

### *Could Christ Return Tonight?*

By Ronald L. Dart

It was the last night of the revival. The congregation was softly singing, “Just as I am,” and the preacher was standing in front of the pulpit with both arms raised in invitation. He knew there were people present who needed to make a decision for Christ. “Jesus Christ could come tonight,” he urged. “Will you be ready for him?”

I was just a boy at the time, but it made a profound impression on me. In fact, when I saw my first aurora borealis, it nearly scared me to death. I was sure Jesus was coming after all, and I knew for a certainty I was not ready. But, of course, Jesus did not come that night or any other night in the past 50 years. Looking back, I wonder why it took me so long to question what the preacher said.

Of course, among those who believe in the return of Christ, most simply take it for granted that his return could take place at any moment. But is that true? Is it possible that you might step out your front door tonight, see a bright light in the sky, and suddenly realize that Jesus *is returning*, and he is returning *now*?

After all, Jesus did promise to return. He said, “And when I go and prepare a place for you, I *will come again* and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3 RSV).

Later, when Jesus had ascended into heaven leaving his disciples gazing upward, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you unto heaven, *will come* in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

So Jesus *will* return, but could it be *tonight*? Is it something that could happen to us without a hint, or are there prophecies that give us a warning of Christ’s impending return? Does the Bible reveal *anything* that must take place before the return of Christ? If there are specific, observable events that precede his return, and those events have not taken place, then how can we

believe that Jesus could literally come tonight?

Fortunately, the prophecies of Christ’s return are well known and easily understood. They tell us in surprisingly plain language what is going to happen in the Last Days. Why then should we be in doubt?

Take for example Paul’s teaching on the resurrection. He wrote to the Thessalonians, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 NIV).

Notice that Paul takes for granted the “coming of the Lord.” And what does he say is to *happen* at Jesus’ coming? “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (vv. 16-17).

The coming of Christ, then, is hardly a secret event. A shout comes from heaven with the voice of an archangel, and a great trumpet is blown. It is a time of the resurrection of the dead and a time when the living saints are caught up to meet Jesus Christ in the air! It would be hard to keep this event a secret. After all, every living Christian has either disappeared or gone straight up in the air!

Explaining this same event in a different letter, Paul gives us a few more details: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last* trump: for the trump shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

We know that the living are not only to be caught up to meet the Lord, but that they will be *changed*. We now

learn that this is not just any “trumpet of God” that is blown, but the *last* trumpet. For it to be the *last* trumpet, there must be trumpets that go before it.

If that’s the case, then *there is a series of “trumpets” that precedes the return of Christ!* Can these trumpets be perceived by men? Are these signs of Christ’s imminent return? If they are, and they have not taken place, then how could Jesus Christ come *tonight*?

### **The Olivet Prophecy**

Jesus’ disciples clearly expected that there would be some prior indication that Jesus’ return was imminent. When he spoke to them of the destruction of the temple, the disciples came to him privately on the Mount of Olives and asked him, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And *what shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” (Matthew 24:3).

Then follows Jesus’ most comprehensive prophecy of the events of the Last Days. Naturally, then, we would expect some reference to the resurrection, the gathering of the saints, and the trumpet of which Paul spoke. You’ll find that reference in verses 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.”

We have put together several prophecies which outline a sequence of events at the end time. Putting them together, we get a fairly comprehensive picture of the events that coincide with the return of Christ. There is to be a shout of the archangel, the sounding of a trumpet, a general resurrection of the dead, and a reunion in the clouds of both living and dead *in Christ*. At this point, those “in Christ” are no longer flesh and blood but are changed into incorruptible spirit beings (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

Now we are in a position to add one more important prophecy to this grouping.

### **Seven Trumpets**

There is only one place in the Bible where a sequence of trumpets is described—the Book of Revelation. It is a sequence of seven trumpets and the *last* trumpet is described in Revelation 11:15, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms

of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Now we know more about the return of Christ. Not only will there be a shout and a trumpet, but a proclamation of the beginning of his Kingdom. It will be a time to destroy those who destroyed the earth and to reward his resurrected saints (Revelation 11:16-18).

What does the Book of Revelation tell us will take place *immediately prior* to the return of Christ? If we start with the return of Christ, the last trumpet, and the resurrection, and then work our way backward in time, what do we find? Are there any prophesied events which *must* take place *before* the return of Christ?

