

WHEN AND HOW



WILL CHRIST RETURN?

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Introduction

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth (John 14:3, 28) to establish the Kingdom of God, right here on earth, and His rulership over all nations (Revelation 20:4, 6). The Bible also gives us many indications as to when Christ's return will occur. Prophetic Scriptures outline in detail the conditions pointing to His Second Coming.

In Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, Christ described events which would lead to His return and the end of THIS age, AND to the beginning of the Millennium—the NEW age of the wonderful world tomorrow!

He warned against ever-increasing religious deception (1 Timothy 4:1), wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matthew 24:4–7). All of these events are referred to as the beginning of sorrows (Matthew 24:8). Mankind will encounter “perilous” or “stressful” times in these last days (2 Timothy 3:1–5). Scoffers will even deny that Christ will return as He said He would (2 Peter 3:3–4; Jude 17–18).

Christ predicted that there would be religious persecution of His Church, as well as defeat in war for countries such as the USA and the UK. These events are commonly described as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:9, 15–28; Mark 13:9, 11–23; Luke 21:12–24; Deuteronomy 31:29). Christ stated that some members of His Church would be protected at a place of safety here on earth during the Great Tribulation; and that the Great Tribulation would be followed by heavenly signs or cosmic disturbances (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25–26) and the terrible plagues of the “Day of the Lord.” This will ultimately lead to Christ's return in great power and great glory (Matthew 24:30–31; Mark 13:26–27; Luke 21:27–28).

At the time of Christ's Second Coming, the saints—converted Christians—will either be *resurrected* to immortality if they have already died, or they will be *changed to immortality* if they are still alive (1 Corinthians 15:50–56; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). They will meet

Christ in the air and then descend with Him, *on that same 24-hour-day*, to the Mount of Olives, which shall split in two, making a very large valley (Zechariah 14:4). It is there that the final battle of God Almighty against hostile human armies will take place. Christ and His saints will then begin to RULE on this earth, over all peoples, for one thousand years.

Our main emphasis in this booklet focuses on the events **leading to the return of Christ**. We will also clear up many misconceptions about the **manner** of Christ's return and the **false notion** that we can determine the day and year of His return. Christ Himself said that we must not try to calculate or figure out the exact time, and there are some important and surprising reasons for this command, as we will explain.

Chapter 1

THE Sign of Christ's Return

The Bible provides detailed descriptions of the many events that indicate the imminent return of Christ. However, Christ gave only ONE compelling and convincing sign to prove to us WHEN His Second Coming would occur. Very few understand what this sign is.

In Matthew 24:3, four of Christ's disciples asked Him three questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the SIGN of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Christ had just spoken about the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem during the lifetime of some of His original Apostles (vv. 1-2). The disciples wanted to know more about the destruction of the second Temple, erroneously believing that such an event would coincide with Christ's return. As it turned out, the second Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., but Christ did not return then, nor would He for many years to come. Christ explained to them that numerous significant events would have to occur before He would return.

In Mark 13:4, the disciples are quoted as asking, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the SIGN when all these things will be fulfilled?"

In the accounts of both Matthew and Mark, Christ pointed out that the gospel of the Kingdom of God would have to be preached in all the world, to all nations, prior to His coming and the end of the age.

He said in Matthew 24:14, "**And this gospel of the kingdom WILL BE preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.**" He is quoted as saying in Mark 13:10, "**And the gospel must first be preached [Authorized Version: "published"] to all the nations.**"

The fact that the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God in all the world was given as a SIGN for Christ's return, shows that this gospel had NOT been preached *to the world* for a long time. Of

course, all kinds of “gospels” were preached, but not the gospel OF the Kingdom of God! Christ came to preach that gospel—the good news or glad tidings OF the Kingdom of God. It is THAT gospel which He commands His Church to preach today in all the world!

But just what IS the Kingdom of God?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In Mark 10:15, 25 we read that we must receive and *enter* the Kingdom of GOD. Mark 14:25 quotes Christ as saying that He would *drink wine* in the Kingdom of GOD. He states in Luke 4:43 that He came to *preach* the Kingdom of GOD. He adds in Luke 6:20 that the poor are blessed because *theirs is* the Kingdom of GOD.

In Luke 7:28 He explains that everyone who will be in the Kingdom of GOD will be *greater* than any human being, including John the Baptist. (Human beings—flesh and blood—*cannot inherit* the Kingdom of GOD, compare 1 Corinthians 15:50. As long as they are flesh and blood, they cannot enter it. They must be *changed*, compare verses 51–54. They must be *born of water and Spirit*, to be able to enter the Kingdom of GOD, compare John 3:5. As long as they are not born of the Spirit, they are flesh (verse 6), and unless *born again*, they cannot see the Kingdom of GOD (verse 3)).

We are also warned in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 that the *unrighteous will not* inherit the Kingdom of GOD. In Luke 13:28–29, Christ speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets *sitting* in the Kingdom of GOD.

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

In addition, the Bible speaks sometimes of the Kingdom of CHRIST, but this is NOT another gospel, and it is not addressing a different Kingdom.

In Luke 1:32–33 we read that of Christ’s Kingdom there will be no end. We read in Colossians 1:13 that the Father has *translated us* into (that is, He has brought us under the dominion of) the Kingdom of the Son. 2 Timothy 4:1, 18 speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

We read in 2 Peter 1:11 that an abundant *entrance* will be supplied to us into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:5 makes it very clear that the Kingdom is the Kingdom of God and of Christ: "... no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER

We also read that it is God the FATHER's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). Matthew 26:29 adds that Christ will drink wine again with the disciples in His Father's Kingdom. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 we read that we should walk worthy of God the Father (compare 1 Thessalonians 1:1) who calls us into His own Kingdom and glory. Luke 22:29–30 says that Christ will bestow on the apostles a Kingdom, just as the Father bestowed one upon Him, that they *may eat and drink* at His table in His kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Finally, we read in 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28, "Then comes the end, when He [Christ] delivers the kingdom to GOD THE FATHER, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power... then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE GOD

So how are we to understand these statements? What IS the Kingdom of God; of Christ; and of the Father? How are we to enter or inherit it? And what exactly is the Church of God to proclaim in all the world just prior to Christ's return?

God IS a Family, consisting of God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. [The Holy Spirit is not a third member of the God Family, but it is the power and the mind of God proceeding from both the Father and the Son.] Both the Father and the Son are God.

THE FATHER IS GOD

It is accepted by most professing Christians that the *Father is God*. After Christ's resurrection, He told Mary: "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to MY GOD and your God" (John 20:17). In Ephesians 1:17, Paul refers to the Father as the "GOD of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And so, several decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find a statement that was recorded by John, an apostle of Jesus Christ: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which GOD [the Father] GAVE HIM to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John” (Revelation 1:1).

JESUS CHRIST IS GOD

However, there are quite a few who debate the concept that the *Son, Jesus Christ, is God*, even though the Bible is very clear on this point. Notice Titus 2:11–14: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

John 1:18 tells us: “No one has ever seen God [the Father]. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (*New Revised Standard Version*). Notice the rendering of this passage in the *New American Bible*: “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.” Similar rendering is also used in the Luther Bible: “No one has seen God at any time; the only Begotten, WHO IS GOD and who is in the Father’s bosom, has revealed Him to us.” The *Elberfelder Bible* comments in an annotation that many old and good sources render the phrase, “the only-begotten Son,” as “the only-begotten GOD.”

Additionally, Romans 9:5 refers to Jesus Christ as “the eternally blessed God.” Hebrews 1:8 refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as “God.” In Isaiah 9:6–7, we read about Christ: “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God.”

After His resurrection, doubting Thomas identified Jesus as his God (John 20:28). Indeed, Jesus Christ identified Himself several times in the New Testament as the “I am”—the Eternal or Ever-living One (John 8:58). HE was the God of the Old Testament, dealing directly

with the people, speaking to them and even manifesting Himself to them. It had to be Christ who did this, because He Himself said that no one has ever seen the form of “God” (the Father) or heard the voice of God (the Father). (Compare John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 John 4:12.)

The Jews thought that they worshipped the Father, erroneously thinking that He was the God of the Old Testament. That is why we read that Christ came to REVEAL the Father to them (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). The Jews thought they knew the Father, not realizing that the God of the Old Testament was Jesus Christ—not God the Father. And they rejected the fact that Christ was Immanuel—“God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

THE GOSPEL

So then, having established the fact that both the Father and Christ are God, let us now focus on what the gospel OF the Kingdom of God is. There is only ONE gospel (Galatians 1:6–9), and it is mostly called the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; 24:14; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 8:1; 9:2). It is also referred to as the gospel OF Christ (Mark 1:1; Romans 1:9, 16; compare 2 Thessalonians 1:6–8)—not just ABOUT Christ. It is also identified as the gospel OF God the Father (Romans 1:1).

God the Father is the Originator and Owner of the Gospel. He entrusted it to Christ to preach it here on earth. It is God’s and Christ’s gospel which the Church is to proclaim today. Notice, it is not called the gospel ABOUT Christ or not even ABOUT God the Father; nor is it called the gospel ABOUT the Kingdom of God. Rather, it is described as the gospel OF God; OF Christ; and OF the Kingdom of God.

We emphasize this concept because the differences are wide-ranging. The gospel message is a message FROM God TO man—it is FOR man. It includes the truth about God, about Christ, and about the Kingdom of God, but it is more encompassing than that. It shows man how he can ENTER the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is the Family of God. God IS a RULING Family! The God Family—the God Kingdom—consists today as it always has, of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. Both the Father and the Son are GOD. They ARE the Kingdom or Family of God. Converted Christians are NOT YET in the Kingdom or Family of God. They are Spirit-begotten children of God, to be BORN into the Kingdom of God

at the time of Christ's return to this earth. Then, they too will be IN the Kingdom of God—the Family of GOD. Then, they will BE God!

In order to be IN the Kingdom of God, one must BE God. Man is NOT yet in the Kingdom. He is not yet God because flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. But it is man's destiny to enter into eternal life—into the Kingdom of God—to become a member of the Kingdom or RULING Family of God.

When we preach the gospel OF the Kingdom of God, we preach the message, **which belongs to and originates with the KINGDOM of God—the Family of God.** The everlasting or eternal gospel is **the message OF God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. It is the message OF the Kingdom of God.**

By now, it should be clear why we read about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the Father, and the Kingdom of Christ. God is a Family, consisting of the Father and the Son. God is a Kingdom, which also includes government and rulership. Both the Father and the Son are God—members of the Kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

The Bible indeed teaches that we are going to enter the Kingdom of *heaven*, but this does not mean that we will go to heaven. We need to understand what is meant by the term, "Kingdom of heaven."

First of all, we should note that only Matthew uses this expression. The other gospel writers consistently and exclusively use the term "Kingdom of God." It is therefore obvious that both terms describe the same thing.

The Kingdom of God is identical with the "Kingdom of heaven," since God the Father and Jesus Christ *are in heaven* and *rule in and from heaven* over this earth and the entire universe. But this does not mean that we will go to heaven to enter the Kingdom there; rather, Christ will return to this earth and restore the Government of God on this earth. The Kingdom of God, through its representative, Jesus Christ, will rule here on earth, and we will be ruling with and under Him as born-again members of the God Family. Ultimately, God the Father will also come down to the new earth to establish headquarters on it, after new heavens and a new earth have been created, in which righteousness dwells (Revelation 21:1–4).

The terms “Kingdom of heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are identical in Scripture. This can be seen, for example, when comparing Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20. Both passages say that the “Kingdom of heaven” and the “Kingdom of God” belong to those who are poor in spirit; that is, who are of a humble and contrite spirit.

Also, when comparing Matthew 13:31–32 with Mark 4:30–32, we read that both the “Kingdom of heaven” and the “Kingdom of God” are likened to a grain of mustard seed which grows to become a big tree to give shelter to the birds. (Note that the Kingdom is represented as being established on earth, as there are no birds in heaven.)

