

Theory #13

The Rapture: *What, why, when, who and how*

We've alluded to the Rapture briefly several times in the last few theories, but before we talk about it in more detail, we need to nail down a description of the Tribulation, which is, after all, the main reason we talk about the Rapture in the first place. So let's do that.

THE TRIBULATION

The Tribulation, as commonly referred to, is a seven-year period¹ at the end of the 6,000 years of redemptive effort² during which God has used various means to win souls back from Satan's dominion. Six is the number of man, and God has given mankind six 1,000-year days to get right with Him. Time is just about up and God will now purge the earth of sin and corruption. Why? Because He intends to establish a victorious 1,000-year reign of restoration and rest on a redeemed planet,³ over which He will rule in righteousness.⁴ You cannot have a time of peace and goodness while there are rampaging forces trying to destroy that very peace. So God must purge the earth of overt evil⁵ first, before He begins His reign. The seven-year Tribulation, then, is designed to do just that: to effectively sterilize the earth, and we are told that this will happen by fire. Listen to what the apostle Peter has to say about it:

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the

¹ Daniel's 70th week, prophesied in Dan. 9:27. This is the last of 70 weeks (of years = 490 years) prophesied for Israel to “finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.” (Dan. 9:24) From the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the cutting off of the Messiah in 30 AD, there would be a total of 69 weeks of years. The final week of seven years allotted for Israel would not take place until the end of this age, when the Anti-Christ would be loosed upon this earth in a final battle for supremacy, and God would again focus His attention on Israel and her final destiny as His chosen people.

² Actually a slightly truncated 6000 years. Note Matthew 24:22. God shortened “those days.” We believe this refers to Days 5 & 6. See our discussion of God's timeline in Theory #6.

³ A picture, as we've said before, of the 7th day of the creation week, the Sabbath rest.

⁴ This is called the Millennial Reign in theological circles.

⁵ It appears that God will deal with all the rebellious and overtly evil folks at the Second Coming, and the Kingdom of God on earth will be reserved to those who are willing to bow to God's authority. Satan and his angels will be bound for 1000 years during this age of rest, but will be released at the end for a short time when the earth will undergo its final purging and cleansing of rebellious men, those who have turned against the iron rod of God's wise and beneficent rule.

elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise⁶ we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:8-13)

Heavens passing away with a roar? Elements melting with intense heat? The earth and all its works burned up? Hmm...what's *that* all about? Is the earth going to disappear?

Here's a thought.

What words do we use to describe a nuclear explosion?

We call it a BLAST (heavens pass away with “a roar”).

We say, “Everything was vaporized!” Atoms and molecules flying apart in all directions, literally dissolved by intense heat energy (“elements melting with intense heat”)?

We call it “Ground Zero.” There's nothing left (“the earth and all its works burned up”).

Sounds like Peter is describing a similar scenario.

And it sounds like the “day of God” is literally “the end of the world” as we know it, followed by the return of Christ and the commencement of His Kingdom.

So is God going to blow the world to smithereens, or is He going to let us do it?

And if He does, who will be left here to enjoy the new world of peace and rest that He wants to create?

Good questions. How will this work?

One thing we know. God is not a monster, and He's not indiscriminate. He is good. He's righteous. He is just.

And He's loving. So He will find a way to purge the evil without touching the good (in His eyes). We are told

⁶ Isaiah 60:21; 65:17, 25; 66:22

that He is going to effectively separate the wheat (the God-lovers) from the chaff (the haters of God⁷) and then dispose of the chaff (burn it with fire) so that the world can have its day of rest. Listen to John the Baptist: “As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (That prophecy was initially fulfilled during Jesus’ first coming. Remember the tongues of fire at Pentecost?⁸ Now imagine a 2000-year gap between these two verses.) “And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn,⁹ but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11-12) This last sentence takes place at the end of God’s 6,000-year redemptive timeline.

Let’s take this passage apart. The “winnowing fork,” in our opinion, is the gospel of Jesus Christ—the good news of Jesus’ Lordship and the coming Kingdom—and our free-will response to it. It is the call to repentance. The call to obedience. The call to perseverance. Will we remain faithful through times of testing or will we blow away from God’s presence like chaff on the wind? Testing separates people: the humble from the arrogant, the contrite from the callous, dividing “true-God lovers” from everyone else. What did John the Baptist say? “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” We can respond in faith, or we can harden ourselves, turn our back to God and move in the opposite direction. It’s our choice. God came to reconcile a lost and rebellious world to Himself. We can spit in His face and stomp on His cross, or we can fall to our knees in shame over our sin and ask for mercy.

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” (1 John 4:15) And “no one can say Jesus is Lord,¹⁰ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:3) The gospel is like a razor-sharp arrow that pierces to the core of every person who hears it and reveals their inward heart toward truth. Do they

⁷ Keep in mind, God does not define hatred of Him the same way we do. He says if you love the world, you hate Him. If you love anything more than Him, you hate Him. “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of (or for) the Father is not in him....” (1 John 2:15) And James says this: “...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4) This will become painfully obvious in the days to come. This also illustrates the idea that loving God is akin to marriage, where preference of another is a grievous offense and prohibited within the bounds of the covenant. God is giving us a picture of His intention to wed a pure Bride who loves Him above everything and everyone else.

⁸ Read Acts 2.

⁹ We believe this may be an oblique reference to the Rapture of the Church as well as a reference to His regathering of Jewish believers into His Kingdom ala Matt. 24:31.

¹⁰ This means personal Lord, Master, ruler. If He’s not in charge of every part your life, He’s not your Lord.

recognize their sin? Do they admit their need for deliverance? Do they long for reconciliation with their Maker? The gospel asks this question:¹¹ Am I willing to make God the Lord of my very life? Of my possessions? My future? My decisions? My career? My calendar? My talents? My relationships? My lifestyle? Am I willing to turn from my sin (submission to the devil) and live for Him, His way, under His authority? Am I willing to admit I need a Savior?

The “wheat” is a picture of God’s people, those who have done that; who have repented and trusted in Christ as their Savior and who are trying to “walk in the light” as authentic disciples of Jesus. They are tabernacles of the Holy Spirit;¹² God-lovers; true worshippers. God is on the throne of their hearts and they have surrendered authority to Him. This does not mean they are perfect, just submitted to His correction.

The “chaff,” on the other hand, is a picture of those who have put themselves and their own agenda and interests on the throne. They have listened to the god of this world, followed his suggestions and aligned themselves with his perspectives, and they have resisted the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They are at odds with their Creator, just as Satan is at enmity with God.

The “unquenchable fire” is the judgment of the wicked and rebellious at the end of the age. It is first literal fire on earth, but ultimately refers to the lake of fire, the final destination of the rebels.¹³

Does this sound harsh or unreasonable to you? That God would judge the world? The job of a judge is to pass sentence on unrepentant evil-doers, is it not? And to make sure that the sentence is carried out? (Or to grant a measure of leniency or forgiveness to those who demonstrate bona-fide repentance.) Should God be

¹¹ Because the “good news” is preceded by the word “Repent!”

¹² They have turned their personal lives over to Jesus and have invited Him in as Lord and Savior.

¹³ In other words, there is going to be a final purging and destruction of the earth—mankind’s defiled earth—by fire (probably nuclear war), but rebellious souls will also experience the unquenchable fire of hell. However that looks is up to God, but it will be complete and utter misery, pain, regret and torment.

any less righteous than an earthly judge? Should He wink at sin or evil, or let self-centered men define it? Should He pretend that everyone is basically good, like we do?¹⁴

No. He knows us only too well.

Does it sound like I am preaching at you? If it does, it's only because there are a lot of people out there who think they are "good people." Who believe they are on their way to heaven, and yet they are, bottom line, living for themselves, giving short shrift to God. They may not be *overtly* rebellious, but their hearts are cool toward God. They are lukewarm. And they need to change.

Remember, God has given mankind nearly 2,000 years since the crucifixion to get right with Him.¹⁵ Vast numbers have heard about Jesus and His sacrifice. Some have not. But even the most uninformed and isolated among us can look up at the stars at night and see His signature or smell His fragrance in the rose. A blind, deaf and mute quadriplegic still has a conscience that can hear God's call.¹⁶

But besides creation itself and that still small voice, He has graciously left us warning after warning in His Word telling us we should be diligent in our efforts to reconcile with Him. Missionary after missionary has taken that Word to the ends of the earth. But the vast majority of mankind has turned away and not heeded His call. They have chosen to believe other things and have spread those false beliefs abroad. But even worse than ignoring Him or rejecting Him or believing other things, they have chosen to *worship* all but Him.¹⁷ And they have chosen to scoff at His Word and mock those who believe it. Thus, He will righteously afflict¹⁸ all who have not put their trust in Him despite His grand effort to make Himself known and to make

¹⁴ We make excuses for our sin and sometimes everyone else's too. This is partly because we figure if we let other people off the hook, we'll be let off the hook, too. And that's what we want. But the truth is, we're all basically selfish and self-absorbed, concerned primarily with our own desires, comfort, and outcomes. We don't want to suffer. Better other people than us.

¹⁵ Days 5 & 6 of God's redemptive timeline.

¹⁶ We will be judged based on the light that we had, nothing more, nothing less. But we all have more light than we think we have.

¹⁷ God is not just a big needy Co-Dependent in the sky who wants everybody to like Him. He's looking for those who truly love Him from a pure heart. Not for what they can get out of it, but simply because He is eminently loveable and pre-eminently worthy of our love. After all, "He loved us first." We respond out of gratitude and awe, that a perfect God would love such an imperfect bunch of undeserving losers.

¹⁸ What we mean by this is that God is not just out to hurt a bunch of people because they didn't choose Him. He wants them to experience the weight of their choice to follow Satan, because if they don't repent, that choice will be eternal and irrevocable. And they will regret it forever. God is always motivated by love. Even when He casts the rebellious into hell, He does so to protect those who have chosen to live in peace with Him and each other. And He does it because it's what they chose, to stay in Satan's camp.

His mercy available to all men.¹⁹ God has used every means at His disposal²⁰ to convince men that He loves them. He has patiently waited century after century for us to turn back to Him. And we have not. Time is running out.

There is only one more opportunity. Despite its being a harrowing time of judgment, the Tribulation is God's final push to give rebellious Jews and unbelieving anti-Christ Gentiles one last chance to repent before He returns in power and glory to set up His Kingdom. But because for so many, neither patience and kindness, nor warnings, privations and afflictions have worked to bring them to repentance, God has now to resort to "the big stick." The biggest stick of all. Think of a loving father who, being at wit's end with a stubborn, foolish, arrogant, rebellious child delivers a most painful punishment in a last-ditch hope that the wayward offspring will finally come to his senses. God's hope is that we will, too.

FAST-TRACK SANCITIFICATION

The Tribulation is also God's last chance to bring new believers (those who respond during the last seven years of suffering) to maturity and to ferret out the chaff from the tares²¹—an accelerated sanctification program if you will, to refine the faith of His newest followers.²² He apparently allows Satan to bring about those trials that will, in the end, accomplish this purging or cleansing process.²³

So what does God's "big stick" look like?

Jesus tells us that it will start like "birth pangs upon a woman with child," increasing in frequency and intensity as time goes on. "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation and

¹⁹ Review John 1 for more on this.

²⁰ See Romans 1. The witness of creation, our own consciences, the Word of God, the testimony of believers, the typology of Israel and her history, and divine encounters with God's Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. "The eyes of God roam to and fro across the earth, looking for those whose hearts are toward Him." And then He goes to work to bring the light of the glorious gospel of grace to their ears.

²¹ False believers.

²² Those who come to faith during the Tribulation, after the Rapture, will need to endure to the end, to death in many cases, to be saved. If they forsake their faith, they forsake God, as in all other times.