Take a careful look at the 11th chapter of Revelation. Verse 15 describes the seventh trumpet. Why not start at the beginning of the chapter and see what happens just before the seventh trumpet?

At this point in John’s vision, he is given a measuring reed and instructed to measure the Temple, the altar, and the worshipers. He is instructed to omit measuring the outer court, “for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months” (Revelation 11:2).

This is a highly significant prophecy. It is possible to infer the existence of a Temple prior to the return of Christ? There are indications in Daniel, for example, that the daily sacrifice will be reinstated at some time prior to the return of Christ (Daniel 12:11). Of course, other interpretations have been offered.

Of special interest is the last half of Revelation 11:2: “. . . and the holy city shall they [Gentiles] tread under thy foot forty and two months.” Here is a strong indication that Jerusalem will be an occupied city for three and one half years prior to the seventh trumpet. Its occupation by the Gentiles is considered an unnatural state. Presumably it is *not* occupied by these people before the three and one-half year period or after it.

Jesus spoke of this time in the Olivet prophecy. Answering his disciples’ questions about his coming and the end of the age, he said, “And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . For these be the days of vengeance. . . for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and *Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*” (Luke 21:20-24).

Putting the Olivet prophecy together with the

beginning of Revelation 11, we learn that for 42 months prior to Christ's return, Jerusalem is "trodden down of the Gentiles." This three and one-half year period is called "the times of the Gentiles." The immediate warning of the beginning of this three and one-half year period is "Jerusalem compassed with armies."

There are some very specific events which must take place, and a specific period of time which must elapse immediately preceding the return of Christ.

Let's return to the 11th chapter of Revelation. Immediately following his statement about the Gentiles, God told John, "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth."

Once again we have a specific time period, specific events that must take place just before the seventh trumpet, and a three and one-half year time period. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, there's a strong presumption that the times of the Gentiles and of the two witnesses coincide.

The work of the two witnesses is dramatic to say the least. In the manner of Elijah, they are able to call down fire out of heaven and consume their enemies, as well as close the heavens that it doesn't rain during the days of their prophecies. They can turn water into blood and smite the earth with plagues as often as they wish. At the end of their three and one-half year ministry, the beast of Revelation 13 will kill them, "And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves" (Revelation 11:8-9).

All of this takes place immediately prior to the return of Christ. Three and one-half days after the two witnesses are killed, they are raised from the dead and caught up into the air. Coincidentally there is a great earthquake which is immediately followed by the seventh trumpet (vv. 11-15).

How could we construct a theory of prophecy that would allow the return of Christ without this taking place and without the whole world knowing about it?

### **Six Trumpets**

The first six trumpets are described in the eighth and ninth chapters of Revelation. The eighth chapter begins with the opening of the seventh and last seal followed by a short period of silence. Then John saw seven

angels standing before God and to them were given seven trumpets (v. 2).

The angels then sound their trumpets in sequence. When the first angel sounded, "There followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: And the third part of trees were burnt, and all green grass was burnt up" (v. 7).

The second angel sounded his trumpet, ". . . and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed" (vv. 8-9). Could this be a completely metaphorical, secret, unknown event?

These are ecological events of such magnitude that no one can overlook them.

Remember that the last trumpet and the return of Christ follow in close sequence the events described in the first six trumpets!

When the third trumpet is sounded a great star named wormwood falls on the rivers of waters and a third part of them are made poison (vv. 10-11). The fourth angel sounds his trumpet and a third part of the sun goes dark, a third part of the moon, and a third part of the stars.

Then an angel flies through the midst of the heaven, ". . . saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" (v. 13).

This introduces the "three woes"—the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets. A careful study of the fifth and sixth trumpets (Revelation 9:1-21), reveals war of mind-boggling proportions. Read it carefully and see if you can reason how the return of Christ could take place without our being aware of the events described in this chapter! This is the ultimate war. This is the war which, if Jesus did not intervene with the *third* woe to stop it, would mean, quite literally, the end of the world.

In the Olivet prophecy, Jesus spoke of such a time. He said, "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*: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

Does that sound far-fetched to you? After all, could there be a war so extensive that it endangered *all* flesh?

There was a time when we might have denied it, but with the advent of nuclear, chemical, and biological

warfare, the ability to destroy all life is well within the grasp of the great powers.

### **The Sixth Trumpet**

But since we're looking at the period *just before* Jesus' return, let's pause and look carefully at the *sixth* trumpet. The record is found beginning in Revelation 9:13, "And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great River Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for *to slay the third part of men*. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them" (vv. 13-16).

