

PART IV

WHEN WILL THE RAPTURE TAKE PLACE?

*But concerning the **times and the seasons**, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the **day of the Lord** [Tribulation] so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, **Peace and safety**, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, **brethren**, are not in darkness, **that that day should overtake you as a thief**. (1 Thessalonians 5.1-4)*

*Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the **coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and **our gathering together unto him**; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for **it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed**, the son of perdition. (2 Thessalonians 2.1-3)*

NINE

COMMANDS TO BE ALERT

Christians are commanded to “*watch*,” to be “*alert*” and to be spiritually “*awake*” for the Rapture by Jesus, Paul and Peter. Their commands and admonishments were not given to make Christians think Jesus Christ could return at *any moment*. They were given to motivate Christians to “*watch*” for the *warning signs* of His return.

The commands by Jesus to be alert

Jesus gave a few commands to His disciples, and to all Christians of the Church Age, to be “*alert*” and “*ready*” when He returns.

Matthew 24.42-44

A command by Jesus to “*watch*” and to be “*ready*” was given at the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse:

Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.

This command was given to all Christians, but it has greater meaning to us who are living in the “last days” of the “end times.” The “last days” started with the taking back of the holy city of Jerusalem from the Arabs in 1967. That event marked the start of the “end times” (Luke 21.24). We must “*watch*” the *warning signs* to know when Christ will return so we are not caught by surprise as Jesus commanded.

Many prophecy teachers argue that this one command implies that Christ can return at *any moment* since Pentecost. We know this is not what He wanted Christians to believe. Why? He commands all Christians to be “*ready*” and to “*watch*” so we will not be caught by surprise when He returns. How can we be “*ready*” and what do we “*watch*” for to not be caught by surprise? There are only two things we can do – live holy lives and “*watch*” for the *warning signs* that precede the return of Christ. If there is nothing to “*watch*” for how can we “*watch*”?

Matthew 25.13

Jesus told two parables in the Olivet Discourse after giving a detailed description of what would take place before and during the Tribulation. The first was the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25.1-12). Five of the virgins were waiting and ready when the bridegroom returned, and five were not. The virgins who were not ready were not allowed into the wedding feast. At the conclusion of the parable He warned:

Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

The bridegroom was delaying his return; that is why all of the virgins fell asleep. The question of how long the delay will be is obvious. It will be nearly 2000 years, because He has not yet returned. All of the virgins fell asleep, but five were prepared when the bridegroom returned. They had oil in their lamps. Christians today who “*watch*” the *warning signs* are prepared for the return of Christ. Those who are not “*watching*” the *warning signs* are not prepared for His return.

The second parable concerns a man who goes on a journey and gives his servants money to invest while he is gone (Matthew 25.14-30). He was away for a *long time* (Matthew 25.19). We know that the duration between the ascension of Jesus and His return will be about 2000 years. It is obvious that He could not return at *any moment* since His ascension, because He has not returned.

Mark 13.33-37

Jesus gave a command in the Olivet Discourse that is similar to the command that Matthew recorded. We know it is a different command because of the wording.

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch. Watch therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

The only things that we can “*watch*” for are the prophetic *warning signs* that the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, Paul and Peter gave us to “*watch*” for so we would know the approximate time of the Rapture.

Luke 12.40

Jesus gave a similar command earlier in His ministry, after admonishing His followers to seek the kingdom of God rather than the riches of the world (Luke 12.35-39). He concluded by saying:

Be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.

It appears to some that Jesus taught the doctrine of *imminence*, but this statement, as you will see, and all similar statements do not have to do with His *imminent* return. The commands to believers to be “*ready*” and to eagerly “*wait*” for the return of Jesus were given specifically for the “*generation*” living in the “*last days*.” It was also given in a general manner for all generations to keep their minds on the things above rather than the things on Earth (Colossians 3.1-2). Christians who “*watch*” for the *warning signs* of the return of Christ, rather than seek after the riches and the pleasures of this sinful world, are the obedient and faithful servants.

One may also consider that this statement is referring to a Christian who is not actively “*watching*” for the return of Christ by “*looking*” for *warning signs* to be fulfilled. Christ will return when those who are not “*watching*” do not think He will

return. Those who are “*watching*” the *warning signs* will know the approximate time of His return (1 Thessalonians 5.4).

The admonishments by Paul to be alert

Paul gave several admonishments to the churches that he founded to “wait” for the return of Jesus Christ. As we will see, he did not imply that Christ could return at *any moment*.

1 Corinthians 1.7-8

Paul gave this admonishment to the church in Corinth to wait the return of the Lord:

So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye be unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was given specifically for those living in the “end times” and generally to all believers throughout the Church Age, just as the commands by Jesus were given. If Christians keep their eyes on Jesus, each and every day, they are less likely to be carried away by the temptations of the world. One way a Christian keeps his eyes on Jesus is by “waiting” for the fulfillment of the prophecies (*warning signs*) that will take place before Christ returns. Other ways are through daily prayer (Ephesians 6.18; 1 Thessalonians 5.17), study of Scripture (Acts 17.11; 2 Timothy 2.15), and regular fellowship with fellow Christians (Hebrews 10.24-25).

Philippians 3.20

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul stated that all believers are to “wait” for the return of Christ:

For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prior to this statement Paul exhorted his readers to press on toward the goal, be complete, live by the same standard he does and to follow his example (Philippians 3.14-17). He also warned them that there were some people who claimed to be saved, yet they were “*enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things*” (Philippians 3.18-19). In this admonishment, Paul is reminding all believers throughout the Church Age to remember that our home is Heaven, and that they should “wait” for their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1.9-10

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul praised them for turning from idols to the living and true God. He then told them to “wait” for His Son Jesus, who will come

from Heaven to deliver them from the wrath (Tribulation) to come:

For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come.

This command was given to newly-born believers who had turned away from “*idols*” to live holy lives. He added to that command the admonishment to “*wait*” for the return of Jesus. The context of this passage is holiness, and Paul added the promise that Jesus would return someday and keep Christians from going through the Tribulation. The “*wrath to come*” is the Tribulation. When one lives a holy life he will patiently “*wait*” for the return of Christ by “*watching*” the *warning signs*.

All believers from the apostles to the last generation are commanded to “*wait*” for the return of Christ. When one considers the parables of Jesus (Matthew 25.14-30; Luke 19.11-27), where He made it explicitly clear that He would be gone a “*long time*” (Matthew 25.19), it becomes obvious that “*waiting*” for Him does not mean He could return at *any moment* since Pentecost. It means one must be “*patient*,” as James wrote (5.7-8), and “*wait*” for His return by “*looking*” for the *warning signs*.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that Jesus made several prophecies which must be fulfilled prior to His return. He prophesied the Temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24.2), the city of Jerusalem would be taken and controlled by the Gentiles until the “*times of the Gentiles*” was fulfilled (Luke 21.24), and Peter would be martyred in his old age (John 21.18-19).

1 Thessalonians 5.1-9

Later, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul gave another warning to them to “*watch*” for the return of Christ. He described the Rapture (4.13-17), and then commanded them to “*comfort one another with these words*” (v. 18). He continued to explain that they do not need anyone to teach them what will happen just before the Rapture takes place. (There are no chapter breaks in the original text.):

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. (vs. 1-3)

Paul then warned his readers in verses 4-9 to be spiritually alert and sober:

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night: and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not into wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse one, Paul told his readers they had no need for someone to explain to them how they would know when the Rapture would be an *imminent* event. He had already taught them about it when he founded the church. Yet he summarized that teaching in verses 2 and 3. The Rapture/Tribulation will catch the unsaved by surprise, as a “*thief*” does when he comes to steal in the dead of night. They will be cheering when there is a time of so-called “*peace and safety*” in the world. It is just after this period of peace that the Rapture will take place and the Tribulation will start.

The lost will be caught by surprise, but believers who are awake will not be caught by surprise by the return of Christ. They will know the **When** because they will know **What** to look for – a period of false “*peace and safety*” throughout the world.

2 Thessalonians 2.1-3

In his second letter to the church in Thessalonica Paul commanded them to not be deceived about the return of the Lord:

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

Someone had forged a letter claiming that the “*Day of the Lord,*” which starts with the Tribulation, was “*just at hand.*” Paul cleared up the confusion by explaining that two things had to take place before the Tribulation could start – the “*falling away*” and the revealing of the “*man of sin.*”

The only way to keep from being deceived is to know what must take place prior to the start of the Tribulation. Paul had told them in his first letter that there will be a period of “*peace and safety*” before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 5.3). In his second letter he gave two more signs – the “*falling away*” of the Church from the faith, and the revealing of the “*man of sin.*” As noted previously we are living in the time of the “*falling away.*” The next two super-signs are the rise of the “*man of sin*” (Antichrist) and a period of false “*peace and safety.*”

Titus 2.11-13

Paul also exhorted Titus to warn his flock to live holy lives by “*looking*” for the return of Christ:

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is an exhortation to live a holy life. All Christians should be “*looking for the*

blessed hope and appearing” of Christ. It is holy living that leads a person to look for the return of Jesus Christ, and one does that by knowing what the *warning signs* are.

The statement by Jesus to, “*Watch therefore, for ye know not the day or the hour*” of His return (Matthew 25.13), complements the statements by Paul cited above. One cannot know the exact “*day or hour*” of the return of Christ years ahead of time (Matthew 24.36), but when the prophecies leading up to the Tribulation are fulfilled we will be in a much better position to recognize the approximate time of the start of Tribulation. Alert Christians can know the Tribulation is extremely close when there is a worldwide period of false “*peace and safety*” (1 Thessalonians 5.3), and the Antichrist has been revealed (2 Thessalonians 2.3). A Christian can know the approximate time of the **When**, because the **What** has taken place.

The admonishment by Peter to look for the Rapture

Peter also admonished his readers to be “*looking*” for the return of Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3.10-12

Peter wrote this after saying that the world would be destroyed by fire:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

The context of this passage is holiness. Peter explains that, because this present world and universe will be destroyed by fire some day, Christians should live holy lives. While a believer is living a holy life he should be “*looking*” for the Rapture. Again, holiness precedes “*looking*” for the return of Christ. If one is living a holy life, he will then “*watch*” for Christ’s return.

Conclusion

The context of the commands and warnings by Jesus, Paul and Peter to be “*alert*” is holiness. Christians are commanded to live holy lives, and “*looking*” for the return of Christ is an important aspect of holy living. They were not theological truths on which to base a doctrine. Christ cannot return at *any moment*, because numerous prophetic *signs* have to be fulfilled before the start of the Tribulation. If there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation those *warning signs* will be fulfilled before we make our exit. The two most important *warning signs* are the time of false “*peace and safety*” (1 Thessalonians 5.3), and the revealing of the “*man of sin*,” the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2.1-3).

Christians who believe in the false doctrines of Preterism, Amillennialism,

Postmillennialism and Dominion Theology are not obeying the commands of Jesus to “*watch*” for His return by actively “*looking*” for prophecies to be fulfilled before that blessed event. One radio talk show host said that Christians are to “wait for the Second Coming,” but not to look for prophecies to be fulfilled beforehand because there are none (“Bible Answer Man” program, 6.22.2009).

The commands to be “*alert*” were not given to make Christians think Christ could return at *any moment*. The Holy Spirit, who inspired Paul and Peter to write all of their letters, knew that Christ would not return in their lifetime, nor would He return for nearly 2000 years! It would be an act of deception by the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son to give us commands to eagerly “*wait*” for Christ to return at *any moment* when They knew He would not return for 2000 or more years! The end (holy living) can never justify the means (doctrine of *imminence*)! We should all eagerly “look” for the **What** (*warning signs*) to know the time of the **When** (the Rapture).

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 9

1. Jesus and Paul commanded Christians to be “*alert*” for the Rapture. How do Christians stay “*alert*?”
2. Does the command to “*wait*” for the return of Jesus Christ mean He can return at *any moment*?
3. What does the word “*wait*” imply concerning the length of time of the return of Christ?
4. Are Christians commanded to be “*patient*” while they “*wait*” for Christ to return?
5. Should Bible students know the “*times and seasons*” of the return of Christ, and how do they determine what the “*times and seasons*” are?
6. Will the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation catch the unsaved by surprise?
7. Will some Christians be caught by surprise by the Rapture?

8. What is the *super-sign* that Paul says will take place just prior to the Rapture in his first letter to the Thessalonians?

9. What are the other *super-signs* that Paul wrote about in his second letter to the Thessalonians?

10. If one is living a holy life, will he be “*looking*” for the return of Christ?

11. Can the end ever justify the means?

TEN

THE GAP

Most Pre-Tribulation eschatologists do not teach that there is a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation, yet some argue that there is a *gap* of a few days, weeks or months. Some even argue that there could be years or decades between these two events. A few prophecy teachers who have held to this hypothesis are – Clarence Larkin, Timothy LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, Chuck Smith, Chuck Missler, Jimmy Swaggart and Earl Radmacher.

Arguments against a Gap

Morgan Edwards
(1722-1795)

Morgan Edwards, a Welsh historian of religion and Baptist preacher, pastored several churches in England, Ireland and America. He was the second person in the Modern Era to publish a writing concerning the timing of the Rapture. During his studies at Bristol Baptist Seminary in England (1742-44), he wrote a 56 page essay for eschatology class that was later published in Philadelphia in 1788 under the title: *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties*. He said the Rapture would take place 3½ years before the Second Advent of Jesus Christ:

I say, *somewhat more --*; because the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's "appearing in the air" (I Thes. iv. 17); and **this will be about three years and a half before the millennium**, as we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many "mansions in the father's house" (John xiv. 2), and so disappear during the foresaid period of time. The design of this retreat and disappearing will be to judge the risen and changed saints; for "now the time is come that judgment must begin," and that will be "at the house of God" (I Pet. iv. 17) (Ibid., p. 7, emphasis mine)

Edwards believed the Rapture would take place 3½ years before the Second Coming. That would make him a Mid-Tribulationist. He obviously did not believe in a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation.

Edwards wrote of a Rapture almost 90 years before John Darby made public his belief in a Pre-tribulation Rapture. He also pre-dated the work of the Jesuit priest Manuel de Lacunza (1731-1801), *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, published in 1812, by 70 years. It was later published in English in 1827. It is possible that Edwards was influenced by the commentary that Jesuit priest Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) wrote on the book of Revelation, published in 1590. He said the Tribulation would last 3½ years.

John Nelson Darby
(1800-1882)

John Darby was an Anglo-Irish evangelist, and a co-founder of the Plymouth Brethren. He is considered to be the father of modern Dispensationalism, and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine. He did not believe in a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation:

In 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-4, after speaking of the day of the Lord coming on the world as a thief in the night, the apostle adds, “*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief.*” The natural inference being, that the day of the Lord will come **simultaneously** upon the world and the church; only it will find the latter prepared for it, while it will be destruction to the former.¹ (The Coming of the Lord and the Translation of the Church, emphasis mine)

He said the “day of the Lord” (Tribulation) will come upon the righteous and the unsaved “simultaneously.” He does not leave room for a *gap* just as the Bible does not.

