

When Is the Rapture? eBook

Sane and Sensible Perspectives on the Last Days

Jesus gave us a massive clue to many things about the Last Days when He drew this comparison between the Days of Noah and that ones that would precede His Return. Ironically, the main thing He was seeking to tell us about the timing of His Return has been completely misunderstood by those who believe that this passage describes a pre-Tribulation “taking away” of the saints. Nothing could be further from the truth!

37 But as the days of Noah were, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the ark. 39 And they did not know until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 42 Therefore watch; for you do not know what hour your Lord comes. Matthew 24:37-42 MKJV

If you understand this passage, your only question will be, “How did we ever get this so wrong?” Yet, for over a hundred years a false teaching has been spreading through Christendom—something no Christians prior to 1830 believed (See “The History of the Rapture”). Its message is that Jesus wills secretly come for His Bride and “take us away” in the Rapture—long before danger comes our way. The main proof text is right here in this passage in which He compares the End times to “the days of Noah.”

After describing what happened to that generation, Jesus repeats the warning: “So also will be the coming of the Son of Man.” What will that be like? There will be two working beside each other on a farm and “one will be taken, the other left.”

This will not be a unique event—it will happen all over the place. Two, for instance, will be working at a mill and “one shall be taken, and the other left.” That’s the rapture of believers, isn’t it? One group—the faithful Bride—is “taken” up to glory; the other is left behind. A hugely popular book and movie series made exactly this claim. But, don’t they have it backwards?

Let’s back up to what Jesus was making His comparison to. Remember, what will happen in our day will be just like what happened “in the days of Noah.” Who was it who were taken in Noah’s day? The faithful family? No! They were the ones who huddled in the ark (always a picture of the Church) as waves of judgement flooded the earth, wiping out all life around them. Or better said, the waters of judgment “came and took them all away.” The only ones who were taken were the unfaithful ones taken away by the judgment to meet their doom. We do not want to be



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part of that unhappy group. It will be far better to ride out the flood of judgement than to be taken away by it.

Jesus uses the exact same word “taken” to describe those situations in our day when one will be taken and the other left. The only sane and sensible way to interpret this is by the clear meaning according to Jesus’ own interpretation. Jesus is not trying to trick us. He is seeking to prepare us. He doesn’t want us among those who are “taken”! The ones who are “taken” are the ones who are carried off to judgment. How did we ever get this so wrong?

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Without question this is the topic of primary concern. Will the Church--will believers--go through the terrible events of the Great Tribulation? Or, will the Rapture take us out of here? Why not let Jesus tell us plainly what His view is?

[For the Sake of the Elect](#) (Matthew 24:21-22, 29-31)

Being the “elect” of God isn’t exactly what we might wish it to be. Get ready for the trials and troubles of the End Times. It looks like we have been chosen for a lot of things that we would never have signed up for—if that choice were ours to make.



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[At the Last Trumpet](#) (Matthew 24:29-31)

The “last trumpet” should be the last word on when the Rapture will take place. Yet, even clear signs can be misunderstood. Let this passage be a trumpet call to a sane and sensible interpretation of the timing of the Lord’s Return.

[As in the Days of Noah](#) (Matthew 24:37-44)

This illustration is a perfect example of how words in scripture can be lifted out of their context, then have their meaning completely twisted. So, before we start jumping for joy at “being taken away,” let’s listen to what Jesus was actually saying.

[For You Do Not Know](#) (Matthew 24:42-44)

Can we take the blindfolds off now? What is the point of watching and waiting, if there will be no sign of His coming? What is the true point of His warning in this passage? Let’s open our eyes and read the scripture with spiritual vision.

[Will the Son of Man Find Faith?](#) (Luke 18:1-8)

The scriptural allusions to the Last Days are everywhere. Even here in this well-known passage about the reluctant judge, Jesus slipped in a little nugget about His Return. This particular nugget exposes the pre-trib rapture teaching as fool’s gold.

[In the Twinkling of an Eye](#) (1 Corinthians 15:52)

This amazing transformation gets overlooked in the debate over the Rapture where the focus is on the when, not the amazing what. Catch the wink you’ll get a clear picture of when it all happens: You’re going to want to be “on the ground” for this.

[We Who Are Left](#) (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The fascinating thing about this passage is the way Paul readily includes himself in the company of those who will go through all the terrible things he expects to come in the run up to the Lord’s return. He looks forward to going through it!

[The Dead Will Rise First](#) (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The rising of the righteous dead is an unmistakable element of what will happen when Jesus returns to reign upon the earth. That’s why what Paul put into this passage speaks so profoundly to us about the timing of the Rapture and the Tribulation.

[Like a Thief in the Night](#) (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)

Who is the thief: Jesus or Satan? Will the real “thief” of this passage please stand up? And may the real victims of the “thievery” show yourselves! Here’s a hint: read this rightly and you will WANT to be left behind.

[That Day Shall Not Come Until](#) (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

Many people are saying that the Rapture could happen “at any moment.” Just read this passage with faith-opened eyes and you will see that this kind of thinking is impossible. Because “that day shall not come until”—and that “until” hasn’t happened yet!



The Restrainer Removed (2 Thessalonians 2:5-8)

If Jesus Christ is the One to watch for, the antichrist is the one to watch out for. We are told by Paul that he is going to be held back—restrained—until the proper time. Can any time be the right time for such a rascal to be given free reign?

Be Patient Until the Lord Comes (James 5:7-8)

This is perhaps “the least” of the New Testament passages concerning the Last Days. Despite its humble appearance, it still has some powerful things to say to us about the timing of the Rapture and of the Lord’s Return.

He Who Overcomes (Revelation 3:10-12)

Jesus has a lot to say in the Book of Revelation about overcoming. How can you be an overcomer, unless you have something tremendous to overcome? No medals are ever given for those who flee from danger.

The Mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:15-17)

The mark of the beast! We have heard about it all our lives. That dreaded mark. When it appears, we’ll know that the choice is life or death in this life and eternal life or death in the next. Will we really be the ones who have to make that choice?

Blessed Are the Dead (Revelation 14:9-13)

Can a passage from the middle of the Tribulation period give us insight into when the Rapture of believers takes place? Indeed, it can. Could be it’s time to come down from the clouds and see earth events by the light of scripture.

The Matthew 24 Timeline (Matthew 24:1-31)

Did Jesus give us a timeline for the major events of the End Times? Yes, He did! This wonderful timeline functions like a skeleton, providing the structural element that supports living flesh and connects it the right way.

A History of the Rapture (By J. Preston Eby)

This history of the Rapture theory is eye opening. One question to ask about it is this: Does this strange and sordid history sound like the way the Lord would bring His truth to birth?

Scriptures and Footnotes

Free Downloads

[pdf Signs of the Second Coming \(36-page eBook\) \(693 KB\)](#)

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

"The Harvest at the End of the Age"

This parable is meant to be a soul-stirring encouragement to believers who want to see a lot of souls saved. And it is. But it also brings a sobering message of doom to two groups whose primary focus is not the salvation of the lost. First, doom is declared for all the lost who do not repent. They will be uprooted from the earth like weeds. The second doom comes through the destruction of any hope that the pre-trib theory is true. In effect, Jesus is saying here that if you want to be taken away first, then you would have to qualify as a weed. But, then, that would be to your doom...

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 ESV

Wanting What God Wants

Is anyone thinking about this? With all the debate about pre-trib, mid-trib or post-trib most of the attention seems to be about saving oneself. People say things like, "Well, I sure don't want to go through the Tribulation. I don't want to stick around for that." Of course, we don't. None of us want to—at least by fallen nature. Fallen nature is always thinking about personal survival and comfort. That's what it does. But Jesus has given us a new nature, hasn't He? By the new birth, we now have a nature like His that wants to do God's will. Even if we don't want to be faithful, we can pray like He did when He was being asked to go through something He wanted to avoid.

And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Mark 14:36 ESV

We can all loudly thank God that Jesus—as the representative Man—was willing to lay His life down in sacrifice for us. Our salvation depended upon it! If He had turned aside from His path of duty, we would all be lost. If He had only been thinking about His own survival and comfort, we could never have been saved. Mercifully, He didn't back down in the face of suffering and death. As the first and only upright man since Adam fell, He was thinking about us. He came to earth for the sake of the harvest. When the Father showed Him there was no other way to harvest lost souls, He yielded fully and freely to the assignment. What about us?



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Jesus wants us thinking (with Him) about the harvest of souls—at “the end of that age.” That’s what is so incredible about this parable when you stop to think about it. When Jesus told us this the harvest had not even begun! Salvation through faith in Him could only truly begin once He died and resurrected. Wouldn’t it have made more sense for Him to talk about, let’s say, the harvest “of the age”, rather than one limited to the end of the age? After all, for two thousand years the church has been harvesting souls from the world during this age of grace. Why not tell us more about that? Why turn our attention to the end of the age, before that age even begins?

What Is He Thinking?

One can only guess at what Jesus may have been thinking, but perhaps there are two reasons. The first are the obvious ones. He would want the Church to know that until the end of the age, there will be “weeds”—the seed of the evil one—to contend with in every generation (see the first part of the parable quoted below). The Church will work under a condition where all that the evil one plants upon the earth will be allowed to grow up alongside the work that God will be doing to grow His wheat. There will be no final elimination of lies, or of evil, or of evil doers until the end of the age. Only then—at the very end—will the ingathering take place. Will the Church be harvested first? Will a pre-end Rapture take us all away? No, emphatically not!

Jesus says that the Lord of the Harvest will say to His servants (the angels), “Gather the weeds first.” You don’t want to be in that group! They will be gathered, bundled together and burned. Until that moment the wheat—faithful believers—will still be alive and growing on the earth, right along with the seed of the evil one. The Church gets harvested last, not first. Jesus wants us to know this. Why? Wouldn’t He be counting on His Church to be praying and witnessing right up to the last minute? Wouldn’t He want us working with the Father to save those who can be saved?¹ Apparently, Jesus will be harvesting right up to the end of the age. In fact, this is not just any harvest, it is “the” harvest. And it comes at the very “end of the age.”

As much as we need to know this timeline for our own understanding, there may be a second reason for Jesus to tell this parable about the final harvest: our motivation. By His words in Matthew 24, Jesus reveals that the end will come “after the tribulation of those days” (see “A Great Tribulation”). In other words, Jesus was well aware that the Church would be facing its severest trial just before the end of the age. How could it be otherwise? All the evil seed sown on the earth by the evil one will be growing towards fullness and harvest. As the Church grows toward its harvest, evil will, therefore, be increasing all around it. This parable alone tells us that.

What We Don’t See

We often fail to see that this dark harvest will (incredibly) help the Church be prepared for its own harvest. In that sense, it may be that it will be taken out of the way once it is no longer necessary. How? Let’s remember that Jesus isn’t coming back for “foolish virgins” but for a Bride without “spot or wrinkle” who has finally reached Her destined maturity and worthily reflects the Image of the One who saved her.² The pressure of hard times and trials, combined with faith in God’s Word, are what cleanse us from contamination by the world even now. The Tribulation that is coming is certain to have a cleansing effect upon the Bride—at least those of the Church who remain faithful. This will inevitably mean being united to Jesus in His prayer of



Gethsemane saying, “Not our will, but Thine be done.” The picture we are shown of the enemy’s final defeat is of believers standing firm, even “unto death.”

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Revelation 12:11 ESV

Will we love the harvest as much as Jesus wants us to? Certainly, many of us love harvesting souls now. But when the Tribulation begins, will we still love the harvest? Will we love the lost enough to pray, fast and witness for their salvation, even if they are the ones persecuting us? As the “love of many grows cold,” will our love for the lost become a blazing furnace?³ Let’s pray that it does.

Dear Christian, this is exactly what believers under persecution for two thousand years have been doing: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”⁴ How could we imagine that this was not destined for us? We have been chosen to be laborers in the greatest harvest the world has ever seen. That means we have also been destined to be purified by a love for the lost that will make us willing to lay our lives down (if we are praying to remain faithful). When all have been harvested who can be, when the Bride has been purified by selfless living, the seed of the evil one will finally be taken away. With our work completed, we then can look to be gathered. Then, we will see the Lord of the Harvest with unashamed eyes: “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Scripture

24 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ 28 He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” Matthew 13:24-30 ESV



CHAPTER TWO

"See That No One Misleads You"

Anyone studying the Last Days has this warning to contend with. We are told in advance that all kinds of deceptive teachings and beliefs are going to gain wide circulation. In fact, some of the worst deceptions were already in place before we were born. How can you recognize the truth when so many voices are clamoring for your attention? We need two things: a desire to let the plain meaning of scripture be the main thing we listen to and a willingness to set aside our personal hope, fears and desires in order to hear what scripture is actually saying.

3 As he sat 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?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.
Matthew 24:3-8 ESV

A Sleeping Bride?