²³ We must not blame God for sin and evil, even though He allows it. He allows it for a good purpose: to bring those who have turned their backs on Him to repentance and to refine the faith of those who have surrendered but have not yet been purified. (Dan. 12:10)

kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” (Matt. 24) We have seen these birth pangs taking place in our own generation. Two world wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Iraq War, the War in Afghanistan, and those are just the ones the U.S. has been significantly involved in. Countless other wars encircle the globe, motivated by religious conflict, territorial disputes, and clashes over natural resources. In addition, increasingly erratic and aberrant weather patterns are emerging, disrupting harvests and damaging infrastructure. Global warming is all the rage, and earthquakes, cyclones, tornadoes, widespread flooding, large-size hail, tsunamis and wildfires are becoming alarmingly more frequent and devastating, even in places where they were previously unknown. California is currently burning out of control.²⁴

But one day the Tribulation will begin in earnest. It appears that there are a series of three major outpourings of wrath. The Scriptures never tell us exactly when they begin. We are not even sure if the judgments are sequential, overlapping or concurrent, or whether they begin some years before the official start of the final week of Tribulation or not. There are some who believe they begin at least 10 years before the Second Coming²⁵ and some believe they do not start until the mid-Trib. In any case, here is how the Bible describes them:

First listed are the seven seal judgments,²⁶ which are opened by Jesus Himself and include:

- 1) a conquering king with a crown, riding a white horse;
- 2) widespread wars or conflicts;
- 3) crop failures; inflation and/or famine;
- 4) 1/4 of mankind killed by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts;
- 5) persecution and martyrdom of believers;

²⁴ Summer 2008 over 1800 wildfires plagued California, right after the State Supreme Court struck down a Defense of Marriage Act that had been passed by the people. Coincidence or warning? You decide.

²⁵ See www.thepropheticyears.com. This is Don Koenig’s site and he gives some good perspective on this view. One of the reasons to support it is that God, in designing the feast schedule for Israel, put the Feast of Trumpets (possibly signifying the Rapture as well as the gathering of God’s elect from the four winds at His coming) on the first of the month of Tishri, at the new moon, and the next feast, Atonement, on the 10th of the month of Tishri, possibly symbolizing the day that Israel repents and mourns her rejection of the Messiah. Some believe this spacing indicates a final 10-year period of judgment aimed at bringing the world to repentance. Interestingly, in Rev. 2:10 says “do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Jesus speaking) Are these ten days symbolic of ten years of tribulation? That would be Koenig’s view.

²⁶ See Revelation 6 and 8.

- 6) a great earthquake; eclipses (total solar and lunar eclipses); stars falling to the earth (meteor impacts?); the sky splitting apart like a scroll; every mountain and island being moved out of their places and widespread terror among men.

After this we are told about the 144,000 bondservants of God who are sealed from harm before any harm comes to the earth;²⁷ and then a multitude of tribulation martyrs are seen in heaven. This may be a hint that these three sets of judgments overlap, and that we are well into the second half of the Tribulation or even at the end at this point.

- 7) silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The seven trumpet judgments sound like the effects of a major war (possibly nuclear) and include:

- 1) hail and fire mixed with blood; 1/3 of the earth and trees and all the green grass burned up;
- 2) a great mountain burning with fire is thrown into the sea (nuclear explosion?, volcanic eruption?, meteor?); 1/3 of the sea turned to blood; 1/3 of sea creatures die; 1/3 of ships are destroyed (possibly referring to the Mediterranean Sea only);
- 3) a great star (missile?, meteor?) falls from heaven, burning like a torch, turning 1/3 of the rivers and springs bitter, killing many;
- 4) 1/3 of the sun, moon and stars are darkened; and the day does not shine for a third of it and the stars also (nuclear fallout?, volcanic ash?, eclipses?);
- 5) bottomless pit opened; smoke darkens the sun and pollutes the air; a tormenting locust/scorpion-like plague which is not fatal but causes exceedingly painful sores for five months (it appears to be either demonic or the result of biological warfare delivered by what could be an ancient description of modern warheads or missiles); men long for death but it eludes them; the 144,000 are not harmed. (This completes the first woe.)²⁸
- 6) the death of 1/3 of mankind by fire and smoke and brimstone; 200 million-man army prepared from the east; two witnesses²⁹ prophesy in Jerusalem for 1260 days after which they are killed;

²⁷ This may be the mid-Trib and may hint that a first rapture of the Bride, symbolized by the waving of the two leavened loaves of soft white winter wheat at Pentecost, has already occurred. Else why would God seal 144,000 male bondservants, but not seal His Bride, whom He loves and sees as righteous, from the torment of these plagues?

²⁸ Rev. 9:12

²⁹ These two individuals are described as “the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” This implies that they are not contemporary living humans, but rather have come to earth on a mission from heaven. These two have long

after three and a half days, their dead bodies come back to life and they rise up to heaven in a cloud and their enemies behold them;³⁰ this is followed by a great earthquake and a tenth of the city falls, killing 7,000 people. (This completes the second woe.)³¹

We are told in Rev. 10:7 that just prior to seventh angel sounding his trumpet, “the mystery of God is finished.” We think this may refer to the Church, which was a mystery until it was revealed to the apostles and prophets.³² The implication being that the Rapture of the Church is completed at this point in the Tribulation.³³

- 7) This is followed by a war in heaven.³⁴ Satan and his angels lose that battle and they are cast down to earth, for we are told that “there was no longer any place found for them in heaven.” Prior to this, Satan was the “accuser of the brethren,” the prosecuting attorney in the court of heaven. He is now fired. This is another hint that the Rapture³⁵ has now been completed, the Bema Seat judgment has taken place, and there is no longer any need for an accuser of the brethren in heaven. The devil comes down to earth at this point with great rage. Apparently now

been thought to be Enoch and Elijah, two men who never died but were taken bodily to heaven in the Old Testament era. Scripture says “it is given unto each man once to die and then the judgment,” so perhaps this will be their opportunity to die like mortals and be resurrected.

³⁰ They cannot be harmed until the days of their prophesying are completed. Fire comes out of their mouths and devours their enemies if anyone tries to kill them. They are able to shut up the sky and cause droughts, or turn waters into blood, or smite the earth with any plague as often as they desire. After the 1260 days, they will be killed by the Anti-Christ, apparently at the mid-Trib and their bodies will lie in the streets of the city for three and a half days. The world will rejoice at the death of these two tormentors, even exchanging gifts in celebration. Then their bodies will come back to life and they will stand on their feet to the amazement of all, after which they will be called up to heaven in a cloud and their enemies will see them rise.

³¹ Rev. 11:14

³² Rev. 10:7 “...but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached the gospel to His servants the prophets.” Note how similar this sounds to Paul’s statement in Eph.3:4-5: “...when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...”

³³ This may indicate that there are two Raptures: one at the start of the Tribulation and one at the Mid-Trib. The Mid-Trib saints would be pictured by the hard red spring wheat that is harvested during the fall feast cycle.

³⁴ Rev. 12:7-9

³⁵ Eph. 3:1-10 says “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

(at the mid-Trib) he possesses the Anti-Christ who begins to declare himself to be God. The Anti-Christ institutes the Mark of the Beast and demands worship from mankind in order to buy or sell. The False Prophet is his public relations manager, so to speak, and convinces the world to worship him and obey his edict.

At this point, apparently the middle of the Tribulation, the abomination of desolation³⁶ spoken of by Daniel the prophet occurs, and the believing remnant of Israel, recognizing that this is not her Messiah, flees to the wilderness for 1260 days (probably Petra); Satan is enraged, pursues Israel (probably in the person of the Anti-Christ) but fails to stop her; then returns to make war with her offspring, apparently other Jews and Gentiles who do not live in Israel, but obey God and believe in Jesus. (This apparently end the third woe.)

These judgments are followed by seven plagues (or bowl judgments), “which are the last,³⁷ because in them the wrath of God is finished.”³⁸ They include:

- 1) malignant sores upon those who take the mark of the beast (which we believe occurs just after the mid-Trib);
- 2) the sea turning to blood and the death of all sea life;
- 3) the rivers and springs turning to blood;
- 4) scorching sun;
- 5) darkness over the kingdom of Anti-Christ;
- 6) drying up of the Euphrates River to prepare the way for the kings of the East; demonic signs to draw the kings of the earth together in preparation for the battle of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation;
- 7) lightening and thunder; the largest earthquake in human history, 100 lb. hailstones.

³⁶ This is probably some sort of defilement of the Jewish Temple or altar, or the setting up of the Anti-Christ’s image in the Holy of Holies, or some similar telling event that reveals the Anti-Christ to be an imposter, not Israel’s true Messiah.

³⁷ This language seems to indicate that the judgments are sequential and that the bowl judgments follow the seals and the trumpets. And yet there are other indications that these judgments may overlap or be concurrent. Time will tell.

³⁸ Rev. 15:1

These “days of wrath” are coming soon. We are at the very doors. The world is about to embark on the most frightening, traumatic time ever known in human history. This prophesied wrath of God includes violent natural disasters, horrible incurable worldwide plagues and pestilences, climatic upheaval and destruction, famine, inflation, terror, signs in the skies and seas, wars (probably nuclear), and destruction of the earth by a multitude of catastrophic events. But that’s not all....

SATAN’S WRATH

Besides God’s wrath, Satan, knowing his time is short, will be pouring out *his* wrath at the end, primarily on the Jews, God’s chosen people, but also on the followers of Jesus who come to faith during the last seven years, particularly in the last three and-a-half years.³⁹ In actuality, Satan has already been pouring his wrath on Jews and Christ-followers for millennia. He hates God’s people and wants them dead, simply on principle. The Jews are a special case though. They were God’s chosen people from the time of the patriarchs; they were given the Scriptures and the responsibility to model for the world what life under God looks like. They failed, repeatedly and continuously (with brief intervals of repentance and compliance), walking in unbelief, idolatry and adultery as a nation. Finally, in His own day Jesus told the Jews shortly before His death: “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Mat. 23:39)

In other words, Jesus will not return until the Jews “have had it up to here” with pain and suffering and are ready to repent and receive their promised Messiah. Centuries of persecution have plagued them as a people: pogroms, inquisitions, genocides. And still they resist. But this last seven years of human misery will bring them (or a remnant of them), finally, to their knees in abject repentance, adoration and worship.

Satan’s goal then? To wipe them off the face of the earth⁴⁰ before that happens, so they will never utter those words. *Anything* to keep Jesus from coming back. As he has attempted to do throughout history, Satan

³⁹ Satan has no need to afflict lost people. They already belong to him. He gains nothing by bothering them except sinister pleasure. He does hate them though also, and he does harm them, just because God loves them and they are made in His image, but the battle really begins when we defect to God’s side. It raises the devil’s ire to new levels and causes him to mount up a frontal assault against us in an attempt to drive us back into his kingdom and retain his ground.

⁴⁰ Sound familiar? Ever wonder who really started the Nazi movement or the religion of Islam?

will pull out all the stops in these last days to destroy the Jewish race⁴¹ once and for all and to obliterate the name of Christ from the earth. There will be no earthly Kingdom if he has his way!⁴²

What about the Gentiles who come to faith during those last seven years? What will happen to them? They will also be impacted by demonic-inspired wrath: persecution, ridicule, terror, confiscation of property, starvation, loss of freedoms, poverty and martyrdom. But that is not God's doing. God is not killing or harming believers, though He permits others to do so in order to test and refine them.

The fact is, when Adam sinned and knowingly rejected God's instructions, he became the devil's slave.

Why? Because Scripture says we are slaves of the one we obey. Whomever we give power to, by submitting to their influence and authority, becomes our master. In so doing, Adam forfeited his lordship over the earth and yielded that lordship to the devil. Thus the devil gained the upper hand and the cursed earth became his domain. He has been wrecking havoc on the human race ever since, but only within certain legal limits. He can only afflict a person to the degree that he has gained legal ground in their life through generational sins and curses, vows, judgments, ungodly (false) beliefs and sin.