We even find that in Matthew’s account, the terms for “Kingdom of heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are used interchangeably. In Matthew 19:23–24, Christ tells us that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter into the “Kingdom of heaven” (verse 23), and that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the “Kingdom of God” (verse 24); adding, however, that with God nothing is impossible (verse 26).

Even though Matthew uses the expression “Kingdom of heaven” most of the time, he does use the expression “Kingdom of God” on occasion when special emphasis is intended. We read in Matthew 21:31 that the repentant publicans and the harlots will go into the Kingdom of God before the self-righteous and power-hungry chief priests and the elders of the people. He said in Matthew 21:43 that the Kingdom of God will be taken from them and be given to the holy nation of true Christians who are bringing forth the fruits of the Kingdom (compare John 15:1–8; 1 Peter 2:9).

And He stated in Matthew 6:33 that our first priority must be to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. In this sentence, the use of the term “Kingdom of heaven” would not emphasize quite the same meaning, as it is the Kingdom of God and GOD’s righteousness—which is a stronger term than “heaven’s” righteousness—which we must seek.

WHY “KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” IN THE RECORD OF MATTHEW

Still, Matthew uses the term “Kingdom of heaven” most of the time, rather than “Kingdom of God.” The reason is partly to be seen in the

fact that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience (who did not want to use the word “God” frequently), while Luke wrote to Gentiles (both in his gospel record, as well as in the book of Acts), and Mark and John’s audience is less distinct and distinguishable. (Note that while John never uses the term “Kingdom of heaven,” he very seldom uses the words “Kingdom of God.”)

But this is only part of the explanation. Since the four gospel writers quote Jesus Christ, all of them would have quoted His words accurately. None of them would have dared to change His words by supplementing one term (“Kingdom of God”) for another (“Kingdom of heaven”), and *vice versa*. It is clear, then, that Christ used both expressions, and while Matthew chose to quote more frequently Christ’s statements when He used the words, “Kingdom of heaven,” the others chose to quote His statements when He used the words, “Kingdom of God.” Christ might have used both expressions in sermons or speeches at the same time, or on different occasions. That is the reason we must look at all Scriptures in the Bible on a given topic to get the entire picture—“here a little, and there a little” (compare Isaiah 28:9–10).

WHY CHRIST USED THE TERM “KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”

The question then needs to be answered as to why CHRIST used the statement, “Kingdom of heaven,” when He spoke of the Kingdom of God.

Christ preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God, making it clear at the same time that the Kingdom of God *is presently in heaven* and that those who are already begotten of the Spirit, to be born into the Kingdom of God, are in that sense connected with a heavenly Kingdom. Even though they are not in the Kingdom yet, their names are already written in heaven (Luke 10:20)—in the Book of Life—and they are to build up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). Their citizenship is in heaven as well (Philippians 3:20).

John the Baptist and Christ both emphasized that the Kingdom of heaven will come down to this earth (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 16:28). We are also told that Christ will bring our reward down to this earth (Revelation 22:12), a reward which has been stored for us in heaven (Matthew 5:12).

In addition, the term “Kingdom of heaven” stresses the fact that

the heavenly Kingdom is not to be confused with the kingdom of the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4)—Satan the devil (Matthew 12:25–26)—nor with the kingdom of men (Matthew 20:25–27). The Kingdom of God is not ruled by man, but by God who is in heaven (Mark 11:30–33). The God of heaven will establish His Kingdom here on earth (Daniel 2:44), and no human being will be in it. Only immortal God beings will rule in the Kingdom of heaven over man. They will rule “under the whole heaven”; that is, here on earth (Daniel 7:27).

To reiterate, we do not go to heaven when we die. Rather, the Kingdom of the God of heaven will be set up here on earth, when Christ returns, and we, as changed immortal beings, will be in it to rule all nations (Revelation 2:26–27).

GOD IS A FAMILY

The Bible teaches us very dogmatically that God IS a ruling Family, and that we can become born-again members of His Family, or His Kingdom. We read in John 1:1 that Jesus Christ—the Word or Logos or Son of God—was “WITH” God since all eternity, and He also “WAS” God. The difficulty in understanding this fact may be easily resolved when we recognize that the word “God” is a NAME that can refer to both the Father and the Son. It is, in fact, a FAMILY name. So, the Word or Logos—Jesus Christ—was with God (the Father), and He was also God—the second member of the God FAMILY.

Ephesians 3:14–15 confirms this truth, telling us that it is “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole FAMILY in heaven and earth is NAMED.” Note, too, how the New International Version renders Hebrews 2:11: “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy ARE of the same FAMILY.” In addition, the German Menge Bible includes in the annotation to Ephesians 2:19 that the term “household of God” means “members of the FAMILY of God” (in German, “Mitglieder der Gottesfamilie”).

There is only ONE Kingdom of God—one RULE. God the Father and Jesus Christ are not divided; they are totally unified. They are “ONE.” It is the Kingdom of the Father—the HIGHEST in the Godhead (John 14:28)—and of the Son, because both are God, forming the Kingdom of God. To say it differently, the Kingdom or Family of God is composed of the Father and the Son. The Kingdom of God is a hierarchy,

with God the Father on top and Jesus Christ under Him. But it is the great potential of man to become part of the God Kingdom and God Family—to become God, UNDER the Father and Christ, to enter into and inherit the Kingdom of God as born-again immortal members, and sons and daughters of God and His everlasting ruling Family.

THE SIGN—THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

So then, it is THAT message—the gospel OF the Kingdom of God—which must be preached in all the world as a witness, and THEN the end will come. Until very recently, this message has NOT been preached at all *to the world* since the time of the early apostles, but now it is, showing that we are living in the end times, and *the only sign that Christ gave for His Second Coming is being fulfilled!*

Chapter 2

Factors Indicating Christ's Return

Even though Christ gave us only one definite SIGN regarding His return, He told us in the parable of the fig tree, in Matthew 24:32–33, that we can determine by the occurrence of certain prophesied events when His return “is near.” He listed numerous predictions relating to His imminent return, some of which were already mentioned or alluded to in the Introduction. We present in this chapter some additional relevant events.

(Detailed discussions about the different aspects listed herein can be found in our free booklets: *“Europe in Prophecy,” “Is That in the Bible—The Mysteries of the Book of Revelation,” “The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord,” “The Ten European Revivals of the Ancient Roman Empire,” “Biblical Prophecy—From Now Until Forever,”* and *“The Fall and Rise of Britain and America.”*)

MASS DESTRUCTION

Christ warned us that just prior to His return, the world will have reached a state of potential mass destruction and total annihilation of all of mankind. In fact, He said that if He was not to return, “no flesh” would be “saved,” in the sense of “saved alive” (Matthew 24:22). The *New International Version* says: “... no one would survive.” The *Living Bible* states: “all mankind [would] perish.”

Until recently, mankind did not have the capability to destroy himself and all life on this planet, but now, with the invention of terrible weapons of mass destruction, this possibility is clearly staring us in the face—another indicator that Christ’s return is imminent (compare also Revelation 11:18).

GREAT SIGNS FROM HEAVEN

Christ spoke about “great SIGNS from heaven” (Luke 21:11). This is

a reference to the “heavenly signs” mentioned in Revelation 6:12–17, following the Great Tribulation and immediately preceding the Day of the Lord (which will begin about one year before Christ’s return). The Great Tribulation, spoken of in many biblical passages, describes national captivity of the modern houses of Israel and Judah (the British Commonwealth nations and the USA, as well as the modern Jews) and a martyrdom of many of the saints (Revelation 6:9–11).

Christ mentioned that after the Great Tribulation has begun, there would be “SIGNS in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:25–26). Notice the immediate context of these events: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (vv. 27–28).

When the “heavenly signs” begin to appear, Christ’s return is imminent, as they introduce and signal the beginning of the Day of the Lord—culminating in the establishment of God’s rule over man here on earth.

THE TENTH REVIVAL OF THE ANCIENT ROMAN EMPIRE

Scripture teaches us that the ancient Roman Empire (symbolized by the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 13:1–3) would be revived *ten times* throughout European history (symbolized by the *ten horns* of the beast in Revelation 13:1).

Nine of these ten resurrections have already occurred, and the tenth and last revival is happening in Europe, as we speak. Ten European nations or groups of nations will give their power and authority to a charismatic political and military leader of German or Austrian descent—the “beast” (Revelation 17:12); and when this occurs, Christ’s return is imminent.

THE SEVENTH REVIVAL OF THE ANCIENT HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

We also know from Scripture that the last *seven* European revivals

of the ancient Roman Empire [symbolized by the *seven heads* of the beast in Revelation 17:3] would be a collaboration between the political nations—the “state”—and the Roman Catholic Church—the “church” (see the reference to Rome, the city built on seven hills, in verse 9).

Six of these seven revivals have already occurred. (The revivals were historically referred to, at times, as “Holy Roman Empire” or “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.”) The seventh and last revival is happening in Europe, as we speak. The “beast” will collaborate with a very powerful religious leader (the “false prophet”) who will deceive the nations with false signs and wonders (Revelation 13:13–24); and when this occurs, Christ’s return is imminent.

EUROPE’S INVASION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Furthermore, the volatile situation in the Middle East will deteriorate even more, and the Jews will build a third Temple in Jerusalem (Revelation 11:1–2) and begin to offer daily sacrifices (Daniel 12:11). This will anger the Arab world, and the nations under the power of the beast and the false prophet will intervene militarily with the declared goal to create peace in the region. They will invade the Promised Land (Daniel 11:41–43), end the sacrifices and enslave the Jewish people.

Christ warned about these events, stating that the “abomination of desolation” will stand at the holy place—the third Temple (Matthew 24:15). The false prophet will take his “domicile” in the Temple—perhaps in the “Holy of Holies”—claiming to be God Himself (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, 9). When this happens, Christ’s return is imminent.

EUROPE’S WAR WITH USA AND UK

Around the same time, the military-religious European power bloc will start World War III. This terrible war will be mainly directed against the *modern* house of Israel—the United Kingdom (which by that time will have left the EU) and the USA—as well as the people of Judah. All of these nations will be defeated by the Europeans. When this happens, Christ’s return is imminent.

EUROPE’S WAR WITH FAR EASTERN NATIONS

Following these events and the heavenly signs, the beast will become disturbed by rumors from the northeast (Daniel 11:44), as

Far Eastern nations such as Russia, China, Japan and India will have united militarily and will begin preparations for an attack against Europe. This will lead to an outright war between Europe and these Far Eastern nations (Revelation 9:1–21). When this happens, Christ's return is imminent.

INVASION OF FAR EASTERN NATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Far Eastern nations ("kings from the East") will also invade the Middle East. They will be crossing the dried-up river Euphrates to move their armies and equipment to a place called "Armageddon" ("the hill of Megiddo" in the valley of Jezreel) to assemble there (Revelation 16:12–16), with the apparent desire to advance toward Jerusalem to defeat the beast (who will by that time be in Jerusalem, having planted "his tent of his palace" there) and to wipe out his European armies that have conquered the Middle East and are mainly stationed in Jerusalem.

But the kings from the East will suddenly feel threatened by another "enemy," and being influenced by Satan and his demonic powers, they will combine their forces with the kings of the whole world (including the beast power) in an attempt to defeat that common foe. That "foe" is none other than the returning Jesus Christ! They will combine their forces with the beast's armies to fight Christ in the valley of Jehoshaphat ("Kidron Valley"), which borders Jerusalem on the east (Joel 3:12–16).