Has this warning come to late? Or, are we already deceived? If we are deceived, how would we know? A pastor once compared deception to being in a deep, dreamless sleep. You don't even know you're asleep until someone tries to wake you up. As likely as not, you won't thank them for spoiling your slumber! And isn't it true that sometimes the sleep is so deep that either the person has to shout at us or shake us to wake us? The "birth pangs" are like that.⁵ The Lord prophesied through the writer of Hebrews that "yet once more I will shake all things."⁶ The shaking is to awaken His slumbering Bride.

On a personal note, I was deceived before I began. When I came to faith at age 33 in 1982, I was "birthed" into a faith community that believed the pre-Tribulation Rapture theory hook, line and sinker. I absorbed that teaching along with all the others I received. Why not? They loved the Lord and God used them for my salvation. They were right about Jesus. I assumed they were right about all things. Then, a visiting pastor came through our fellowship, had us pull out our Bibles, and for two days walked us through all of the relevant scriptures. Something like scales fell from my eyes and I could see clearly what the scriptures were clearly saying: Jesus comes "after the tribulation of those days."⁷ The enemy thoroughly deceived me while I was an unbeliever; now he was at it again. And do you know what? He's good at it!



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Stop for the Caution Light

Naturally enough, the disciples wanted to get a heads up on the Last Days. However, when they asked Jesus, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" what He said should make us all pause. The very first thing that He wanted them (and us) to know is this: "See that no one leads you astray." There it is. Evidently, the time leading up to His Return will be very conducive to deception. Don't be deceived. Specifically, don't let anyone "lead you astray." Being led astray implies that there is a marked path we are meant to follow, but we might be tempted to depart from it.⁸ The truth is that we have a path. We have a timeline. Jesus Himself gave it to us in this same passage from Matthew. Nothing could be clearer—unless some deception leads us to stray from it. (See "A Great Tribulation" for the timeline.)

Just such a deceptive teaching came along in the 1830s. For over all previous centuries the Church believed that she would go through the Tribulation and Jesus would come at the end of it to rescue her. Then, a Jesuit priest invented the theory of a pre-tribulation rapture in order to confuse the Protestants, get them arguing among themselves and take the heat off the Catholic Church as the major negative focus of their End Times teachings. This nefarious (devious) teaching was unwittingly promoted by certain individuals within the Plymouth Brethren, including John Nelson Darby among others. Through Darby, C. I. Scofield was influenced. Scofield influenced D. L. Moody. From there the doctrine spread like influenza throughout the Body of Christ. There's much more to the story—please get the download, History of the Rapture.

What Can Settle the Issue?

This theory and its history certainly have tell-tale signs of being a deception introduced into an otherwise healthy Body of Christ. How can we know for sure? Let the scriptures speak for themselves! Roughly twenty New Testament passages have been gathered together and explored on this site. Set theory aside and go through them one by one, asking the Lord honestly to show you what the plain meaning of these passages could be. He loves us. He holds nothing against us. He wants His truth to set us free. And it will if we are willing to let it.

If you will let me, however, I will warn you, that if you go to the Lord or the scriptures with an agenda, or let's say, with an emotional pre-disposition, you are already setting yourself up for deception. For instance, it's ok to have some fear about going through the Tribulation, but it's not ok to let that fear influence your understanding of the scriptures. With Jesus you have to want what He wants you to want, in order to get a clear word. This is called abandonment to Him. It's also called detachment from the world. We detach from any desires of our own and we attach only to Him. Jesus says that if you want to know His will in order to do it, He will reveal Himself to you.⁹ It often takes a lot of prayer before we can hear from the Lord, because so much self must be taken out of the way.

Another Test to Apply

Another way we can test the pre-trib and mid-trib theories for deception is by the context Jesus describes. Immediately after warning the disciples against being deceived, Jesus says, "For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray." We

usually take this to mean a false Messiah is claiming to be Jesus. It can also mean that even people who say of Jesus that He is “the Christ” will also spread deception. Let’s face it, only one teaching is true: either Jesus is coming before, after, or during the Tribulation. The other two, though they are promoted by genuine believers, are deceptions. And there is one more clue.

After describing some of the birth pangs (wars and rumors of wars), Jesus says this: “See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.” By alarmed, Jesus indicates that there is no need to go to full alert (alarm) expecting Him to suddenly appear. Other things must happen first. Then, He outlines for us what that sequence of events will be. Don’t be deceived by any of the birth pangs. You’re way out of synch with His schedule if that happens. Yet, this is rampant today.

Every fresh catastrophe or strange “sign” sends people to the web with wild predictions of the Rapture about to happen. Surely, Jesus is coming for His Bride! Why think like that? If you believe in the pre-trib theory, then you have absolutely no timeline for Jesus’ Return. This way of thinking provokes exactly the kind of “alarm” which Jesus warns us to avoid. This theory renders its adherents unable to read any of the signs correctly. However, there is one group of Last Days believers who are never “alarmed” by any of the events taking place on the earth at present. They know that there is no need to suppose that Jesus is about to appear—the Tribulation and the rule of the antichrist haven’t happened yet. So, they seek a better, more balanced understanding of events, one that fits them into the timeline Jesus gave, not as something that might bring on the Rapture.



CHAPTER THREE

"He Who Endures to the End"

This one stern statement of Jesus should end the debate about the timing of the Rapture. Listen to it in context of the teaching of Jesus on the Great Tribulation. A pre-Tribulation escape from danger and death is nothing anyone would have to "endure." Yet, Jesus warns us that we had better be prepared to hunker down and endure to the end—not to the beginning, or some supposed mid-point—but to the very end of the times He describes in order to be saved.

8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:8-14 ESV

He Who Endures

Can we please just let this one word of Jesus speak for itself? I can understand why there is such a great desire to twist it out of all recognition. Who wants to have to undergo suffering and dangerous times? Who would volunteer for this? Nevertheless, if this is what is coming, we definitely need to get ready for it. And that means getting what used to be called the "intestinal fortitude" to keep marching forward. But why worry about any of this if there is a way to explain it away?

Sadly, there is not. In this passage Jesus is giving His great discourse on the End Times. He has already detailed some truly terrible events, such as wars and rumors of wars, famine, pestilence and earthquakes. These He says are but "the beginning of the birth pangs." This means that worse is coming! Indeed, it is. There will be tribulation and persecution, along with great deception. These will be accompanied by lawlessness (by unbelievers) and falling away from the faith (by believers whose love for God has "grown cold"). It is in the context of this kind of pressure that Jesus declares that "the one who endures to the end will be saved." Will those who don't even try to endure be saved? Please don't bet on it!

Nothing could be more obvious that this: "enduring to the end" means that you've got to go through something you don't want to go through. We only say we "endured" a party if it was dreadfully dull. We never say we had to "endure" a steak dinner with cake and ice cream for desert. It would be equally absurd to say that we will have to "endure" being taken out of harm's way by the Rapture. How did we ever get such an outlandish idea stuck in our collective head? No, it's obvious, isn't it, that we will have to endure going through all of the desperate, dangerous times that Jesus describes.



When Does It End?

How long will that season of hard trial for us last? It will last until the gospel of the kingdom is “proclaimed throughout the whole world.” The most powerful proclamations of the gospel, the most convincing witnesses of faith in the living God, come from those who are under duress. Those who are living fat and happy, whose lives are untouched by trial or trouble, may indeed know the Lord, but few are ever persuaded by their testimony. Unbelievers can always say (as Satan said of Job), “Of course they believe in God. Look how well things are going for them. But just let God (if there is a God) pull back the blessing and then we’ll see how they sing.” Jesus is evidently planning to use the faithful prayers and witness of His believing Church in order to gain a great Harvest just as He said, “at the end of the age.”

Let’s ask again, “How long will that season of hard trial for us last?” According to Jesus’ own words, the end will come once this final witness of the gospel is “proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.” It is only once this happens, that the “end will come.” Have you ever wondered why Christians will be called to undergo trial and suffering at the End of the Age? This is it. The pressure of the Last Days is designed to “squeeze” out of the faithful, believing Church, such a witness that will bring even some the most hardened souls to eternal salvation.

On this side of Eternity, listening to our fallen nature, we may not want any part of that. But look beyond. See the eternal realms. See by faith how important it is that not even one soul destined for salvation should be lost. Was not our own eternal life deemed worthy of horrendous suffering by our glorious Lord? Jesus is in us. Somehow, He will help us rise to the occasion. Somehow, we will find through Him the grace and strength of heart to “endure to the end.”



CHAPTER FOUR

"Many Will Fall Away"

Jesus prophesied that many believers would abandon the faith in the years leading up to His Return. Why would He say that? Why will so many fall away? Could it be that the pre-Tribulation Rapture expectation, so confidently proclaimed and so ardently, believed is setting Christians for a huge disappointment? This warning of Jesus comes right at the beginning of what He was saying that the Church needed to be prepared to endure. But suppose we aren't mentally and emotionally ready to endure the hardships He describes?

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:9-14 ESV

The Parable of the Potsherds

Putting together the puzzle of the End Times can be compared to what archaeologists do. Having worked on four digs (two in England, two in Israel) I know the drill. First, the thousands of discovered pottery pieces have to be gathered, scrubbed clean and dried. Then, they are carefully examined by hand, checking for weight, thickness, texture, style and shape along with many other variables. All the while, the restorer is filing them away in a mental "catalogue" with all the other pieces. At some point, they can be culled into groups of similar pieces and further combed through to find the ones that most likely will fit together to re-form the broken vessel.

This restoration process always begins with individual pieces. In the same way, putting the End Times puzzle together means looking at each piece carefully, weighing it on its own merits and understanding it on its own terms. Leave all pre-conceived notions behind! No one knows what the pot will look like until the pot sherds begin to come together. In the same way, much foolishness results in looking at the scriptures through the lens of pre-conceived ideas.

I first looked upon the End Times with a prejudiced eye because when I was born again, everyone around me believed in the pre-tribulation rapture. It was only when someone from outside our group made me look at the individual pieces that I saw—lo and behold!—that none of them fit the cozy picture proclaimed to me. I am so glad that my eyes were opened then. It is one thing to wake up and see trouble coming from a distance. That way you can prepare. But woe to those who wake up in the midst of chaos! Sadly, Jesus may be warning us that this is exactly what will happen for some.



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Why Many Will Fall

Right after describing the tribulation that is coming, Jesus warned that believers would be hated “by all nations” for His name’s sake. Throughout history the Church has experienced persecution, even death-dealing martyrdom. But this has always been limited in time and place. Only a few nations here and there at times have turned against Christian and Jewish believers. The coming persecution will be world-wide. “All nations” will turn against believers with a universal hatred for those who stand up for the Lord. At the heart of it, this is why this tribulation described by Jesus is said by Him to be the greatest that the world has ever seen. The persecution will evidently be so great that no one could be saved from it, unless for the elect’s sake “those days are shortened” (Matthew 24:22). It is the persecution, not just the chaotic times, that will make the coming tribulation truly terrible.

Is it any wonder that “many will fall away”? Just suppose that you have been trained to believe that you will never have to face persecution (or even chaotic times). Then, without warning you find yourself caught up in the very disasters you fully expected to avoid. Had you not been promised by an array of pastors and Bible teachers that you would be raptured out of here before times got too intense? Imagine what this would do to your faith. Think how tempted you would be to cast it all down. To never trust scripture again. To even doubt all you thought you knew about God. Nowadays, people fall away from faith due to the unexpected death of just one loved one. Imagine how great the falling away will be when millions are martyred.

The truth is that our loving, gracious and all-powerful Savior has allowed His Bride experience devastating times of persecution and unspeakable hardship throughout the entire history of the Church, as well as our Jewish kindred in faith. If Jesus were to rapture us out of harm’s way, He would have to apologize to countless millions of Christians who were asked by Him to be faithful in perfectly horrendous situations. What? Have we won some bizarre kind of spiritual lottery and are the only Christians in history to have a collective “get out of jail free” card? This is absurd. It would be laughable, if it weren’t setting so many sheep up for the slaughter of their faith.

Why Hearts Will Grow Cold

Jesus not only said that there would be a great falling away from the faith. He also warns us that lawlessness will increase and the “love of many will grow cold.” Certainly, those who fully let go of their faith will see their heart for God growing cold. Those two awful outcomes go hand in hand. But is that all that Jesus is alluding to? Might He not also be warning us that there is a direct connection between lawlessness and cold hearts? Isn’t it true that lawlessness often means people sinning against the innocent, not to persecute them (though it can mean that), but to oppress and mistreat them? How can we keep our hearts from growing cold if we are the ones being sinned against?