God respects the legal rights of His opponent, and that is a judicial parameter that He will not contravene illegally and unilaterally.⁴³ But because Satan lied to Eve, God gained rights to a do-over. The Garden test would be run again and in the fullness of time, God incarnated Himself in human flesh and became the Second Adam. (See our full discussion of this subject in Theory #4.) He was tested by the devil after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness (making Him more vulnerable), passed the test, and thus gained the right to challenge the Fall and win back His creation. But that right was not automatic. After all, Satan was the legal master over the entire human race and our father. He demanded a price for our freedom. It was akin to the Bride Price that a suitor pays to the father for the bride's hand. What price did Satan demand? It was a price

⁴¹ Past efforts by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king, Titus the Roman general, Mohammed, various Inquisitions and pogroms of the Middle Ages, the Crusades, the Turks, Hitler and now radical Islam have all failed to obliterate this race from the earth. Despite such concerted efforts, it is a testament to God's prophesied intentions for Israel that she still lives and is now in her own land.

⁴² Little does Satan know that his own violent attacks are the goads that God will use to drive the Jews to the end of themselves and into His waiting arms.

⁴³ And once the Holy Spirit has been removed from the earth, God will not restrain evil. And evil naturally wants to destroy good. Thus Tribulation believers will experience tremendous persecution.

he did not think God would pay.⁴⁴ The price was the blood of His only begotten Son, exacted in the most miserable and torturous of murders. Satan thought if he killed Christ, the whole subject would be moot, because a dead Messiah is no Messiah at all. He didn't count on God's resurrecting power.

Now that the Bride price has been paid, we are free to come back into the Garden and await the coming wedding to our Groom. But only if we are willing to submit to our new Lord and Master, the Father of Lights and His Son, our heavenly Husband. We are not free to be our own gods, but only to love and serve the God of gods. There are only two kingdoms and those who refuse to submit to the Second Adam's dominion must remain with Satan in his camp, under his lordship. When he is vanquished forever, they will, as his property, go where he goes. Hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his angels. God will not tolerate another rebellion, so those who throw in their lot with the deceiver will be thrown with him into the lake of fire.

God gave His Church the job of spreading the "good news" of Jesus' redemptive victory. Believers, then, are His change-agents, acting in the world to rescue the slaves of Satan, individual by individual as they hear and respond to the gospel.⁴⁵ This is the Great Commission, a holy effort aimed at bringing ready and willing hearts back into God's camp where they will be trained as a potential Bride of their new Lord. Faith, repentance and obedience in response to the message of God's finished work of redemption reveal those willing and surrendered hearts.

Jesus sacrifice is the ground from which all hope springs. Without that, there would be no way of escape from Satan's dominion. But God will not force anyone to change masters. Heaven is not a jail, but a palace for the redeemed who will one day wed their King Jesus. God the Father has partnered with patriarchs, prophets and saints⁴⁶ to bring fallen humanity back into the Throne Room. But He has not, and will not,

⁴⁴ Since Satan is our father until we come to faith, God had to pay the Bride Price asked by Satan. But also, since God was our original Father, before we sold ourselves into slavery to the devil, the right of redemption was still His and He exercised it on our behalf.

⁴⁵ It is only by virtue of Jesus' victory and our identification with that victory by faith and repentance that we are said to inherit His life and authority. Only in partnership with Him can we take our place as "joint heirs with Christ" and exercise His authority against the demonic realm. Learning to walk in one's authority in Christ is advanced-level sanctification and it bears tremendous fruit in His kingdom here and now. During the Millennial Reign, we will rule and reign with Him as His heavenly consort. But we can begin learning those skills here and now under the Spirit's tutelage.

⁴⁶ Saved sinners.

unilaterally “change men’s hearts” to *make them* switch sides. That decision has to come from each person by their own free choice in response to the wooing of the Holy Spirit and the witness in their own hearts. God does not have any interest in turning His heaven into a factious earth by admitting all sorts of unregenerate people, nor is He interested in using His sovereignty to create a bunch of captive robots. He is after a spotless Bride made in His image, and nothing less. Those who do not surrender to God, even under tremendous pressure and hopeless circumstances, will be left in Satan’s camp to reap what he has sown in their hearts and his own.

So in summary, God will not vent His wrath on those He counts as righteous, though He allows the enemy to afflict them in *his* wrath. God’s goal is that His children would learn through trials and tribulations (throughout all the ages) how to resist the devil themselves; how to bind and loose; how to take their authority in Christ seriously and use it for righteous purposes. God’s Tribulation then is not designed for the righteous, but for the rebellious. However, Satan’s is just the opposite. His goal is to afflict, persecute, and ultimately destroy the faith of the righteous⁴⁷—in all eras, but particularly in these last days. Before he runs out of time.

So what does this tell us about the Rapture?

Will God allow His Bride, the true Church, to experience His wrath along with the wicked and rebellious? Or will He rescue her before the curtain falls on this God-forsaken world?

THE RAPTURE

We have alluded to “the Rapture” several times throughout the latter part of these Theories. What *is* the Rapture? And what significance does it have for you and for me?

“The Rapture” is shorthand for the doctrine that purports a supernatural catching-away of true believers bodily⁴⁸ to heaven sometime before⁴⁹ (or concurrent with) Christ’s return in power and glory at the end of the

⁴⁷ He already owns the unrighteous, those who have not converted to God’s camp.

⁴⁸ By bodily, we don’t mean our physical bodies float up into the clouds. Our physical bodies will be changed into imperishable bodies, spiritual bodies, “in the twinkling of an eye,” and that’s what will go up to meet Christ in the air. (1 Cor. 15)

⁴⁹ Most people think seven or fewer years before.

seven-year Tribulation.⁵⁰ This event is simply a fact according to Scripture, but theories abound as to *when* it occurs, the details of *how* it occurs and *who* will be raptured. Obviously, the *why* question is more easily answered: to spare His Bride the agonies of God's judgment on a rebellious earth⁵¹ and/or to give her an imperishable and glorified spiritual body so that she can rule and reign with Him as His heavenly consort. Here are three passages that appear to speak of it, the first two by Paul and the third by Jesus:

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”⁵²

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep (dead), that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God;⁵³ and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Matthew 24:37-42:

Jesus speaking: “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in

⁵⁰ Also known as the 70th Week of Daniel. See Daniel 9:27.

⁵¹ If that is not the reason, then why have a Rapture at all? Why not just make us pass under the rod like the Jews and separate us from the goats in the valley of Jehoshaphat?

⁵² Read the whole chapter to learn more of what Paul means here by imperishable bodies.

⁵³ If this trumpet is the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, then the Rapture must be mid-Trib or just before the mid-Trib.

marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”

WHEN WILL THE RAPTURE OCCUR?

Among those who accept the Rapture, a variety of scenarios are put forth as to its timing. These theories are commonly called the pre-Trib, mid-Trib, and post-Trib Rapture positions.⁵⁴ In other words, will Jesus remove His Bride from the earth at the start of the seven years of Tribulation, at the mid-point, or at the end? One can easily argue for any of these positions from Scripture because there are certain verses in the Bible intended as encouragement for the Bride (that she won't have to suffer His wrath), others as instructions for new Tribulation converts, and still others for the Jewish remnant that will come to faith in the latter half of the Tribulation. Those who get saved during the Tribulation will begin reading the Bible voraciously (assuming they haven't all been burned⁵⁵), searching for clues as to their destiny and there needs to be instruction for *them* just as there is for all other believers during any other time in history.⁵⁶ They will find verses that instruct them not to take the mark of the Beast and that encourage them to “persevere unto death” in order to gain the crown of life. They must “endure to the end” in faith to be saved, just as all believers are required to do. But the situation will be dire and the consequences of conversion will be life threatening; more so than at any other time in history. So it will take high-quality commitment to hang onto Christ during the last days,⁵⁷ especially for new believers with tenuous faith. Born-again Jews who have begun reading the New Testament will be told by Matthew not to take the mark and to flee into the wilderness when they see the

⁵⁴ There are also other theories. Two that come to mind are the partial rapture theory and the multiple rapture theory. We will touch on these briefly later.

⁵⁵ We expect a huge Bible-burning campaign post-Rapture. Once the Christians have departed, the Anti-Christ forces will probably step up their campaign to vilify this holiest of books, to outlaw its many pointed passages on sin, and to make it as scarce as hens' teeth. There will probably also be prohibitions against teaching the deity to Christ, even to one's children. This is the Great Apostasy, when Christendom abandons its belief in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His divinity.

⁵⁶ This is one thing that makes it difficult to sort out all the verses pertaining to the Rapture and the end times. It can be quite confusing if a person doesn't know to which group to apply a particular scripture; although it will be much clearer as time progresses.

⁵⁷ Because of the persecution that will follow on the heels of conversion.

mysterious “abomination of desolation” taking place in their newly rebuilt Temple.⁵⁸ Unconverted Jews, on the other hand, will not repent until they actually see the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven, bearing the scars of His crucifixion.

Let’s look at these various theories then, one by one in more detail and see if we can come to any firmer conclusions regarding the timing of the Rapture of the Bride.

Post-Trib Rapture: Some Christians think the Rapture happens at the end of the Tribulation, more or less simultaneously with the Second Coming, as Jesus returns in power and glory. We will, according to this view, be caught up to meet Christ in the air just as He is coming down from heaven to the earth in power and glory, and then we will come right back down with Him. We sometimes joke that we might bump into ourselves on the way back down, as the apostle Paul says this event “happens in the twinkling of an eye.”

The rationale for the post-Trib view is taken from several scriptures that seem to indicate that believers or “the saints” will be here during the worst of the Tribulation and that many will die, but “those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with Him in the clouds” at the very end (as will those who have already perished, as Scripture tells us “the dead in Christ will rise first”). Verses that say we must “endure unto death;” that the Anti-Christ “will make war against the saints and overcome them;” that he will oppress the saints and “they will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time” (the latter 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation); many falling “by the sword and by flame and by captivity and by plunder;” the “shattering of the power of the holy people,” and that the angels will gather God’s elect from the four winds just after Jesus returns are seen as supporting this view. Many other verses are used, and we are not willing to say categorically that this view is wrong. But it is possible to apply all the verses that seem to indicate a post-Trib Rapture either to Jews who convert during the Tribulation, or to Gentile converts (those who come to faith at any time during the seven years of wrath). Perhaps there will be a translation of these saints⁵⁹ at the Second Coming also. This view, in our opinion, is the least satisfying because we are told to comfort ourselves with certain scriptures, but it is little comfort if one has to go through torture and death before one gets delivered,

⁵⁸ Or some facsimile thereof.

⁵⁹ Translating their bodies from mortal to immortal.

or comforted for that matter. This view is also inconsistent with the illustration embedded in the Jewish wedding tradition⁶⁰ that we talked about in Theory #5, a very important piece of cultural history given the references to the Church as the Bride of Christ. It is also inconsistent with many passages that indicate that the Church will be protected from God's wrath. And Jesus Himself tells us that those days will be like the days of Noah. Noah himself was told by God to go into the ark seven days before the flood of water came upon the earth. One might conclude that this is a hint that the Church will go into Christ (the real Ark) seven years before the earth is destroyed by fire.

Whatever the case, we are inclined to believe that God will not vent His wrath on the righteous, but will protect them in a place of safety. Satan's wrath is another story however. We will discuss this more later.

Mid-Trib Rapture: This is the idea that the Rapture occurs at the halfway-point in the seven-year Tribulation, at the start of what Scripture calls "the Great Tribulation." Probably the most convincing verse for this position is in Revelation 10:7:

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel (or trumpet), when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached the gospel to His servants the prophets."

If the "mystery of God" mentioned here refers to the fact that Gentiles will have the opportunity to become heirs of the Kingdom and receive the blessings of salvation along with the righteous remnant of Israel, as Paul described it in Ephesians 3,⁶¹ then this would seem to indicate that the redemption of the Gentiles, at least into the Body of Christ, is completed at the Mid-Trib or at whatever point the seventh angel sounds. (The seventh trumpet judgment appears to immediately precede the flight of Israel to a place of safety for three and-a-half years, so one would assume this occurs midway into the Tribulation.) So if the Church will

⁶⁰ We see in the passage relating to Jacob's marriage, and Laban's bait-and-switch scheme, that he was asked to complete the "bridal week" with Leah, and then he would receive Rachel also as his wife, for another seven years of service. (Gen. 29:20-27) This gives us clear evidence that spending a week sequestered with the bride was the marriage tradition for Hebrew culture.