FLIGHT TO THE PLACE OF SAFETY HERE ON EARTH

Another important event which will indicate the return of Jesus Christ to this earth is the "flight" of the Church of God to a place of safety here on earth. Rather than teaching a secret rapture of the Church to heaven, the Bible teaches protection from the Great Tribulation for God's Church *here on earth*. We will discuss this rarely-understood promise in much detail throughout the remainder of this booklet.

Early Christians did not believe in the concept of a secret rapture. In fact, it was not taught prior to the sixteenth century. Joseph Ribera, Cardinal Bellarmine and Alcasar, Jesuit Priests of the sixteenth century, were the first Christian authorities to promulgate this idea. Even in their day, the idea was unclear.

It was not until 1830 that men who claimed divine inspiration said the Holy Spirit revealed to them that the last days had come, that the Lord was about to return, and that first He would “rapture” the believers who were ready, at a secret coming. Obviously, the last days did not arrive then, and Christ did not return in 1830, so why would anyone believe that the “Holy Spirit” revealed to them a “secret rapture”?

The Bible does not teach a secret rapture. Rather, God’s Word reveals that Christ will return **ONCE, NOT TWICE** (Hebrews 9:28). As will be pointed out below, He will come openly, not in secret (Matthew 24:21–31; Revelation 1:7; Acts 1:10–11), and He will **END** the Great Tribulation at the time of His Coming by establishing the **Kingdom of God here on earth** (Revelation 11:15–18).

Christ will come at the time of the **LAST TRUMPET** when His elect will be resurrected from the dead or changed to immortality (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; 1 Corinthians 15:50–52). There can only be **ONE** last trumpet, which means there can only be **ONE** return of Christ!

Chapter 3

Will Christ Return Visibly and Bodily?

As we have already seen, Christ promised us that He WILL return. The Bible also reveals to us HOW—in what MANNER—He will return.

In Matthew 24:26–30, Jesus Himself said:

“Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For *as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be... Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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.”

This passage clearly states that the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, will be seen by “all the tribes of the earth” at His return. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* state that they will “gaze—that is with wide open eyes as at something remarkable.” Indeed, it will be remarkable—a truly unique situation—when Christ returns to this earth just in time to save man from self-annihilation (compare Matthew 24:21–22), and He will be seen by “all the tribes of the earth” at that time.

We read in Acts 1:9–11: “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

Since Christ ascended visibly as He did, it therefore follows that He will *return in like manner*, that is, visibly, so that He can be seen by “all the tribes of the earth.”

It is possible that Christ will circle the earth so that all tribes can see Him. Remember that Christ declared: “For as the lightning comes

from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:27; compare also Luke 17:24). It is also possible that television cameras and other electronic equipment will show and broadcast His appearance all over the world—as the peoples and nations will see the dead bodies of the two witnesses for three-and-a-half days, apparently via electronic transmission of some kind (compare Revelation 11:9).

We need to understand, however, that even though Christ will return visibly—not secretly—He will not appear with the same physical BODY that He had before His death. Christ is now a SPIRIT being, and He has a SPIRITUAL body. But He can, of course, manifest Himself AS a physical being, even with bones and flesh.

The angels said that Jesus will return in the same manner as He left. Let us note that Jesus, after His crucifixion, appeared visibly to His apostles and others on many occasions, and that He ascended to heaven "visibly." Jesus appeared to:

- Mary Magdalene shortly after His resurrection (Mark 16:9; John 20:14-17);
- the women who held Him by the feet (Matthew 28:9);
- the two disciples "as they walked and went into the country" on their way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-31);
- Cephas or Peter and then to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5);
- the original eleven apostles (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-20, 24-28; 21:1-25); giving them the commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18);
- over 500 brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6);

Please note especially that after Christ's resurrection, He "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being SEEN by them DURING FORTY DAYS and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3), until the time of His ascension (Acts 1:4-9; Luke 24:50-51).

This is a considerable body of Scriptural evidence proving that Jesus, after His crucifixion and resurrection, showed Himself visibly to hundreds of people, manifesting Himself as a human being. He will manifest Himself visibly at His Second Coming, and at that time, He will appear in great glory and power!

In Revelation 1:7, there is further proof: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

We read that EVERY eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. This is referring to the Jewish race and mankind in general whose sins necessitated Christ’s death on our behalf.

Many strange ideas exist about Christ’s return—including the belief that Christ would be returning as a physical Man—being born again from a woman. Some believe that Christ will rule with the saints from heaven. Others believe that Christ has already returned to this earth! The secret rapture concept is another wrong theory. The Bible is very consistent in describing Christ’s Second Coming as one and the same event. He will only come a “second time” (Hebrews 9:28); that is, not a second time in secret and then a third time openly. When He returns, He will be *seen*. Then, He will gather His elect—not before then (Matthew 24:27–31).

Chapter 4

The Day of Christ's Return — Fixed?

Even though this might surprise some of our readers, the exact time of Christ's return is NOT fixed. Quite to the contrary, several Scriptures suggest that God the Father may *delay* or *accelerate* the return of Jesus Christ.

HASTENING CHRIST'S RETURN

For instance, we read in 2 Peter 3:12 that we are to be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God"—the return of Christ. The same Greek word ("*spendo*") is used, for instance, in Luke 19:5–6 and Acts 22:18 (translated as, "make haste"). In Acts 20:16, it is translated as "(he) hastened" and in Luke 2:16, it is translated as, "(they came) with haste."

Regarding the return of Christ, the Apostle Paul stated that we should be even more diligent concerning our fellowship as a Church, "...and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

Passages such as 2 Peter 3:12 and Hebrews 10:25 are specifically directed at the end-time generation of the Church. In fact, Paul says that all has been written for us as an example, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (compare 1 Corinthians 10:11).

The literal Greek translation of 2 Peter 3:12 reads, according to *The Englishman's Greek New Testament... An Interlinear Literal Translation*: "...expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God by reason of which [the] heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and [the] elements burning with heat shall melt..."

The term "hastening" (as used in the *New King James Bible*) is therefore a correct rendition. The *New English Bible* says: "... look eagerly for the coming of the day of God and work to hasten it on." The *New Testament in Modern Speech*, by Richard Francis Weymouth ("Weymouth"), says: "... expecting and helping to hasten the coming of [the day]."

The German *Elberfelder* Bible says, „beschleunigen.“ This German word can mean, „hastening,“ and it can also mean, „accelerate.“ In this context, we might consider Isaiah 62:7, which says, in the *Authorized Version*: “And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”

DELAYING CHRIST’S RETURN

Just as we can hasten Christ’s return, so we can also delay it, to an extent. This can be seen in 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” It is apparent from the context that the end-time generation is especially addressed here. The context is Christ’s coming, as verses 3–4 make very clear: “...scoffers will come IN THE LAST DAYS... and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’...”

According to 2 Peter 3:9, God may delay Christ’s coming, if Church members, whom God wants to be in His Kingdom, are not ready, due to a lack of serious repentance. The *Ryrie Study Bible* points out: “To believers, Peter now says that the seeming delay of Christ’s return is for the purpose of allowing more people to repent.”

We might also notice Revelation 10:6. The *Authorized Version* says that there should be “time no longer.” The *New King James Bible* says, “... there should be delay no longer.” The *Ryrie Study Bible* comments: “Lit. there will be no more delay.” So say the *Nelson Study Bible*, the *American Standard Version*, Weymouth, as well as the *Elberfelder Bible* (“Frist, Aufschub”) and the *Menge Bible* (“Verzug”).

The *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W.E. Vine, states, on page 333, under “season,” that the Greek word for “time” or “delay;” i.e., “*chronos*,” must be translated in Revelation 10:6 as “delay.”

Since Revelation 10:6 says that there will be no more delay “in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel” (verse 7), it shows that there HAD BEEN delay before the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

Ezekiel 12:25, 28 is another Scripture which supports the concept of a delay prior to Christ’s return. It reads: “For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will NO MORE be postponed... None of My words will be postponed ANY MORE...” This passage seems to say that at one point, God’s words or

prophecies were postponed or delayed; but that the time will come when they won't be postponed or delayed any longer. This would be similar to the passage in Revelation 10:6, which says that there won't be any longer "time" or "delay."

The Church of God has felt, based on this passage and other Scriptures, that God had held back or delayed certain events to take place in the 1970's and early 80's. Also, from what we are seeing now in the world, it APPEARS that God is speeding up events to reach their climax soon (compare Matthew 24:32–35)—BUT NOBODY CAN BE CERTAIN OF THIS, OR KNOW FOR SURE.

EXACTLY THREE-AND-A-HALF YEARS AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

Some have speculated that Christ will return exactly three-and-a-half years after the beginning of the Great Tribulation. This does not take into account, however, that these last days will be **shortened**.

We read in Hosea 6:1–2: "Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day [not: AFTER three-and-a-half prophetic days or years] He will raise us up."

DOES THE FATHER KNOW?

Some feel that the precise moment of Christ's return has been fixed for thousands of years—as the Father "knows" the exact moment of Christ's Second Coming. They say that according to Christ's words, the Father knew at least 2,000 years ago exactly when He would send back His Son: "But of that day and hour no one KNOWS, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only (Matthew 24:36)." (Mark 13:32 adds that not even the Son of God—Jesus Christ—knows that exact time.)

However, in light of the fact that Christ's return can be delayed or accelerated—at least partially because of human conduct—it is very doubtful that God the Father "knew" the exact day and hour of Christ's return for thousands of years. As we will explain, what Christ is actually saying in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 is that it is **within the Father's authority to DECIDE** when the moment of Christ's return has come, but that moment is indeed dependent upon certain events.

We need to read Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, together with Acts 1:6–7, which says: “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time [return to] restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’”

Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 do not say, in connection with Acts 1:7, that the exact time of Christ’s return and the restoration of the Kingdom of God was already fixed more than 2,000 years ago. Rather, it is within God the Father’s authority to decide when to send Christ. Has He already made that decision? Had He decided already 2,000 years ago, when Christ spoke those words, exactly when He would send Christ back to this earth?

One might say, God knows everything. But we need to realize that there are certain things that God does not want to know. For instance, *God does not want to know* whether we will sin tomorrow; and He does not want to know, when He calls us into His truth, whether we will make it into His Kingdom or whether we will commit the unpardonable sin, even though He is confident that we WILL complete our calling until the day of Christ’s return (Philippians 1:6). In the same way, it is doubtful, that God had already decided 2,000 or 6,000 years ago, exactly when (up to the second!!!) He would send Christ back, as His decision on when to do so depends on some factors [as previously mentioned].

THE FATHER DECIDES

We should note that, according to the two passages in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, Christ said that man, angels and Christ do not “know,” but “only My Father.” There is NO VERB here, following “My Father,” so it must be added.

The passage in Acts 1:7 does not say that God “knows.” It only says that it is not for Christ’s disciples to “know.” In regard to the Father, it is stated that He has “put this” in His own power or authority. Reading Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 together with Acts 1:7, it is apparent that the words which need to be supplied in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 would have to be those showing God’s AUTHORITY to set the date.

Therefore, a possible rendering of Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 would be:

“But of that day and hour no one “knows” [“understands,” “can

be sure"; compare *Strong's* No. 1492], not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father ["is sure," "understands," in the sense of "decides"]."

The Bible does not say that the Father already decided thousands of years ago exactly when to send back the Son. **If He had, HOW COULD Christ NOT have known?** Some claim that Christ knows now, while He did not know 2,000 years ago, but Christ's statements refer to the time of His return. Christ's whole point was that He does not know or is sure of it (as He does not make the decision); hence, it is useless for man to try to figure it out.

WILL CHRIST RETURN ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST OR THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS?

Some teach that Christ will return on the annual Holy Day of Pentecost. Others claim that He will return on the Feast of Trumpets.

It is true that the Feast of Trumpets—not the Day of Pentecost—*represents* Christ's return and the resurrection of the saints that will occur when the seventh trumpet sounds. But the Feast of Trumpets *represents much more*.

