

I Will Come Again

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Chapter One

I Will Come Again

*“ And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I Will Come Again, and receive you unto myself;
that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

John 14:3

When this age-abiding promise was first uttered by Jesus to his apostles, it did not make sense. Having not yet received the holy Spirit, they assumed the next step would be for Jesus to take charge as a king, throw off the yoke of Roman bondage, exalt Israel, and bless the world. Why should he leave now? There was work to be done here. When Jesus spoke of his death and—strangely—of his leaving, the idea simply did not fit into their expectations. Yet, as they wended their way along the path to Gethsemane, Jesus had assured them,

“ If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.”

Dazed, these words made little impression on his disciples. But forty days later on Mt. Olivet, huddled together in amazement with eyes turned heavenward, straining to catch the last glimpse of their ascending Lord, this promise came alive. “ I will come again.” Yes, their beloved

Master would return. The Apostles wove that glorious theme into the fabric of their ministry and their very lives.

No other doctrine is discussed more in the New Testament—over one third of its writings deal with this momentous event. How our hearts thrill at the hope of being united with the returned Lord, our heavenly Bridegroom, seeing him as he is, living with him and experiencing his love forevermore. What a great reality —reigning with him in a kingdom that extends to the ends of the [1] earth, bringing “ peace..like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.” Isaiah 66:12; Revelation 20:5.

Long have faithful Christians prayed with the Apostle John, “ Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Centuries have passed. Seemingly, nothing has happened. But suddenly our day is charged with an air of expectancy.

Few would question that we are living in an unprecedented time of human history. Most Bible-believing Christians feel we are living in the very time the Bible says Christ is to return. There is a surge of interest in prophecy—a revival of concern about the Second Advent. Many speak of the imminent coming of Christ. This expectancy is based on our Lord’ s Great Prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21.

Many believe that the nearness of Christ’ s return is indicated by such signs as the following:

Israel restored	Mt. 24:32; Jer. 16:13-18
Knowledge and travel increased	
Evils exposed as never before	Dan. 12:4
Infidelity rampant from university to pulpit	Lk. 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5 Lk. 18:8; 2 Tim. 4:1-4
Men seeking pleasure, morality rotting	2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13
Strikes, walkouts	James 5:1-4
Racial strife, riots	Zeph. 1:7-9
Juvenile delinquency	2 Tim. 3:2
Wars and war preparations intensified	Joel 3:9-11
Men crying fearfully for peace	1 Thess. 5:3, Lk. 21:26
Trouble everywhere	Mt. 24:21-22

But let us take a closer look at our Master’ s words and see what these signs really teach.

Matthew 24:3 —“ And as he sat upon 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* [Greek, *parousia*], and of the end of the world?” [2]

“ Coming” or “ Presence”

The Greek word translated “ coming” is *parousia*. It really means “ presence.” The following dictionaries (standard works in fundamentalist and evangelical bookstores) confirm this definition of presence.

W. E. Vine’ s EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS: “ *Parousia*, literally, a presence, *para*, with, and *ousia*, being.. denotes both an arrival and a consequent presence with.”

ROBERT YOUNG’ S ANALYTICAL CONCORDANCE TO THE BIBLE: “ *Parousia*, a being alongside, presence.”

Moulton and Milligan’ s VOCABULARY OF THE GREEK TESTAMENT, Foreword: “ *Parousia*, as applied to the return of the Lord, is simply the anglicizing of the Greek word which literally means ‘ presence.’ ”

Other Bible dictionaries and Greek lexicons also give “ presence” as the primary definition of *parousia*: THE EXPOSITORS GREEK TESTAMENT, ARNDT AND GINGRICH, NEW WESTMINSTER BIBLE DICTIONARY, ROTHERHAM’ S THE EMPHASIZED BIBLE —APPENDIX, LIDDELL AND SCOTT’ S GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON, THAYER’ S GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, and THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA. Over fifty recognized authorities define *parousia* as “ presence.”

The Bible Definition

However, we are not confined to dictionary definitions. The Lord has provided a scriptural definition for the Greek word *parousia*. *Parousia* appears in Matthew 24:27 where it is mistranslated “ coming.” The

following chart compares its parallel citation in Luke 17:26, providing the Bible’ s own definition for parousia.

Matthew 24:27	Luke 17:26
But as the days of Noah were,	= As it was in the days of Noah,
so shall also the parousia of the Son of man be.	= so shall it be in the days of the Son of man.

[3]

The phrase “ *parousia* of the Son of man” in Matthew 24:37 means the same as the phrase “ in the days of the Son of man” in Luke 17:26. The “ days of the Son of man” (Luke 17:26) refers to the time that Christ is present, just as the “ days of Noah” (Matthew 24:37) would refer to the time when Noah was present among his wicked generation. Therefore, parousia in Matthew 24:37 should be translated “ presence of the Son of man” instead of “ coming of the Son of man.”

The Bible definition and usage of *parousia* to denote “ presence” is further confirmed by the Apostle Paul’ s usage of the word. The thought of “ presence” is plainly shown by the contrast with “ absence” in the following scriptures.

Philippians 2:12 —“ Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my *presence* [Greek, *parousia*] only, but now much more in my *absence*, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

2 Corinthians 10:10-11 —“ For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily *presence* [Greek, *parousia*] is weak, and his speech contemptible. Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are *absent*, such will we be also in deed when we are present.”

1 Corinthians 16:17 —“ I am glad of the *coming* [presence, Greek, *parousia*] of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied.” (Was Paul comforted by Stephanas’ *coming* or *presence*?)

1 Corinthians 7:5-6 —“ For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the **coming** [presence, Greek, *parousia*] of Titus.” (Was Paul comforted by Titus’ *coming* or *presence*?)

Every New Testament scripture in which *parousia* is used is listed in *Appendix A*. [4]

Historical Greek Usage of Parousia Denoting “ Presence”

Historically, first century B.C. through the third century A.D. Greek literature used *parousia* to denote presence.

1st Century BC	Diodorus
1st Century AD	Josephus
2nd Century AD	Aelius Aristides
2nd Century AD	Iambicus
3rd Century AD	Doigenes
3rd Century AD	Porphyry
From GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICONS OF NEW TESTAMENT AND OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE	

Hundreds of documents have been found dating back to the first and third centuries A.D. in which the Greek word *parousia* means “ presence.”

**Evangelical and Fundamentalist
Consent to “ Presence”**

The EMPHASIZED BIBLE translated by Rotherham is published by Kregel, an evangelical publishing house. Rotherham relates his struggle with the word *parousia* in the third edition of his translation. Although contrary to his theology, he acknowledged that *parousia* means “ presence” and so translated it in every occurrence. Rotherham states in his Appendix, p. 271:

In this edition the word *parousia* is uniformly rendered ‘ presence’ (‘ coming,’ as a representative of this word, being set aside). The original term occurs twenty-four times in the N.T., viz.: Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor-inthians 15:23; 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6, 7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:3; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12 and 1 John 2:28. The sense of ‘ presence’ is so plainly shown by the contrast with ‘ absence’ (implied in 2 Corinthians 10:10, and expressed in Philippians 2:12) that the question naturally arises —[5] Why not always so render it? The more so, inasmuch as there is in 2 Peter 1:16 also, a peculiar fitness in our English word ‘ presence.’ This passage, it will be remembered, relates to our Lord’ s transformation upon the Mount. The wonderful manifestation there made was a display and sample of ‘ presence’ rather than of ‘ coming.’ The Lord was already there; and, being there, he was transformed (cp. Matthew 17:2, n.) and the ‘ majesty’ of his glorified person was then disclosed. His bodily ‘ presence’ was one which implied and exerted ‘ power’ ; so that ‘ power and presence’ go excellently well together—the ‘ power’ befitting such a ‘ presence’ ; and the three favoured disciples were at one and the same moment witnesses of both.

Harry Rimmer (D.D., Sc.D.), who was styled “ Fundamentalism’ s outstanding spokesman” until his death, admitted that the word *parousia* means personal presence. In his book, THE COMING KING, he observed that the Greek word *parousia* is used thirteen times in describing the return of Christ and not once does it have the thought of “ coming.”

Christianity Today (a well-known evangelical magazine) published a series of essays on “ Fundamentals of the Faith.” The essay in booklet form on “ The Second Advent of Christ” had this to say about *parousia*: “ ..let us look at the Greek words used in the New Testament for the idea of the return. First of all, there is the word *parousia*, which means basically ‘ presence.’ ”

No doctrine is more frequently mentioned in the New Testament than Christ’ s Second Advent. Yet, few doctrines have been as greatly

fragmented into such diversified concepts. Much of the beauty of this doctrine has been wrested from the grasp of God' s people. It is ironic that all secular Greek dictionaries define *parousia* as “ presence.” Most Biblical dictionaries likewise define *parousia* as “ presence.” Most current fundamentalist and evangelical writings on the Second Advent usually begin by correctly defining *parousia* as “ presence.” Then a strange thing happens. Somehow the word “ coming” replaces “ presence.” Incorrect theology requires *parousia* to be translated “ coming.” Yet, scriptural harmony requires that it be translated “ presence.” [6]

Since *parousia* means “ presence,” then the fulfillment of the signs of this prophecy means that Christ is not coming shortly, but that he is already secretly here as a “ thief in the night.” Remember, the scriptures show that Christ' s initial return would be a thief-like, secret presence before “ every eye shall see him.” 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15.

“ Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth”

Historically, there is not a single Protestant concept of the Second Advent that has an unbroken lineage back to the time of the Reformation. Since that time, Bible-believing Christians have fluctuated among a number of conflicting concepts.

Our purpose in this work is to ascertain from the scriptures, and the scriptures alone, the glorious beauties of this momentous event. The faithful Christian is to “ study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) The Word of Truth was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. But now the average Christian is no longer dependent upon the translators or scholars alone to determine the meaning of a specific Hebrew or Greek word in a given text. In fact, many of the new “ translations” are mere paraphrases of former translations, with little or no consideration given to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Further, even the best translations have some flaws since they are the works of man.

The availability of biblical concordances, Hebrew and Greek dictionaries and lexicons in libraries and Bible bookstores is one of the blessings of our day. With the Bible in one hand and a concordance and lexicon in the other, the average Christian can verify the meaning of original words

in the Hebrew Old Testament or Greek New Testament manuscripts. He can be a “ workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

For many centuries, the church has been on a rough and stormy sea, longing for the blessed haven of Christ’ s return. Now, with the chart and compass of God’ s Word, the Christian can trace the various independent lines of prophecy and see the blessed haven just before him. As there is the danger of shipwreck upon reefs [7] just beneath the water’ s surface along many shorelines, so the Christian must be his own mariner, avoiding the ensnarement of unscriptural or even partially scriptural theories on the Second Advent. As a “ workman that needeth not to be ashamed,” he will utilize, whenever necessary, the tools that make the Hebrew and Greek texts of scripture understandable.

If this work inspires the reader to a deeper search of the Scriptures on the subject of Christ’ s presence, then it will have made a contribution to the fellowship of believers.

A Secret Presence Before “ Every Eye Shall See Him”

Having observed that the word *parousia* means “ presence” and not “ coming,” Matthew 24:3 properly reads: “ **What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the world?**” Luke 21:25 refers to “ signs” in the plural.

The Scriptures show that the first stage of our Lord’ s *parousia*, presence, will be secret. “ The day of the Lord will arrive [*will be here*, Greek, *heko*] as a thief.” (2 Peter 3:10, Rotherham) (See Chapter Three for detailed proof that *heko* means “ presence.”) A thief enters a house quietly, doing a secret work. Consequently, the first works of our returned Lord are during a secret presence. The world will, at first, be unaware that Christ has returned. “ But ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” implies a period of overlapping. (1 Thessalonians 5:4) Later, Christ’ s presence will be manifest to all.

The Scriptures use another Greek word *apokalupsis* to describe this revelation to all. “ The Lord Jesus shall be **revealed** [*apokalupsis*] from heaven . . . in flaming fire taking vengeance.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8) It is in reference to this revelation to all, that scriptures like Revelation 1:7 apply. “ He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.”

Christians who are not overcharged with the cares of this life will experience the joys of discerning the signs of his secret presence before they are “ caught up together” with him. Luke 21:34-36

Later chapters will consider in scriptural detail both the thief-like presence and subsequent revelation of the returned Christ to all mankind. (See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of “ Every eye shall see him.”)

Chapter Two

Signs of Christ's Presence

In considering the signs of Christ’ s presence, it is important to recognize three scriptural points.

(1) Since, as established in the previous chapter, the Greek word *parousia* means “ presence” and not “ coming,” then the signs that many accept as evidence of Christ’ s imminent coming actually prove that he is already present.

(2) Luke 17:26-27, Matthew 24:37-38 and many other scriptures reveal that Christ is present before the tribulation period.

Luke 17:26-27 —“ And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

The point of comparison is **not** between the *arrival* of Noah and the *arrival* of our Lord. It is **not** even between the *coming of the flood* and the *coming of our Lord*. The comparison is between the *days of Noah before the flood* and the *days of the presence of our Lord before the tribulation* with which this Gospel Age ends. In both periods, the people were in ignorance of the coming trouble. **The days of the Son of man are the days of his parousia, presence—invisible and unknown to the world.** Therefore, we should expect to see signs of Christ’ s presence before the tribulation.