Only a clear-sighted realization of the times that are coming will make us fortify ourselves with mercy and forgiveness. Unless we have learned how to forgive the unforgiveable and show mercy to the merciless, our hearts will grow cold with hatred for the lawless ones. We need to get ready for the future now, by climbing up on the Mercy Seat with Jesus and learning His way of interceding for the ungodly. The ungodly are coming our way. This cannot be avoided! If we

stick our heads in the sand, hoping the fable is true and that we will be whisked away without a worry, we will never do the homework needed now of learning how to live as Christians are meant to live: praying for those who spitefully abuse us.¹⁰



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CHAPTER FIVE

"There Will Be a Great Tribulation"

Without question this is the topic of primary concern among Christians who look into the Last Days. Will the Church--will believers--go through the terrible events of the Great Tribulation? Or, will the Rapture take us out of here before things get too rough? Some would say, "Yes, don't worry! Jesus loves us too much to let that happen. He will come before the Tribulation and take us all away." Others tell us that although Christians will go through some of the Tribulation, they will be safely removed before the worst of it arrives. When is the rapture? There will be a Great Tribulation

But on what authority do they make these claims? Jesus said exactly the opposite! Isn't He our highest authority? If that is the case, then, truly we need look no further than His Words. As it happens, He spoke plainly about the timing of the events of the Last Days and typically, He didn't pull any punches. So, please set aside any pre-conceived time tables (and any fears or desires that you may have) and listen afresh to His great teaching about the End Times given on the Mount of Olives during His final week on earth. Listen to the words of the One who is the Truth.

21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be... 27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. 29 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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24:21, 27-31 ESV

Short and to the Point

There is a short form and a long form to this. The long form will come in another article—it is the "Matthew 24 Timeline." The short form simply brings together two verses in the numerical order—verse 21 followed by verse 29. In answer to the disciples' question, Jesus says that there will be a great tribulation coming at "the End of the Age." How great will it be? It will be "such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." Without a doubt this is the Great Tribulation that no one in their right minds wants to go through. Now, when does it come in relation to the Rapture of the Church and the Lord's Return?

When will we "see the Son of Man coming on the clouds" (Jesus' Return) and when will His angels "gather his elect from the four winds (the Rapture)?¹¹ Jesus gives us to answer in verse 29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days." Nothing could be clearer! Remember, this



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timeline is coming straight from Jesus Himself. Don't look to see Him return and don't expect to be gathered to Him on this side of the Great Tribulation. We will have to go through it faithfully to experience that honor. There are at least two obvious points of major contradiction between the words of Jesus and those who hold the pre-trib and mid-trib rapture teachings.

1) First, there is no "secret" rapture. According to Jesus, everyone on earth will see Him when He returns. Not only will His coming be like lightning which lights up the entire sky, but all of the tribes of the earth will see Him. The saved and unsaved alike will see Him when He returns. The pre and mid theories depend upon a "secret" taking away of the elect by which only they know when the Lord comes for them. Those who are "left behind" on the earth do not see the Lord during this preliminary coming. They only see the absence of the ones who have been taken away. But Jesus says everyone will see Him at the same time—and that will also be the time when we are "gathered" to be with Him.

2) Second, the Rapture doesn't come before the tribulation! Again, according to the clear teaching of Jesus, the Rapture takes place after the "great tribulation"—a tribulation which will not be surpassed by any (supposed) other tribulation that might be stuck in someone's timeline. Notice also that the Rapture only happens after the "loud trumpet call" which everyone will hear. Follow this link for clarification that this is none other than "The Last Trumpet."

Putting It Together

So, now we have it. There is no "secret" snatching away of the saints before things get too intense. Everything good is reserved for the end. The dead rise (come from heaven), the saints are gathered, the last trumpet sounds, the unbelievers mourn (well, that's not so good) and the final trumpet sounds. When? "Immediately after the tribulation of those days."

Much more can be detailed. Refer to the "Matthew 24 Timeline." Many more points about the timing of Jesus' return can be made. See the other 19 articles. Nevertheless, this one passage given to us by the Coming One Himself, should be enough to settle the issue. Why can argue with the Master? It's time to yield to the plain meaning of scripture and release that we are going to have to buckle up with a stout-hearted faith and get prepared for what's coming. There is no end run around these events of the End Times.



CHAPTER SIX

"For the Sake of the Elect"

Being the "elect" of God isn't exactly what we might wish it to be. Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof, reflecting on the trials and troubles of his Jewish heritage, asked the Lord (hilariously), "I know we are your chosen people, but once in a while, can't you choose someone else?" Well, if you have been chosen to be saved, if you are among the elect, get ready for the trials and troubles of the End Times. It looks like we have been chosen for a lot of things that we would never have signed up for—if that choice were ours to make.

21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short... 29 "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:21-22; 29-31 ESV

Jesus Breaks the News

Perhaps it is not what we wish to hear, but let's give it a good listen anyway. If it is in the scriptures (and it is), then there is a reason why we need to hear it. In fact, if we refuse to hear the unpleasant, we may miss out entirely on the blessing. Verse 22 is Jesus saying, in effect, "I've got good news and bad news, which do you want first?" Not waiting for an answer, He goes straight to the bad news. A tribulation is coming in the Last Days that will be so great that there never has been such a terrible time, nor ever will be again. It will be so bad that if the days are not cut short, "no human being would be saved." That is as bad as it gets. Evidently, the rampage of evil on the earth will be utterly without precedent or parallel. But there is good news: "For the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." There will be a way to survive them!

If you're like me, you don't want to have to go through such nightmarish times. You certainly don't want ANY of your loved ones to have to face such trials and terrors. Their torment is our torture! And yet, such times as these are inevitably coming on the earth. Suppose, I were to tell you that you were going to have a beautiful set of twins born to you, a boy and a girl (just to balance it out). If you had a heart to have children to love and cherish, you would be all for it right? Especially, if you were the man. Guys don't have to suffer for this to happen. But for women it's different. They know that suffering will come their way, perhaps even the inescapable suffering of a hard labor. There is no way to get out of it, not if you want those lovely new creations to come forth.



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Birthing on the Earth

Something like this is coming to the earth. The Lord Jesus is seeking to bring forth a whole new race of beings in full display of their “glorious liberty.” The world has never yet seen the fullness of what the faithful Bride of Christ looks like when she armed for spiritual battle and abandoned to uncompromising love. Nor have we the Bride on earth ever really ascended into those heights of love and depths of service we are destined to experience. The “birth pangs” of the Last Days will press it out of us. It will also usher in the new age of the millennial reign of Christ when the earth itself will be set free from the curse and be fully restored to Edenic vitality.

For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but because of Him who subjected it on hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Romans 8:19-21 ESV

This is what is at stake. Something incredibly glorious, beautiful and thrilling is about to be birthed on planet earth. Only Jesus is capable of bringing it off, especially with all of the dark kingdom seeking to thwart His Return at every step. But He will be victorious! That’s why He can reassure us, that He is perfectly, supremely, in control of the whole event. He has already mastered everything and everyone with His far-seeing eye. His plans cannot and will not fail. No matter how bad it gets during the Tribulation, He wants us to know in advance that He has already cut those days short. Short enough for many of His faithful Bride to survive them. Hold fast to that unfailing hope and keep pressing in to see the new creation come forth.



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CHAPTER SEVEN

"At the Last Trumpet"

The "last trumpet" should be the last word on when the Rapture will take place. In the crazy mixed up world of Biblical interpretation, even this clear, seemingly unmistakable sign has been misunderstood. Fortunately, nothing clears confusion better than letting the words of scripture speak for themselves. This passage is a trumpet call to a sane and sensible interpretation of the timing of the Lord's Return.

29 "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24:29-31 ESV

A Blast Heard Round the World

Right here in the 31st verse of Matthew 24 Jesus states that "a loud trumpet call" will announce His Return. Can anyone doubt that this "loud" blast will be heard world-wide? If Jesus is coming secretly for His elect to whisk them away to safety, why all the fanfare? In fact, this trumpet blast is like the herald that announces a king's entrance. By the time Jesus approaches the earth, all eyes will be already on Him. According to this text, we will clearly see the "sign of the Son of Man" while He is still in the air. Everyone on earth will see this sign. Then, we will hear the trumpet blast that heralds His arrival, giving proper dignity to so momentous an event.

This sign could also be translated as His "miraculous" or "wondrous" appearance, coming as He will be "on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." So, unmistakable and unavoidable will this sight be that even those who have not been eagerly looking for His appearing "will mourn" when they see Him. The unsaved and the unrighteous will mourn because they will have realized too late that their time is up. There is no opportunity left for them to repent. But for those of us who will be longing for sight of Him (and for His rescue), our hearts will rejoice.¹² The loud sound of the trumpet will shock and terrify those who are unready, but it will greet our ears with joyful exhilaration. Here is where the true "rapture" of believers begins.

Not only will we be waiting to hear that heavenly herald, but a host of angels will also be on the alert. This trumpet blast signals that the time has come for them to gather His elect "from the four winds." Where are the four winds which encompass "His elect"? They cannot be in heaven. Winds and weather change are a thing of the earth realm. In heavenly previews, the Word shows us "a sea like glass" where no shifting currents of air or water ripple its surface. Not only that, but calling them the four winds signifies north, east, south and west—the four quarters of the earth that our winds travel toward. This can only mean that these angels have been sent to gather the elect of Jesus who are still on the earth. This is not some rag-tag, half-saved group



born of the Tribulation with no seasoned believers to shepherd them, but His “elect.” These are the “chosen ones” who have stood faithfully against everything the devil and the antichrist have thrown at them.

The Trumpet and the Tribulation

What else does this passage show us of the timing? In verse 29, we see that this sign of the Son of Man arriving comes “after the tribulation of those days.” This is none other than that “great tribulation” which Jesus described in verse 21, the tribulation that is so terrible that if the days were not cut short, “no human being would be saved.” This is the tribulation which we all wish we could avoid! Nevertheless, Jesus is telling us right here in Matthew that He doesn’t come for “His elect” before the tribulation, but afterwards. His elect are still on the earth doing all that they can by prayer and grace to remain faithful under the most severe trial His believing Church has ever had to undergo.

A further question concerns the trumpet call itself. Since the passage doesn’t say exactly, are we correct in supposing that this trumpet blast is indeed the “last” trumpet? This can easily be clarified by referring to Paul’s teaching. He wrote to the Corinthian church that the dead in Christ (those who abide “from one end of heaven to the other”) will rise first and accompany the Lord as He descends to earth. Then, we will be “caught up together with them” in the air—just as Jesus describes in the passage from Matthew explored above. The elect on earth and the elect in heaven meet the Lord in the sky. Note that Paul fully expects many of us to still be alive and on the earth. We will indeed rise, but he wants us to know that the dead will be the first to rise on that great Day.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ESV

The Last Trumpet at Last

All of this happens “with the sound of the trumpet of God.” There’s our heavenly herald. But is this the last trumpet? It certainly is! Paul made it unmistakably clear when he wrote the Thessalonian church about this same event. He told them that we will not all “sleep,” meaning that not all of us will have died and be in heaven. Many believers will still be on the earth, but we will all “be changed.” By no effort of our own and in “the twinkling of an eye” a tremendous change will occur. The dead will be raised, and we will be changed with them “at the last trumpet.”

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will



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sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 1
Corinthians 15:51-52 ESV

Let's abandon once and for all the foolish, false hope of a pre-trib rapture. We will rise. We will be changed. We will meet the Lord in the air. But the dead in Christ will rise before we do and that will only happen when the last trumpet sounds.



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CHAPTER EIGHT

"As in the Days of Noah"

This illustration by Jesus is a perfect example of how words in scripture can be lifted out of their context, then have their meaning completely twisted, so that they bear no relationship to the thought of the original passage. No one ever believes that they do this. Yet, sadly, it happens frequently and can happen to any of us, especially if we think it can't ("Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." 1 Corinthians 10:12).

In this passage, for instance, we have the unmistakable thought of people being taken away. "One will be taken and one left" is stated not once, but twice. So, can we say, "Aha! Here is clear proof that some will be taken out of harm's way by the Rapture! Make sure you're not left behind to go through the Tribulation." I have heard many people teach it just this way. But, before we start jumping for joy, let's listen to what Jesus was actually saying.

37 But as the days of Noah were, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the ark. 39 And they did not know until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 42 Therefore watch; for you do not know what hour your Lord comes. Matthew 24:37-42 MKJV

The Days of Noah

Jesus's first point is that the coming of the Son of Man will have a clear similarity to the way things were in the days of Noah. He describes those times as one in which ordinary people were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark." In other words, for those doomed people it was life as usual. They had no idea that the flood of judgement was coming. They saw what Noah was doing to prepare by building a massive ark--how could they miss it? They also heard him preaching that they needed to repent. But they utterly disregarded these two warning signs.

Let's not think that there is no analogy to the Tribulation here, simply because Jesus describes the days of Noah as ordinary life. Jesus could easily have described those days as a period of extreme lawlessness: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). It was also a time of unprecedented violence: "And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them" (Genesis 6:13). Both Jesus and His immediate audience would have known what the scriptures said about why the flood came in those days. Those days only seemed ordinary to the people, because they were so far gone from God that violence, sexual immorality and wickedness had become the "new normal." From the Lord God's perspective those days were far from ordinary!