J. Vernon McGee
(1904-1988)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee, an ordained Presbyterian minister who later pastored the interdenominational Open Door Church in Los Angeles, was a well-loved Bible teacher (Bible Institute of Los Angeles), noted graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, theologian and radio preacher (Thru the Bible Radio program). He emphatically taught that there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. He said the rapture of the church actually does two things:

“**It ends this day of grace**” and “**it begins the day of the Lord.** The great tribulation will get under way when the church leaves the earth. The **one event of the rapture will end the day of grace and begin the day of the Lord. It closes one day and opens another.**” (*1 and II Thessalonians*, p. 86, emphasis mine)

John Walvoord
(1910-2002)

John Walvoord, who succeeded Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer as president of Dallas Seminary in 1952, was the author of over 30 books. His expertise was prophecy, and he did not teach a *gap* between the Rapture and Tribulation:

The **first thing** that’s going to happen **after the Rapture** is that we’re entering a new period called the “Day of the Lord”... This is a day of grace, God’s withholding judgment. **Once the Rapture occurs it changes immediately.** It’s the “Day of the Lord”... Now the “**Day of the Lord**” is going to begin at the **time of the Rapture** according to 1 Thessalonians 5, and it’s going to continue, I think, through the whole end time period even the 1000 year reign of Christ on

Earth. That whole period is a time when God deals in direct judgment upon sin... **So that's going to be the beginning.** ("The Second Coming" audio tape, date unknown, recording available, emphasis mine)

**Harold Lindsell
(1913-1998)**

Dr. Harold Lindsell, former associate editor of *Christianity Today* magazine, and co-founder of Fuller Seminary, believed there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. We quote him again because of his clear statement concerning the *gap* theory:

The overwhelming verdict of those who hold to a pretribulation rapture is that this so-called *signless event* is **followed immediately by the seven-year tribulation period**. Thus, immediately following the rapture of the Church, Israel and the Antichrist will enter into a covenant. (*The Gathering Storm*, p. 137, emphasis mine)

**Oliver Greene
(1915-1976)**

Oliver Greene, independent fundamental Baptist evangelist, author of over 100 books and booklets and founder of the Gospel Hour radio ministry, left no room for a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation in his theology:

Immediately after the Rapture, the false Messiah will make his appearance. He will be riding upon a white horse (a symbol of peace) with a bow – but no arrow – in his hand (another symbol of peace). (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*, p. 157, emphasis mine)

**Dave Breese
(1926-2002)**

Dave Breese, a notable televangelist and pastor, founded Christian Destiny Ministry, helped form the AWANA Youth Association and served with Youth for Christ for 13 years. He taught the Pre-Tribulation Rapture during his distinguished ministry, yet he did not believe there would be a *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation. In his essay, "The Rapture," he explains:

The Tribulation is the beginning of "the day of the Lord." As we have seen, the Christians were conscious – because they read about it in the Old Testament – that there was a time of fearful judgment coming upon the world called the day of the Lord. The churches, however, needed instruction as to how to discern the presence of the day of the Lord and the way to know that the day of grace was finished. Concerning this, the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, saying, "*Now we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by*

spirit, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1-2).

The apostle Paul is, therefore, saying that the **rapture** of the Church, concerning which he had carefully instructed the Thessalonians, was the **watershed point ending the day of grace and beginning the day of the Lord**. In that the Rapture had not taken place, the day of the Lord was not yet present.

Here, the apostle Paul gives us a **clear line of demarcation** between the Church Age, the day of grace, and the day of the Lord, which is the day of divine judgment. That **line of demarcation is the rapture of the Church**. (James, William T., *Storming Toward Armageddon*, pp. 298-299, emphasis mine)

The Rapture is the event that separates the “Day of Grace” (Church Age) from the “Day of the Lord” (Tribulation). Some Pre-Tribulationists understand this, and do not allow for a *gap* between those events.

J. Dwight Pentecost

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, a theologian best known for his book *Things to Come*, is the Distinguished Professor of Bible Exposition, Emeritus, at Dallas Theological Seminary, one of only two so honored. During his academic career he has taught biblical subjects for 6 decades (Philadelphia College of Bible, 1948-55; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955-present). He is a leading Pre-Tribulationist who does not allow room for a *gap*. His book, *Things to Come*, states that the Tribulation begins immediately after the Rapture:

The only way this day could break unexpectedly upon the world is to have it begin **immediately after the rapture of the church**. It is thus concluded that the Day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God’s dealing with Israel after the **rapture at the beginning of the tribulation period** and extending through the second advent and the millennial age unto the creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millennium. (*Things to Come*, pp. 230-231, emphasis mine)

Jack Van Impe

Dr. Jack Van Impe, a noted televangelist, host of the “Jack Van Impe Presents” television show and an avid teacher of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture for over 50 years, teaches the doctrine of *imminence*, yet he makes no allowance for a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation:

Multitudes today are unaware of the fact that there are two stages or phases within the process of the second coming – the Rapture and the Revelation – and that these events are **separated by a seven-year** period of time. (*11:59 and Counting*, p. 8, emphasis mine)

The Rapture is not Christ’s appearance upon earth, but a meeting in the heavenlies – an intermediary evacuation of believers from earth before the storm. **Seven**

years later, Christ does come to earth, touching down on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). (Ibid., pp. 16-17, emphasis mine)

The Day of the Lord begins as the Tribulation period commences. It continues through the 1,000-year reign of Christ because the destruction of the world by fire afterward is still called the Day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10). Some try to make this the Rapture, causing confusion. It begins immediately *after* the Rapture. This is the reason that the Day of the Lord comes *as a thief in the night* (1 Thessalonians 5:2). (*Jack Van Impe Study Bible*, pp. 28-29, emphasis added, JVI)

There are two stages or phases within the process of the Second Coming – the Rapture and the Revelation – and these are **separated by a seven-year period of time... This event ends the Church Age and ushers in the Tribulation period.** (Ibid., p. 81, emphasis mine)

Van Impe says there is a time of just 7 years between the Rapture and the Second Coming. Therefore, there could not be a *gap* between the Rapture and the beginning of the 7-year Tribulation. In his television show that aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (April 20, 2009), clarified his position:

The **first night** of the **New World Order** is when a leader goes to Israel and makes peace between the Arabs and the Jews; **that is the night we're gone**. Then that government **lasts for 7 years**, then Christ comes back to stop the New World Order, and set up His kingdom here. That's how near it is.

Remember, we'll not know who he (**Antichrist**) is because the **Rapture takes place the night before this one comes to power**. That's how near it is. (Emphasis mine)

Salem Kirban

Salem Kirban has been writing prophecy books for over 40 years, and firmly believing in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture and in *imminence*, yet he does not see a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. Concerning the concept that human history will last 7000 years, he wrote in 1978:

The 6th day then, according to this suggestion would end at about the year 1996. The Millennium would then be ushered in and the thousand year reign of the saints with Christ would begin. If this assumption was correct, then the **Rapture** would take place at **seven years before the Millennium**. (*Guide to Survival*, pp. 136-137, emphasis mine)

Timothy LaHaye

Dr. Timothy LaHaye teaches that there may be a *gap* between the Rapture and start of the Tribulation, but in a chart in his prophecy Bible he does not show there is a *gap*.²

Thomas Ice

Dr. Thomas Ice, Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center that was founded by Dr. Timothy LaHaye in 1994, Associate Professor of Religion at Liberty University and author of several books on Bible prophecy, does not believe there is a *gap*. From his website, in an essay concerning the *signs* of the times, he tells us:

The present church age is not a time in which Bible prophecy is being fulfilled. Bible prophecy relates to a time after the rapture (the seven-year tribulation period). However, this does not mean that God is not preparing the world for that future time during the present church age – in fact, He is. But this is not “fulfillment” of Bible prophecy. So while prophecy is not being fulfilled in our day, it does not follow that we cannot track “general trends” in current preparation for the coming tribulation, **especially since it immediately follows the rapture.**³ (“Signs of the times and Prophetic Fulfillment,” emphasis mine)

Perry Stone

Perry Stone, televangelist and host of the “Manna-Fest” television program, said there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation:

Everything changes in **one day**. In **one day’s time** the **Rapture happens**. In that **same time** when the Rapture happens, in that **same hour**, it **introduces the day of the Lord**, the day of God’s judgment, the day of God’s wrath.

We have the Rapture which is the day of Christ. It’s the gathering together unto the Lord the Bible talks about. But that **Rapture**, day of Christ, **introduces the beginning of the day of the Lord**. The day of the Lord then goes for **7 years**, the great **Tribulation period**. The first part is the wrath of the Lamb, the second half, the second 42 months, is the wrath of God poured out on the Earth. (“Manna-Fest” TV program, 3.09.2009, emphasis mine)

Dave Hunt

Dave Hunt, a Christian apologist, speaker, radio commentator and author, began full-time ministry in 1973, and founded the Berean Call in 1990. He has written several books on theology, prophecy and the cults. He stated that the Rapture takes place 7 years before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

One cannot escape the fact that Christ and His apostles gave definite signs to watch for that would herald the nearness of His return. Why give these signs if some generation at some time in the future was not expected to recognize them and know that His Second Coming was, as He Himself said, “near, even at the doors”?

Yes, but if the **Rapture occurs seven years prior to the Second Coming**, then those signs are not for us. (*How Close Are We?*, p. 115, emphasis mine)

Hilton Sutton

Hilton Sutton, founder of Hilton Sutton World Ministries, and author of numerous books about the Bible, has been teaching Bible prophecy for over 50 years. He does not believe in a *gap*:

The return of Jesus is in two stages **separated by seven years**: Rapture before the Tribulation and return at the end of the Tribulation.⁴ (Emphasis mine.)

Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith has stated a few times that he does not believe there is a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. In his 1976 book, *Snatched Away*, he did not leave room for a *gap*:

We'll be with the Lord in heaven for a **7-year period** during which time the earth will experience what's known as the Great Tribulation, when the judgment of God is being poured out upon the earth. (pp. 7-8, emphasis mine)

In his 1977 book, *What the World is Coming to*, he said:

The Church will be transported into heaven for a **seven-year period** during which time there will be a Great Tribulation upon the earth. (pp. 39-40, emphasis mine)

When he was asked if he believes Daniel's 70th week begins immediately after the Rapture he said, "Yes, yes, we believe that. We definitely believe that." He also made the following comments during the same radio broadcast concerning the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation:

Well, I believe that the **7-year period** will probably, pretty much take place **as soon as the Church is out**. As I see the events in the Bible, when Israel is invaded by this army, great army of combined Muslim nations in Ezekiel 38, and God then rises to their defense supernaturally, and destroys this army that is coming against Jerusalem, that in chapter 39 of Ezekiel in that day He is going to pour His Spirit again upon the nation of Israel. He'll no longer hide Himself from them, and that, I believe, will **correspond with the Lord taking His Church out of the Earth**. ("To Every Man an Answer" radio program, 4.01.2002, emphasis mine)

And I believe that the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the Church today is the only thing that is keeping the Antichrist from taking over the world at this very moment. And I do believe that **the moment the Church is taken out that the Antichrist will be revealed along with the False Prophet**. ("To Every Man an Answer" radio program, 5.15.2003, emphasis mine)

Smith reinforced his belief that there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation on the "Pastor's Perspective" radio program in 2010. A caller said he heard Timothy LaHaye say there was a *gap* between the Rapture and Tribulation, and asked Smith what his position was. He responded by saying:

I really **don't know** where Tim LaHaye would get the idea that there was a gap between the rapture of the Church and the Tribulation... **I don't see that there's necessarily a time gap there.** I would think that as soon as God destroys this invading army it would appear that the Church will already be gone or raptured. ("Pastor's Perspective" radio program, 1.19.2010, emphasis mine)

Although Smith has said a few times that he believes there is no *gap* he has stated a couple times that there is a *gap*. A caller asked him if he believed the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation would take place on the same day based on Luke 17.27, 29. He replied:

Well, well I still believe the judgment of God in the great Tribulation probably **won't be the moment the Church is taken** out because of the fact the Church, it seems that the Church would be taken out, I believe, at that time the Antichrist would be revealed. (KWVE, 107.9 FM, 12.10.2007, emphasis mine)

He made a confession concerning the example of judgment falling on Sodom the same day Lot departed the city:

And so **it would appear** that with, with Lot you know, that in **the day** that he went out that the **judgment came.** (Ibid., emphasis mine)

In conclusion he answered by saying it is "plausible" for the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation to take place on the same day:

So, I... I don't... you know, **it's a plausible thing**, but I don't quite see it that way myself. (Ibid., emphasis mine,)

Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen, associate pastor of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, California, and son-in-law of Chuck Smith, said the Tribulation will start when the Rapture takes place. He first said the Day of the Lord begins with the Rapture, and the Rapture occurs simultaneously with the Tribulation. His last statement is that the Day of the Lord probably begins with the Rapture:

I think it **begins with the Rapture...** We believe that the **Rapture will occur and then the Antichrist will come to power...** ("To Everyman an Answer," radio program, 2002, emphasis mine)

The things that are building up to the Rapture or that Tribulation period of time, and we see the **Rapture as being simultaneous with the Tribulation beginning.** There is some guess work involved and sometimes we're close and sometimes we're not so close. ("To Everyman an Answer," radio program, 5.07.2002, emphasis mine)

The idea of the **Day of the Lord** is not restricted to one 24-hour day. It is a period of time, which probably, you know, it's a bit speculative, but it probably **begins with the Rapture**, because of course, Jesus speaks about His coming as a thief in the night, and He seems to indicate that that is going to be the time that what we

call the **Tribulation** or the judgment **begins** to be poured out on the Earth. (“Pastor’s Perspective,” radio program, 10.02.2008, emphasis mine)

So of course the church being removed from the world is the Rapture, and **that would bring about the final seven-year period**. So we tend to see it more **simultaneously** that it would **happen concurrently**. (“Pastor’s Perspective” radio program, 1.19.2010, emphasis mine)

Don Stewart

Don Stewart, associate pastor of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, and co-host of “Pastor’s Perspective” radio show does not believe there is a *gap*:

His coming is what we call His revelation; that’s at His Second Coming, and that is what is in view here. The Rapture is an event that precedes it. Now the question, of course, is how long does it precede the revelation of Christ? Is it instantaneous or almost the same? Or is it like we believe here, we believe the Bible teaches, **7 years before?** (“To Every Man an Answer,” 3.27.1998, emphasis mine)

The Second Coming is in two stages, first the Rapture of the Church and then **7 years later** the revelation of Christ. So Christ comes first for the Church, takes the Church back to Heaven, the Rapture, then the revelation comes **7 years later**. (“Pastor’s Perspective,” 5.12.2009, emphasis mine)

And the **day of the Lord** which is God’s judgment on the Earth **begins** on the Earth **when the Rapture of the Church takes place**. We sort of set the stage, don’t we Chuck? **Once we’re out of here that’s when the clock starts ticking again**. (“Pastor’s Perspective,” 8.27.2009, emphasis mine)

Smith answered Stewart’s question by saying, “Yes, it opens the door.” Stewart confirmed his belief that there is no gap in a radio call-in program that Chuck Smith and Brian Brodersen were part of:

Yeah, if there was a gap of time between the taking out of the Church, the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel you wonder who is God working with what people on the Earth because it’s the Jews He is going to work with the last seven-year period, and if the Church isn’t here He doesn’t seem like He has anybody. So it seems almost it has to **happen simultaneously** there, Mel, and you know this is the Church Age, and when the **Church Age ends at the Rapture, at the same time that agreement will be confirmed or signed and that will begin the last seven-year period** culminating in the Second Coming of Christ. So again we **don’t see a necessity of a gap** particularly with seven-year idea with the burning of the weapons and so it seems **one’s going to follow directly after the other**. (“Pastor’s Perspective” radio program, 1.19.2010)

The Days of Noah and Lot

Jesus taught the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation take place on the same 24-hour day:

And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: after the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away: and let him that is in the field likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. (Luke 17.26-33)

The flood began on the same 24-hour day that Noah entered the ark:

*In the **selfsame day** entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth. (Genesis 7.13, 17, emphasis mine)*

Jesus said that on the day that the Rapture takes place the Tribulation will start. On the day that Lot departed Sodom, God brought judgment upon it:

*And when the **morning arose**, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters that are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. But he lingered; and the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, Jehovah being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. (Genesis 19.15-16, emphasis mine)*

*The **sun was risen upon the earth** when Lot came unto Zoar. Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. (Genesis 19.23-25, emphasis mine)*

The flood began on the very 24-hour day Noah and his family entered the ark. Sodom was destroyed on the same 24-hour day that Lot departed. Therefore, the Rapture should occur on the 24-hour day that the Tribulation starts. A “day” must be a normal 24-hour day or the statement about not going down from the rooftop or back to the house makes no sense (Luke 17.31).

