

THE RETURN

OF

JESUS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST
FOR THE RESURRECTION AND TRANSLATION
OF HIS CHILDREN UNTO ETERNAL LIFE
AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD OF
UNGODLINESS BY FIRE.

PREPARED BY:

TOMMY BLANTON

5030 WILLARD RD.

WILLARD, N.C. 28478

910-285-3802

St.blanton79@gmail.com

ANTIOCHCHURCHNC1.COM

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INTRODUCTION

The blessed and glorious promise that the Savior of Calvary will come to the earth for the second time, not as an offering for our sins but to give us the eternally promised reward of eternal life, is the greatest promise and hope the child of God can possibly contemplate.

It is that promise and hope which we wish to present in this study.

To assume a position of profound knowledge on this subject would be self-exaltation. On the other hand, to hold a deep and unwavering faith in this great promise, along with a passionate commitment to its glorious and eternal consequence, is reason enough to lift any soul into "heavenly places in Christ and the personal thrill of such prospect is enough to make one cry out: "Even so come Lord Jesus!

Let me emphasize to begin with that I cannot and do not plan to project a date-certain for the return of Christ. Enough misguided, self-enthralled "prophets" have already tested those waters and failed.

However, with due respect and restraint regarding the "day" of his return, we should have an unrestrained faith and hope in its divinely declared reality. Not to do so, as many have, is a virtual denial of the grand scope and essential purpose of his return, without which the promise and fulfillment of eternal life cannot be consummated.

Further, even though we cannot declare the specific day of his return we can be very much aware of certain "sign-posts" along the Christian journey which point us, inexorably, to that blessed day and thereby be prepared for its inevitability. There are many scripturally sound indicators of the approaching day of our Lord's return. However, again, great caution should be exercised in our interpretation and application of scriptures which we think address his second return, but in reality they apply to some other time or event in God's calendar of things. For example, there are many prophecies in the O.T. which declare that the Lord will come and save his people. Generally they refer to the first coming of Christ to bring our salvation. To interpret them otherwise could cause great confusion in the application of scripture. In our study we will address many references to the "coming" of God and how they apply to many different events and purposes over the years.

I think that it is very important that, as faithful Christians, we have every right to expect to be divinely guided as to any revealed truth which would alert us to the time of his return. I believe that Christ wants us to deeply anticipate his coming and I also believe he has no desire to hide its inevitability from us. Whether or not he will ever reveal the exact day of his return ahead of time, remains to be seen. If he does we can certainly expect that he would leave no doubts or deception or illusion.

Another caveat about our understanding and application of the scriptures on Christ's return is with a veritable truth, but one which is so often taken out of context. I speak of the scriptures which tell us that "no man knoweth the day or the hour, but that he will come as a thief in the night". At this point I only bring it to our attention and we will address such scriptures in due course.

Another critical point we should include in our introductory comments, has to do with the total apathy, indifference and plain-do-not-care-attitude on the part of many professing Christians. After all, it is declared, if I do not know the day, why should I be bothered with it in any case. Thus, many simply brush the subject aside as though it is out of sight and out of mind and that it is something the Lord will have to attend to. The effect of this kind of attitude is to seriously weaken or even destroy the entire prospect and hope in our hearts and minds. This is a recipe for disaster of faith.

Even though we have made a casual reference to the existence of many concepts and doctrines which many feel are associated with the actual second return of Christ, I want to alert us again to this fact and urge that we make sure that such doctrines really do belong in the schedule of events to occur when our Lord returns again. We expect to address many of these points in a separate section of this study where we can give definite reasons why they should not be associated with his return and not just call a passing attention to them. There are so many of them as well as so many that cannot, by any possible scripture, be placed at the time of the return of Christ.

With that we will conclude our introductory remarks with the greatest emphasis we can possibly place upon the great and glorious promise of our Lord's return to earth again. He will be coming, not as a sacrifice for our sins, but as our redeemer to crown us with eternal life. There is no event in the Christian life or on the calendar of the entire Christian Church which holds more joy, hope and promise than his return. The purpose of his coming is that he might resurrect all Christians of all ages who sleep in their graves and translate all Christians living at the time of his return and by this process confer upon them immortality, incorruptibility, eternal life. This will be followed by the destruction of the wickedness of this world. God will then give to his beloved the absolutely best that his creative power is able to provide. *What A Day That Will Be?*

A STATEMENT OF FAITH ABOUT THE COMING OF THE LORD

1. WE BELIEVE IN THE BODILY, VISIBLE SECOND RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE EARTH.
2. WE BELIEVE THAT HIS RETURN WILL OCCUR AT THE LAST DAY OF TIME, WHEN ALL TIME AND PROBATION AND GRACE FOR THE WORLD HAS ENDED.
3. WE BELIEVE THAT, UPON HIS RETURN AND THE RESURRECTION, THERE WILL BE NO OTHER EVENTS OR PROPHECIES TO BE FULFILLED.
4. WE BELIEVE THAT THE PURPOSE OF HIS RETURN IS TO CONFER UPON HIS CHILDREN THE REWARD OF ETERNAL DURATION AND FIXITY; ETERNAL LIFE.
5. WE BELIEVE THAT NO ONE HAS PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED THEIR ETERNAL REWARD WHICH IS THE PRODUCT OF A LIFE OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
6. WE BELIEVE THAT HIS RETURN WILL BE INSTANTANEOUS – IN A MOMENT AND IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE.
7. WE BELIEVE THE SLEEPING (DEAD) SAINTS OF ALL PAST AGES, WILL BE RESURRECTED FROM THEIR GRAVES BY THE RE-CREATING POWER OF GOD.
8. WE BELIEVE THAT, FOLLOWING THEM, ALL WHO ARE ALIVE AND HIS CHILDREN, WILL BE TRANSLATED (CHANGED) FROM A MORTAL STATE TO AN IMMORTAL STATE.
9. WE DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE UNGODLY AT ANY TIME. (1) THE RESURRECTION IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST. (2) THE VERY FACT AND PROCESS OF THE RESURRECTION WILL CHANGE ALL PARTICIPANTS FROM MORTAL TO IMMORTALITY OR CORRUPTIBLE TO INCORRUPTIBLE. THIS DOES NOT AND CANNOT APPLY TO THE UNGODLY.
10. WE BELIEVE THAT FOLLOWING THE RESURRECTION / TRANSLATION, THE EARTH WILL PASS AWAY WITH A GREAT NOISE AND BE CONSUMED BY FIRE WITH ALL OF THE WORKS THEREIN.
11. WE BELIEVE THAT THE RESURRECTED SAINTS WILL FOREVER BE WITH JESUS WHEREVER HIS PERFECT DWELLING FOR THEM IS PREPARED. WE ARE TOLD IN SEVERAL SCRIPTURES THAT THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH. WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, GOD FIRST PUT MAN ON THE EARTH IN THE “PARADISE OF EDEN” AND HE CAN STILL MAKE IT AS WONDERFUL AND BLESSED AS HE CAN ANY OTHER LOCATION IN HIS UNIVERSE.
12. WE BELIEVE THAT WE WILL KNOW AND BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER, JUST AS JESUS KNEW HIS DISCIPLES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION.
13. WE BELIEVE THAT GOD WILL ARRANGE ALL OF THE COMPONENTS OF OUR ETERNAL LIFE TO BE THE BEST WHICH GOD CAN CREATE. JUST TO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, WITHOUT ALL OF THE SORROW, TROUBLES, SIN AND DEATH OF THIS EARTHLY LIFE WILL BE INCOMPREHENSIBLE.
14. EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS!

THERE ARE MANY “COMINGS” OF THE LORD

This probably sounds like a very strange or even false statement, since we know that the Lord first came to this earth, visibly and physically, when he was born in Bethlehem’s manger and the second time he will come to the earth, we are assured by scripture, will be at the end of the world. Why, then, do we pose a topic of the “many comings” of the Lord and just what are they?

We can answer the first part of this question very simply by pointing out that the Lord has come to the world on many occasions and for many different reasons, all or most of which may have nothing at all to do with our main subject: “The Second Return of Christ”. An example of this would be the flood in Noah’s day. God certainly came to that world by way of the flood upon the ungodly. And while our study of his second return may well borrow from the example of the flood, yet that was not visible as his second return will be.

The second part of the question, what are these “many comings” and what do they mean if, in fact, they do not apply to the second return of Christ, will require greater description and examples to fairly answer. With that in mind, we plan to use this section to discuss briefly some of the many occasions of which it can be said that there is reference to the “coming” of God in a divine visitation upon the earth. We can expect to find that some of these references are about God’s “coming” in judgment upon sin and ungodliness, while other instances may refer to his “coming” to deliver his people in times of distress.

1. The book of Exodus focuses great attention upon the deliverance of Israel from centuries of bondage in Egypt. No one should question the fact that God “came” down to accomplish that task. Without that it would never have occurred. We note, however, that his “coming” in this instance and purpose, was not a visible coming such as that of Christ coming to save the world. At this same time, when God “came” to deliver his people from bondage, he also “came” to render judgments upon the nation of Egypt.
2. Only a short time after God “came” down to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, he “came” down upon Mt. Sinai, with thunder, lightning and quaking, to give the law to Moses. God “came” to Moses “face to face” on this mountain for this landmark event.
3. Going back to the earlier chapters of Exodus, God “came” to Moses in the burning bush to call him for the great task of leading Israel out of Egypt.
4. After the sin of Adam and Eve, Gen. 1:8 tells us: “And they heard the voice of the Lord God “walking” in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the “presence” of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden”. God “came” to Adam to confront him about his disobedience.
5. The story of Noah reveals the repentance of God over ever having created man, and tells us of his intent to destroy man from the face of the earth. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. When the flood came, it was as if God had “come” down to render judgment upon a godless generation.

6. After the flood, the tower of Babel was constructed, apparently in disbelief and distrust of God. In Gen. 11:7, God said, "Go to, let us "go down", and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech". God did not visibly, physically come down; he did not need to. From his omnipresent position in the universe, he simply commanded the confusion of their languages and the building of the tower of Babel was terminated.
7. In Gen. 18:20-21, the scripture says: "And the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will "go down now" and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know". God "came" down in judgment upon the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.
8. The children of Judah forsook the Lord and all of his law, temple and way of life. The prophet Jeremiah spent 42 years of ministry trying to get them to repent and return to the Lord. Because they refused to do so, God "came" down in the form of the armies of the Babylonian Empire, and carried them away captive for 70 years. At the end of the 70 years, God, in fulfillment of Is. 45, sent his servant Cyrus (ruler of the Persian Empire) to deliver them and allow them to go back to Jerusalem. If you could have been there, you would have cried out with all of the children of Judah that, "God came down" and delivered us.
9. The prophets spoke often about the "coming" of the Lord or the "coming" of the day of God. Many of their projections were prophecies of the coming of God as the savior of the world in the form of the Christ child. We will only reference a few of these to convey the great moment and purpose of this first visible "coming" of Jesus to the world.
 - a. Ps. 40:7. Then said I, Lo, "I come": in the volume of the book it is written of me. The writer of Hebrews, 10:5-7, referring to this same event declares: "Wherefore when he "cometh" into the world, he saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared for me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, "I come" (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God". (*The coming of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins*).
 - b. Is. 11:1. And there shall "come" forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. (*The coming of Christ as savior through the lineage of David*).
 - c. Is. 25:9. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord (Jehovah); we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (*Jehovah, God promised to come as our savior*).
 - d. Is. 31:4. ----- so shall the Lord of hosts "come down" to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.
 - e. Is. 35:4. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; behold, your God will "come" with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will "come" and save you.
 - f. Is. 40:9-10. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto cities of Judah, "behold your God". Behold, the Lord God will "come" with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.
 - g. Is. 59:20. And the Redeemer shall "come" to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.

- h. **Mic. 5:2.** But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he “come” forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.
 - i. **Zech. 9:9.** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King “cometh” unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.
 - j. **Zech. 14:5.** And ye shall flee to the valleys of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall “come”, and all the saints with thee.
- 10. Mt. 16:27-28.** For the Son of man shall “come” in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. *(There are several N.T. verses which speak of the Son of man coming in his kingdom which are not a reference to the second visible return of Jesus at the last day. This is one example of that. The way you know for certain that it does not refer to the last day coming is the statement which Jesus made that, “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom”. We will encounter other examples of this. Such scriptures are speaking of the establishing of the kingdom of God, and/or some other event of immediate occurrence.)*
- a. **Mk. 9:1.** And he said unto them, verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God “come” with power.
 - b. **Lk. 7:19.** And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, art thou he that should “come” or look we for another? *(John is reflecting on O.T. prophecies with this question).*
 - c. **Lk. 17:20-21.** And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should “come”, he answered them and said, the kingdom of God “cometh” not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. *(So much of the “coming” the Bible talks about is not some visible object to be seen).*
 - d. **Jn. 4:25-26.** The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah “cometh” which is called Christ: when he is “come” he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.
 - e. **Jn. 5:25.** Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is “coming” AND NOW IS, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.
 - f. **Jn. 14:18.** I will not leave you comfortless, I will “come” to you. *(He spoke these words about the Holy Ghost which had not yet been given).*
 - g. **Acts 2:20.** The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord “come”. *(If you read Acts 2:16-20, it will show that the “day of the Lord to come was a part of Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost).*
- 11. There are additional scriptures about the “coming” of the Lord which need to be addressed.** Notable among them are several verses in the book of Revelation and also the 24th chapter of the book of Matthew. Many of these are used by orthodox theology in relation to the second return of Christ. However, they do not apply to that. We will have specific separate sections for these two areas of this thought. We have given many examples from throughout the Bible where there

is a reference to the “coming” of the Lord for various reasons, many of which do not refer to a visible, bodily “coming” of the Lord. We have given these to show that care must be exercised not to apply scriptures in the wrong manner, giving careful thought to what they say, what they intended to say and what the context of their statements is.