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Sounds like our own day, right? Jesus' point isn't that those days were ordinary, but that the wicked of that generation "were unaware." They didn't heed the signs, didn't repent, and didn't prepare. The flood caught them totally by surprise. When the waters rose, it was too late for them to escape. They were all "swept away." Not all, of course. Jesus didn't need to say it, because every believer (then and now) knows the rest of the story. Noah and his family had been living a repentant, faithful life. They had prepared. The flood didn't take them by surprise. They rode it out within the ark that the Lord helped them build. The ark kept them safe in the midst of the flood. They emerged to a renewed and cleansed earth on the other side of judgement--once the flood had passed.

Who Are the "Taken"?

Now, let's take a closer look at just who it was who was taken. Once you understand this passage, your only question will be, "How did we ever get this so wrong?" Yet, for over a hundred years a false teaching has been spreading through Christendom—something no Christians prior to 1830 believed (See "The History of the Rapture"). Its message is that Jesus will secretly come for His Bride and "take us away" in the Rapture—long before danger comes our way. The main proof text is right here in this passage in which He compares the End times to "the days of Noah."

After describing what happened to that generation, Jesus repeats the warning: "So also will be the coming of the Son of Man." What will that be like? There will be two working beside each other on a farm and "one will be taken, the other left." This will not be a unique event—it will happen all over the place. Two, for instance, will be working at a mill and "one shall be taken, and the other left." That's the rapture of believers, isn't it? One group—the faithful Bride—is "taken" up to glory; the other is left behind. A hugely popular book and movie series made exactly this claim. But, don't they have it backwards?

Let's back up to what Jesus was making His comparison to. Remember, what will happen in our day will be just like what happened "in the days of Noah." Who was it who were taken in Noah's day? The faithful family? No! They were the ones who huddled in the ark (always a picture of the Church) as waves of judgement flooded the earth, wiping out all life around them. Or better said, the waters of judgment "came and took them all away." The only ones who were taken were the unfaithful ones taken away by the judgment to meet their doom. We do not want to be part of that unhappy group. It will be far better to ride out the flood of judgement than to be taken away by it.

Don't Be Among the Taken!

Jesus uses the exact same word "taken" to describe those situations in our day when one will be taken and the other left. The only sane and sensible way to interpret this is by the clear meaning according to Jesus' own interpretation. Jesus is not trying to trick us. He is seeking to prepare us. He doesn't want us among those who are "taken"! The ones who are "taken" are the ones who are carried off to judgment. How did we ever get this so wrong?



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CHAPTER NINE

"For You Do Not Know"

Can we take the blindfolds off? So many are proclaiming that Jesus might show up at any moment that we might as well not have any working eyes to see with. What is the point of watching and waiting, if there will be no sign of His coming? In fact, there will be plenty of signs leading up to that day. Jesus is One of many who gives us signs to watch for. Nevertheless, in this passage our Lord seems to be saying just this: that no of us will have a clue when He is about to return. But is that really what He is saying? And is that the true point of His warning? Let's open our eyes and read the scripture with spiritual vision.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Matthew 24:42-44 ESV

The Idea of No Idea

This passage seems to promote the idea that we will have no idea when the Lord is going to show up. The Rapture could happen at any moment! No, it won't. That's a complete mis-reading of scripture. The events leading up to the return of the Lord and our rising to meet Him in the air are fully and clearly explained by Jesus earlier in this passage. There is a timeline that He walks us through. As those days unfold, we will all know that His drawing near is only a matter of months, then days away. Nevertheless, this part of the passage seems to be throwing into doubt that there is any timeline for us to observe: "you do not know what day your Lord is coming."

What does Jesus mean by this? Does He mean that we won't have any idea even about what He calls elsewhere, "the times and seasons"? No, that cannot be His intent. In those other passages it's obvious that He expects us to know that we are in the End Times when it comes upon us and to know why (please see "Times and Seasons vs Day and Hour"). A farmer watching the signs growing right before his eyes knows when the day of harvest is about to arrive. But he doesn't know the exact day or hour. So, too in this passage. Jesus is warning all of us that we will not know "what day" our Lord is coming, nor the hour, for He will be "coming at an hour you do not expect."

Many seem to think that the "hour" of Jesus' Return and our rising to meet Him (the rapture of believers) will take us all by surprise. We won't have a clue that it's coming. That's missing the point of this passage. The point Jesus makes is for us to remain awake so that we won't be taken by surprise. Jesus doesn't want any of us taken by surprise! He specifically warns us to "Stay awake" so that our house won't be broken into by a thief in the night (see [Thief in the Night](#) for Paul's corroboration on this).



What This Is Really About

The thief is a bad actor. Jesus isn't warning us against Himself! We of all people on the earth who have been awakened to a faith relationship with Jesus, will need to keep that faith alive and alert. The thief will be prowling about looking for a way into our house—our souls, our lives—to steal our attention and affection away from the Lord. We are to resist all the efforts of the tempter to bring us down. There will not be a time in the End Times to relax our guard and fall back to sleep. Falling asleep is a metaphor for death or for the spiritual complacency that leads to sin, or worse for falling away from faith entirely.¹³

Jesus wants us to stay awake. Since He isn't saying "stay alive", the message is stay out of sin. Don't let the Son of Man catch you in sin when He returns! That would be like dying in your sins suddenly and unprepared with no time left to repent. Don't let your house be broken into. Keep the devil out and Jesus in. Stay awake!



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CHAPTER TEN

"Will the Son of Man Find Faith?"

Have you ever noticed that once something becomes important to you, you start seeing it everywhere? Some of us never knew that there were so many churches until we asked Jesus into our life. Once our eyes were opened to Him, we started noticing steeples everywhere! Something like that happens around End Times prophecy. The scriptural allusions to the Last Days are everywhere. Even here in this well-known passage about the reluctant judge, Jesus slipped in a little nugget about His Return. This particular nugget exposes the pre-trib rapture teaching as fool's gold.

1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8 ESV

A Teaching with a Twist

The end of this little passage has such a sudden, dramatic twist to it that we almost need to read it from the end, rather than the beginning. For the first seven verses it seems that all Jesus has on His Mind is encouraging us "to pray and not lose heart." He wants us to know that God is listening to our prayers even when the answer is delayed, that God is entirely unlike wicked, uncaring judges on earth, and that He will "speedily" give just to His elect. Ok, let's pause and take a little humor break over the Lord's definition of speedily. This is after all, coming to us from the One who said He was coming back "soon."

Nevertheless, on heaven's side of the equation, everyone (probably) leaps into action as soon as our prayers ascend. Speed is of the essence! That's what the angel told Daniel when he arrived 21 days after Daniel's fasting and prayer began (Daniel 10:1-21). The highest heaven apparently has to battle through the second heavens to bring answers to prayer down to earth. Even so, from our side it may seem like a needlessly long delay with nothing happening. Is anyone listening? Doesn't God care? Absolutely He does! Jesus wants us to know that God acts without "long delay." So far, so good. But then comes the twist: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" How did that get in here?



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Turning the Tables

When it comes to turning the tables, Jesus is the Master. Just ask the money-changers in the Temple what it felt like to have their tables over-turned. In this case it's us. The question isn't really can we trust God to be faithful. God is always faithful! No, the real question is can God trust us to be faithful. Specifically, can Jesus trust us to keep the faith alive, so that when He goes to all the trouble that it's going to take to mount an earth-bound Rescue mission, will He find any of us down here still living and acting like we have Him for our God? That is a huge question.

God, help us to be faithful! And, let's notice that that little word "faithful" means "full of faith." Help us God to be full of faith, trusting you with all the chaos that will be going on and with what may seem like too a long delay on Your part. Lord not only keep us doing the right thing (being faithful by refusing the mark of the beast, for instance) but also keep the right thing in us—a heart full of faith in you.

The Question on His Mind

Before leaving this passage, we need to note the obvious expectation it holds. Jesus fully expects Christians to be on the earth when He Returns. There is no hint here that Christians one day won't have to worry about praying hard for rescue from oppression. That is a given that comes the way of every generation. Rather, it seems that the pressure of having to "keep praying and not give up" will only increase with time. So much so, that it even has Jesus wondering out loud if the church of the future will be able to stand the test of their times. Will we (that future church) still be found faithful when He Returns?

According to this passage, it is not a question of whether or not we will be here when Jesus returns. It is only a question of whether we will be found faithful. Dear Christian, the pre-tribulation rapture theory will never prepare you for being found faithful under pressure. It can only make you wonder why you are suffering. ("Wasn't I promised that Jesus loved me too much to let me suffer?"). The rest of us, realizing that great sacrifice and suffering may be required of us, are doing all we can in prayer and heart preparation to get ready for the ultimate Test. It's coming. Indeed, it is just around the corner. Everyone one of us will need His help us get through it with a passing grade! Why not start praying for faith-courage now?



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

"In the Twinkling of an Eye"

This lovely phrase—"in the twinkling of an eye"—describes a moment in time that will be like no other. It will be well worth waiting for, because the Lord has positively crammed it full of abundant grace. The most astounding thing about it is how quickly and powerfully He will accomplish our entire transformation. This sometimes gets overlooked in the debate over the Rapture where the focus is on the when, not the amazing what. Even, so if you catch the wink you'll get a clear picture of when it all happens: You'll want to be "on the ground" for this.

50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:50-52

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Eye

What a wonderful phrase: "In the twinkling of an eye." Doesn't it call to mind those moments when someone you loved or were intrigued by gave you that look, that lovely look, of a happy secret thought towards you just bubbling out of them? Personally, I have never been privileged (yet) to see that look in Jesus' eye, but I have certainly had those times of sharing in a humorous moment with Him when I was quite sure it was there.

The moment being described here will be one of wonder for us, no doubt, but we should also realize that it will be overflowing with joy for Him. This is the moment when His redeemed Bride becomes fully redeemed. This is the moment when He Returns to gather us fully and forever to Himself. How He has planned for this moment. How He has waited upon its arrival. Have we yearned to see Him face to face? He has had that same yearning for us, but on an infinite scale. Yes, there will be a twinkle in His eye!

That twinkle will be all the more "delicious" for Him to enjoy because of what happens in this unprecedented and absolutely unique moment. Jesus will be transforming—"we will be changed"—the whole vast multitude of believers still alive on the earth "in a twinkling of an eye." All that is perishable about us, all that is subject to the fallen side of things, will pass away and the "incorruptible" will fully fill our spiritual sails at last. Pause a moment to think of what that means.

The Old Pattern and the New Way

Recall how much effort we now have to put into restraining our sinful flesh. Consider how difficult it is at times to let go all care and yield ourselves entirely to Jesus. The life of faith is hard work! Remember also those moments when your spirit soared with perfect freedom.



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You've been sort of free many times, perhaps, but gloriously free? Those are the rare times. Then, be honest about how little daily progress we seem to make towards moral perfection, spiritual growth and character development. Sure, usually we can look back and see that some progress was made after surviving a difficult time of trial or a sustained time of prayer and fasting. But what an effort it all takes! And how little we truly have to show for it. By this we can see better the magnitude of what's coming.

This moment will be like none other. Every faithful believer is changed once they die and go to heaven. How that happens we don't know (not having died yet), but we do know that the dead are changed from perishable to imperishable. While passing through death, the fallen nature and the physical body are removed, and the new heavenly body is given. That pattern is the only change of this kind that believers have ever known.¹⁴ Until now. But in this moment, no one will be passing through death—that is what “we shall not all sleep” means. Even better, without the slightest effort on our part, we “shall all be changed.” Full transformation will come!

Here Comes the Twinkle

Pulling off this massive transformation for more people than He has ever done it for in one moment and pulling it off for a living multitude will certainly put a twinkle in the Lord's eye. And you had better believe it will put a twinkly in ours, too. But you are going to have to stay alive and stay on the earth until He comes to experience it. This delicious moment is the Rapture and according to this passage it happens “at the last trumpet.” When does that happen? That's obvious and easy. This last trumpet happens at the end. You don't get a last trumpet anywhere else. In this case, we are given even more to go on.

Paul shows us exactly when to listen for this last trumpet. He says, “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” It is all of one piece. The dead are not raised before this moment. The living will not be changed before this moment. Specifically, we will not be changed by some (imagined) pre-trib Rapture, taken up to heaven, be given heavenly bodies there, then brought back down for this moment. No, you have to be on earth waiting with patient perseverance through a great test of faith to see this moment come to you.¹⁵ Only then will we hear the last trumpet herald the Lord's return to earth (See “The Last Trumpet” for further insight to the exact time.)