Conclusion

Jesus said that on the very “*day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all*” (Luke 17.27), and “*in the day that Lot went out from*

Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17.29). He then said, “*After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed*” (Luke 17.30). This is the first revealing at the Rapture. If there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation, all the prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts will be fulfilled before the Rapture. Therefore, the Rapture should not take place until all those prophecies (*warning signs*) have been fulfilled.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 10

1. Why do some eschatologists believe there is a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation?
2. Did judgment fall on the unsaved on the same 24-hour day that Noah and his family enter the ark?
3. Did judgment fall on the unsaved on the same 24-hour day that Lot and his family depart from Sodom?
4. Did Jesus say that “*as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man,*” meaning judgment will fall on the world on the 24-hour day that He raptures the Church?
5. Is there any passage in the Bible that says there is a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation?
6. If a doctrine has no Scripture to support it, should it be taught as a biblical truth, or as an opinion?

7. Who do you think is right? Those who believe in **a gap**, or those who believe there is **no gap**:

No gap

Morgan Edwards
John Nelson Darby
J. Vernon McGee
John Walvoord
Harold Lindsell
Oliver Greene
Dave Breese
J. Dwight Pentecost
Jack Van Impe
Salem Kirban
Thomas Ice
Perry Stone
Dave Hunt
Hilton Sutton
Chuck Smith (formerly believed in a gap)
Brian Brodersen
Don Stewart

Gap

Clarence Larkin
Timothy LaHaye
Hal Lindsey
Chuck Smith
Chuck Missler
Jimmy Swaggart
Earl Radmacher

ELEVEN

THE DOCTRINE OF IMMINENCE

Ever since the disciples asked Jesus that all-important question, “*When will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the world?*” (Matthew 24.3), Bible students have tried to determine when Jesus Christ will return. Some have predicted His return would take place on specific dates while others have taught He can return at *any moment*. The Bible exhorts all Christians to “*look,*” “*watch*” and “*wait*” for His return.

Definition of Imminence

Dr. Thomas Ice gives a definition of this doctrine on his website:

What is the biblical definition of imminency? Four important elements contribute to a pretribulational understanding of imminency. First, imminency means that the rapture could take place at any moment. While other events may take place before the rapture, no event must precede it. If prior events are required before the rapture, then the rapture could not be described as imminent. Thus, if any event were required to occur before the rapture, then the concept of imminency would be destroyed.

Second, since the rapture is imminent and could happen at any moment, then it follows that one must be prepared for it to occur at any time, without sign or warning.

Third, imminency eliminates any attempt at date setting. Date setting is impossible since the rapture is signless (i.e., providing no basis for date setting) and if imminency is really true, the moment a date was fixed then Christ could not come at any moment, destroying imminency.

Fourth, Renold Showers says, “A person cannot legitimately say that an imminent event will happen soon. The term ‘soon’ implies that an event must take place ‘within a short time (after a particular point of time specified or implied).’ By contrast, an imminent event may take place within a short time, but it does not have to do so in order to be imminent. As I hope you can see by now, ‘imminent’ is not equal to ‘soon.’” A. T. Pierson has noted that, “Imminence is the combination of two conditions, viz.,: certainty and uncertainty. By an imminent event we mean one which is certain to occur at some time, uncertain at what time.” (“Imminency And The Any-Moment Rapture”)¹

The statement by Ice that teacher’s of *imminence* cannot say that Christ is coming “soon” or “very soon” is correct. Unfortunately, some men who teach the doctrine of *imminence* frequently say the Rapture will take place “soon.”

The doctrine of Imminence is not stated in the Bible

Dr. John Walvoord, who was an ardent Pre-Tribulationist, admitted that *imminence* is a doctrine that is not stated in the Bible:

Pretribulationism is **an induction** rather than an explicit statement of the Bible. (*The Rapture Question*: Revised, 11th printing, 1973, p. 181, emphasis mine)

While pretribulationists have strained to find some specific reference in support of their views **most adherents concede** that there is no explicit reference... (Ibid, p. 182, emphasis mine)

The early church believed in the imminency of the Lord's return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism. (Ibid. p. 192)

If the doctrine of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture "is an induction rather than an explicit statement of the Bible," then the doctrine of *imminence* is also "an induction rather than an explicit statement." We disagree with Walvoord that *imminence* "is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism." There is no need for it to defend the Pre-Tribulation doctrine as will be shown in the following chapter.

Arguments against Imminence

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)

Sir Isaac Newton was an English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, natural philosopher, alchemist and theologian. He was one of the most influential men in history, and is considered by some to have been the greatest scientist ever. The truth that the Jewish people must return to their ancient homeland before the Rapture has been known among some theologians throughout the Church Age. The most famous theologian who wrote about the physical return of the Jews to Israel was Newton. More than 300 years before the nation of Israel was re-established he made this insightful statement:

Since the commandment to return precedes the Messiah... it may perhaps come forth not from the Jews themselves, but from some other kingdom friendly to them, and precede their return from captivity and give occasion to it; and, lastly, that the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the waste places is predicted in Micah. vii. 11, Amos ix. 11, 14, Ezek. xxxvi. 33, 35, 36, 38, Isa. liv. 3, 11, 12, lv. 12, lxi. 4, lxxv. 18, 21, 22...and thus the return from captivity and coming of the Messiah and his kingdom are described in Daniel vii, Rev. xix., Acts i., Mal. iv., Joel iii., Ezek. xxxvi., xxxvii., Isa. lx., lxii., lxiii., lxxv., and lxxvi., and many other places of Scripture. (Moore, Philip N., *The End of History Messiah Conspiracy*, p. 493; citing Franz Kobler, *Newton on the Restoration of the Jews*, 1943, pp. 22-23, citing *Yahudah Manuscript 9.2*)

Newton knew the Jews had to return to the Holy Land before Christ could return. He did not believe in *imminence* and understood specific prophecies had to be fulfilled before Christ could return to rapture the Church.

Harold Lindsell
(1913-1998)

Dr. Harold Lindsell rejected the doctrine of *imminence*. In his book, *The Gathering Storm*, he explains why *warning signs* of the Tribulation are also *warning signs* of the Rapture, and why this fact destroys the doctrine of *imminence*:

Every premillennial scholar agrees that specific signs, giving detailed information about events which will transpire during the tribulation period, are found in Scripture. The overwhelming verdict of those who hold to a pretribulation rapture is that this so-called *signless event* is followed immediately by the seven-year tribulation period. Thus, immediately following the rapture of the Church, Israel and the Antichrist will enter into a covenant. *Three-and-a-half years before the second coming of Christ*, says Dr. Walvoord, *the dictator in the Mediterranean will desecrate a future Jewish temple and stop sacrificial worship of God being carried on in this temple (Armageddon, p. 95)*. The obvious is all too apparent. There could be no rapture until the Jews come back to Palestine and Jerusalem is in their hands so they can rebuild the temple. This rebuilding of the temple could not take place unless Israel was in the land and in control of old Jerusalem unless the rapture occurs at an indefinite period of time before the Day of the Lord commences. The Jews must be in the land before the tribulation begins. The Jews are in the land, although the rapture has not yet taken place. Thus, it becomes plain that the signs having to do with the tribulation are pertinent to the rapture and that these signs make an any-moment rapture from the days of the apostles an invalid thesis. (p. 137)

Oliver Greene
(1915-1976)

Dr. Oliver Greene did not fully believe in *imminence*. He said before the Rapture takes place the divinity of Jesus Christ will be stripped away, and the people of the world would be conditioned to worship an image:

All of this will lead to mass idolatry; and **when the world is educated** to the point where the masses will fall down and worship an image, the **Rapture will occur** and the Church will be caught up. Immediately after the Rapture the Antichrist will make his appearance and offer peace and prosperity to the world – the Utopia the Post-Millennialists have talked about but have never brought about. (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*, p. 251, emphasis mine)

We know, as Greene noted, the unsaved must be conditioned to worship an image. We have seen maniacal dictators seek worship in the recent past such as Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao and Obama. When the Antichrist rises to power the lost will be fully

conditioned to worship a man and his image, or the Antichrist will condition them before the Rapture.

Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith does not believe the full doctrine of *imminence*. He says Christ can return only during the “age when the church was to be taken out”:

As we approach the day in which the Lord takes His church out of this world, it would only be fitting that He make us more aware of the promise to the church of being caught up before the great tribulation. Why would the Lord reveal it to Martin Luther, John Calvin, or any Reformation church leaders? **They weren't living in the age when the church was to be taken out.** (*The Final Act*, p. 192, emphasis mine)

Smith is correct that there was no need for Jesus to give the Reformers insight into eschatology. They were not living in the time of His return.

He is not certain which event is *imminent* – the Rapture or the Russian invasion of Israel:

As I understand Bible prophecy, one of the next major events to take place in the Biblical order of events will be either Russia's attacking Israel or the Rapture of the Church. **Which is going to come first we don't know.** (*The Soon to be Revealed Antichrist*, p. 4, emphasis mine)

In the very next paragraph he had this to say concerning the *imminence* of the Rapture:

In reality, the rapture of the Church can take place at any time. (Ibid.)

Smith is not certain which event is *imminent*, yet he contends that the Rapture is *imminent*. If the Russian invasion of Israel takes place first, then the Rapture is not an *imminent* event.

In an answer to a question on Pastor's Perspective radio program, Smith said that certain things had to take place prior to the Rapture such as Israel being back in the land, and weapons of mass destruction being developed.³

He defends the doctrine of *imminence* as many do by arguing it is necessary for Christians to believe it to continue serving God. In a response to the doctrine of Preterism he said:

I think that when you deny and take away the expectancy of the imminent return of Jesus Christ that you are opening the door to a lot of, you might say, slothful Christian living. It's no longer an urgency in our getting the gospel out to the world. It's no longer something that, you know, we need to do. We see things in a totally different light, and so I think it has brought spiritual death wherever the doctrine has gone. (“Pastor's Perspective,” 1.09.2006)

Belief in the doctrine of *imminence* is not necessary to keep Christians from “slothful living.” It is also not needed to make Christians understand the urgency of

sharing the gospel with the lost, and it also does not bring “spiritual death.” None of the reformers believed in the 20th century doctrine of *imminence*. Some thought the Rapture would take place in their lifetime because they thought all of the *signs* of Christ’s return had been fulfilled. They turned the world upside down just as the apostles did (Acts 17.6).

Christians who are not motivated to live a holy life with a zeal to share the gospel with the lost because of the incredible gift of eternal life, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will not be motivated by believing in *imminence*.

Timothy LaHaye

Dr. Timothy LaHaye does not fully believe in the doctrine of *imminence* either. The following is a most insightful statement:

I personally believe Christ’s return will occur after Russia is destroyed, as I explain more fully in the next chapter. I am convinced that the destruction of Russia will appear as a supernatural event that will cause all the world to know that God has acted. During the aftermath of this catastrophe, millions of people will seek the Lord. In fact, the greatest soul harvest in the history of mankind may result from that moment of divine retribution. If so, there will be a need for harvesters; since this event takes place before Israel’s conversion and the sealing of the 144,000 during the first half of the Tribulation, who will be better equipped to do the harvesting than the church of Jesus Christ and her worldwide host of missionaries?

I risk the criticism of colleagues when I suggest that Christ may rapture His church *after* the destruction of Russia – particularly (sic) because there is no conclusive biblical teaching for this view. I may be influenced by my yearning to see the mighty soul harvest, as related in the next chapter. But I caution the reader not to be dogmatic. We know Russia will be destroyed, but we cannot determine exactly when in the scenario it will happen. (*The Coming Peace in the Middle East*, p. 150, emphasis added, T.L.)

LaHaye added to the above statement by saying:

Yes, **I am inclined to believe** that as members of the body of Jesus Christ **we will see the destruction of Russia** and have an opportunity to share in an unprecedented soul harvest. This is one reason why I challenge Christians everywhere to develop the practice of sharing their faith effectively and to appropriate the maximum means of communication in this day. (Ibid., p. 152, emphasis mine)

And what about the Rapture? I *think* it will occur after the destruction of Russia, so Christians will be on the scene to be the soul-winning harvesters when as much as 20-25 percent of the world’s population receives Christ. He *could* come to take away His church *before* the invasion. The Rapture could take place at anytime. Even today. (Ibid., p. 188, emphasis T.L.)

The statement by LaHaye that the Rapture will take place after Russia is defeated is significant. It is an extremely important *warning sign* that we should look for to know how near the Rapture is.

Jack Van Impe

Dr. Jack Van Impe teaches the doctrine of *imminence*. He believes it is not a new doctrine claiming that the early Church fathers “believed it” as well as some of the reformers. “The Church was told to live in the light of the imminent coming of the Lord to translate them into His presence... The return of Christ for His Church is a signless and always imminent event” (*Jack Van Impe Study Bible*, pp. 45, 81). Yet he understands some prophecies could not be fulfilled until the 20th century. This is what he wrote in 1983 about Russia invading Israel, as Ezekiel prophesied in chapters 38 and 39:

Let me repeat that Russia could not march until Israel became a nation, and there was no Israel until 1948. Thus, this event could not have taken place in past history. Because Israel now exists as a nation, and because Russia moves against Israel when she is a nation, I want you to follow a thrilling outline with me. (*11:59 and Counting*, p. 100)

Van Impe showed the Rapture was not *imminent* until at least 1948. Since he believes there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation as noted in Chapter 6 of this book (p. 116), it means he cannot reasonably believe the doctrine of *imminence*. There are 16 more prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts (Appendix A). It is impossible for them to be fulfilled on the day the Tribulation starts. They must be fulfilled before that day, therefore the Rapture, which takes place on the same 24-hour day the Tribulation starts, cannot take place at *any moment*.

In his video entitled, “AD 2000, the End?” he said he believes in the 6 day 6000 year hypothesis. Any prophecy teacher who believes that hypothesis cannot reasonably believe in the doctrine of *imminence* until the 6000 years are up. Van Impe believed it would be up in the year 2000 AD. Since that year has come and gone he can now say he believes the Rapture is an *imminent* event.