God has always been involved, in one way or another, in the affairs of this world as they relate to his people. In this involvement, God is very often spoken of in terms of “coming”, “coming to”, “coming down”, etc. It is absolutely essential that we faithfully differentiate between those “comings of the Lord” which are not intended to be a reference to the visible, physical, second return of Christ, as compared to those scriptures which do, in fact, refer to his second return. That is why we have set forth examples of various “comings” of the Lord in this section, so that we may be guided in the proper application of those scriptures which clearly are applicable to his visible, second return.

TWO MEN IN WHITE

-ACTS 1:9-11

Acts 1:9-11. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, 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; Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Jesus Christ first came to this world approximately 2000 years ago by way of a virgin birth, in the little town of Bethlehem. His first advent startled and annoyed the world even though the Hebrew scriptures thoroughly foretold it through prophesies, types and shadows of various and numerous expressions. There were so many different descriptions and details given of his first advent that you wonder how they failed to recognize it, especially those who were of his own nation.

Everyone who has made a reasonable inquiry into his first coming is aware that its purpose was to provide a plan by which the whole world might be saved from sin and death. With his death, burial and resurrection accomplished, he ascended from the earth and subsequently established his church (Acts 2) to carry his message of salvation to all the world.

The age of the work and implementation of the gospel message is known to us as: “the day of grace”, “the day of the Lord”, “the gospel age” or “the dispensation of the Holy Ghost”. When Jesus ascended from the earth some 40 days after his resurrection, from the Mt. of Olives (having previously commanded his disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, Acts 1:4-8), while they gazed steadfastly into heaven an astounding thing happened.

Provided above are the scriptures found in Acts 1:9-11. Verse 10 declares that “two men stood by them in white appare”l. Our attention need not be drawn to “these two men in white”, as to whether or not they are an apparition, “angels” dispatched from beyond the stars or God’s amazing display of power in much the same way as the “fourth man in the fire”, Dan. 3:24-25. Instead, our attention should be totally focused on the message they brought to the disciples, who very likely were stunned and bewildered at the amazing events of the past 2 months. Who could criticize them if, as they watched Jesus ascend, they were completely overwhelmed by the weight of it all. They had followed him during his phenomenal ministry for 3 ½ years. They watched as he was taken, grossly condemned and then crucified. They observed him when he was buried while they feared for their own lives. They were startled, first with unbelief, then with great joy, at his resurrection. During his last 40 days on earth, he was with them constantly, explaining the manner and message of the gospel of the kingdom. Finally, just before his ascension, he commissioned them with the greatest responsibility ever thrust upon any man: go into all the world and preach the gospel unto every creature, baptizing and teaching them all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.

While they observed his ascension and while they thought on all these things – “two men in white apparel stood by them”. These two men had a very brief, clear and concise message for the disciples: “YE MEN OF GALILEE, WHY STAND YE GAZING UP INTO HEAVEN? THIS SAME JESUS, WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.”

Upon hearing this message, it must have brought great relief, reassurance and hope from all that they had seen and heard. They immediately returned to Jerusalem, to wait (10 days) for the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

THE MESSAGE OF THE TWO MEN IN WHITE

How profound, powerful and providential was the message they brought. It stands as a bridge connecting the first coming of Christ along with his message of salvation, spanning across the years from his first advent unto the future time of his second coming, not as a sin offering, but with our eternal salvation. That message set their hearts on fire with zeal and hope and connected every succeeding generation of faithful followers of Christ with 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 all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

There are several salient points we should note in this message from these “two men in white”, which they delivered to the disciples.

1. Their message says there is no need to stand here gazing into the heavens, as though you would see or apprehend Jesus and bring him back. Turn your gaze and attention to the commission and work he has left in your charge.
2. This same Jesus -- not another ; not an angelic substitute; not a changed or re-figured Jesus, and not some invisible, imaginary appearance.
3. (This same Jesus) which you have seen go into heaven – which your eyes have physically beheld – with all of his being, attributes, body, scars, etc. Not an apparition, invisible entity or appearance, nor any other philosophical, theological or imaginary being, but – Jesus himself!
4. (He) shall so come again in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. And Paul, some 20 or more years later, wrote to the Thessalonian Christians that: “The Lord himself will descend from heaven (I Thess. 4:16). These “two men in white” describe an event which is just as obvious, real, glorious and provable as their eyes conveyed to them of his bodily ascension.

How powerfully ordained of God is this message concerning the visible return of this same Jesus, in which the disciples and subsequent generations of Christians have placed their hope, their trust and their lives. Before the day of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first 120 disciples, thereby establishing the church, the kingdom of God, and before Peter’s inaugural gospel message – they are given another message, dramatically and super-naturally, that their beloved Jesus will come again!

The very purpose and grand design embodied in this return is the singular and absolutely exclusive act of conveying to the saints of God of all ages, that is to say, all who are in Christ, their promised reward of eternal life by way of a resurrection from among the dead.

It embodies a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, II Pet. 3:13.

It embodies the end of sin, death and sorrow, trouble and heartbreak, sickness and disease and every consequence of the fall of man from the grace of God.

It embodies the hope and assurance of a resurrection for all those who have believed in Christ.

It embodies the only time and event, wherein anyone of any age, can be changed from mortality to immortality and from corruptibility to incorruptibility.

It embodies the moment when God's children of all ages will receive their crown of everlasting life, along with every blessing God sees fit to endow it with.

It precludes and denies any other event, so called, as being associated with the second return of Christ, whether secretly, historically or openly.

It is the one moment when Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God; that is to say, the conclusion of the work of the kingdom on earth is over at the return of Christ. I Cor. 15:23-28.

It is the time when death itself shall be destroyed so that there is no remnant of its plague left in the universe.

The return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints UNTO eternal life, emphatically denies that anyone has already gone "to their eternal reward at death", and thereby circumventing and destroying the very promise and purpose and hope of the return of Christ and the resurrection.

It is very significant that this super-naturally-declared, matter-of-fact message of the second return of Jesus is strategically and powerfully announced at this very specific moment in the calendar of divine events. If it had been delayed until the church was on its way with its mission and an apostle had declared it as an inclusion with the rest of their message (which it surely was), it would have been just as true but not as powerful, poignant and providential. However, given as it was at this very opportune moment and also delivered by God's own miraculous means of herald, it takes its place, singularly, alone at the apex (as well as the foundation) of God's conspicuous and unchangeable promise and hope for his people. It is not a "fill-in" snippet or opinionated editorial on the back page of the Jerusalem Gazette. It is the bold type headline for the introduction to the coming edition of the entire gospel message. Wherever the true message of God's redeeming grace would be preached in all of its fullness, heralding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it would, necessarily, include the crowning and dramatic moment of the completion of that message: the second return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of his own children.

The verses of scripture declaring this marvelous event may be few (in this location – Acts 1), but that in no way diminishes its value and its distinguished place in the gospel truth. In today's Christian church it has either been de-emphasized or else used only as a vehicle by which a veritable maze of presumed prophetic events are to be accomplished. In all of this there is one simple truth, glaring as it were, right at us, that is totally overlooked. That simple truth is this: when Jesus returns, it's all over, including any prophetic scriptures that theology deems yet to be fulfilled. In I Cor. 15:23-24, Paul describes the resurrection of "those that are Christ's at his coming", and then adds: "then cometh the end". There cannot be an end beyond THE END.

To understand the purpose and any associated activity of the second return of Christ, it is first necessary to understand its relationship with and significance to the entire scope of salvation. First and foremost in this understanding is the fact that without the second return of Jesus, eternal salvation ceases to be possible for anyone. Put another way, if you can obtain your full eternal life with all of its attendant grandeur and glory without (or before) the return of Jesus, then such return is absolutely meaningless and without purpose. Maybe that is precisely why, as we mentioned above, that today's Christian church has de-emphasized its message and necessity, or else uses the doctrine of his return to facilitate agendas other than the specific crowning with life eternal. The vast majority of professing Christians and theologians emphatically teach that it is death – not the second return of Jesus – which is the vehicle by which the Christian (immediately) comes into their full and complete eternal life (reward). Regardless as to where you think eternal life will be spent and regardless as to all of the amenities, treasure and blessing it will hold, if you receive it at death, the return of Jesus and the resurrection is completely null and void. Until the Christian church comes to the convicting faith that death does not and cannot usher us into paradise, there is no reason or purpose to believe and teach the second return of Jesus.

The absolute and exclusive purpose "THESE TWO MEN IN WHITE" were dispatched to the Mt. of Olives to herald this grand promise and hope was that the disciples would know that "this same Jesus which you have seen go into heaven will so come again as you have seen him go". And the reason for that return would be so that he could give to his people the crown of life which they had been promised and had believed in and lived their lives for.

Salvation begins with faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It embraces the necessity of our new birth into the family of God. It continues as we grow, obey, serve and fulfill his blessed will for our lives. Its grand and glorious triumph over sin and death is not fulfilled by dying – what a contradiction that would be – but, instead, by the second return of Jesus and the resurrection of the sleeping saints and the translation of the living saints. Without the second return of Jesus and the resurrection of every saved child of God, there is no eternal life ---- ever.

By teaching that "death is the release from the body of an immortal – soul – entity, which is (supposedly) fully cognizant and capable of comprehending and communicating and having every divine attribute and blessing of the eternal existence in Christ – you completely destroy and refute the teaching, purpose, hope and reality of the coming of the Lord Jesus along with the physical resurrection of those who sleep in him. (This is a good place to point out again that the Bible never,

once states that the “soul” is immortal and will live forever. Look it up and you will see.) Not only does it destroy the doctrine of the return of Jesus and the resurrection, receiving your complete eternal reward at death, whether good or bad, makes a complete mockery of the doctrines and agendas which are believed to have to occur at or around a second return of Jesus. Doctrines such as a resurrection for the wicked and a “judgment” bar for every human who has ever lived; along with millennium of peace, the restoration of Israel and others. And to add insult to injury, after these agendas have, presumably, been accomplished, everyone is sent right back to where they were brought down (or up) from. If God’s full and eternal reward is received by way of some invisible, immortal entity making an unexplainable exit from your body at death – then, and by that event, you make void useless and contradictory any subsequent resurrection or other events for anyone. This is most especially true inasmuch as those “immortal entities” which are presumed to have been sent to their full, eternal reward at death, are now, in a moment and the twinkling of an eye, sent right back to where they were called from – both the good and the bad.

No doubt I will be viciously excoriated for denying that “death is the gate to glory” and also denying that “some invisible, body-less (without any human faculty, organ, senses, form or means of rationally functioning) leaves the body and goes straight to its full and complete experience and enjoyment of every attribute God has planned for eternal life to possess. My response would be: “I believe in the resurrection when Jesus comes again”! You can’t have it both ways.

I do not believe that the message of these “TWO MEN IN WHITE” was an offer of encouragement meant only for the apostles, as important as that surely was. Their message was given for them and every subsequent believer in Christ, to both encourage and bring hope for us in our journey with the Lord. Therefore, let me repeat what I have already said, with all the emphasis possible, that: (1) Jesus will visibly, bodily return to earth again, and, (2) that the purpose of his return is to finish the work of the resurrection of which Christ was the first fruits, and afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming, I Cor. 15:20-23. By this event and this means, all of God’s children of all ages, will (simultaneously) receive the crown of everlasting life. No one has received it before this event and no one will receive it after this event.

Armed with the phenomenal truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and then miraculously assured that “this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven”, and then filled with the promised baptism of the Holy Ghost – is it any wonder that “they turned the world upside down”? That same experience, promise and truth is the foundation of every Christian heart today. To separate this great promise of the return of Christ from being an integral and absolutely essential part of the entire scope and function of redemption, or to make it irrelevant in any degree by making it the catalyst and channel of a maze of events, doctrines and traditions which are not a biblical part of the second return of Christ is, in both cases, a flagrant violation of its clearly defined purpose and biblically described occurrence.

The message of “THESE TWO MEN IN WHITE” was anchored in the Apostles heart as they began the greatest mission the world has ever known. They have faithfully taught and preserved it for all who have believed after them. It is our hope and promise today.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS

I THESS. 4:13-18

I Thess. 4:13-18. 13. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

These verses of scripture written by Paul to the church at Thessalonica, are so full of very clear and wonderful specifics about the return of Jesus and the resurrection that they serve us as a great model of that great event. Already in this same epistle, Paul has made a loving reference to the coming of the Lord, in ch. 2:19 and 3:13. In each case embracing the tender and joyous prospect of sharing with his beloved Thessalonian brethren, that great day when his joy and rejoicing in them shall culminate in the coming of Christ and eternal life.

Then the 13th verse of the 4th chapter begins with a statement which should command their complete attention: “But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them which are asleep”. Paul is not insinuating a lack of understanding of the return of Christ and the resurrection on the part of these Thessalonian brethren; he is setting out to reinforce this great truth to them, lest they diminish its importance.

“concerning them which are asleep”, is a very specific and identifying statement. Make no mistake about it, he is referring to that group of people who “sleep in Christ”(I Cor 15:18). Further, so that we may clearly and definitively apply this expression “asleep in Christ”, we declare that it refers to those who belong to Christ by way of his salvation, from all ages of time, who have died in the faith (Heb. 11:13) and are asleep in their graves awaiting the return of Christ and their resurrection. This is the event that Paul wants them to clearly understand so that they may rejoice in its hope.