⁶¹ "And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into *the mystery of Christ*, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel..." The fact that the Gentiles would be invited to join God's chosen people, Israel, and become joint heirs with Christ was a concession unknown in Old Testament times, thus a "mystery" not revealed until Paul. It was Israel's unbelief that opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. The Jews as a whole were set aside for a period of two prophetic days* (2,000 years) after the crucifixion because of their rejection of Christ, and during that time, God sent His message to the Gentiles around the world, initially through the ministry of the apostles and those Jews who did believe. So the Gentiles owe the Jews a profound debt.

*See Hosea 6:2.

be completed at the seventh (and last) trumpet judgment, then one could easily assume the Church will be going through at least the first half of the Tribulation, since there are apparently still seven *bowl* judgments to go along with the Mark of the Beast, destruction of Mystery Babylon the Great, etc.).⁶²

Or one can explain this verse as evidence for the multiple rapture theory. This Mid-Trib Rapture would then constitute a second Rapture. We will discuss this more later also.

Other arguments for this mid-Trib view are based on scriptures that talk of the Mark of the Beast (Rev. 13 and 14) and the death of those who refuse it (so there are obviously believers around at the mid-Trib).

Another argument for the Mid-Trib Rapture is in Rev. 12:7-12 where we see that Satan is thrown out of heaven. This scripture immediately follows the description of the seventh trumpet judgment, though that is not proof that they are sequential: "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, *and they did not love their life even to death.*' For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." This would seem to indicate that, at the Mid-Trib, Satan's job as the accuser of the brethren is terminated. If the entire Church has been raptured at this point, then there would be no further purpose for Satan to appear in heaven as the accuser of the brethren.

⁶² Presumably it is at this point that the Anti-Christ is possessed by Satan, because verses in Daniel 9 tell us that "in the middle of the week" the Anti-Christ will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering and will defile the Temple, followed by a demand that he be worshipped. When Israel recognizes his flagrant violation of the Torah, they will begin to wake up to the fact that he is an imposter.

Many other verses can be collected that seem to indicate that the Church will go through at least part of the Tribulation. But these scriptures can also be seen as applying to Jews and Gentiles who come to faith during the Tribulation in response to the two witnesses prophesying from Jerusalem.

Another argument against this view is that it does not comport with the symbolism of the Jewish wedding customs (discussed at the end of Theory #5). The bridal week lasts seven days, not three and-a-half days.

In addition, Scripture tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Anti-Christ won't be revealed until "the restrainer" is taken out of the way. If the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, we can conclude that those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells will have to be removed at the same time He is. This would mean either 1) that the Anti-Christ is not clearly revealed until the mid-Trib, thus the restrainer is not removed until the mid-Trib, or 2) that believers raptured at the Mid-Trib would not have the indwelling Holy Spirit since He would have been removed at the start of the Tribulation. Could they then be part of the Bride? The Anti-Christ is presumably "revealed" at the beginning of the Tribulation when he confirms the covenant with the many for one week (7 years), so if that is the case, this removal of "the restrainer" would have to happen at the beginning of the 70th week, or earlier. (Some say the restrainer is the Church, but the restrainer is called a "he" in 2 Thess. 2:7. The Church is referred to as a "she.") One other possibility is that the restrainer is Michael the Archangel who, according to Dan. 12:1-2, stands guard over the sons of Israel. Here's what Daniel is told: "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." But we would place these events at the end of the Tribulation rather than the mid-point, and see them as referring specifically to Israel, not the Church.

If the Bride also comprises pre-cross believers (those who complied with God's requirement of animal sacrifice for sin) as well as Church Age believers, then yes, they can be part of the Bride. It all hinges on the definition of "the dead in Christ" that Paul spoke of in 1 Thess. 4:16. If the Bride is only Spirit-indwelt believers, then no, they cannot. They would be part of the "friends of the Bridegroom" or some such group.

The Pre-Trib Rapture: The Rapture is believed by many to be God's way of rescuing His true Bride from the fallout of His own wrath, the prophesied destruction of the Tribulation period. And we would agree that that is its primary purpose. Some of those who hold this view, then, reason that the Rapture will happen at the beginning of the Tribulation, right before God begins to pour out His judgments on this rebellious planet. We believe this Pre-Trib view is the most credible of the three major views for a number of reasons. Here are two arguments from Scripture that lend support to this position:

Genesis 7:7-10

- 1) God told righteous Noah and his family to get themselves into the ark fully *seven days before* the rains started in which He destroyed the entire world with a flood; and then repopulated the earth from those eight people.⁶³

Why would God give us this information regarding these seven days unless it's important? We believe it is a prophetic hint that tells those who are listening that God will take His Bride out of harm's way *seven years* before He destroys the world a second time, this time with fire.⁶⁴

And Genesis 18:17-33

- 2) When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked Him if He would still destroy the city if there were ten righteous living there, and God said no, He would not destroy it for the sake of the ten righteous. He subsequently removed the few righteous from the city before doing so.

Listen to part of this dialogue between Abraham and God regarding Sodom: "And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know'....And

⁶³ Many cultures have flood stories that validate the biblical account. In Chinese script, the character for "vessel" comprises three symbols: boat, the number eight, and mouths—an oddity were it not for this account in Scripture. (There were eight onboard Noah's Ark.)

⁶⁴ We do not apply this illustration to Israel during the Tribulation because it is pretty clear that Israel flees to Petra at the mid-point of the Trib, thus only three and-a-half years before the final cataclysm, not seven.

Abraham came near and said, 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?' So the Lord said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.'"

Many conclude from these verses alone that God will not punish His faithful along with the wicked, ever. This is a virtual axiom of Scripture, a reliable principle of God's justice. He is a righteous judge and does not *punish* the innocent⁶⁵ along with the guilty. He will, in fact, protect them from His wrath.⁶⁶ (He does not, however, necessarily protect them from Satan's wrath.) Here's a verse that just says as much:

2 Peter 2:4-9

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment..."

So, if God was unwilling to destroy Sodom as long as there were any righteous people living there and removed the few righteous prior to doing so, wouldn't it stand to reason, then, that God would also remove

⁶⁵ Innocent in this context does not mean "without sin." No human is without sin. The innocent are those who have repented and trusted Christ for salvation and who are faithful to God under testing. Their sins have been paid for and their slate is clean, provided they continue in faith and repentance, not rebellion.

⁶⁶ Which lends profound weight and credibility to the Pre-Trib Rapture of the Bride.

the true Church, His Bride—perhaps multiplied *millions*⁶⁷ of “righteous”⁶⁸—before He brings down His wrath on an unbelieving world in the end days?

In addition, here are some other reasons we like this view:

- One, it's much more satisfying, comforting and attractive and Scripture tells us we should be comforted when we see these signs approaching, and that we should look up because our redemption draws nigh.
- Two, it is hard to imagine a loving God leaving His Bride here during the outpouring of His wrath. Some believe that He could protect her *in situ*, but that is harder to do when the wrath includes devastating inflation;⁶⁹ scorching sun; famine; 100-pound hailstones; nuclear war; or darkness. The Church is sprinkled throughout the world, thoroughly intermixed with unbelievers in some places, and so it is a monumental feat to keep the devastating effects of a nuclear bomb, for example, from impacting individuals who are living at ground zero, but allowing it to impact others living in that same location. The blast alone would pretty much flatten the place for miles around. Or if a storm cloud of 100 lb. hailstones is let loose on a city or a region, it's pretty difficult to protect great numbers of individuals and their dwellings in that particular area from the damage, while allowing it to afflict others right next door. Not that it can't be done...but it's a stretch. And as we noted before, God did not leave Noah or Lot in the midst of His judgment, but removed them to a place of protection.
- Three, there is the mysterious reference to God's sealing of 144,000 celibate Jews with a mark on their foreheads that they might not be tormented by the mysterious plague of locust/scorpion

⁶⁷ This is a guess, of course. In the Old Testament, when God told Israel to make two leavened loaves and wave them before the priest on the feast of Pentecost, He specified that they make them of two-tenths of an ephah of wheat. One could guess that this might indicate that only 20% of professing Christians will be raptured, or waved before the Lord. That would indicate that most of those who consider themselves Christians are not living it. The two loaves might symbolize Jewish and Gentile true believers, or living and dead believers. In any case, we think it symbolizes something significant, else God would not have given them this instruction.

⁶⁸ Righteous meaning “in Christ” and trusting in His shed blood for salvation. Believers are not perfect and won't be until they see the Lord, go through the Bema Seat judgment and lose their flesh with its sinful appetites. True believers, those God considers worthy to escape His wrath, however, *are* living consistent with what they believe God desires and repent when they fail to do so. Rebellion does not characterize true believers. It is consistent with backsliding and apostasy.

⁶⁹ There won't be special prices for believers.

demons.⁷⁰ Why would God protect a few thousand celibate Jewish men, but not protect His Bride at the same time when it was obviously within His power to do so?

- Fourth, various plagues kill a third of mankind, “and *the rest of mankind*, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.” (Rev.9:20,21) So if the Bride is not raptured before the Tribulation, she would apparently be killed by these various plagues (sent or allowed by God), because surely she would not be among those who would not repent. But neither of these options seem appropriate based on what we know about God (not punishing the righteous) and about His love for the Bride.
- Fifth, if the Church is left here to endure the Tribulation, wouldn't we be jumping up and down and waving our hands and shouting at the top of our lungs about every prophetic warning and fulfillment and every attempt to curtail our religious freedom? “There he is, the Anti-Christ!!!” “Don't take the mark!!!” “Here, read this!!!!” “Don't be deceived!!!” “Hey, you can't do that!” Maybe they wouldn't listen to us, but they would certainly have a hard time ignoring our rantings. Unless they put us all in concentration camps or prisons as raving lunatics, or intimidated us into silence (which they will attempt to do), chances are we'd be trying to find every possible way to spread the word without being killed for it. (On the other hand, Jesus *did* say not to “cast your pearls before swine, lest they turn and trample you underfoot,” so maybe Christians will not be willing to publicly proclaim the truth to a world gone mad.)
- Sixth, as we mentioned before, there is a passage in 2 Thess. 2:6,7 that says that the Anti-Christ will not be revealed until he who restrains him is taken out of the way. “And you know what restrains him now, so in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only *he who now restrains* will do so until he is taken out of the way.” Since the Anti-Christ is likely to be “revealed” when the covenant is confirmed at the beginning of the 70th week (because it is he who confirms it), the restrainer would presumably have to be taken out of the way before that.⁷¹ Many, in speculating as to who this restrainer is, believe it is the Holy Spirit, the one who convicts the world of

⁷⁰ Rev. 9:1-11

⁷¹ Unless Scripture means revealed *as* the Anti-Christ; that is, takes his seat in the Temple and displays himself as being God.

sin, righteousness and judgment, and that He will cease this work at some point, allowing evil to run rampant. But the wording “taken out of the way” seems to indicate not just a suspension of a task, but an actual removal. And if He is removed from the earth, then the true Spirit-indwelt Bride⁷² must also be removed, because the Holy Spirit is her comforter, counselor, companion and guide, and He will never leave or forsake her. He is the down-payment of her inheritance and she is sealed to Him. Thus the true Bride, all who have the deposit of the Holy Spirit, must be raptured at the same time that the restrainer is taken out of the way (if the restrainer is indeed the Holy Spirit). Some say the restrainer is the Church (but she is not a “he”), in which case the true Church would be “taken out of the way” anyway. This removal of the Holy Spirit does not mean that God is no longer present on the earth. It just means that the Comforter, whom Jesus promised to send to His Bride, would return to heaven with the Bride. Then the earth would look more like it did before the first Pentecost. (This does presume, though, that everyone who has the Holy Spirit resident within them would be raptured. Keep in mind that, in the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit came into people, it was obvious. There were evidences, empowerments, signs. It is not just assumed to have happened because they prayed a prayer or got baptized. This is still the case though the churches often preach otherwise.)