Dave Hunt

Dave Hunt is a leading Pre-Tribulationist, and an ardent defender of the doctrine of *imminence*. Yet he believes there will be a definite *sign* just prior to the Rapture. In Chapter 19 of his book, *How Close Are We?*, he had this to say about the timing of the Rapture:

The Rapture comes in the midst of peace (I Thessalonians 5:3); the Second Coming in the midst of war (Revelation 19:11-21). (p. 204, emphasis mine)

Hunt clearly understands that the Rapture will take place during a time of universal peace, just as Paul said:

When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction will come upon

them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. (1 Thessalonians 5.3-4)

Paul said Christians of the Church Age will see this period of false “*peace and safety*,” and they should not be caught by surprise when it is broken by the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. It is one of the last major *warning signs* that will alert Christians to the *imminence* of the Rapture.

Hunt and others say *imminence* keeps Christians from backsliding:

And what an encouragement to carnality and worldly living it would have been to know that the Lord couldn’t come at any moment and catch one by surprise doing, perhaps, those things that no Christian should. Much would have been lost by giving the date of the Rapture – and nothing would have been gained. (*How Close Are We?*, p. 316)

Only if His imminent return is our constant hope will we live as true followers of Christ... (Ibid., p. 320)

Millions of Christians have lived holy lives without believing in *imminence*. Belief in that doctrine does not edify one to live a holy life.

Joel Rosenberg

Joel Rosenberg, a New York Times best-selling author and founder of the Joshua Fund, is a strong Pre-Tribulationist who believes in *imminence*, but he thinks it is possible the Russian invasion of Israel could take place before the Rapture. He answered the question, “Will the War of Gog and Magog happen before or after the Rapture?” by saying:

The truth is we simply **do not know the answer for certain**, because Ezekiel does not say. Many of the theologians I have cited in this book believe the war will occur after the Rapture. In the novel *Left Behind*, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins describe the War of Gog and Magog as having already happened before the Rapture takes place. In *The Ezekiel Option*, I also chose to portray the war occurring before the Rapture. (Emphasis mine)

He went on to argue:

It would certainly be consistent with God’s heart for humanity that he would cause this cataclysmic moment to occur before the Rapture in order to shake people out of their spiritual apathy and/or rebellion and give them at least one more chance to receive Christ as their Savior before the terrible events of the Tribulation occur.

But let me be clear: I believe that the Rapture could occur at any moment, and I would certainly not be surprised in any way if it occurred before the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 come to pass.

Christian theologians speak of the “doctrine of imminence.” This means that according to the Bible there is no prophetic event that has to happen before Jesus

snatches his church from the earth. That is, the Bible teaches us that we should be ready for Jesus to come for us at any moment. I fully believe that. But it should be noted with regard to this doctrine that while no major prophetic event has to happen before the Rapture, that doesn't mean no such event will happen first. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this truth is the rebirth of Israel. This major prophetic event was foretold in Ezekiel 36–37, yet **its fulfillment happened before the Rapture**. Thus, it is **certainly possible that other events—such as the events of Ezekiel 38–39—could happen before the Rapture as well.**⁴ (Emphasis mine)

“Couldda” Dispensationalism

Dr. Wouldda Shouldda Couldda believes the Rapture became an *imminent* event that could have taken place *any moment* since Pentecost or the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This idea is not prevalent, but a few hold to it.

One argument says the command by Jesus to “*look up*” when the things spoken of in the Olivet Discourse begin to come to pass (Luke 21.28), referred to the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21.21-24). When the Temple was destroyed “that fulfilled every and any prophecy that had to be fulfilled before the Rapture.” That event “rendered the Rapture of the Church imminent.” (Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 2003, pp. 636-637).

This quasi-Preterist thinking ignores some very important facts. According to this hypothesis the Rapture could have taken place before the book of Revelation was written about 25 years after the destruction of the Temple. It also rejects the fact that Israel had to return to Palestine and become a functioning nation so it could fulfill the prophecy that says she will make a covenant with the Antichrist (Isaiah 28.15-18; Daniel 9.27). The only way to get around this prophecy that had to be fulfilled as we saw in 1948 is to argue there could be a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. That *gap* could have been over 1900 years according to this hypothesis! We know this hypothesis is not valid because we are still here, the book of Revelation was written, Israel became a nation and many other pre-tribulational prophecies have been fulfilled (Appendix A). We also know it is not biblical because the Bible teaches there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation as explained in the previous chapter.

This hypothesis also ignores verses 25 through 27 of Luke 21 which says that just prior to the Rapture there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and dismay among nations. The oceans will be roaring and people will be fainting from fear of what is about to happen. It is after this prophecy of cosmic *warning signs* that Jesus commanded all Christians to “*look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh.*” According to the Bible the Rapture cannot take place until those cosmic *warning signs* come to pass.

Fruchtenbaum also believes the 7 churches in the book of Revelation (Chapters 2-3), are symbolic of 7 periods in the Church Age. The promise of being kept from the “*hour of trial,*” which he interprets as a promise of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture, was made to the church of Philadelphia (Revelation 3.10). He believes the period of the Philadelphia church ran from 1648-1900 (Ibid., pp. 48-50).

His beliefs that the Rapture became an *imminent* event that can take place at *any moment*, and the Philadelphia church was promised to escape the “hour of trial”

(Tribulation) are contradictory. If the Rapture has been *imminent* since 70 AD the Philadelphia church could not be symbolic of the Church from 1648-1900. If the Philadelphia church is symbolic of the Church from 1648-1900 the Rapture could not have been *imminent* since 70 AD as he says. Therefore the Rapture could not have become *imminent* until after 1648.

Another mistake that Fruchtenbaum and others make who believe the 7 churches are symbolic of 7 periods of Church history is that the Philadelphia church period is over, and the Rapture has not taken place. Since, according to Fruchtenbaum, the Philadelphia church period ended in 1900 the promise of being raptured could not have been to that church. Instead the apostate Laodecian church will be spared the “*hour of trial*” (Tribulation) because it began in 1900. We believe the Philadelphia church period began in 1792 when William Carey sailed to India and opened the door of foreign missions. It will continue until the Rapture, thus receiving the promise of being kept from the “*hour of trial*” (Revelation 3.10). This is the answer to the disciples’ prayer “*lead us not into temptation*” (Matthew 6.13). The Greek word that is translated “*trial*” and “*temptation*” is *peirasmos*.

Dave Hunt is another who holds to “*Couldda*” dispensationalism. Here is his argument:

Would it have been possible for a previous generation to go from knights in armor, for example, to nuclear arms in such a short period of time? That particular leap in technology may not have been necessary. There may be other weapons more ingenious and far more horrible which **could have** been developed and used more simply and quickly. No one can dogmatically rule out such a possibility. Human genius is unpredictable. (Ibid., pp. 260, emphasis mine)

Once again, while admitting that such a feat would not seem likely under ordinary circumstances, one cannot say it would have been impossible. There may well have been some other more ingenious method of accomplishing more simply the same end which **could have** been developed quickly had the Rapture occurred at any previous time in history.

It is certainly possible that some former generation, with incredible genius, **could have** developed within seven years or less the weapons and technologies necessary to fulfill all prophecies concerning Daniel’s seventieth week. That simple possibility preserves imminency. The Rapture **could have** come at any time and these developments followed immediately and swiftly, perhaps with techniques even more ingenious than our generation has used. (Ibid., p. 261)

A major factor, of course, is the necessity for Israel to be back in her land, where last days prophecies place her, immediately after the Rapture. This is required by the fact that Antichrist makes a covenant involving Israel at the very beginning of Daniel’s seventieth week. Would that not mean, then, that the Rapture could not occur until Israel had once again become a nation? If so, we have lost imminency. (Ibid., p. 263)

Hunt’s unlikely hypothesis that past generations “*couldda*” developed weapons of mass destruction and technology to create and run a world economic system is mute. It could not have been accomplished by “*human genius*” – only by divine

intervention. Since it did not happen, it means it could not have happened. Why does anyone argue about what “couldda” happened?

Conclusion

The arguments for *imminence* are not based on Scripture. Most who teach it say there are *signs* of the approaching Tribulation and the Glorious Appearing of Jesus Christ. Those *signs* are also *signs* of the Rapture. The Rapture is either an *imminent* event with no *warning signs*, or it is not *imminent* and *signs* precede it.

Other eschatologists believe *imminence* is necessary to motivate Christians to serve Christ. “I believe if you remove the imminent return of Jesus Christ you remove, perhaps, the greatest motivation for service to Christ that a believer has” (MacArthur, John Jr., *The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 57)

The doctrine of *imminence* is not necessary to motivate Christians to live holy lives. They should because of their love for Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice He made for us on the cross. They should also do so because they are commanded to (Leviticus 11.44; 19.2; 20.7; Matthew 5.48; 1 Peter 1.14-16). Another reason for holiness is the sobering fact that one may die at *any moment*. No one has a guarantee they will live another day; therefore, Christians should live holy lives each and every day. The knowledge that today may be one’s last day should be a greater incentive to live a holy life than the thought that Christ may return at *any moment*.

Some eschatologists also argue that the doctrine is extremely important to keep Christians on their spiritual toes. Dave Hunt and others say *imminence* keeps Christians from backsliding and without that doctrine it could cause God to question our motives:

And what an encouragement to carnality and worldly living it would have been to know that the Lord couldn’t come at any moment and **catch one by surprise doing, perhaps, those things that no Christian should**. Much would have been lost by giving the date of the Rapture – and nothing would have been gained. (Hunt, Dave, *How Close Are We?*, p. 316, emphasis, mine)

Only if His imminent return is our constant hope will we live as **true followers of Christ**... (Ibid., p. 320, emphasis mine)

If we knew the exact time in advance, it would **call our motivation into question and ruin an opportunity to prove that our devotion to Him is pure**. (MacArthur, John Jr., *The Second Coming*, p. 139, emphasis mine)

Millions of Christians have lived holy lives without believing in *imminence*. Belief in that doctrine does not edify one to live a holy life. Jesus does not have to return at *any moment* to “catch one by surprise doing those things that no Christian should” do. He knew everything everyone would do before He created the universe.

Some pastors believe the Holy Spirit deliberately wanted Christians throughout the Church Age to believe Christ could return at *any moment*. We must always keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is omniscient, and He knew that Christ was not scheduled to return for over 1900 years when He inspired Paul, James, Peter and John to write their letters. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the disciples into thinking Christ could return in their lifetime, and in no way did He seek to have millions of Christians

misled into believing Christ could return at *any moment* with no *warning signs* preceding His return!

To say the Holy Spirit deliberately deceived the apostles, and that He has deceived Christians for the last 1900 years into believing Christ could return at *any moment* would be accusing Him of Jesuit casuistry (the end justifies the means). *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid* (Romans 6.1-2).

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 11

1. In one sentence explain what the doctrine of *imminence* teaches.
2. Is the doctrine of *imminence* clearly stated in the Bible or is it based on personal opinion?
3. Do those who teach *imminence* frequently contradict that doctrine by claiming specific *signs* have been fulfilled?
4. Did God put numerous passages in the Bible about the Antichrist to help Christians identify him before the Rapture or to help the unsaved identify him after he becomes dictator of the world?
5. Did the Holy Spirit deliberately mislead the apostles into believing Christ could return at *any moment* even though He knew Christ would not return for over 1900 years?
6. Has the Holy Spirit misled Christians throughout the Church Age into believing Christ can return at *any moment*?
7. What event, that everyone experiences, is a greater incentive to serve the Lord faithfully than the doctrine of *imminence*?

TWELVE

IS THE RAPTURE IMMINENT?

The doctrine of *imminence* is based on a few passages which do not teach it directly while there are some passages that teach the opposite.

Passages that seem to allude to Imminence

The defenders of the doctrine of *imminence* argue that key phrases prove the Rapture has been an *imminent* event since Pentecost. These phrases are “drawn near” (James 5.8), “has drawn near” (Romans 13.12; 1 Peter 4.7) and “at hand” (Romans 13.12; Philippians 4.5; Revelation 1.3).

The Greek adverb *engus*, means “to bring near, to draw nigh, be at hand” (*Liddell & Scott, Greek Lexicon*, p. 189). Greek language expert Dr. Joseph Thayer says that when it is used in reference to time it is “concerning things imminent and soon to come to pass” (*Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 164).

The passages noted above do not teach that the return of Jesus was “*at hand*” in the first century. Instead, they say that the return of Christ is certain. The passages do not refer to time as will be shown. The Holy Spirit knew that Christ was not scheduled to return for over 1900 years when He inspired Paul, James, Peter and John to write their letters. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the disciples into thinking Christ could return in their lifetime, and in no way did He seek to have millions of Christians misled into believing Christ could return at *any moment* with no *warning signs* preceding His return!

Evidence that this is correct is the fact that Jesus told His disciples directly that He would not return while they were alive:

And He said unto the disciples, “The days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it.” (Luke 17.22)

This statement is clear that the disciples would not be alive when Jesus returns. They understood this. That is why none of them taught that Christ could return at *any moment* and it proves that the above passages have nothing to do with the timing of the Rapture.

Passages that do not teach Imminence

There is no passage that teaches the doctrine of *imminence*, and there are several passages that teach just the opposite. These passages are: Isaiah 13.6, 17.1; 19.1; Ezekiel 30.3; Joel 1.15; 2.1; Obadiah 15 and Haggai 2.6.

Isaiah wrote around 700 BC that the “the *day of Jehovah is at hand*” (13.6). It does not seem correct that 2700 years is “near” or “at hand.” The only meaning that

makes sense is that it is certain it will come to pass. It does not mean that 2700 years is “near” to God. Every event is “near” to God because He lives outside of the property of time. Remember, the Bible was written by God to mankind.

Isaiah also wrote that Damascus is “about” to be destroyed, yet it has been more than 2700 years, and it is still a thriving city. It is obvious that the word “about” has nothing to do with time. It has to do with certainty. We can be confident that the city of Damascus will be destroyed in the future. The King James translators rendered this verse more accurately:

The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. (Isaiah 17.1)

Isaiah prophesied that Jehovah “*is about to come out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity...*” (26.21). It should be translated “*For behold, Jehovah will certainly come out from His place...*”

The King James translators rendered it:

For, behold, the LORD cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain. (Isaiah 26.21)

Ezekiel also wrote that the “*Day of Jehovah*” is “near”:

For the day is near, even the day of Jehovah is near; it shall be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. (Ezekiel 30.3)

This is a prophecy of the Tribulation, not of local judgment, because it is a time of doom for the nations. The nations to be judged are listed – Egypt, Ethiopia, Put, Lud, Arabia and Libya. These are the nations that team up with Gog and Magog for the attack on Israel in the last days (Ezekiel 38.5). Only Ethiopia and Put are mentioned in Chapter 38 of Ezekiel, but it is understood that these other nations will be in league with Gog and Magog. Many times there is more than one passage describing a single event. All of the passages must be pieced together as a jigsaw puzzle to see the entire picture.

The Tribulation was in no way “near” when Ezekiel wrote this prophecy. Near has nothing to do with time. It has to do with certainty. We can be certain that Christ will return and judge the nations.

Joel prophesied that “*the day of Jehovah is at hand*” (1.15), and he also wrote that “*the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is nigh at hand*” (2.1). If he meant the Tribulation was near (time-wise), he was mistaken. Yet, if he meant that it was “certain” that Christ would come to judge the world, he was correct.