On that day, not just one trumpet was blown, but the Levites blew several trumpets. In the book of Revelation, we read that seven seals will be opened, and the seventh seal consists of seven trumpets, which will be blown by seven angels. However, these seven trumpets, which are all pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, will not be blown in just one day, but for a longer period of time. Also, even when the seventh or last trumpet sounds, the events that will occur at that time will take longer than just 24 hours. All of the events that are described to occur during the blowing of the seven trumpets, and even the seventh trumpet, cannot possibly occur during a 24-hour-time span allotted to the Feast of Trumpets.

As members of the Church of God, we are duty-bound to observe today God's annual Holy Days, as we obey God's instruction in this regard. The Holy Days remind us of God's plan for us and for all of mankind. They picture seven steps in God's master plan, but they do not necessarily tell us the exact days or hours when those steps were or will be implemented.

For instance, since we know that the steps pertaining to Pentecost

have already been implemented, we can say that it is highly unlikely that Christ will come back on the Day of Pentecost. (The Day of Pentecost pictures the spiritual *begetting* of God's disciples—the firstfruits—and their receipt of the Holy Spirit in this day and age. It does not picture the *birth* of God's firstfruits as Spirit beings in the first resurrection. One reason is that the two loaves, representing the firstfruits, which had to be presented to the LORD on the Day of Pentecost, had to be baked with leaven (compare Leviticus 23:17). Leaven symbolizes sin. Today, converted Christians still sin, but once they are born again into the Kingdom or Family of God and have become God, they will not and cannot sin anymore.)

However, we should not state dogmatically that Christ will come back on the Feast of Trumpets, or worse yet, attach a particular year to the Feast of Trumpets, and say, "Christ will come back on the Feast of Trumpets in the year of..."

Remember, Christ clearly told us: "But of that DAY and hour [of His return] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32).

EXACTLY 6,000 YEARS OF HUMAN RULE?

We do not find anywhere in the Bible that the time of Christ's return has been fixed thousands of years ago. Some have pointed to 2 Peter 3:8, claiming that God allotted man exactly 6,000 years to rule this earth, and that exactly after 6,000 years, Christ will return. However, that is not what 2 Peter 3:8 conveys. The Scripture reads: "... with the Lord one day is AS a thousand years, and a thousand years AS one day."

This Scripture does not provide us with a fixed date. The Greek word for "as" is "*hos*," and it can also be translated as "about." (Compare *Young's*, under "about.") In fact, the *Authorized Version* translates this word 14 times as "about." For instance, the word "*hos*" is correctly translated as "about" in passages such as Mark 8:9; Luke 2:37; 8:42; and John 1:39.

The passage in 2 Peter 3:8 seems to convey that in the eyes of God one day is ABOUT 1,000 years long—not necessarily exactly so.

CONDITIONAL PROPHECIES

Some prophecies are conditional—they are conditioned upon

whether man repents. As we saw, the TIMING of Christ's return is somewhat conditional on the repentance of some Church members. But this might even apply to the entire physical nation of the modern house of Israel.

Although it is not very likely that the USA or the UK will repent, it IS possible. If they do—or if enough people repent—God may hold back the destruction of the USA and the UK (which in turn would delay Christ's return). It appears that God would not have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, if He would have found ten righteous people, although He said to Abraham earlier that He would destroy it. Something similar COULD BE possible for modern America and the UK, as well as other nations.

The Scripture in Jeremiah 18:7–11 supports this conclusion. It says that God will relent of the evil which He intended to bring on a nation, if that nation repents. God had Jonah proclaim that in forty days, Nineveh would be destroyed. This SOUNDED like an unconditional prophecy, but it was not, as God did not do it when Nineveh repented. However, as the book of Nahum shows, Nineveh was destroyed later because their repentance did not last. The book of Jonah contains a classic case of a DELAYED prophecy.

It is natural to desire the soon-coming return of Jesus Christ. But we must not forget that terrible conditions will precede His coming, so much so that God warns us not to desire the evil time ahead of us (Jeremiah 17:16; Amos 5:18). Rather, we must have God's attitude of mercy, compassion and long-suffering, hoping that some will repent, so that perhaps war and destruction might be delayed and postponed.

There are also passages in the book of Joel that leave it open as to whether or not God will start the Day of the Lord at a certain time, depending on man's reaction and repentance (compare Joel 2:12–14). Although unconditional prophecy will not "fail," time given for certain events to take their full course may. It also says that God will CUT SHORT His work (Romans 9:28), as He will cut short or shorten the days of trouble.

One thing IS certain, however: God's patience is not limitless, as the parable in Luke 13:6–9 shows. Christ had just warned His audience that they would perish if they did not repent (verses 1–5). He continued to present a parable about a tree that had not shown fruit

for three years. The tree is granted a fourth and last year, to either produce fruit or to be cut down after that time. This parable implies that God does set a time limit for a Church member (as well as for nations) to repent and produce fruit.

Christ warned in John 15:2, 5: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." God has allotted to His Church—and mankind as a whole—a certain amount of time to repent. But there will come the moment when God WILL decide to bring disaster upon the nations and to finally send Christ back. God will not wait forever for everyone in the Church—and in the world—to repent.

As in the days of Jeremiah, the time will come when God will not hear anymore prayers for the people of the world; when He will not tolerate any further delay; and when He will cut short His work (compare Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). That is the reason God says in Isaiah 46:13 (*Authorized Version*): "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory."

While the fulfillment of God's prophecies may tarry for a while, the time will come when there will be no more delay or postponement. We read in Habakkuk 2:2–3: "... Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. THOUGH IT TARRIES [for a while, due to God's longsuffering and patience toward us in the Church and man in general], wait for it; Because it will surely come, IT WILL NOT TARRY [once God has decreed the exact time when to send His Son back and to end man's rule on earth]."

It is the FATHER'S decision to determine exactly when to send Jesus Christ back to this earth. That is the reason why even Jesus Christ does not know the EXACT time.

But now a word of caution and warning: There is great danger involved with the concept of trying to figure out, exactly, when Christ returns. One problem is that if people think God is *delaying* Christ's coming, believing He is still afar off, they may begin to become slack in their Christian lives (compare Matthew 24:48–50). On the other

hand, the belief that Christ's coming is *just around the corner* can create a sense of fatalism, especially in younger people, who may say, "Why should I think of getting a career, as everything will be over soon?"

We must live as if we still have a whole lifetime ahead of us, with long-term goals. At the same time, we need to always be ready spiritually for Christ's return, and we must continue to watch the unfolding of world events that are leading to the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Chapter 5

This Generation Will Not Pass Away...

As mentioned earlier, Christ described events in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, which would lead to His return. It is in THAT context that Jesus added the following words:

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, *this generation* will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:32–35).

It is clarified in the parallel Scripture in Luke 21:31, that Christ was speaking about His coming and the establishment of the “Kingdom of God” here on earth: “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.”

WHAT DOES “THIS GENERATION” MEAN?

Commentaries are divided on the meaning of Christ’s statement that “this generation” would not pass away, and we will discuss some of the concepts herein.

PRIOR TO CHRIST’S DEATH?

Some commentaries erroneously assume that Christ was addressing His disciples at the time prior to His death, and that He was promising *them* that He would return in their lifetime. These commentaries overlook the fact that Christ was not only addressing His four disciples who had asked Him about the signs of His coming, but that He spoke to **ALL of His disciples—present and future**. He specifically said in Mark 13:37: “And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

Also, whenever the Bible uses the expression “you,” it is referring to the physical or spiritual “descendants” of “Israel”—including the

modern descendants of the physical nations of the ancient Houses of Israel and Judah, AND the modern descendants of spiritual Israel, which is the Church of God (Galatians 6:16).

Since Jesus did NOT return in the lifetimes of His early disciples, we can rule out the possibility that He was talking about the generation at the time of the Twelve Apostles. He clearly did not mean to tell them that their generation—the people living at the time of the original Apostles—would not die out before His return. Christ could not have meant that, as otherwise, He would have lied. Lying is sinning—a transgression of one of the Ten Commandments—but Christ never sinned (compare 1 Peter 2:22).

DOES “GENERATION” JUST MEAN “RACE”?

Other commentaries state that the word “generation” can mean “race,” and that Christ meant that Israel as a people would not cease to exist before Christ’s return (compare *The Nelson Study Bible*).

Even though it is true that Israel as a people would not cease to exist—and neither would the Church of God (compare Matthew 16:18)—it is doubtful that Jesus had that aspect in mind. Rather, He emphasized the need for His disciples to watch world events and to be ready for His return. He told them that when “these things BEGIN to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28).

The context of His statement that “this generation” would not pass away, is clearly the *very end time*, just prior to His return, not the continuing existence of “Israel” for over 2,000 years. The events described by Christ were meant to be indications for His end-time disciples that He would return soon.

GENERATION AT THE END TIME

Therefore, some commentaries offer the explanation that “the word describes a particular era in which people will see the end times. That is, the events will occur so rapidly that all will happen within one generation. ‘All these things’ includes the Antichrist [better, the manifestation of the Beast and the False Prophet, compare Revelation 19:19–20], the tribulation, and more importantly the appearance of Christ in glory” (*The Nelson Study Bible*).

This is, in fact, the correct explanation. We need to realize that the Greek word for “generation,” i.e., “*genea*,” can describe a particular people at a very specific time—not the entire race throughout many “generations.” For instance, Christ spoke on several occasions to His particular “generation” which was alive at the time of His First Coming, and He did NOT mean that THAT generation would not die until His return. Notice Matthew 12:41–42: “The men of Nineveh [who had died] will RISE UP in the JUDGMENT [the Great White Throne Judgment, after the Millennium, compare Revelation 20:11–12] WITH THIS GENERATION [so they will have also died] and condemn it... The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with THIS generation and condemn it...”

Christ said in Mark 8:12 that no sign from heaven would be given to “this generation” (living at the time of Christ’s First Coming), but we read earlier that heavenly signs WILL be given to a future generation, which will live just prior to His return.

HOW LONG IS A GENERATION?

We might wonder how long a “generation” lasts, according to the Bible. We find a biblical definition for the approximate length of a human life in this modern day and age in Psalm 90:10, where we read: “The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”

We also read in God’s Word that God sometimes shortens or prolongs human life, and that bloodthirsty and deceitful men may not live out HALF their days (Psalm 55:23). This is an interesting statement in light of the fact that men will be so bloodthirsty and destructive in the end time that Christ will HAVE to come and SHORTEN the days of worldwide warfare, which He will do “for the elect’s sake,” because otherwise, NO man would be saved alive—no one would survive (Matthew 24:22).

THIS IS THE LAST GENERATION

At this moment in time, we have not yet seen the beginning of the Great Tribulation, but we have been witnessing ever-increasing religious deception, wars, earthquakes, famines and disease epidemics—events

which are described by Christ as the “beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). These will become more and more visible and frightening in the years to come.

We do not know the exact time of Christ’s return, but based on the parable of the fig tree, we CAN say that we ARE living today in the very last generation, and that Christ WILL return BEFORE this present generation has “passed away.” It is therefore important for us to watch and pray, and to be “ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an HOUR [we] do NOT expect” (Matthew 24:44).

Chapter 6

The Great Tribulation — Seven Years or Three-and-One-Half Years?

When will the Great Tribulation begin? And how long will it last before Christ returns?

Christ said in Matthew 24:21: “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Notice the time frame—the Great Tribulation will begin at the time when the “abomination of desolation” will be observed standing in the holy place (verse 15).

At that time, the “man of sin”—a false religious leader—will be sitting in the Temple of God in Jerusalem, committing a terrible abomination by claiming to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:2–4). This will coincide with the imminent desolation of Jerusalem, as it will be attacked and made desolate by Gentile armies (compare Luke 21:20–23). They will occupy Jerusalem and the Promised Land until the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled (verse 24).