“That ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope”, completes the 13th verse and calls attention to another group or class of people: “those who have no hope”. If the Thessalonians (or anyone) miss the point of this expression, then “ignorance” would indeed be the cause. Those “others which have no hope” refers to those who (as Paul writes in Eph. 2:12) are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. In a word, lost. They have no hope because they are aliens from Christ and his saving grace. And Paul is teaching the Thessalonian Christians that they are not like these “others”, who are hopeless and therefore the Thessalonians have no reason to sorrow (about the future).

Paul uses a beautiful term to place these Christians who have ended their earthly life in a condition of “sleep” – as opposed to “death”. When you go to “sleep” at night it is with the expectation of awakening in the morning to another day of life. We don’t refer to a person who is taking rest in their sleep as being “dead”, simply because they expect to arise in the morning. Likewise, when Paul speaks “concerning them which are asleep”, he is contemplating their resurrection in that morning when Christ returns. In the context of this fact, Paul dismisses sorrow such as “others” who have no hope expectation, grounds or possibility of a resurrection at any time, ever.

The 14th verse begins with a very profound and conditional statement: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again”. “If we believe” is a process that opens the door to all of God’s grace for our lives which is not available through any other process, condition or way of life known to all mankind. That certifies its profoundness. Then this “if we believe” makes everything available by way of this CONDITIONAL process by its functioning in our hearts and lives. Let us think about that.

Every blessing of our spiritual inheritance through our Lord Jesus Christ is obtained “BY FAITH”. This statement has a very broad general support throughout Christendom. Our hope of eternal life is predicated upon our faith in him. It not only has as its very beginning, our faith in the Lord Jesus and his atoning work, it is also maintained and continued as this faith grows and bears fruit.

But just what is “faith”? There is a broad misconception throughout today’s church that if we simply state our belief that Jesus died for us, that “faith” has thereby been totally justified and consummated. “Faith” in Jesus Christ may be encapsulated in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but, like a new born child, it has much continual growth and maturity ahead of it. This is accomplished as we continue our faith, growing therein. If our salvation is procured and finalized by an “initial profession of faith in Christ” – without the necessity of growing it its process and maturity, - then as some declare we are “once saved always saved”. But scripture does not teach that. Every day of the Christian experience, from its beginning until we die or Christ returns, is conditional upon faith. Faith is the learning, acceptance, obedience and fruit-bearing based on the teachings of the Bible as applicable to our Christian experience. And faith comes by hearing the preached word of God (continually).

Paul is not saying (in V14) if you just state that you believe that Jesus died and rose again, without its attendant work in our hearts and our continual growth and fruitfulness therein, that we have the benefits of eternal life. As I have already stated, this “believing” is a profound, continual and conditional work in our lives. “We walk by faith, not by sight”. Everyday our relationship with Christ and our hope of life eternal is contingent upon “faith”.

Paul’s point in this verse connects back to the 13th verse. Those who sleep in Christ, having already finished a life of continual, conditional faith, God will bring with him (from their sleep in the grave), whether it be Abraham who has slept for hundreds of years or someone who died in Christ only a month before his return. We are saved by faith; we live and walk with Christ by faith and because of being faithful until death, we have a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will give to us at that day –(the day of his appearing). II Tim. 4:8.

V14. “THEM ALSO WHICH SLEEP IN JESUS WILL GOD BRING WITH HIM”. This statement follows the condition of “if we believe that Jesus died and rose again”. “Even so them also which sleep in Jesus”, presumes that, in like manner in which Jesus rose from the grave, “them also which sleep in Jesus will have the same experience – when he comes. This precisely mirrors Paul’s teaching in I Cor. 15:23, where he proclaims Christ as the “first fruits” (of the resurrection), afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. These two passages teach us that, (1) Christ is raised from the dead, (2) that if we believe, we also will have a resurrection like his when he comes.

V15. ‘FOR THIS WE SAY UNTO YOU BY THE WORD OF THE LORD’. This affirmation of a resurrection for all who believe in Christ (for their salvation), is not just Pauline theology; it is based upon the word of the Lord. This verifies that this great truth of the resurrection of Christ and his children is taught in the O.T., since Paul had no other “scriptures” at this time to quote from.

V15. THAT WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTO THE COMING OF THE LORD’. “We Christians” which are living by faith in Christ at the time of his return are addressed here as Paul gives a sequence of events for that day. Even though the whole world is filled with wickedness and evil imaginations, including half-hearted religionists, there will be a remnant which remain faithful and are yet living when Christ comes. They are the ones referenced in the statement “we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord”.

These which are living when Christ returns “SHALL NOT PREVENT THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP’. That is, they shall not precede, go before or have priority over those who sleep in Jesus, awaiting their resurrection. Paul’s attention is still focused on “those which are asleep”, as he did in V13. He is seeking to allay misinformation, fear or sorrow concerning their condition in Christ, since they have already died and are buried. Paul’s message concerning the status of those who are asleep, carries another powerful context with it. That context is: they are asleep, they are not currently living and they have not already (at death) gone to their eternal reward. Otherwise Paul would simply have assured them not to sorrow for them because they would already be enjoying their eternal reward and are in a much better place. Instead, he leaves the already deceased brethren of these Thessalonian Christians “asleep”, waiting for the second coming of Jesus.

Paul describes two conditions of God’s people who have been saved by his grace in this 15th verse. One condition is of those “who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord”. The other condition is of those “which are asleep”. Throughout his comments in verses 13-18, these are the only conditions and recipients of the events of the coming of the Lord Jesus. Both of these categories of recipients mentioned in these verses (the living and sleeping saints) are the only ones ever, at any time, to benefit from the second return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

It is very important that we digress for a moment so as to emphasize an essential fact which, for a multitude of ambiguous and unscriptural reasons, orthodox theology ignores. That fact is two-fold in this manner. (1) When Jesus Christ (as a man who lived with flesh and blood on this earth) was resurrected from his grave after 3 days and 3 nights, his humanity was, by virtue of his resurrection, changed into immortality, never to die or be subject to death again. His resurrection was not like that

of Lazarus, who lived for a while longer and then died again. The only hope Lazarus has now is if he finished his life faithful to God, so that he may have a resurrection unto immortality like that which Jesus had.

The resurrection of Jesus – by the power of deity – forever delivered the humanity of Christ from fleshly temptations and their consequences. Jesus ever liveth, never to die again. Without the resurrection unto an immortalized condition within his fleshly body, Jesus' resurrection would have been no different than that of Lazarus. But he is now the "first fruits" of them which slept and now possesses that status of immortality of which Paul declares we shall put on at our own resurrection (I Cor. 15:52-54). Jesus did not die just to be dead. He died that he might live again by virtue of his resurrection.

The phenomenal events of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ were no mere demonstration of divine power, such as the opening of the Red Sea, etc. It was the design and plan by which God made available eternal life for his fleshly body, and through that, the same opportunity for all mankind who put their trust in him. Theology must come to recognize that eternal life – both for the man Christ Jesus and also for his people – is a promise, process and ultimately a possession which can only be obtained through the process of a resurrection at the return of Christ. In effect, it is a new creation by the power of God, without the condition of probation or faith attached to it. If we do not believe in God's ability to accomplish that through the process of the resurrection, we do not believe in the grand promise of eternal life. Orthodoxy is forced to admit by their own tenant of faith, that there is no process by which immortality of the kind and quality eternal life will possess, which is accomplished by death. The argument that an "immortal soul leaves our corruptible body at death and goes to its eternal, never-dying reward, while leaving a corruptible body in the grave, fosters suspicions of every conceivable fallacy.

(2) The second imperative truth which must be emphasized in connection with the return of Jesus and the resurrection, is as follows. The resurrection of anyone when Jesus returns falls into two conditions. First, the resurrection is applicable only to those who "sleep" in Jesus. Secondly this resurrection is the final consequence of faith in God and thereby immortality, eternal life is conferred upon them. Thus the resurrection is a product of faith in Christ, which, obviously, an unbeliever does not possess. That is why the 14th verse begins with, "For if we believe".

It follows then, if Christ is the first to be resurrected unto eternal life, anyone else who is resurrected at his second coming has, by virtue of such resurrection, eternal life conferred upon them also. This establishes two irrevocable truths: (1) The resurrection is the vehicle by which (Jesus) and his children can obtain everlasting life; (2) This resurrection is conditioned upon a life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one else for any reason will have a resurrection that conveys any form, good or bad, of eternal duration upon them. Further, the resurrection that is produced by faith in Jesus, precludes and denies an eternal life at death for anyone.

Shall we deny the resurrection at the return of Christ its great purpose, design and hope of being the only means of ever achieving eternal life and credit instead death as being the vehicle which conveys

us into the eternality of God? Or shall we ascribe to the resurrection at the return of Jesus, glory, honor and eternal life, immortality and incorruptibility. The only scriptural choice is a resurrection through faith in Christ at his return.

In verse 16, Paul triumphantly declares the return of Jesus, attended by a dramatic and glorious entrance into the realm of people on earth. First there is a shout; then a voice of the archangel, followed by the trump of God.

To better understand these methods heralding the coming of the Lord, look at the first four words of this verse: “For the Lord himself”. The Lord Jesus himself is returning to earth. Some people put all kinds of spin on these methods of heralding the appearing of Christ, such as a host of angels led by one chief angel; with this host giving forth a great chorus of shouts, while a bugle band blows its loudest sound. Before we jump on that wagon let’s consider two things about it.

Going back to the message of “Two Men In White” in the first chapter of Acts we need to remember what they said in verse 11. “This same Jesus which you have seen go into heaven, shall so come again in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven”. If we rely on this verse we will understand that Jesus will personally return to earth again, alone. That is how they saw him ascend.

Then in verse 16, we are informed that “the Lord himself shall descend”. What, then, are these other accompaniments which Paul writes about? In our exhilaration and triumphant joy at the coming of Jesus, we overlook an important fact: that is, that Jesus himself is absolutely thrilled beyond description also. The joy of this moment is not one-sided; it is the grand and glorious moment for the Lord Jesus as much as it is for his people. Everything he has done for thousands of years was in preparation and anxious anticipation for this very event. His power, grace, sacrifice, love, messages and all redeeming work, in which he has literally invested his entire being, is now revealed in the moment of his return. To say that Jesus is overflowing with sheer eternal joy is an understatement.

The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout! Who is shouting? I think Jesus is. He is not some pious, robotic, ritualistic sovereign just taking care of the duty before him. He is the Lord from heaven, the blessed and only potentate; our great God and savior – who will personally descend himself to bring the last grand and glorious message to his waiting saints: “enter thou into the joy of thy Lord”; “well done good and faithful servant”!

The “voice of the archangel”? “Archangel” is a reference to the chief angel or messenger. Who else but the Lord Jesus himself aptly fills this description? Jesus himself is the clarion voice announcing his return, the resurrection and the end of time.

“The trump of God”? This is not a brass bugle band. It is the trump of God “himself”. It would be counter-productive to attempt to definitively describe and detail what this “trump of God” is, other than a triumphant announcement of the appearance of the Lord. Who knows, maybe the universe is in one grand choral exclamation, heralding such a momentous event. The gospel is the “trump” of God for all practical purposes. In this context, the last gospel message would fit the description of the trump of God. However the sense of this 16th verse is that the sound of this “trump of God” occurs at

the very time of his appearance. God, the creator of the sound, will be fully capable of making the earth reverberate with the explosive sound of his appearance. This not some “secret rapture” as some teach; it is the grand and glorious return of the Lord Jesus to earth to reward his faithful children.

Verse 16 continues, “and the dead in Christ shall rise first”. That is the eternal order of divine business; to fulfill the long-awaited day when the faithful saints of God of all ages shall be resurrected unto eternal life. Paul describes this in I Cor. 15:51-52, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible which is the consummation of all things of this world.

At the end of verse 16, when it says, “the dead in Christ shall rise first”, orthodox theology inserts its own next step by alleging that, after the dead in Christ are raised, that event is followed by a “second resurrection” wherein the dead who are not Christians shall be raised second. The error of that theology is in 2 opposing facts: (1) the Bible never mentions a second resurrection. (2) The very next verse disputes such error by describing the true sequence of events following the statement that “the dead in Christ shall rise first”.

V17. Then! This is a very specific identification of the sequence of events. The last clause of V16 stipulates that the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then – that is – following after the event of the dead in Christ rising first – “we (Christians) which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (who were raised first) in the clouds.

There are no directives, either textual or contextual, in this description of events, which can be construed to reference a resurrection for the ungodly. The complete subject of this passage of scripture is about Christians who are asleep and Christians which are alive at his return. Jesus is not coming back with a triumphal shout and voice of the archangel and the trump of God to proclaim a resurrection for the ungodly, which have disobeyed and despised his offer of salvation. “Triumph” is not for losers but for winners. This event is for God’s own children of all ages; it is their coronation day. They are not being crowned with a crown of earthly gold; they are being crowned with incorruptibility, immortality, eternal life.

V18 then tells us: “Wherefore comfort one another with these words”. The message he has explained to the Thessalonian Christians was for their inspiration and comfort, knowing that they were not without hope as others who did not know the Savior. The message of the second return of Christ is a message which, rightly believed, should bring a sense of hope, peace and joy to the Christian heart. If we leave this hope to the words which Paul has herein given, they will prepare the Christian heart with anticipation and joy for the coming of Christ. If, on the other hand, we confuse it with unscriptural events which ought not to be assigned to this glorious day, it becomes a burden which no one wants to see. The coming of the Lord Jesus for the resurrection of his saints and the translation of living saints, is a source of great comfort.

I THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

I Thess. 5:1-11. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

In this chapter Paul continues his exhortations and teachings to the church at Thessalonica, on the subject of the return of Christ (the day of the Lord). (Keep in mind that when he wrote his letter it was not divided into chapters and verses. His thought from verse 18 of the last chapter continues into the 5th chapter).