This is the sixth trumpet—the second woe. Here is something very specific that is to happen in a very specific period of time. We are also dealing with an army of very specific size—200,000,000 men! In the specific time of one year, one month, one day, and one hour, one-third of the earth's population will be slain! This is to take place *just before* the return of Christ!

Do you *still* believe that Jesus might come tonight?

Remember, Jesus called this a time of *great tribulation* (Matthew 24:21). *Many* prophets speak of a unique time in human history called the time of "Jacob's trouble." They repeatedly refer to it as a time unlike any other time in the history of man. It is *this time* of which Jesus speaks.

It is Christ's return at the last trump that shortens these days. It is called the third "woe" because the last trumpet introduces the seven vials of God's wrath (Revelation 16).

But as we're working our way back in time from the return of Christ, we might as well look at the *first woe*, the fifth trumpet.

"And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that

they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment is as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man" (Revelation 9:1-5).

What does this describe? Is it chemical warfare—nerve gas, perhaps? It apparently does not harm buildings or plant life but puts a human being in incredible agony. Notice again that there is a specific period of time involved—five months (v. 5).

We've worked our way back 18 months, one day, and one hour prior to the return of Christ. We also have specific things that are to take place during that time.

Do you *still* believe that Jesus might come *tonight*? *And remember there are four trumpets before these!*

There are no specific times laid out for the first four trumpets. In all probability, all seven trumpets make a total of 42 months, or 1260 days, or three and one-half years.

### **Who is Protected?**

Take a look at the fifth trumpet again. When this trumpet is blown, a smoking abyss is opened, and "locusts" come out upon the earth. But these are not just any locusts. They have power as scorpions do.

The "locusts" were commanded "that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any trees; but *only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads*" (Revelation 9:4).

Who, in contrast, are the people who have the "seal of God" in their foreheads? They are obviously living human beings who for some reason have been designated by God to be protected from all these things.

These people are described earlier in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 6 we find the opening of six seals. The seventh seal (Revelation 8:1), will introduce the seven trumpets. But immediately after the opening of the seventh seal there is a pause. At this moment John sees another angel ascending from the east "having the seal of the living God" (Revelation 7:2).

"He cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, *till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads*" (Revelation 7:2-3).

None of this is hard to follow. The earth is headed into a time of trouble and God wants his servants to be protected from the horrors of that holocaust.

There's a peculiarity about these "servants of God." First, there are 144,000 of them—12,000 each from "the tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation 7:4).

*Why are there no Gentiles in this group?* Some assume the Gentiles are included in the innumerable multitude described in Revelation 7:9. But the Scripture does not say that the innumerable multitude of people is *sealed*. It is only the 144,000 who are *sealed* (vv. 3-4).

Why are there no Gentiles sealed? The answer is deceptively simple. We are in a time the Bible calls “the Great Tribulation.” Notice Jesus’ own description of this time: “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 be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22).

So if there was no greater tribulation before this time and there will never be greater tribulation *after* this time, then we have clearly pinpointed a unique event in all of history.

This time is further identified by Jeremiah; “Alas! For that day is *great*, so that none is like it: It is even the time of *Jacob’s* trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7). Notice that the time of Jacob’s trouble is also a *great* tribulation and that it is unique in all of history. Obviously the prophets are talking about the *same period of time*.

That means that the “Great Tribulation” of Jesus’ prophecies is the time identified by Jeremiah as the time of *Jacob’s* trouble (remember that Jacob’s name was changed to Israel).

Therefore, it makes sense that those who are protected from that tribulation are members of the 12 tribes of Israel who are “servants of God.” There is no need to seal Gentile servants of God, *for the Great Tribulation is not upon Gentile countries, but upon Israel*.

Returning again to the Olivet prophecy, Jesus warned, “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon *this people*” (Luke 21:20-23).

Notice that Jesus said wrath would be upon *this* people. This won’t happen every place in the world at this moment. It isn’t necessary for those in Germany,

Austria, Brazil, or Argentina to flee. It is necessary for those who are in Judea to get out. Moments before the actual entry of the beast power into Jerusalem is the beginning of a three and one-half year period of serious tribulation in Israel. Jesus continued, “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (v. 24).

### **The Abomination of Desolation**

There is one other sign for those living in Judea. Jesus continued, “When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whose readeth let him understand), then let them which be *in Judea* flee into the mountains” (Matthew 24:15).