In Daniel 12:1, we find an additional reference to the Great Tribulation: “At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time, And at that time your people shall be delivered.”

Here, the Great Tribulation is equated with a “time of trouble.” Both expressions refer to the same period, as they both describe an unparalleled time of trouble for man.

When the Great Tribulation ends, Christ will return. In fact, He will return to shorten the time in order to prevent all human beings from being destroyed (compare Matthew 24:22).

GREAT TRIBULATION FOR SEVEN YEARS?

Some claim that the Great Tribulation will last for seven years.

However, there is absolutely no biblical evidence for that teaching. The Bible dogmatically postulates throughout that the Great Tribulation will not last longer than approximately three-and-a-half years.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF DANIEL 9:27

Some misunderstand a prophecy in Daniel 9:27, erroneously stating that the “beast”—a future military leader—will make a covenant with the Jews seven years prior to the return of Christ, which covenant will allegedly be broken after three-and-a-half years. However, Daniel 9:27 does not describe such a covenant or treaty at all. Rather, it is addressing the New Covenant which Jesus Christ brought into existence at the time of His First Coming.

In any event, Daniel 9:27 cannot be used to teach that the Great Tribulation will last for seven years. Even the proponents of an end-time covenant or treaty say, quite inconsistently, that the troubles of the Great Tribulation will begin when the treaty is broken, allegedly three-and-a-half years AFTER the treaty is made. However, they still insist, quite illogically, that the Great Tribulation begins when the treaty is made, allegedly seven years before Christ’s return. But why would a Great TRIBULATION last for seven years, when the TROUBLES only begin for the last three-and-a-half years?

HOW TO UNDERSTAND DANIEL 9:27

Let us read Daniel 9:24–27 in context, in the *Authorized Version*:

“(24) Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. (25) Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks [i.e., sixty-nine weeks]: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

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

(27) And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

To properly understand this passage, let us note the following quote from Lesson 19 of the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, copyrighted 1961, 1965, and 1967.

The publication pointed out that **Jesus Christ, the “Messiah the Prince,”** is the minister of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6); that **He was to CONFIRM the covenant for one “week”** (Daniel 9:26–27); that **His ministry was to be cut in HALF, as He was cut off in the midst of the week** (verse 27); and that Christ will COMPLETE His work of confirming the New Covenant in the future (Same verse; also Hebrews 8:10 and Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The publication continued:

“A ‘day’ in the prophecy of Daniel 9:27 represents a year in fulfillment (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:3–6). Christ ministered three-and-a-half years—ONE HALF of this prophetic ‘week.’ For three-and-one-half years **He CONFIRMED**—spelled out the TERMS of—**THE NEW COVENANT** with His disciples who recorded them for us today. By dying for our sins in the MIDST OF the ‘week,’ He put the final STAMP on the covenant and made it binding with His blood. Through Him, ALL PEOPLE can now enter into the New Covenant and become HEIRS ‘according to the promise’ which God made to Abraham (Gal. 3:29).

“But Daniel 9:26–27 reveals that there yet REMAINS three-and-one-half years of Christ’s ministry to be FULFILLED! Let’s understand. When Jesus returns to this earth He will FULFILL the covenant He made with Abraham. Abraham and his SPIRITUAL seed through Christ will then inherit the world and eternal life.”

We explain in our free booklet, *“Biblical Prophecy—From Now Until Forever,”* what Christ will do after His return, and HOW He will complete the three-and-a-half years of His remaining ministry. We show that during that time, Christ will free the captives of the modern houses of Israel and Judah from slavery and bring them into the Promised Land; will defeat Asiatic hordes which will try to invade the Promised Land; will reinstitute, apparently for the duration of the three-and-a-

half years, animal sacrifices to be brought by the modern remnants of the houses of Israel and Judah; and will allot the Promised Land to the surviving twelve tribes of Israel.

WHEN CHRIST WAS BAPTIZED

A subsequent letter from the Letter Answering Department of the *Worldwide Church of God*, dated 1987, commented on the passage in Daniel 9:24–27 as follows:

“To explain this prophecy, I will quote from *Halley’s Bible Handbook*: ‘The Captivity, which was then drawing to a close, had lasted 70 years. Daniel is here told by the angel that it would yet be ‘70 weeks’ till the coming of the Messiah [see verse 24]. The ‘70 weeks’ is generally understood to mean 70 weeks of years, that is, 70 sevens of years, or seven times 70 years, that is 490 years. As if the angel were saying, The Captivity has been 70 years; the period between the Captivity and the Coming of the Messiah will be seven times that long. Seven, and cycles of seven, sometimes have symbolic meanings; yet the actual facts of this prophecy are most amazing, as follows:

“The date from which the 70 weeks was to be counted was the **decree to re-build Jerusalem** [see verse 25]. There were three decrees issued by Persian kings for this purpose ... The principal one of these was **457 B C** [the one given by Artaxerxes]. The 70 weeks is subdivided into 7 weeks, 62 weeks, and 1 week [see verses 25 and 27]... the 69 weeks [62 weeks plus 7 weeks] equal 483 days, that is, on the year-day theory, Ezek 4:6, which is the commonly accepted interpretation, **483 years.**

“This **483 years is the period between the decree to re-build Jerusalem and the coming of the ‘Anointed One,’** [see verse 25]. The decree to re-build Jerusalem, as noted above, was 457 B C. Adding 483 years to 457 B C brings us to 26 A D, the very year that Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry. A most remarkable fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, even to the year. **Further, within 3 ½ years Jesus was crucified, that is, “in the midst of the one week” “the Anointed One” was “cut off,” “purged away sin and brought in everlasting righteousness”** [see verses 24, 26, and 27].’

“We must make one slight correction in Mr. Halley’s figures. His overall calculations are correct, but he did not account for the **ONE YEAR** which is gained in making the transition from B.C. to A.D. dates.

Because there is no year 0, one year is gained and must be added to the A.D. date. **It was A.D. 27 when Jesus was baptized and began His ministry**—not A.D. 26... It is significant that in Daniel's prophecy of the 'seventy weeks' (Dan. 9:24–27), Jesus was to be cut off 'in the midst of the week.' While this prophecy has the application of a day for a year, so that this 70th week [that is, the remaining one week in addition to the 62 and 7 weeks, compare verse 27] became a literal seven years, Christ being 'cut off' after three-and-a-half years' ministry, as He was, yet it is significant that He was also 'cut off' on the middle day [Wednesday] of a literal week."

This is remarkable! We show in our free booklet, "*Jesus Christ—a Great Mystery*," that Christ was indeed crucified on a Wednesday, and that He was three days and three nights in the grave, thereby fulfilling the only sign which He had given to the Pharisees that He was the Messiah (compare Matthew 12:40). He was resurrected on Saturday afternoon and left the grave on Saturday evening, just before sunset.

The long-time understanding of the Church of God has been that *Daniel 9:27 refers to the First Coming of Jesus Christ and His Sacrifice, as well as His confirmation of the New Covenant. When Christ died, the necessity for animal sacrifices ceased. His death "cause[d] the [animal] sacrifice... to cease" (Daniel 9:27).*

DOES DANIEL 9:27 TEACH A FUTURE TREATY BETWEEN THE BEAST AND JUDAH?

Some commentaries claim, however, that the covenant mentioned in Daniel 9:27 refers to a future treaty between a European prince and the nation of Israel—the Jews—which is to last for three-and-a-half years.

Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible explains:

"Verse 26 seems to point to the death and rejection of Christ and the destruction of the temple which followed in AD 70—with a wider reference at the end. But the subject of verse 27 is not at all clear. 'He' is taken by some to be the Messiah, by others to be the destroying prince of the previous verse."

For instance, the *Ryrie Study Bible* claims:

"The prince of verse 26, the antichrist... will make a pact with many (of the Jewish people) at the beginning of the Tribulation period. But in the midst of the week (i.e. 3½ years later) Antichrist will

break his covenant and desecrate the Temple by demanding worship of himself in it.”

The *Nelson Study Bible* concurs, stating in regard to Daniel 9:27:

“He’ may be a reference to the antichrist, who will confirm a covenant with Israel. ‘In the middle of the week’—that is, three and one-half years later—he will break the covenant.”

Unger’s Bible Handbook claims something similar:

“During the first half [of the final week of seven years] the ‘prince’ (world ruler, ‘little horn’ of 7:8, 24–25) will make a covenant with the Jews, who are restored in Palestine with a resumption of the temple worship. In the middle of the week the covenant is broken, worship for the Jews ceases (2 Thess 2:3–4), and the time of the Great Tribulation ensues.”

Apart from the fact that these commentaries, especially *Unger*, confuse the identity of the “little horn” (an end-time religious leader) with the beast (an end-time political leader), and that they are quite inconsistent with their description of the “Great Tribulation,” there is little reason to believe that the “covenant,” referred to in Daniel 9:27, refers to a future treaty between a political or religious leader and the Jews. In fact, the Bible shows that a treaty or confederation will be made between the beast (the end-time king of modern Assyria) and certain Arab nations AGAINST the Jews—not WITH them (compare Psalm 83:2–8).

DANIEL 9:27 DOES NOT TEACH AN END-TIME TREATY BETWEEN WORLDLY POWERS

The *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, states that Daniel 9:27 may contain an “allusion” to Antiochus Epiphanes, but that the passage clearly talks about “Christ the Prince,” His Sacrifice, and the New Covenant.

The “*New Bible Commentary: Revised*,” explains convincingly, on page 699:

“Who is the one that causes the covenant to prevail? Many find the subject in ‘the prince who is to come’ of v. 26, and refer this, either to Antiochus, or to the Roman ruler of a future, revived Roman Empire. However, the word prince is there in a **subordinate position**, and it is *very unlikely* that this word should be the subject in v. 27. It is

better to regard the *subject as the Messiah*, since He has been the most prominent Person in this passage. The covenant which is to prevail is the covenant of grace wherein the Messiah, by His life and death, obtains salvation for His people. The seventieth seven... thus has reference to **the time of our Lord's earthly life**. For half of this seven the Messiah, by means of his death, *causes the Jewish sacrifices to cease* (cf. Heb. 8:13)."

Based on the foregoing, it is our understanding that Daniel 9:27 refers to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the "Prince of Peace," and **not** to a future political or religious leader of a revived Roman Empire (See also our free booklet, *"Biblical Prophecy—From Now Until Forever,"* pages 33–35).

GREAT TRIBULATION LASTS FOR NOT MORE THAN THREE-AND-A-HALF YEARS

In any event, the Bible confirms that the Great Tribulation will not last seven years, but, at the most, three-and-a-half years.

We read in Daniel 7:25: "He [an end-time religious leader, the "man of sin," also called the "false prophet" in Scripture] shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand FOR A TIME AND TIMES AND HALF A TIME."

During the Great Tribulation, a religious power under the lead of the "false prophet," in collaboration with a military power under the lead of the "beast," will persecute the saints. They will do so for "a time and times and half a time." The commentary of *"Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge"* explains that this phrase means "three years and a half, or reckoning thirty days to a month, 1,260 days."

The *Nelson Study Bible* agrees, stating (in their annotation to Revelation 11:3) that "a time and times and half a time" is "a period of **three and a half years** made up of 42 thirty-day lunar months."

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* states that "a time and times and half a time" equals a period of "one year, two years, and half a year" or "1260 days" or "forty-two months," adding that the phrase is to be understood quite literally as "*three and a half years*" of "persecution."

In Daniel 12, we find another reference to the duration of the Great Tribulation. Daniel asked an angel how long it would take until “all these things” would be fulfilled (verse 6), about which the angel had told him, including the persecution of the saints, their deliverance from persecution, and the resurrection of the righteous to eternal life (verses 2–3).