V1. But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. That is, you don't need for me to explain to you as to when our Lord shall return.

V2. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. That is, at a time when men (of the world) least expect it to occur.

V3. When men think and say all is well and we shall continue on forever, then sudden destruction will come upon them. It will occur suddenly like as to the travail upon a woman with child; today she goes about life; tomorrow she is delivered of her child. She knew it was coming, but she did not know the exact day.

V4-5. But ye, brethren – as God's children and not children of the world – won't be surprised as a thief that comes without any fore-warning, as in the darkness of night. But as children of the light of God's word, as well as the conditions of the world about you, it won't catch you by surprise. Not as something which was unexpected or for which you were unprepared for and without knowledge of.

V6-8. In these verses Paul simply warns them to be aware that the Lord will return when many in the world have no clue of such an event by reason of their own willful ignorance of God's plan. As for the Christian, they should always be conscious of that glorious day.

V11. In this verse again, as in ch. 4:18, he admonishes them to comfort each other and edify one another in the Lord and in the sure and certain promise of his return. With this he concludes his teaching to the church in his first epistle to the Thessalonians concerning the return of Christ.

II THESSALONIANS 1:7-10

II Thess. 1:7-10. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

The first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians is believed to have been written in approximately 50 A.D. The second epistle, according to commentators, was written only a few months later, in 51 A.D. When you compare his comments in the last two chapters of the first epistle, with the first two chapters of the second epistle, you readily see that his mind is still very much on the second coming of the Lord. It is as though he had not finished all that he felt should be said about the subject in his first epistle and therefore wrote them again to include additional information.

He begins the second epistle with his usual warm greetings to them, while also acknowledging the tribulations they were enduring.

Then in verses 7-10, of the first chapter, he addresses the coming of the Lord, at which time vengeance would be recompensed upon the ungodly – “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel”. These, he says will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. In Verse 10, he declares that this will be when he comes to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe. Chapter 1 is essentially an introduction to the subject he has in mind in this second epistle. Therefore we will turn our attention to:

II THESSALONIANS 2:1-12.

II Thess. 2:1-12. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, or by letter from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there COME A FALLING AWAY FIRST, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God shewing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Having made an introduction to the subject of the second coming of Christ in the first chapter of this epistle, he now proceeds with a very unusual, deep and even controversial discourse about one which he refers to as "THE MAN OF SIN".

In the first 2 verses he calls their attention back to the "day of the Lord", which, without any doubt, is a reference to the second return of Christ. He introduces this "day" with the careful warning for them not to think that this day is "at hand", i.e. about to occur in their immediate life time.

Let no man deceive you by any means, he urgently counsels them in verse 3. The deceit he refers to here is that they should not think that the "day of the Lord" is on hand and about to occur. The reason for this warning is that "there shall come a falling away first, and that the man of sin shall be revealed as the son of perdition". Paul is telling them that time must necessarily elapse for this work of the mystery of iniquity and the falling away (of the Christian church), which would facilitate the exaltation of the "man of sin", to develop into the monstrous system of deceit which it will become.

Continuing in verse 4, he gives a startling description of this "man of sin who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God".

A "falling away first" could not be applied to any one person or even one community of believers. Paul is describing a general, church-wide falling away or plunge into a spiritual condition totally without scriptural support. The "man of sin", likewise, does not describe a single individual, but rather a ruling system controlled by men and not by God. This "man of sin", or ruling hierarchy is characterized as totally opposing God, while simultaneously being exalted to a position of presuming to take the very place of God. And this exalted hierarchy of man in the place of God is being imposed

upon the very church of God, that is, in the temple of God. So it is with a brazen, ridiculous claim of a superior position of both holiness and also power which this “man of sin” exerts upon the church.

There is but one system, with its description meeting all the gross and blasphemous characterization that Paul gives for it which can be identified throughout the history of the Christian church. That one system is the PAPAL HIERARCHY, set up as early as the 6th century, officially recognized and authorized by the law of the Roman Empire under the emperor Justinian in 529 A.D., and lasted until its power over the religious conscience of the world was dethroned at the end of the 18th century.

Paul continues on through verse 12, describing various aspects of this system of “falling away” from biblical truth by the “man of sin” who exalts himself as though he is in the stead of God in the temple of God. This matter is actually a long lesson within itself to fully describe and historically verify that this is, indeed, the papal system of the dark-age church. However our lesson is about the second return of Christ and I do not want us to become engrossed in a study of such length and thereby create a distraction from our real purpose. I have prepared and available lengthy lessons already which fully describe this “man of sin” and also identify its place in history. Paul’s purpose in this matter is that the Thessalonian Christians would not be deceived about the “day of the Lord” as to its occurrence and that it was not to be until this man of sin event met its overthrow. We have given above a time frame for it and history verifies the ending of the domineering control and suppression which it exercised over the world. We welcome specific questions relative to this conclusion.

There was confusion and unbelief regarding the return of Christ and the resurrection in Paul’s day just as there is in ours. He was warning them, and us, about the deception of such unbelief. There was to be a time of great apostasy (falling away) preceding the return of Christ. If you know anything about the history of the Christian church, you know that such conditions marked the dark-age church. Sadly, many professing Christians know little about this history. This apostasy is an enlarged subject of the book of Revelation, of which we have dealt in much detail.

In closing this chapter, take a step back and view both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonian Christians as one unit. You will see that he gave specific attention to the “SECOND RETURN OF CHRIST” in I Thess. 2,3,4 and 5, and II Thess. 1 and 2. Thus, of the total of 8 chapters in both epistles the subject of the return of Christ is referenced in 6 of them. There is no doubt, therefore, that the second return of Christ is the main topic of these two letters. The 4th chapter of the first epistle provides us with a very clear description of this great event and hope; the other chapters support it.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

“THE LAST TRUMP”

I COR. 15:20-26; 51-55.

1 Cor. 15:20-26. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

1 Cor. 15:51-55. Behold I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

Historically, the 15th chapter of First Corinthians has been known as the “resurrection chapter”. This is a very appropriate and inspiring description. The express teaching of the entire chapter certainly gives complete credibility to the name of “resurrection chapter”. Paul’s inclusion of this subject in his letter to the Corinthian Christians was for the express purpose of correcting a misconception, or rather unbelief of the resurrection as it related to God’s people. (We have produced an entire lesson on the resurrection, with a major portion of it devoted to this 15th chapter. We refer you to that lesson on our WEB site for an analysis of each verse of this chapter).

The question could be raised as to why I am using this resurrection chapter in connection with the second return of Christ. The answer to that question should be obvious: the coming of Christ and the resurrection of believers are inextricably linked together. There is no resurrection of believers without the return of Christ, and, the return of Christ has but one purpose, the resurrection of believers.

Throughout this chapter Paul deals with every aspect of the resurrection; both the resurrection of Christ and, based upon the fact of his resurrection, the guarantee of a resurrection for believers in Christ. This is encapsulated completely in one powerful expression found in verse 23: “Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming”.

I mentioned earlier that Paul gives minute and graphic details of the resurrection throughout this chapter. However, our focus will be on the portion of it which brings out specific details of the coming of Christ. As we have seen in verse 23, a description of the sequence of the resurrection likening it to the first-fruits offering and this was followed by the rest of the fruit just like Christ at his coming. Two pictures are embraced in this sequence. First, the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits is the anti-type of that offering under the law as described in Lev. 23:9-14. Under the law the very first of their

spring harvest belonged to God; the balance of the harvest was their own. Applying this to the resurrection, it completely replicates its ancient typology in the expression in V23 of “Christ the first fruits. The other natural analogy embraced in this is that of the rest of the harvest of a fruit tree. There is the first to ripen and be harvested and then, the rest of the fruit of the same tree and kind of fruit will later be harvested.

It is important to note the inclusive facts of this, as well as that which is thereby excluded. Included in this complete process of the resurrection are “Christ and they that are Christ’s”. No others for any reason at any time are included in this entire lesson on the resurrection. Excluded, then, from any place, ever, in the resurrection, is anyone who does not belong to Christ. There is no resurrection for those without Christ and his saving grace. This fact is further emphasized by the analogy of the fruit of a tree. Once you gather the first ripe fruit of a tree, and later return to gather the rest, the second gathering will be exactly like the first. You don’t gather apples first and return to the same tree to gather cockle burrs or briars.

Let us focus our attention on the rest of the harvest from the “tree of life” at his coming. We have already stated and subsequently discussed, that the only reason for the return of Christ is for the resurrection of “sleeping” believers. The imperative truth that must be unequivocally and unwaveringly embraced in this return of Christ and the resurrection of believers is that – IT IS ONLY THROUGH AND BY THIS PROCESS (RETURN OF JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION) THAT THERE IS ANY HOPE OF EVER COMING INTO OUR ETERNAL INHERITANCE. AT NO OTHER TIME, AND BY NO OTHER PROCESS WILL ANYONE RECEIVE THE REWARD OF LIFE THAT WILL NEVER END. The second return of Jesus and the resurrection of his children (only) is the precise process and plan by which our corruptibility will be changed to incorruptibility. Everything Jesus lived and died for was entirely dependent upon his resurrection from among the dead on the third day. Everything we as his born again children have lived (and died for) is the exact same thing: our own resurrection from among the dead.

The prevailing theology which has proliferated the beliefs of the majority of people, and churches, namely that a Christian receives his eternal reward by way of our natural death and thereby and at that time and process, are ushered into our eternal reward, is not only a gross prevarication of the truth of the Bible, it is, moreover a sacrilegious desecration and rejection of the very fundamental truth that Christ was risen in order that we could have a resurrection unto eternal life through faith in him. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the full scope and substance of the everlasting gospel. The death, burial and resurrection of “those who belong to Christ”, is the entire scope and substance of our hope of eternal life. Without the return of Jesus and our resurrection unto an eternal existence, our faith is vain, we are of all men most miserable and our Christian profession is a colossal fraud and we are yet in our sins.

We entitled this section “THE LAST TRUMP” borrowed from Paul’s use of this expression in verse 52: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the LAST TRUMP; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised and we shall be changed. Also, let me remind you of the other instance we have considered which made mention of the sound of a trumpet, I Thess. 4:16. For the Lord himself shall

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall be raised first.

We do not believe this trumpet represents some literal bugle corp, loudly blowing so as to announce the coming of the Lord. It is not necessary to have a detailed description of what a “last trump” might be. The important thing is that there is one and its only purpose is to herald the coming of the Lord and the ushering in of the eternal age for God’s people. Notwithstanding this, we have an entire written lesson prepared on the feast of trumpets on our WEB site, in which we have references to the “last trump”. Please refer to that.

What this expression in I Cor. 15:52 signals to us is the end of all things earthly and the beginning of all things eternally for God’s people. Maybe it is the Lord himself, in one earth-rending shout, proclaiming his coming, the resurrection and conferring of the crown of eternal life upon his people. It cannot be denied that Jesus Christ will be leading the charge of this earth-changing and eternal event. And with this last trump -----

The dead shall be raised incorruptible. In verses 35-57 of this chapter, Paul is answering the question of how are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? In this process he uses the analogy of seeds of grain sown in the ground and of different kinds or species of flesh and of the distinctions of bodies terrestrial and celestial, in his description of the resurrection and with what body do they come.

After his thoughts on the differences of a seed of wheat when it is sown in the ground as contrasted to its “body” when it sprouts from the ground, he states in verse 42: “So also is the resurrection of the dead”. Then he adds: “it is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption”.

There is a profound, yet simple, truth here that must not be overlooked, neglected or mis-interpreted. Simply put, Paul is saying that at death we are ‘sown’ into the grave where we corrupt away, that is, dust returns to dust. However, the marvel and power proclaimed next is this: “It is raised in incorruption. In this one proclamation Paul has described the process, purpose, boundaries and glory of the resurrection. (1) It is by the divine process of recreation; (2) It is for the singular purpose of destroying corruptibility and its inherent components; (3) By the very fact that the resurrection process and purpose provides incorruptibility of those who are raised, it is thereby bounded or limited only to those who are thereby forever purified of every scintilla of sins nature and consequences and therefore limits a resurrection from the grave for everyone but God’s children through his salvation; (4) And finally, the resurrection provides eternal glorification of all who are raised as verse 43 states: “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory”. It is the same glory with which Jesus Christ was crowned by virtue of his own resurrection. This process, purpose, boundaries and glory which Paul attaches to the resurrection is an unequivocal denial and refutation of the theology of a resurrection for sinners. No sinner will ever receive incorruptibility and glory: not by a resurrection or any other process.

Paul is not yet through with his powerful description of the resurrection and its consequence. In verse 44 he continues: “It is sown a natural body” (subsisting of flesh and blood, corrupted by the DNA of

sin). "It is raised a spiritual body" (a body like that of Christ). He further verifies this in verse 49, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly".

Then the crowning work of the resurrection at the return of Christ is described in verse 53 in this manner: "For this corruptible (sinful decaying human being) must put on incorruptibility, and this mortal must put on immortality. In verse 54, when this change which comes by way of the resurrection is effected, our old corruptible, mortal nature will become incorruptible, immortal. That will put an eternal end to the great enemy, death.

And all of this will occur at the "LAST TRUMP", at the return of Christ. I urge you to re-read I Cor. 15:1-58, carefully. The only thing which Paul describes as being a part of this great and blessed day, is the resurrection of the righteous. No resurrection of sinners; no judgment bar gathering of all mankind, no 1000 years of peace when the unsaved of the earth will have a better chance to be saved; no 7 years of tribulation, and no restoration of literal Israel back to Jerusalem. These have already seen their day in history.

