

The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

(Proverbs 4:18)

*You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely
as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners.
Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me.*

(Song of Songs 6:4-6)

CONTENTS

The Day of all Days	05
Answering the Critic	08
Many Signs Yet No Signs?	16
Why No Specific Dates?	21
Timing of the Rapture	23
Are You Really Ready?	44

THE DAY OF ALL DAYS

The most important end-time event the Bible teaches is that Jesus Christ is COMING AGAIN. The prophetic promise that He is one day coming back to Planet Earth to banish evil and bring in everlasting righteousness has been a source of great comfort for believers of every generation, a “*blessed hope*” indeed. This Final Conflict between good and evil is described most clearly in the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John writes:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, “Come gather for the great supper of God to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders – flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.”

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image.

Those two were thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

(Revelation 19:17-21)

What a stark contrast described in the above verses! There are two very conflicting responses. One a cry of praise about the righteousness of God's judgements and the other an outrageous attempt to resist His rule.

It is hard to imagine the evil and madness in the heart of man could go so far. The armies of the world will apparently forget their animosity toward each other and unite to fight the Son of God and His Heavenly Armies.

But both the Antichrist and the False Prophet, who had deceived the masses with his sorcery and miracles, will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire to be tormented forever. Satan will be bound in a pit to steal, kill and destroy no more.

The Lord Jesus will then turn to judge all those still alive on Earth who had rejected Him and His people and worshipped the Antichrist (*Matthew 25:31-46*). He will set up His Throne in the City of Jerusalem and from there rule without rival over the kingdoms of this world!

A Word of Caution

In speaking of the return of Christ, dear friends, we need to be aware of false teachings on the subject. Some liberal Christians and cultists teach that the Second Coming is a spiritual event. This means Jesus is coming spiritually and not physically and visibly. Others teach the Second Coming refers to finding God in our hearts. Still others teach that the Second Advent refers to a substitute Jesus who will guide the world into a new age of peace and harmony.

To safeguard against such error, the Holy Spirit used three different words in the New Testament Documents to make it clear beyond doubt that Jesus is coming personally, physically and visibly.

The first of these is *Parousia*. This is the most common term used in the New Testament for the Second Advent. It means *coming, arrival* or *presence*. It was used in the first century for the visit of an emperor or other important persons. The word gives the idea that there will be nothing vague or uncertain about the Lord's coming. He will do something which will be visible to all.

If someone still wants to argue that the Lord's coming to us at the end of the Age means that He is absent at the moment, the other two words used to describe the event should remove all doubts.

The first of these is *apokalupsis*.

This word carries the meaning of revelation, unveiling, and removing the cover of something that is hidden. So the Lord's coming will reveal who He is and what the world really is. Everything which is now hidden will come to light and be disclosed.

The other term is *epiphaneia*. This word also gives the idea of making known and making visible things which are secret and invisible at present. It carries the notion of drawing back a veil so that what exists already may be truly seen for what it is. But the term also means appearing or manifestation.

ANSWERING THE CRITIC

According to some Bible critics Jesus and the New Testament writers were very much mistaken as to the time of His return and therefore all end-time biblical prophecy must be considered fallible and rejected. Unfortunately, these fallacies have hindered many people from seeing the prophetic significance of what is happening around them.

Below I have given just a few examples of the most common Scripture passages that are cited as proof to these claims. The first can be found in the Gospel of Matthew:

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

(Matthew 24:34)

It is claimed that Jesus plainly teaches here that the generation living at the time He spoke this prophecy would not have passed away before all the things recorded in the preceding verses had come to pass. Of course, if true, this would qualify as a mistake on the Lord's part. But if anyone will read the entire passage, and the context within which this verse is found, he will see that Jesus teaches nothing of the kind.

The word rendered *generation* in this passage can often times be used to mean *race, family, or men begotten of the same stock*, and there is nothing to exclude that this is one of the meanings of the word used in the Gospel accounts.

Taking this as the true meaning of the word *generation*, the passage can be interpreted to mean that the Jewish race, “*will not pass away*,” but will maintain its identity until the coming of the Lord.

It is a historical fact that the Jewish race – though driven from their native lands and scattered throughout the nations of the world for centuries – have continued to exist and retain their race identity to this day.

Another interpretation that has been offered for the meaning of the word *generation* is that Jesus was speaking about how rapidly things will culminate in the last days leading up to His return. That is, when all the signs of which He said would precede His coming begin to happen, events will ripen so fast that the generation living when the signs appear will not have passed away until all things belonging to that particular epoch will have come to pass.

Digging a Little Deeper

The second passage of Scripture which has been constantly used to claim that Jesus was mistaken about His Second Coming can be found in the Gospel of Matthew cited below:

I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

(Matthew 16:28)

This is interpreted to say that the Lord’s coming again to establish His earthly reign would be before some of those standing in His presence had died. Now when one takes care to read this very same statement in the parallel passages of the Gospel of Mark and Luke, it becomes obvious that Jesus was uttering a prophecy of His Transfiguration and not His Second Advent at all.