This is an urgent warning. Jesus told them that if they were on the housetop not to come down to take anything out of their house, but to step to the roof of the next house and follow the highway of the roof tops right out of town. If they were in the field, they were not to return for clothing, food, or anything else. They were just supposed to stop whatever they were doing and quietly walk over the next hill and down the next valley and get away. But this warning is *only* for those living in and around Jerusalem.

Of this time Jesus said, “But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: for then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:20-21).

Jesus continued to warn, “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, behold he is in the desert; go not forth: behold he is in the secret chamber; believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west; so also shall the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:22-26).

There is no surprise here. It’s obvious that when a great power arises, enters Jerusalem, and places the abomination of desolation, many will start claiming that the return of Christ is at hand. Jesus tells us there will even be people claiming that Christ has *already come*. His reply? Don’t believe it. He is saying there will be no doubt in our mind when he returns. You won’t stand around asking, “Well, has he or hasn’t

he?” When Jesus returns, *you will know it*.

Just what is this “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel the prophet?

Until Jesus made this statement, his disciples, like other Jews, thought the “abomination of desolation” was already history, and indeed it was. Jesus was referring to Daniel 11:31, “and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.” These prophecies of Daniel were fulfilled in one Antiochus IV, surnamed “Epiphanes.”

Antiochus, also “the king of the north” in this prophecy, had as his goal the Hellenization of every part of his dominions. About 170 BC, Antiochus marched to Jerusalem and “plundered the city and temple with every circumstance of cruelty and profanation, and slew or enslaved great numbers of the inhabitants. For *three years and a half* they were altogether deprived of their civil and religious liberties. The daily sacrifice was prohibited, and upon the altar of burnt offering a small altar to Jupiter Capitolinus was erected. On the twenty-fifth of Chisleu (December), 168, the desecration was consummated in the offering of a sow upon the great altar, and a sprinkling of the liquor in which a portion of it had been boiled over the copies of the Law and every available part of the temple. Such was the ‘abomination of desolation,’ which became proverbial; (Daniel 9:27, 12:11, Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14)” (*The Bible Handbook*, by Joseph Angus, page 603).

While Daniel’s prophecy *clearly* designates Antiochus Epiphanes, it is just as clearly designated for the end time. It is a *dual* prophecy, and Antiochus is only a *type* of one who is to come in the end time. A careful study of Daniel 11 and 12 makes this quite clear.

After a very uncomplimentary description of the one who is to place the abomination of desolation, Daniel tells us, “And *at the time of the end* shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships. . . He shall enter also in the glorious land. . .” (Daniel 11:40-41).

This is the time when Jerusalem shall be encompassed with armies and eventually occupied. Daniel continues, “And he [the king of the north, the latter day ‘Antiochus’] shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him” (Daniel 11:45).

The first verse of chapter 12 also helps us to identify

the time setting of this prophecy: “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a *time of trouble* such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. . .”

We have come once again to the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” the Great Tribulation. Bear in mind, *all this takes place before the return of Christ!*

### **The Day of the Lord**

There is yet one more key to understanding the events of the Last Days.

Over and over again the prophets develop a theme called “the day of the Lord.” Just how many times in history can there be a “day of the Lord”? Is it a unique time in all of history. Indeed *many* prophets speak of this time. Did they understand it the same way? Did the phrase “day of the Lord” mean the same thing to Isaiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Malachi, and Paul? All these prophets use that phrase.

Isaiah, speaking of the “day of the Lord,” warned: “Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. . . For the *day of the Lord* of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low” (Isaiah 2:10-12).

This is clearly the same time spoken of by John when he wrote: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:15-17).

This last citation from the Book of Revelation occurs in the midst of the sixth seal of John’s prophecy. What Isaiah calls the day of the Lord, John calls “the great day of his wrath.”

Isaiah continues his prophecy by saying, “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. . . And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to *shake terribly the earth*” (Isaiah 2:17-19).

A careful look at the sixth seal in Revelation 6 reveals yet another parallel. John says, “And I beheld

when he had opened the sixth seal, lo, there was a *great earthquake*” (v. 12).

Clearly then the sixth seal of Revelation 6 introduces that unique time in all history called “the day of the Lord.” It is a time of a great earthquake, a time when “the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island was moved out of their places” (Revelation 6:12-14).