The return of Jesus and the resurrection of God's children of all ages! That is all! No more and no less. And thus the eternal age will begin for all who know the Lord and are saved. They will forever be with the Lord!

THE BLESSED HOPE AND GLORIOUS APPEARING

TITUS 2:11-15

*Tit. 2:11-15. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world: **LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.***

Let me begin this section with a simple application of the message these scriptures are conveying to us. The God who created this world has extended to its sin-bound people his abundant grace in mercy, forgiveness and salvation through the transformation of our lives in Jesus Christ. This grace has been made available to all men upon the earth, offering eternal redemption to mankind.

The application and effect of this grace upon our lives is to teach us a new, different life through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Grace will teach us to deny all sin and sinfulness, which is perpetrated through our lusts for worldly things and their ways. Further, it will teach us to live our life in Christ in a sober, godly and righteous way, according to the high calling of God's grace to our hearts.

With this grace-endowed and grace-inspired life, our vision, dreams, hopes and aspirations of life are not focused on the pursuit of mere worldly ambitions. Instead, we are diligently focused on the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God, who is our Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one --- Jesus, our great God and Savior – who sacrificed his life at Calvary for us. And this he did so that he might redeem us from our past sins and iniquity, because his desire and purpose through much grace was to have a people purified from their sins and be filled with a burning zeal to do good works as he directs.

The consummation of all this grace of God poured out at Calvary, as well as before and since, has three great objectives for our lives:

1. To redeem us from a sin-filled life.
2. To create in us a Christ-like life, zealous of good, Christian works.
3. To come to this earth again to crown us with eternal life.

Now is the day and time for the first two items above to be implemented in our lives. The third item – the glorious day when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God – is that future day when Jesus shall return to resurrect all who sleep in him and then crown all of his children of every age with eternal life.

THE END OF THE WORLD

II PET. 3:10-14.

II Pet. 3:10-14. But the “day of the Lord” will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

“THE END OF THE WORLD” is not a subject that you hear very much about. That is, not in the tone and description which these verses outline for us. Orthodox theology, with its myriad and diverse teachings on this subject, has proliferated the “end time” event with so many “tribulations, milleniums, raptures, judgments, national restoration, resurrections and many more, that, if possible, the Lord himself would not know when to sound the “last trump”. Where will orthodoxy arrange for Peter’s unequivocal, final and absolute terminal point for all activities on this earth, for the good and the evil, so as to be fitted into their ever-extending agenda? By the time you program all of the above-mentioned agenda items into a sequence that has any degree of order and scriptural accuracy to them, stretching from some form of Christ’s appearance and until all the tribulations, raptures, resurrections and millennial reign, etc., are fitted in, “THE END OF THE WORLD” will be a moot point, cast aside and forgotten.

But that is not the way in which Peter described the coming of the Lord and the end of the world, and we would be well advised to pay close attention to his words.

This chapter begins with Peter’s call for them to be stirred in their minds by way of remembering past apostolic messages. That which he calls their attention to are the messages of the holy prophets which messages were echoed and corroborated by commandments of the apostles of the Lord.

Then, in verse three, he warns them of “scoffers walking after their own lusts” – in the last days. That is where he is headed with this “stirring of their pure minds, by the infallible word of the Lord previously spoken unto them regarding such scoffers who would come in the last days. Exactly what are these scoffers casting their scorn and derision toward? Verse four answers that their scoffing is about the “promise of his coming”. That is the subject Peter is reminding them of with warnings about those who are scorning the Christian hopefuls with their questions of unbelief: “where is the promise of his coming?” Their taunt of unbelief is that “all things continue as they were ever since the beginning of the creation.” Their godless drivel and narrow-minded ignorance results in the mistaken notion that, since the creation of man, there has been nothing to portend the ending of the world.

In verses 4-6, Peter accuses them of willful ignorance on this point. It is either their willful ignorance or their lust-driven scoffing and disdain that keeps them from knowing and accepting the irrefutable

facts of the flood which overran the world of wickedness in Noah's day, sparing only he and his family. The world as they knew it came to an end by the waters of the flood. Every living thing in that world except that which was in the ark perished from the face of the earth.

The word of God was the power by which the heavens and earth were created and existed with bodies of water about it. This world, in all of its existence from the creation unto Noah's day, without any destructive, world-ending event, was (by the word of God) overflowed by water and destroyed. After the flood, the earth was restored to its former condition, purged of all of its wickedness. A rainbow of promise was given as verification that the earth would never be destroyed by "WATER" again.

That world, being overflowed with water, afterwards being restored by the word of God's own infallible will and purpose, is now reserved by God's express will and kept in store, reserved unto destruction by fire upon an ungodly age. An example of this destruction by fire is shown in the overthrow of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when God rained down fire and brimstone upon them. (See Jude V7).

V8-9. The scoffers are casting doubts on the message of Christ's coming because they say it has been centuries and nothing as internationally traumatic as the end of the world has remotely occurred. They concluded that everything would continue on in this same pattern. Their ignorance of the word of God gave rise to the notion that there would never be a world-ending calamity. Peter refutes this by telling them that time with God is not a matter of years or days. God's purposes are measured in his great desire that none should perish, but all should repent of their sins unto eternal life. By implication that method of measurement has as its terminal point a time, not when a certain number of days have transpired, but when the world of humanity becomes grossly evil, as it was also in Noah's day. That was the case before the flood, as it was also with the vile wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, and shall also be when the Lord returns the second time. The earth and the works therein will come to an abrupt end by the fire and brimstone as Peter describes in the following verses.

V10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ----. "As a thief in the night", suggests stealth, unawares, unexpected and unknown. This kind of expression is also found in Mt. 24, Lk. 12, I Thess. 5 and also in our text, II Pet. 3:10. In each of these instances, the idea is that a momentous event will occur with people not expecting or looking for it, and, indeed, it will catch them by total surprise. (Note: We are not suggesting by the inclusion of these various scriptures that they are each a reference to the "second" coming of Christ; they are not. But they do all speak of a catastrophic event)

There is an interesting and very important sequel to this thought of "a thief in the night" which is found in I Thess. 5, where the specific reference is to the second coming of the Lord. That chapter in I Thess., begins: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night". Then in verse 4 of that chapter there is a startling caveat to this "coming as a thief" by the statement that "ye brethren

are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief". Continuing in V5, "Ye are all the children of light, and children of the day: We are not of the night, nor of darkness".

There can be only one implication of this exclusion from being caught by surprise, or totally unexpected, as by a thief in the night. That exclusion is that God's children will not be caught unawares of the coming of Christ, as if a thief in the night had unexpectedly broken into their home.

We must be careful with this declaration that God's people won't be in darkness about the day of the Lord as some will who will be caught as a "thief in the night". This difference of light and darkness between believers and unbelievers should never be used as a catalyst to presume to know the day of the Lord's appearing. At the same time, it certainly is conceivable and very probable and practical that God's people should know when circumstances and conditions in the world provide a clear indication that the "coming of the Lord draweth nigh". Christians would be as unawares as others if they were not able to see in the gathering clouds of wickedness a portent of the end of the world by the return of Christ. No one at any time should rush to purport to know the exact day and time of the second return of Christ. That being said, it is absolutely certain that God knows and just as sure that he has every right and ability to reveal it to whomever he might choose, if to anyone. Also, it should be the deepest desire of God's children to know of this day; not for the sake of preferential knowledge but for the purpose of preparation and readiness. Notwithstanding this I remain skeptical of anyone who presumes to know of that day. If God, in his infinite wisdom, chooses to make it known, it would not be for self-exaltation; instead it would very likely bring a cross.

My own convictions are that the coming of the day of the Lord would be preceded by gross spiritual deterioration and wickedness in general, with little hope of reversing such downward spiral. God's people certainly should live in such close relationship with him that the approaching day of his coming should be apparent. Until and unless God gives irrefutable evidence of that day, the best advice is to live as if it would be today, and work as if it is far distant. It is an absolute certainty that those whose lives are absorbed in all the lust, carnality, sin and rejection of Christ, won't have a clue about that day. It is equally as certain that those whose dedication, purity and service unto God is acceptable to him, will not be kept in abstract darkness about the most important event in history. In a later section of this lesson, we plan to include a part about how great events on God's agenda have been known.

This chapter begins: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night".

Now back to II Pet. 3:10. In this day of the Lord, which will come as a thief in the night to those who are in spiritual darkness, it will be greeted by a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. If you join this cataclysmic prediction which Peter describes here, with the words of Paul in I Cor. 15:52, "in a moment in the twinkling of an eye", both of which predictions are specifically addressing the second coming of Jesus, their combined evidence completely precludes the maze of millenium, tribulations, judgment day readings, several resurrections, secret raptures, etc, etc, which theologians and prophecy guru's attempt to attach to the coming of Christ. The "thief in the night" condition coupled with the

explosion-like“ destruction of the earth and the works therein”, will not accommodate or allow for the transpiring of such unwarranted theological agendas. In addition, Paul’s graphic description of the “play-by-play” account of Christ’s return (I Thess. 4:13-18) likewise leaves no room for years or even centuries (as in a future millennium or the literal restoration of Israel) along with separated resurrections or years of tribulation, all projected (by orthodox theology) to transpire after Christ return.

We submit that a better more scripturally accurate sequence to that grand and glorious day is as follows. In a moment, in the twinkling of a eye ---- at the last trump ---- the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout ---- the dead in Christ shall rise first ---- to meet the Lord in the air ---- all of which catches the unbelieving world as a thief in the night ---- followed immediately by the heavens passing away with a great noise and the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up ---- and so shall we (believers) ever be with the Lord.

Now compare the above orderly sequence of events at the return of Christ with the kind of scenario required to accommodate the predictions, events, time requirements, etc. which are most prominently believed and taught by widely accepted theologians in our day and you should be able to see why we have laid out the process as we have. That other scenario would look something like this.

Christ will come ---- set up a 1000 years of peace and time of easier salvation ---- wedge in a secret rapture of the saints ---- all the while restoring the 12 tribes of Israel in Palestine with special favors for them ---- make room for 7 years of tribulation (some say 3 ½) ---- meanwhile, bring Abraham, Paul, Mary and the saints of all ages down from their mansions in the sky ---- while simultaneously giving some needed relief to the unbelievers already in their eternal torture chambers ---- give to these dead saints and sinners their mortal, resurrected bodies ---- pack them 7 to 9 feet deep all over the earth (it would take it) ---- open a book and, detail by minute detail, read every journal of every life (all in a moment) ---- and don’t forget, when Christ first returned (1000 years ago) the living saints were secretly, bodily raptured away ---- now make room for two separate resurrections at different times (some say 1000 years apart) ----yet have them simultaneously standing together to be told if they are saints or sinners ---- never mind that that decision supposedly was made when they died and went to their well-deserved, but vastly different, eternal rewards. O, and one more thing; none of this can begin to happen until a “red heifer” is born somewhere!!!

You might want to ask if I am making fun of this? No, frankly, it is pitiful. Let us not accuse God of such obvious subterfuge, scriptural inaccuracies, imaginations and pious deception, not to mention a totally incompatible, incoherent and incongruous scenario of tangled, impossible predictions.

The return of Jesus Christ to the earth again has one objective: To resurrect or translate his children into their eternal existence and to destroy a world of wickedness and rejection of his offer of salvation.

V11. Back to the text in II Pet. 3:10-14. With due consideration given to the fact that the coming of the Lord will bring executive judgment (the execution of an already-determined and declared purpose) against a world that has, in general, rejected his call and offer of grace, it should cause

everyone who believes in and lives for the Lord Jesus to conduct their lives in all holiness and godliness.

V12. And further, we should anticipate the coming of the day of God with earnestness, not for the destruction of wickedness, which it will bring, but for the eternal life it will bring to all of God's faithful children. This coming of the day of God is the occasion for the dissolution of the elements and the heavens (atmospheric heavens) by a fervent heat. I call attention to the language used to describe this cataclysmic event. The words used are "pass away", "melt", "burned up", "dissolved", and "being on fire shall be dissolved". There is no suggestion that (1) this fire will continue burning for all eternity, (2) that the ungodly are called before a judgment tribunal, or (3) that anyone escapes this destructive fire and is sent elsewhere to continue burning. To the contrary, the language used (dissolved, melt, burned up) demand an extinction of existence in any form.

V13. "Nevertheless we" That is, all of this "passing away with a great noise, melting and being dissolved", is for a world and a population which is given to ungodliness; not to the righteous. So – what happens to them? The answer to that question is contained in Paul's outline of the return of the Lord as recorded in I Thess. 4:13-18, where he addresses the reward of the Christian life. In his description the Christians are "resurrected and caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" By combining Paul's description in I Thess. 4:13-18, with Peter's description in II Pet. 3:10-14, you have two sequential pictures of the "end of the world": (1) resurrected Christians caught up from the earth to meet the Lord in the air, and, (2) the visitation of an explosive, fervent heat, melting the earth and its elements and the (atmospheric) heavens surrounding it, including the ungodly therein.

Then Peter gives us this "nevertheless we" moment. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. In other words, after the fire has gone out, God, who is still the creator of heaven and earth, simply speaks the word, and a new totally restored, resplendently beautiful, heaven and earth, with unbounded space or limitations is brought into grand existence and view. There is one tremendous difference in this "new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, or, wherein the righteous will dwell". The entire scope and dimensions of the new creation will be the dwelling place of the righteous. That is, the new heavens and new earth will be the eternal dominion of God's people.