It is the opinion of many scholars that there should not be a chapter division where Matthew chapter seventeen begins, but that the text should continue right on as it does in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke. In fact, chapter divisions are not a part of the original Scriptures. In the Gospel of Luke we read it like this:

But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him!”

When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

(Luke 9:27-37)

Only *some* of those standing with Jesus when He uttered the prophecy were to see Him come in His Kingdom with power, and as we can see from the verses quoted above, only three of them did – Peter, James and John.

These three were to go up with Jesus to the Mount, and there on the Mountain they were to see the glory shining forth in His face, in His Person and in the very raiment He wore. They were to hear the Father declare, “*This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.*” Years later, after Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension, the Apostle Peter testifies to what we are saying with these words:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

(2 Peter 1:16-19)

If events had been allowed to take their natural course, Jesus would have manifested Himself there and then to the world as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, as He had done to the Disciples. But He chose rather to go down from the Mount of Transfiguration – where He had been manifested in glory as coming in His Kingdom, where the Kingdom of God came with power – to die as an atoning sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary that all men might be saved. In relation to this subject, I find the following words of one Christian minister extremely thought provoking. He wrote:

For Christ to be glorious was almost a less matter than for Him to restrain or hide His glory. It is forever His glory that He concealed His glory; and that, though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor.

Incredible! The Transfiguration, was not a new miracle, but the temporary cessation of an ongoing one. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying His glory!

Did Paul Entertain Mistaken Hopes?

The third passage of Scripture critics constantly cite as proof that the New Testament writers were mistaken regarding the Lord's Second Coming is found in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul writes:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words.

(1Thessalonians 4:16-18)

The phrase, "*We who are still alive and are left,*" is said to be evident that Paul was expecting Jesus to return in his own lifetime. But every believer who has a true understanding of the doctrine of the Second Coming of the Lord naturally entertains the hope that he may be alive when the event occurs. And as we shall

demonstrate in another chapter, Jesus wanted us to have such a hope.

I too hope to be alive when Jesus comes, but never would I venture to teach that I will be. And this is true also with the Apostle Paul's words here. He knew quite well that it is not for believers "*to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.*" This conclusion can be further verified by Paul's own words in his Second Letter to that same Church when he writes:

For God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

(2 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

The phrase, "*whether we are awake or asleep,*" means whatever the case may be, indicating that it may be possible for them to witness the Lord's coming, but it is not a certainty.

In the passage from First Thessalonians under criticism Paul simply puts himself in the class of people who will be alive at the time of Christ's return. His words could be paraphrased, "*we Christians who are alive.*"

There are also many other passages in the New Testament that prove it was considered normal in the early Church to expect Christ's return in their lifetime. Consider the following:

Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

(1 Corinthians 1:7)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

(Titus 2:11-14)

Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

(1Thessalonians 1:9-10)

The Apostle Paul also urged Timothy to, “*Keep this commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Here again the language used includes the possibility that the Lord could come in Timothy’s lifetime. Such expectancy can also be found in Paul’s Epistle to the believers at Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Philippians 3:20)

The One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

(Philippians 1:6-7)

This statement reflects Paul's expectation that these believers could be alive when Christ returned. Otherwise he would have said, "will bring it to completion until you die." And we see in the following passage that Jesus Himself wanted the Twelve to have that same expectation. In the Gospel of John we read:

*When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!
So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"*

(John 21:21-24)

But does Jesus not give the idea in some of His parables that His coming back would be after a long time? For example, in the Gospel of Matthew He uses a parable to show that because "*the bridegroom,*" Christ, seemed to delay His coming, some professing believers would fall into spiritual slumber.

And immediately after this parable, Jesus also speaks of a delay with the parable of a Man travelling away into a far country, and only after a long time would return to reckon with His servants. This theme is again emphasized by the parable of the ten minas in chapter nineteen of the Gospel of Luke, because the Disciples thought the Kingdom was to come immediately. We will unravel this puzzle in chapter four.

MANY SIGNS YET NO SIGNS?

During His earthly ministry Jesus did indeed say continually that many signs and events must precede His Second Advent and indicate its nearness. In the Gospel of Matthew, after He had told His Disciples about the coming judgement on Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple, they asked the following questions:

Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

(Matthew 24:3-4)

In reply, Jesus does not give any specific dates, but clearly informs them of what to look out for:

For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

So when you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to take his cloak.

How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight may not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equalled again.

If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

At that time if anyone says to you, “Look here is the Christ!” or, “There he is!” do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.

So, if anyone tells you, “There he is, out in the desert,” do not go out, or, “Here he is, in the inner rooms,” do not believe it.