While Isaiah knows nothing of a series of seals, he *clearly* prophesies the same time spoken of by John. Isaiah 2, then, is *for the Last Days*.

Isaiah does not refer to the heavenly signs in his second chapter, but he has more to say about the day of the Lord elsewhere. In chapter 13: “Howl ye; for the *day of the Lord* is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint and every man’s heart shall melt. . . Behold, the *day of the Lord* cometh, cruel both with wrath and with fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: And He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine” (vv. 6-10).

*Clearly* Isaiah is talking about the time described by John as the opening of the sixth seal. Interestingly enough, this particular prophecy of Isaiah is directed at *Babylon* and forecasts the ultimate fall of the end-time antitype of that corrupt city (vv. 19-22).

Isaiah finds yet another occasion to mention the Day of the Lord, this time in connection with the judgment of Edom. Here he refers to the host of the heavens being dissolved, rolled together like a scroll, and all the starry hosts falling down like leaves from trees as Edom comes to its ultimate judgment, called “the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion” (Isaiah 34:4-8).

## Joel

Joel begins his prophecy with dire warnings of plagues, war, and famine (compare with the first four seals of Revelation 6). Then he cries, “Alas for the day! For *the day of the Lord* is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (Joel 1:14-15).

Once again we find a connection between an Old Testament prophet and the ultimate revelation to John.

Joel adds a familiar theme to his prophecy beginning in chapter 2: “Blow ye the *trumpet* in Zion,

and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the *day of the Lord cometh*, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness as the morning spread on the mountains: a great people and a strong; *there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it*, even to the years of many generations.” Later he describes this devouring army as having the appearance of *horses*.

Look at Revelation 9:1. Here we have the fifth trumpet of Revelation (Joel started his prophecy with the words “blow ye the trumpet in Zion”). In John’s prophecy, when the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, an abyss was opened and the smoke darkened the sun and the air. (Compare Revelation 9:2 with Joel 2:2.)

John tells us the shape of the locusts were like *horses* prepared to battle (v. 5 with Joel 2:4). By Joel’s reckoning, then, the Day of the Lord is ushered in with the sixth seal of Revelation 6, and continues on through the trumpets of Revelation 8 and 9.

To further clarify the time, Joel continues, “The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his Word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible: who can abide it?” (Joel 2:10-11).

There is an interesting sequel to Joel’s prophecy. The latter part of this chapter contains a summation by Joel of what God will do at the very end time when the Day of the Lord comes. This prophecy was cited verbatim by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. He said, “These are not drunken as you suppose, seeing that it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:13-14).

Peter saw the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost as a type of the fulfillment of God’s promises through Joel.

Peter went on, “And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before that great and notable day of the Lord come*” (vv. 19-20).

Clearly Peter saw that the “Day of the Lord” had not yet occurred.

## Zephaniah

Let's look at how Zephaniah saw the Day of the Lord: "The great *day of the Lord* is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: and mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, *a day of the trumpet* and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high towers. . . Neither their silver and their gold shall be able to deliver them in the *day of the Lord's wrath*; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy . . ." (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

The prophet Jeremiah, not to be left out, includes a reference to the Day of the Lord in his prophecy against Egypt. In the middle of his prophecy of the destruction of Egypt, he thunders, "For this is the day of the Lord of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and drunk with their blood; for the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates" (Jeremiah 46:10).

There is an interesting parallel here with Isaiah 34. Here also the Day of the Lord is connected with what the prophet calls a "sacrifice." The language of both these prophecies is strongly suggestive of the battle of Armageddon and the "supper of the great God" (Revelation 19:17-21).

Ezekiel refers to the Day of the Lord as "the time of the heathen" (Ezekiel 30:3). By that he means that it is a day when the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, etc. (v. 4).

Amos also speaks of the Day of the Lord saying, "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. . . Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light? And even very dark and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18-20).

Malachi adds a new dimension quoting God saying, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6).

Paul adds yet a new dimension to it when he says, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the *day of the Lord* so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then

sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Notice it's not the return of Christ Paul is talking about, but the *Day of the Lord*, which begins months before the return of Christ.

Having given his warning, Paul continues: "But ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. . . For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-9).

Indeed, with all the prophetic warnings God has sent, it would be a disgrace for any Christian to be caught totally unaware by the Day of the Lord or the return of Christ.