Obadiah also prophesied of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the nations. (v. 15a)

Obadiah was saying what Joel said – the judgment of Jehovah is certain and no one can escape it. He did not mean it was “near” time-wise.

Haggai used the phrase “*a little while*” (2.6) concerning the Second Coming of the Messiah. It is hard to believe that 2500 years is “*a little while*.” This phrase was used

to remind people that there would be a day of judgment. The context is vengeance. God is reminding Israel that no matter how bad things may be they should not lose hope, but trust in Him. He will judge the wicked and reward the faithful.

These passages could not be saying the Lord Jesus Christ would return to judge the world in a short period of time. How could He come to judge the world before He came to die for the world? No one today would dare to say the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was *imminent* during the Old Testament dispensation based on phrases that seem to say that, because He had yet to come the first time to die for mankind.

We also know Christ could not have returned to judge the world until the fourth kingdom of Daniel's prophecy was established (Daniel 2.31-45; 7.2-28). When these prophets wrote, the third kingdom (Greece) had not yet risen.

If the words in the Old Testament, "*near*" and "*about*" and "*a little while,*" have nothing to do with the timing of the Rapture and the Second Coming, neither do similar words that are used in the New Testament. We know this because it has been over 1900 years since the New Testament was written and Christ has not returned. As noted before, they have to do with the "certainty," not the "nearness" of those events.

Another way to look at passages that use words which imply an event will take place in the near future is to understand that the prophet was carried forward by the Holy Spirit in a prophetic vision (1 Peter 1.21), and what he saw in the vision was about to take place.

Jesus Christ did not teach the doctrine of Imminence

Jesus Christ did not teach that He could return at *any moment* after Pentecost. He made it clear to His disciples that they would not see His return; that Peter would die first; that the gospel would be preached to all the world; that He would build His Church; that the disciples would be persecuted and martyred; that Paul would go to Rome; that John would prophesy again after writing the book of Revelation; and that the city of Jerusalem would be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles was fulfilled.

Jesus told His disciples they would not see Him return (Luke 17.22; Acts 1.7-8)

Jesus plainly told His disciples that they would not see His return:

And he said unto the disciples, "The days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it." (Luke 17.22)

Jesus made it clear by that statement that none of His disciples would be alive when He returns. He also told His disciples that they should not concern themselves with the timing of the establishment of the Kingdom. Just prior to His ascension, the 11 disciples asked Him if He would establish the Kingdom. He responded by saying:

"It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has set within His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you. And you will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts 1.7-8)

**Jesus said Peter would be martyred
(John 21.18-19)**

Jesus said that Peter would grow old and die a martyr's death:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, when you were young you dressed yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you shall stretch forth your hands and another shall dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” Now this he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said unto him, “Follow me.”

John said it signified “*by what manner of death he should glorify God*” (John 21.19). The Rapture could not take place until after Peter had grown old and died, otherwise Jesus would have made a false prophesy. Since all of the New Testament books were written prior to the death of Peter (except the book of Revelation), it is clear that the doctrine of *imminence* is not taught in the New Testament. Later it will be shown that it is also not taught in the book of Revelation.

**Jesus said other disciples would be martyred
(John 16.2)**

Jesus also prophesied that other disciples and believers would be persecuted and killed:

They will put you out of the synagogues: yes, the hour comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he offers service unto God.

We know that all of the apostles, except John, were martyred for their faith. The last to be martyred was most likely Peter, under the reign of Nero, around 67 AD. Jesus could not have returned until His disciples, except John, had been martyred.

**The apostles would make disciples of all nations
(Matthew 28.19-20)**

The Lord could not have returned at *any moment* after His ascension, because He commanded the apostles to make disciples of all nations:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

It took the eleven disciples, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, other evangelists and thousands of believers a few decades to just preach the gospel to the entire known (Roman) world. Paul said in his letter to the Colossians that the gospel had been “proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (1.23). That letter was written around 60 AD. If we use that date as the fulfillment of taking the gospel to the entire world, Jesus could not have returned prior to 60 AD.

**Jesus said He would build His Church
(Matthew 16.18)**

Jesus told His disciples that He would build His Church through them:

“And I also say unto you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”

History tells us that it took several decades to build the Church. John most likely did not write his gospel, his three letters and the book of Revelation until the time of Domitian, who reigned from 81-96 AD. Those books were written for the Church. Christ obviously could not have returned until all the books of the Bible had been written.

**Jesus told Paul he would testify in Rome
(Acts 23.11)**

Jesus visited Paul in Jerusalem after he appeared before the Sanhedrin and told him that he would preach the gospel in Rome:

“And the night following the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer: for as you have testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome.”

Paul recounted this incident when the ship he was sailing to Italy on sank (Acts 27.24). It is evident that the Rapture could not possibly take place before Paul went to Rome.

**Jesus said Jerusalem would be captured
(Luke 21.20-24)**

Jesus also prophesied in the Olivet Discourse that the city of Jerusalem would be captured by the Gentiles:

“But when you see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains and let them that are in the midst of her depart. And let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! There shall be great distress upon the land and wrath unto this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led captive into all the nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

The Gentiles would control Jerusalem until the “*times of the Gentiles*” was fulfilled. It is obvious that Jesus could not rapture the Church until after Jerusalem was captured by the Gentiles. That means the Rapture was not *imminent* until at least 70 AD. The Rapture could not take place until the “*times of the Gentiles*” was

completed. It is now understood that the “*times of the Gentiles*” ended in 1967 when Israel took control of Jerusalem. We have the benefit of hindsight and know that the Rapture has not been an *imminent* event that could happen at *any moment* for more than 1900 years.

Jesus said John would prophesy by writing Revelation (Revelation 10.11)

John was given the revelation of Jesus Christ on the island of Patmos:

And they say unto me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

We know that Jesus could not have raptured the Church until John completed the book of Revelation which took place around 95 A.D. Jesus could not return until at least the start of the 2nd century.

It is therefore hard to imagine why eschatologists today teach that Jesus Christ could have returned at *any moment* since Pentecost. History shows that it is not possible. Harold Lindsell explained why no one today should believe in the doctrine of *imminence*:

We can understand and excuse earlier earnest students of the Word who were wrong about this matter. But we have further light and can see now that those who held to an any-moment rapture were incorrect in their interpretation of Scripture. (*The Gathering Storm*, p. 121)

The parables of the talents (Matthew 25.14-30; Luke 19.12-27)

Jesus Christ also taught against His soon return through the parables of the talents. The parable about a nobleman, who went to a distant country to receive a kingdom and then returned (Luke 19.12-27), and the Olivet Discourse parable about a man who went on a journey (Matthew 25.14-30), refute the doctrine of *imminence*. These two parables were given at different times, but they speak of the same subject. He said, “*A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then returned*” (Luke 19.12), and “*Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them*” (Matthew 25.19). The phrases, “*went to a distant country*” and “*after a long time,*” are the key.

All dispensational theologians agree that the parables concern the Church. We now understand the phrases “*went to a distant country*” and “*after a long time*” mean more than 1900 years. Did the early Church understand this? They may not have thought it would be 1900 years before Jesus would return, but they knew it would be a “*long time.*” They heard Jesus read Isaiah 61, which said that there would be a long period of time between the First and Second Comings of the Messiah.

More parables of Jesus (Matthew 13.3-8; 24-30; 31-33; 44-46; 47-50)

Four of the seven parables of Matthew Chapter 13 prove the Rapture was not an *imminent* event. In the first four parables, Jesus explained that a long period of time would elapse between His resurrection and His return.

The first parable is about Jesus and the apostles sowing the gospel (v. 3-8). The second parable (v. 24-30) concerns the fact that tares (the unsaved) would grow up alongside the wheat (saved). The wheat and the tares are allowed to mature until the harvest (Second Coming). The third parable is of the mustard seed (v. 31-33). It was the smallest seed in the Middle East, yet it grew into a large tree. The tree is symbolic of Christendom. Yet every bird nested in the tree. Birds are always symbolic of the unsaved. We see in this third parable that there would be a period of time for the tree (the Church) to grow to maturity, and once it was fully grown, the unsaved would become part of it. The fourth parable is about the apostasy (leaven) in the Church (v. 33). Leaven always represents false teaching (Matthew 16.6). The parable describes false teaching that leavens the whole lump (the Church) after it is mature, just as in the parable of the mustard seed. It has been over 1900 years, and the Church is still growing in its apostasy. The first four parables show that there would be a considerable amount of time between the founding of the Church (day of Pentecost) and the Second Coming of Christ.

Jesus commanded us to be “*alert*” and to “*watch*” for His return (Matthew 24.33, 42; Mark 13.37; Luke 21.34, 36). The only way we can look for His return is to “*watch*” for prophecies to be fulfilled that will take place before the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation.

Paul did not teach the doctrine of Imminence

Acts 20.28-30

Paul knew Jesus could not return at *any moment* during his final visit to the church of Ephesus around 60 AD. He warned the elders:

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

One might argue that this could take only a few years, but we know that it usually takes many years for false teachers to work their way into an established church and lead it astray. One thing is certain – Paul knew Jesus could not return at *any moment* when he made that prophecy.

Romans 13.11-12

Paul did not teach in his letter to the Romans, that Jesus could return at *any moment*:

And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

The word “nearer” simply means that the return of Christ is nearer than it has been. This is a commonsense statement. It is not a doctrinal statement that the Rapture has been *imminent* since Pentecost. The phrase “*the day is at hand*” (v. 12), should be translated “the day has drawn near.” All Paul was saying is that the “*night*” (time of doing evil) is almost over and the “*day*” (time of doing good) “*has drawn near,*” so we should live holy lives. This passage is an admonishment to live a holy life; it is not a doctrinal statement.

The literal meaning of the Greek adverb *engus* is “bring near, to draw nigh, be at hand” (*Liddell & Scott, Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 189), as noted previously. If the correct understanding is that the Second Coming was being brought “*near*” or “*at hand,*” and that it was *imminent* in the time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (57 AD), there is a problem.

It has been over 1900 years since the letter was written, and the Rapture has not taken place. No one can believe that 1900 years is “*near*” or “*at hand.*” It may be to God, but not to us. The Bible was written for us, not for God. All time references must be accepted as being from our perspective.

The meaning of the phrase “*at hand*” is a statement of certainty (the event will take place), as we noted previously, or it is a reference to the statement by Jesus concerning His return. Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse, “*Even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors*” (Matthew 24.33). Every statement in the New Testament about the timing of the return of Jesus is a reference to this statement by Jesus. This is called “the law of first mention.” Jesus said that when the things He spoke of in the Olivet Discourse start to take place (the two World Wars and the birth of the nation of Israel, Matthew 24.6-8, 32), then the time of His return will be “*at hand.*”

When Paul said, “*the day is at hand,*” he was making a reference to the statement by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. In other words, he was saying that when his readers see the events described in that discourse start to take place, they would know the return of Jesus is “*at hand.*”

This law of first mention applies to the other uses of the phrase “*at hand*” and the word “*near,*” that are found in Philippians 4.5; James 5.8; 1 Peter 4.7 and Revelation 1.3.

1 Corinthians 15.51-52

Some believe that a passage in Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth teaches *imminence*:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.

This passage does not teach *imminence*. The transforming of mortal bodies to

immortal ones takes place in the “*twinkling of an eye*.” That happens after all the *warning signs* of the Rapture have been fulfilled, including the 2 that take place on the day of the Rapture (Joel 2.30-31; Luke 21.25-27). It is also important to notice the order of events. The last trumpet sounds first, the dead are raised incorruptible and then Christians who alive and remain will be changed. It is the changing of our mortal bodies to immortal ones that takes place in the “*twinkling of an eye*,” not the entire Rapture event as explained in Chapter 2.

Philippians 3.20

Paul said Christians should wait for the return of Christ, but he did not imply His return was an *imminent* event:

For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage has nothing to do with *imminence*. It tells us to “*wait*” for the Lord’s return. Jesus said He would go “*to a distant country to receive a kingdom*” (Luke 19.12), and be gone a “*long time*” (Matthew 25.19). Christians are to patiently “*wait*” for the return of Christ just as James said (5.7-8). As noted several times before, Christians do that by watching for the *signs* of His coming to be fulfilled.

Philippians 4.5

Paul told the believers at Philippi that the Lord was “*at hand*”:

Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

If he meant the return of Christ was “*at hand*” when he wrote the letter (62 AD), he was wrong. As noted several times before, 1900 years is not “*near*” or “*at hand*.” The proper understanding is that the return of Christ is “*certain*,” or it is a reference to the statement by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. When the events described by Jesus begin to take place, then His return will be “*at hand*.”

Colossians 3.4

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul said Jesus would return; he did not say His return was *imminent*:

When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then will you also with him be manifested in glory.

This passage does not support the doctrine of *imminence* either. It simply says Christ will return.

1 Thessalonians 1.10

This is another passage that commands us to “*wait*” for the return of Christ, but it does not support *imminence*:

For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how you turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

This is one of many passages that command Christians to “wait.” Waiting for the return of Christ does not mean He can return at *any moment*. Christians are also told many times to be “looking” and to “watch” for His return. The way one “waits” is to “watch” for the *warning signs* of His return.

1 Thessalonians 5.1-6

Paul warned the Thessalonians in his first letter to be spiritually awake at all times so the “*Day of the Lord*” (Rapture/Tribulation) would not overtake them like a thief. He said they did not need anything to be written to them about the “*times and seasons*,” because he had already taught it to them:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober.

We know from this passage that Jesus will not return to rapture believers until after there is a false peace. According to the book of Revelation, the Antichrist comes to power through peace (6.1-2), and then war breaks out (6.3-4). The Antichrist will bring about a short period of “*peace and safety*,” and then make the “*covenant of death*” with Israel (Isaiah 28.15). The Rapture will take place on the day that this covenant of death is made.

This passage clearly teaches that all Christians should be spiritually awake and “watch” for the return of Christ. They do this by watching for the *warning signs* of the Rapture. As the *signs* are fulfilled one will know how close the Rapture is. Once all of the *warning signs* have been fulfilled, then one will know the Rapture is at hand, and that it finally is an *imminent* event.

2 Thessalonians 2.1-3

In his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul explained what must take place prior to the start of the “*Day of the Lord*”:

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; Let no man beguile you in any wise:

for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition...

Someone had forged a letter claiming that the “*Day of the Lord,*” which starts with the Tribulation, was “*just at hand.*” Paul cleared up the confusion by explaining that two things had to take place before the Tribulation could start – the “*falling away*” and the revealing of the “*man of sin.*”

The “it” here is the start of the Tribulation. It cannot take place until the “*falling away*” of the Church from the faith, and the “*man of sin*” is revealed. Many eschatologists believe that we are in this time of the “*falling away,*” but the Antichrist has yet to be revealed. Until he is revealed, the Tribulation cannot start.

1 Timothy 6.14

Paul told Timothy to live a holy life until the return of Jesus, but that does not mean that he was saying Christ could return at *any moment*:

That thou keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Paul simply told Timothy and all Christians throughout the Church Age to live holy lives. Even if this passage were taken by itself, it does not support the doctrine of *imminence*. Nothing is said about when Christ will return. It does not say He will return at *any moment*. It merely says that He will return. We know from numerous passages throughout the Bible that specific *warning signs* must take place before the Tribulation starts.

2 Timothy 4.3-4

Paul warned Timothy about a time of apostasy in the future:

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables.