The angel answered, in verse 7: “... that it shall be for A TIME, TIMES, AND HALF A TIME; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, [then] all these things shall be fulfilled.” Again, we see that the persecution of God’s people during the Great Tribulation is described as beginning **three-and-a-half years** prior to Christ’s return and the resurrection of the righteous dead.

In Revelation 11:2, we are told that the Gentiles will “tread the holy city [Jerusalem] underfoot for FORTY-TWO MONTHS,” and verse 3 explains that God’s two witnesses will “prophesy ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY DAYS.” All these phrases refer to a time span of three-and-a-half years.

Vincent’s Word Studies explains that the term “forty and two months” describes a “period which appears in [several] forms in Revelation: “forty-two months... twelve hundred and sixty days... a time, times and half a time, or **three years and a half.**”

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* elaborates, in their notation to Revelation 11:2, that the phrase, “forty and two months” describes “The same period as Daniel’s ‘time, times, and half... The three and a half... was the duration of Antiochus’ treading down of the temple and persecution of faithful Israelites... Also, three and a half years was the period of the heaven being shut up, and of consequent famine, in Elias’ time. Thus, three and a half represented to the Church the idea of toil, pilgrimage, and persecution.”

John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible adds the following thought in his notation to Revelation 11:3:

“... it is observable, that the date of the beast’s reign and tyranny is expressed by *months*, and the date of the church’s being in the wilderness, and the prophesying of the witnesses, is signified by *days*; and the reason which some give is not despicable, as that the beast and his followers are the children of darkness and of the night, over which the moon presides, from whence months are numbered; and the church

and the witnesses are children of the day, over which the sun rules.”

A further reference to Satan’s attempt to persecute the saints during the Great Tribulation can be found in Revelation 12. Some members of God’s true Church will be protected from Satan’s attacks in a place of safety here on earth (compare Revelation 3:10). Others, however, will have to endure Satan’s persecution; and Satan will use his “instruments”—the beast and the false prophet—to bring about such persecution. The relevant time span described here is “a TIME and TIMES and HALF A TIME”—that is, three-and-a-half years. The entire passage in Revelation 12:13–17 will be discussed in detail later in this booklet.

All biblical references to the duration of the Great Tribulation speak of **three-and-a-half years**. The concept that the Great Tribulation would last *for seven years* is not biblical. In fact, there is not one single passage in the Bible suggesting that the Great Tribulation would last longer than three-and-a-half years. Even if one were to understand the passage in Daniel 9:27 as referring to a seven-year contract, it would still not say that the GREAT TRIBULATION would last for seven years.

Chapter 7

2,300 Evenings and Mornings, 1,260 Days, 1,290 Days and 1,335 Days in the Book of Daniel

As we have explained before, we do not know the exact day of Christ's return. It is the FATHER's *decision* to determine when exactly to send Jesus Christ back to this earth. That is the reason why *even Jesus Christ does not know* the EXACT time.

Some disagree, claiming that the book of Daniel gives us precise figures and numbers to show us exactly when Jesus Christ will return. This idea is rather strange, since Christ inspired Daniel's writings. So, since Daniel was led by the Holy Spirit to pen down the exact time of Christ's return, wouldn't Christ know it too?

What then, is the correct understanding of certain numbers and times mentioned in the book of Daniel?

2,300 EVENINGS AND MORNINGS (DANIEL 8:1-14)

Daniel 8:1-14 addresses the future time when daily sacrifices will be reinstated by the Jews, but subsequently abolished. This will happen just before the return of Christ. In this context, a time frame of 2,300 evenings and mornings is mentioned.

Verses 13 and 14 of Daniel 8 are not all that clear in the *New King James Version*. Notice how other renditions make the meaning clearer.

The Revised English Bible states: "... 'How long will the period of this vision last? How long will the regular offering be suppressed and impiety cause desolation? How long will the Holy Place and the fair-est of all lands be given over to be trodden down?' The answer came, 'For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the Holy Place will be restored.'"

The *New Jerusalem Bible* writes: "... 'How long is this vision to be...?' ... 'Until two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings have gone by; then the sanctuary will have its rights restored.'"

The *New International Version* reads: "... 'How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision **concerning the daily sacrifice**, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?' He said to me, '**It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings**; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.'"

Notice carefully: **2,300 evenings and mornings** were to pass before the sanctuary would be cleansed or restored. During this time span, the daily offerings would be suppressed; the "transgression of desolation" (verse 13)—also known as the "abomination of desolation"—would appear; and the Holy Place or the sanctuary would be trodden down or trampled underfoot.

The "*Soncino Commentary*" states that the 2,300 evenings and mornings refer to the number of times of the offerings, which are normally brought twice daily and which will be omitted, giving a total period of **1,150 DAYS**. The *Broadman Bible Commentary* agrees: "The time is given two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings... These sacrifices would [be suppressed for] **1,150 DAYS**."

We are told then that **the daily sacrifices will cease for 1,150 days**.

THE 1,260 DAYS, 1,290 DAYS, AND 1,335 DAYS (DANIEL 12:7, 11–12)

In Daniel 12, we are introduced to three additional numbers. In this end-time prophecy (verse 4), we are told, in verses 7, 11–12:

"... it shall be for a time, [two] times, and half a time [or 3-½ years or 1,260 days]... all these things shall be finished... And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be **one thousand two hundred and ninety days**. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the **one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days**."

CORRECT ASSUMPTION?

Some operate from the *assumption* that all the days end with the return of Christ. They count backwards from the [assumed] day of the

return of Christ, and some have reached the following conclusions:

(a) 1,335 days before Christ's return: The organized Work of God's Church and the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God ends.

(b) 1,290 days before Christ's return or 45 days after the Work ends: The abomination of desolation is set up.

(c) 1,260 days (3½ years) before Christ's return or 75 days after the Work ends or 30 days after the abomination of desolation is set up: The Great Tribulation begins and Jerusalem is occupied by Gentiles [Compare Daniel 7:25, a period of 3½ years or 1,260 days of persecution of the saints.]

(d) 1,150 days before Christ's return or 90 days after the beginning of the Great Tribulation, or 120 days after the abomination of desolation is set up: The daily sacrifices are taken away.

PROBLEM WITH THIS ASSUMPTION

We should be able to see that this interpretation *fails to reconcile* an important discrepancy:

According to this explanation, the sacrifices will still be given until 1,150 days before Christ's return (see **Daniel 8:13–14**), even though the Great Tribulation will have already begun and the city of Jerusalem will have already been occupied (for 110 days) AND the abomination of desolation will have already been set up (for 140 days).

But **Daniel 12:11** says that there will be 1,290 days AFTER the daily sacrifices were taken away AND the abomination of desolation will have been set up.

So, if we were to count backwards from the [assumed] day of Christ's return, then Daniel 8:13–14 would tell us that the daily sacrifices will be abolished for 1,150 days *before Christ's return*, while Daniel 12:11 would tell us that the daily sacrifices will be abolished for 1,290 days *before Christ's return*. Both statements could not be correct, as they would contradict each other.

OTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF DANIEL'S NUMBERS

What are some other possible ways to understand the numbers in Daniel 8 and 12?

Rather than counting backwards, many commentaries propose to count "forward," beginning with events prior to Christ's return and

continuing with events after the return of Christ.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, commenting on Daniel 12:11–12, points out that historically, it took **1,290 days** from the profanation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes (in the month Ijar of the year 145 B.C.) until the restoration of the worship by Judas Maccabeus on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month [Chisleu] of 148 B.C. Then, **FORTY-FIVE DAYS** more elapsed before Antiochus' death in the month Shebat of 148 B.C., "so ending the Jews' calamities..."

Applying these facts prophetically, the commentary suggests that "Jesus at His coming will deliver the Jews [better: Israel and Judah]. An interval elapses, during which their consciences are awakened to repentance and faith in Him. A second interval elapses in which Israel's outcasts are gathered, and then the united blessing takes place. These stages are marked by the 1260, 1290, and 1335 days."

It appears that the commentary applies at least some of the intervals to the time *after Christ's return*.

Scofield Reference Notes seems to offer a similar explanation, commenting on Daniel 12:12 as follows:

"Three periods of 'days' date from the 'abomination' (that is, The blasphemous assumption of deity by the Beast—[our comment: the false prophet])... Twelve hundred and sixty days [pass until] the destruction of the Beast... This is also the duration of the great tribulation... Dating from the same event is a period of 1290 days, an addition of thirty days... Again forty-five days are added...

"No account is directly given of that which occupies the interval of seventy-five days *between the end of the tribulation* and the *full blessing* of verse 12... It is suggested that the explanation may be found in the prophetic descriptions of the events following... Armageddon... The Beast is destroyed, and Gentile world-dominion ended, by the smiting of the 'Stone cut out without hands' at the end of the 1260 days, but the scene is, so to speak, filled with the debris of the image which the 'wind' must carry away before full blessing comes in [compare Daniel 2:35]."

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible makes similar comments to Daniel 12:11, applying some of the intervals to events *after Christ's return*:

"... there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days; from the

beginning of the reign of antichrist to the end of it are one thousand two hundred and sixty days or years, or forty two months, which is the same... here thirty days... are added, which begin where the other end, and is the *time allotted for the conversion of the Jews* [better Israel and Judah], and other things, making way for the kingdom of Christ; and which the reign of antichrist was an hindrance of, but should now immediately take place."

The *Ryrie Study Bible* comments on Daniel 12:11–12:

"... Antichrist will abolish the Jewish sacrifices... From that time to the end will be 1,290 days. Normally 3½ years (of 360 days per year) would include only 1,260 days. The extra 30 days mentioned here allow for the judgments which take place *after the second coming of Christ*... Since the one who lives 75 days after the second advent ... is called Blessed, this must mark the beginning of the actual functioning of Christ's millennial kingdom."

According to the opinion of the above-quoted commentaries, a possible future scenario could unfold, as follows:

(a) After 1,260 days of the beginning of the Great Tribulation, Christ returns, ending the Great Tribulation. On the same day of His return, He will fight at Jerusalem with the armies of the kings of the world, including the kings of the East, the beast and the false prophet.

(b) 30 days later (1,290 days), Christ will have judged and banished Satan and awakened the surviving Israelites and Jews to repentance and brought them back to the Promised Land; and the worship in the cleansed Temple will resume.

(c) 45 days later (1,335 days), the peaceful rule of Christ will begin, after the hordes from the east will have been destroyed [compare Ezekiel 38]. As Antiochus died 1,335 days after he had profaned the first temple, so the hordes from the east (who collaborated with the beast at the very end, compare Revelation 16:12) will be destroyed 1,335 days after the third Temple has been profaned.

(d) But what about the 1,150 days, since the sanctuary will be cleansed 1,150 days after the sacrifices have been taken away?

The Bible says that the sacrifices will be taken away, and that after 1,150 days have expired, the sanctuary will be cleansed. It does not say, when exactly it will be cleansed, or that the Millennial sacrifices (mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, beginning with chapter 40) will

resume right away after the cleansing. It does not say either, that at the end of the 1,150 days, Christ will return.

Rather, it says that sacrifices will be given prior to Christ's return, and then they will be taken away, around the same time that the beast and the false prophet set up the abomination of desolation in the Holy Place (a rebuilt Temple). It is true that Christ will ultimately cleanse the sanctuary or Temple and (temporary) sacrifices will resume, but this will happen sometime after He has returned.

PROBLEM WITH THIS INTERPRETATION

Nevertheless, the afore-stated opinions also face a big problem—the fact that they all presuppose that we can start counting from a particular [assumed] given date and that 1,150 or 1,260 days later, Christ will return. The error of this idea is that even after the daily sacrifices have been taken away, Christ's return could still be *delayed* due to human conduct.

