9:11-15; Mic. 4:1-7; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 14:9-21; and Rev. 20:1-6.

Many of the Psalms also apply prophetically to the Millennium. For example, read this passage of Psalm 48:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in *the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mt. Zion in the far north, the city of the great King. God, in her palaces, has made Himself known as a stronghold.* For, lo, the kings assembled themselves, they passed by together. They saw it, then they were amazed; they were terrified, they fled in alarm. Panic seized them there, anguish, as of a woman in childbirth (Ps. 48:1-6, emphasis added).

When Jesus sets up His administration in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Millennium, apparently many of the rulers of the earth who survive the Tribulation will hear the report of Jesus' reign and will travel to see it for themselves! They will be shocked by what they see.¹³

¹³ From looking at other scriptures, it seems that the Millennium will begin, not only with believers populating the earth, but with unbelievers as well (see Is. 2:1-5; 60:1-5; Dan. 7:13-14).

For other Psalms that refer to the millennial reign of Christ, see Ps. 2:1-12; 24:1-10; 47:1-9; 66:1-7; 68:15-17; 99:1-9; and 100:1-5.

The Eternal State

The end of the Millennium marks the beginning of what Bible scholars refer to as the "Eternal State," which begins with a new heavens and new earth. Jesus will then turn everything over to the Father, according to 1 Corinthians 15:24-28:

Then comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For "He has put all things in subjection under His feet" [Ps. 8:6]. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He [the Father] is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him [the Father], then the Son Himself will also be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

Satan, who had been bound for the duration of the thousand years, will be released at the end of the Millennium. He will then deceive those who are inwardly rebellious toward Jesus but who have been feigning obedience to Him (see Ps. 66:3).

God will permit Satan to deceive them in order to reveal the true condition of their hearts so that they can be rightfully judged. Under his deception, they will gather together to attack the holy city, Jerusalem, intending to overthrow the government of Jesus. The battle won't last long because fire will come down from heaven to consume the surrounding armies, and Satan will be cast permanently into the lake of fire and brimstone (see Rev. 20:7-10).

That future gathering for battle is foretold in Psalm 2:

Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [Christ]; "Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury; "But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My Holy mountain." "[Jesus now speaks] I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord; He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'" Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way. For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

A Final Judgment

Just preceding the Eternal State, one final judgment will take place. All the unrighteous of all the ages will be bodily resurrected to stand before God's throne and be judged according to their deeds (see Rev. 20:5, 11-15). Everyone who is now in Hades will be brought before that judgment, referred to as the "Great White Throne of Judgment," and will then be cast into Gehenna, the lake of fire. This is referred to as "the second death" (Rev. 20:14).

The Eternal State begins with a passing away of the first heavens and earth, fulfilling Jesus' two-thousand-year-old promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Then God will create a new heavens and earth just as Peter foretold in his second epistle:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:10-14; see also Is. 65:17-18).

Finally, the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven to the earth (see Rev. 21:1-2). Our minds can hardly begin to grasp the glories of that city, which covers an area one-half the size of the United States (see Rev. 21:16), or the wonders of that never-ending age. We will be living in the perfect society forever, under the rule of God, to the glory of Jesus Christ!