(3) These signs are to be recognized by alert Christians as a proof that Christ is present. This precludes an instantaneous gathering of the living church at Christ’ s return. The dead in Christ are raised “ first” when

Christ returns, but those “ living in Christ” remain on earth for a period of time after his return and *see signs* [9] *of his thief-like presence*. The scriptural teaching of the living saints being “ caught up together” with the returned Lord will be considered in detail in a later chapter.

There are many proofs of Christ’ s presence, some of which are here considered.

Israel Restored

Matthew 24:32 —“ ..the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves.”

The “ fig tree” is generally accepted by students of prophecy as a symbol of the nation of Israel. (Jeremiah 24) In Matthew 21:19, Jesus cursed the fig tree because he found no fruit on it and it withered away. Shortly thereafter, he proclaimed judgment on the nation of Israel, “ Behold, your house is left unto you desolate,” because they had not borne fruitage to God. (Matthew 23:38)

Israel was subsequently scattered and persecuted. Historians agree that Israel’ s rebirth is a miracle of history. Never before has a nation been destroyed, its people dispersed to the ends of the earth, and then, nearly 2,000 years later, regathered to their homeland and re-established as a nation. The fig tree coming back to life, putting forth leaves, represents Israel coming to life as a nation and receiving God’ s favor increasingly.

Matthew 24:32, Mark 13:28 and Luke 21:29 all say when “ the fig tree putteth forth leaves ye know that summer is nigh.” Matthew and Mark follow this by saying, “ so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things know ye that *it* is near, even at the doors.” Some claim that the word “ it” in Matthew 24:33 and Mark 13:29 should be translated “ he” and feel the verse means that when Israel (the fig tree) brings forth leaves, then not “ it,” but “ he” (Christ) is near at hand. This is not correct. The “ it” refers back to the “ summer” in the previous verse. When the fig tree shoots forth leaves, then “ summer is nigh.”

“ Summer” is the kingdom time of favor on earth that follows the destruction of the present social order by Christ. Christ is already here when the fig tree returns to life. His presence brings about the restoration of Israel and the destruction of our present [10] evil world to make room for his kingdom that will rule from the rivers to the ends of the earth.

How can we be certain that the “ it” refers to the kingdom and not to Christ? It is wonderful how the Bible is its own interpreter. Again, the Bible interprets a key word by means of a parallel account.

Luke 21:31 replaces the word “ it” of Matthew and Mark with the phrase “ kingdom of God.” Compare Luke 21:29-31 with Matthew 24:32-33 and Mark 13:28-29.

Luke 21: 29-31 —“ And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the **kingdom of God** is nigh at hand.”

Many Christians will agree that the fig tree, Israel restored, is the greatest sign of our Lord’ s prophecy. Actually, Israel’ s reappearance is a proof that Christ is present.

Jerusalem No Longer Trodden Down

Luke 21:24 —“ Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

Jerusalem, in this passage, has been generally interpreted two ways.

(1) “ **Jerusalem**” **is the literal city.** Therefore, the maximum extension of fulfillment would be 1967 when the old city, Biblical Jerusalem, was captured and became a part of the modern State of Israel.

(2) “ **Jerusalem**” **is symbolic of the Jewish people.** The incipient fulfillment began when World War I resulted in the guarantee of a national homeland for the Jews.

Jerusalem’ s ceasing to be trodden down of the Gentiles was given by Jesus as a sign of his *parousia*. Since *parousia* means presence, not coming, whichever application we place on “ Jerusalem,” Christ must now be present because Jerusalem is no longer trodden down by the Gentiles. [11]

Other New Nations

Luke 21:29-30 —“ Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth...”

If the “ fig tree” is symbolic of the new nation of Israel, then it is logical to conclude that all the other trees shooting forth leaves picture the birth of other new nations. Israel and all the new nations are signs of Christ’ s presence. Since 1948, over 130 new nations have joined the United Nations. The birth of so many new nations is further proof that Christ has returned.

**“ Many Shall Run To and Fro and
Knowledge Shall be Increased.” Daniel 12:4**

The events of Daniel 12:4 **occur when Michael the archangel stands up** in the Time of the End. (Daniel 12:1; Jude 9) First Thessalonians 4:16 shows that Christ’ s return is accompanied by the symbolism of “ the voice of the archangel.” Therefore, the events that follow Michael’ s (“ the archangel”) standing up in Daniel 12 are proofs that the Lord is present.

“ Many run to and fro.” Through increased and numerous modes of transportation millions are crossing and recrossing each other’ s paths around the world.

Selden’ s first automobile in 1877 marked the leap forward in transportation. The world’ s car population has grown five times as fast as the human population over the last 50 years. In 1950, there were 53 million cars. Today, there are over 600 million cars.

In the past 100 years, man has increased his travel from 30 mph to the fastest escape velocity from Earth at 36,250 mph, achieved by the NASA’ s New Horizons spacecraft in 2006 enroute to the planet Pluto.

“ Knowledge Shall Increase”

Information Explosion. The capabilities of science and technology have advanced at sensational rates. Cloning, genetic engineering, information technology, communications, precision mapping of the world, and routine flights in outer space have become common. [12]

More information has been produced in the last 20 years than the previous 5,000. If the increase of knowledge from the dawn of history to

the 1800s is given a value of one, then knowledge has doubled 16 times within the last 10 years. Today, the amount of information and knowledge in the world is doubling every 18 months.

Literacy. One hundred years ago, 90 percent of the world's population could not read or write.

Today, the literacy rate of youths ages 14 to 24 is 100 percent in developed countries and 85 percent in developing countries. The literacy rate of adults over age 15 is 99 percent in developed countries and 74 percent in developing countries. By 2003, 85% of American adults completed high school and 27 percent of adults age 25 and over held college degrees.

Communications. Sophistication in communications allows man to see and hear throughout the world instantly.

Telephones/Cell Phones. Between 1997 and 2002 the number of telephone lines grew by 40%, and the number of cell phone users grew by 547%. For the first time, mobile phones outnumbered fixed-line phone connections by 1.05 billion. By 2005, 2,168,433,600 cellular telephones were in use worldwide, with over 690 mobile networks across 213 countries.

Computers. Computer usage and the amount of information transmitted through them have increased phenomenally. Host computers increased 16.5% in 2002 to 1,716 million, drawing more than 600 million people online regularly.

In 1991 there were 4.4 million Internet users worldwide. By 2005 there were over 1 billion. Today, it is estimated that there are more than 38 million websites, and the number of emails is in the trillions every month. In 2000, the Internet was processing 600 million domain requests per day. By 2003, over 9 billion per day were being processed. In 2004, Google got only 138 requests a minute. By 2007 Google search engines were receiving about 1 billion requests a day in 90 languages.

Optical fiber technology has made a 400-fold increase in speed. In 1991, data was transmitted through optical fiber at 32 billion bits per second. The world's fastest supercomputer is Japan's Earth Simulator. It simulates weather and earthquake [13] patterns. It performs 35 trillion

calculations a second. It is almost twice as fast as the next fastest computer.

Inventions. Ninety percent of all scientists who have ever lived are alive today. Fifty percent of the world' s inventions have been created in the last decade.

The noted historian Barbara Tuchman has observed, “ Man entered the Nineteenth Century using only his own and animal power, supplemented by that of wind and water, much as he had entered the Thirteenth or, for that matter, the First. He entered the Twentieth with his capacities in transportation, communication, production, manufacture, and weaponry multiplied a thousand-fold by the energy of machines.” (THE PROUD TOWER, foreword, xvi)

Unprecedented travel and increase of knowledge mark the presence of Christ.

Evils are Exposed as Never Before

1 Corinthians 4:5 —“ Therefore, judge nothing before the time, ***until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts...***”

Never in all the annals of history have ecclesiastics, statesmen, men in government, heads of industry, labor leaders, and the rich been so cross-questioned, criticized, and exposed as now at the bar of public judgment. Notwithstanding their determined effort to avoid the examination, they are obliged to go to trial. Watergate, Irangate, Enron, corporate scandals, insider-trading, and exposed manipulations by multi-national oil interests are but a few examples.

The most significant thing about these frauds is not that they took place (corruption is as old as human history), but that they could not be covered up. Why? We are living in the time when the “ hidden things of darkness” will be made “ manifest.” Even totalitarian states like the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European Communist Block nations were powerless to prevent the exposure of political and economic corruption that resulted in the overthrow of the communist empire. These worldwide exposures of corruption are another proof that we are at the time of our Lord' s return and the end of the world. [14]

Little Faith on the Earth

Luke 18:8 —“ *...When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*”

2 Timothy 4:1-4 —“ *..his appearing..the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..* and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Infidelity is rampant from university to pulpit. In the professed church of Christ the Word of God is no longer the standard of faith, the guide of life. Human philosophies and theories are taking its place. Even heathen vagaries are flourishing in places formerly beyond their pale.

A survey taken among delegates to the National Council of Churches revealed:

Over 33% could not state they had a firm belief in God; 31% could not say there is life after death; 62% did not believe miracles happened as the Bible says they did; 77% did not believe the devil actually exists; and 87% percent rejected the Bible concept of inherited sin.

Our day is in such marked contrast with the past that church historians speak of it as the post-Christian era. This worldwide scarcity of faith means the Son of man has come.

**Many denying the “invisible presence” is a
SIGN of Christ’ s presence. 2 Peter 3:3-4**

Vs. 3 —Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,”

Vs. 4 —And saying, Where is the promise of his *coming* (*parousia* — **presence**)? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. [That is, there are no signs of his presence.] [15]

2 Peter 3:4 proves *parousia* does not mean visible presence. In fact, it proves that Jesus would be present while some would be scoffing — “Where is the promise of his presence?” This proves Christ is invisibly present while some are saying he cannot be present because there are no

signs of his presence. It is literally impossible to have scoffers denying that a *visibly* present person is not present.

During the “end times” in which we live, some have denied that the Lord is present. 2 Peter 3:4 predicted this would happen. Therefore, Christians’ denial of the Lord’s invisible presence is one of the strongest proofs or signs that the Lord is present.

“Last Days” Signs of Christ’s Presence

The foregoing proves that the “last days” referred to in 2 Peter 3:3-4 are a part of the period of Christ’s *parousia* or presence. Consequently, the signs of the “last days” in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 are, in reality, signs of Christ’s presence.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 —“ In the last days will come *time of troubles*. *Men will love nothing but money and self* [affluence and materialism]; no gratitude, no piety..implacable in their hatreds, scandalmongers, *intemperate and fierce* [drug addiction and senseless violence], despisers of those that are good, traitors..*lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, men who hold an outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality.*” (N.E.B., K.J.V.)

These verses read like Twenty-first Century headlines. A further word about one of these signs:

“ *Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*” This has been remarkably fulfilled in a prevalent philosophy of today. “ Hedonism,” the philosophy that the end and object of life is pleasure, is not new. But today, for the first time, it has received general acceptance throughout the world. The various conditions predicted in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 are further proof that we are in the “last days” of this “present evil world.” [16]

Today is the age of leisure. For sinful man, leisure breeds pleasure. Pleasure breeds immorality. In rich countries, working hours are shorter—vacations and holidays, longer. The average middle-class household is filled with televisions, video and DVD players, music systems, magazines, newspapers, books, and personal computers, as well as paraphernalia for hobbies and sports. Never have so many people had so much time for wholesome or for degrading activities.

Pleasure is big business. 16% of the world's people buy 80% of all consumables. International tourism generated an estimated \$682 billion in 2005. Hollywood movie costs are enormous—with an average film budget of \$200 million. Sports television broadcasting of the 2002 World Cup amounted to 41,000 viewing hours. Major sports stars are paid above \$10 million a year for those at the top.

Worldwide revenues for the pornographic industry in 2006 were \$97 billion, with revenues in the U.S. at \$13.3 billion. Every second \$3,075.64 is spent on pornography, and 28,258 Internet users view pornography. Pornography accounts for 20% to 30% of all Internet traffic.

Revolution and Anarchy

Zephaniah 1:7-9 —“ For the *day of the Lord is at hand*: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass *in the day of the Lord's sacrifice*, that *I will punish the princes, and the king's children*, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. In the same day *also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.*”

The terms “princes,” “king's children,” and “masters” refer symbolically to the old establishment before the “Lord's day,” which was controlled by an alliance of the wealthy, government leaders, and church prelates who dominated the masses especially prior to the 20th century.

This Scripture shows not only that there will be a great overthrow of wealth and power in the day of the Lord's presence but, [17] also, that the trouble will involve *all* classes. The revolutionary masses involved in breaking down the present systems will also be punished for their equally unjust and unrighteous course.

Throughout the Christian Age, economically speaking, there have been basically two classes: the “haves” and the “have-nots.” A large middle class is a peculiarity of our era and locates us in the Day of the Lord. For centuries, the wealthy have been aligned with church and state in the exploitation of the masses.

But now we are in the “Day of the Lord” spoken of by Zephaniah. To recompense the exploitations of the past, **the returned Lord has**

prepared a “ sacrifice” from the avaricious accumulations of the wealthy. And the “ guests” (masses) have been invited to share. This economic leveling has resulted in the large middle class of our day. The masses of the 20th century have enjoyed unprecedented economical and social advantages.

Third World Nations Are Demanding Their Piece of the Economic Pie.

Demonstrations, riots, and struggles between capital and labor, racial majorities and minorities, and wealthy and poor nations will progressively get worse in the day of the Lord’ s presence until they end in complete anarchy. Already, anarchy is just below the surface—ready to burst forth at the slightest provocation.

The Lord is balancing the scales of justice for past wrongs. The exploited classes with their unjustified demands and violence have nothing better to offer. Because their ideologies are honeycombed with selfishness, they will accomplish but one thing: the destruction of the present social order.