- And seventh, Satan is the accuser of the brethren and though it is not crystal clear as to timing, we know that he and his angels are thrown out of heaven at some point, as reported in Rev. 12:1-12. The question, though, is precisely why and when this happens. There is no reason given and details on the “when” are sketchy, but we think this event has a bearing on the Rapture. Here is what *is* clear:

- a. It is clear that Lucifer sinned prior to Adam’s fall, and it seems highly likely that earth became his abode at that point because Revelation 12:4 tells us that “his tail swept away a third part of the stars of heaven (angels), and threw them to the earth.” (Which tells us that 1/3 of the angelic hosts rebelled with him and they were apparently banished to the earth at that point. Some of these fallen angels are terrestrial spirits who are confined here and who operate at the behest of their commander-in-chief, Satan himself. Others are higher-level

⁷² Note that New Testament believers *knew* when the Holy Spirit came into them. They spoke in tongues, prophesied, and were definitely changed into bold, sold-out witnesses. See Acts 19.

angels who operate as princes or authorities over certain regions of the earth and who command under-demons to carry out certain tasks.)

- b. It is also clear that, amazingly, Satan still had (or has) access to heaven after his fall, because we see in the book of Job that he appeared there frequently before God's throne as "the accuser of the brethren." (Job 1, Rev. 12:10)
- c. It is clear that at some point, though, Satan was, or will be, thrown out of heaven *permanently* based on Rev. 12:7-10 as we quoted earlier. There are basically three options as to when this did or will happen:

Option 1) Some would say this already happened at the original fall of Lucifer and that's all this section of Scripture is talking about. Problem with that theory is, this passage states that the dragon was the accuser of the brethren at the time he was thrown down, but that office didn't start until after Adam and Eve were created and fell themselves, so it cannot refer to a time before the creation of man. (Since Satan appeared in the Garden as the tempter, we know he fell before Adam. But he was not the accuser of the brethren before Adam since there were no brethren to accuse.) So we know this original fall can't be what is being referred to. So it must be referring to another throwing down, later. (Read Rev. 12:12-17.)

Option 2) Some would say it happened at the time Jesus ascended into heaven after making provision for those who would repent (by dying on the cross and rising from the dead). Scripture says He "passed through the heavens" as a conquering King. And if "the authority and the power and the kingdom of our God and His Christ has come," they may have a point. If this is the case, we would have to say that "the brethren" of whom Satan was the accuser were only pre-cross believers or Jews then, rather than Christians. But if Satan was thrown down 2000 years ago "having great wrath" because he knows his time is short, then that doesn't jive so well with a ginning up of end-times Satanic activity and demonic signs and wonders. In other words, if he's had "great wrath" for the last 2,000 years, then these end days should be no different than the former days, except that he knows his time is short, and that may be the case. Satan obviously

hates God's people and has always hated them, but in the last days it sounds like his hatred is characterized by an unusual amount of venom. And that is a possibility. But Scripture also tells us in 1 John 2:1 (written *after* Jesus died and rose) that Jesus is our Advocate with the Father when we sin. Why do Christians need an Advocate if the Prosecuting Attorney is not allowed into heaven during the Church Age? We think this is significant.

Option 3) Or this "throwing down" of Satan and his angels will happen at the Rapture of the Church or just after the Bema Seat judgment. If this option is true, then it makes perfect sense. The Rapture of the Church followed by the Bema Seat judgment would forever eliminate the role, or need for, the accuser of the brethren in heaven. The Bride would be, at that point, completely sanctified and exonerated, her dress having been burned away through repentance. So, in effect, Satan would be out of a job ("there was no longer any place found for him in heaven"). Here is what the Scripture says: "Woe to the earth (symbolic of Jews) and the sea (symbolic of Gentiles); because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.' And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman (Israel) who gave birth to the male child (Jesus)." This statement is followed immediately by verses that describe Israel's flight to safety in the wilderness, where she will be nourished by the Lord and protected from the serpent (Satan) for three and-a-half years. This flight happens at the mid-point of the Tribulation (because we are told how many days she will be in seclusion), so we know the "throwing down" must occur no later than the mid-Trib. This works whether there is one pre-Trib rapture, or one mid-Trib rapture, or two raptures (pre- and mid-). Once the Bema Seat Judgment is completed, it is unlikely that God would allow the Bride's adversary and accuser to hang out in heaven after she arrives, where she would have to endure the sight of one who had so tormented her on earth. It might rob heaven of some of its splendor, no?

d. So, if the reason the accuser is thrown down is that there are no longer any “brethren” on earth to accuse, it becomes clear that 1) the Rapture is Pre- or at least Mid-Trib or both; 2) Satan is out of a job at that point; and 3) he’s royally ticked off. God has won a major victory, taking millions of saints to heaven, and now Satan has even stronger motivation to corral and keep the rest of the sons of Adam in his clutches. At this point there will only be unbelievers or false/backslidden/nominal believers left here on earth (some of whom will be saved later and will endure martyrdom), and many of them will have embraced the Anti-Christ’s explanation for the Rapture (which we’ll discuss later). So Satan’s goal will be to: 1) literally annihilate Israel⁷³ before she can be saved, 2) prevent unsaved Gentiles from seeing the truth, and 3) kill those who do before they can spread the word. He will be completely absorbed trying to stop any more of earth’s citizens from defecting to the true Messiah’s camp. As the Scripture says: “...the dragon was enraged with the woman (Israel), and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus,” an obvious reference to Christians and Jews. (If there is a Mid-Trib Rapture, there should not be any Christians on the earth immediately following this Mid-Trib event, so which followers of Jesus would Satan be pursuing? Eventually there will be more believers though, who respond to the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, and many of them will die for their faith. Perhaps it is these whom the devil goes after.) Satan wants to harm or kill them out of hatred for God, and he wants to steal them *from* God if they have believed. His wrath, then, is focused on believers. Unbelievers already belong to him. *God’s* wrath, on the other hand, is focused on *unbelievers*. Believers already belong to *Him*.

Here is another verse to ponder that seems to support a Pre-Trib Rapture:

Rev. 3:10

"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."

⁷³ Radical Islam is a tool of Satan and is following his agenda. That agenda is to wipe out God’s people.

This verse is found in one of the “letters to the Churches” (Philadelphia) in the book of the Revelation, which was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD; probably 25 years after. So the “hour of testing” Jesus is speaking of is not the attack on the holy city and its Temple. Not only are the dates at odds, but Jerusalem does not constitute “the whole world.” This “hour of testing” spoken of here affects everyone worldwide (or at least the area constituting the Beast empire).

Should we take this verse to mean, though, that true Christians will not *suffer* in this life, will be kept safe, because they are the Bride or “the King’s kids”? Not at all. They suffer now and always have suffered for their testimony, but not at His hands.⁷⁴ We need to keep two things distinct and separate: the wrath of God vs. the wrath of Satan. Satan has always had it in for God’s people, both the Chosen People (the Hebrews) and the Christians. His goal is to rob God of His Bride and His Kingdom and to set himself up as the permanent supreme ruler over the earth. So the Church around the world will continue to see significant and escalating persecution at his hands before the Rapture (loss of rights and property, ridicule, loss of tax benefits, fines/imprisonment for speaking out against homosexuality or “hate speech,” restrictions on evangelism, torture and death for some, especially in countries with Islamic or Hindu governments, but in the West also). And any who come to faith during the Tribulation will suffer great testing as well, as if their entire sanctification will have to be effected during that short (but seemingly interminable) seven years. Their lot will be starvation, lost of property, terror, ostracism, poverty, flight and gruesome death. All of these attacks on believers are Satan's wrath and we should expect that. Just as he wants us to backslide, be tormented by lies and deceptions, mutilate ourselves, indulge our lusts, feel hopeless, cause division in the Church, and curse us with diseases, he wants to murder us. That is his nature.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Though we do not believe God is up there mulling over how to afflict His kids (i.e., “Let’s see, I think I’ll give this one a cleft lip.”), He does take responsibility for calamities that happen, such as birth defects, owing to the fact that He has the power to intervene, could if He chose to, but didn’t for legal reasons. In other words, He acknowledges that “the buck stops here.”

⁷⁵ If you are not under attack, then you are probably no threat to Satan’s kingdom or his goals or he still has you in his clutches, or perhaps you have passed the test and have learned to vanquish him. Jesus said, “A student is not greater than His Master, is he? If they hated Me, they will hate you.” And “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and heap insults upon you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven;...But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.” (Luke 6:22-26)

The Jews, too, have suffered persecution since God singled them out as His chosen race. Anti-Semitism is alive and well and increasing and will continue to be a force for evil in this world until the very end. Just like Jesus said, if they hated Him, they will hate His followers and His people and will do everything in their power to snuff them out before He can return to redeem them.

So we conclude that there are three different groups of people for whom God has three different agendas in the last days:

- 1) Rebellious Israel will be chastened for rejecting her Messiah for nearly 2,000 years, but a remnant will come to repentance during the Tribulation. Those new Jewish believers who heed the Bible's instructions to flee Jerusalem when they see the "abomination of desolation" will be protected in a place of safety (in "the wilderness") for three and-a-half years (probably in the ancient city carved out of limestone called Petra, which means appropriately "the Rock"⁷⁶ of salvation) and perhaps will again be fed with manna. New Gentile converts and non-Israeli Jews who respond to the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish missionaries will be a second focus of Satan's wrath. These who believe could all be called Tribulation saints.
- 2) The Church (comprising both Jews and Gentiles) that has been standing on "the Rock" and loving her Jesus will be protected in a hidden place (heaven) waiting for the great day of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.⁷⁷
- 3) Those fallen sons of Adam who have never repented and who are living in rebellion against God in the end days are the ones who will reap eternal destruction, as have all rebels before them. The Tribulation is God's wrath being poured out on the guilty and rebellious: the unbelievers, idolaters and all who love and practice lying. Romans 1 and 2 tell us that all men have enough knowledge of God to make a right decision.⁷⁸ But most choose to fulfill their own earthly desires rather than submit to and worship their Maker. In the end, this decision will cost them everything.

⁷⁶ Jesus is called the Rock of our salvation.

⁷⁷ See Theory #5, God's Prophetic Calendar for a discussion of the symbolism of the Jewish wedding customs.

⁷⁸ Ask anyone what they would think if they walked into their kitchen and saw 10 Coke cans lined up on the edge of the counter, all facing the same direction and precisely two inches apart and they will tell you "someone's been in my kitchen." But when it comes to the natural world, they cannot seem to draw the same logical and obvious conclusion. "Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving..." They can look at a field full of varied grasses, flowers, trees and leaves of the most exquisite design and intricate interdependency and think it all happened by chance.

WHEN? DATE SETTING:

We are cautioned against date-setting for the Rapture (“no man knows the day or the hour”⁷⁹), but we are also told to be alert and sober, looking for the great day of our Lord’s appearing. We are told to watch and wait. To be ready, and to look up. So we humbly seek His wisdom on this subject in an effort to do just that: to be ready. (What does it mean to be ready?⁸⁰) As to when the Rapture might happen, then, we can only go by what He’s told us: certain signs and evidences. Studying the Redemption Chart following Theory #6 is a good place to start.