He has now restored mankind and the world back to his original intention: to live eternally with him. We could discuss without end exactly where the specific living place or home of the righteous will be. I suppose no subject, where God's people will spend eternity, has been filled with more imagination and misinterpretation and even fantasy than this has. Many prophetic scriptures and otherwise have been twisted completely out of their meaning in an effort to produce a vision that is scripturally unsupported. Our purpose with this entire lesson is about the "return of Christ and its purpose" and not about playing harps, crowns of gold, mansions and other carnal endowments so many seem to want. Why can't we be satisfied with the truth that, whatever and wherever Jesus determines for us to spend eternity, will be the very best that God is able to provide and it probably won't be as we have imagined it to be; just better. Peter's inspired words declare that there will be a new heaven and new earth ---- wherein dwelleth righteousness. It will be enough to obtain that, in any form.

O.T. PATTERNS OF THE END OF THE WORLD.

If we look back into the O.T., there are two major catastrophic events in the history of man from which we can gain two valuable examples for the event we are studying from II Pet. 3:10-14. Those two events are the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha in the days of Abraham.

In Gen. 6:5-8, you see the reason why God destroyed the earth with a massive, earth-covering flood of water. *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord".*

The wording which describes the depth of evil and wickedness in Noah's day is virtually an exact replica of the moral depravity of our day. God said that he was sorry he had even made man. He determined that he would destroy every living creature from the face of the earth. The estimates which I have heard of the population of that time range between two and three million people. In all of that world and that great population, only one man and his family was saved. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord". No, God's grace didn't just begin with the Christian era; it was just more manifested and demonstrated then. But for the grace of God, Noah would have perished with the rest of the world. The reason Noah found grace was because he was a righteous man who obeyed the Lord. Noah built the ark for the saving of himself and his family. (Note: It was God's grace that spared Noah, but Noah put every board on the ark, without which he would not have been saved, regardless as to the grace of God. It took both God's grace and Noah's righteous works to save him ---- it still does today.

They entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed the earth and all that was in it. As the rains descended, the ark began to float above the waters. As the flood waters recinded the ark descended and landed on Mt. Ararat. Noah and his family are now the only ones who dwell upon the earth.

There are some benefits for us in a comparison of the similarities between the end of the antedeluvian age and the end of our present world.

1. The world was completely overrun with total moral depravity and wickedness. So is our day.
2. God purposed the complete destruction of every living creature in that world. So it is also determined for our world.
3. Noah found grace in God's sight and God gave him a plan for the ark for his salvation. Likewise, a remnant of the billions in this age have found the plan of God's grace for their lives, while they labor in obedience to God's plan for his church.
4. The rain began to descend on God's predetermined time table. In Noah's case God set (Gen. 6:3) a specific time for the remainder of that world. Whether that is a precursor for the end of our world would demand great caution in its application. In Noah's case, we know of the

beginning time and can therefore reasonably anticipate the end. In our case, even if the same rule did apply, which could be questioned, we would need specific divine and irrefutable revelation to ascertain it.

5. One other major point which draws a parallel between the destruction by the flood and the destruction which will be by the fires of the last day, relates to what happened after the catastrophe is over. In the case of Noah's ark, as we have already indicated the ark rose above the flood and when the waters receded it settled back to earth (on Mt. Ararat). In effect, Noah inherited the entire world, albeit it was now free from sin and ungodliness. Comparing this to the end of the world and the destruction by fire, I only need to recall two scriptures which we have already covered: (1) I Thess. 4:13-15, which teaches us that the resurrected saints will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Regardless as to where you think God's people will ultimately spend eternity, these verses do not describe or even allude to that. They are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (which is not "heaven") and then says, "so shall we ever be with the Lord". Again, it does not specify a place, no more than the fact that the Lord has just come down. (2) Then you turn to Peter's account of the destruction by a great noise and elements and the earth melting with fervent heat. After this world-changing destruction by fire has done its work – that is, it has burned up the earth and destroyed all the wicked and wickedness with it, Peter declares, (V13) that we, according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. (Note: Is the earth to be completely dissolved, disintegrated, and totally consumed and then re-created or will it be purged of all wickedness, sin, the works of man and anything pertaining to it – and then restored to the glory it had in the beginning of creation? This is not a question which changes anything but the means to the same end. I prefer the restoration method, since that is what happened in the flood, which is a type for us. I would not argue either).

There is another O.T. pattern of the end-time event which we shall now consider. The pattern of the destruction of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and brimstone was rained down upon them, forever removing them from the face of the earth.

The account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is found in Gen. 19. Specifically in verses 24-25, it is said that God rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire. The results of this was that these cities, along with all the surrounding plains and all of the inhabitants and that which grew upon the ground was overthrown. Lot and his two daughters escaped, while Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. As Lot looked back on these cities which he had mercifully been delivered from, he could see the smoke ascending like a furnace.

The reason for the destruction of these two cities was their gross moral wickedness. Not in the sense that there was sin present in the city only, but gross morally depraved, carnal, irreversible corruption. Bible scholars consider Sodom and Gomorrah as one of, if not the first communities where homosexuality and its perversion was rampant within the culture. Gen. 19:1-9 is a strong indication of this. The first chapter of Romans reveals God's contempt for such a life style.

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed along with every inhabitant in them, all because of reprobate hearts supporting a life of utter godlessness, shame, carnal lusts and passions and total corruption. There are no such cities today; only a salt plain where they are presumed to have been.

However there is more to this story as it relates to our present day circumstances. Jude, verse 7 bridges the gap between Sodom and our era. Jude is recounting the history of disobedience to God and the consequences thereof. In verse 7 he states: **“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner – GIVING THEMSELVES OVER TO FORNICATION, AND GOING AFTER STRANGE FLESH, -- ARE SET FORTH FOR AN EXAMPLE – SUFFERING THE VENGEANCE OF “ETERNAL FIRE”.**

Peter provides us with words which confirm and reiterate what is written in Jude. In II Pet. 2:5-6, it reads: **“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly – And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, MAKING THEM AN ENSAMPLE UNTO THOSE THAT AFTER SHOULD LIVE UNGODLY”.** (It should be noted that these words of Peter, including the rest of chapter 2, are, as it were, a preface to the third chapter which we are studying.

In the books of Jude and II Peter we have the clear confirmation that the destruction upon the antediluvian age and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, serve as examples to our own age and its ungodliness. In each example, every living creature was utterly destroyed. The people in the flood are not now somewhere still drowning, or, as dark-age theology would have it, burning somewhere. Likewise, the people and the cities of Sodom are not still burning; they were turned to ashes. There is a very interesting and clearly defining fact in Jude V7, regarding the fire that destroyed both the cities and the inhabitants therein. That fact is the statement that says they **“suffered the vengeance of ETERNAL FIRE.** There is absolutely no way to rationally or scripturally propose that these cities with their inhabitants are still burning, in any form, anywhere. But the text clearly states that they suffered the vengeance of eternal fire. The only possible way to reconcile this **“eternal fire”** with the absolute reality of the facts, is to conclude that the destruction of Sodom and its inhabitants was an eternally, irreversible, everlasting event. It does not and cannot refer to a fire continually burning for eternity, but to a fire which dissolved and turned them into ashes and can never be stopped, changed, reversed or in any manner continued.

Now the conclusion of II Pet. 3:10-14. While it may be repetitious of points already made, that will only serve to further confirm the truth of Peter’s message about the end of the world. Having referenced the destruction by the flood in Noah’s day and by fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter then describes the end of this age, drawing upon the example of those two ancient catastrophes.

With this as his back drop, he proceeds to lay out the utter and final end of the world of ungodliness, **“when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up”.** Continuing this thought (V11-12), he affirms that all **“these things shall be dissolved”**, and anticipates the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. He concludes his description of this day of God with final results of the promise of a new heaven and earth wherein only

righteousness will dwell. The rest of the third chapter is an exhortation to holy living so that we may be prepared for that day.

Why is this chapter, with its frank and graphic description of the end of the world, along with all ungodliness – not a part of the theological dialogue when speaking and teaching about the “coming of the Lord”? Is it because the description Peter gives is not compatible with all of the many other agendas which have been theologically attached to the orthodox teachings about prophecy and the return of Christ? Is orthodoxy unable to fit the myriad of events which, like leeches, have accumulated upon the otherwise simplicity and distinctiveness of the biblical account of the return of Christ, thereby leaving no way for Jesus to simply, but powerfully and personally return, resurrect his saints, rain down fire and brimstone upon and ungodly world, and then recreate a new heaven and earth for the eternal abode of the righteous. Surely it is safer to listen to the “theology” of Peter, rather than any other “orthodox” teachings.

THE COMING OF THE LORD AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The varied interpretations assigned to the book of Revelation by prophecy “experts” and theologians today are so completely disorganized, unscriptural and without understanding that they leave the average Christian in doubts, confusion and unbelief. Even though there are several references in the book about a “coming”, extreme care should be exercised to avoid applying such references to the second coming of Christ in those instances where that application is not correct. The thought of the “coming” of the Lord is mentioned about 10 times in the book. Most of these references are found in chapters 1,2 and 3, while 3 references are found in chapter 22.

The book of Revelation is a “road map” of the journey of the Christian church from its inception to the return of Christ, with major historical mile-posts identified by its many and varied lessons. The book is written to the 7 churches of Asia, which were 7 actual churches in Asia Minor and are used here in a symbolic application of these historical mile-posts along that journey. For example, the last of the 7 churches is Laodicea, a lukewarm, self-satisfied church era, generally believed to represent the very age in which we now live.

To several of these 7 churches (church ages) (not all of them) God spoke to them of “coming” for various reasons. I will list each one and briefly comment on the purpose and manner of this “coming”.

1. To Ephesus. This is the apostolic age of the church; it covers the first century. This church started off great, but even while the apostles were still living it began to drift from its first love of the gospel. Rev. 2:5 says: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else “I WILL COME UNTO THEE QUICKLY AND REMOVE THY CANDLESTICK OUT OF HIS PLACE, except thou repent. This is a promise to come with corrective measures for their falling away from their first love, not a visible coming.
2. To Smyrna. This is the age between 100 A.D. and 312 A.D. It is a time of horrible persecution by the forces of the Roman Empire, intent in many instances on destroying the Christian church. Rev. 2:10 says: Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. – There is no mention of a “coming” to this church.
3. To Pergamos. This is the age of the church when the persecution by the pagan empire has been stopped by Constantine and the church rises in the favor of the world, while at the same time deteriorating in spiritual quality to the point that historians refer to them as “baptized pagans”. Rev. 2:16 says: Repent; or else I will “come” unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. This church is rising in the traditions and idolatry of paganism but is turning from the truth of the word of God. It is from 312 to 529.
4. To Thyatira. This is the longest of the church ages and reaches from 529 to 1529, to the time when the Reformation began. The accusation against her is that she suffers that false prophetess Jezebel to teach and seduce people to follow her evil ways, including her fornication against the truth. Serious judgments are spoken of against her. Even in her time,

there were a few souls who still, under tremendous persecution and beastly treatment, tried to remain faithful. To these, Rev. 3:25 says: But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. During a thousand years of religious tyranny, God says he will come to deliver them.

5. To Sardis. This is the age between 1529 and 1789, when the battle between the Roman Church—state system and the Protestant reformation raged. To the little remnant (Sardis means remnant) of faithful during this age, God says: Rev. 3:3. ---- If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. This not a visible coming but a coming to render to the Jezebel horrors her just rewards.
6. To Philadelphia. From 1789 through the 19th and into the early 20th century. This was the age which was marked by worldwide revival because the yoke of Rome is broken and the word of God is being preached everywhere again. Rev. 3:11 says: Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. This statement, “I come quickly”, surrounded by the spiritual awakening which Philadelphia is marked by, draws our attention beyond the age itself. It is the 6th of 7 churches; spiritual restoration is worldwide; the horizon surely has signs of that special coming every age has waited for.
7. To Laodicea. From the early part of the 20th century until the end. This is an age of a lukewarm church atmosphere; apathy, disinterest, self-satisfied, with no (spiritual) need, but cannot see her own wretchedness. This is us! Your church and my church and every church; some more than others, but all affected by the disease of mediocre commitment and true spiritual characteristics. Rev. 3:20 says: Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will “come” in to him, and will sup with him and he with me. This is an obvious invitation from God to Laodicea to let him inside the church.

With the varying reasons and consequences which are associated with his “coming” to the different churches, it will not accommodate an interpretation which applies these “comings” to the second return of Christ at the last day. God was speaking of his coming to the individual church age in a manner relating to their several and historic events and spiritual conditions.

It must always be remembered that every time the Bible speaks of the Lord coming is not necessarily a reference to his last day return. For example, Jn. 14:18, Jesus says: “I will not leave you comfortless I will come to you”. This refers to the coming or outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Another example of this is Gen. 11:5, at the occasion of the building of the tower of Babel. It reads: “And the Lord “CAME DOWN” to see the city and tower, which the children of men built. God came down to them in judgment, not in some physical form. There are many such references as these in the Bible. Because of this it is necessary to always be sure of the specific text, context and subject matter at hand, before applying expressions which might speak of a “coming” of the Lord.

Notwithstanding the messages of God’s “coming” to the 7 churches as it relates to their particular condition and spiritual status in their own age, that does not mean that there are no references in the book that, in fact, do speak to his second return. After all, as we have said, the book is a kind of road map of the journey of the church from its beginning until Christ returns. Why wouldn’t it address this greatest of all mile-posts along that journey? Accordingly the last chapter of the book, chapter 22, verses 7, 12, and 20 does just that.

In 22:6 it says, "These sayings (of this book) are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. The very next verse (V7) says:

"BEHOLD I COME QUICKLY". It is as if V6 is saying, I have finished the prophecy of this book, describing the major events of the church as they were divided historically into 7 eras, and now, the next thing on the agenda is the second return of Christ, the author of the book.