Remember that we read in Revelation 10:6–7 that only in the days of the sounding of the *seventh angel*, there will be no further delay. The seventh angel will sound during the Day of the Lord—**not** at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

In addition, we saw that the time of the Great Tribulation might be shorter than 3½ years or 1,260 prophetic days. Ultimately, nobody knows or can know the exact DAY of Christ's return. It is within the Father's exclusive authority to determine the right time.

CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

We must emphasize that we do not know the exact meaning of the 1,150 days—or of the 1,260 days, 1,290 days or 1,335 days—but there is certainly importance attached to them.

To our knowledge, NOBODY understands at this time the full meaning of these numbers in the book of Daniel, even though some erroneously and quite presumptuously claim that they do. However, we should not try to read certain human interpretations into them. God will reveal the meaning to His true servants in His due time (Daniel 12:4, 9–10; compare also Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24).

God WILL reveal to His servants, what He will do, and when (Amos 3:6–8). Let us wait patiently for God, and let us not try to step

ahead of Him—only to become embarrassed later when our human interpretations do not come true. And most certainly, let us **NOT try to determine the date of Christ's return** by using any of the numbers in the book of Daniel or by using any other passage in God's Word, as if it contained some hidden meaning in contradiction to Christ's clear statement that *not even He knows* the exact time of His return.

Many have tried to predict the exact year, month and even day of Christ's Second Coming, and ALL of them have been terribly wrong. Even giving dates under the disguise of "speculation" is very unwise. We should not try to repeat the mistakes of others.

Chapter 8

The Gathering of the Eagles

Within the context of Christ's return, He said that "eagles" or "vultures" will be gathered together where the "carcass" or the "body" is. What did He mean by these statements?

Christ spoke at least twice about the "body" or the "carcass" attracting "eagles" or "vultures." His words are recorded in Matthew 24:28 and in Luke 17:37. In both cases, He spoke about *His return to this earth*. However, we might note a few distinctions as we look at His statements more carefully.

CHRIST'S SAYINGS IN MATTHEW 24

In Matthew 24:26–28, Christ says: "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

The Greek word for "carcass" is "*ptoma*," which "denotes, lit. a fall...; hence, that which is fallen, a corpse" (*W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

The *Nelson Study Bible* comments to Matthew 24:28: "This sweeping statement conveys an image of the horrible carnage that will take place in the judgment at the coming of the Son of Man."

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* offers a similar explanation for Matthew 24:28. It says: "When the Son of Man comes at the end of the age there will be no secrecy about it. His coming will be as apparent as the lightning that flashes across the sky. Further, his coming in judgment is as inevitable as is the gathering of the vultures where there is a carcass. Eagles is the literal Greek word... The Greek word *ptoma* normally designates a corpse or carcass, not a living body. The word for the coming of the Son of Man is *Parousia*, an apparent

reference to his coming at the end of the age.”

These explanations as to Christ’s sayings in Matthew 24:28 seem to be correct. Christ is indeed speaking about the MANNER of His return at a time of GREAT DESTRUCTION on this earth. As eagles descend on a carcass, so the destruction of this world and the manner of Christ’s return will be VISIBLE to everyone. As we saw in this booklet, *Christ is not coming in secret*—nor is He coming at a time of peace.

CHRIST’S SAYINGS IN LUKE 17:37

When turning to Christ’s sayings in Luke 17:37, He seems to be emphasizing a SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT ASPECT regarding His coming. However, most commentaries fail to see the distinction in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37, and as a result, they give the same explanation for both passages.

Note what Christ is saying in Luke 17: 24–37. Although in this passage He is addressing the general time of His return (verses 24, 30), He also introduces the thought that at that time, “...two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.’ And they answered and said to Him, ‘Where, Lord?’ So He said to them, ‘Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together’” (verses 36–37).

OBVIOUS DISTINCTION

We need to recognize the OBVIOUS DISTINCTION between Christ’s words in Matthew 24:28 and in Luke 17:37.

While the Greek word for “carcass” in Matthew 24:28 designates, in fact, a DEAD body, this is NOT the case in Luke 17:37, where the Greek word is “*soma*.” This word does not necessarily have to describe a dead body. In fact, in most cases, it refers to a LIVING body.

One of the few commentaries that seems to have noticed the distinction is *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*. As a consequence, Henry gives a slightly different explanation for Luke 17:37, stating two possible ways of understanding this passage:

“(1) Wherever the wicked are, they shall be found out by the judgments of God; as wherever a dead carcass [sic] is, the birds make a prey of it. The judgments of God shall fasten upon them, as the eagles do upon the prey.

“(2) Wherever the godly are, who are marked for preservation, they shall be found happy in the enjoyment of Christ. Wherever Christ is,

believers will flock to him, and meet in him, as eagles about the prey... WHEREVER THE BODY IS, WHEREVER THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED, thither will pious souls resort, there they will find Christ. Wherever Christ records his name he will meet his people, and bless them."

THE BODY—THE CHURCH OF GOD

With these comments, Henry seems to be referring to CHRIST'S CHURCH AS THE BODY. In other words, it is Christ's Church, the body, which will be preaching the gospel (compare Matthew 24:14; 28:19–20). This seems to be a correct way of understanding this passage. The Greek word "*soma*" refers in many cases to the living body of Christ—the Church (compare Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22–23).

GOD'S PROTECTION OF HIS CHURCH

Although Christ is describing *events in Luke 17, leading up to His return*, the fact that some will be taken, and some may be left behind, could be a reference to a short time span of about three-and-a-half years, JUST PRIOR to His Second Coming, when His Church will be taken to a place of safety here on earth, to be PROTECTED from the terrible things to come (Revelation 3:10). [We will discuss biblical proofs for such a place of safety in the next chapter.]

We note that God's protection is many times associated with eagles, or eagle's wings. God will give His Church, often pictured as a "woman" or "virgin," "two wings of a GREAT EAGLE, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [three-and-a-half years], from the presence of the serpent [Satan the devil]" (Revelation 12:14).

In similar ways, God protected ancient Israel when they left Egypt. Please note Exodus 19:4: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on EAGLES' WINGS and brought you to Myself." Isaiah 63:9 identifies the "eagles' wings," as follows: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the ANGEL of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and *carried them* All the days of old."

We note that the Bible does at times refer to angels as "eagles," or that certain angels are described as having characteristics of eagles (Ezekiel 1:10; 10:14; Revelation 4:7).

ANGELS HELP THE CHURCH

It is therefore possible that Christ was addressing, in Luke 17:37, a SUPERNATURAL PROTECTION of God's Church, through ANGELIC involvement, in connection with a specific place of safety here ON THIS EARTH, just PRIOR to His Second Coming. Those who qualify for such protection will be "taken" to this place, while others, who are not considered worthy, will be "left behind."

Christ admonishes us in Luke 21:36: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass [by escaping to the place of safety on this earth], and to stand before the Son of Man [when He returns]."

FLIGHT "BY FOOT"

We are NOT told HOW, exactly, God will bring those whom He considers worthy to the place of safety. We do know, however, that He will do so WITH SUPERNATURAL PROTECTION (Revelation 12:15–16). Ancient Israel left Egypt BY FOOT. Similarly, we read that Christ asks us to pray that our FLIGHT would not happen in winter or on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20). [A possible explanation for the need of such a prayer is discussed in chapter 10.]

This seems to indicate that SOME will go to the place of safety "by foot" or by means of physical transportation. But even then, supernatural protection during this "flight" will be guaranteed, in the same way that God protected ancient Israel on their exodus out of Egypt.

SUPERNATURAL TRANSPORT

At other times, God protected human beings by SUPERNATURALLY TRANSPORTING them—or "*taking them*"—to another place on this earth (as in the case of Elijah, as well as Ezekiel; compare 2 Kings 2:16 and Ezekiel 3:12–15). Compare, too, Acts 8:38–40 for another supernatural "transport" of one of God's disciples.

We might also remember that God "took" Enoch (Genesis 5:24). Enoch was supernaturally "taken away" from the place where he lived and transported to another place on this earth. God did this to protect him from death (Hebrews 11:5).

So, it appears that some people might, in some way, "physically" flee to a place of safety, while others will be taken there supernaturally.

It is also possible that some might be transported supernaturally to a place of gathering from where all Church members who are worthy of protection, might begin their remaining journey or flight “by foot” to the place of safety. In any event, they all will have angelic protection.

We therefore conclude that Christ described in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37, EVENTS LEADING to His coming (including the physical protection of His worthy disciples), as well as His ACTUAL coming and the terrible CONDITIONS of this world, at AND IN THE MANNER of His coming:

Eagles or angels will be gathered together to protect Christ’s body—the Church, as implied in Luke 17:37.

To emphasize, Christ is not returning at that time when His Church will be brought to the place of safety for protection—His return will occur about 3½ years later. As everyone can observe when eagles or vultures descend on a carcass, so Christ’s actual return to this earth, as implied in Matthew 24:28, will be *obvious and visible to all*. Since eagles can refer to angels, it is even possible that Christ’s picture of descending eagles in Matthew 24:28 (and not only in Luke 17:37) refers to angels, in the sense that God will send symbolic eagles or angels to descend on the dead body or the carcass of this spiritually dead world, to render punishment and judgment on those who do not know or obey God.

We read that God will “give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10).

Chapter 9

The Place of Safety During the Great Tribulation

Jesus Christ warned His end-time disciples of the Great Tribulation, which will be so terrible that nothing like it has ever happened before, nor will ever happen again (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1). At the same time, Christ challenged us to watch and pray always to be counted worthy to escape or be protected from the Great Tribulation (Luke 21:34–36).

PROTECTION HERE ON EARTH

Even though God CAN protect us anywhere He wants, He has decreed that His very elect will be protected at a certain place here on earth. Christ compares the time preceding His coming with the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37–39), and as God protected Noah and his family in the ark—here on earth—so He will protect His people on this earth in the way that HE has chosen. He will definitely NOT protect them by “rapturing” them to heaven!

Christ tells us in Revelation 3:10: “Because you have kept My command to persevere (to have patience), I also will keep you from the hour of trial [tribulation] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” The *Moffat* translation renders this passage as follows: “I will keep you safe through the hour of trial.” The *Living Bible* interprets: “I will protect you from the time of Great Tribulation and temptation.”

The name of the prophet Zephaniah means, “Whom the LORD has hidden.” We are told in Zephaniah’s message, as well, that WE can be hidden, or protected, in the day of the LORD’S anger. Zephaniah 2:3 reads: “Seek the LORD, all you meek [humble] of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the LORD’S anger.”

Compare also David’s inspired statements in Psalm 17:8; Psalm

27:5; and Psalm 31:19–20. King Solomon confirms, in Proverbs 14:26, that God’s people will be protected in the coming times of trial: “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And His children will have a place of refuge.”

God gives us the same promise in Isaiah 26:20–21: “Come, My people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; The earth will also disclose her blood, And will no more cover her slain.”

Joel 3:14–16 reads: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, And the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, And utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But the LORD will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel.”

We read in Jeremiah 4:6 that God’s people are to “Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, And great destruction.”

THE CHURCH’S “FLIGHT” TO THE PLACE OF SAFETY

This place of refuge is more clearly described in Revelation 12:13–17, promising the end-time Church of God her place in the wilderness—on this earth—prepared by God; a place where she will be nourished for three-and-a-half years and protected from Satan the devil. Compare this with Isaiah 33:16, describing the righteous person (verse 15) as dwelling “on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure.”

Revelation 12:13–16 reads:

“(13) Now when the dragon (Satan the devil, Revelation 12:9) saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child (Jesus Christ).

“(14) But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness TO HER PLACE [*New International Version*: “to the place prepared for her in the desert”], where she is nourished [*Living Bible*: “cared for and protected”; *Amplified Bible*: “where she is to be kept safe and fed”] FOR A TIME AND TIMES AND HALF A TIME [*Living Bible*: “for three and a half years”], from the presence of the serpent.

“(15) So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

“(16) But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon spewed out of his mouth.”