The events that Zephaniah foretells take place during the Day of the Lord. The magnitude of the prophecy rules out a 24-hour day—or a shorter period of time. The masses are invited to share the economic excess of the wealthy, and time is required to reveal the deceit and violence of the exploited as they revolt against the status quo.

The last century has been characterized by revolutions in every area—political, social, cultural, industrial, and economic. [18] The 21st century will witness increased economic upheavals until the “ present evil world” or social order collapses.

Some revolutions have been characterized by violence. In the 20th century 26 principle monarchies were abolished, 35 democracies were established, 31 democracies were overthrown in military coups, and over 32 principle single party states were established.

Other revolutions have been accomplished by ballot, defending the rights of exploited men, women, children, and animals. The whole revolutionary trend of our day, with its periodic violent eruptions, is another sign that the Lord has returned and will replace the ruins of our social order with his Kingdom.

The Wealthy Are Fighting Back. Never has there been greater wealth, but now poverty is becoming widespread and the gap between the richest and poorest is once again widening. Of all high-income nations, the U.S. has the most unequal distribution of income. The top 1% now own more than the bottom 90%. Consequently, 45 million people in the U.S. are living in poverty.

Global Disparity. In spite of economic leveling, the average inhabitant of the world's richest country is over 100 times wealthier than the average inhabitant of the poorest. Between 1960 and 1995, the disparity in per capita income between the world's 20 richest and 20 poorest nations more than doubled from 18 to 1 to 37 to 1.

The top fifth (20%) of the world's people who live in the highest income countries have access to 86% of world gross domestic product (GDP). The bottom fifth, in the poorest countries racked with starvation, has about 1%. Worldwide anarchy will follow.

Wars and War Preparations

Joel 3:9-11 —“ Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come..gather yourselves together round about..”

Joel 3:1 identifies the events of this chapter as occurring during the regathering of [19] Israel. As already seen, the regathering of Israel is a proof of Christ's presence. Therefore, in the days of Israel's return, the wars and intensified war preparations are further signs of Christ's presence. (Joel 3:1)

A phenomenon of our era is the two World Wars affecting every corner of the globe. From 1990 to 1995, 70 states were involved in 93 wars killing 5.5 million people

Sociologist Andreski, the noted expert on wars, noted, “ Our own century has so far been much more warlike than its predecessor.” Concurring, *Time* magazine observes that 100,000,000 have died in wars since the beginning of the 20th century, while only 3,845,000 died in the 19th century. (Time, March 9, 1970)

Natural Resource Wars. Resource-related conflicts during the 1990s killed more than 5 million people and displaced 17 to 21 million. The population explosion and industrialization of Third World nations accentuate the oil crunch. Nations will go to war for oil and other resources.

War Preparations. The premium is on nuclear armaments. Many Third World nations have the poor man's bomb—chemical warfare—and are working on actual nuclear warheads. Such volatile weaponry in the hands of these regimes spells trouble.

The U.S. is now the world's sole military colossus, accounting for 40 percent of all military spending, or \$322 billion. The next ten highest military spenders combined total \$314 billion. The rest of the world's military spending combined total \$188 billion.

World military expenditures in 2001 were conservatively estimated at \$839 billion—or \$2.3 billion each day—almost \$100 million every hour. More than 75% of the total is spent by just 15 countries.

Wars and intensified war preparations are another proof of the return of Christ.

“ Let the Weak Say I Am Strong”

The previous scripture in Joel 3:10 reveals that during the intensity of war and war preparations, the weak nations say, “ I am strong.” For centuries the weaker nations placated and satisfied the whims of the stronger nations in fear of the consequences. This has changed in our day. In the U.N., the weaker powers [20] stand up to the great powers, verbally assailing and influencing them as never before. The court of world opinion and power politics limits the harassment of weaker nations by major powers.

The greatest power in the world today, the U.S., has bitterly experienced the “ weak” saying, “ I am strong.” In the war against North Korea and again in the conflict with North Vietnam, the U.S. was unable to wage total war for fear of the consequences of world opinion. With hat in hand, the U.S. gradually withdrew from Vietnam, hoping not to lose too much face in an impossible situation. The stranglehold of the small oil-rich nations on the economies of great world powers is another fulfillment of this sign.

Terrorism has been a tool the “ weak” have used to control the “ strong.” Since 9/11 especially, an extreme minority of Islamic fundamentalists have terrorized the super giants like the U.S., Russia, England, etc. Over 1,700 terrorist incidents were reported in 2002, leaving over 1,500 dead and almost 3,800 injured.

The weak nations saying, “ I am strong,” is still another proof that Christ has returned.

“ Peace and Safety”

In “ The Day of the Lord” “ ...when they shall say Peace and Safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child...” 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3

“ The Day of the Lord” is marked by fearful nations crying for peace in conferences, but to no avail. The trouble comes upon them in spasms as “ travail upon a woman with child.”

In 1907 a world court was set up at The Hague, Netherlands, to arbitrate international disputes. War was outlawed! “ Peace and safety” were assured. Then World War I shook the world with an impact unprecedented in history as a whole world order began to crumble. In 1938 Neville Chamberlain “ appeased” Hitler with part of Czechoslovakia and returned to England pronouncing “ Peace in our times.” Shortly after, the nations were embroiled in World War II.

No previous generation has witnessed such a frenzy of peace-efforts, both on the United Nations level and nation-to-nation negotiations. [21]

Yet, 54% of the peace agreements break down within 5 years of signature. Expenditures for U.N. peacekeeping increased from \$2.6 billion in 2002 to roughly \$5 billion in 2005. Contrast this with military expenditures worldwide, which increased from \$839 billion in 2001 to \$1.1 trillion in 2005.

In spite of these peacekeeping missions, war and sudden destruction continue to erupt as in Korea, Vietnam, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, etc. The Cold War ended with the fall of the Soviet Union. No longer was there rivalry between two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Seemingly, the world would now have peace. Then, small wars like Desert Storm and the Yugoslavian ethnic wars broke out. The

U.S. war on terrorism has thus far included Afghanistan and Iraq. The Scriptures also indicate that Russia will again become a power to reckon with. N. Korea and Iran remain continual threats. The unprecedented peace efforts of our time prove the presence of Christ.

Unprecedented Trouble

Matthew 24:21-22 —“ For then shall be *great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time*, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved...”

Remember, in Matthew 24:3 this unprecedented trouble is a sign that Christ is present, *parousia* (presence, not coming). Watchful Christians discern Christ is invisibly present during this “ great tribulation.” Therefore, it cannot apply to a seven-year period between “ a secret rapture” and his visible return. (See a detailed discussion on the “ seven-year tribulation” theory, *Appendix E.*)

Historians agree we are in just such an era of unprecedented trouble. For example:

Looking back from the vantage point of the present, we see that the outbreak of **World War I ushered in a twentieth-century ‘ Time of Troubles’ ..from which our civilization has by no means yet emerged. Directly or indirectly all the convulsions of the last half century stem back to 1914** and [22] Sarajevo: the two World Wars, the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise and fall of Hitler, the continuing turmoil in the Far and Near East, the power-struggle between the Communist world and our own...
—Edmond Taylor, *THE FALL OF THE DYNASTIES*, Doubleday, N.Y., 1963, p. 16.

Yet, “ in the **toll from Democide** [the murder of any people by a political system that habitually and systematically murders large numbers of its own citizens], possibly even more than **350,000,000** were killed at the high end of the range, we have experienced in this century the equivalent of nuclear war.” (R.J. Rummel, *The Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 1986)

In his book *OUT OF CONTROL*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor and professor of American Foreign Policy at John Hopkins University, notes that the 20th century began amid great hope and promise, but became the century of insanity. In elaborating on his observation of **175 millions slaughtered in the name of the “ politics of organized insanity,”** he says:

Contrary to its promise, the 20th century became mankind’ s most bloody and hateful century of hallucinatory politics and of monstrous killings. Cruelty was institutionalized to an unprecedented degree, lethality was organized on a mass production basis. The contrast between the scientific potential for good and the political evil that was actually unleashed is shocking. Never before in history was killing so globally pervasive, never before did it consume so many lives, never before was human annihilation pursued with such concentration of sustained effort on behalf of such arrogantly irrational goals.

Additionally, the population explosion, hunger, AIDS, pollution, global warming, crime, violence, drugs, and financial crises have all contributed toward making our time the “ great tribulation” of Matthew 24:21. Unprecedented tribulation as a result of [23] Christ’ s presence is everywhere. It has never been so widespread and intense.

Nations On The Run—Another Remarkable Prophecy

Amos 5:18-20 —“ Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? ***The day of the LORD*** is darkness, and not light. As if a man did ***flee from a [1] lion***, and a ***[2] bear met him***; or ***went into the [3] house***, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a ***[4] serpent bit him.***”

In Amos’ prophecy the fleeing man represents the world’ s experiences in this dark “ time of trouble.” At the beginning of the 20th century, Great Britain ruled the most expansive empire on earth. **The [1] lion in this prophecy, Britain’ s national symbol**, appropriately illustrated the mighty nation that devoured (colonized) weaker nations. **Colonialism’ s suffocating grasping led to the world’ s fleeing to another form of government.**

The man in Amos 5:20 escaped the lion only to meet the bear—a form of government diametrically opposed to the grasping greed of colonialism—Communism! [2] **The former Soviet Union, the “ bear”** of Amos’ prophecy, offered man another hope for safety in this time of trouble. **Communism’ s failure to rescue man was underscored by its precipitous fall.** The nations are now seeking another hope of security—nationalism. The Soviet Union broke up into fourteen independent nations. The seven satellite countries of Eastern Europe declared their autonomy as nations.

Entering the “ house” of nationalism has been anything but comfortable for the nations of the world. Ethnic hatred fractured Yugoslavia into six new nations: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, the Republic of Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Western nations are still paying the consequences. First Afghanistan, now Chechnian nationalism is terrorizing Russia. Ethnic nationalism has exploded into the killing fields of Africa—Yemen, Nigeria, Congo, Rwanda, Zambia, etc. [24]

While the people put their “ hand on the wall” seeking support of nationalism, they are bitten by the serpent, “ ..that old Serpent, which is the Devil and Satan...” Rev. 20:2. Another deception will yet follow—perhaps Babylon’ s short-lived rise to power.

Twentieth century history—a remarkable fulfillment of Amos 5—is proof that the Day of the LORD is here. These are not signs of the imminent coming of Christ. Rather, they are signs of Christ’ s *parousia*—presence. Christ has returned. [25]

Chapter Three

Establishing the "Secret Presence" Concept

Christians who believe Jesus will return in the flesh agree that Jesus *returns* “ as a thief.” All are admonished to watch, since Jesus will come unexpectedly. But they vigorously disagree that Jesus can be *present* “ as a thief” —unobserved. Why? They say he returns in the flesh; therefore, “ every eye will see him.” A comparison of 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10 proves that Jesus will not only come unexpectedly, but will also be present unawares.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 —“ For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so *cometh* as a thief in the night.”

The Greek word here correctly translated *cometh* means *come*. We agree that the coming of Jesus is thief-like —unexpected.

2 Peter 3:10 —“ But the day of the Lord will *come* [Greek *hecko* means *be here*] as a thief in the night...”

The Greek word *hecko* is here wrongly rendered *come*. It means *be present* or *be here*. The concept that Jesus comes in a body of flesh and every eye literally sees him is, therefore, incorrect. Jesus will **be here, present**, unawares —“ as a thief.” This is confirmed in Revelation 3:3 —“ I will *come* [Gk. *hecko* —**be present**] like a thief.” (NIV)

Some Christians say Jesus cannot be present because we cannot literally see him. The Scriptures teach that Jesus not only comes unawares “ as a thief,” but he is also **present unawares** “ as [26] a thief.” Why? Because he returned as an invisible spirit being. That is why Jesus told his disciples in John 14:19 —“ yet a little while, and the world **seeth me no more...**” When the time comes for his revealing to the world, they will mentally discern him. In Revelation 1:7, the Greek word translated “ see” —“ every eye shall see him” —is often used to denote mental perception. Blind people say, ‘ *I see,*’ to express mental discernment.

Proof That Hecko Means “ Be Here” or “ Be Present”

STRONG’ S CONCORDANCE, #2240 —to arrive, that is to be present.

YOUNG’ S CONCORDANCE —to have come, be here.

LIDDELL AND SCOTT’ S GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON —to have come, be present, be here.

THAYER’ S GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT —to have come, have arrived, be here.

EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS by Vine —“ I come and am here.”

As Vine observes, *hecko* means —come (arrive) and be here. *Hecko* does not mean the instant of arrival, but includes both arrival and presence.

For the general use of *hecko* in the New Testament, see Luke 15:27, John 4:47, and 1 John 5:20.

Why Some Christians Are Unaware

Luke 21:34-36 warns that when Christ returns, some Christians will be unaware of his presence. This “Day” comes as a snare upon two kinds of Christians. Some are overcharged with the cares of this life; others neglect the Word and Spirit of God to follow leaders who misguide them.

Luke 21:34-36 also refers to signs of Christ’ s second presence. Notice how watching Christians are aware when “**the day of the Lord**” comes upon them, whereas the world and negligent Christians are not.