In Verse 7 it is stated, as referenced above: "Behold I come quickly". In Verse 12: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be". And finally in verse 20: "He which testifieth these things saith, SURELY I COME QUICKLY. AMEN. EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS.

When you read the references to the Lord's coming in chapters 2 and 3, directed to various of the 7 churches, you get the sense that it is applicable to the specific church and the conditions relating to their applicable historic era. When you come to Rev. 22:7, 12, and 20, the prophecy proper has concluded and the next thing, nay, the only thing left on God's agenda is his return. You do not get the sense that he is speaking to a specific era of the church, but to the church universal. It does not offer some corrective or instructive words about its condition. It is about his coming to reward his saints of all ages with the crown of everlasting life. "Even so, come Lord Jesus".

Note: It is generally believed that the 20th chapter offers a prophecy of the second coming of Christ. That is not the message of that chapter at all. On our WEB site is a complete lesson on the entire 20th chapter, to which you are hereby referred for further information about it.

“SIGNS OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST”

After having covered many scriptures and thoughts relative to the return of Christ, there always remains the question as to when this will be. It is not inappropriate that we have this question; in fact our hearts should blaze with its very prospect. At the same time however, we are forced to acknowledge that we do not have the answer to such question. If we are not inquisitive about the return of Christ, we evidently do not understand its purpose or its great blessing. The prospect of seeing our Lord, who gave himself for our sins, should be the crowning moment of every Christian.

Let me be very clear: I do not know that day and I am in no way trying to imply that I do. However that does not mean that God cannot – or will not – ever reveal it, if and when he should see fit to do so. The fact that we do not know the day or the hour should not diminish our desire to know. A deep belief in the return of Jesus should inspire us to want to know when. Contrariwise, to presume to know when we do not is only and ego driven one-ups-man-ship kind of attitude. That is fool-hardy.

Therefore, while it is true that no one can say that they know the day of Christ’s appearing, even though there has been many who have falsely claimed to know, that does not mean that there are not or will not be signs which are true indicators of that day approaching. There probably are many individual things which point to the coming of the Lord and the end of the world. We will only discuss 3 SIGNS which we believe are clear and obvious and which are broad enough to embrace all the smaller things within their scope. Those 3 signs are:

1. **A MORALLY BANKRUPT SOCIETY**
2. **FULFILLED PROPHECY**
3. **A LUKEWARM, SELF-SATISFIED CHURCH**

We will consider each of these signs in the order listed above. Our discussion of them will be in brief form simply because we are not trying to analyze them but are putting them forward as signs.

1. A MORALLY BANKRUPT SOCIETY.

In II Tim. 3:1-5, Paul writes that in the last days perilous times will come. Then he proceeds to name many morally debased items that represent such times. Maybe it can be debated as to whether his statement about “last days” is applicable to the day in which he lived or some era approaching or of our own age now, or maybe in some manner all three. It is for sure that even a casual observation of today’s world-wide societal moral conditions easily fits within the description he gives. In addition, there are many other scriptures that give us a description of the serious absence of moral values.

Every problem mankind faces or has ever faced, is the result somewhere of a moral failure. That does not mean that if some problem or catastrophe befalls you that you committed some act which precipitated it. We live in a fallen society. Some eras of time are manifestly more morally depraved than others. For example, in the days of Noah the express reason God sent the flood upon that generation was their moral decadence. The same was true of Sodom and Gomorrah and also of the destruction of Jerusalem and other examples. God may tolerate man’s decline into a cesspool of

moral degeneracy for a while; but by and by he determines it is enough and judgments come. Man has never been able or willing to recognize that fact and that a holy God will not tolerate impunity and moral degeneracy forever. I think our own society falls within that description.

There are many evidences of the daily declining moral bankruptcy of the present day society.

1. First and overall there is the corruption of individuals. No matter how morally degenerate one may be, they revolt at being told so. That does not change the facts. The standard for determining this is not any form of rules established by any class of society; it is determined by the standard of a holy God, as laid out in his word. By that standard moral bankruptcy is in a free-fall in our time. Wherever you look, whatever the venue, world-wide, the moral fiber of the human family is not only tainted by original sin; it is overwhelmed by a passionate lust to pursue every evil imagination which can fulfill a morally unbridled heart. The examples range all over the landscape of vulgarities, lusts, disparities, violence, addictions, perversions, despicable wantonness, greed, lasciviousness, debauchery, deceit, and any other thing which man's evil propensities can drive him to. Nothing is off limits. Moral corruption spans every life-style, every segment of society, every culture, race, religion, institution, age, position, poor, rich, male, female, individuals, gangs, churches, military, governments, schools, arts, sciences, trades – and any other division or category of the human family. It is rapidly increasing. More and more are involved with deeper and more egregious attitudes, actions and immoralities. The elite and leaders of society; the popular, idolized casts of humanity and every far-reaching corner of man's thoughts of evil imaginations are plummeting into this abyss of moral bankruptcy.

It is impossible to name every individual, morally bankrupt act or sin. But they include such as drunkenness, drugs, theft, vulgarities, greed, an entire host of dispositions such as bitterness, hatred, malice, prejudice (on every side) deceit, lies, sexual perversions of every style: adulteries, fornication, prostitution, live-in, gay, lesbian, child abuse, and any other form of sexual perversion, murder, indolence ---- and a host of other descriptions too many to innumerate, but whatever may be contrary to the holy will of God.

Every segment of our world society is not just affected by this but is actively involved in its propulsion into the pits of moral degradation. To be sure none are left out, they include such areas as: corruption in government; business, sports, institutions of learning, entertainment of all kinds, social arenas, homes, religious institutions, militaries, terrorists, and others.

No corner of the world or society is left out. Nothing is off limits. The downward plummet is constant and accelerating. There is no public outcry for it to be confronted and changed; rather it daily gains support and momentum and any effort or voice to the contrary is loudly shouted down. We are on a track to the "sodomy" of society and we are very near the door.

THAT IS WHY A MORALLY BANKRUPT SOCIETY IS A SIGN OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST!

2. FULFILLED PROPHECY.

Bible prophecy, with specific reference to Daniel and Revelation, has already been fulfilled. That is not the conclusion of major ministries and prophecy “guru’s”. Their view is that major prophetic scriptures are yet to be fulfilled in the future. Even though they have no ability to look ahead and identify the future, they still place many visions of Revelation into the future, somewhere along with the return of Christ. There is no way to accurately interpret prophecy without history. For example the O.T. prophecies about the coming Messiah were not clearly known until they were fulfilled.

We have prepared lessons on Daniel and Revelation on our WEB site. We found in their research that church history has already been the activity which has fulfilled these visions. The only exception to all of Revelation being already fulfilled would be the final extension of anything related to the Laodicean church age, Rev. 3:14-22.

Therefore, for this sign of the return of Christ we will simply identify prophetic passages along with the application we believe should apply to them.

1. First, a comment on the predictions made by Jesus in the 24th chapter of Matthew, which is most usually applied to the future coming of Christ and therefore still to be fulfilled. We have written a lesson on this entire chapter, with the conclusion that it all applies to the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the end of the Jewish polity. I refer you to this lesson for further explanation.
2. Next, we look at Rev. chapters 1-3, and the 7 churches of Asia which we believe symbolize the 7 historic eras or events of the Christian church. They are as follows:
 - a. Ephesus: Fulfilled in the first century church.
 - b. Smyrna: The persecuted church, fulfilled from the first century to 312 A.D.
 - c. Pergamos: The worldly, Pagan elevated church extends to 529 A.D.
 - d. Thyatira: The dark-age, Jezebel, harlot church – 529-1529.
 - e. Sardis: The struggling, remnant church, battling in the Reformation – 1529 – 1789.
 - f. Philadelphia: The church of world-wide restoration and revival –1789 to 1900.
 - g. Laodicea: The lukewarm, self-satisfied church – 1900 to the end.
3. Other visions of Revelation and their application.
 - a. Rev. 11. 1260 years of sackcloth testimony of God’s two witnesses, O.T. and N.T. 529 – 1789.
 - b. Rev. 12. The woman (church) fleeing to the wilderness for 1260 years, 529-1789.
 - c. Rev. 13. The beast with 7 heads and 10 horns – 1260 years of blasphemies – 529 – 1789.
 - d. Rev. 20. 1000 years of binding of Satan in the pit. 800-1800.
 - e. Rev. 21-22. The restored church after 1800.

We have only listed the chapters in Revelation most frequently referred to by commentators. However every prophecy in the book of Revelation has been fulfilled. The entire book of Revelation with every vision therein, is embraced within the framework of the 7 church ages. That is, the other visions of the book also fit within the time-frame of the 7 church ages. The other visions are

depictions of events within the time of the 7 churches and are about these churches and their journey along the path of history.

Prophecy, O.T. and N.T. is given to guide God's people like a road map. By looking over the route the church has followed, you will be better able to see as God does, the things which apply to his church. When Jesus returns, prophecy is over. There are no activities, kingdoms or other events, other than the ushering in of the eternal age which will take place after the return of Christ.

When all these things are fulfilled, then cometh the end!

4. A LUKEWARM CHURCH.

The church of Laodicea is the last of the "7 churches of Asia". The fact that it is the last one of the 7 is significant enough to get us to thinking. But that fact alone is not the point of this third sign of the ending of the age. More specifically, it is the condition of this church as the ordained temple of the Holy Ghost, the instrument of God's saving grace through the gospel to the world.

It was not because it was the last of the 7 churches that caused God to raise unspeakable accusations of being rich, increased with goods, having need of nothing (spiritual), yet cannot see that it is miserable naked, poor, blind, etc. Instead it is because of these conditions within her general ranks that she is the last church age.

Just what is it that (1) Jesus sees in the church of today which she cannot see in herself, (2) what is it that makes him declare, "I will spue thee out of my mouth"?

1. First and foremost, the church of today is possessed of a mediocre, self-satisfied spirit. To say that today's "brand" of Christian is far less than totally committed to God, is to put it mildly. Don't just criticize me for making this assertion; just look across her bow and judge what you see for yourself. If there is one thing above all others which has always been repugnant to God and raises the ire of his wrath, it is half-heartedness. "Half-Hearted Church" is the name divinely emblazoned across the "bill board" of today's church. To be sure, many have programs running on all cylinders, but let Jesus stop in on Sunday morning and deliver his message from Rev. 3:14-22, and he will be run out of town as he was almost 2000 years ago.
2. Next, don't dare ask today's church member to seek diligently after and desire to be taught, precept upon precept, line upon line and here a little, there a little, of every meticulous lesson of biblical truth. Churches where only 4% of the members know what they believe are not interested in that kind of church. Besides, "we're saved by grace, aren't we"? Even if it was not important ---- and it certainly is ---- any professing Christian should hunger for the "bread of God" both for its life giving sustenance and also for its relationship and joy in "knowing" the Lord. The depth, or lack thereof, of understanding and obeying biblical truth has been described by a major ministry of today as "appalling". I would add that it is worse than that; it is fatal. "And God's people seem to love to have it so".
3. The third reason God's church and her lukewarm, self-satisfied condition warrants God's threat of "regurgitation" is her absolute indifference to just one simple verse Jesus gave us such as I Pet. 1:16 that we should "be holy even as he is holy". Has the church which Jesus purchased with his spotless blood, come to the place where she resents even the mentioning

of holiness of life? Pulpit after pulpit raises their voices in an almost violent crescendo of condemnation at the suggestion that a pure, godly, holy life is expected of God's children. They brand it as legalism or works or anything to destroy its relevance. Somebody needs to read their Bible.

When it is estimated that 50% of all church members have viewed pornography; preachers too; when it would be hard to find a church member that didn't like their beer and wine; whose tongues spill vile language and whose hearts pant with passions of lust; when one church has spent billions because of their child sexual abuse; when gambling is looked on as the free use of my own money instead of a sinful addiction – and the list is endless. Someone needs to stand up with the message, "repent or go into captivity".

This is not a matter of one church being better than another, or small churches compared to mega-churches. It is a matter of a church-wide, world-wide drift into mediocre self-satisfaction. No doubt God has a faithful remnant somewhere just as he did with Israel in the day Christ was born or like in the dark ages era. However when Judah was carried into the Babylonian captivity, the faithful went with the unbelievers.

We have nothing to gain here by identifying a catalog of sins of today's church, even though that can certainly be done. The word of God to the church of Laodicea is all the indicators we need to identify her problem. That message was not addressed to some extreme cult that the rank and file would condemn and reject. It is about the general church of this era about which God says she is: lukewarm, rich and increased with goods and has need of nothing – and knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. That about says it all. Lukewarm, self-satisfied – rich – and doesn't know the depth of its spiritual needs.

One of the most distressing signs of a lukewarm, half-hearted Christianity is the general attitude of having salvation without a complete transformation of the human heart and life. That is the very thing that Christ died that we might have. We have come to the place that we have adopted such a simplistic, easy believe-ism, "come as you are and leave as you came approach to salvation that it does not leave any room for a conversion or new birth like Paul had. We want our claims to salvation by grace, but we do not want grace to change our lives.

Three signs (and others) of the end of the age and the coming of Christ: (1) moral decadence; (2) fulfilled prophecy; (3) a lukewarm, self-satisfied church. What more evidence could there be of the coming of the Lord. His patience and grace must surely be worn thin. Evangelist Billy Graham is reported to have said: "If God does not soon come, he will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah". The idea was that our age is similar to that age.

EVEN SO COME LORD JESUS.

GOD REVEALETH SECRETS

AMOS 3:7. SURELY THE LORD GOD WILL DO NOTHING BUT HE REVEALETH HIS SECRETS UNTO HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS.