Like a key piece to a child's puzzle, this three-sided piece locks in a “sane and sensible” understanding of the Rapture as an event that arrives at the very end—just as Jesus arrives. That may not be the picture we want to see. But it is the picture on the cover of the box. This is exactly what Jesus told us would happen when He gave us the timeline in Matthew 24 (See “The Great Tribulation”). Paul, for one, apparently had no qualms about being still alive on earth, willing to go through hardship, if it meant being among the blessed company of those who would be changed in the “twinkling of an eye.” So, let's not do what some frustrated children do and try to force this piece to fit some interpretation that we would rather have. Rather, let it show us the wonder of the extraordinary event we can look forward to experiencing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"We Who Are Left"

The fascinating thing about this passage is the way Paul readily includes himself in the company of those who will go through all of the terrible things he expects to come upon the earth in the run up to the Lord's return. There is no thought here that the Church will be taken out of the way. He looks forward to being "left behind" and on the ground, still alive and waiting for Jesus to come down. In Paul's mind, the "tribulation saints" won't be some supposed second-string team, recruited in the last days of the campaign, but the most seasoned players the Lord has on the field. Why would we have ever imaged otherwise?

15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1
Thessalonians 4:15-18 ESV

Paul Left Behind?

I wonder what would happen if this one verse—verse 17—could be read over and over in every church in America (and wherever else it's needed). If it could be read out loud enough, surely the scales would fall from everyone who ever believed in the pre-trib rapture theory. This is Paul, the great apostle himself, saying he fully expects that he would be "left behind." Well, ok he doesn't say that exactly, but he does say that if he is still alive when Jesus returns, he would be among those "who are left."

There is absolutely no thought here that there would be some secret rapture that would carry him out of harms way. Remember, this is the same Paul who warns that the Day of the Lord cannot come until the man of sin is fully revealed.¹⁶ He knows that perilous times will accompany the return of the Lord, but he doesn't expect to be removed from them. He fully expects to be left. Compare this to the Last Days "experts" who think that it would be terrible to go through those same times and disgraceful (a sign of not being a "true" believer) to be "left behind." How backwards we have it from both the heart and the teaching of Paul.

The Heart of Paul's Teaching

Clearly, the left behind proponents don't have Paul's teaching. Paul fully expected mature believers like himself to be on the earth waiting their turn to be "caught up" when the Lord raises the dead. Not sooner. Just as clearly, they don't have Paul's heart. Paul would be astonished that any of us who name the Name of Jesus, would want to seek our own comfort rather than be



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of service to those around us.¹⁷ He would be astounded that any of us would want to escape from playing our part in the greatest faith-battle ever fought. Just listen to his heart:

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Philippians 1:29-30 ESV

Beloved, it has “been granted” to us that we, too, will likely be asked to not only believe in Jesus but also suffer for his sake. Paul, the greatest of the apostles had to suffer, despite all that he was doing for good and for the gospel. Nevertheless, all of his suffering not only advanced the kingdom purposes of the Lord, it also brought unspeakable blessing and spiritual growth into Paul’s own life.¹⁸ He is the one who cried out to know Jesus better by embracing the way of the cross. His words in Philippians are among the most noble ever written. They show the heart of one who desires the Lord Jesus above all else.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:8-11 ESV

May we, too, press in to know the Lord and use even the suffering that may come our way to rise even higher and closer to the One we love.



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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"The Dead Will Rise First"

They say that "dead men tell no tales." This is certainly true of the dead in this passage. Paul couldn't have made it clearer. The rising of the righteous dead is an unmistakable element of what will happen when Jesus returns to reign upon the earth. That's why what Paul put into this passage speaks so profoundly to us about the timing of the Rapture and the Tribulation. Like the last trumpet this is a marker that defines the order of events just as banners mark the companies in a parade. That makes it immeasurably easier to match other scriptures up to this one. The overlay gives us an undeniable answer to when the Rapture takes place.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ESV

Honoring the Dead in Christ

Protocol and honor are important to the Lord. He commands us to give honor to those who merit honor.¹⁹ Apparently, His desire is to honor the dead who have died in faith. We may not see it this way, but ours is a highly favored and select generation, the one chosen to experience first-hand the awesome events of the Last Days. These are the days all generations of Christians have been looking forward to and praying towards for two thousand years. And yet, like the heroes of the faith in Hebrews, it was not appointed for them to see the things we are being allowed to see.²⁰ That honor has been given to us. Additionally, the dead in Christ are our "elders" in the faith. It was only by their faithfulness in their trials that saving faith survived on the earth and came to us. We owe them a debt of honor and gratitude.

Paul seems to be making this point by making sure that the Thessalonians understand that the dead in Christ "will rise first." This is their position of dignity and honor. Of course, they will be raised first. They won't come after us as if we are somehow more important or worthier of honor. It is only because of their faithfulness that Jesus has a remnant Bride to work with in the Last Days. Jesus never forgets and never overlooks anyone's effort to be faithful. So, of course, the ones on the battlefield aren't the only soldiers in this campaign to re-conquer the earth. Our elders play their crucial parts and they must be honored. Raise them first is the Imperial decree! Then, and only then, will we be "caught up together with them" in the air.



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An Indelible Reference Point

In marking down this point of honor, Paul also gives us an indelible reference point for the timing of the Rapture. NO ONE is going to rise to meet the Lord in the air before the dead are raised. There will be no secret rapture before the dead are raised. Such a shady deal would be an insult to all those who went before us. What? Was it alright for them to suffer and sacrifice and fight hard to remain faithful in previous generations—but don't expect that of us? Just move us straight to the head of the line! Don't bother with testing us. That was maybe ok for our elders, but we deserve a pass. Can we not see how grotesque the pre-trib rapture theory truly is? Where is there any honor in it?

Yet, even setting all thought of honor aside, where is the logic of thinking that there is any way that anyone will be raised to meet the Lord before the dead are raised? This rising of dead kills off all ideas that some other path than going through the Tribulation exists. No, there are only three possible ways to go while waiting for that last trumpet and the rising of the dead. One is taking the mark of the beast or denying the Lord in a vain attempt to save one's life. Jesus has already warned us that if we try to save our life we will lose it. So, that option is out. This only leaves being martyred or (somehow) surviving the ordeal as an overcomer.

My advice? Let's do all we can to remain faithful no matter what comes our way. Then, let the Lord decide whether we will join the faithful dead who rise to meet Him first or wait our turn with the rest of the overcoming community on the ground.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Like a Thief in the Night"

There is an immense amount of confusion swirling around this passage, partly because of the mix of metaphors. The action of the Enemy is described by Jesus as that of a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy, yet the action of Jesus seems to be compared to that of a thief in this passage.²¹ Well, which is it? Will the real "thief" of this passage please stand up? And may the real victims of the "thievery" show yourselves! Here's a hint: read this rightly and you will WANT to be left behind.

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8 ESV

Is Jesus a Thief?

If the question is, "Is Jesus a thief?", then the answer has to be no. When Paul states that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, he specifically includes thieves on the list.²² Jesus is no thief. He doesn't steal things or people away. He never violates free will and always respects legal rights, even when we might wish He wouldn't. The confusion comes through this passage comparing "the day of the Lord" (not Jesus) to the action of a thief at night. People sleeping in the dark may think that they are safe and secure, but a thief steals in just the same. Suddenly, they are caught in a trap and lose everything they valued.

To extend the image rightly, we should see that this is a warning against "sleeping" and "being in the dark" about the coming Day of the Lord. Such people will be caught napping, not thinking they are in any danger at all. Then, without warning, the Day will suddenly be upon them and it will be too late. They will be caught in the trap of their own rebellion and disregard of the Lord. The true thief, Satan, will have lulled them to sleep, then robbed them of their chance at salvation and eternal life with Jesus. The destruction of their lives and their souls will be upon them and it will be too late to repent. Jesus isn't the thief here. The devil is. He is the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. This passage identifies the exact time when the lost lose everything, when they are lost without remedy.

But what about us? Will Jesus or the Day of the Lord be coming for us like a thief? Not at all. Paul declares that believers are "children of the light, children of the day." Even better, he says



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that “that day”—the Day of the Lord—will not surprise us like a thief.” What? Wasn’t there a movie years ago called “The Thief in the Night” which portrayed Christians as being utterly surprised by the End Times events? What about the “Left Behind” series? Well, we can’t expect Hollywood to get it right. The Bible in this passage alone (but please read the others too) states very plainly that we who believe will not be in the dark or taken by surprise. The thief in the night is coming for the unbelievers, not us!



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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"That Day Will Not Come Unless"

Perhaps for such a time as ours this scripture was given. So many people in our day are running breathlessly around making wild predictions about the Rapture about to happen, and about Jesus ready to show up "at any moment." Just read this passage with faith-opened eyes and you will see that this kind of thinking is impossible. Neither one of those events can possibly happen yet. How can we know this? Because "that day shall not come until"—and that "until" hasn't happened yet!

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 MKJV

Gathering Together

The first thing to notice about this passage is that it ties together "the coming of our Lord Jesus" with "our being gathered together to him." In our parlance, being gathered together to Him is the Rapture of believers. Believers who are living on the earth will one day all be raised from the earth and gathered to be with Jesus forever. This gathering is directly tied to the "coming of the Lord." So, here we have the coming of the Lord for the believers that He is gathering. Now we can see this event—the Rapture—clearly. When does it happen?

That's what everyone wanted to know back then in Paul's day just as we still do now. But before he says anything about the timing, Paul warns us all not to be "quickly shaken in mind or alarmed." Why? Because then as now people were in an anxious state thinking that Jesus could come at any moment and that perhaps He had already come, and they didn't know it—a first century version of being left behind.²³ Paul states that that kind of thinking springs from deception—"don't let anyone deceive you in any way." Then, he drops the bomb: "for that day will not come unless." With that little word "unless" all thought that "Jesus can come at any moment" is blown out of the water.

Paul goes on to list some of the things on the timeline that believers should be watching for. This is not a complete list for other passages by Jesus, the prophets and the apostles add more items to this timeline. Additionally, as revelation increases around the Biblical prophetic narrative, we will likely receive even more understanding of the timeline as the events unfold around us. Beyond this we can expect even more prophetic revelation, insight and encouragement coming to us from the Lord through His prophets on the earth. Indeed, this is already happening. Nevertheless, what Paul gives us here is substantial.



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Has This Happened Yet?

We should watch for what he calls “the rebellion” because it is coming first. This will be with “the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) is revealed.” Has the antichrist been revealed to the church and to the world? Not as of this writing in early 2019. If that were the case, we who are watching the signs would all know it. Very likely he is on the scene waiting the right moment, but that moment hasn’t come yet. There is a lot of speculation who he might be (precisely because we sense he is alive), but no definitive “revealing.” So, could anyone in church history have legitimately—on biblical grounds—expected that Jesus could come at any moment? Certainly not. Nor can we. We could only embrace that mis-guided idea if we completely disregard this passage from Paul (as well as many others).

This day of the Rapture, this day when Jesus comes to gather us, is something we all want to see. But it “will not come, unless” the rebellion comes, and the antichrist is fully revealed. Other things will also come first. This antichrist, who opposes God and God’s people at every turn, will set himself up to be worshiped and take “his set in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” Has any of this happened yet? No? Then, we cannot expect Jesus to come yet.

Sadly, what may happen is this. These events will indeed unfold before our eyes and Jesus will not have come. Many Christians who have been taught to believe the fable will hardly be able to believe their eyes. They will be spiritually and emotionally unprepared to walk through the danger, suffering and sacrifice that will come upon the earth as the man of lawlessness gains power. A “great falling away” has been predicted for the End Times. One source of it may well be the dashed hopes and broken faith in God that could overwhelm multitudes of believers who have believed the wrong thing, not about Jesus, but about what He is asking us to undergo. If you seek an easy way out, who could blame you? But if it doesn’t come, how will you be ready for what’s really coming first. For “that day will not come unless...”



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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"The Restrainer Removed"

If Jesus Christ is the One to watch for, the antichrist is the one to watch out for. We are told by Paul that he is going to be held back—restrained—until the proper time. Can any time be the right time for such a rascal to be given free reign? Notwithstanding our reason or desire, it's going to happen. So, we're told to keep our eyes open. But whatever Paul told the Thessalonians when he was with them, he left something out (it seems) in passing the message on to us through this letter. Among other things it leaves us wondering, "Who is the restrainer? How and why is it or he removed?" And that opened the door to some wild speculation.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8 ESV

Who Is this Restrainer?

Let's cut to the chase. Many think that "he who now restrains" is none other than the Holy Spirit. Once He is taken "out of the way" all hell will break loose. Literally. This fuels the theory that if the Holy Spirit is removed this can only mean that the Church is also removed. Agreed. There certainly can be no believers on the earth if there is no Holy Spirit upon the earth. The Church cannot exist without the indwelling Holy Spirit who is given to every Christian at conversion. He is the Inner Witness who is united to our spirit, affirming our faith and making the new creation life possible. If He goes, we go. But is this really what this passage is saying?

There are not just difficulties with this idea, there are impossibilities. First, the difficulties. Verse 6 presents us with a problem. That little word "what" shows us that what Paul has in mind is not a person. This is unarguable. Check the translations and the Greek if you know it. Paul has something impersonal in mind. True, he switches off in the next verse and clearly speaks of a "he", but that doesn't remove the problem. The restrainer of verse 6 cannot refer to the Holy Spirit. He is more fully a Person than any of us who were created in the image of God. As a Person, He may indeed be largely unknown to many in the Body of Christ who "host" Him on the inside of their renewed being. But it is a he who indwells us, not an it.