We understand that the woman is, first of all, symbolic for Eve (Genesis 3:15); then for the Old Testament Church which would evolve from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob’s TWELVE sons, and which would become known as the Church of Israel in the wilderness; then for Mary, the mother of Christ; and finally—subsequent to Christ’s ascension—for the New Testament Church of God (compare Matthew 25:1; Ephesians 5:22–32; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Galatians 4:26).

While the woman has flown to her place of safety—here on earth—with two wings of a great eagle (compare again Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:11–12; Isaiah 63:9), to be nourished there for three-and-a-half years (Revelation 12:14), Satan will spew water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman. This might perhaps allude to an army or to a military force (compare Daniel 11:10; Jeremiah 46:7; 47:2–3). The earth will open its mouth to help the woman (compare Numbers 16:31–33). All of this will happen on earth—not in heaven, as some who believe in the false concept of a secret rapture erroneously teach. After all, God’s heaven is most certainly not a wilderness, and the “earth” cannot open its mouth to help those in heaven.

Revelation 12:17 continues:

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Satan will proceed to persecute others within the Church who will not be at the place of safety here on earth. They “keep” the commandments of God in the sense that they know of them and are familiar with them, but they don’t necessarily OBSERVE and DO them diligently and with zeal. They “have” the testimony of Jesus Christ in the sense that they know about it; but again, they do not apply it diligently in their lives.

Revelation 12:14–16 pictures the flight of a particular group of people, while verse 17 describes those who are “left behind.” Exactly how all of this will come about is yet to be revealed. However, the

biblical parallels, as shown in past examples of God's deliverance, are recorded as lessons of encouragement and instruction for us.

In 2 Peter 2:4–9 we read that God knows how to deliver the godly from temptation and trials, including the Great Tribulation. He saved Noah by letting him find protection in an ark, and He delivered Lot by leading him out of Sodom and providing a place of refuge for him at a particular location.

Early Christians escaped from Jerusalem and fled to the city of Pella, just before the Romans invaded and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (compare Eusebius in his *Church History*; and Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, Book VI, chapter 3, section 3). God has revealed to us, in His Word, that He will protect His very elect end-time people at a particular place "in the wilderness." Will you be among those who are counted worthy to escape the Great Tribulation?

Chapter 10

Not in Winter or on the Sabbath

In Matthew 24, the chapter which contains the famous “Olivet prophecy,” Jesus Christ explained the “sign of His coming and the end of the age” (verse 3). After discussing the “beginning of sorrows” (verse 8), He pointed at the worldwide preaching of the gospel (verse 14), followed by the Great Tribulation (beginning with verse 15). Shortly thereafter, Christ will return. In that context, Jesus said, in verses 19–22:

“(19) But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies IN THOSE DAYS. (20) And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. (21) For THEN there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until THIS TIME, no, nor ever shall be...”

NOT RESTRICTED TO FIRST CENTURY

Even though some commentaries state that Jesus’ sayings were restricted to the time of 69 A.D. and 70 A.D., when true Christians fled to the city of Pella before the Romans invaded and destroyed Jerusalem, it is clear from the context that those events, even though constituting a forerunner, did not describe the final fulfillment of the prophesied events. There was no “Great Tribulation” at the time of 70 A.D.—worse than it ever had been or will be—nor did those events precede “the end of the age”—this present civilization—and “the coming of Christ.”

It is true that Christ specifically addressed first “THOSE who are in Judea,” telling them to “flee to the mountains” (verse 16). But then, His statement is all-encompassing, stating in verse 20: “And pray that YOUR flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.”

NOT IN WINTER

Regarding His statement that the flight should not be in winter,

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible remarks about the winter season:

“When days are short, and unfit for long journeys, and roads are bad, and sometimes not passable, through large snows, or floods of water; and when to dwell in desert places, and lodge in mountains, must be very uncomfortable: wherefore Christ directs to pray to God, who has the disposal of all events, and of the timing of them, that he would so order things in the course of his providence, that their flight might not be in such a season of the year, when traveling would be very difficult and troublesome.”

The winter can be a very uncomfortable time. Even in the Middle East and Jerusalem, it can be cold and very wet, and is actually described as the rainy season (Jeremiah 36:22; Song of Solomon 2:11).

NOT ON THE SABBATH

Christ was clearly saying in verse 20 that the Sabbath (as well as “winter”) would still be in existence “in those days,” just prior to His return.

The notion that Christ came to abolish the law of the Ten Commandments (including the commandment to keep holy the Seventh-Day Sabbath), is utterly false. Paul said in Hebrews 4:9: “It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the sabbath” (*Lamsa* translation). The *New King James Bible* translates, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God,” but in the Greek, the word for “rest” is “*sabbatismos*” and means, literally, “keeping of the Sabbath” or “Sabbath-rest.” The time of the Sabbath rest begins Friday evening, at sunset, and lasts to Saturday evening, at sunset, according to the Hebrew calendar.

At the same time, the Bible makes it clear that it is not a sin to “flee” on the Sabbath. The ancient people of Israel left Egypt on the First Day of Unleavened Bread (an annual Sabbath or Holy Day), and, according to tradition, they crossed the Red Sea during their flight from the Egyptians on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread (another annual Holy Day). Also, according to tradition, the Israelites invaded and conquered Jericho on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

SABBATH IS HOLY

However, the Sabbath would most certainly not be the best time to FLEE from persecution and a pursuing army. The weekly and annual Sabbaths are “holy,” and Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath

(Mark 2:28). The Sabbath is a rest day (Luke 23:56). It should be a delight for God's people (Isaiah 58:13). Going on a long journey or fleeing from a persecuting army would not be helpful in keeping our minds on the holiness of that day.

But as mentioned, IF that were the time for our flight, we would of course have to do so and could not refuse to leave. Some, however, especially those who will be new or "weak" in the faith, might have conscientious problems to flee on the Sabbath and might decide to "stay behind."

REAL DIFFICULTIES

There are additional reasons why Jesus asked us to pray that our flight would not occur during winter or especially on the Sabbath.

It would most certainly not be easy "in those days" to have to flee "in winter or on the Sabbath." Remember, Christ said in Matthew 24:19: "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in THOSE days." A flight under those conditions might be very burdensome, and Christ was encouraging His end-time disciples who would be aware of the signs of the time, to pray that their flight would NOT be in winter or on the Sabbath.

PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF RIGHT SABBATH-KEEPING

Christ focused specifically on the Sabbath for several reasons:

At the time of the end, the Satan-induced governments of this world will have begun a thorough persecution of all those who keep the Sabbath. We read of a worldwide martyrdom of God's disciples who will be keeping the Sabbath. These martyrs will include those who will have rejected the "mark of the beast." Those who accept the "mark of the beast" includes those who keep Sunday, instead of the Sabbath, as well as man-made pagan holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, instead of God's annual Sabbaths or Holy Days (compare our free booklet, *"Europe in Prophecy"*).

As happened before in history, the followers of "orthodox Christianity" will persecute all those who don't keep holy **their** "weekly day of worship"—Sunday, the day of a pagan sun-god—as well as their annual "holidays" such as Christmas or Easter; days originally dedicated to pagan sun-gods—and who instead insist on keeping holy

God's weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days.

The "mark of the beast"—designating those working or not working on certain days—will identify all those who belong to the universal "Christian" church in existence "in those days." By extension, it will also single out those who do NOT belong to that universal church.

We read that Satan will influence the governments of this world to persecute those who will be fleeing to a place of safety here on earth (compare Revelation 12:14–16). Those who keep the Sabbath and have probably already been under surveillance by governments, will be in danger of additional persecution, and the governments might step in to try to prevent their flight. If that were to happen on the Sabbath, one can easily see how difficult, even mentally and spiritually, the conditions would be for the continuation of the flight.

Christ also prophesied that some outside the Church of God would keep the Sabbath. For instance, the Sabbath is being kept even today—more or less—in some parts of the state of Israel. Since it is *possible* that the place of safety might be located in the Middle East, it would be difficult to flee there, if it somehow involved a route through some parts of the state of Israel.

According to prophecy, the Jews in Israel will have begun, by that time, to become more zealous in their religion; to build the third Temple; and to re-institute the daily sacrifices. It stands to reason that true Christians would have to encounter resistance even from certain orthodox Jews if they had to flee on the Sabbath.

If most of the Jews in the state of Israel were to re-institute their (unbiblical) traditions regarding the Sabbath, which is highly likely, it would be very difficult to pass through their region on the Sabbath day.

Note what the commentary of *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible* has to say about the ancient traditions of the Jews:

"Long journeys were prohibited... The law of Moses did not mention the distance to which persons might go on the Sabbath, but most of the Jews maintained that it should not be more than 2000 cubits. Some supposed that it was 7 furlongs, or nearly a mile. This distance was allowed in order that they might go to their places of worship. Most of them held that it was not lawful to go further, under any circumstances of war or affliction.

"Jesus teaches his disciples to pray that their flight might not be

on the Sabbath, because, if they should not go farther than a Sabbath-day's journey, they would not be beyond the reach of danger, and if they did, they would be exposed to the charge of violating the law [as interpreted by the Jews—not taught by the Bible]. It should be added that it was almost impracticable to travel in Judea on that day, as the gates of the cities were usually closed."

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible gives a similar explanation, which, even though referring to the time of Jesus' First Coming, might be applicable to a renewed, but misguided zeal of the Jews in the future:

"And the reason why our Lord put them on praying, that their flight might not be on the Sabbath day, was, because he knew not only that the Jews, who believed not in him, would not suffer them to travel on a sabbath day more than two thousand cubits; which, according to their traditions..., was a sabbath day's journey; and which would not be sufficient for their flight to put them out of danger..."

"And though the Jews did allow, that the sabbath might be violated where life was in danger, and that it was lawful to defend themselves against an enemy on the sabbath day; yet this did not universally obtain; and it was made a question of, after the time of Christ, whether it was lawful to flee from danger on the sabbath day."

We read that Christ's true disciples will be hated by all nations in those days (Matthew 24:9). This would include hatred from professing Christians, because true Christians will not accept the pagan concepts and worship which have become part of orthodox Christianity. This would include hatred from Arabs who will view Sabbath-keeping Christians as "Jewish." This would also include hatred from Jews, because true Christians will not accept Jewish traditions and they will confess Jesus Christ as the ONLY Savior of the world, which concept the Jews (as well as the Arabs and other non-Christian religions) universally reject! **True disciples will become the target** of worldwide persecution from every corner, and fleeing on the Sabbath would contribute to additional hostilities!

Christ's statement also shows that the specific day and the season (summer or winter, etc.) of the flight are *not yet fixed* (and neither is the day of Christ's return). Rather, it is within the Father's authority to decide when exactly the day and the season of the flight will occur. So let us pray then, that our flight will not occur in winter or on the Sabbath day.

Conclusion

Christ *WILL* come back. God's promise to give us, at that time, eternal life in the Kingdom of God *WILL* be fulfilled. However, we do **not** know the exact timing of Christ's Second Coming, nor do we know the exact timing of certain events preceding His return, including the beginning of the Great Tribulation and the Church's flight to the Place of Safety.

God the Father has retained sole authority to make those decisions, and they might very well depend on our individual reluctance to repent, and our collective neglect to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a witness in all of the world and to all nations.

Rather than engaging in futile and time-wasting exercises of trying to figure out the exact *time* of Christ's Second Coming, we are admonished to be spiritually ready *at all times*, since Christ will return when we do NOT expect it. We are to watch and pray always that we are counted worthy to escape all those terrible things which will surely engulf this globe in the not-too-distant future, and to stand confidently and without fear before the Son of Man when He returns.

The following booklets are available, upon request:

- Europe in Prophecy: The Unfolding of End-Time Events
The Theory of Evolution — a Fairy Tale for Adults?
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