If the pre-Trib Rapture scenario is correct as we suspect, there are a few possible ballpark dates for these events. Here are some relevant considerations:

- 1) God gave Israel 40 years to repent after executing her Messiah in 30 AD. When she did not repent, judgment fell (in 70 AD) and many were killed. Those who survived went into exile and the Temple was destroyed. Jesus warned that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the “times of the Gentiles” be fulfilled. If these “Times of the Gentiles” began when the Gentile Romans took over Jerusalem (and began to trample down the city), and if they ended in 1967 when Israel recaptured her entire holy city from the Gentiles for the first time since 70 AD, that would mean that, as of 2007, another 40-year grace period has passed (1967 + 40 = 2007), again without any evidence that Israel is ready to repent. Forty is the number of testing and, given this scenario, Israel’s time to be added to the Church has expired.⁸¹ These two forty-year periods then would be like bookends on the Times of the Gentiles; two identical periods of testing and opportunity for Israel before judgment falls. God might act soon to bring judgment to

⁷⁹ This has also been described as an idiomatic expression referring to the feast of Trumpets, which is the only feast that began with the certification of the new moon by a priest upon the testimony of two witnesses. And because it was often difficult to discern the new moon, this feast came to be given two days in case the new moon was not spotted on the first day of the month.

⁸⁰ What does it mean to be ready? Besides not living in rebellion, it might also mean to have no other priorities that would cause one to tell Jesus to “wait a minute” when He comes calling. Are your affairs in order? Are you clinging to this world and your possessions? Do you have goals you feel you must accomplish before you leave this earth? Recall the parable of the rich man who threw a wedding feast for his son and was told by many invitees, “I can’t come right now, I have to _____ first.” (Fill in the blank.) This is also illustrated by those who refused to follow Him on earth because they had to first “bury their father,” etc. They weren’t ready to abandon all for Christ. The apostles are seen leaving their nets or their posts immediately when Jesus asked them to follow Him. This is the heart we need to have toward Him if we are to be prepared to exit this world in the twinkling of an eye.

⁸¹ It makes sense that the He would give Israel forty years to repent and be added to the Bride before rapturing the Church. Jesus said, “And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Also see Matt. 22, the story of the marriage feast and Matt. 25, the story of the ten virgins allude to this.

bear on His wayward people, and that judgment might look like Jerusalem being assigned to the nations by the UN as an international religious city. Or there could be some other severe judgment, such as a dividing of the city between Jews and Palestinians. Or a war. In any case, we would not be surprised if this happened in the near future.

- 2) It is also now more than 60 years since Israel budded, and Jesus said the generation that saw the budding of “the fig tree” (presumably Israel’s reconstitution as a nation in 1947) would see the end of all things. That generation will end in 2017 or at most 2018 (according to the Gentile calendar).⁸² Jesus’ exact words were “this generation (the one that sees the budding of the fig tree) will not pass away until all these things” mentioned in His discourse (i.e., the Tribulation, Second Coming) take place.
- 3) The spring feasts of the Jewish calendar (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Feast of Weeks) were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. The fall feasts remain, but will be fulfilled at the Second Coming and probably all in the same year, just as the spring feasts were. There are three fall feasts, all of which occur in the seventh month of the religious calendar (which is also the first month of the civil calendar). These feasts are Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. The Feast of Trumpets is also Israel’s New Year’s Day (Rosh Hashanah). There are ten days (counting the first two feasts) from the Feast of Trumpets to the Day of Atonement (also called Yom Kippur). Then there are five more days until the eight-day Feast of Tabernacles begins. Here’s how it breaks down:
 - a. The Feast of Trumpets is celebrated (nowadays for two-days) at the head of the civil year each autumn.⁸³ The feast begins with the certification of the new moon by the priest and this can happen on either the first or second day of the month, depending on visibility. Since Paul tells us that the Rapture will occur at “the last trump,” this could indicate that the catching away of the Bride might possibly occur at the end of the Feast of Trumpets.⁸⁴

⁸² We don’t know if God is counting His years in Jewish lunar months or Gentile solar months. If He is counting in lunar months, then there are only 69 solar years to reckon with. Which would put the end of that generation in 2017.

⁸³ Seven is the number of completion and the last three prophetic feasts of the Jewish calendar will be fulfilled by the final events of the Second Coming in the seventh month of the Jewish religious year. God has this wired down to the millisecond.

⁸⁴ Followed by seven years of tribulation, and then by the Second Coming on the Day of Atonement. The tribulation, then, would start on a New Year with the Rapture and end seven years later also on a New Year or just prior to the New Year, and then Jesus will return at the start of the eighth year.

- b. Ten “Days of Awe” are observed from the Feast of Trumpets through the Day of Atonement. These are days of repentance, reconciliation and preparation for the year to come. They may also signify three years of birthpangs and seven years of tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ.⁸⁵
- c. On the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is celebrated. This feast may symbolize the return of Christ to rescue a repentant remnant of Israel and to judge the world at the end of the Tribulation. He told Israel they would not see Him again until they were ready to receive Him as their Messiah (Mat. 23:39).

Some believe that the Rapture will happen on the Feast of Pentecost, because the Church *began* on Pentecost, as did the Law. On this feast, which occurs at the onset of the spring wheat harvest, two leavened loaves are waved before the Lord at the altar. Some think this pictures the Rapture of Jewish and Gentile (or living and dead) believers *on* Pentecost. Not a bad assumption, although Jesus’ statement that “no man knows the day or the hour of His return,” not even Himself or the angels, but God alone is problematic. Pentecost is only a one-day feast and always occurs on a Sunday (at least according to the Scripture⁸⁶). So in that case we could know the exact day.

“No one knows the day nor the hour” is believed by some to be an idiom for the two-day Feast of Rosh Hashanah. This is not the biblical formula however. Scripture only allots one day for this feast. Thus this interpretation of Jesus’ statement might be off base. Also Rosh Hashanah is the only feast of the seven annual Jewish feasts that occurs at the beginning of the month (and the first of the year) after the four months of the spring-wheat growing season. This might indicate that the harvest of wheat would occur in the Fall.

Another interpretation for Jesus’ statement (“no man knows the day or the hour”) may more properly allude to the Jewish wedding custom, where the father sends his son to fetch the bride once the bridal chamber is

⁸⁵ The true Church is profoundly grateful to Israel for her part in bringing the Messiah into the world and preserving the record of His life and death and resurrection. (Remember, the early Church was primarily Jewish.)

⁸⁶ The timing of this feast has been adjusted in Israel, ostensibly to disconnect it from the beginning of the Church at the first Pentecost. Jews do not now celebrate it on a Sunday, but 50 days after the feast of Unleavened Bread.

completed. This date is determined by the father alone. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also."

We like the possibility of two Raptures: one at the end of the winter wheat harvest in the spring and one at the spring wheat harvest in the fall. One might ask why God created two kinds of wheat. Perhaps it signifies that there are two kinds of Christians, those who are easily broken and those who are harder and require more threshing. Winter wheat is softer and white and has more protein. Spring wheat is hard and red. Perhaps believers who were backslidden or living in sin at the first Rapture would be threshed and then raptured at the second (or Mid-Trib) Rapture.

SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

Jesus said that "immediately after the Tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." (Matt.24:29-30) The prophet Joel tells us that God will "display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." (Joel 2:30-31 NASB)

This is strong evidence that there will be both solar and lunar eclipses marking significant events before the Second Coming of Christ.⁸⁷ Recent research by pastor Mark Biltz of El Shaddai Ministries has found that back-to-back total lunar eclipses have taken place on the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles (the first and last feasts of the annual Jewish feast cycle) two years in a row at significant junctures in Israel's history.⁸⁸ The most recent occurrence of this so-called tetrad⁸⁹ of eclipses was in 1967, the year that Israel recaptured East Jerusalem and brought the city entirely under Jewish control for the first time since 70 AD and 1968, the

⁸⁷ Matt. 24:29, Joel 2:31, Rev. 8:12

⁸⁸ Validation for this observation comes from the schedule for lunar and solar eclipses as monitored by NASA and other agencies.

⁸⁹ A series of four total lunar eclipses in a row without any partial or penumbral eclipses in between.

following year. The two feasts on which the eclipses occur symbolize Christ's first coming as the sacrificial Lamb and His Second Coming as the conquering King. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. This is highly unusual, that four total lunar eclipses would fall on the same Jewish feast days two years in a row, with no (lunar) eclipses of any kind between them. But even more astounding is the fact that the same thing occurred in 1949 and 1950, the two years following the declaration of independence of the state of Israel in 1948. (There were also partial eclipses on the same two feast days in 1948.) Amazing. Either these are some very bizarre coincidences, or God seems to be saying to Israel⁹⁰ with this particular sign, "I, the beginning and the end, have not abandoned you. I am watching and waiting. And guess what? I'm still in control."

And going further back in time, there are no tetrads on these (or any) Jewish feast days until you get to 1493 and 1494, the two years following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Again, back-to-back lunar eclipses on these same two feast days and none in between. And again, partial eclipses occurred on those same two feast days in 1492. Again, God seems to be saying, "I see your plight. I am watching you. And I'm in control."

Looking out into the future, the next scheduled occurrence of the same tetrad on the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles is set for 2014 and 2015. Astounding. To make matters more significant, there are no more of these tetrads on successive Jewish feast days of Passover and Tabernacles for the remainder of the 21st century. That makes these in 2014 and 2015 especially noteworthy then.

If these eclipses are part of the signs in the sky that Jesus and Joel prophesied about, then they could indicate that the "abomination of desolation" could occur in 2014,⁹¹ precipitating the beginning of "the Great Tribulation."⁹² If Jesus is to return three and-a-half years later, we should be entering the Tribulation in the near future, and if the Pre-Trib Rapture position is right, we may be on the brink of evacuation.

⁹⁰ Some of these eclipses are not visible in Israel, but remember, Israel has been scattered throughout the world since 70 AD.

⁹¹ It could also signify the confirmation of the covenant by the Anti-Christ and the start of the 70th week of Daniel.

⁹² The latter half of the seven-year Tribulation.

After the chaos of the Rapture, there will be battles over legal and property rights issues, Martial Law may be imposed, elections may be suspended, and the world may come together in ways it has not be able to before. It will perhaps take some time before a covenant or peace accord can be confirmed between the Anti-Christ and “the many,” but it won’t be long. In fact, there may be a war (Ez. 38 perhaps) that erupts post-Rapture, since Israel’s main ally, the true Church, would be gone. What’s to restrain the anti-Zionists at that point from taking this opportunity to attack a vulnerable Israel, thinking no one will come to her defense? Such a war might be the very thing that precipitates a peace agreement, especially if Israel is victorious as she has been in every war up to this point.

WHO GOES, WHO STAYS AND WHY?

The separation of the wheat from the chaff that we discussed earlier is a complex subject that seems to reflect on this issue of the Rapture. It is possible that we can get overly fixated on details, so we don’t want to make that mistake. God’s point is that He can distinguish between wheat and chaff or wheat and tares, and that He will separate them at the end of the age. Suffice it to say, God will not leave one kernel of genuine wheat to be burned up with unquenchable fire.

It is interesting however that God created two kinds of wheat: soft white winter wheat that is harvested in the spring, and hard red spring wheat that is harvested in the fall. One could speculate that these two kinds of wheat picture two kinds of believers, perhaps those who were ready at the start of the Tribulation and those who were not and had to be purified and refined during the first half of this trying period.

Still the question comes: How does God identify the wheat and do we even need to worry about that? That’s what we want to talk about here. Obviously God knows which are wheat and which are chaff or tares, but do we need to know? Yes, we do. If we are not certain we are saved, something is probably amiss.

The critical or defining characteristic of true spiritual wheat is that it has a germ, a core seed of the Holy Spirit resident within it. That germ is alive and contains the instructions for producing more of the same. When it grows, it bears real fruit. Without the germ, there is no fruit. Wheat produces more wheat. It does not produce tares, nor does it produce corn. Could we say, then, that true members of the wheat family are

those Christians who reproduce; who are not afraid to identify themselves as wheat and who allow the kernel to die so that the germ can live? We could...or we could just say that true wheat has the germ resident in it and no matter what stage of the dying/birthing process it is in, it is still wheat, even if it is dormant. Because the fact is, if wheat has not been planted yet, it is not going to reproduce. But it's still wheat.

You might be a new kernel yourself. You have put your faith in Jesus, repented and given Him your sins, but you've not entirely died to self yet, nor have you led anyone else to Christ. But you are not engaged in deliberate sin. Will you be left behind in the Rapture? True, Jesus is coming for a Bride without spot or wrinkle, but sanctification is a process and none of us are complete or perfect yet. Do we scold our children for being children? No. Jesus said to let the children come to Him. Perhaps that is encouragement to us adults as well who are still children in the journey.