Our Lord says, “ Take heed to *yourselves*, lest at any time *your* hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you [Christians] [27] unexpectedly. For as a snare shall it come on all *them* [the world] that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch [watch yourselves and also the word of prophecy] ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

The phrase “ that ye may be accounted worthy to escape” in verse 36 of the *King James Version* is a poor translation. Compare the following translations:

REVISED STANDARD VERSION: “ praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place.”

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION: “ praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place.”

ROTHERHAM: “ making supplication that ye may gain full vigour to escape all these things that are about to be coming to pass.”

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE: “ praying at all times for strength to pass safely through all these imminent troubles.”

These translations prove the thought of the Greek* is that watching and praying Christians will receive the strength to pass through the troubles during the early period of that “ day.” Note that the church is still on the earth. Strength is not necessary for an experience from which the Lord removes you, but the Lord gives strength to endure the dangers Christians must encounter in the tribulation. However, negligent Christians are ensnared by these dangers. Note well the implications of this scripture.

*Both VINE’ S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS and THAYER’ S GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT observe that the Greek word in Luke 21:36 translated “ accounted worthy” in the *King James Version* is not found in the most authentic manuscripts. Instead, the Greek word *katischuo*, which means “ full strength,” appears. The word “ escape” is a translation of the Greek word *ekpheugo* which means “ to seek safety.” Thayer defines *katischuo ekpheugo* —“ to have full strength to overpower or overcome.” [28]

Faithful Christians are here during part of the tribulation period, but are sustained by the strength of the Lord.

Luke 21:29-31 discusses the “ fig tree” —Israel coming to life. This parallels the “ fig tree” passage of Matthew 24:31-33. In Matthew 24 the “ fig tree” —Israel coming to life again—was one of the signs of the parousia—presence—of Christ. The “ great tribulation” of Matthew 24:21,22 was also a proof that Christ was present. The “ great tribulation” of Matthew 24 parallels the “ distress of nations with perplexity” of Luke 21:25. Luke 21:29-31 shows “ that day” of Christ’ s presence includes severe tribulation that only the Lord’ s people who are watching and praying will have the spiritual “ strength” to endure. Notice Luke 21 confirms the twofold lesson of 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10. First, the faithful watchers will not be caught unaware of his return. Second, they will be aware of his

invisible presence during the troublous events of “ that day of the Lord.” Because they are watching, the Lord’ s people will receive the spiritual strength to endure some of the trying experiences of that day before they are taken to be with their invisible Bridegroom.

The Church Lives Into Part of the Tribulation

Nahum 1:5-8 confirms this thought. Verse 5 describes mountains quaking, hills melting, and the whole world being devoured by the presence of the Lord. Verse 6 asks, “ Who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?” Verses 7 and 8 answer this question: “ The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

The “ day of trouble” which accompanies the Lord’ s presence finds the church still here on the earth. (Daniel 12:1; Zephaniah 1:14-15) The Lord is their stronghold during this tribulation. By contrast, in Verse 8, he will pursue his enemies with an overrunning flood and darkness.

Psalms 46:1-6 deals with the tribulation period that brings the present world to an end. While the earth is being removed, while the mountains are being carried into the sea, while the sea is roaring, and while the mountains are shaking, we find in verse 4 that the church, the “ City of God,” is still on the earth. [29]

Why is it that “ she shall not be moved” during the tribulation? Is it because the church is with Christ in heaven? No! “ God is in the midst of her” while she is yet here on earth. The church would not need this protection if she were already taken home, but she needs it in the time of trouble while she is still here. God will protect her in the trouble and, additionally, He “ will help her right early.” The church will only experience part of the tribulation before her resurrection change. This cannot refer to “ tribulation saints” of Revelation since only the church, the bride of Christ, is symbolized in Scripture as the “ City of God.” (Compare Psalms 46:5 and Revelation 21:2.)

A deeper insight into the nature of the tribulation in Psalms 46 is obtained from the meaning of the word mountain as used in the Bible.

Mountains are symbolic of kingdoms or nations. In Jeremiah 51:24-25, the nation of Babylon is called a “ destroying mountain” because of her many military victories. Speaking of the nations that opposed Israel,

Isaiah 41:15 states that Israel would “ thresh the mountains” and “ make the hills as chaff.” In Daniel 2:35, 44, 45, the Kingdom of God is described as a “ great mountain” that “ filled the whole earth.” Thus we see in scriptural usage, mountains are symbolic of kingdoms or nations.

Water is often symbolic of people (Revelation 17:15).

The *roaring sea* would represent the restless or anarchistic elements of mankind.

When Psalms 46 says, “ *The waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof*” and “ though the *mountains* be carried into the midst of the sea,” it means “ the great tribulation” will result in the destruction of the nations by anarchistic elements of society.

A further proof that the church is still here during part of the tribulation is found in Matthew 24:21. As discussed, Matthew 24 contains a series of signs or events that denote, not the imminent coming, but **the secret presence of Christ**. Faithful watchers would discern these signs of Christ’ s presence. A period of unprecedented trouble is spoken of in Matthew 24:21 as one of the signs of Christ’ s presence; and faithful watchers will see these [30] signs. Therefore, some of the church will be on earth when the tribulation begins and discern it as a sign of Christ’ s presence.

These scriptures are but a few that reveal that the church will still be on earth during part of the tribulation.

Is the Tribulation a Period of Seven Years?

The tribulation period is variously referred to in Scripture as follows:

Matthew 24:21 —“ *Great tribulation* such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Daniel 12:1 —“ *A time of trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation.”

Isaiah 22:5; Obadiah 14; Nahum 1:7; Habakkuk 3:16; Zephaniah 1:15; Ezekiel 7:7 —“ *A day of trouble.*”

Note that nowhere in these tribulation scriptures is a seven-year period mentioned.

Many fundamentalists are unaware that the “ seven-year tribulation” is mistakenly based on Daniel 9:24-27—a scripture that has nothing to do with the “ tribulation” which closes the Christian Age. (See *Appendix E* for a detailed discussion on the “ Origin and Scriptural Evaluation of the Seven-Year Tribulation Theory.”) [31]

Chapter Four

"Caught Up Together With Him"

Paul referred to “ the glorious appearing..of our Saviour Jesus Christ” as “ that blessed hope.” (Titus 2:13) What a blessed hope indeed when Christ finally appears and the church is united with her beloved bridegroom. Soon the warfare will be ended, the toiling and suffering over. Soon the church will experience that joy of seeing him face to face and sharing the presence of his fellowship throughout eternity. Long have Christians waited for the second coming of Christ. Long have they fervently prayed for the time they would be united with him whom they have grown to love so much. Inspiring thoughts of this glorious event have been the basis of many hymns.

A concept evolving from this joyous expectation is the “ rapture.” However, the word “ rapture” is not found in the Bible. Is the popular concept of a “ rapture” scriptural? A consideration of all the scriptures on the resurrection of the saints reveals that when Christ returns, the “ dead in Christ” are raised. Then, during the period between his return and the full establishment of his Kingdom, the living saints are gathered to him individually as they die over a period of time.

What Do the Scriptures Say?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 describes the raising of the saints at Christ’ s second presence. Note the sequence of time between the resurrection of the “ dead in Christ” and the living saints being “ caught up.”

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven..and the *dead* in Christ *shall rise first: Then we* which are alive and

remain shall be caught up together with them..to meet the Lord...[32]

This scripture states that Christ first resurrects the saints who are “ dead,” having fallen asleep in death since his first advent. “ Then” (afterwards, Greek *epeita*, “ thereafter”) the living saints are “ caught up” to meet the Lord. The contrast of “ first” and “ then” denotes a difference of time. Paul doesn’ t tell us here how long the time difference is, but other scriptures do. Note another important point. Evidently the phrase “ caught up together with them” **does not denote the time, but rather the *place*** of their being together. In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, the same Greek word *hama* is again translated “ together” and clearly denotes *place*. “ That whether we wake or sleep, we should live *together* with him.” Thus, nothing in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 indicates that the “ dead in Christ” and the living church are taken at the same time.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 also describes the two parts of the resurrection of the saints. “ *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at [during] the last trump.*” The word “ at” is a poor translation. Rotherham correctly translates it “ during.”

The phrase “ the last trump” implies previous trumpets. The only other trumpets in the New Testament are a series of seven trumpets found in Revelation. Some mistakenly believe that the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:51 sounds during a “ secret rapture” to be followed by a “ seven-year tribulation” during which, among other events, the seven trumpets of Revelation literally sound. However, since the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:51 is called the last trumpet, it corresponds with the last of the seven trumpets of Revelation. This would mean the previous six trumpets have already sounded. Evidently, the sounding of these six trumpets is not literal, since such a literal sounding would have aroused worldwide attention. We can reasonably conclude that the six trumpets are symbolic. And if the first six are symbolic, then the seventh trumpet is also symbolic. scriptural proof that the symbolic meaning of the trumpets is a proclamation of truth will be dealt with at a later point. It is during this period of the sounding of the last trump that the resurrection of the church will occur.

The “ day of the Lord” is also the “ day of the trumpet.” (Zephaniah 1:15-16) This symbolic trumpet, proclamation of truth, sounds during the whole “ day of the Lord.” [33]

**“ We Shall Not All Sleep,
But We Shall All Be Changed”**

Some will have slept in death before their resurrection at Christ’ s return. However, Christians living during Christ’ s presence will be changed in the twinkling of an eye without sleeping in death. Will all the living be changed at the same time, or will each be raised to immortality at the instant of their dying?

Revelation 14:13 gives the answer: “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth:.. that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” *All* the saints, even those living today, are, in this text, considered “ dead.”

“ Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3) These “ dead” do die. A point of time is indicated by the word “ henceforth.” The point of time is Christ’ s return. Preceding verses describe events during Christ’ s presence. Then Revelation 14:13 speaks of something that happens from “ henceforth,” that is, from the return of Christ onward. “ Henceforth” refers to a period of time that follows, not a moment that follows. “ Blessed are the saints” who die from that point on because, though they “ rest from their labours” in the flesh, they will not have to wait in the sleep of death. Their “ works” follow immediately with them as they are raised to meet the Lord. These scriptures teach the resurrection of the sleeping saints at his return—then, an individual resurrection of the remaining living saints occurs over a period of time as each dies and is changed “ in the twinkling of an eye.”

The Problem of a Partial Quotation

A set of verses in our Lord’ s Great Prophecy is frequently used to prove the instantaneous gathering of the living saints to Christ in the air. However, they have nothing to do with the living saints being taken to heaven.

Luke 17:34-36 —“ I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall

be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” [34]

This is an example of the danger of a partial quotation. Upon the basis of this limited citation, it might be reasoned that the ones that are taken are caught up to heaven, but verse 37 rules out this possibility:

Vs. 37 —“ And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles [Greek, eagles or vultures] be gathered together.”

The curiosity of the disciples was aroused by Jesus’ statement that two people would be in various situations and one would be taken. The disciples specifically asked where “ the one” would be taken. Notice that Jesus did not say they would be caught up together with him at his return. His answer is “ wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” Some feel the body here referred to is the body of Jesus. However, Matthew 24:28 specifies that the body to which the eagles are gathered is a dead body or carcass.

The lesson of the eagle in Job 39:30 corroborates this usage of a slain body. Further, if the body is referring to the literal body of Jesus, then eagles must also be literal and this would render the passage meaningless. Both the body and the eagles are symbolic. Jesus evidently based his lesson on two characteristics of eagles found in Job 39:27-30: the eagle’ s ability to see her prey (food) afar off; and her willingness to travel a great distance to secure this food—where the body (food) is, there the eagles will be. The Scriptures compare faithful Christians to eagles in this respect. They have the ability to see or discern spiritual food afar off, and they will travel great distances to secure it.

A Rich Feast

The lesson of Luke 17:34-36 is beautiful. Remember, Luke 17 and Matthew 24 are accounts of our Lord’ s Great Prophecy in which he gave signs of his *parousia*, presence. The living church cannot be caught up at the moment of Christ’ s return, for they will be here on earth discerning the signs of Christ’ s presence. But their relationship to the returned Lord is blessed and unique.

Chapters two and three of Revelation describe seven churches. Many Bible-believing Christians hold the concept that these represent seven

stages of the church down through the Christian Age. [35] To the Philadelphia or sixth stage, the Lord said, “ Behold, I come quickly.” (Revelation 3:11) But, to the Laodicean, or seventh stage of the church, the Lord says, “ I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Revelation 3:20

At the close of the sixth stage of the church’ s history, the Lord is imminently coming (“ Behold, I come quickly”). But the Lord is actually here during the seventh or Laodicean stage of the church. If someone is knocking at our door, he is no longer coming—he is present. We might refuse to hear the knock, or we might refuse to open the door, but this does not disannul the fact that he has arrived.

So it is with the returned Lord. The fulfilled signs of our Lord’ s Great Prophecy prove that we are in the Laodicean or seventh stage of church history, the period during which the Lord is present and some of the church remain here on earth. We might refuse to hear his knock. We might refuse to understand the truth of his presence, or even refuse to open the door of our hearts to the returned Lord. Nevertheless, he is present whether we accept it or not.

To those who do accept it, there is a great spiritual feast. They sup together with their returned Lord. This feast of truth that is to be the blessed portion of the church on earth when the Lord returns is also discussed in Luke 12:37-40:

Luke 12:37-40 —“ Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

The faithful church will be watching for the Lord’ s return. When he returns, they will recognize it, and he will serve them with a special feast of truth. This feast is not in heaven—it is [36] enjoyed by watchful servants on earth. These verses depict the blessed conditions of faithful Christians who remain on earth for a period of time after our Lord

returns. “Feasting” is one aspect of the two-fold lesson of the eagles. When the Lord returns, the eagle class, faithful Christians, will be gathered to this rich spiritual feast. The second lesson is that the eagle can see food afar off and will travel great distances to secure it. Revelation 18:1-5 explains what is involved in this traveling.