That letter was written around 65 AD. Paul knew that Jesus could not return at *any moment* when he wrote it. He knew it would be many years before Christ could return.

2 Timothy 4.6-7

Paul did not look for the *imminent* return of Jesus, instead he awaited his death:

For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith...

Titus 2.11-13

A statement by Paul to Titus is also misunderstood by some eschatologists:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

This passage clearly refutes the doctrine of *imminence*. Instead of it saying Christ can return at *any moment*, believers are commanded to be “looking” for His return. The only way to be “looking” for His return is to “watch” for specific *warning signs* that will be fulfilled prior to His return as Scripture says. Then, as they are fulfilled one will know the Rapture is that much closer. All of the passages that command us to be “looking” for and to “watch” for the return of Christ refute the doctrine of *imminence*.

Hebrews 10.25, 37

The following verses in Hebrews do not support the doctrine of *imminence*:

Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the day drawing near. (v. 25)

For yet a very little while, He that comes will come, and will not tarry (v. 37).

The phrase “*as you see the day drawing near*” (Hebrews 10.25) implies there is something for us to “watch.” The only things Christians can possibly “watch,” to know how near the Rapture is, are *warning signs*. Without *warning signs* to look for, one cannot possibly know if the Rapture is near.

The phrases, “*in a very little while,*” and “*will not delay*” (Hebrews 10.37), are quoted from Habakkuk 2.3:

For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hastens toward the end, and will not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay.

The passage in Habakkuk does not say Christ can return at *any moment*. It says that He will not return soon, but will tarry. Yet, even though the Bible teaches there would be a long span between the First and Second Comings of Jesus Christ, Christians are commanded to eagerly “wait” for His return.

Why are Christians commanded to eagerly “wait” for the return of Christ? No believer in the Church Age can know the exact day of His return years in advance (Matthew 24.36), but they can know the approximate time by waiting and watching. The way Christians eagerly “wait” and “watch” for His return is by “looking” for the *warning signs*.

Similar phrases, such as “*near*” and “*at hand,*” were used by the Old Testament prophets concerning the Second Coming, as we noted earlier – (Isaiah 13.6; 26.21; 29.17; Ezekiel 30.3; Joel 1.15; 2.1; Obadiah 15; Haggai 2.6; Zechariah 8.1-8). It is obvious that the Second Coming of Christ was not a “*near*” event that was “*at hand*”

because His First Coming was more than 500 years away. The context of these passages is not about the timing of the Second Coming – that it was “near” or “at hand.” The context is about the certainty of that event, as noted previously.

If you replace the words “near” or “at hand” with the words “a certainty” the statements make sense. Here is an example using Isaiah 13.6:

Wail, for the day of Jehovah is at hand; as destruction from the Almighty will it come.

Wail, for the day of Jehovah is a certainty; as destruction from the Almighty will it come.

The prophet was not saying that the “day of Jehovah” (Tribulation) was “near” in his day. Instead, he was saying the “day of the Jehovah” would certainly take place.

James did not teach the doctrine of Imminence

James did not teach the doctrine of *imminence*. Instead, he exhorted his readers to not give up, “*due to the persecution they suffered*” and to patiently “*wait*” for the return of Christ.

James 5.7-8

James used the analogy of a farmer to explain that it would be some time before Christ would return. He emphasized the need to be “*patient*” (thrice) and to “*wait*” for His return:

*Be **patient** therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman **waits** for the precious fruit of the earth, being **patient** over it, until it receives the early and latter rain. Be **patient** and establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.* (Emphasis mine)

Most teachers of *imminence* miss the object of the passage – “patience.” James is admonishing believers three times to be “*patient*.” Why? Because the Rapture was a long way off. The phrase “*the coming of the Lord is at hand*” does not mean Jesus could return at *any moment*; it means His return is certain. Jesus could not return around the time James wrote this letter (45 AD) because the temple had not been destroyed. Remember, Jesus prophesied that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24.2).

James did not teach the doctrine of *imminence*. He taught that it was an event that certainly would take place, but he knew it would take place a long time in the future. That is why he told his readers to be “*patient*.” He knew, as did the Christians of the 1st century, that specific prophecies had to be fulfilled before Christ could return. He knew Peter had to die a martyr’s death (John 21.18-19) and that the Temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24.1-2).

Peter did not teach the doctrine of Imminence

Peter also did not teach the doctrine of *imminence*, even though some argue that he did.

1 Peter 4.7-8

The passage below appears to support the doctrine of *imminence*, but a closer look reveals that it does not:

But the end of all things is at hand: therefore be of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer: above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves; for love covers a multitude of sins.

If Peter meant that the “*end of all things*” was “*at hand*” in 64 AD, when he wrote his first letter, he was wrong! No one can believe that 1945 years is “*at hand*.” It may be for God, since 1000 years is as one day (2 Peter 3.8), but it is not for us. The only way this passage and other passages that use similar phrases make sense is if these are not time references.

Instead of being statements of time, they are statements of certainty. If we substitute “*certain*” for “*at hand*” the passage becomes crystal clear – “*But the end of all things is certain.*” The only ones who believe these phrases “*At hand*” and “*near*” are time references are the Preterists.

2 Peter 2.1-3

Peter prophesied around 64-68 AD that false teachers would sneak into the Church and introduce destructive heresies, denying Jesus is Lord:

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not.

Peter knew it would take some time for this prophecy to be fulfilled and that it would happen after he died. Remember, he wrote this letter a couple of years before he was martyred. A few decades later when John wrote the book of Revelation it was confirmed they had sneaked in (Revelation 2.14-15, 20).

2 Peter 3.1-5

Peter prophesied that in the “*last days*” men would ridicule the promise of the return of Christ:

This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance; that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles: knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God.

Peter knew he would grow old and die before Jesus would return. He also knew, when he wrote his second letter, that there would be an indeterminate time before his prophecy about the mockers and false teachers would be fulfilled. That period of time would have to be several decades at least, because the mockers will say that “*since the fathers fell asleep*” everything has remained the same just as it was from the beginning of creation. If the “*fathers*” is a reference to the apostles, there would have to be a lengthy delay between their deaths and the time of the mockers.

Peter may have known that the delay would be decades or hundreds of years long. The use of the statement, “*that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Peter 3.8), could mean that he understood Jesus would not return for a very long time. We can be confident that the above statement was a reference to the delay of the return of Christ as being an extremely long period of time.

The statement about the mockers is a prophecy that some would ridicule the teaching of the return of Jesus Christ, because He has not returned. They are ignorant of the two parables that Jesus in which He said that He would be gone a “*long time*” (Matthew 25.19), because he was going to a “*distant country*” (Luke 19.12).

Peter knew he would be martyred (2 Peter 1.13-14)

Peter knew that he must die before the Lord could return, because Jesus prophesied he would die (John 21.18-19). He looked forward to that day:

And I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me.

Peter awaited martyrdom, as Paul did, not the Rapture. He knew that he had to die before the Rapture could take place.

John did not teach the doctrine of Imminence

Some eschatologists are certain that John taught the doctrine of *imminence* in his first letter, and also in the book of Revelation, but he did not.

1 John 3.2-3

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The *imminent* return of Christ is not stated here. The purifying effect of His return is not our belief that He can return at *any moment*, it is our assurance that when He returns we will be with Him and be like Him.

Revelation 1.1

This verse is a favorite among Preterists. They claim that it proves Jesus Christ returned in 70 AD:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.

The phrase “*the things which must shortly take place*” has nothing to do with chronological time. The Greek words, *en tachei* can mean “with all speed” (Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 693), “with swiftness” or “with speed;” and for this verse and Revelation 22.6, “with speed” is the probable meaning (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, pp. 241-242). “With speed” is also the meaning in Romans 16.20:

And the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Satan was not bruised “shortly” or in a “brief space of time,” after the letter was written. Instead, Christians suffered a period of great persecution shortly after it was written. Nero slaughtered thousands of Christians, including Peter and Paul. Satan was bruised at a later time in a “speedy” or “swift” manner.

The meaning of a word depends on the context. The context of Revelation 1.1 means Jesus will return in a “swift” or “speedy” manner just as He said He would, like a thief in the night (Luke 12.39), and as “*lightning*” (Matthew 24.27). Yet, even though He will return in a “swift” manner, we can know the approximate time of His return by watching the *warning signs* so we will not be caught by surprise, as the unsaved will be (1 Thessalonians 5.3-4).

The clear meaning of this verse is seen once the word “swiftly” is substituted for “shortly”:

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants, even the things which must **swiftly** come to pass: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.*

This is a paraphrased version that makes it clear what Jesus was saying:

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants, even the things which must come to pass in a **swift** manner: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.*

Revelation 1.3

This is another favorite verse of the Preterists, but as you can see it does not support their doctrine that Christ had to return soon after the book of Revelation was written, as they claim around 68 AD:

Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.

The phrase, “*for the time is at hand,*” also has nothing to do with chronological time. The Greek word for “time” is not “*chronos*” (the time of day) but “*kairos*” (opportune time). “*Chronos* marks quantity, *kairos*, quality” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, p. 333). A better reading of this verse is:

Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for it is an opportune time.

Jesus Christ is telling us that it is always an “opportune time” to study the book of Revelation. By careful study of prophecy we can see the *warning signs* as they are fulfilled, and we can determine how close we are to the Rapture. Jesus is telling Christians to look for the **What** (*warning signs*) so they can know the **When** (time of His return).

The Greek word “*kairos*” is derived from Caerus, the Greek god of opportunity, luck and favorable moments. This youngest child of Zeus had one lock of hair. When he ran by, a person had to grab his lock of hair to get good luck. The use of the word “*kairos*” in this verse means the time of opportunity to understand what is written is at hand. When John wrote Revelation (95 AD), he did not mean the Rapture was “*at hand.*”

Conclusion

The doctrine of *imminence* is not taught in the Bible. Instead, there are several passages that say just the opposite (Isaiah 13.6, 17.1; 19.1; Ezekiel 30.3; Joel 1.15; 2.1; Obadiah 15; Haggai 2.6). Jesus did not teach it and neither did Paul, James, Peter or John.

The Bible says specific prophecies (*warning signs*) must be fulfilled before the start of the Tribulation. Many of those prophecies have been fulfilled, but several more must be fulfilled. If there is no *gap* between the Rapture and the Tribulation as explained in Chapter 10, then all of the *signs* that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts will be fulfilled before the Rapture.

It may be some time before all of these prophecies are fulfilled. A world government, economy and church will not spring up overnight. It most likely will take a few years at least to establish a “New World Order.” Christians should keep a close eye on the news, and “*watch*” for the creation of this world order. They must

also be prepared for the increased spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6.10-18) that they will fight as the Tribulation draws closer.

We must always keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is omniscient, and He knew that Christ was not scheduled to return for over 1900 years when He inspired Paul, James, Peter and John to write their letters. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the disciples into thinking Christ could return in their lifetime, and in no way did He seek to have millions of Christians throughout the Church Age misled into believing Christ could return at *any moment* with no *warning signs* preceding His return!

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 12

1. Should a doctrine be based on clear or unclear passages?
2. Did Jesus, Paul, James, Peter or John teach the doctrine of *imminence*?
3. Does the Bible clearly state that specific *warning signs* will be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts?
4. Did Jesus Christ want Christians throughout the Church Age to believe He could return at *any moment*?
5. Since Jesus knew after His resurrection that He would not return for over 1900 years is it possible He would have said something that would make His disciples believe He could return at *any moment*?
6. Would the Holy Spirit, who clearly knew Jesus would not return to Earth for over 1900 years, inspire Peter, Paul, James or John to write something that would make Christians believe that Jesus could return at *any moment*?
7. Would a person who teaches that Jesus and the Holy Spirit deliberately sought to make Christians believe Jesus could return at *any moment* be in danger of committing blasphemy?

THIRTEEN

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, He gave His inner circle of disciples a special briefing, called the Olivet Discourse. In it, He said the Temple would be destroyed, as well as the nation of Israel. He also explained what would take place prior to and during the Tribulation. This special briefing is recorded in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The following quotations are taken from all three books, weaved together to make one narrative.

Jesus used the illustration of a pregnant woman to describe what the Church Age would be like. It would be a long period of time, and at the end there would be two birth pains, and then a birth. We saw almost 1900 years pass from the start of the Church Age (33 AD) until the first birth pain, World War I (1914). The second birth pain came in 1939 with the Second World War, and then the birth of the nation of Israel in 1948. The Lord will return before Israel becomes an old man by age 80 in 2028, and 7 years earlier to rapture the Church (Psalm 90.10).

The Prophecy of the Temple (Matthew 24.1-3; Mark 13.1-4; Luke 21.5-7)

Jesus began His briefing on the “last days” saying the Temple would be destroyed:

And Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24.1-3)

This news stunned the disciples. They asked three specific questions:

1. When will the Temple be destroyed?
2. What will the *sign* be of its destruction?
3. What will the *sign* be of the return of Jesus and the end of the age?

The disciples asked the **When** and the **What**. The **What** is the *warning signs* of the Rapture, and the **When** is the Rapture.

Persecution of believers before the Temple's destruction (Luke 21.12-20)

Later in His prophetic discourse, Jesus explained what will occur prior to the destruction of the Temple. This was only recorded by Luke:

But before all these things, they shall lay their hands on you, and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake. It shall turn out unto you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay. But ye shall be delivered up even by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. And not a hair of your head shall perish. In your patience ye shall win your souls. But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand.

The phrase, “*but before all these things,*” is the key to knowing that this refers to the 1st century, and not the time prior to the Rapture. From 33 to 70 AD, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and non-Jews. Thousands were thrown in prison, and some were killed. Nero was said to have slaughtered thousands for mere entertainment. Peter and Paul are the two most famous Christians to die during the reign of Nero.

Destruction of the Temple (Luke 21.20-24)

Jesus then explained how the Temple would be destroyed. Again, this was only recorded by Luke:

But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. (Luke 21.20-22)

General Vespasian surrounded the city of Jerusalem in 66-67 A.D. The Roman legions dug a trench around the entire city. Everyone who was caught attempting to escape was crucified. Yet, before he attacked the city, he received word that Emperor Nero had died. He returned to Rome to take control of the empire in 69 AD, and left his eldest son, General Titus, in Judea. The siege was lifted for a year, and after the reprieve General Titus led the final assault on the city.

The Christians who knew what Jesus had told His disciples concerning the siege of Jerusalem left the city during the reprieve. They saw the **What** (*sign* of the surrounding of Jerusalem), and knew the **When** (destruction of the Temple) was *imminent*. Those who did not depart the city had no opportunity to leave later.

Jesus gave Christians of the 1st century the specific *warning sign* to know when the Temple would be destroyed – the surrounding of the city of Jerusalem. He then gave this grave warning:

Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (Luke 21.23-24)

Those who did not heed the warning by Jesus to depart from Jerusalem when they saw the city surrounded by armies suffered through the worst period in her history. Over one million people died by starvation, disease and the sword. Josephus, a Jewish historian of the 1st century, said about 98,000 Jews were taken captive, as Jesus prophesied.

We see the importance of paying attention to the **What** to know the **When**. The Christians, who knew the sign of Jerusalem being surrounded, knew the destruction of the Temple was at hand. Josephus tells us that the “holy people” (Christians) fled Jerusalem during this time and were spared. Christians today can know the **What** (*signs* of the Rapture), and be fully ready for the **When** (Rapture).