Is this restrainer, then, a combination of the Holy Spirit (if He is the "he" of verse 7) and whatever that "it" of verse 6 is? There are other candidates. Various scholars have argued for the restrainer being civil government, gospel preaching, the binding of Satan, the providence of God, the Jewish state, the Church and the archangel Michael. Which one or which combination of them is the correct interpretation? Will the real restrainer please stand up (but don't remove yourself yet!)?



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Possible Candidates

Let's try fitting together the pieces using the Holy Spirit as the "he." Could it be the Church? No, the Church is a living Body composed of individual persons. Paul taught us that. He can't be forgetting it here. Speaking of Paul's teachings, we know that one of the restrainers of sin in this present age is the civil authority—governments! Here's what he wrote about it in Romans.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Romans 13:1-2 ESV

A governing "authority" is definitely an it, not a person. With that in mind, the best candidate for the verse 7 "he" is God in His providential capacity—His self-chosen ability to work through the governmental authorities He raises up as restraints upon sin. By this reading, the restrainer is God the Father. Apparently, He has ordained "a time" in which the antichrist is to be revealed. By removing His restraining Hand upon government, the Father will give the antichrist the opportunity he needs. The lawless one will seize full control for himself. This has been foretold. This is ordained. Just as the Father's Hand once restrained Herod from killing the Christ child, so now the removal of His Hand will loose the antichrist from all restraint.

An Impossibility that Remains

This selection of candidates removes the difficulties of the text. That still leaves an impossibility to discuss. How could it be possible that the Holy Spirit could be removed from the earth? Those who imagine that this will happen have not given enough thought to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Without Him you not only do not have the Church, you don't have any life left on earth! The Holy Spirit is indeed a restrainer of sin. He is also the giver and sustainer of all life, not just the life of faith in the hearts of believers.²⁴ That any life can exist apart from the Holy Spirit's active involvement, can only be believed by those who think that the Holy Spirit is only given to the Church. The Holy Spirit is indeed given to the Church in a way that the world does not receive, but He is still given to all life as Sustainer.

When Jesus was walking with His disciples on the way to Jerusalem, they asked about the Holy Spirit. He told them that they already knew Him, and they were puzzled. Like some Christians, they had no conscious, relational connection to the Holy Spirit.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17 ESV

Just because the world cannot "receive" the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean that He isn't with them. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit was with the disciples even though they were not yet converted, born-again believers. Even so, they were "receiving" His witness. How else could anyone get any pointers leading them to faith in Jesus? No one in the Rapture debate questions



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that there will be believers, martyrs and converts during the tribulation. How can any of that take place without the Holy Spirit? This is absurd!

Our Indispensable Ally

Every convert receives that Holy Spirit when they are born again. Every martyr or faithful Christian needs the active work of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful—none of us can stand in our own strength alone. The believing remnant of the Tribulation who refuse the mark of the beast will need the Holy Spirit more than any generation that ever lived. Even so, all generations have the Holy Spirit working with them. Otherwise, there could be no life. That's why the alleged "removal" of the Holy Spirit is an unthinkable impossibility.



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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Be Patient Until the Lord Comes"

This is perhaps "the least" of the New Testament passages concerning the Last Days. Despite its humble appearance, it still has some powerful things to say to us about the timing of the Rapture and of the Lord's Return. It is an agricultural image, especially suited to the Lord's teaching that we would know the "times and seasons" that would bring us to the final harvest of the Last Days.

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. James 5:7-8 NIV

Farmers and the Coming Harvest

The principle for reading the whole of the Bible is to let the plain meaning of the text speak for itself, unless there is something in the passage which shows that a different approach is necessary (a rare occurrence). In this case, James is asking us to picture the Lord's Return in the light of an agricultural image. He would certainly have known Jesus' teaching that there is to be a great harvest at the end of the age (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43). This makes the harvest image James uses especially appropriate as an image of the Last Days.

James tells his readers that they are to be like farmers, patiently waiting for the turning of the season, waiting for the exact right moment to begin the harvest. Now, you don't have to be a farmer to understand that there is a long interval between seed time and harvest. Patience is necessary. So is understanding the cycle of the "autumn and spring rains" that control the crop's growth. The farmer could do nothing to advance or slow down the seasons. He had to watch for the approaching season and plant according. After that there was little to do but cultivate the growing plants, watching and waiting for the exact moment of harvest to arrive.

This is where the harvest analogy bears tremendous fruit for us. Jesus made it clear that no one would know the exact date of His Return, but all alert believers would see and understand the "times and seasons" (see Day and Hour vs Times and Seasons). This is exactly the way it is for farmers! They certainly can see the crop growing and getting ready to harvest. They would have to be blind otherwise. Nevertheless, the exact day of the harvest would remain shrouded in mystery until it got very close. What if rains come at the wrong time? The harvest might have to be postponed. What if pests threaten the crop? The harvest may have to begin early.

A Truly Bizarre Idea

These and other practical considerations could easily shift the actual harvest date. Even so, every farmer knows when the day is drawing near and when it is not. There could be no such



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ludicrous sight as a farmer running around saying the harvest could come at any moment when the crop is barely above ground. Yet, isn't this just what the pre-tribulation rapture theory would have us believe: that Jesus could come at any moment? Nothing could be further from the truth! To believe that you would have to throw away this passage in James.

No sensible farmer expects the day of the harvest to magically appear at any moment. One stage of growth after another leads inevitably to the day of harvest. As it draws near there is no question that "the great day" is only a day or two away. There is nothing here to support the strange and bizarre idea that Jesus could come for us at any moment. Or that He would snatch us away without any clear signs leading up to the expected moment. No. There can be no doubt that James expects us to watch for the obvious signs which have to come before the harvest and the ingathering. Then, we will know—just as every farmer knows—that the longed-for day has arrived.

Yes, unbelievers will be taken by surprise. They won't be watching the signs or have any idea that the day of harvest is drawing near. And yes, they will be taken away. They will be snatched away to their doom! But we will be the ones who patiently watch and wait, standing firm against all adverse weather, knowing full-well that we are to take part in the final harvest.



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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"He Who Overcomes"

Jesus has a lot to say in the Book of Revelation about overcoming. John, who was with the Lord at Patmos, also included messages about overcoming in his gospel and his first letter. He had seen by prophetic vision exactly what the Lord wanted us to know about the Last Days. Apparently, John consider it critical for Christians to know that they need to become overcomers. How can you be an overcomer, unless you have something tremendous to overcome? No medals are ever given for those who flee from danger.

10 Because you have kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which will come upon all the habitable world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly. Hold fast to that which you have, so that no one may take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will go out no more. And I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of Heaven from My God, and My new name. Revelation 3:10-12 MKJV

Revelation of the End Times

Something that everyone “knows” is that the Book of Revelation seems to be primarily about the End Times. Not only does it come last in the Bible—which may be a visual tip-off in itself—but the entire book from Chapter 4 on clearly speaks of what “must happen after this.”²⁵ Even the messages to the seven churches which come in the first three chapters can be interpreted as foreshadowing issues that the Church of the Last Days will have to face. The passage quoted above is just such a passage. This faith-strengthening message was given to the church of Philadelphia. As with the other messages, the truth of it represents Jesus’s timeless counsel to Christians in every age. As such, it holds tremendous significance for those who will need their faith strengthened in order to battle through the challenges that are coming.

But is there more to it than this? It seems that there is. Although the first three verses of the message (not quoted) address issues specific to this little church in ancient Asian Minor, verse 10 turns a corner, widening the scope of their trial. The Lord promises that He will keep them (safe) “from the hour of temptation which will come upon all the habitable world.” That simply hasn’t happened yet! The Lord may indeed have kept them during a gripping time of trial, but there never yet has been such a time of temptation as Jesus described, one which would “try (all) those who dwell upon the earth.” Whatever may the merits of projecting other messages to these seven churches into the future, this one wants to be thrust there. Or here, rather. Because we are heading into that future where just such a time of world-wide trial is expected.

If it is true that we are the generation this passage alludes to, then we would be wise to drink in all its faith-strengthening wisdom. If Christians in other generations needed to join the ranks of “him who overcomes,” how much more will we? There is no escaping the logic of this: You



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cannot become an Overcomer unless you have something to overcome. Or this logic: No one hoping a pre-trib rapture will carry them to safety will have the motivation necessary for learning to be an Overcomer. Why exercise your faith in that direction if the major obstacle to overcome—the Tribulation—is going to be removed from your path? Can we not see that this is a complete set-up by the enemy who certainly would want his enemy, the Bride, lulled to sleep with false promises?

Preparing to Overcome

Those who are awake to the threat, prepare to face it. The first counsel of wisdom in this passage urges us to “keep the Word of my patience” so that we might be kept from temptation during the time of trial. This translates into learning how to patiently, steadily, endure anything and everything that comes our way today. Today, under the Lord’s leadership, always works as a preparation for tomorrow. Patience, perseverance and prayer are three Ps that truly move mountains. Let these become our daily bread during today’s trials, and we will be that much better equipped for enduring future ones.

Next, Jesus says to “hold fast.” Holding on to our faith in Him requires getting a really good faith-grip on His grace. Remember, trials don’t make us look good, especially to ourselves, because they reveal our weaknesses. But trials walked through with faith in Jesus always end up making Him look good for the grace-filled way He carries us through. Learning how to trust the Lord in the midst of ordinary, daily trials will prepare us for the ones to come. The best way to hold fast is to keep the “Big Five Connectors” in good working condition. Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship and service aren’t just church things to do. They are lifelines to our Savior that keep us well-connected to the One who said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.”²⁶

There is more that we will need to learn and more ways by which we can prepare (see Ways to Prepare). Even so, the best preparation is learning to listen, trust and obey Jesus every day. A time is coming when listening and obedience may become matters of life and death for all of us. In such a time we will need to trust Him like never before. That may seem backwards. In such a time it would it not be easiest to fall apart? Yes, but pressure has a way of clarifying the issue. Trusting Jesus has always been a matter of choice. Under great pressure we will realize that we have no other choice than to trust Him—we will be so far beyond our own ability to understand or overcome the trials in our own strength. We will have to trust.

So, take heart. All things really do work together for good, even great trials. Best of all Jesus has promised us this—that there really is a way for us to overcome. He would not be calling us to become overcomers if it were not possible. Let Him make the way for that splendid outcome to occur in your life by clinging to Him through thick and thin. Come to think of it, that’s a great way to live even now!



CHAPTER NINETEEN

"It Causes All to Be Marked"

The mark of the beast! We have heard about it all our lives. That dreaded mark. When it appears, we'll know that the choice is life or death in this life and eternal life or death in the next. If we choose to live by taking the mark, we will die forever in unending torment. If we refuse the mark, we'll be pursued by the beast system, seeking our death. A terrible choice. At least, by choosing to live for Jesus, He guarantees we'll live forever. Oh, but what an unwanted predicament! Is it any wonder that a theory emerged offering us the hope of a way out?

And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. Revelation 13:15-17 ESV

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. Revelation 19:20 ESV

A Declaration of War

This hated mark is ground zero for the End Times. With it, all-out war is declared against God and those who follow Him. There is no question about that. Everyone who takes this mark is doomed to eternal death. Everyone who tries to flee from taking it will be hunted down. Why would anyone take it? Why would anyone refuse it? The first answer is easy. Those who take the mark will have been deceived "by the signs" the beast performed. It will be deception all the way.

Even now, we can readily imagine a scenario by which a mark (or a chip) will be promoted as a way to end identity theft, or insure that our vital records are always available, or enable us to sail through financial transactions with a wave of the hand. Deception. But the greatest deception of all will be the signs and wonders the beast provides to a gullible and unsuspecting world of unbelievers. Not believing the truth about God, leaves people wide open to believing any lie that wants to take His place. But just to be sure, compulsion will be waiting in the wings: the beast "causes all" to receive the mark if deception doesn't do the job. Persuasion, deception and compulsion thrown in favor of taking that awful mark, who will resist?



The Problem of Compulsion

Many do. And that creates an insoluble problem for the pre-trib and mid-trib rapture theories. They would have it that all genuine believers get lifted to safety before this mark and martyrdom gets forced upon them. The ones who remain will be the “foolish virgins” who didn’t stay well-connected to the Lord. This hapless crew is composed of half-saved, compromised and double minded believers who got “left behind” because they were living for the world, rather than the Lord. In truth, they would be easy candidates for continued deception and compromise, not stalwart resistance.

Why would the beast and his cohorts have to use compulsion on them? Just let nature (fallen nature) take its course and they’ll fold up true to form. Are we to believe that they will suddenly discover a spine and a passion they never had before? How is it that the most heroic believers—those who resist the mark in the face of certain torture or death—will somehow emerge from the ranks of those unqualified to be raptured? How is it that this ragtag band will gain the highest accolades of heaven, rather than the “wise virgins” who were carried to safety?