For as lighting that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(Matthew 24:4-32)

Jesus then concludes His list of events that must precede His Second Advent by saying:

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

(Matthew 24:32-34)

In other words, just as we can tell that summer is near when we see the first leaves appear on the fig tree, so we will be able to tell Christ's return is upon us when we see all these prophetic events being fulfilled and, like labour pains, with an increase in frequency and intensity as we get closer to the end. That is clear enough, but then Jesus finishes up by saying:

*But about **that day** and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

*Keep **awake** therefore, for **you do not know on what day your Lord is coming**. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must **be ready**, for the Son of Man is **coming at an unexpected hour**.*

(Matthew 24:36-45)

On the surface, it does seem Jesus is contradicting Himself here. He gives very specific details to warn His Church that His arrival is upon us and yet He says that He will come at an unexpected hour, like a thief in the night, and as in the days of Noah. In the days of Noah the majority of people were carrying on with the normal functions of life; with normal and legitimate plans for tomorrow, next week and next year, when complete destruction came upon them very unexpectedly.

But Unexpected for Who?

Once again, Scripture must be its own interpreter. In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians the Apostle Paul gives us the answer. He writes:

Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

(1 Thessalonians 5:1-4)

Paul uses very similar language here to the words of Jesus cited above. He says that *the day of the Lord – that day in Matthew 24:36 – will come like a thief in the night*, and like the commencement of a woman's *labour pains*, in that the precise moment of the beginning of her labour pains is quite unpredictable. This is true even today in spite of all the modern techniques for monitoring pregnancies.

However, Paul goes on to say in that same passage TO WHOM the Lord will come at an unexpected hour:

*But you are not in darkness, brethren, for **that day** to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.*

(1Thessalonians 5:4-7)

So there are no contradictions at all! The Lord's coming will be unexpected, or by surprise, for only one class of people – those who are of this world and caught up in this world's system. However, it will include professing believers as well as unbelievers.

The fact that many even within the visible Church will not be awake and ready is explained very clearly in the parables of the unfaithful slave and the ten virgins that follow Matthew chapter twenty-four quoted above.

To conclude, the purpose of Jesus' and Paul's teaching is to prepare God's elect. This does not mean that Christians are to be fanatical or irresponsible, foolishly ignoring any common-sense provisions for the future. It just means that we are to be ALWAYS spiritually awake. We will show you how to do this in chapter six.

WHY NO SPECIFIC DATES?

We saw in the previous chapter that Jesus avoided giving any dates concerning His Second Advent, only a list of signs that must precede His coming and indicate its nearness.

For some reason, He does not want us to understand the exact *timing* of His future plans. Through close observation of both the Old and New Testament, you will notice that this is often a characteristic of biblical prophecy.

For instance, the Prophet Daniel, after having received visions of many end-time events, and seeking to understand *when* they would come to pass, was told by the Angel of God:

Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end.

(Daniel 12:9-10)

Like Daniel, the early Church was told, “*it is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.*”

I believe there is a logical reason for this. Think of the situation Jesus was faced with. He had to keep His new-born Bride alive with expectancy for His Second Coming.

If He had said that hundreds of years were to elapse before He came back to Earth to establish His Kingdom, their expectancy would have been shattered and they would have done exactly what He told them not to do. They would have gotten entangled with the world, and had their eyes fixed on earthly things and not “*on things that are above.*”

So very cleverly, Jesus lists prophetic events in such a way so as to fulfil two essential purposes: To keep Christians watching and waiting down through the centuries and insight for Christians living in the last days.

Clever indeed! The way these and other end-time prophecies are recorded in Scripture make it possible for every generation of Church History to interpret them in light of its own historical experience and therefore live in the hope that Christ could appear in their lifetime. And we learn from many historical documents that it actually worked!

A Similar Case

I believe this biblical principle we have spoken of above applies also to the study of the Rapture. For some reason the Lord does not want us to fully understand the exact *timing* of this event.

The fact that the Church has had opposite views on the subject for so long, each with strong biblical evidence to support them, appears to bear witness to this fact. Let us take a look.

TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

Almost all Evangelical Christians believe in a physical rapture, as the Scriptures plainly teach it. But there is some disagreement about the *timing* of the event in relation to the Great Tribulation. The debate centres on whether the Church will go through any or all of the seven years before the Rapture occurs.

The most popular and commonly held views are the Pre-Tribulation View, the Mid-Tribulation View, and the Post-Tribulation View.

Below I have set forth a very brief introduction to each. But before we begin, allow me to underline an important point: Any opinion on this subject is not essential to the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

Therefore, it would be a major error to allow our different views and opinions on prophetic events to cut off fellowship with other believers, who serve Christ and revere the Bible as we do.