Beginning of birth pains (Matthew 24.4-8; Mark 13.5-8; Luke 21.8-11)

Jesus explained what will happen before the Tribulation starts:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail. (Matthew 24.4-8)

These verses cover the time preceding the Tribulation. Full-Preterists and Partial-Preterists believe this was fulfilled in 70 AD. (Appendix E explains why it did not take place in 70 AD). During this time, which covers the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, many false messiahs will try to mislead the elect and the unsaved. There have been false messiahs (antichrists), false teachers and false prophets since the start of the Church Age (Acts 20.29-30; 2 Peter 2.1; 1 John 2.18; 4.1), yet an increasing number of these deceivers have plagued mankind during the last two centuries, and now in the 21st century. Some of the more infamous false prophets were William Miller, Joseph Smith, Jr., Charles Taze Russell, Joseph Franklin Rutherford, Ellen G. White, Herbert W. Armstrong, Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones and Elizabeth Clare Prophet.

The phrase, “*nation against nation*,” is a Hebrew idiom. It is found in two places in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 15.1-8; Isaiah 19.1-5). Its four-fold meaning describes:

1. A war
2. that begins in a small way
3. and grows
4. to include all the lands before the eyes of the prophet.

It is a perfect picture of the two world wars. The first started with conflict between the Austro-Hungarian and Serbian empires after Gavrilo Princip shot and killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. It quickly activated a series of alliances that set off a chain reaction of war declarations. Within a month, much of Europe was in a state of open warfare. Out of that Great War came the Balfour Declaration, which prepared the land of Israel for the Jews.

World War II escalated in a similar fashion. Germany invaded Poland, and the subsequent declarations of war launched the Second Great War. Eventually, most of the nations of the world were dragged into it. The destruction of the Jewish people by Adolf Hitler and his butchers prepared the Jews for the land of Israel.

A mother carries her unborn child for a period of nine months; when she is gripped by the initial birth pains she knows she is nearing the time to deliver her child. Likewise, Jesus said we will know when we come near the end of this Christian dispensation when we see the beginning of the birth pains – the two world wars. A mother, gripped with the first birth pain, cannot say the exact day or hour her child will be born, yet she knows that she has come near to the end of her time of waiting.

The remaining warning signs, “*plagues,*” “*famines,*” “*great earthquakes in various places*” and “*terrors and great signs from heaven*” started with World War I. They will continue and grow in number and severity as we approach the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation.

No one knows exactly what the last *warning signs* will be – “*terrors and great signs from heaven.*” They will be so spectacular that everyone on Earth will be terrorized by them. They could be large meteor showers or strikes, near-passes by comets or asteroids, comet or asteroid strikes, massive solar flares or possibly gamma ray bursts.

Once these *warning signs* have come to pass, Christians will know the Rapture is very near. There are many other *signs* that are given elsewhere in the Bible that will enable Christians to know how close the Rapture is.

Persecution of the elect during the Tribulation (Matthew 24.9-14; Mark 13.9-13)

According to the “Law of Double Reference” Jesus changes the subject from the events of World War II and jumps over the years in which we are now living, and begins to talk about the Tribulation in verses 9 through 28. He explains how the elect (believers in Him) will be persecuted during the first half of the Tribulation:

But take ye heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in synagogues shall ye be beaten; and before governors and kings shall ye stand for my sake, for a testimony unto them. And the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations. And when they lead you to judgment, and deliver you up, be not anxious beforehand what ye shall speak: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit. They shall

deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake, but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child; and children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

During the Tribulation, the 144,000 of the 12 tribes of Israel (Revelation 7.1-9) will preach the Gospel throughout the entire world. Billions will be saved because of their preaching (Revelation 7.13-14). Many of them will also share the gospel and lead millions more to Jesus. No one knows how many people will be saved during the Tribulation, but it could be several billion, possibly half the world's population (Isaiah 26.9).

Those who trust in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation will be hated and persecuted in large numbers during the Tribulation. They will be put in prison, and most will be killed. Untold millions of people, who are saved after the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation and are not of the 144,000, will be put to death by the executioners working for Antichrist (Revelation 6.9-11). Some will have the opportunity to speak before governors and kings (presidents, prime ministers, etc.). They are to rely on the Holy Spirit to speak through them rather than devise their own defense.

Family members will turn on each other because of the massive persecution of believers throughout the world. The unsaved will turn in true believers to the authorities. The few believers, who survive this massive persecution, will enter the Millennial Kingdom in mortal bodies and repopulate the world (Isaiah 65.17-25).

The second half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24.15-28; Mark 13.14-23)

The Lord explains what will happen at the mid-point of the Tribulation and beyond:

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing where he ought not, in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a Sabbath. For those days shall be tribulation, such as there hath not been the like from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be And except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake, whom he chose, he shortened the days. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Lo, there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you all things beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth:

Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

The abomination of desolation marks the mid-point of the Tribulation. This event signals the beginning of the greatest time of tribulation in the history of the world. This tribulation from the devil, his horde of fallen angels, the Antichrist and his minions will be very severe, worse than all previous persecutions by the forces of darkness and wickedness (Ephesians 6.12). The tremendous persecution by the forces of evil will be minimal compared to the final wrath of God, which will be greater than at any other time in history. The second half of the tribulation will be so great, that if God were to let it go on more than 3 ½ years, everyone would be killed, and there would be no one to populate the Millennial Kingdom. As it is, very few people survive (Isaiah 13.12).

The abomination of desolation was prophesied in Daniel 9.27. The Beast (little horn) confirms a covenant with many nations, including Israel, at the start of the Tribulation. The signing of this covenant is the beginning of the Tribulation. It lasts seven years, and in the middle of the covenant the Beast (Antichrist) breaks the covenant and puts an end to the sacrifices that are made in the rebuilt Temple in Israel. Putting a stop to the sacrifices is not the abomination of desolation. It is the act, by the Antichrist and the False Prophet, of erecting a statue of the Antichrist in the Holy of Holies and declaring himself to be “God” (2 Thessalonians 2.4). The False Prophet will then force everyone on Earth to worship the Antichrist and his image (Revelation 13.15).

In the middle of the Tribulation the Antichrist will make Jerusalem his second headquarters (the first will be in Babylon). He will then launch a massive pogrom of persecution against the Jews and Christians. The world church, which will be headquartered in Rome prior to this time, will move out. It will establish its new headquarters in the rebuilt city of Babylon (Zechariah 5.7-11).

Believers and religious Jews will flee from Jerusalem and hide in the mountains when the Antichrist moves in. He will begin to persecute Jews immediately after he proclaims himself to be God. Jews in Israel will not have time to pack their bags. When the Antichrist erects the abomination of desolation, they might make it out with just the clothes on their backs if they leave before the Antichrist finishes his show. Pregnant women and mothers with infant children will be very fortunate if they escape. If the persecution begins in the winter, fewer still will be able to escape with their lives (Matthew 24.15-22). Many eschatologists speculate that they will flee to the wilderness of Petra (Revelation 12.14). It will be reminiscent of when they departed Egypt and ate the unleavened bread.

During the second half of the Tribulation, there will be false messiahs and prophets who will perform spectacular signs and wonders. They will almost, but not quite, mislead the elect. Believers will not be fooled, because they know that Jesus Christ is to return quickly with the speed of lightning, and wipe out the armies of the world that have surrounded the city of Jerusalem to fight Him (Revelation 19.17-21).

The Glorious Appearing of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24.29-31; Mark 13.24-27)

Jesus concluded by explaining what would happen when He returns:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

Just before Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, the Earth will be going through massive convulsions. The waves of the oceans will be much larger than normal, bombarding the coastal regions with massive breakers. This unusual activity will cause people to fear the worst. This could be caused by a polar shift (Isaiah 24.1, 20), a partial melting of the polar ice caps, a shift in the moon's orbit or a combination of those things.

The sun and the moon will also be darkened, either by natural or supernatural causes. The heavens will be shaken and stars will fall from the sky. The shaking of the heavens (stars in space) is the work of God, for He is the only one who can shake them (Isaiah 13.13; Joel 3.16; Haggai 2.6, 21; Hebrews 12.26); the devil can only shake the nations (Isaiah 14.16).

The stars falling out of the sky is the language of appearance. We call a meteor a "falling star." The ancients referred to asteroids, meteors and comets as "stars." Asteroids, meteors and comets will strike the Earth just prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Since the heavens will be physically shaken, it is logical that asteroids and comets could be moved out of their orbits and strike the Earth.

Immediately before Christ returns, His *sign* will appear in the sky. Everyone will see it and understand that the time of His Glorious Appearing is at hand.

When Jesus returns to Earth, everyone will see Him returning in the same manner that He departed (Acts 1.11). He will also be accompanied by His holy angels (2 Thessalonians 1.7), and by believers of the Church Age. They will be riding flying horses just as Christ will (Revelation 19.7-8, 14), His will be a cherub in the form of a horse (Psalm 18.10). Some of the holy angels will come in their chariots of fire (Isaiah 66.15).

Christ will execute the wicked who are hiding in the ancient land of Edom (Isaiah 63.1-6; Habakkuk 3.3), and then travel to Jerusalem to destroy the armies of the Antichrist, who have surrounded the city to do battle with Him (Revelation 17.14). He will slay them with fire that comes from His mouth (Isaiah 66.15-16; Revelation 19.21), and strike the wicked with "*rays coming forth from his hand*" (Habakkuk 3.4). He also strikes them with pestilence (Habakkuk 3.5).

The command to be ready for the Rapture (Matthew 24.32-51; Mark 13.28-37; Luke 21.29-36)

According to the Law of Recurrence, Jesus returns to the subject of verses 7 and 8 of Matthew 24, and tells the parable of the Fig Tree. He also explains what will happen in the “last days” and why Christians should watch for *warning signs*:

Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Then shall two man be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left. Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24.32-51)

The Lord described the Tribulation and His return at the end of it. He then returned to the events that will take place before the start of the Tribulation in this passage. We find here the “law of recurrence” principle. This hermeneutical law can be likened to painting a portrait. The artist blocks out different parts of one’s features, and the next day he fills in the details. Jesus takes up where He left off by the “law of double reference” in verse 8 of Matthew 24. He continues to explain what will happen after the beginning of birth pains which were the first two world wars.

The parable of the fig tree is a prophecy of the rebirth of the nation of Israel. The Greek phrase “*panta tauta*,” that is translated “*all these things*,” refers to the beginning of birth pains (Matthew 24.8). Jesus was saying, in effect, that when you see the birth pains – World War I and II, that are accompanied by famines, pestilence and earthquakes – you will know that His return is drawing near.

The Greek word *genea* is translated “generation.” The words *gene*, *genetic*, and *gynecology* are derived from it. It literally means “*born one*” (Thayer’s *Greek-English*

Lexicon, p. 112). Jesus said that this “born one” (nation of Israel) will be in existence when He returns. The same word is used in John 3.16 and is translated “begotten.”

Luke recorded the parable of the fig tree, “*And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees*” (Luke 21.29). He added “*all the trees*” which is a reference to the United Nations. That political organization is the foundation for the creation of the “end-times” world government that is still many years away. In 1948, the fig tree (Israel) put forth its leaves – it became a nation. Israel could not have been recognized as a nation without the United Nations to do it.

Remember, Jesus said there would be birth pains – World Wars I and II. Birth pains always indicate there will be a birth. What is this birth about which Jesus was talking? There can be no question that He was referring to the birth of the nation of Israel, which took place on May 14, 1948. This was also prophesied in Isaiah 66.7, where the prophet used this same term, *travail*:

“Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she delivered a man child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth?” says Jehovah. “Shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb?” says your God. (Isaiah 66.7-9, KJV)

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. (Hosea 11.1)

The birth of a man-child, preceded by a time of travail, is what the above passages prophesied. The nation of Israel is Jehovah’s son. Those birth pains were World Wars I and II. Finally the birth of this man-child took place on May 14, 1948. Jesus said “this born one” would not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.

The *signs* Jesus gave were the beginning of birth pains, followed by the *super-sign* – the birth of the nation of Israel, and its growth from a baby to a mature man. Note the analogy of the growth of a Jewish child into manhood with the development of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was born in 1948. Then war broke out and the Arabs vowed to behead Israel in 10 days. All they were able to do was give Israel a mild circumcision in 8 days. A Jewish boy’s Bar Mitzvah (his coming of age), occurs at age 13; at Israel’s “Bar Mitzvah” (1961), Adolf Eichmann was captured (1961) and hung for his role in the Holocaust. That marked the year Israel was recognized by the United Nations as a developed nation. A Jewish boy was not supposed to go to war until after his 19th birthday (Numbers 1.3). Israel became a man of war by taking back the city of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War of 1967. A Jewish male could only become a priest (a man of peace) in his 30th year. On September 17, 1978, Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, signed the Camp David Accord. That led directly to the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, signed on March 26, 1979.

The phrase, “*but of that day and hour knows no one*” (Matthew 24.36), is a reference to the Pre-Tribulation Rapture, not the Second Coming. We know this because anyone alive when the Antichrist commits the abomination of desolation can simply count the days (1260) until the Second Coming (Daniel 12.11).

When will the Rapture take place? As noted early, it cannot be pinned down several years beforehand to the exact day and hour. The Second Coming should take

place by 2028 at the latest, and the Rapture 7 years earlier. Jesus said that the generation that sees the birth of Israel will be alive when He returns: “*this generation (born one - Israel) shall not pass away.*” If the re-establishment of the nation of Israel is the starting date of that generation, 80 years brings us to 2028 (Psalm 90.10).

Jesus did not know the day of His Second Coming prior to His death and resurrection because He voluntarily gave up knowledge of certain things when He came to Earth. He did not give up His divinity, but voluntarily “*emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men*” (Philippians 2:7).

It is possible that we may be able to pin down the day of the Rapture when we come to the last year of the Church Age through the study of the 7 major feasts celebrated by the Hebrew people (Leviticus 23). They are: Passover (14th of Nisan-March/April), Unleavened Bread (15th of Nisan); First Fruits (1st day after the Sabbath after Passover); Weeks or Pentecost (50 days after First Fruits); Trumpets (1st of Tishri-September/October); Atonement (10th of Tishri); and Tabernacles or Booths (15th of Tishri).

Four of these 7 feasts were fulfilled by Jesus during His First Coming. He died on Passover (John 13:1; 19:17-18), being the final Passover Lamb (John 1:29). He was buried on the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:42), and rose from the tomb on the Feast of First Fruits (Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-8), being the First Fruit (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). On the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and took up permanent residence inside the bodies of 120 believers (Acts 1.15; 2:1-4). Four of the 7 feasts were fulfilled on the very day of the feasts, leaving 3 to be fulfilled.

The remaining 3 feasts await fulfillment, and some believe they could be fulfilled on the day of each feast. The Rapture may be the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The Second Coming of Jesus could then fulfill the Feast of Atonement, and the establishing of the Millennial Kingdom on Earth could be the fulfillment of the Feast of Booths.

Of the 3 major events to come, the Rapture will take place first. Therefore, it should take place on the day of the next feast – the Feast of Trumpets. We cannot know in advance which year the Rapture will take place, but if this position which some take is correct, the Rapture would take place on the Feast of Trumpets at the blowing of the last of the many trumpets of that two-day feast.