What a powerful exclamation this verse brings to our attention. It is almost like “where did that word come from”? God does NOTHING without revealing it to his servants the prophets. Daniel made an explanation to king Nebuchadnezzar about the God who revealeth secrets. In fact, some of the prophecies God gave to Daniel to write and preserve, he also told him that he could not know its meaning because it was for a later date.

Perhaps no one questions God’s ability to reveal hidden secrets. After all, he is omniscient, knowing all things from the beginning. In this day of “enlightenment” and so many learned scholars, equipped with such a vast arsenal of information, who needs God to reveal anything to us. Why, all you have to do is type in a subject, any subject, on your computer and an unbelievable array of information is instantly available to you. However it is not the availability of information that solves the mysteries of life and prepares us for any eventuality. Even with the Bible before us, which covers the whole will of God, men still read it and grope in darkness, not knowing what to do unless God reveals it. God must reveal it and only he can. And, as Amos 3:7 assures us, he does reveal it to his servants. With that assurance, let us test its application to the second return of Christ.

All through the history of God’s people, as faithfully recorded in scripture, no great event affecting the life and destiny of God’s people has been kept hidden from them. In the beginning, with Adam and Eve alone in the Garden, God revealed to them his sacred will for their lives.

When God determined to destroy the earth with a flood because of gross wickedness, he revealed every detail to Noah, a preacher of righteousness, including the plan of his escape from the flood. God even told him how long until the flood would come. (Gen. 6:3)

Later, God determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He sent “angels” on the journey to this task and they stopped by the home of Abraham. Before they continued on with their mission, they revealed to Abraham what it was. This gave Abraham the opportunity to intercede with God for his nephew, Lot, who lived in Sodom.

Years in advance of the bondage of Israel in Egypt, God revealed to Abraham that the bondage would be for 400 years. Thus, when those years were being fulfilled, God’s people had a divinely revealed basis for knowing that their time of deliverance was approaching. Why did Jocabed risk putting her baby, Moses, in a basket in the river? Was it not because she saw he was a “proper” child and, from the revelation of God to Abraham passed down to her, saw the hand of God to deliver him.

The Babylonian captivity, which really occurred because of the idolatry and disobedience of Judah, yet God still revealed to them the time of their captivity and therefore of their deliverance. God still had a purpose in Judah and there were many faithful ones among those who were disobedient. Jeremiah had often told them that they would go into this captivity. But God also revealed to him that it would be for 70 years. Daniel, a participant in the captivity, was favored with the revelation of this time frame, so much so that when the time approached, he was praying before God because the 70 years were nearing their end.

Time enough cannot be assigned here to the numerous prophecies God gave to his servants about the coming Savior and specific indicators as to who he was, what he would do, what would happen to him and an endless number of minute details describing this great plan of God to come and redeem his people.

As the day drew near for Jesus, the Savior, to come to the world, spiritual darkness was rampant, the people of Israel were scattered over the Roman Empire; they were chafing under the yoke of Rome and hope must surely have been dim. But then God began to move.

Zacharias, serving in the temple, was smitten dumb and then his barren wife conceived a child that, strangely, would be named John. They must have thought – what is God doing?

Then God appears to the Virgin Mary with the astounding revelation that she would be the mother of the long-awaited Christ. Then and there, 9 months before Christ was born into the world, they knew beyond any doubt, not only that Christ was coming, but exactly when. The ancient messages of the prophets of the coming Savior must have literally flooded their souls. Their long-awaited hope, centuries in coming, was completely revealed to a very special company of faithful people. He came as a “thief in the night” to the rulers of Rome and even the religious elite of Jerusalem.. But there was a remnant who were not in darkness that that day should overtake them unawares as a thief in the night. They were joyfully anticipating that day by the months, weeks and days.

Much has been said about the thorn in the flesh Paul had, which was given to him because of the abundance of revelations given to him, lest he be exalted above measure. His life and ministry reveals the tremendous amount of revelation given to him in every circumstance of his life. He could not have endured the path he was called to follow without daily revelation from God as to what the next move was. He was a pioneer for the gospel in a very hostile world. As to his revelation concerning the coming of the Lord, he has left us with the record of I Cor. 15, and I and II Thess. Not only was the coming of the Lord revealed to him, more than to others, but even the fact that there would be a time element of a great falling away first, after which the Lord would return. He didn't have revelation on the exact date but he has left us with enough information for our age to know that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Another event of great moment in the history of God's people and of his plan is that of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. The story about this day of judgment and

destruction upon the nation of Israel and their great city, temple and national life, is recorded in Mt. 24, Mk. 13, and Lk. 21. The Lord carefully outlined the many signs of this event so that the disciples would not be caught unawares. Many of those signs occurred over an extended period of time. But there were at least two that should have made the disciples of Christ keenly aware of its approaching finality for them to be prepared and not be of those who were destroyed. One of those was the warning in Lk. 21:20-21, that when they saw Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then know that the desolation thereof was nigh. The Roman armies compassed the city about 67 A.D., and in 70 A.D. it was destroyed. They surely could have known when the Roman army laid siege to the city and therefore knew that the destruction thereof was at hand. The other signal as to the time of this destruction of Jerusalem is in Mt. 24:34, Mk. 13:30 and Lk. 21:32. There Christ told his disciples that “this generation would not pass until all these things were fulfilled”. From the day in which Christ warned them of this, they knew that within their generation, while many or all of them who heard it were still living, that this historic event would occur.

I have stated that one of the signs of the coming of Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy, especially of Daniel and Revelation. The great prophecies of both of these books are all bounded by certain specific time frames. Throughout these two books these time frames are given as: “time, times and dividing of times”, 42 months, and 1260 days. We have given (in separate lessons) the precise dates for the fulfillment of each of the time frames mentioned in both Daniel and Revelation, along with the beginning and ending dates and the events which the prophecies called for to transpire within those precise time frames. This is something you will be very hard pressed to ever find in the commentaries given by orthodox theologians on any of these time frames. There are a few who have given some off-the-wall events presuming to comply with the text of the events connected to its respective time frame. But there is no consistency, application of the full text nor adequate and accurate historical evidence provided to support such conclusions.

These time frames were given for very specific reasons and are very critical to the vision itself. Unless the vision and time frame are accurately correlated together, supported by adequate historical evidence, then there is no confidence which can be put in them. These prophetic time indicators are given for the express purpose of enabling us to see exactly when certain prophesied events transpire. When the prophecy to which they apply is properly interpreted and the time frame is historically accurate, you then have a benchmark of the milestones of the journey of the church. Otherwise you wind up in a hodge-podge of interpretations of the vision, with no application of the time frame to such interpretations and therefore the entire prophesy loses its purpose.

Our position has been that these prophecies are historically fulfilled and this tells us that the day of the church and all of the milestones along its journey have been passed. This then becomes a strong signal of the ending of the journey and the coming of the Lord. That is exactly why, in the last chapter of Revelation, after all of the prophesy-proper has been issued, we have the repeated statement, “behold I come quickly”. If we don’t have the milestones identified correctly, the prophecy means little or nothing to you.

This analysis of other scriptural revelations of the great events on God's agenda, brings us to our own day and our blessed hope, the second return of Christ to the world again. We are well informed of the fact that the Lord Jesus will come again. We can also say that we know much of what that day will be like, including the resurrection and translation of the saints and the destruction of the world by fire. We just do not know of the specific day when it will occur. In much the same way as his first coming to be born in Bethlehem, his faithful people knew he would come and no doubt could tell from prevailing conditions that it was drawing near.

For example, it is possible, if they had known the prophecy of the 9th chapter of Daniel, they could have expected the coming of the Messiah in their own life time. But not until the amazing announcements of the birth of John and the birth of Christ, would they have had a definite time table. With the announcement to Mary that she was with child of the Holy Ghost and that she would give birth to the Son of the Highest, the day was not only fixed, it was specifically known. It remains to be seen, if and when or whether, God will reveal the very day of his glorious return. There is great purpose and virtue in it not being known. I Jn. 3:3, tells us that, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure". There is a cleansing inducement in knowing and hoping in his return, but not knowing whether it is today or another generation to come. Notwithstanding this truth, it would be grossly wrong to presume to pre-empt God's prerogative to reveal whatsoever he deems best. There is nothing to preclude that possible revelation but God's own will about the matter. The event of his return certainly ranks at or near the top of every other event on God's agenda of all time. It's importance and significance to all of God's faithful of every generation of time, especially to those who are living at that time, is of such magnitude that it virtually compels it's divine unveiling.

With precedents of all other major events impacting God's faithful and their relationship with him being made known, it begs the question as to why in his own time and purpose he would not also gladly make this event known. The coming of the Lord is the culmination of centuries of promises, waiting, hope and endurance of every child of God in every generation. Moreover, it is of immeasurable glory to God himself. No wonder Paul writes (I Thess. 4:16) that the Lord himself shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. While time has little consequence with God, yet he surely anticipates this event with great joy. He does not want anyone to miss it, but to those who through labors, hardships and sufferings, have served his great cause, it is his day of welcome and reward.

In spite of this, in a lukewarm, apathetic and self-satisfied church age, the only response you hear from them about the coming of the Lord is the "thief in the night" prohibition concerning the revelation of the day and time. They do this while failing to pay attention to the exception to that "thief in the darkness" class of people with the off-setting truth that, "ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief".

Let me emphatically emphasize again the folly of any (and there have been many) who, without revelation and with a misuse of scriptures, have set a day and time for the return of Christ. They have

been wrong and a reproach to the cause and message of his return. They have been and should be refuted for their error.

When the time and event of his first coming was announced, there was no way to disqualify the information and revelation. Scripture supported the calendar and the corroborating, undeniable evidence was in Mary's womb, whether or not people believed it. Maybe many, including the religious elite did not know the truth, but Mary and Joseph and Zacharias and Elizabeth, and no doubt others knew. And it was a glorious revelation to them. Likewise I would leave to the Lord his own prerogative of revealing in his own way and time, his coming to the earth again. That is what he has done in every age to every significant event on his agenda. To ignore it for the day of his appearing, the crowning day of all others, would not be in keeping with his protocol and his own word.

There should be nothing in the Christian heart which inspires as much hope, it's song, it's endurance and it's anticipation with exceeding joy as much as the "blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ".

Having said all of the above, I want to repeat the disclaimer which I have already made several times. "I DO NOT CLAIM TO KNOW THE DAY IN WHICH THE LORD JESUS WILL RETURN". I DO LEAVE IT TO GOD'S OWN PREROGATIVE AS TO WHETHER OR NOT HE REVEALS IT TO ANYONE, EVER. THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT, IN HIS OWN TIME AND PURPOSE, HE WILL REVEAL IT".

“SUMMARY”

I believe that the Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ will visibly return to the earth again. I believe he will be the same Jesus as when he ascended from the earth about 30 A.D. I believe that his return will have a few basic purposes and mission. (1) To resurrect from their graves every child of God from all past generations of time. (2) To translate from a mortal state to an immortal state those who are his children and still living when he appears the second time. (3) To raise both of these groups up to meet the Lord in the air. (4) To destroy the world by fire and brimstone. (5) To recreate the heavens and the earth for the everlasting dwelling of the righteous. (6) That this will be the crowning day of eternal life for all of God’s people and thus shall they ever be with the Lord in all of the glory, beauty and wonder into which God is able to create our eternal existence.

I believe the first chapter of Acts, the 4th and 5th chapters of I Thessalonians as well as part of II Thessalonians, I Corinthians chapter 15, Titus chapter 2 and II Peter chapter 3, as well as other passages of scripture, are the basis for the truth that Jesus will return to the earth again the second time.

I do not believe that Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13 and Luke chapter 21, teach the second return of Christ. Their entire subject is about the final end of the Jewish national life and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Thus all of the events described in these chapters were fulfilled in the final destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

I do not believe, as Preterist teach, that Jesus returned the second time in 70 A.D., and that the resurrection of the sleeping saints AND the translation of the living saints occurred at that time. In addition, I do not teach or believe the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation which they erroneously wrest to fit their own agenda in an attempt to prove that Jesus returned the second time in 70 A.D. I make this comment because I have taught that Mt. 24 was fulfilled in 70 A.D., but it did not include the visible return of Christ nor any form of a resurrection or translation of God’s people. The only message of Mt. 24, MK. 13, and Lk. 21, is the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

I believe that major prophesies of Daniel and Revelation were fulfilled during the journey of the church from its inception to its end. I do not teach that the second return of Christ will be accompanied by such events as a secret rapture, 1000 years of peace, Jesus reigning in a restored Jerusalem and Israel, a judgment bar to determine who wins and who loses when Jesus comes, especially after they have (according to orthodox theology) been given their rewards at death, a future anti-Christ and other such events proposed by so-called prophecy experts.

I believe that some strong indications that the coming of the Lord draws near are: 1. Moral decay; 2. Fulfilled prophesy; and 3. A lukewarm, self-satisfied church.

The most glorious event in the history of man since his fall will be the return of Christ and the crown of everlasting life given to all those who he has saved during all that history.

I believe that the earth and the works therein will be destroyed by fire in the last day. After this is accomplished, I believe that the earth will be re-created (restored) to its glory and beauty before the fall of man.

I believe that the return of Christ will be an instantaneous work of God and not something which will be over a long period of time of days or even years.

I believe that the return of Christ to the world will be the glorious crowning day for eternal life to all that belong to the Lord Jesus. I believe that wherever and whatever God designs for the eternal age for his children will be the absolute best God can prepare.

EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS!

THIS DOCUMENT PREPARED BY:

TOMMY BLANTON

5030 WILLARD RD.

WILLARD, N.C. 28478

910-285-3802