When the Apostle Paul says it is good that there are divisions, he is speaking of exposing those who claim to be of Christ, but dishonour Him by their actions.

The Pre-Tribulation View

The Pre-Tribulation View teaches that the Rapture will occur **BEFORE** the Great Tribulation commences and **BEFORE** the appearing of the Antichrist and the implementation of the Mark of the Beast.

At some point after the Church is removed by this “secret rapture,” God’s wrath will begin, when the Antichrist enters into a seven-year covenant or treaty with the *many* (see *Daniel 9:27*).

This divides the Second Advent into two parts, or two distinct phases, separated by an interval of seven years. This means the many signs the Bible says must happen prior to the Lord’s Second Advent are a reference to events that are to occur after the Rapture.

The Mid-Tribulation View

The Mid-Tribulation View teaches that the Rapture will come at the mid-point of the Great Tribulation. This means believers will go through the first half of the seven-year period.

To support this interpretation, they equate the trumpet in First Thessalonians (*4:16*), and the last trumpet in First Corinthians (*15:52*), with the seventh trumpet in the Book of Revelation (*11:15*), which Scripture clearly indicates is blown half way through the seven years.

A problem attributed to this is that Scripture clearly says the Day of the Lord will come at a time when the world is saying “*peace and security*,” and as in the days of Noah and Lot, when everything was normal. But half way through the Great Tribulation the world would already be in chaos and turmoil.

Mid-Tribulationists respond that when Jesus used the days of Lot and Noah as example, He did not necessarily mean that all would be good in the world, or that there would be no crisis. Conditions before the Flood and before the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah were terrible, but it had all become part of the routine and accepted as normal, a lot like what we are witnessing today.

The Post-Tribulation View

The Post-Tribulation View holds that the Rapture will occur towards the end of the Tribulation Period, just before the Second Coming. This teaches that all believers will be raptured up to meet Christ in the air – as First Thessalonians says – and then return shortly after with the Lord to judge unbelievers and the warring nations at Armageddon. This means that the Rapture and the Second Coming are basically one single event separated into two parts by a shorter time period than seven years.

The Post-Tribulation View points out that although the Church will be present on Earth during the out-pouring of God's judgements and the tyranny of the Antichrist, God will protect her from the wrath preserved for sinful men, although many will be martyred for their faith, as the following prophetic portion of Scripture declares:

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

(Revelation 13:7)

Why Not One Resurrection with a Few Phases?

A major Post-Tribulation argument is that the Bible teaches only one resurrection of the righteous, and *Revelation 20:4-5* declares that the *first resurrection* takes place after the Battle of Armageddon. And elsewhere Christ says:

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

(John 6:44-45)

The Pre-Tribulation View argues that Revelation chapter twenty refers to believers who are martyred during the Great Tribulation, those who come to faith after the Church is removed. They also argue that this passage of Revelation actually supports their view. It indicates that all other believers have already been resurrected. And the reason it takes so long for these martyrs to be raised is because they must wait:

Until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

(Revelation 6:11-12)

They add that the reason the resurrection of these martyrs is called the *first resurrection* is to show that they are part of the company, the Church, which has already been resurrected.

And as to Christ raising all believers up on the *last day*, they rightly point out that this is another way of describing *the Day of the Lord*, which a close study of the Bible reveals to be a time period longer than a twenty-four-hour day.

It refers to the Great Tribulation, the Rapture, the Second Advent and judgement of the nations. It also includes the Millennium reign, the Great White Throne Judgement, Satan's final rebellion and destruction (see *Revelation 20*) and the destruction of this old Universe and the creation of a new one (see *Revelation 21*).

It's a Question of Who the Elect Are

Another powerful passage of Scripture Post-Tribulationists use to support their view is found in the following passage from the Gospel of Matthew:

Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(Matthew 24:29-32)

This verse clearly says that the Lord catches up His *elect* at the end of the Great Tribulation. There is also the sound of the *trumpet*, just as in First Thessalonians chapter four and First Corinthians chapter fifteen.

Pre-Tribulationists contend that the trumpets of Thessalonians and Corinthians are connected with the Church and the raising of believers who have died in Christ, while the trumpet in Matthew quoted above is connected to Jews and Christians who become believers during the Tribulation Period.

These new converts are said to be gathered from all over the Earth after the Great Tribulation to a single location to meet the Lord after He has returned to Earth in an open display of glory with all His saints.

Some adherents to the Pre-Tribulation View interpret the term *elect* in Matthew as a reference to the physical seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob only, as this was a common Old Testament term for physical Israel.

They are viewed as being gathered by the angels from every part of the Earth and taken to Israel, where Christ has arrived to destroy the Antichrist, rescue the Jewish people and set up His Millennial Kingdom (See *Isaiah 65:9-25*).