Jesus told the thief on the cross who had just believed: "This day you will be with me in Paradise." Had he borne any fruit yet?⁹³ No, but did he later? His public identification with the Wounded Healer has been told to generations of believers. And we ourselves even used his example on one occasion to lead a dying woman to Christ. So perhaps he has produced a lot of fruit, simply by identifying with Christ and being willing to stand up for Him.

ARE YOU READY?

We are told over and over that we are to be ready, alert, sober, watching and waiting for Jesus' return. What does it mean to be ready? Jesus tells His people repeatedly that they do not know the day nor the hour their Bridegroom will come. He tells the story of ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-12, all of whom were waiting for the Bridegroom. But five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones did not bring extra oil for their lamps. They were apparently minus the Holy Spirit or were not Spirit-filled. In any event, they were not ready. When the shout came that the Bridegroom was on His way, they asked the five wise virgins to give them some of their oil, but were told to go buy their own as there was not enough for both of them. When the

⁹³ If God's creation is designed as a living illustration for us, we could guess that the life cycle of plants is instructive. A plant has to first sprout, then grow roots and a stem, and finally a blossom. After that the beautiful blossom dies and the seedpod matures. Once it is sufficiently dried, it pops open, casting its seeds on the soil and many new plants grow up around it. This is a picture of spiritual growth. Until we die to ourselves, we cannot produce fruit or seed.

foolish virgins were gone to the dealers, the Bridegroom returned and the doors of the wedding feast were closed and they were not able to enter. And they were told that He didn't know where they were from. In other words, they did not have an intimate relationship with Him.

This parable was a message to Israel, that those who will attend the wedding feast will not include the entire nation—but only those who are true Holy Spirit vessels, carrying Jesus in their hearts. But the parable may be a message to the Church as well, that we dare not allow ourselves to become as those in darkness. We are light bearers, but we cannot be so without the infilling of the Spirit.

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

How do we get the Holy Spirit? Some would say the Holy Spirit is automatically given to everyone who believes the facts about the gospel: that 1) Jesus is God; 2) He died for our sins; 3) He rose from the grave on the third day; and 4) He's coming again. And that we must just take it on faith that the Holy Spirit comes to us when we do so. But it's clear in Acts 8 that not everyone who believed in Jesus automatically received the Holy Spirit. In Samaria, those who were converted through the testimony of Philip had not received Him. The text says that He "had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (v.16) From this text alone, we see that believing in the name of the Lord Jesus or being baptized into Him does not automatically confer the indwelling Holy Spirit. In fact, Peter and John had to come from Jerusalem and lay hands on them and then they received.

We see this same situation in Acts 19 with the dozen men from Ephesus who did not receive the Spirit when they repented and believed. Even when they were baptized again, into the name of the Lord Jesus, they still did not automatically receive it. Not until Paul laid his hands on them did they finally receive the Spirit. And once they did, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. In other words, it was obvious. No one had to take it on faith.

The Bible indicates that signs accompany the giving of the Spirit. Boldness. Fearlessness. A desire to share the gospel. Even works of power. Speaking with other tongues (though not all speak with tongues, Paul tells us in 1 Cor.12:30). Gifts of the Spirit. Paul said that he did not want the Corinthians' faith to rest on his words

or the wisdom of men, but on the power of God that attended and validated them.⁹⁴ They were to *know* they had received the Spirit experientially, not just *believe* it on faith. And they did.

Unfortunately, much of the Church has abandoned the genuine gospel for a powerless facsimile. And we suspect the Holy Spirit is, in many cases, not being received at all. Today much of the Church thinks it's enough that we believe the facts about Christ, or that we prayed some magic prayer in time gone by, as insurance, to make sure we don't have to go to "the bad place," though we quickly moved on to more compelling activities. But this doesn't cut it with God. Without a genuine surrender of the heart, godly sorrow, repentance, and an invitation, there is no likelihood that the Holy Spirit will take up residence. He is no trespasser; no invader. He will not bully His way into a person's heart. He waits for the heart's throne to be assigned to Him. We have to convince Him that our submission and our faith is real.

How do we do that? We lay it all down. And mean it. Let go of everything you own, every dream and hope you have, every demand that lives in your heart—your pride and ambition. Your stuff. And tell Him it's all His. *You're* all His. Hold onto nothing. Let Him be in charge. Repent of every known sin (if you haven't already).⁹⁵ And then ask Him to come in and fill your heart. If nothing changes, seek out a mature Christian to help you.⁹⁶ So, what it comes down to is: you can believe with your mind that Jesus is Lord and even profess it with your mouth out of your mind; or you can believe and profess it from your heart. This is acceptable faith. It is surrendered faith. It is obedient faith.⁹⁷

So what does it look like if we already *have* the Holy Spirit? Is it just that we get goose bumps when we sing worship songs? Is it that we raise our hands in church? Or that we speak in tongues? No, though those things might definitely be part of a Spirit-filled believer's life, they are not the defining things. 1 John tells us to test ourselves to see whether we are in the faith: Do we walk in the light? Do we confess our sins? Do we

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:4,5

⁹⁵ See Appendix B for detailed instructions on how to repent.

⁹⁶ A mature Christian is not necessarily someone who has gone to church for decades. Find someone who understands God's heart, His kingdom, and the spirit realm. These people are few and far between. Make inquiries. Contact Cleansing Stream ministries, Restoring the Foundations ministry, Theophostic ministries, various inner healing ministries.

⁹⁷ Someone will quote John here: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." (1 John 5:1) Surely he was speaking of belief in the heart, not in the mind alone. I meet people every week who say they are Christians and believe Jesus is God, but they do not follow Him nor is He their Lord. Is this true belief? Not according to James 2:20.

obey the Father and practice righteousness according to God's standard? Do we love the brethren? Do we love the world or the things in the world? Do we persevere in faith under trial? Do we confess Jesus as God with our mouths? Are our prayers answered? Do we have the witness of His Spirit in our spirit? Do we deny Christ? Are we ashamed to be associated with Him? Do we have boldness to witness? Is there power operating in our lives? Do we have increasing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit?

If you doubt your own salvation, we suggest you not take that lightly. Perhaps it is your own spirit informing you that something is amiss. Are you a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways? Do you have one foot in the world and one in the Church⁹⁸? You cannot have two masters. Is there a part of you that doesn't want to pray, doesn't want to worship, doesn't want to read the Word, doesn't want to fellowship? If so, you probably have a divided heart, and that needs to get fixed. Sanctification is a process, and we are all at different stages of our transformation, but *salvation* itself is a moment-in-time union with and surrender to the Lover of our souls. We all need to know that God has accepted us. Ask yourself this question: Have I had a genuine encounter with the Holy Spirit? Do I have fellowship with the Father? Do I know Him in whom I have believed? If the answer is no, find a believer who can help you get that fixed. (See Appendix A and B for further help.)

WHO GOES?

There are a couple of scriptures in particular (and many in general) that would leave one with the clear impression that not all "believers" will escape the wrath of God poured out on a rebellious earth at the end of days. Two that come immediately to mind are Rev. 3:10 and Luke 21:36.

Starting with Rev. 3:10, in which Jesus is speaking to disciples *in* the Church:

"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."

This seems a pretty blatant promise of deliverance. But it is not spoken to all church-goers, as can be attested by other statements in Revelation 1-3 in the various letters to the churches, in which Jesus

⁹⁸ We are not talking about the organized church here, but the living, breathing Body of Christ.

castigates the churches for their complacency, blindness and outright sin and warns them to repent or suffer the consequences. In other words, the corollary is also true: “If you have *not* kept the word of My perseverance, I will *not* keep you from the hour of testing...”

What is the word of His perseverance? It is that we continue in faith and repentance and obedience despite testing and trials or persecution. That we continue to walk with Him in white and do not deny Him. Not that we will do this perfectly, but that will be our direction and aim. And we repent when we fail, instead of hardening our hearts.

And another passage, in Luke 21, beginning at verse 34, which is the tail-end of the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus tells his disciples what the end days will look like, says this:

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. Watch and pray, therefore, *that you may be counted worthy* to escape the wrath (judgment) that is coming upon the [whole] earth and be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

This translation seems to be saying, “When this happens, which it *will*, don’t be caught unawares and living a debauched life or you will suffer wrath.” But living a “good life” without God is not enough either. One needs the Holy Spirit resident inside, for it is the Holy Spirit who was given to the Church at Pentecost and who will likewise be taken from the earth at the Rapture when the Church is airlifted to heaven.

Deliverance is also implied in other verses such as:

Ephesians 5:5-7:

“For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things [i.e., immorality] the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.”

Implying that immoral lifestyles and idolatry are the catalyst for the wrath and, indeed, make one an object of it. It is ludicrous then to state that Christians who practice immorality or live in sin are exempt from God's wrath and can "get away with it" and still go to heaven. Remember, heaven is for those who have trusted in Christ as their Lord (Master) and Savior and have demonstrated that trust by ongoing faith, repentance and obedience.⁹⁹ God is not mocked. What a man sows, that he will also reap. Scripture is clear on this point. There is no favoritism with God. He is no respecter of persons and says so as clearly as can be said. (See Romans 2.) In other words, we cannot say we believe and have received Jesus, and go on living as if we haven't, as the world lives, in wanton pursuit of our own agenda and lusts. The two are incompatible.

Therefore, it seems clear to us that deliverance from the coming wrath, whether it comes in the form of a pre-Trib or pre-Wrath Rapture or *in situ* protection, only applies to those who are true disciples, whose hearts are committed and whose lives show it. In other words, they are doers of the word, not just hearers only. That "doing" includes genuine repentance when we fail (not just a big pile of good works that builds up our ego and gives us a false sense of our own worthiness or security). None of us is perfect. We all stumble from time to time. Hopefully less and less as time goes on, but still, we struggle. And we suffer the Father's discipline. The narrow gate is narrow because it's a painful, hard way. And for that reason, it must also be a *relational way*. We can't walk it alone. Jesus must be our Shepherd and the brethren our companions in the journey if we want to make it to the end.

Take a gander at Matt.7:13,14,21-27:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it...Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, '*I never knew you*; depart from Me, you who practice **lawlessness**.'

⁹⁹ Some will gain heaven after only an hour of faith; others will have toiled in the faith vineyard their entire lives.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine, and *does not* act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.”

Scary words. What is **lawlessness**? It is ignoring or flaunting the clear expectations of God, as if to say one is in a special category, somehow exempt from judgment. Keep in mind, these lawless ones are *in* the churches. They are “so-called brethren” who call Jesus Lord and even perform apparent miracles, but who are cast away from Him because of their lawless deeds. They are not abiding in Him. They are not repenting. They are not turning away from sin. They *think* they are saved. They are wrong!¹⁰⁰ They took Him and His cross for granted. Listen: “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace.” (Hebrews 10:26-29)

We encourage you. If you want to be assured of a place at the table, follow the true Lord Jesus with your whole heart, and let Him be your genuine friend and companion. Don't try to do it without Him. Surrender all you have and all you are to His Lordship.

Forewarned is forearmed.

¹⁰⁰ They are perhaps like the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who went around trying to cast out demons “in Jesus’ name” but were not genuine followers. They tried to use Jesus, but didn’t want to submit to the requirements of faith and repentance. The devil tore them to shreds.

THE GREAT APOSTASY

We are told that a great falling away from the faith will occur just prior to, or at the beginning of, the Tribulation.¹⁰¹ Jesus Himself said, “When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?”¹⁰² Many in the Church, however, are proclaiming, anticipating and promoting a revival to beat all revivals. They, in their evangelistic zeal and hope, believe that God will sweep a huge portion of mankind into the fold before the Rapture.