This just doesn’t make sense. Only a dedicated Body of believers, who deeply love Jesus and fully understand the times will be able to withstand the deception that is coming. Only they will have the faith-courage to hang in there with Him in the face of massive opposition. And why would God allow severely flawed believers and un-shepherded new believers to be put to such an extreme test? Wouldn’t He ask that of those who had already been passing the preliminary trials? The forcing of the mark on those who refuse it, proves that this has to be the true Church which goes through the Great Tribulation.

Scriptures on the Mark

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Revelation 14:9-12 ESV

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. Revelation 19:20 ESV



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"Blessed Are the Dead"

Can a passage from the middle of the Tribulation period give us insight into when the Rapture of believers takes place? Indeed, it can. The Lord is famous for writing His Book in such a way that a freshly discovered jewel in one passage shines a revealing light on other seemingly disconnected ones. In this case, a verse about the mark of the beast gives insight into the state of the Church during the Tribulation. Oops. Does that mean the Church will be going through the Tribulation, not floating above it? Could be it's time to come down from the clouds and see earth events by the light of scripture.

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." 12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:9-13 ESV

Saints on Earth During the Tribulation?

What could be worse than this troubled time? If anyone is caught by God worshipping the beast and its image and receiving that fateful mark, they will "drink the wine of God's wrath." Even worse, that wine will be "poured full strength" so that the torment with fire will go on forever. Whatever you do, don't do this! And yet we know from other scriptures that the flip side of this is that anyone caught by the beast system not doing these things will be tortured and beheaded. So, we will either be caught by God if we prove unfaithful or caught by the antichrist if we hold out against him. Surely, God would never let His chosen, faithful people get into such a predicament.

This passage destroys that vain imagination. After setting forth His absolute demand for obedience—if we want to make it to heaven—the Lord tells us, "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints." Endurance implies having to go patiently and persistently through something that can only be endured, not enjoyed. This is not a polite request of the Lord. This is God literally holding our feet to the fire and giving us no other option but to do what He requires. Surely this doesn't mean us! Indeed, many will tell you that there is a third "caught by someone" option: If you are a believer in Jesus in advance of these days, you will be caught up into the air by Him and carried high above earth's greatest trial.



A Secondary Theory

As much as that idea “makes sense” to us, to our sense of survival, it doesn’t make any sense in the context of this passage. In fact, it makes so little sense that a whole secondary theory had to be created to cover the glaring problem that this one passage creates for the first theory. The problem is that this call is given to “the saints”, which is the New Testament designation for genuine believers. Wait a minute. Weren’t all the believers caught up into heaven in the Rapture? See the problem?

The “solution” generally offered (to the credulous) is that these are believers who have sprung up on their own after the Rapture. They had perhaps been only partial believers or sinfully compromised believers before the genuine believers got taken away. The Rapture woke them up. Seeing the true believers rise into heaven convinced them that they had better get serious about living for God. It is to these untrained and untried believers that the demand to be faithful under extreme duress is directed. Perhaps, there is a kind of primitive justice to it. They squandered their opportunity to be raptured away by living large in the world. Now, it’s their turn to pay the piper.

Difficulties Abound

There are so many insuperable difficulties with this that one hardly knows where to begin. First, the saints are being called to endure (verse 12). This only has meaning if you consider what this word means in daily life. It implies that life has been going on somewhat like normal and then difficulties begin from which there is no way out. The only thing that can be done is endure them by going through them—by putting up with them, not by getting out of them. That’s a picture of pre-Tribulation believers walking into difficult times. That is what all Christians believed for 1800 years until this modern theory came along.

Second, these are not called believers, a word that the New Testament also uses for followers of Jesus. They are called saints. That word is *hagios* in the Greek. It means consecrated ones. This word is directed to “those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” That just doesn’t fit the idea that these are barely saved individuals who only came to faith once they saw their time was up. It will apply to them if, God willing, they step up to the plate and stand firm in a trial that the “genuine” saints wished whole-heartedly to avoid. But why would a merciful God put “green” recruits through something that “seasoned” believers are allowed to escape. If it is unsuitable for the “mature”, how could it possibly be appropriate for babes?

The third difficulty is best portrayed by a sports analogy. If this theory is correct, then the best Coach in the universe when faced with the most important game of His career, against the greatest opposing team His enemy ever assembled, inexplicably pulls His entire squad out of the game. This leaves no one on the field (the first string) trained by Him and not even anyone on the bench (the second string) He can send in. What does He do? At the last minute, after the game begins, He recruits untested and untrained people from the parking lot. But wait. He has no one left in the game who can train them. They are entirely on their own with no leaders, no teachers and no trainers. How crazy is that? How crazy is it to believe this?

Highest Honor

The all-too-often unmentioned blessing comes at the end of the passage. John tells us that he “heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” There is perhaps no higher honor that any believer could hope to receive than this. This is given to those who are willing to lay down their lives in martyrdom as a testimony of their love for Jesus and as a witness to the unbelieving world. Such consecration is highly prized by God and eternally rewarded. As far as we know there is no reward for taking the easy way out.



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The Matthew 24 Timeline

The Modern King James Version (MKJV)

Jesus gave us a timeline for the major events of the End Times. This wonderful outline includes the birth pangs, the Great Tribulation, the rise of the antichrist and all the stunning elements of His Return. It functions like a skeleton, providing the structural elements that support living flesh and connects them the right way.

The only thing left for us to do is to “put meat on these bones” by taking the passages from elsewhere in the Bible and attaching them at the right spot. Of course, if you take this structure apart and rearrange it (as some do), you don’t get a lovely prophetic creation from Jesus, you get a monstrosity. But why would anyone want to do that?

He [Jesus] answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. Matthew 16:2-3 ESV

Jesus Predicts the Temple’s Destruction

1 And Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone on another that shall not be thrown down.

This timeline—usually called the “Olivet Discourse”—came forth not as prepared remarks during class time, but simply in the course of ordinary conversation. Of course, nothing with Jesus is ordinary. The disciples found that out when they came to Jesus wanting to share the view with Him of the temple’s buildings as they were departing from its grounds. Coming from the sticks (Galilee), they would have been over-awed by the splendor and magnificence of Herod’s temple in Jerusalem. They expected Jesus to join with them in praising it. Instead, He shattered their mood by foretelling its utter destruction: there would not be even “one stone on another that shall not be thrown down.” The arrow went deep. The Temple stood for something far greater and more substantial than itself. It could only be thrown down, if God were to bring a terrible judgment against the Jewish nation.

The Disciples Ask Three Questions

3 And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?



Upon descending the temple mount, Jesus and His disciples would have crossed the lovely Kidron Valley with its tombs of the kings and the Garden of Gethsemane, then climbed to the crest of the Mount of Olives. All Jerusalem lay before their gaze, but the only thing that held their attention for that half hour walk was the sobering effect of Jesus' words. As soon as their Master was seated, they approached Him with the question filling their minds (and ours). It's actually not one, but three separate questions. When will the temple be destroyed? What will be the sign of Your Return? And, what will be the sign of the "end of the world"?

Jesus Warns against Deception

4 And Jesus answered and said to them, Take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and will deceive many. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for all these things must occur; but the end is not yet.

Jesus began with a stern warning. We need to heed it, too. The thing of first importance our Lord evidently wants us to know is that these will be extremely deceptive times. There will be false messiahs and false messages. "Many" will be deceived by this. Let's remember that the word Christ or messiah in Jesus' day was not a man's name, but a title that meant a heaven-sent savior. Many will claim to be able to "save" humanity from the troubles coming on the earth. That's the thing to watch out for. There will also be wars and "rumors" of even more wars breaking out (think nightly news). We are not to be "troubled" by such reports, deceived into thinking that they are signs that the world is about to end. These things are unavoidable, but "the end is not yet." Other things have to happen first.

The Beginning of Sorrows (Birth Pangs)

7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in different places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Now, Jesus describes conditions which He calls "the beginning of sorrows," a phrase which carries the meaning of the pains or throes (travail) of childbirth.²⁷ Hence, these pre-Tribulation "sorrows" are often referred to as "birth pangs." The picture here is of a world going into the convulsions of labor as the new thing God is doing is birthed upon the earth. As with human birth pangs, we can expect an increase in magnitude (of the pain they will inflict) and in frequency, as these "contractions" come closer together. Specifically, we are to watch for famines, pestilences (plagues) and earthquakes world-wide. These calamities are already increasing. In addition, the fabric of human society will be torn as nation (ethnic group) rises against ethnic group and kingdoms (what we would call nations) rise against kingdoms. This sign, too, is falling into place. Although we do not have a world-wide war going on, the number of wars world-wide is rising sharply.



Tribulation and Persecution Begin

9 Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted and will kill you. And you will be hated of all nations for My name's sake. 10 And then many will be offended, and will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will rise and deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will become cold.

Once the birth pangs reach a certain level, persecution will break out. Jesus does not say if the two events are causally related, though it may be that Christians and Jews will be blamed for the calamities striking the earth. Nor is He saying that there will be no persecution until this time. He is the One who stated plainly that in the world we would have tribulation.²⁸ The word He used includes the meaning of persecution and indeed, times of persecution have always plagued the church. However, during this time we “will be hated of all nations.” This is a world-wide persecution that begins during the birth pangs as unbelievers turn against the Church.

This will prove too much for some believers to bear. Verses 10 to 12 heartbreaking describe not unbelievers, but Christians turning against Christians. We can expect betrayals as “many” believers become “offended,” turning against the faith and those who keep it.²⁹ Deception will increase, so much so, that lawlessness “will abound” even among believers. For many people of faith, the love of God and love of man will simply “grow cold” as their faith dies. Knowing this possibility exists, pray that it never happens to you or yours. Jesus is warning us so we can prepare.

Perseverance, Dedication and Blessing

13 But he who endures to the end, the same shall be kept safe. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world as a witness to all nations. And then the end shall come.

The conditions in the previous verses lead into a glorious promise that contains a warning. Jesus promises that help will come to those “who endure to the end.” Those who set their “hearts on pilgrimage” to pass faithfully through these perilous times are guaranteed that God will keep them safe.³⁰ Does this mean no physical harm will come their way? Hardly. Jesus previously declared that many faithful believers will “be afflicted and killed.” Being kept safe in this context means being kept from apostacy—denying the faith. Such apostacy is exactly what comes upon the many believers who betray fellow believer, turn lawless and grow cold hearts. In this promise is the warning that if we don’t doggedly purpose to go through everything faithfully, we too may become “offended” by what God allows the devil to do.

Meanwhile, one sign of enduring faith is that “the gospel of the kingdom” will at last go out to all the world, reaching every nation. This is not the “gospel of salvation” as great as that is but the message that this world has a kingdom that is coming in fullness and a King who is already ruling the universe. This focus of the gospel message is not about getting to heaven but bringing heaven down to earth through faith and obedience to earth’s rightful King. As the Church aligns with its message and as that message is given a living witness, “the end will come.” Which end



does Jesus mean? Is this the end of the birth pangs or the end of the tribulation that comes before He Returns?

The Abomination of Desolation

15 Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand). 16 Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains. 17 Let him on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; 18 nor let him in the field turn back to take his clothes. 19 And woe to those who are with child, and to those who give suck in those days! 20 But pray that your flight is not in the winter, nor on the sabbath day;

This point on the timeline directly connects with Daniel's prophecy which describes the rule of the antichrist. According to Daniel 12:11, when this event happens there will be 3 ½ years left before "the end of days."³¹ Notice that Jesus, speaking to His disciples (and through them to us) says "when you see" this abomination taking place, then run for cover. How He describes that flight to safety is couched in the images of His day, but the key thing to note is that Jesus fully expects believers to see these things and take evasive action. There is nothing here to suggest that believers will already have been taken to safety (a pre-trib rapture) or that Jesus will suddenly take them away now that this sign is revealed (a mid-trib rapture). No. We will be here, and He will not be coming to rescue us yet. We will, therefore, need to seek safety.

"Great" Tribulation Begins

21 for then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened.

It only gets worse. "Great tribulation" begins. It won't last forever—only for a while (those 3 ½ years mentioned above). But while it lasts Jesus says that it will be the worst the world has ever seen. Therefore, without a doubt this is the Great Tribulation which we all know is coming and which we all hope to escape or survive as the case may be. Our usual time for it is seven years, not three and a half. Without opening up that debate, much less trying to resolve, let's just take notice that Jesus doesn't say, "The great tribulation begins now" at this juncture where the abomination of desolation is revealed. He is simply saying that once this abomination stands in the temple, there will be "great tribulation." That is something everyone can agree on! Perhaps, this marks the mid-point of a tribulation that grew up as the birth pangs gained intensity. In that case, we don't have a marker for the exact moment the seven-year Great Tribulation begins. At least not with this timeline. But we do have its mid-point.