## An Act of Salvation

To many of those who believe in the return of Christ, however fervently, his return is seen as a random event. It is as if God has set an alarm clock in heaven and kept the exact day and hour a secret from anyone but himself. When the alarm clock goes off, the angels are gathered together, the trumpet is blown, and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are loosed. All this irrespective of what is going on down here on God's green earth.

The Bible presents a very different picture. Jesus' return is shown to be the culmination of a series of cataclysmic events. The return of Christ is shown to be an *act of salvation*. Man is just about to destroy himself from the face of the planet, and Christ intervenes to bring human war-mongering to an end.

Why have so many misunderstood? Probably because they have seen the seven last trumpets as acts of God. In a sense they are, but notice carefully what actually happens when each is blown. Take the fifth trumpet. When the fifth angel sounds his trumpet, John sees a star falling from heaven to the earth: "and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit as the smoke of a great furnace. . . And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth" (Revelation 9:1-3).

Notice that the only act of God is the warning of a trumpet and the *unlocking* of something previously confined. What John then sees in vision is not an *act of God*, but an *act of human war*—a war previously restrained, but now released.

Notice the sixth trumpet. When the sixth angel sounded, John heard a voice saying, “Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men” (Revelation 9:13-15).

Once again, the only act of God is the sounding of a trumpet and the releasing of something previously restrained. Even the first four trumpets may easily be acts of human warfare, and the sounding of the trumpet is merely the “alarm of war,” as it is so aptly described in Old Testament literature.

According to Paul, even the man of sin is restrained for a time and only released or revealed to the world when his time is come (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8).

What is especially interesting about this prophecy is that Paul clearly tells us that *the revelation of this “man of sin” must take place before the return of Christ*. In writing to the Thessalonians he said, “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*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

The return of Christ is not a random, meaningless event, unrelated to anything taking place here on earth. God has been watching and restraining the evil of men from the days of the Tower of Babel until now. Even at this moment evil demonic forces would destroy God’s handiwork, the world, and everything in it, if they were not restrained.

When the decision is made for Christ to return, the war to end all wars is imminent. The destruction of all flesh is at hand. It is at that moment that Jesus Christ will take his great power, will return to the earth in wrath, will raise the dead, give reward to his servants, and destroy them who are destroying the earth (Revelation 11:18).

### **Be Ready**

With all these clear statements in prophecy, why did Jesus say, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42)?

If indeed the prophecies are true, how is it possible for Jesus’ disciples to be so surprised? Jesus continued, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh.” How can this be?

Remember that, although there are supernatural events described in the Book of Revelation, none of these supernatural events may be apparent to the eyes of men. All the disasters, all the wars, will appear to the eyes of men to be *humanly induced*. One man may see a missile falling from the heavens as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation, while another man may not. Even with all these cataclysmic events, there will still be room to doubt whether prophecy is *truly* being fulfilled in these events! No human being will *ever* be able to be *certain* of the day and hour of Jesus Christ’s return. But Paul’s warning is still cogent: “But you are not in darkness brethren that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

The purpose of the prophecies is not to enable us to date the return of Christ, but to help us to understand the *meaning* of the return of Christ.

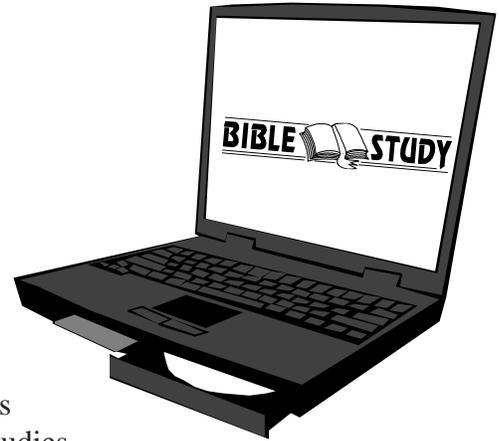
What, then, is a Christian to do? Listen to Jesus’ answer, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh *shall find so doing*” (Matthew 24:45-46).

Whatever your calling, whatever your mission, whatever it is that God has given you to do, he expects to find you *doing* it when he returns. That is how you are “ready.”

So you see, whether or not Jesus Christ could return tonight is irrelevant for *you*. As far as you personally are concerned, *today* is all you have to work with. You must be ready today, for you may not have tomorrow. The Son of man could indeed come for *you* tonight, even though he does not come for the rest of the world.

So in one sense of the word, the preacher was right. Jesus Christ *could* return tonight—for you. And he asked a very relevant question: “Will you be ready for him?”

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