However, it is also true that in the New Testament the term *elect* is used more in connection with spiritual Israel, the Church, composed of both Jew and Gentile, than in connection with physical Israel. Consider the following:

Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us.

(Romans 8:33-35)

Are "Church" and "Saints" Synonymous?

Adherents to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture argue that if it is correct to say the Church will go through the Great Tribulation, then one would expect that the most detailed description of those years – given in chapters four to eighteen of the Book of Revelation – would speak of the Church's role on Earth during that period. But there is absolute silence on the subject, they assert.

They point out that the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, occurs nineteen times in the first three chapters of Revelation, where the Lord Jesus addresses Seven Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, and does not appear again until chapter nineteen, where the Church is described as a Bride adorned for her Bridegroom.

Post-Tribulationists reply that while the word *church* does not appear in the Book of Revelation from chapter four to eighteen, the word *saints* is used on many occasions, which is proof that the Church will be present on Earth during this time.

Again, Pre-Tribulationists see the word *saints* in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture as a reference to the converts to Christ *after* the Rapture and not to the Church at all.

For Us or With Us?

Pre-Tribulationists also points out how Scripture says in one place the Lord comes *for* His saints and in another place *with* His saints. Therefore, the fact the holy ones, or saints, descend from Heaven *with* Christ to judge the world must assume they had been caught up to Heaven some time before.

Not so for adherents to a Post-Tribulation Rapture. They use the argument stated earlier: that all believers will be raptured up to meet Christ in the air and then return shortly after with the Lord to judge unbelievers and the warring nations at Armageddon, thus fulfilling the *with* passages.

Is a Longer Time Interval Really Necessary?

Another important argument for the Pre-Tribulation View is what is seen as the absolute necessity of a time interval between the Rapture and the Second Advent. This time interval is said to be needed to allow many of the end-time events described in the Bible to fit together in a non-contradictory manner.

For example, the New Testament states that all believers must one day appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. In Second Corinthians we read:

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due him for the things done in the body whether good or bad.

(2 Corinthians 5:10-11)

This event is often called the *Bema Judgement*. The word comes from the Greek word *bema*, which refers to a raised platform where awards were given at the Greek games or a place where a judge presided.

Many Christians agree this judgement will be for believers only, as the context of Second Corinthians and parallel passages clearly indicates that the word *we* refers to Paul and other believers. Unbelievers will appear at a separate judgement – the Great White Throne Judgement of Revelation chapter twenty. This is clearly portrayed in the Old Testament also. In the Psalms we read:

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

(Psalm 1:5)

The purpose of the Judgement Seat of Christ is not to determine if a person is saved or not, for eternal life was given on Earth at the moment a person trusted in the finished work of Jesus and continued in the faith.

Rather this judgement is all about rewards and loss. The Lord will judge our service (*1Corinthians 3:13*), words (*Matthew 12:36*), motives behind our actions (*1Corinthians 4:5*), and our treatment of others (*Romans 14:10-13*), to mention a few.

This being established, the question of where and when this judgement occurs is raised. The Apostle Paul tells us when in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. It reads:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time: wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

(1Corinthians 4:5-6)

Supporters of the Pre-Tribulation View interpret the words, “*wait till the Lord comes,*” as a reference to the Rapture and so for them the Judgement Seat of Christ occurs in Heaven.

They further argue that since this verse says Christians will receive their rewards after the Lord comes, and since Scripture gives no mention of the Judgement Seat of Christ in the detailed accounts connected to His Second Coming to Earth, then it must happen with a time interval, seven years, to be exact.

However, among scholars there are actually five options as to where and when the Judgement Seat of Christ will be. Many believe it will happen immediately after the Second Advent. Others believe it will be during the Millennium Kingdom.

Getting “Ready” Down Here or up There?

In chapter nineteen of the Book of Revelation the Church is pictured as the Bride of Christ clothed in fine linen, made ready for her Bridegroom. John writes:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

(Revelation 19:7-9)

Here we are told that these beautiful garments represent the righteous acts of believers. Pre-Tribulationists say that in order to fit the preparation described here, the Bride would have to have been already in Heaven for some time, and not just a short interval.

Contrary to this, Post-Tribulationists argue that Revelation clearly places the Marriage Supper of the Lamb at the end of the Great Tribulation, not seven years before.

Moreover, they point out that since the beautiful white garments of the saints represent the righteous acts of believers, this must have been produced on Earth. However, they are works of faith, not works of the Law.

Otherwise, Who Will Repopulate the Earth?

Another situation where the Pre-Tribulation View believes a time gap is necessary is the presence of believers in mortal bodies during the Millennial Reign.

The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, He will establish His Kingdom that will last for a period of one thousand years (see *Revelation 20:1-6*). And that all the Old Testament saints and New Testament saints will enter it in new glorified bodies.