Deceived People and Deceptive Signs

23 Then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ! Or, There! Do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and



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wonders; so much so that, if it were possible, they would deceive even the elect. **25 Behold, I have told you beforehand. 26 Therefore if they shall say to you, Behold, He is in the desert! Do not go out. Behold, He is in the secret rooms! Do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines even to the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered.**

For the third time, Jesus warns against deception! Once more, false messages of hope will abound, along with false claims to be the savior everyone needs. Don't fall for it. No matter how badly believers will want Jesus to come, He's not coming early! So, He says, "Do not go out... Do not believe it." Nevertheless, even now—without any of these signs in place—without a temple and the antichrist in the temple, many believers are already running around expecting Jesus to come for His Bride at any minute. Once again, through the disciples, Jesus is telling us that we will be "on the ground" during this time of persecution and tribulation. But we are to hold out in faith. He will not be coming secretly. When He comes everyone on earth will see Him just as we see lightning when it flashes "out of the east and shines even to the west." But that moment hasn't yet arrived, though it is just around the corner.

The Tribulation Ends with Darkness

29 And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

This foreboding sign will also bring relief. It will certainly be a terrifying sign to unbelievers of their imminent doom. However, for those believers who have survived everything the antichrist and the devil threw at them, this darkening of the world will shout out that the Light of the World is about to appear. This will be like the drum roll which announces something big is about to happen. Just as the beginning of a play is announced by bringing the house lights down, this will claim everyone's attention and bring the whole chaotic world to silence. For those who have remained faithful, it will be a breathless silence filled with a heavenly anticipation. We will know that our "rapture" is about to occur. The theory has that backwards, too. Every last one of us will feel the thrill in our hearts as the lights dim. We'll look up knowing that He is coming for us. And then...

Jesus Returns for All to See

30 And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in the heavens. And then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

The "sign" of the Son of Man appears! This word sign could easily be translated "supernaturally wondrous or miraculous." Don't think that it means our English word for something written in code that requires interpretation. Not in this moment! All eyes will see Him. Jesus will be



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“coming in the clouds of the heaven with power and great glory.” That will be so stupendous a sign that no one could possibly miss it, even those who might wish they could. For, “all the tribes of the earth”—the unbelievers who refused to acknowledge Him—will mourn. Their dismay will be great for it will be too late to receive Him now. On the other hand, those who have received Him and have been proven faithful, will hear that “the sound of a trumpet” and we will rise. Whether we are in “the heavens” (having died) or are still living under earth’s “four winds,” the angels will “gather His elect” to be with Him forever.

When does all this happen? After we go through the birth pangs, after we go through the persecution and the perils, after the antichrist has his dark day, after the tribulation of those days, then “we will see” the Son of Man—Jesus!—coming for His faithful Bride at last!



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A History of the Pre-trib Rapture's Origin

The following is an account of the origin of the Pretribulation Rapture teaching which was made by J. Preston Eby, a diligent researcher and prolific author.

"It wasn't until the early or mid-1800s that there was any significant group of believers around the world that looked for a "rapture" of the Church prior to a seven-year tribulation period. It may come as a shock to some who read these lines, but it is a fact, nonetheless, that the "rapture" teaching was not taught by the early Church, it was not taught by Church of the first centuries, it was not taught by the Reformers, it was not taught by anyone (except a couple of Roman Catholic theologians) until about the year 1830. At the time of the Reformation, the early Protestants widely held and were convinced the Pope was the supreme individual embodiment and personification of the spirit of antichrist, and the Roman Church, the Harlot System of Revelation seventeen. This understanding was responsible for bringing millions of believers out of the Roman Catholic religious system. It therefore became expedient for certain Romish theologians to turn the attention of the people away from the Papacy, and this they endeavored to do by inventing a counter-interpretation to that held by the Protestants. This new scheme of prophetic interpretation became known as *futurism*. Rather than viewing the drama of the book of Revelation spiritually and historically, they would consign it all to a brief period of time at the end of the age. It was a Jesuit priest named **Ribera** who, in the days of the Reformation, first taught that all the events in the book of Revelation were to take place literally during the three and a half years reign of the antichrist way down at the end of the age. Thus, Ribera laid the foundation of a system of prophetic interpretation of which the *secret rapture* has now become an integral part.

"Later, **Emmanuel Lacunza**, also a Jesuit priest, built on Ribera's teachings, and spent much of his life writing a book titled *"The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty."* Lacunza, however, wrote under the assumed name of **Rabbi Ben Ezra**, supposedly a learned Jew who had accepted Christ as his Savior. With Jesuit cunning, he thus conspired to get his book a hearing in the Protestant world they would not even permit it in their homes coming from a Jesuit pen but as the earnest work of the "converted Jew," they would consume it with avid interest! Within the pages of this elaborate forgery, Lacunza taught the novel notion that Jesus returns not once, but twice, and at the "first stage" of His return He "raptures" His Church so they can escape the reign of the "future antichrist." His book was first published in Spanish in the 1812 and soon found its way onto the shelves of the library of the Archbishop of Canterbury in London, England.

"Now, enter the name of **Edward Irving**. Born in Scotland in 1792, Irving became one of the most eloquent preachers of his time, and a leading figure of the Catholic Apostolic Church of England. In 1828 his open-air meetings in Scotland drew crowds of 10,000 people. His church in London seated one thousand people and was packed week after week with a congregation drawn from the most brilliant and influential circles of society. There were some among them who by prophetic declaration announced that the Lord was coming soon, and this idea became prominent in their prophetic utterances and teachings. Out of those prophetic declarations some began to study the scriptures in the light of a physical, literal coming of the Lord. Up until that time the coming of the Lord was understood as coming of the Lord *TO* His people, and *IN* His saints, and there was no sense of His fleshly coming. Irving discovered Lacunza's book and



was deeply shaken by it, in fact, fell in love with it, translated it into English, and it was published in London in 1827. At this time Irving heard what he believed to be a voice from heaven commanding him to preach the *Secret Rapture of the Saints*. Irving then began to hold Bible conferences throughout Scotland, Emphasizing the coming of Jesus to rapture His Church.

"About this same time there began the emergence of a new movement which came to be known as the Plymouth Brethren. The Brethren movement had its beginning in Dublin in 1825 when a small group of earnest men, dissatisfied with the lethargic condition that prevailed in the Protestant Church in Ireland, met for prayer and fellowship. Soon others joined the fellowship and associated groups sprang up in various places. Though the movement had its beginning at Dublin, it was Plymouth, England that became the center of their vast literature outreach, thus the name Plymouth Brethren became attached. Although there was interest from the start in prophetic subjects, the center of interest was on the body of Christ as an organism and the spiritual unity of Christ of all believers in reaction to the deadness of formalism of the organized church systems and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. A man by the name of John Nelson Darby was the leading spirit among the Plymouth Brethren from 1830 onward. Darby was from a prosperous Irish family, was educated as a lawyer, took high honors at Dublin University, then turned aside, to his father's chagrin, to become a minister.

"Thus Irving and Darby were contemporaries, though associated with different spiritual movements. Another series of meetings were in progress at this time. A group of seeking Christians were meeting in the castle of Lady Powerscourt for the study of Bible prophecy. Many clergymen attended, and quite a few who were Irvingites. The Irvingites came to the meetings obsessed with the ideas of the "Secret Rapture" and the "future antichrist," imbibed from the Jesuit teaching of the Secret Rapture and the futurist interpretation of prophecy, as well as the famous book by Rabbi Ben-Ezra, or, actually, Jesuit priest Emmanuel Lacunza! Darby was himself a prolific writer and from the time a constant stream of propaganda came from his pen. His writings on biblical subjects number over 30 volumes of 600 pages each. Darby developed and organized "futurism" into a system of prophetic teaching called "dispensationalism." Darby's biographers refer to him as "the father of dispensationalism." And the crown jewel in the kingdom of dispensationalism is, of course, the so-called SECRET RAPTURE!

"The Secret Rapture teaching was introduced into the United States and Canada in the 1860s and 1870s though there is some indication that it may have been taught as early as the 1840s. Darby himself visited the United States six times. The new teaching was spreading. A Congregationalist preacher by the name of C.I. Scofield came under the influence of Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. The Scofield Reference Bible was destined to have a tremendous impact upon the beliefs of many, when, three million copies were published in the first 50 years. Through this Bible, Scofield carried the teaching of the Secret Rapture into the very heart of evangelism. Some ignorant souls look on the notes in this Bible as the Word of God itself. I do not doubt for one instant that many who read these lines have been influenced somewhere in their spiritual lives by the footnotes in the Scofield Bible.

"There is one final link in the chain of the development and spread of the rapture theory that should be mentioned in passing. I would draw your attention again to the source, the origin, of the rapture doctrine and the chain of contact by which it has been brought down to this day. It began as **a Roman Catholic invention**. The Jesuit priest Ribera's writings influenced the Jesuit priest Lacunza, Lacunza influenced Irving, Irving influenced Darby, Darby influenced Scofield, Scofield and Darby influenced D.L. Moody, and Moody influenced the Pentecostal Movement. How? you ask. The Assemblies of God is today by far the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. When the Pentecostal movement began at the turn of the century, and the



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Assemblies of God held their first general council in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, they were a small movement and didn't have their own publishing house. They needed Sunday School and study materials for their churches so where do you suppose they got it? They bought it from *Moody Press* and had their own cover stitched on it! So, what do you think the Assemblies of God people believed? They believed what Moody Bible Institute taught!

This had its impact on Pentecostal theology, because in the early years there were practically no pre-millennialists in the Pentecostal movement. Most of the ministers in those early days came from Presbyterian, Methodist, or other historic denominations men who, being baptized in the Holy Spirit and leaving their denominations, joined themselves to the Assemblies of God or one of the other emerging Pentecostal denominations. That is how the Pentecostal movement became influenced and saturated with the "*Secret Rapture*" doctrine by a direct chain right back to ***THE ROMAN CHURCH.***"



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Scriptures and Footnotes

¹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 ESV

² So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:27 ESV

³ And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:12-13 ESV

⁴ "Tertullian, one of the 2nd century Church Fathers wrote that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church", implying that the martyrs' willing sacrifice of their lives leads to the conversion of others."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_martyrs

⁵ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Matthew 24:8 ESV

⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Hebrews 12:26-27 ESV

⁷ "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 24:29-30 ESV

⁸ The word "astray" translated here is *planaō* in the Greek. According to Strong's Concordance it means "to (properly cause to) roam (from safety, truth, or virtue): - go astray, deceive, err, seduce, wander, be out of the way."

⁹ 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." John 14:21 ESV

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10-12 ESV

¹¹ In case there is a question about the four winds. Winds are only in the earth realm, not in heaven where the crystal sea before the throne is untouched by any ripple of wind or tide. Also, the four corners of the earth, the four quarters of the earth and the four winds all indicate the same thing: north, east, south and west. Directions which have no reference to heaven.

¹² The victor's crown of righteousness is now waiting for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on the day that he comes, and not only to me but also to all who eagerly wait for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:8 ISV

¹³ For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:12-16 ESV

¹⁴ There are two outstanding exceptions: Enoch and Elijah were lifted up to heaven without passing through death.

¹⁵ Of course, if we die as faithful martyrs in the persecution, or die in the usual ways of accident, disease and old age, we would see this moment. But that would be to see it in company with the dead who are raised, not as believers still on earth.

¹⁶ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5 ESV

¹⁷ In toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 2 Corinthians 11:27-29 ESV

¹⁸ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ,



then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV

¹⁹ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Romans 13:7 ESV

²⁰ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:39-40 ESV

²¹ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:10 ESV

²² Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 2 Corinthians 6:9-10 ESV

²³ I'm making a joke here, because there never existed our modern belief in a pre-tribulation rapture until a Jesuit launched the idea in the early 1800s. He was hoping to spread confusion among the Protestants. He succeeded.

²⁴ When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Psalm 104:29-30 ESV

²⁵ After these things I looked, and behold, a door was opened in Heaven. And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you what must occur after these things. Revelation 4:1 ESV

²⁶ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 ESV

²⁷ From Strong's Complete Concordance: *ōdin* Akin to G3601; a pang or throe, especially of childbirth: - pain, sorrow, travail.

²⁸ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 ESV

²⁹ Strong's: The word for offended is *skandalizo* which means to "scandalize"; from G4625; to entrap, that is, trip up (figuratively stumble [transitively] or entice to sin, apostasy or displeasure): - (make to) offend.

³⁰ Blessed are those whose strength is in you; who have set their hearts on a pilgrimage. Passing through the valley of Weeping, they make it a place of springs. Yes, the autumn rain covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength. Everyone of them appears before God in Zion. Psalm 84:5-7 WEB

³¹ And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the desolating abomination set up, a thousand two hundred and ninety days shall occur. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But you go on to the end, for you shall rest and stand in your lot at the end of the days. Daniel 12:11-13 MKJV