Fleeing Babylon

Revelation 18:1-5 —“ And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Many believe the mighty angel of verse one is our returned Lord. The Greek word *aggelos*, here translated “angel,” means “messenger.” Revelation 20:1-3 also used the word “angel” or “messenger” when referring to the returned Christ coming down from heaven and binding Satan. Malachi 3:1-3, a parallel passage to Revelation 18:1-5, speaks of our returned Lord as the “messenger of the covenant.”

Our returned Lord, the mighty angel of Revelation 18:1, enlightens the earth with his glory. (Other scriptures show a great enlightenment of truth along every line—scientific, humanitarian, philosophical, religious, etc., which causes the earth to tremble. Psalms 97:1, 4)

Revelation 18:2-4 reveals that the returned Lord has a message against Babylon. Most agree that Babylon is a false Christian system. Revelation 17:5 indicts both a mother system [37] of Babylon and daughter systems. Therefore, Babylon represents a number of false Christian systems. Note the difference between the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:2-4 before her plagues come, and the destruction of Babylon in Revelation 18:8 when the plagues come. Therefore, the Lord is present for a period of time before the destruction of Babylon.

Throughout the age, before his return, the Lord tried to “ heal” Babylon (Jer. 51:9), but she refused to be “ healed.” At his return, he casts her off from favor. Revelation 18:2-4 refers to Babylon’ s fall from divine favor. Then in Revelation 18:4, our returned Lord has a message for all true Christians in Babylon: “ Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Note again the lesson of the eagle. The returned Lord has promised a great spiritual feast of truth, yet most Christians are in Babylon when he returns. Just as the eagle can see food far away and travels a great distance to secure it, so faithful Christians will discern the lack of spiritual food in Babylon and will leave. They must flee Babylon (Jeremiah 51:6) in order to enjoy the spiritual feast from the returned Lord.

The confirmation of applying Revelation 18:1-5 to the beginning period of Christ’ s presence, during which the living saints are gradually caught up to the Lord, is found in Revelation 14. The time element and message of Revelation 14:8 is exactly the same as Revelation 18:2.

Revelation 14:8 —“ And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

It is during the period of this proclamation of the fall of Babylon from favor that we are given our “ henceforth” period of Revelation 14:13, “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from *henceforth*.” We have already seen that Revelation 14:13 proves the individual resurrection of the living church over a period of time. The synchronizing of the time element of Revelation 18:1-5 and Revelation 14 is further proof that when our Lord returns there is a gradual resurrection of the living church, not an instantaneous gathering to Christ. [38]

The lesson of Luke 17:34-37 is important to all Christians now living during our Lord’ s presence. The *eagles* of verse 37 are symbolic of *faithful Christians*. The *bed, mill and field* of verses 34 through 36 are also symbolic. They represent *different spiritual conditions in the nominal churches*. The ones in the mill, the field, and the bed who are taken represent faithful Christians.

When the Lord returns, He will call His people out of Babylon. He will attract them as eagles are attracted by food for which they have a keenness of vision and appetite. The watching and worthy are taken; that is, they leave Babylon. The others are left to experience the plagues that destroy Babylon. The food of “ present truth” now provided by our present Lord is having its intended effect of gathering his saints to it. It is not the gathering by one man or many men unto themselves or into a new denomination, but a gathering unto a spiritual feast of prophetic truth provided by the returned Lord.

A Further Proof

A further proof that the one in the bed, the one in the mill and the one in the field (Luke 17:34-36) do not picture the living church caught up to heaven is found in Luke 17:30-33.

Luke 17:30-33 —“ Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’ s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”

If, as some feel, the living Christians are “ raptured” instantaneously, then those who are taken have no time to make a choice or do anything else. This is contrary to verses 30 to 33. When the Son of man is revealed, the one in the field has the choice of turning back and the one upon the housetop can decide to go down into the house to take his belongings. These verses harmonize with Luke 17:34-37 where, like the eagles, the one in the bed, the mill, and the field are gathered to a spiritual feast of prophetic [39] truth to strengthen them in the troublous experiences of “ that day” of Luke 21:34-36.

When the Lord returns and calls his people out of Babylon (the nominal churches), those on the housetops (Christians with a higher degree of spirituality) should leave immediately without taking any Babylonish encumbrances with them. Even when the flight from Babylon has begun, none should turn back as did Lot’ s wife, verse 32.

Luke 17:33 further confirms that these verses refer to a condition of separation here on earth. Notice it is after one is taken that he still has the

choice to turn back. After the gathering begins, his course of action will determine whether he loses or saves his life.

From the foregoing scriptures discussed in this chapter, it becomes evident that the instantaneous change and resurrection of both the living and dead in Christ at the moment of his return is not a scriptural concept. 1 Corinthians 15:50-51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 reveal that all faithful Christians who died before the Second Advent will be raised to be together with their Lord at his return. From that time onward, “henceforth,” Revelation 14:13 reveals that members of the living church on earth will be caught up individually to their returned Lord as they complete their course on earth. Many scriptures show that the returned Lord will reveal himself in a very special way to faithful Christians on earth and provide a rich feast of spiritual truth. [40]

Chapter Five

"Every Eye Shall See Him"

Having established scripturally that the Second Advent of Christ begins with a secret invisible presence discernible only to the faithful watchers by the eye of faith, the question logically arises: Will the future revelation to all mankind involve mental perception or literal sight?

Harmony must be sought between two sets of scriptures relative to this matter. Matthew 24:30-31 and Revelation 1:7, if taken literally, could be interpreted to mean that all mankind will see the returned Christ with their literal eyes. On the other hand, the following four scriptures clearly state that after Christ ascended into heaven, mankind would not and could not see him with the literal eye.

(1) “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye [shall] see me: because I live, ye shall live also.” John 14:19 Here is a plain statement by Jesus just prior to his death and resurrection that the world would never again see him. Then he adds that “ye,” the apostles and all the church, would see him again. Why? Because “ye shall live also.” Just as Christ was resurrected, so his faithful followers will be raised at his second advent. “The world seeth me no more.” When Christ returns, the world will not see him with the literal eye, but his followers

will literally see him when they are caught up together with him in their resurrection bodies. 1 John 3:2

(2) Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that the glorified Christ is the express image of the Father's person. Colossians 1:15 speaks of Christ, "who is the image of the invisible God." These scriptures show that when Christ ascended into the presence of God, he was the exact image of the Father. From 1 Timothy 6:16 we learn that [41] Christ is "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, *nor can see.*" If no man can see Christ after his ascension because he is the exact glorious image of the Heavenly Father, then no man can see the returned Christ of glory.

(3) Acts 22:6-8 and 11-14 record that a mere glimpse of the glorified Christ completely blinded Saul of Tarsus. It required the power of God through Ananias to even partially restore Saul's sight. (Acts 9:17, 18)

(4) Luke 17:20 reveals King Jesus will return unobserved at his second presence of Christ, when he returns to set up his kingdom. Verse 20 states, "The Kingdom of God *cometh not with observation.*" If Christ's return were visible to man, then the Kingdom of God would come visibly.

Literal, or Symbolic

These four scriptures show that the glorified Christ will not and cannot be seen at his return. Yet Revelation 1:7 and Matthew 24:30 seem to indicate that all mankind will see the returned Lord. Will this be by literal sight or by mental perception (as, for example, when we say, "I see [understand] what you mean")?

As Christians, we cannot afford to base our conclusions upon one set of scriptures and ignore other scriptures that do not fit with our views. We must accept the challenge: "Study to show thyself approved unto God..rightly dividing the Word of Truth." The only valid way to ascertain the correct view of any Biblical doctrine is to collate all the scriptures on a given subject and then rightly divide them, that is, harmonize them. Only then can we be sure of the correct understanding. When all the scriptures on a given subject are brought together, they will harmonize. They will not contradict.

It is generally admitted that some scriptures are symbolic. For example, the *fig tree* of Matthew 24:32 represents the *nation of Israel*, and the *eagles* of Luke 17:37 symbolize *faithful Christians*. The question is: How do we determine if a passage is literal or symbolic? Whenever a literal interpretation does violence to reason or places the passage [42] in direct antagonism to plain statements of Scripture, it is a good indication that the passage should be considered figuratively, and its interpretation as a symbol should be sought in harmony with obviously plain and literal passages.

John 14:19; 1 Timothy 6:16; Acts 22:6-8, 11-14, and Luke 17:20 are all plain statements to the effect that the returned Lord cannot and will not be seen by the human eye. These scriptures should be read and reread. They are literal statements that cannot be taken symbolically.

Mental Perception

Now for a consideration of Matthew 24:30-31 and Revelation 1:7 which speak of all mankind seeing the returned Lord: Are they literal or symbolic? In both texts, the Greek word translated “see” is *optanomai*. The following definition is from AN EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS, by W. E. Vine:

Optanomai—to see; used (a) objectively, with reference to person or thing seen, or (b) subjectively, with reference to an inward impression or a spiritual experience or a mental occupation.

Thus, we see *optanomai* can mean either literal sight or mental perception. The following examples demonstrate how the Greek word *optanomai* is used in Scripture to denote mental understanding.

Luke 3:6 —“ And all flesh shall *see* [*optanomai*] the salvation of God.” [One doesn't literally see salvation, one understands it.]

John 1:51 —“ And he [Jesus] saith unto him [Nathanael], Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall *see* [*optanomai*] heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” [Nathanael never literally saw this. In an allusion to Jacob' s ladder, Jesus is

saying that the Son of man would become the real ladder of communication between heaven and earth.]

Revelation 19:10 —“ And he said unto me, *See* [*optanomai*] thou do it not.” [43]

Matthew 27:4 —“ ..And they said..*see* [*optanomai*] thou to that.”

Matthew 27:24 —“ ..I am innocent..*see* [*optanomai*] ye to it.”

These scriptures prove that the Bible uses *optanomai*, translated “ see” in Matthew 24:30-31 and Revelation 1:7, in a symbolic sense to denote mental understanding.

A thoughtful reading of Matthew 24:30-31 and Revelation 1:7 reveals terminology that lends itself to symbols and, in fact, are often used in the Bible as symbols. For example, in Matthew 24:30-31, words that frequently are used symbolically are here italicized.

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* [*optanomai*] the Son of man coming in the *clouds of heaven* with power and great glory. And he shall send his *angels* with a great *sound of a trumpet*, and they shall gather together his elect from the *four winds*, from one end of *heaven* to the other.

This scripture cannot be taken literally. Any concept with which it is harmonized requires a symbolic interpretation. Some apply this scripture to the living saints being caught up with Christ to heaven. But here they are gathered “ *from* one end of heaven to the other.” If understood literally, the saints would already be in heaven when Christ returns, and this scripture would teach that the saints are taken at that time out of heaven and not to heaven. This rules out a literal interpretation of Matthew 24:30-31.

It also says that they are gathered from the “ four winds.” Are the saints gathered from four literal winds? Those who teach the rapture concept recognize this problem and symbolize the four winds and the word “ heaven” in verse 31 to mean that the church will be gathered from all

parts of the earth. However, this presents a greater problem. By what rule can we arbitrarily symbolize the word “ heaven” in verse 31, yet insist that it is literal in [44] verse 30 where it mentions “ the sign of the Son of man in heaven” and “ coming in the clouds of heaven” ?

Matthew 24:30-31 is either literal or symbolic; it cannot be both. A literal application does not make sense. Therefore, both verses must be consistently symbolic.

Symbolic Meaning of Matthew 24:30-31

Heaven and heavens are often symbolic of corrupt religious systems (2 Peter 3:5-10; Isaiah 34:4-5; Joel 2:9-11).

See can denote mental perception (Luke 3:6; John 1:51; Revelation 19:10; Matthew 27:4, 24).

Clouds often represent trouble as in Joel 2:1-2, a parallel text of Matthew 24:30-31.

The word *angels* is translated from the Greek word *aggelos* which literally means messenger and often refers to any messenger of God (Revelation 2 and 3, the seven angels or messengers to the church).

Trumpets are often used to denote a proclamation of truth (1 Corinthians 14:8; Joel 2:1).

With these symbols in mind the explanation of Matthew 24:30-31 becomes meaningful. The Master tells us in verse 30 that one of the first signs or evidences of Christ’ s return will be in heaven, that is, in the corrupt religious systems. Verse 29 speaks of the powers of the heavens shaking.

Agnostic revolutionary influences have infiltrated the churches. The resultant battle between the fundamentalist and modernist has sorely rent the church “ heavens.” Since Vatican II, Catholicism is being similarly shaken. The Son of man comes in “ clouds of heaven,” that is, during this trouble that is shaking the churches. The Luke account includes “ distress of nations with perplexity.”

This worldwide trouble in both the churches and the nations will increase in intensity until all the people of the earth mourn because of it. Finally, “ they shall see [discern] the Son of man coming in the clouds” of trouble; that is, they will realize that the trouble is the result of our Lord’ s return. While the heavens [45] (nominal churches) of Matthew 24:30 are being shaken, verse 31 reveals that the returned Lord will “ send his angels [messengers] with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect—from one end of heaven [corrupt church systems] to the other.” Revelation 18:1-4, a parallel passage, further confirms that this trumpet is a proclamation of truth. Through this great proclamation of the truth, faithful servants of God will call the Lord’ s people out of Babylon.