Dr. Jack Van Impe believes that it is possible the remaining prophecies will be fulfilled on the days of the three remaining feasts – Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Atonement and Feast of Booths. He explained his belief that the history of man may be completed by the year 2000 in his 1990 video, “A.D. 2000 – the End?”

We also know that God “*will do nothing, except he reveal his secret unto his servants the prophets*” (Amos 3:7). Is it possible that God has revealed when the Rapture will take place through the feasts? If the 3 major events yet to be fulfilled – Rapture, and Coming and Millennial Kingdom are fulfilled on the last 3 feasts they will be fulfilled in different years.

Some eschatologists agree that the warning by Jesus concerning His return (Matthew 24.32-51) is a reference to the Second Coming, and not the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Arnold Fruchtenbaum explained why it refers to the Pre-Tribulation Rapture:

Within premillennial and pretribulational circles, the majority view today is that this passage is speaking of the Second Coming rather than the Rapture. Two main reasons are given. *First*: contextually, Jesus has been speaking about the Second Coming and since this passage follows that discussion, then, logically, it would

mean that He is speaking of the same thing. *Second*: the “taking away” of Matthew 24:40-41 is taken to be the same as verse 39, which is a “taking away” in judgment. Hence, the “taking away” is in judgment at the Second Coming, and not the blessing of the Rapture.

In answer to the first point, Matthew 24:36 begins with the word *But*, which in Greek is *peri de* construction in Greek is a contrastive introduction of a new subject and, hence, is often translated as *But concerning* (1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 1 Thes. 5:1; etc.). The usage of this construction points to the introduction of a new subject. So yes, He has been discussing the Second Coming until this point. However, the *peri de* means that He is now introducing a new subject, and that is the Rapture. This would not be the first time the chronological sequence of the Olivet Discourse was broken to speak of an earlier event. It also happened in Luke 21:12. In answer to the *second* point, in Greek, the “taking away” in verses 40-41 is a different Greek word than the one used in verse 39, and so it need not be interpreted as the same kind of “taking away.” (*The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 2003 edition, pp. 640-641)

Jesus said in Matthew 24:38 that the Rapture would take place in a time like days of Noah. Mankind will be “*eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage*” just as they did in the time of Noah. This must describe a period of time prior to the Tribulation. During the Tribulation, one-fourth of the world’s population will be killed in the first few months (Revelation 6.1-8). Things get much worse. So many people will die during the Tribulation that man will be scarcer than the gold of Ophir (Isaiah 13.12). It is unlikely that people at the end of the Tribulation period will be living life as they did in the time of Noah before the flood. The context depicts a normal type of living before the start Tribulation. During the Tribulation food will be extremely scarce and expensive (Revelation 6.6), and marriage will be a rare event. Seven women will beg one man to be their husband (Isaiah 4.1).

Arnold Frutchenbaum is right that there are two different Greek words used in Matthew 24:39-41 that are translated “taken.” In verse 39 it says, “*they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.*” The Greek word is *airo* which means “to take up or away.” It is a reference to being taken away in judgment. In verses 40-41 the Greek word is *paralambano* which is made up of two words – *para*, which means “alongside of” or “with,” and *lambano* which means “to take.” It is the same word that is used in John 14.3 where it is translated “*receive you unto myself,*” referring to the return of Christ for His Church at the Rapture. All Pre-millennial Bible teachers understand that. It could not have a different meaning when He was speaking to the same group of disciples not more than 72 hours earlier on the Mount of Olives. Some scholars say the passage refers to the wicked being taken into judgment at the end of the Tribulation and believers left behind to go into the glorious Millennial Kingdom. However, *aphiemi*, the Greek word for “*left*” means “to send away” or “leave behind.” It is used in 1 Corinthians 7.12-13 of a husband leaving his wife. Paul says a believing husband should not “*leave*” an unbelieving wife if she consents to live with him.

Certainly the statement, “*two men in the field, one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding in the mill, one will be taken and one will be left,*” is a description of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture as it is in John 14.3.

Some argue that *paralambano*, as is used John 19.17, means that since Jesus was taken away in judgment to be crucified the word has a negative connotation. The passage simply means the soldiers took Jesus with them. Then the words describing where they

took Him are added. The word is also used in Matthew 4.5, 8 where the devil took Jesus to a high place and told Him to jump, and to a high mountain where he showed Him the kingdoms of the world. The word does not have any connotation of good or evil. It means to take along side of. It is the word that is used in John 14.3 and translated “*receive you unto myself*.”

Jesus, in a previous account, said that when He returns it will be like the days of Noah. The time of the Rapture would be in a day similar to that of the time of Noah and Lot:

And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: after the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away: and let him that is in the field likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I say unto you, In that night there shall be two men on one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. There shall be two women grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. There shall be two men in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. And they answering say unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together. (Luke 17.26-37)

This passage contains more information about the Rapture. We see that on the very 24-hour day that Noah entered the ark (Genesis 7.13-17), and on the day that Lot departed the city of Sodom (Genesis 19.15-16, 23-25), the wrath of God fell upon the wicked. The Tribulation will start within 24 hours of the Rapture. (There will be no gap, as some eschatologists argue.)

Just before the Lord returns Christians are to take heed to the words of Jesus who said, “*But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21.28). When He returns, there is nothing for us to do but look up and wait to be caught up. Christians should also remember the warning Jesus gave concerning Lot’s wife, “*Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it*” (Luke 17.33).

Believers who know what to do and who are “watching” for the *warning signs*, will know when that day has arrived. They will also know what to do – just lift up their heads and wait for the “catching up.” Christians who do this will receive the special crown for “*looking*” for the return of Christ, and be caught up alive:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4.8)

All believers, who know what to “look” for on the day of the Rapture as noted above, and have been “eagerly awaiting” His return, will receive that special crown. They will also receive the “*day-star*”:

And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1.19)

The “*day dawn*” refers to the *signs* of Christ’s coming. The “*day-star*” is the assurance that God will give to diligent students of Bible prophecy that the Rapture is about to occur just before it takes place. When those final *warning signs* appear, (Luke 21.25-28) all believers, who love the appearing of Jesus, will look up and await His arrival because they will have been given the “*day-star*” – the assurance that the events that will take place just before the Rapture are indeed the final *warning signs*, and thus be enabled to “*look up*” and be caught up alive.

Noah knew when to enter the ark because God told him when (Genesis 7.4). Lot knew when to depart Sodom because the angels told him and dragged him and his family out (Genesis 19.12-16). On the day of the Rapture Christians who are looking for Christ’s return will know it is the day of their departure because the “*day star*” will arise in hearts giving them the assurance of the **When**.

The warning by Jesus for Christians to remember Lot’s wife, and to look up and wait for His return when the *warning signs* He spoke of start to take place is a proof that the Rapture cannot take place at *any moment*. If there are no *warning signs* to look for just prior to His return, the warning to remember Lot’s wife makes no sense.

Jesus concluded this passage by saying that pairs of people will be separated at His return. Christians will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and the others will be left behind to go through the Tribulation.

The *warning signs* will grow in intensity before and after the day of the Rapture/Tribulation. Before that day and on that day there will be *signs* in the sun, moon and stars (Joel 2.30-31), and distress and fear among the nations (Luke 21.25-27). There are also “*lightnings and voices and thunders*” that proceed from the throne of Jehovah (Revelation 4.5). During the Tribulation the intensity of judgment grows with the breaking of the 7th Seal – “*thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake*” (Revelation 8.5). When the 7th angel blows his trumpet, there will be “*lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail*” (Revelation 11.19). The final judgment comes when the 7th angel pours out his bowl, there is “*lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake*” (Revelation 16.18). It flattens every mountain and sinks every island on Earth (Revelation 16.20). Hailstones also fall from the sky about the “*weight of a talent*” (100 pounds).

Before the Tribulation the *warning signs* become more spectacular. The last 7 *warning signs* will be obvious to everyone and they grow in importance. The final two *warning signs* will be so obvious and spectacular that many people around the world will literally pass out due to fear (Luke 21.26).

When we come to the days just before the Rapture/Tribulation so many *warning signs* will have been fulfilled that all students of Bible prophecy will clearly understand that the Rapture/Tribulation is a very short time away, and that all of the prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts will be fulfilled before the Rapture.

Parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25.1-13)

Before concluding His prophetic briefing, Jesus gives two parables, the first being that of the ten virgins:

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

This parable shows that Jesus would be gone a long time before returning to rapture His bride. Notice that it says the bridegroom “*tarried.*” He was gone so long that all of the virgins fell asleep. If the virgins are symbolic of the Church, it means that Jesus will be gone so long that the majority of Christians will give up looking for His return (2 Peter 3.3-4). This is true today, even though hundreds of books have been written about the Rapture and the Second Coming. Most pastors rarely teach on eschatology because they do not understand it. Very few Christians study the subject because they consider it to be too complex to understand. The vast majority do not even know what the word “eschatology” means. The five foolish virgins represent unsaved people who go to church and think they are saved.

Parable of the talents (Matthew 25.14-30)

The last parable Jesus gave emphasized the fact that He would return after a long period of time:

For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and

faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

This parable shows that Jesus would go into a far country (Heaven), and be gone for a long period of time before returning. He told the same parable earlier in His ministry (Luke 19.12-27). Both parables emphasize the truth that Jesus would be gone for a very long time. These parables are strong proof that Jesus could not return at *any moment* since Pentecost. He had to be gone a very long time, and we know that period of time will be about 2000 years.

The two servants, who doubled their talents, represent true believers of the Church Age who are faithful in serving Jesus. The servant, who hid his one talent, represents unsaved people who go to church and think they are saved. (Some Christians do not serve the Lord. They are saved, but they will receive few rewards as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 3.11-15.)

Judgment of the nations (Matthew 25.31-46)

Jesus concluded by saying He would judge the wicked and reward the righteous when He returns:

But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.

Jesus Christ first returns to the ancient land of Edom (Isaiah 63.1-6; Habakkuk 3.3). He marches up through the forces of the Antichrist to Jerusalem to destroy the armies of the Antichrist that have surrounded it (Revelation 19.17-21). Everyone who survives the Tribulation is then gathered before the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged. The righteous enter into the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 25.31-34). They are the ones who did not take the mark of the Beast, and were kind and helpful to the Jews. They will be saved at the Glorious Appearing of Christ when they are given the gospel in its fullness. That is what is meant by the statement of the Lord, “*But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved*” (Matthew 24.13). They will enter the Millennial Kingdom in their mortal bodies, and repopulate the Earth.

Jesus will explain to the wicked why they are condemned. During the Tribulation they did not help those who were hungry, thirsty, sick or in prison. They did not help those in need, because they were not saved (Matthew 25.41-46).

Chapter review

Special instructions to believers prior to the Rapture

By way of review we will recap the major points of this chapter. Jesus gave special instructions to the believers who will be living in the last days:

And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows. (Luke 21.25)

And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah cometh. (Joel 2.30-31)

These *signs* will begin before the Rapture, increase in intensity during the Tribulation, coming to an end at the return of the Lord in glory. Jesus said, “*But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21.28). We take that literally. Jesus said that those who are looking up when they see these *signs* will receive a special reward, that is, to be caught up alive.

The last instruction is:

But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare. (Luke 21.34-35)

Most of us are not touched by either of these two words “*surfeiting*” and “*drunkenness*,” but we are by this next statement:

For so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21.34-36)

The word “*stand*” indicates “standing innocent, unashamed.” Jesus has given special instructions to believers living immediately preceding the Rapture. That is, we are to look up, stop where we are, turn our heads toward heaven, and watch for our coming Redeemer. If we do not, how embarrassed we will be, having failed God’s last test. There are many people who are saying, “Oh, I’m anxious for the Lord’s return; and if He comes today I’m ready.” God is going to give one final test to show us if we are truly ready. So be ready to look up. If we look up in obedience we will not be harmed, but will be caught up alive and receive the “*crown of righteousness*” (2 Timothy 4.8).

The Day-Star

The “*day-star*” is a promise from God given through Peter. He urges all Christians to study prophecy:

And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1.19)

The “*day dawn*” refers to the signs of Christ’s coming. The “*day-star*” is the assurance that God will give to diligent students of prophecy that the Rapture is about to occur just before it takes place. We have seen there will be signs in the sun, moon, stars and upon the earth immediately prior to the Rapture. Jesus told us when we see these *signs* begin to come to pass we are to look up (Luke 21.28). How will we know to look up? That is the “*day-star*.” Sincere students of prophecy who truly love his appearing will be given the assurance that this is the time to look up for their redemption (the Rapture) draweth nigh.

Days of Noah and Lot

Jesus made it clear that His Second Coming would be a long way off, and his disciples had no reason to look for His return in the near future:

And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it

lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day. (Luke 17.22-24)

Luke 17.23 refers to the Glorious Appearing of Christ at the end of the Tribulation; but in verse 25, we read that He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Jesus then spoke about the events of the Rapture of the Church:

And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. (Luke 17.26)

While the days of Noah were very wicked, Jesus did not particularly deal with the wickedness of Noah's time, but rather with the normalcy of the way people lived in Noah's day:

And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. (Luke 17.26-27)

Jesus showed that the sin of Noah's day was that people lived as though they would never die despite predictions of coming destruction within 120 years (Genesis 6.3). *"Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded..."* (Luke 17.28). The verbs here, by the way, are in the imperfect mode and should be translated, "they kept on" eating and drinking.

But in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: after the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed. (Luke 17.29-30)

Many Bible scholars put Luke 17.26 and the following verses at the end of the Tribulation. This cannot be because Jesus was showing by the days of Noah and the days of Lot, normal living – buying and selling in a normal way, eating and drinking in a normal way. At the end of the Tribulation, the people will not be buying and selling in a normal way, nor marrying and giving in marriage. The mark of the Beast will have been established, and people will not be able to buy or sell unless they have that mark. Marriage will have been virtually abolished (Isaiah 4.1). These phrases, *"days of Noah"* and *"days of Lot"* refer to the days immediately prior to the Rapture of the Church. *"In that day (that is in the day of the Rapture), he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away: and let him that is in the field likewise not return back (Luke 17.31).*

And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished. (Luke 21.29-32)

The Greek word *genea* that is translated "generation" means "born one." Jesus referred to the birth of Israel. May 14, 1948, and likened it to the birth of a Jewish

boy. Israel (that Jewish boy) will not grow up and become an old man in the eightieth year of his life before all the things He mentioned in the Olivet Discourse come to pass.

Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Matthew 24.35)

Conclusion

Do not wait until the Tribulation starts to trust in **Jesus Christ** to save you. If you go into the Tribulation, there is no guarantee you will survive it for very long. Within the first year or so, one-fourth of the world's population will die from war, famine, pestilence and wild animals (Revelation 6.8). By the middle of the Tribulation, one-third of the remaining population of the world will be dead (Revelation 9.15), leaving half of the world's population alive. Things only get worse. So many people die during the Tribulation that man becomes rarer than gold (Isaiah 13.12). (If you have not trusted **Jesus Christ** to save you turn to Appendix B.)

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 13

1. What is the “**What**” and what is the “**When**”?
 - A.
 - B.
2. What were the first birth pains and what was the birth that followed those birth pains?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
3. Will Christians, who know Bible prophecy, be surprised by the Rapture?
4. Will students of Bible prophecy receive a special crown for eagerly “looking” for the return of Jesus?