But the Bible also implies that there will be people in this Messianic Kingdom in their natural human bodies. And that they will carry on ordinary occupations and bear children to populate the world (see *Isaiah 65:20-25*).

Pre-Tribulationists argue that this would be quite impossible if all the saints were caught up at the Second Coming, because everyone would already have a glorified body.

But because the Pre-Tribulation view has at least a seven-year interval between the Rapture and Christ's Second Coming, this is not a problem, because many people will come to faith in Christ during the Great Tribulation and remain alive until Jesus returns.

Moreover, it is argued, if the Rapture happens within moments of the Second Coming, then there would not be any need for a Rapture, Christians would have nothing to be rescued from.

A satisfactory Post-Tribulation reply to these questions is that the Rapture could be simply a short gathering together in Heaven before the descent of Christ and His people to judge the inhabitants on Earth, or for a few days to celebrate the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

As to the repopulating of planet Earth, they suggest it could be young children, who have not yet reached the age of accountability, that will survive the Great Tribulation and be permitted to enter the Millennial Kingdom.

For What Other Reason Their Concern?

In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul had to resolve the problem of a counterfeit letter addressed to the Church in this region that claimed to be written by the Apostle himself.

In this forged letter the author claimed that believers were already in *the Day of the Lord*, that Paul had discussed in his First Letter to the Thessalonians (see *1Thessalonians 5:1-4*). Therefore, Paul is forced to write them this Second Letter to settle the issue, in which he says:

*As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the **day of the Lord** is already here.*

*Let no one deceive you in any way; for **that day** will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.*

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

Pre-Tribulationists interpret Paul's statements above as an indication that the believers at Thessalonica were – present tense – *shaken in mind* and *alarmed* over this forged epistle and that their worry was because they expected to be raptured BEFORE the Great Tribulation began. So Paul was forced to write this Second Letter to comfort them in their distress and “remind them of what he had told them previously.”

Otherwise, they argue, if the Thessalonians believed that they would have to go through the Great Tribulation, then for what reason would they have been so distraught and upset to receive a letter telling them that the Day of the Lord had already come?

They would have been excited, knowing that they would soon see their King, and not afraid. It would mean that what Paul had taught them was being fulfilled.

However, adherents to the Post-Tribulation View interpret Paul's statements to the believers as a warning for them not to be – future tense – *shaken in mind*, because *that day* will not come until the great apostasy and the revealing of the Antichrist, “as he had told them previously.”

In other words, Paul wrote to warn them not to waste time preparing and getting their house in order for an event that was not as close at hand as they had been told in the false letter.

Identifying the Restrainer

In that same passage of Scripture the Apostle Paul says that there is something or someone restraining the Antichrist and his wickedness from being fully manifest:

He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.

Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.

(2 Thessalonians 2:4-9)

Over the centuries many suggestions have been advanced as to who or what the restrainer might be. Some suggested it was the Roman Empire, others the Jewish commonwealth, the preaching of the Gospel, the Angel of Revelation, the Holy Spirit or the Church.

Pre-Tribulationists interpret the restrainer to be the Holy Spirit's work through the Church. This means it is His presence in all true believers individually and corporately that holds back the flood of evil.

So when the Holy Spirit *is removed*, at the Rapture, the Church leaves with Him, and there is no more restraining power. They consider this another powerful proof that the Church will not go through the Great Tribulation.

However, adherents to this view say the return of the Holy Spirit to Heaven will not be a complete withdrawal from Earth during that period. He will still be here, but not in the sense that He is now, living in believers, but in the sense of His ministry in Old Testament times, when He came upon special people for specific purposes. The specific purposes being, in this case, to convict those who are to be saved after the Rapture.

Post-Tribulationists reason that if the Holy Spirit through the Church is holding back the manifestation of the Antichrist now, how is it that He cannot do it with the “Tribulation Church” also, seeing that there will be a great quantity of people saved during that period?

Departing from the World or from the Faith?

Some Post-Tribulation supporters agree the restraining power is indeed the Holy Spirit working through the Church on this Earth, but that it is not God who removes the Church by a secret rapture. Rather, it is the visible Church that removes the Holy Spirit. In other words, as the apostasy gets worse and worse, as we get closer to the end, more and more professing believers will compromise the truth and reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit, causing Him to finally depart.

Removed or Protected?

Pre-Tribulationists assert that Christ would not leave His Bride in a world under judgement because it is against God’s nature and purpose to judge the righteous with the wicked. The rapture of Enoch to Heaven before the Flood and the rescue of Noah, and of Lot and his family from the evil city of Sodom, are given as illustrations of this biblical principle. The following Scriptures are also advanced in support of this view:

For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus – who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

(1Thessalonians 1:9-10)

First, we must define what the Apostle Paul means by the word *rescue*. Does it mean remove or protect? There are numerous cases in the Bible where God DID NOT remove His people, but protected them all through the ordeal – the Israelites in Egypt, the Apostles and Disciples during the tyranny of the Roman Empire, and during the Inquisitions and Dark Ages, to mention a few.