Symbolic Meaning of Revelation 1:7

“ Behold, he cometh with clouds [in a time of trouble] and every eye shall see [optanomai, discern] him [as the trouble intensifies, it will become evident that the day of God’ s wrath has come], and they also which pierced him [the Jewish nation will especially discern Christ’ s presence in the final phase of the time of trouble when they are delivered from an invasion of many nations—Ezekiel 38, 39; Zechariah 12:10]: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him [as the day of wrath intensifies, all will experience much sorrow and anguish].”

Revelation 1:7 cannot be taken literally since those who literally pierced Jesus have long since died. If “ they also which pierced him” is symbolic of the living Jewish people, then the “ clouds” and “ every eye” seeing him must also be symbolic.

Thus, we find that the Bible does not contradict itself. Many scriptures plainly state that the returned Lord cannot be literally seen by man. In harmony with this, the few scriptures that refer to mankind literally seeing the returned Christ are symbolic and denote a mental discernment of Christ’ s presence.

A more detailed scriptural proof of the symbolic explanation of Matthew 24:30-31, Revelation 1:7, and all other scriptures in which the word “ see” denotes mental perception of Christ’ s return, will be found in *Appendix B*. [46]

Chapter Six

The Man of Sin

In his second letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle Paul shows that two events must precede the second presence of our Lord: (1) a great falling away from the original, apostolic faith; and (2) the appearance of the Man of Sin, the Antichrist. (2 Thessalonians 2:3) No interpretation of our Lord's Second Advent should be seriously considered which fails to identify these two events. Having proven that our Lord has already returned, we now proceed to show that the Man of Sin has indeed come, fulfilling every detail of the prophetic description.

Note, however, the disharmony between this prophecy and some current views. Some claim that the Lord Jesus first comes secretly to take his saints—and then the Man of Sin appears. An examination of an error made in the early church is instructive on this point.

Recognizing that Christ was to come invisibly, as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:4; Revelation 16:15), some believers in Paul's day concluded that Jesus was already present and that the resurrection of the dead in Christ had, therefore, occurred. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:18) In order to correct this mistake, Paul found it necessary to advise that they “be not soon shaken in mind..that the day of the Lord is *present* [Greek, *enistemi*]. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3) Compare with the *Revised Standard Version*.

Notice, the invisible presence of Christ is *preceded*, not followed, by the revelation of the Antichrist. Also, verses 1 and 3 teach that the Man of Sin precedes two things: (1) “The coming of our Lord” ; and (2) “our gathering together unto him.” This [47] eliminates the possibility of Christians being taken to heaven before the Man of Sin is revealed.

Since 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 teaches the “man of sin” is revealed before “our gathering together to him [Christ],” the popular “pre-tribulation rapture” cannot be correct. Why? Because it wrongly teaches that the “man of sin” is revealed during a so-called seven-year tribulation which is claimed will occur after the church is gathered to Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 shows the “man of sin” is revealed before we are gathered to Christ.

Furthermore, Paul did not attempt to correct their error by asking if they had seen Jesus with their literal eyes, or had heard a literal trumpet with their ears, or had seen large numbers of Christians suddenly disappear. Had such arguments been appropriate, Paul would certainly have employed them. Their concept of an invisible presence was correct: the Day of the Lord would steal quietly upon the world and many would be overtaken by it unawares. (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4) The mistake of some in that day was not in regard to *what* they should expect, but when. Looking forward with great eagerness to the return of Christ as the fruition of all their hopes, they were prone to accept uncritically any teaching to the effect that their longed-for Lord was present, or near at hand.

Mystery of Iniquity

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8, Paul calls the “ Man of Sin” the “ Mystery of Iniquity” and says that “ it,” not “ he,” is already at work in his day. This could not be a literal man—he would be nearly two thousand years old now. Why did Paul call the “ Man of Sin” the “ Mystery of Iniquity” ?

Remember the beautiful mystery Paul showed us. (Ephesians 5:30-32; Colossians 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:12-28) Christ is “ not one member but many.” Just as the human body is a union of many members, so the church is the body of Christ. Paul’ s lesson of contrast is clear. Just as there is a mystery class of righteous or justified believers who compose Christ, so there is a mystery class of iniquity (evil workers) who comprise Antichrist. Paul’ s use of the phrases, “ Man of Sin” and “ Mystery of Iniquity” in verses 7 and 8 prove they are the same. [48]

Origin of the Man of Sin

To trace the origin of the Man of Sin, we must begin in Paul’ s day. Writing to the church at Thessalonica, he warned them, saying, “ For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [Gk. restrains] will let [Gk. restrain], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed.” (2 Thess. 2:7-8) Compare with the *New American Standard Version*.

In the ambitions of leaders to be “ lords over God’ s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3) and in the desire of some to avoid the path of sacrifice which Jesus ordained, the Antichrist principle found fertile soil. When the Roman

Emperor, the restraining one, ceased his opposition to Christianity, this spirit of worldly ambition blossomed rapidly into the Papacy.

“ As ye have heard that [the] Antichrist shall come,” wrote the Apostle John, “ even now are there many antichrists.” (1 John 2:18) Pointing out that the spirit of Antichrist was already at work, he proceeded in the remainder of the chapter to advise how to escape its influence when it did come.

That there was a great “ falling away” from true Christian faith during the early centuries of the Gospel Era, no Protestant will deny. Pompous rituals and elaborate ceremonies replaced the simple preaching of the Gospel. Salvation was no longer sought through the blood of Christ alone, but from the Mass, holy water, relics of saints, medals and amulets, the rosary, and the intercession of Mary. Multitudes flocked to converted heathen temples to pray to and adore the very idols that the Pagans had worshipped a short time before. The names of the statues were simply changed from Pagan gods and heroes to names of Christian martyrs and saints.

The Roman Emperor, who as *Pontifex Maximus* (“ Chief Religious Ruler”) had been the head of all the Pagan priests, vacated his office in favor of the Bishop of Rome, the new *Pontifex Maximus*. Whereas the Roman emperors had claimed to possess the Keys of Janus and Cybele, the new supreme pontiffs, dressed in the same costume as their forerunners, claimed possession of the Keys of St. Peter and attempted to prove that the Apostle Peter had once been the Bishop of Rome—something completely unsubstantiated by history. [49]

This Man of Sin, growing out of the apostasy as foreseen by Paul, exalted “ himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:4) The temple to which Paul referred was not a literal building, but the Church of God, for he elsewhere declared, “ Ye are the temple of the Living God.” 2 Corinthians 6:16

The self-exaltation of the bishops of Rome in the temple (church) of God was extravagant beyond measure. Applying divine prerogatives to themselves, they claimed that every human being must be subject to their authority.

“ The pope holds the place of the true God,” declared Pope Innocent III (A.D. 1198-1216). The Lateran Council (A.D. 1123) acclaimed the pope as “ Prince of the Universe.” St. Bernard (A.D. 1090-1153) wrote, “ None except God is like the pope, either in heaven or on earth.” Pope Nicholas (A.D. 858-867) boasted that Constantine had “ conferred the appellation of God on the pope, who, therefore, being God, cannot be judged by man.”

Astounding as these false claims are, they deceived the whole Christian world during most of Papacy’ s dark reign (Revelation 13:5-6). Only a faithful few escaped their baneful influence and remained loyal to their true Lord and Head. Note that the Greek prefix “ anti” signifies not merely “ against” or “ opposing,” but also “ instead, in the place of.” (See Strong’ s or Vine’ s.) Thus, Antichrist is not only an opponent of our Lord and his truth, but an impostor, a usurper of his position.

Attributing the purest motives to the popes, the Papacy would still be the Antichrist; because he claims to be the “ Vicar of Christ” on earth and supreme “ Head of the Church.” Each pope in turn has applied the Messianic promises and appellations of scripture to himself. Even kings were required to kiss the pope’ s great toe, supposedly fulfilling Psalm 2:12, “ Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.”

The System—Not Individuals

No one pope was the Antichrist, nor is every Catholic or pope a man of sin. The Man of Sin, the Antichrist, the “ Mystery of Iniquity” is the Papal system—it is **not** an *individual*. [50]

Antichrist in Other Prophecies

There is general agreement that the “ little horn” on the fourth beast of Daniel 7 and the “ leopard beast” of Revelation 13 are symbolic of Antichrist. The question is whether the “ little horn” and the “ leopard beast” picture a literal Man of Sin or a system.

Some believe the four beasts of Daniel 7 represent four governments and that the fourth beast is the Roman Empire, and the “ little horn” on this beast symbolizes a single individual who is the Man of Sin. Yet, they claim that the leopard beast of Revelation 13 does not represent a government but a personal Man of Sin, and its ten horns represent ten governments that support this worldwide dictator.

This view contains a basic violation of scriptural interpretation. When the Bible identifies a symbol, we are on shaky ground when we give that symbol a different meaning.

In Chapter 7 Daniel clearly states that beasts represent governments. Those four governments were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. By what logic are the *beasts of Revelation* symbolic of an individual when *beasts in Daniel* represent governments? Is it not inconsistent to claim the “*little horn*” in Daniel is a man when the *horns of Revelation* are governments? Consistency requires a uniform application of the beasts and horns in both Daniel and Revelation.

The justification for this reversal of interpretation is the claim that the leopard beast of Revelation 13 is referred to by a personal pronoun “he,” whereas the government beasts of Daniel are not. This is not a valid argument. In Daniel 7:19-20, the fourth beast, which all agree represents the Roman Empire, is referred to by the personal pronoun “his.” In Daniel 8:3-7 the beasts picturing Medo-Persia and Greece are continually referred to by the personal pronouns “he” and “him.”

Daniel Chapter 7

Several facts concerning the “little horn” prove that Antichrist is a system and not an individual. Daniel 7:25 reveals that the “little horn...wears out the saints of the most high.” This presents a dilemma if a personal antichrist wears out the saints during a future “seven-year tribulation.” [51]

If, as some claim, the true church is taken to heaven before the “tribulation,” who are “the saints of the most high” that are persecuted by the Man of Sin? They reply that these are the “tribulation saints” of Revelation 7 and not the saints or church of Christ who are taken before the tribulation. They add that the “tribulation saints” will be in the kingdom, but have no part in reigning with Christ in his kingdom. This, they say, is reserved exclusively for the church of Christ.

With this, the future literal Man of Sin concept crumbles. In Daniel 7:13-14, Christ is brought before the Heavenly Father and given the kingdom. In Daniel 7:18 and 22, “The saints of the most high,” the same saints that are persecuted by the “little horn,” the Man of Sin, are also given the kingdom. Remember, only Christ and his church reign in His kingdom. Therefore, “the saints of the most high” in Daniel 7 are not

the “ tribulation saints,” but the Church of Christ who reigns with Christ.

Daniel 7 also gives us the time element of the Man of Sin. The “ little horn” persecutes these saints; consequently, the “ little horn,” the Man of Sin, is revealed before either the Day of Christ when the saints are resurrected or the tribulation occurs.

Daniel 7:25 indicates that “ the saints of the most high” are worn out by the “ little horn” for a period of a “ time, times, and a half times,” which most agree refers to 3½ years or 1,260 days. We have already seen that the saints persecuted by the Man of Sin are the church who reigns with Christ, and not the tribulation saints. Therefore, the church is persecuted for 1,260 days. Consequently, the 1,260-day period occurs before the great tribulation and is not part of the tribulation.

1260 Days

What and when is this 1,260-day period? The Bible is its own interpreter. The Lord has put into the Bible certain rules for interpreting symbols, parables, and time prophecies. If we ignore these basic scriptural rules, then our understanding of scripture will be confused.

The scriptural rule for interpreting time prophecy is found in Ezekiel 4:1-8 where we are given a 390-day period. In Ezekiel 4:6 we read, “ I have appointed thee each day for a year.” By this [52] divinely provided rule of interpretation, 390 days equals 390 years. All agree that the seventy weeks (7 weeks x 7 days = 490 days) of Daniel 9:24-29 refers to 490 years and not 490 days. This is based on the day-equals-a-year key provided in Ezekiel 4:6. Why then do some make an exception to the 1,260 days of Daniel and Revelation and insist on a literal period of 1,260 days?

According to the scriptural rule of interpretation in Ezekiel 4:6, a day for a year, the period of 1,260 days would be a period of 1,260 years. Many students of prophecy apply this to the period between A.D. 539 and 1799.

In 539 A.D. the last of the three horns (civil powers) that stood in the way of the Pope of Rome being recognized as the civil ruler of Rome was removed (Daniel 7:8). Horns in prophecy consistently picture civil or governmental powers. The pope was already acknowledged as the

supreme religious ruler of the empire. The year 539 A.D. marks the beginning of Papacy's (the "little horn") civil power.

For 1,260 years Papacy, the Man of Sin, ruthlessly persecuted the true church (Daniel 7:25) until Papacy's persecuting power was broken in 1799 when the Pope died after being imprisoned by Napoleon. This persecution had reached its ultimate in the so-called Holy Inquisition. Established by Pope Innocent III in 1204 A.D., it was applied with unimaginable cruelty in every country, and the so-called "holy office" of the Inquisition continued the carnage until the armies of Napoleon put an end to its work. Whole villages and towns were indiscriminately slaughtered on the theory that "God will know his own." Tens of thousands were burned alive at the stake, while countless others were subjected to torture by the most hideous inventions.