Though we appreciate their sentiment, we don’t see scriptural support for this idea. On the contrary, Scripture tells us things will wax worse and worse; men will become more and more corrupt; false doctrine will pervade the churches;¹⁰³ false Christs will deceive many; wolves in sheep’s clothing will mislead the flock and true faith and love will wear thin.

This is already happening as Paul predicted in 1 Tim. 3. But the Great Apostasy is something else.

We believe that the Great Apostasy will amount to a demotion of Jesus Christ to the level of a mere prophet, on a par with all the other prophets of other “great religions” of the world, but primarily Islam’s Mohammed and Judaism’s Moses. This demotion would allow the world to bring all monotheistic religions into a common fold, all with equal value and credibility. No one really needs a Savior, after all, since man is basically good. Just wonderful teachers. Examples of love and virtue. And any religion can provide that.

How will this happen? Once the Rapture occurs, and true believers are vilified, there will be nothing standing in the way of this reassessment of Jesus. It is also likely that proselytizing the divinity of Christ will be outlawed, even to one’s own children. Bibles may be banned, or parts excised. Christian schools and literature may be verboten. Churches may have to be approved based on their willingness to abandon the deity-of-Christ doctrine. And any who continue to espouse, preach or teach this (in person, in writing or online) will be subject to prosecution. Fact is, many of our mainline churches and seminaries are already considering this a legitimate move forward. Stripping Jesus of His deity and “only way” status removes what

¹⁰¹ 2 Thess. 2:3

¹⁰² Luke 18:8

¹⁰³ 1 Tim.4:1

some would say is the biggest impediment to world religious unity and world peace. (True Christians will never accept the “many ways to God” philosophy of the mainstream.) Unfortunately, this is a temporary and shortsighted fix, as the Islamic Anti-Christ will eventually seek to foist his *own* “only way” on the world. And that is, of course, Islam run amok.

THE BIG LIE

The Bible tells us in that a lie will be spoken over the earth post-Rapture and all those who did not love the truth so as to be saved will be deceived. “For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” (2 Thess. 2:11-12)¹⁰⁴

Whoa. Hardcore? Yes. But the fact is, God pushes us into our sin when we persist in wanton rebellion. He wants us to reap the full weight of it so that we might come to our senses. Unfortunately, time is running out on the unbelieving world and once it runs out completely, God will pour out His wrath (speaking of the Tribulation) on a wicked, rebellious and unbelieving generation in the last days. “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.” (1 Thess. 5:3)

Keep in mind that God is not indiscriminate. In fact, He is very discriminating. But He cannot let evil go unpunished forever. A righteous judge is required to punish sin. If the judge abdicates his job, who will do it? He’s at the top of the justice system. It’s the same for God. If *He* doesn’t deal with evil, who will? There *is* no one else. Of course God gets the bad rap,¹⁰⁵ but only because we are too foolish to understand that goodness includes standing against evil, and dying if necessary to defeat it. That’s what Jesus did for us. He died to defeat evil.

¹⁰⁴This is not because God is mean, vindictive or evil. It is because He only wants those in heaven who have chosen Him out of love, not just to save their own skin. He is not interested in a heaven populated by the same kind of people who destroyed His earth and made it uninhabitable. That would be foolish, and God is no fool.

¹⁰⁵We complain now because He *doesn’t* intervene and punish evildoers, and we’ll complain then when He does. He can’t win.

Thus, any who reject Christ's vicarious suffering on their behalf, to pay for their sin, must pay for their own sins via their own suffering. Those who have rejected the light of truth will reap the darkness.

But there is another reason, too. Wisdom dictates that, if one wants to initiate a thousand-year day of rest for the earth, one cannot allow an evil generation to enter that Kingdom and destroy it, just as God could not allow a disobedient and faithless generation of Jews to enter the Promised Land after their 40 years of desert wanderings. (Those who rebelled died in the wilderness, while the young who had not sinned in the likeness of their parents were spared and allowed to enter. See Hebrews 3:14-19.) God had to purge the chaff from His seed before planting, and He will do that at the end of this age as well.

The Bible also says that the Anti-Christ or false Christ will come "with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." (2 Thess. 2:9-10) Whatever the lie is, it will be very convincing and may induce the Great Apostasy (major deception about the true identity of Jesus Christ and true saving faith). Most likely it will be a false but rational explanation for what happened to all these people who disappeared suddenly and without warning.

The question might be asked: How could a worldwide Rapture of Christians, resulting in the sudden disappearance of multiplied millions, not alert the rest of the earth to the need to conform to the Bible and its decrees, especially given such blockbuster warnings as the *Left Behind* book series?

God is very creative. Perhaps the Rapture will not look anything like we expect or like anyone has imagined. With all the millions of people who have read the *Left Behind* series or seen the movie, it's possible that God will not do it the way we anticipate, but will do something entirely creative and unexpected that will leave earthlings wondering what really just happened. All we know for sure is that the Anti-Christ won't be revealed until "the restrainer" is taken out of the way. Everything else is speculation: timing, methodology, accompanying events, how it will be interpreted, and so on.

UFO Mania:

One thought that has occurred to us though is that increasingly frequent and dramatic UFO sightings since the 1940s (the Roswell Incident) are paving the way for a massive worldwide sighting or fly-over¹⁰⁶ immediately following, or concurrent with, the Rapture. Given the fact that technology has continued to advance, with large numbers of people now carrying cell-phone cameras and owning video cameras, there is no doubt that more and more convincing photographic documentation of UFOs will be forthcoming. The number of sightings, the increasing credibility of the witnesses, and the quality of the photographs has gradually brought most people to a place where they actually consider life on other planets a good possibility. Or a certainty. At some point, the evidence for UFOs will be incontrovertible. Put that together with all the movies and television shows that have captivated audiences for the last forty years, from Star Trek (“Beam me up, Scotty”) to Star Wars, Alien to E.T. to Knowing, and you have a society completely prepared for this sort of scenario. Satan, the prince of the power of the air, has made every effort to shape our thinking in favor of his final assault; his last big lie.

Imagine the scene. All of a sudden, in the middle of the day or night, masses of people disappear from the planet: from their beds, from their cars, from airplanes (including pilots), from dinner tables. The world, living as it is in total preoccupation with its own affairs, will come unglued.

But now suppose a massive worldwide UFO fly-over occurred immediately following this catching-away of believers? You can bet that every TV and radio news station around the world would be broadcasting the event. People would be terrified, wondering if they were next; wondering what happened to their loved ones; wondering if the planet were being taken over; and before long, an international figure would come forward to explain that he is in communication (as their designated spokesman) with these aliens and has been briefed on what has happened. We can imagine the explanation: these people have been removed by other-worldly entities for “reeducation” because they are holding the world back from its next evolutionary leap into the new age of peace, tolerance, unity and the brotherhood of man. It will be only too easy to believe,

¹⁰⁶ Assuming that spaceships are not true extraterrestrial beings inhabiting distant planets, but are actually demonic manifestations designed to prepare mankind for this final big lie, we can then imagine that Satan will orchestrate a global fly-over to deceive all who dwell on the earth. How difficult would it be to disbelieve what one sees with one’s own eyes, along with millions of others? Especially if, in the years leading up to this event, more and more cell phone snapshots are put on the internet and on TV “proving” the existence of these vehicles despite our government’s frequent denials.

especially given the popularity of Oprah's new school of enlightenment. Will this spokesman be our man of sin? And if he is a Muslim as we expect, then you can bet that the point will not escape him and will be forcefully made that, since Muslims were not taken for reeducation, they must have the real truth about God. Thus Islam will rise in credibility and Christianity will fall. And since it is the Sonship and deity of Christ that are so opposed by every anti-God force out there, you can expect this one doctrine to be purged from the churches, leading to the Great Apostasy. Judaism will also rise in credibility because Jews, too, deny the Sonship and deity of Christ. So besides its economic woes, America will be demoted due to its "Christian nation" status. All the more motivation to see to her complete and utter destruction (Rev. 17-18).

Do you remember verses in Genesis 6 that tell us that "the Nephilim were on the earth in those days (at the time of Noah) and also afterward" when the sons of God (angels) saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful and they took wives to themselves, whomever they chose and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown." These Nephilim were giants, nine to thirteen feet tall (King Og's bed was 13 feet long), and they polluted the human race, to the point that God finally destroyed it with a flood. Noah, however, was "perfect in his generations," a statement we think indicates his genetic line was not polluted like the rest of humanity. The Bible says that the end days will be just like the days of Noah. If we are soon to be visited by "aliens," keep this in mind. They are not aliens, but fallen angels just like those who, as Jude says (v.6), left their proper abode and went after strange flesh in Noah's day.

Recent statements by the Paradigm Research Group, headed up by Edgar Mitchell, former Apollo astronaut credited with the longest moon walk, suggest that it won't be long before the government will be forced to disclose to the public its classified files on UFOs. "We are being visited," stated Mr. Mitchell. Some countries have already opted to disclose their files, but the United States' press is so controlled that we have not been privy to this information. It's coming. If the Rapture happens soon, it may force this revelation sooner rather than later.

Keep in mind that this does not validate the theory of alien life forms. It only proves that "something is out there." That "something" will prove to be nothing other than Satan's calculated and contrived deception of mankind for these last days.

Whenever and however the Rapture happens, though, one wonders how Israel will respond to this sudden disappearance of millions of Christian and Messianic believers. Right now they are not terribly tolerant of Christians or Messianic Jews in their midst, so this might be seen as a blessing. “Good riddance,” they might say. It gets rid of one very annoying and insulting irritant. True Christians are a burr under the saddle of orthodoxy of any stripe (Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Islamic or Jewish). The world is better off, they’ll say. And the devil will make every effort to convince them they’re right. Until his own lust for power overplays its hand.

Unfortunately they will not be rid of us entirely at the Rapture. The two witnesses who begin prophesying in Jerusalem at that point will not let up for 1260 days. They will continue to proclaim the truth that has been banned elsewhere, until they are finally killed by the Anti-Christ. Their subsequent resurrection and ascension, however, will go some distance in convincing the world of the authenticity of their message.

At any rate, it is not, believe you me, worth the risk to ignore this warning. Playing the odds in this game is pure foolishness. The price is too high and you do not want to pay it. There will be no chance for a “do-over” once this Rapture takes place. (Some will be saved during the Tribulation, many at the cost of their lives, but there is no guarantee those who have already heard and rejected the Gospel will get another chance.)

Note the parable in Luke 13: “And someone said to Him, ‘Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?’ And He said to them: ‘Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying ‘Lord, open up to us!’ Then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’; and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.”

Here is a good question:

If we are wrong about this, what will be the cost to you if you join us in our folly?

If you live well, there will be no cost at all.¹⁰⁷ You, along with everyone else, will be judged for your deeds, or not, depending on what reality lies beyond.

If we're right about this, however, and you do not join us in trusting Jesus, what will be the cost to you?

Every conceivable thing. You will lose on every score and every level. You will spend eternity apart from God and His heaven, at the very least in company with hordes of people who rejected God and His provision of salvation, who have nothing to gain by being righteous and will not spare you their nastiness. At worst, you will spend it in a place of fiery torment, never consumed but in a constant state of dying and relentless misery, pain, unfulfilled desires and appetites, regret and torment.¹⁰⁸

We urge you, appeal to God. Ask Him to show you His truth. It is your only hope. If you are sincere, He will grant your request, and likely in a way that cannot be mistaken.

NOTE: Please go on to read the Afterword for some important information on where to go from here. Also the Appendices are chockfull of helpful insights for the true seeker on the subject of salvation, repentance, eternal security and the nature of God.

¹⁰⁷ Except perhaps your "loss" of all the self-indulgent dalliances with sin that you might forsake for this belief.

¹⁰⁸ Why such horrible consequences? We can only speculate. God may have to grant to Satan those who retained him as master, and Satan and his kingdom are subject to horrible judgment. All those in his camp will suffer with him. One description of hell? A place in which you are not only tormented by demons and your own continual pain and regret, but where you experience all the appetites of the flesh (hunger, sexual desire, need for sleep, etc.) without being able to satisfy any of them even momentarily. Horrible thought.