In addition, such a situation is viewed by Post-Tribulationists as a perfect opportunity for a believer to demonstrate his courage, loyalty and faithfulness to his King. It would a perfect opportunity to receive a *better resurrection*.

According to the author of Hebrews, a better resurrection means being an “overcomer” in the face of persecution, and of putting off all earthly rewards and comforts until we get to Heaven, where the recompense will far outweigh the suffering endured.

Elsewhere Jesus uses similar language that could be interpreted to mean either protected through the Great Tribulation or removed by the Rapture. In the Gospel of Luke He says:

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

(Luke 21:34-37)

More Indisputable Evidence?

Another Scripture passage put forward to support a Pre-Tribulation Rapture is also found in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. It reads:

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

(1 Thessalonians 5:4-11)

However, Post-Tribulationists teach this is a reference to the wrath Jesus will inflict at His Second Coming, and His casting people into hell, and not to the Great Tribulation at all, that although terrible, is light in comparison to an eternity without God. And did Jesus not warn us not to fear those who can kill the body only and nothing more? The following passage in Paul's Second Epistle to that same Church is given as proof for this interpretation:

For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-11)

But, it is argued, it would not make sense for the Christian to fear this wrath because He is already saved by grace through faith the moment He receives Christ. However, as we stated earlier, many will fall away from the faith as we get closer to the end.

Finally, the following passage from Revelation chapter three is quoted as proof that God will rescue the Church by the “secret Rapture” from the Great Tribulation:

Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

(Revelation 3:10-11)

To this the following has been pointed out: Most Pre-Tribulationists believe the Seven Churches described in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation represent not only the Seven Churches in existence when John penned His Book, but that they also represent seven periods of Church History, seven being a number signifying completion in the Bible.

Now to claim the Church at Philadelphia is the one on Earth before the Rapture, is to say that either this Church overlaps the Laodicean Church, or the Church to be raptured is the wretched Laodicean Church!

Are Some Falling into the Same Trap?

Pre-Tribulationists argue that two Messianic Comings were clearly foretold in the Old Testament and that most people of Christ’s time were ignorant of this momentous truth. Therefore, the idea of two separate appearances at the Second Advent should come as no surprise to believers.

Then it Would Be Obvious, or Would it?

Pre-Tribulationists frequently quote the passage where Jesus tells believers to be ready because “*about that day and hour no one knows*” (Matthew 24:36). They argue that if the Church is on Earth to witness the emergence of the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast and other major events that are to occur during the Tribulation Period, then believers *would* know the exact time of Christ’s return and be expecting Him to come at the end of the seven years.

However, it is argued, the term *that day* is a synonym of the *Day of the Lord*. And it is the exact time of the *Day of the Lord* that no one knows, of which the Rapture and the Second Coming are only a part of. Paul says this clearly in the following passage, which we also quoted in chapter three:

Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

(1 Thessalonians 5:1-4)

The Apostle Peter confirms Paul’s statement that it is the Day of the Lord that arrives as a thief in the night, and then goes on to confirm what we stated previously – that the Day of the Lord includes the destruction of the old Universe after the Millennium and the creation of a new one. Peter says:

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the Day of the Lord will

come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the Day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

(2 Peter 3:9-14)

Therefore, Post-Tribulationists see the Church witnessing the appearance of all the signs that must precede the Second Advent as a fulfilment of Jesus' own words:

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

(Matthew 24:32-34)

Reading too much into General Statements?

Proponents of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture believe that Jesus teaches it in the following passage from the Gospel of John:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

(John 14:2-4)

Others argue that Jesus makes no mention in this passage that His coming would be “at any moment” and “signless,” but that He was just encouraging His confused and sad followers that He will be coming back for them one day.

Another situation where it is said supporters of a Pre-Tribulation read too much into a general statement is found in the following passage from the Book of Revelation:

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the Spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne.

(Revelation 4:1-3)

Here it is taught that the Rapture is prefigured in John’s being taken up into Heaven, and the fact that the word *church* does not appear after this chapter until chapter nineteen further supports this interpretation. “But this Scripture says John was taken up in the Spirit and not physically.”

His Ways Are Not Our Ways

Dear reader, as you can see from our analysis, each view concerning the timing of the Rapture has abundant scriptural evidence to support it. And if I might add, we have by no means exhausted that evidence.

It is also important to add that these opposite views are not limited to superficial students of the Bible. On the contrary, they have been held by the most prominent of biblical scholars in the history of the Church.

But why has the Lord made it difficult to speak with certainty on this subject? His motives could be many. However, I am tempted to believe that, like everything else, He does not want us to get so involved in the study and timing of events leading up to His Second Coming that we miss what is of greater importance – being ready to meet Him!