Aside from the more spectacular crimes of the Inquisition proper, the steady, relentless crushing of individuals over many centuries certainly presents an appalling scene. No wonder the prophet Daniel was alarmed! (Daniel 7:28) Napoleon's imprisoning of the pope and his death in 1799 ended one of the most bloody periods in history, the 1,260-years' persecution of the saints by Papacy.

The Scriptures do not speak of a "seven-year tribulation" —nor do they speak of two back-to-back 1,260-day periods. The [53] following citations are the only places in the Bible which mention the 1,260 days: Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5. Each agrees with Daniel 7:25.

The *holy people* (saints means holy ones) of Daniel 12:7.

The *holy city* (identified in Revelation 12:2 as the bride of Christ) of Revelation 11:2.

The *woman* (symbolic of the Church, 2 Corinthians 11:2) of Revelation 12:6, 14.

The *saints* in Revelation 13:5, 7.

All show the *church of Christ is persecuted for 1,260 days by Antichrist*. The Bible rule for time prophecy is a day for a year (Ezek. 4:6). During the 1,260 years of Papacy's persecution of the Church, God's two

witnesses (Rev. 11:3, the Old and New Testaments) witnessed in sackcloth—the dead language of Latin.

Earmarks of Antichrist

Daniel 7:25 delineates four characteristics by which the Man of Sin can be identified. “ And he [1] shall *speak great words against the most High*, and [2] shall *wear out the saints of the most High*, and [3] think to *change times* [4] and *laws*.”

We have already considered the first two points: the preposterous words by which popes claimed to be “ as God” and the wearing out of the true Church by Papacy.

Papacy did indeed “ change times.” Unwilling to await the unfolding of God’ s plan, papacy changed the time of Christ’ s Kingdom. It declared the reign of Christ had already begun and applied scriptures relating to the Millennial glory of Christ to the unchallenged dominion of the popes up until 1799. (*Douay Bible*, First Edition, footnote on Revelation 20:2) Another example of Papacy’ s attempting to “ change times” is in its changing of the calendar.

Did Papacy change laws? The precepts and commandments of God meant little. By the claimed right of issuing “ dispensations,” the popes frequently set aside the moral law. Murder of heretics was called praiseworthy, subjects were encouraged to rebel, oaths [54] and contracts were cancelled, and torture was declared to be an “ act of faith.” Spying, intrigue, perjury, and theft were pronounced virtuous deeds when performed in the service of the church. Not content with dispensing divine laws, the popes were always ready to create new ones if convenience so required. Clerical celibacy was prescribed, meat was forbidden for centuries on Fridays, ecclesiastical taxes were levied, and liberties of the people were frequently curtailed.

Indeed, the four earmarks of the Man of Sin given in Daniel 7:25 have been fulfilled in the infamous reign of papacy, especially up to 1799. This is why Martin Luther and the other Reformers identified the papal system as Antichrist. The Man of Sin already has been revealed, therefore, there remains no objection that the Lord is now present (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

With the combined weight of prophecies on our Lord's return, we have as full a confidence of his presence as those who were his personal eyewitnesses on the Mount of Transfiguration at his First Advent (2 Peter 1:16-18).

In fact, our confidence in Jesus' return is "more sure" based on prophecies —

2 Peter 1:19 —“ We have also a more sure word of prophecy, Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, As a light that shineth in a dark place, Until the day dawn and the day star Arise in your hearts.”

The watchers, the children of light, see the day dawning and their Day Star, Jesus, arising on the horizon while the world still sleeps. This blessed knowledge so strengthens and energizes their hearts that they are sanctified in a way they could not be otherwise. He has kept his promise. He has come again.

Those watching see the foregleams of the Sun of Righteousness which will eventually rise with “ healing in his wings” to bless the groaning creation. (Mal. 4:2) With joy they realize that they will also be with him for,

Matthew 13:43 —“ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” [55]

Appendix A

Listing of Every Scripture in Which the Greek Word *Parousia* Occurs

The following is a listing of every scripture in which the Greek word *parousia* occurs. (It is correctly translated presence in this listing):

“ What shall be the sign of thy *presence*?” Matthew 24:3

“ So shall also the *presence* of the Son of Man be.”
Matthew 24:27, 37, 39

“ They that are Christ's at his *presence*.” 1 Corinthians 15:23

“ I am glad of the *presence* of Stephanas...” 1 Corinthians 16:17

“ God...comforted us by the *presence* of Titus; and not by his presence only...” 2 Corinthians 7:6-7

“ For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily *presence* is weak, and his speech contemptible.” 2 Corinthians 10:10

“ Through my *presence* again with you...” Philippians 1:26, MARSHALL’ S GREEK INTERLINEAR

“ Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my *presence* only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2:12

“ What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, presented before our Lord Jesus Christ at his *presence*?” 1 Thessalonians 2:19

That “ he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the *presence* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 3:13 [56]

“ We which are alive and remain unto the *presence* of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep.” 1 Thessalonians 4:15

“ Be preserved blameless unto the *presence* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23

“ Now we beseech you, brethren, by [respecting] the *presence* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1

“ Then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation [*epiphania*] of his *presence*.” 2 Thessalonians 2:8 (See RSV.)

“ Whose *presence* is after...” 2 Thessalonians 2:9

“ Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the *presence* of the Lord.” James 5:7

“ Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the *presence* of the Lord draweth nigh.” James 5:8

“ The power and *presence* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:16

“ There shall come in the last days scoffers [in the church], walking after their own lusts [desires], and saying, Where is the promise of his *presence*.” 2 Peter 3:3-4

“ And hasting unto the *presence* of the day.” 2 Peter 3:12

“ When he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his *presence*.” 1 John 2:28

[57]

Appendix B

Every Scripture in Which the Word "See" Occurs Relative to Seeing at His Second Advent

Matthew 24:30-31 —“ 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 in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

As has been shown on pages 44 and 45, Matthew 24:30-31 cannot be taken literally. The following is a scriptural analysis of the symbols in this highly figurative passage.

Heaven and Heavens

Discussing the destruction during “ The Day of The Lord,” Isaiah 34:2-5, 8 states that “ all the host [multitude] of heaven shall be dissolved.. and shall fall down.. for my sword shall be bathed.” (Verses 4 and 5) The literal heavens do not contain a multitude of people. But the people in the symbolic heavens (the corrupt religious systems) will be punished (symbolized by his sword drenched in blood) by the returned Lord. Joel 2:9-11 describes The Day of the Lord in which a great army causes the earth to “ quake” and the heavens to “ tremble.” Literal heavens do not tremble before an army, but revolutionary forces will terrify and overthrow the nominal church heavens. The heavens of Joel 2:10 are the same as in Matthew 24:29-31, for in the heavens of both scriptures the sun and the moon are symbolically darkened.[58]

Clouds

Joel 2, a parallel scripture to Matthew 24:29-31, reveals that clouds symbolize trouble. In Joel 2:1-2 there is reference to the “ clouds” that become distressingly ominous in the early dawn of the Lord’ s new day. “ A day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; *a great people and a strong*; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

Note from this that the “ clouds” which appear in the early dawning of the day of the Lord’ s presence really consist of “ a great people and a strong,” the like of which has never before been known. This is a reference to the uprising of armed forces so tremendous that civilization will crumble and fall under the impact of the revolutionary struggle they precipitate. These clouds of trouble are even now visible.

See

The Greek word *optanomai* can mean mental perception. (See *Appendix C.*)

Angels

The word “angel” in the Greek, *aggelos*, literally means “messenger.” Often it refers to the angelic host, but it can just as appropriately refer to any messenger of God. For example, the returned Christ is symbolized by an angel that binds Satan for the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

Trumpets

The word “trumpet” is used in scripture to symbolize a proclamation of truth. In the context of speaking the truth clearly, Paul said, “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (2 Corinthians 14:8) Again, Joel 2 parallels Matthew 24:30-31 and reveals the symbolic meaning of this trumpet. Joel 2:1 says that it is a proclamation of truth that warns the people of The Day of The Lord. In Zephaniah 1:14 and 16, The Day of The Lord is spoken of as the “day of the trumpet” in which a warning of truth is given “against the fenced cities, and against the high towers [vested interests of the present evil world].” [59]

The trumpet in Matthew 24:31 is the same as the “last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 and “the trump of God” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, since all three are related to the return of Christ. This trumpet is symbolic of a great proclamation of truth at Christ’s return.

Four Winds

Revelation 7:1 speaks of winds from the four corners of the earth that, when loosed, result in great destruction. Loosing of *four winds* would produce a *whirlwind*, which is another symbol used in scripture to describe the final and severest phase of the “time of trouble” (Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 25:32; Isaiah 66:15-16).

After determining from parallel scriptures the meaning of the symbols in this highly figurative passage, Matthew 24:29-31 becomes easily understood. In answer to the disciples’ query on the signs of his presence (Matthew 24:3), Jesus listed a number of events that have always been true throughout history: “wars and rumours of

wars;” “ nation shall rise against nation;” “ famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes.” Then Jesus said, “ All these are the beginning of sorrows [or tribulation].” These are not unusual events; they are common to history.

Then in Matthew 24:29 Jesus says, “ Immediately after the tribulation of *those days* [the common tribulation of history]” something is going to happen in the heavens. “ The *powers of the heavens* shall be shaken.” Drastic changes will rock the *nominal church heavens*.

“ The *sun* [the *gospel sun*] shall be darkened, and the *moon* [*Mosaic Law*] shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.” The Gospel (New Testament) and the Mosaic Law (Old Testament) were always under attack from those outside the church. Revelation 12:1 shows the sun and the moon have always been the sustaining power of the woman, the true church. But the phenomenon of our time is that the Bible (Sun and Moon) is under attack from modernists within the church who deny the divine inspiration of Scripture. A survey taken among delegates to the National Council of Churches revealed that over one-third could not state they had a firm belief in God. [60]

Stars can symbolize either *faithful or unfaithful teachers*. These “ stars” which “ *fall from heaven*” represent *false teachers* who gravitate from a spiritual to an earthly ministry on a political and social level. Indeed, the powers of the heavens are shaking. The battle between the fundamentalist and modernist has sorely rent the church heavens. The God-is-dead theology was but one example of this shaking. Since Vatican II, Catholicism is also being sorely rent.

Matthew 24:30: “ And then [after the tribulation of those days] shall appear the sign [Greek, *semeion*, evidence] of the Son of man in heaven.” One of the first evidences of Christ’ s *parousia*, presence, will appear in the nominal church heavens. It is the symbolic darkening of the sun and moon, and the fall of the stars. When we see a wholesale attack by leaders in the churches on the divine inspiration of the Bible, and ministers falling from a spiritual condition

to a political or social gospel, then we know that Christ has returned.

From Joel 2:9-11, we saw that it is agnostic revolutionary forces that are shaking the heavens. Indeed, their philosophies have influenced theologians to reject the Bible and degenerate to political battle. This was reflected in the recommendation of the Conference on Church and Society (Detroit, 1968) that the churches should support violence if necessary to achieve social change. These revolutionary philosophies are also shaking the earth.

Revolution has been on the march since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces erupted into World War II. Then followed the Communist takeover of one-third of the world. The flame of revolution spread throughout Africa and Asia as oppressed nations threw off the yoke of colonialism. We have witnessed the black revolution, the sex revolution, and the youth revolution of the 1960s, '70s and '80s. No wonder the Luke account (Luke 21:25-26), when speaking of the shaking of the heavens, adds, "Upon *the earth* distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves [the restless and lawless elements] roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on *the earth* [society]; for the powers of heaven [nominal church] shall be shaken." [61]

The *roaring sea and waves* symbolize the restless masses of humanity (Isa. 57:20), curbed but not fully restrained by the laws and regulations of society. Everyone has heard some of this "roaring," with occasional stormy outbreaks dashing like tidal waves against the earth (social order) and seeking to swallow it up. Restrained for a time, these waves are gathering weight and force. As prophetically shown, it is only a matter of time until all the mountains (kingdoms) are "carried into the midst of the sea," into anarchy. Psalm 46:2

In this connection Matthew 24:30 says, "all the tribes of the earth mourn" as they "see" the Son of man coming in

the “ clouds [*trouble*] of heaven” (and “ earth,” Luke). This unprecedented trouble has caused all mankind to mourn. They are experiencing the world shattering before them. Mankind sees the clouds of trouble. Many even discern these drastic changes as birth pangs that must precede a new world order. As the trouble intensifies, they will begin to discern the Son of man in the clouds of trouble and recognize that the “ great tribulation” will give birth to the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

While the *heavens (nominal churches)* of Matthew 24:29 are experiencing a great shaking, verse 31 shows a harvest work in progress. “ And he [Christ] shall send his *angels [messengers]* with a great sound of a *trumpet [truth]*, and they shall gather together his elect from the *four winds*, from one end of *heaven [nominal churches]* to the other.”

Zephaniah 1:14, 16 reveals that “ the day of the Lord” is also “ a day of the *trumpet.*” This rules out a literal trumpet that sounds momentarily, and confirms a symbolic trumpet of truth that sounds for a period of time.

Matthew 24:31 describes a *great gathering* of the elect, the church (1 Peter 1:2), that is accomplished by a *proclamation of truth (trumpet)* during Christ’ s presence. This is a reference to the harvest work at the end of the Gospel Age which is described in detail in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Here Jesus says that the angels are the reapers that gather the *wheat (faithful Christians)*. Reapers do not refer to spirit angels, but to the *Lord’ s people* who engage in the harvest work. Matthew 9:38 [62]

Since tares look like wheat, the lesson is that the angels (messengers of the returned Lord) will do a separating work, not between the church and the world, but in the nominal church, the present “ heavens.”