Post-Tribulationists warn that if you hold to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, and believe that you will not be here to see the Antichrist and the implementation of the Mark of the Beast and are mistaken, then you might receive both without knowing it and teach others to do likewise!

Pre-Tribulationists warn that if you *do not* believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, then God will “honour your faith” and leave you behind.

Personally, I agree with those scholars, from both sides, that teach it is not a person’s holding to any position on the *timing* of the Rapture that will determine his being gathered to the Lord or left behind, but his heart’s response to the Call!

ARE YOU REALLY READY?

As we examined in chapter three, the Lord's coming will be at an unexpected hour for only one class of people – those who are asleep, both unbelievers and professing believers. In light of the serious implications involved, it is vital for the Church to know exactly what it means to *watch* and *be ready*. In his First Letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle Paul gives us some insight:

So then let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

(1Thessalonians 5:6-9)

Here we are told that our lives should be bearing fruit, which is holiness of character. This is a by-product of a day-to-day walk with the Holy Spirit; it speaks of sanctification without which “*no one will see the Lord.*”

Know the Times and Act

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus gives us another important example of what it means to be ready. We read:

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also,

when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

(Luke 21:29-32)

Here the Lord is telling us to make sure we have an intelligent knowledge of biblical prophecy and how it ties in with history and current events. This involves using our time to diligently study the Word of God and keeping ourselves updated on what is going on in our world instead of wasting time, which is life, on futile activities. Further on in that same passage Jesus adds:

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

(Luke 21:34-37)

This means that we are to be active not only in our Bible study, but also in our prayer life, so that we will have the strength to escape the Great Tribulation and the wisdom and strength to resist the powerful temptations to abandon or compromise the True Gospel in the last days.

The Essence of Readiness

Being active in Bible study and prayer will also keep one from worrying about and lusting after material things, which very often causes people to be distracted from what is more important. Jesus enforces this in the following passage:

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

(Matthew 24:37-40)

Note, there is nothing sinful about the activities mentioned here, but the inference is that people will be wholly taken up with things like these. For a Christian, this is serious, because a person caught up with this world is not ready for the next one. His heart is divided! And as we touched on in the previous chapter, this is what will determine whether he is taken or left behind at the Rapture. This truth is clearly taught in a parallel passage from the Gospel of Luke. We read:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them.

Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed all of them – it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.

I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.

*Then they asked him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them,
“Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”*

(Luke 17:26-37)

It is quite interesting that Jesus deals with the matter of the soul here in relation to the Rapture. But what has Jesus’ frequent teaching on dying to self got to do with the event?

Many Christians believe that when the Lord comes for His Bride, we will all be gathered to Him automatically. They interpret Paul’s words, “*We will all be change in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet,*” to mean that the Rapture Call will produce a sudden and miraculous change that differs from one’s previous walk with the Lord.

But that is not what this passage in Luke teaches. It says that it is through the Rapture Call that one will discover his heart’s real desire. If it is for the Lord Himself then there will be no looking back; “*Remember Lot’s wife.*” The word the Lord used for *remember* means to pay heed to or learn a lesson from.

Many see the sin of Lot’s wife as curiosity or reluctance to leave her earthly possessions. But there is much more to it than that. Lot’s wife looked back because her heart was there.

This also applies to those who are involved in the work of ministry. Perhaps Lot’s wife was a teacher or a preacher in her town. But a true Christian must never be more attached to the gifts of God than to the Giver – and to the work of God than to God Himself. But such detachment can only be wrought out in those who have learned to live by the spirit. Watchman Nee gives us an excellent illustration of what we are speaking of:

At the present time I am engaged in writing a book. I have finished eight chapters and I have another nine to write, about which I am very seriously exercised

before the Lord. But if the call to “come up hither” should come and my reaction were to be, “What about my book?” the answer might well be, “All right, stay down and finish it!”

That precious thing that we are doing downstairs “in the house” can be enough to pin us down, a peg that holds us to earth. It is all a question of us living by the soul or by the spirit.

The Crucial Question

Dear friend, do not overlook the truth being taught here. God does not want your relationship with Him to be based only on what you can get out of Him. He wants you to desire Him for Himself; to be wildly and passionately in love with Him for who He is and the loveliness of His Person.

We are not saying it is wrong to come to the Lord for what He can do for us, for He actually commands it. The problem is that many people never progress beyond this stage.

Therefore, the crucial question is this: Are you willing to leave this Earth right now, or is there something or someone that holds you here and therefore comes between you and the Lord?

If the answer is yes, it is a powerful indication of how much influence the Holy Spirit really has in your life; you are ready for translation.

If the answer is no, ask Him to work in you a true detachment from whatever it is that stands in the way. Only the Holy Spirit can do this for you and He is more than willing!