This work is represented under various symbolic descriptions—it is the gathering of the wheat from the tares into the barn (Matthew 13:30); it is the gathering of the good fish into baskets and the casting of the unsuitable fish caught in the gospel net back into the sea (Matthew 13:47-

49); it is the gathering of his jewels (Malachi 3:17); it is the calling of “ my people” out of Babylon (Revelation 18:4); it is the midnight cry to the virgins, which separate the wise from the foolish (Matthew 25:6); and, in this prophecy, it is the gathering of the “ elect” from all the non-elect of Christendom, from the four winds—from every quarter.

We are not to expect spirit angels to appear with wings and to fly through the air blowing a great trumpet, and here and there catching away some of the saints—no more than we are to expect to become literal fish to be put into literal baskets, or literal grains of wheat to be put into a literal barn. The angels or messengers used by our Lord in this harvest gathering will be such messengers as he has used in his service throughout this age—earthly servants, begotten of his holy Spirit, “ new creatures” in Christ Jesus.

This “ gathering of his elect [the church] from the four winds” means that this gathering will be accomplished before the four winds are completely loosed and become a whirlwind. The harvest work will be completed before the whirlwind, or final feature of the time of trouble, takes place. The elect are gathered “ from one end of heaven to the other,” that is, out of all the nominal churches.

The harvest work of Matthew 13 and Matthew 24:31 is the same work of Revelation 18:1-4. Here the returned Christ gathers his faithful people out of Babylon (heavens, nominal churches) and provides them with a rich spiritual feast of present truth. Thus, by rightly dividing the word of Truth—comparing the symbols of Matthew 24:29-31 with symbols in parallel scriptures—the Bible becomes its own interpreter. [63]

Revelation 1:7

Revelation 1:7 is also often used to prove that every one will literally see the returned Christ. “ Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see (*optanomai*) him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.”

The word “ see” in the Greek is *optanomai*, which we have already seen can mean either mental perception or literal sight. This verse cannot be taken literally, since those who literally pierced Jesus have long since died. The Jewish people living on the earth when Christ returns did not literally pierce him. If “ they which pierced him” is symbolic, then the “ clouds” and “ every eye” seeing him must be symbolic.

Christ returns in clouds of trouble. As the time of trouble reaches its climax, every eye, all mankind, will begin to discern that the trouble is the result of Christ’ s invisible presence. “ *They which pierced him*” at Calvary are symbolic of the *Jewish people living at Christ’ s return*. Zechariah 12:10 shows that one of the final features of the time of trouble will be an invasion of the modern state of Israel. Israel’ s deliverance from this invasion by the returned Christ will cause them to discern that Christ is present.

During the time of trouble, “ all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” The time of trouble is the direct result of Christ’ s presence. As it grows in severity, all mankind will lament until they finally discern that it is an evidence of Christ’ s presence.

Matthew 26:64

Another scripture sometimes misapplied to literal sight is Matthew 26:64. Speaking to the High Priest, Jesus said, “ hereafter shall ye see [*optanomai*] the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” The Greek word translated “ see” is *optanomai*, which here means mental perception. If this scripture is literal, then the High Priest will be living on earth when Christ returns, which is literally impossible. The High Priest Caiaphas was representative of the whole Jewish nation. As we have seen in the previous scripture, the returned Lord will be revealed to the Jewish nation in a very special way during the time of trouble—clouds. [64]

Luke 13:35

Luke 13:35 says “ Ye shall not see [*eido*] me, until the time come when we shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” The Greek word here translated “ see” is *eido*. *Eido* can also denote mental perception or literal sight. (STRONG’ S CONCORDANCE defines *eido* as to see literally or figuratively.) The Jewish nation was cast off from special favor by these words of judgment pronounced by Jesus. But as Zechariah 12:10-14 shows, they will repent of their denial of Christ and see (discern) and experience the second presence of Christ and become a leading nation in Christ’ s Kingdom.

Acts 1:11

Acts 1:11 is another scripture sometimes used to prove that the returned Lord will be seen by the literal eye. “ ..Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in *like manner*, as ye have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11 does not say as you see the Lord ascend into heaven, so in like manner shall you see him come again. It does not say that those who saw him go will see him come, nor that anyone else will see him come.

What Acts 1:11 does say is that the manner of his coming will be *like the manner* of his going. The manner was **not with great splendor and great demonstration**, trumpet sounds and voices, a great shout rending the air and the Lord’ s person shining in supernatural glory and brightness. But the manner was **quietly, secretly, none seeing him leave or knowing of the fact, except his faithful followers**. The world did not see him go, or even know he was going, and they didn’ t care. Thus, only the church at first will discern his presence.

From a careful consideration of the scriptures in this appendix it becomes evident that the texts cannot be taken literally. They support the concept that all mankind will eventually see, mentally discern, the invisible presence of Christ. [65]

Appendix C

***Optanomai* —Strong's #3700**

Optomai and *optanomai* are two ways of spelling the same Greek word which Dr. Strong's Concordance numbering system designates as #3700.

Revelation 1:7 —“ ..every eye shall see (*optanomai*) him...”

Matthew 24:30 —“ ..and they shall see (*optanomai*) the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Mark 13:26 —“ And then shall they see (*optanomai*) the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”

Optanomai can mean literal seeing or mental perception. Its majority New Testament usage denotes a literal sight. However, it is also used to denote mental discernment.

Often the logic is used that if God wanted to teach a certain point in a verse of scripture, He would have used a Greek word that solely has that particular meaning. That is plainly incorrect. For example, God overruled the use of a Greek word in Rev. 20:10 that is translated **tormented** and primarily means **tormented**. However, it can have significance of **testing** or **examining**. The meaning of testing certainly harmonizes with the total teaching of scripture on the subject of the condition of the dead.

Why didn't the Lord use a Greek word in Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 1:7 that solely means discern, that is, mental [66] perception? This begs the question—why didn't the Lord use a Greek word in Revelation 20:10 that solely means **examining** instead of using a word that can also mean **tormented**?

Mark 4:12 clearly states that the scriptures were written purposely in parables and dark sayings so that only the faithful searchers would understand.

Often the Lord provides a key in the context or a related passage to assure us of the meaning of the word in question.

He has provided this key as to the meaning of *optanomai* in a second advent setting. In our Lord’ s Great Prophecy, the Greek word *eido* (Strong’ s #1492) is used a number of times (Matthew 24:33 and Mark 13:29) to solely denote mental perception. Then in a parallel passage, Luke 17:22, *eido* (Strong’ s #1492) and *optanomai* (Strong’ s #3700) are used interchangeably.

Luke 17:22 —“ And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see (*eido*) one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see (*optanomai*) it.”

Luke 17:22-37 is parallel to Matthew 24. This proves that *optanomai* means mental perception in a Second Advent context. [67]

Appendix D

“ Bright Shining” —*Astrapee*

In Matthew 24:27 the Greek word *astrape* can mean lightning or shining. In Luke 17:24 the Greek word *lampo* only means shining. Therefore, these parallel passages prove that the gradual rising of the sun symbolizes how Christ’ s presence will be gradually revealed as we progress further into The Day of the Lord.

Matthew 24:27	=	Luke 17:24
<i>“ parousia”</i>		“ the Son of man...in his day”
“ For as the lightning [<i>astrapee</i>] cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming		“ For as the lightning [<i>astrapee</i>], that lighteneth [<i>astrapto</i>] out of the one part under heaven, shineth [<i>lampo</i>] unto the other

[<i>parousia</i>] of the Son of man be.” Matthew 24:27		part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.” Luke 17:24
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[68]

Strong’ s #796 — <i>astraph, astrapee</i> [Can mean “ lightning” or “ bright shining.”]	
Matt. 24:27 Matt. 28:3 Luke 10:18 Luke 11:36 Luke 17:24 Rev. 4:5 Rev. 8:5 Rev. 11:19 Rev. 16:18	-For as the <i>lightning</i> cometh -His [angel’ s] countenance was like <i>lightning</i> [“ bright shining”] -I beheld Satan as <i>lightning</i> fall -as when the <i>bright shining</i> of a [“ bright shining”] -For as the <i>lightning</i> , that lighteneth -proceeded <i>lightnings</i> and thunderings -thunderings and <i>lightnings</i> , and an -there were <i>lightnings</i> , and voices, -voices, and thunders, and <i>lightnings</i>

Strong’ s #797 - <i>astraphv, astrapto</i>	
Luke 17:24 Luke 24:4	-the lightning, <i>that lighteneth</i> out -stood by them in <i>shining</i> garments: [“ bright shining”]

Strong’ s #2989 - <i>lampv, lampo</i> [Only means “ shining.”]	
Matt. 5:15 Matt. 5:16 Matt. 17:2 Lk. 17:24 Acts 12:7 2 Cor. 4:6	-And it <i>giveth light</i> unto all that are -Let your light so <i>shine</i> before men, -And his face <i>did shine</i> as the sun [Jesus on Mt. of Transfiguration] - <i>Shineth</i> unto the other (part) -A light <i>shined</i> in the prison: -God, who commanded the light <i>to shine</i> out of darkness, <i>hath shined</i> in our hearts

[69]

Appendix E

Origen and Scriptural Evaluation of "The Seven-Year Tribulation" Theory

Many hold the “ seven-year tribulation” theory, which, briefly stated, is this: Christ secretly returns to earth to “ rapture” the church and takes them to heaven. This will be followed (not necessarily immediately) by seven literal years of tribulation during which the “ man of sin” enters upon the world’ s stage. At the close of the seven years, Christ returns publicly with the church (“ every eye shall see him”), destroys antichrist and the false prophet and begins his Millennial Reign. There are variations of the “ seven-year tribulation” theory. Some feel Christ gathers the church at the middle of the seven years and call their concept the “ mid-tribulation rapture.” Others hold that the church is taken after the tribulation and refer to their concept as the “ post-tribulation rapture.”

The “ seven-year tribulation” theory has its roots in dispensationalism, which in turn originated, not in historic Protestantism, but in the 1800s with J.N. Darby. Darby was the leader of the major segment of Plymouth Brethren, a wonderful group of people, but hardly representative of historic Protestantism.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that Darby revived the counter-reformation views of a Spanish Jesuit priest named Ribera. A basic concept of the Reformation was that Papacy as a system was the Antichrist and that much of the book of Revelation was having its fulfillment during the history of the church. In 1590 Ribera published a commentary on the Revelation, as a counter-interpretation to Protestantism, in which he applied all but the earliest chapters of Revelation to the end [70] time and that Antichrist would be a single evil person (not a system) who would rule the world for three and a half years during the end time.

Darby claimed that all the events from the sixth to the nineteenth chapters of Revelation occur during a “ seven-year tribulation.” However, nothing in the book of

Revelation says or even hints that the seven seals are loosed, the seven trumpets are sounded, and the seven plagues are poured out during a seven-year period. A seven-year period is not even mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

It is true that a 3½-year period is mentioned. However, nowhere is it indicated to be half of a seven-year period. It can be easily proven from scripture that the 3½ years occur before the tribulation. (See pages 52-55.) Therefore, the reformers such as Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley believed the 3½ years or 1,260 days were symbolic of a 1,260-year period that began before their time and extended to the “time of the end.” *

The “seven-year tribulation” concept rests solely on an inconsistent application of Daniel 9:24-27, which speaks of a seventy-week period determined upon the Jewish people. Seventy weeks equals 490 days. (70 weeks x 7 days = 490 days.) All agree, upon the basis of Ezekiel 4-6—a day for a year—that these seventy weeks equal not 490 literal days, but 490 years. Again, there is unanimity that the 69 weeks of Daniel 9:25 mark a period from a decree issued in Nehemiah’s day to the First Advent of Christ. Daniel 9:26 states that “*after*” the 69 weeks “shall Messiah (Christ) be cut off.” Verse 27 shows that “in the midst of the [70th] week he [Christ] shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” Christ’s death abolished the necessity of the further offering of typical sacrifices by Israel’s priesthood.

Note that Daniel 9:26 states “*after*” the 69 weeks “shall Messiah [Christ] be cut off.” The Hebrew word *achor* means after. It does not mean in or during. Yet, those who advocate the seven-year tribulation say that Messiah was cut off in or during the 69th week. This is a mistranslation of verse 26, which states that “*after*” the 69 weeks Christ would be cut off. The 70th week is after the 69 weeks, and verse 27 clearly shows it is in the midst of the 70th week that Christ died. Therefore, the seven-year period of the 70th week is not left over until the end of the Christian age.

Thus, the seven-year tribulation concept falls.

* George Eldon Ladd. THE BLESSED HOPE,
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 Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand
 Rapids, Michigan. [71]

The historic position of Protestantism for 300 years since the Reformation has been that the 70th week immediately followed the 69 weeks and was fulfilled with the death of Christ “ in the midst” (middle) of it. In the 19th century, however, dispensationalists came along and said, “ Not so—there is a parenthesis between the 69 weeks and the 70th week. This gap is the period between the First Advent and the rapture.” Then, they say, “ The 70th week, seven years, begins to count. And the ‘ he’ of Daniel 9:27 is not Christ, but anti-Christ, and the seven years of the 70th week is the ‘ seven-year tribulation’ during which Chapters 6-19 of Revelation are fulfilled.” The fact that this “ gap” is purely an assumption not founded on scripture seems to matter little to the seven-year dispensationalists. [72]

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