

- CHRIST'S RETURN -

"On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward." (Zechariah 14:4)



Berean Lamp Ministries
For the Body of Christ

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The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

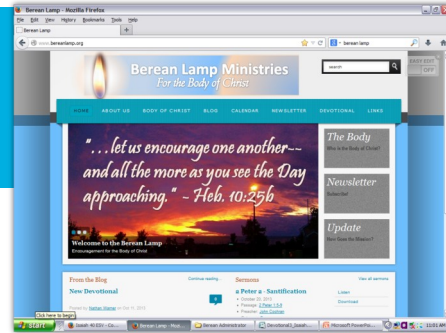


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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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Looking for That Blessed Hope

By Scott Moller

The apostle Paul declared one of his greatest desires was to be *“looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ”* in Titus 2:13 (NIV). He proclaimed that our **blessed hope** was the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ—this “hope” being a blessed or a holy and consecrated hope. Hope is the combination of a feeling of expectation and desire, something to be longed for with our whole being.

Paul and the other apostles truly hoped and longed for the return of Jesus Christ. They wrote of it often in their letters in the New Testament. They reminded the early Christians of Christ’s coming as a means of encouragement. But sadly today, many Christians are no longer looking for the “Blessed Hope.” It could be for many reasons, such as ignorance and lack of understating, misplaced priorities, worldly distractions, or some other reason. It is usually easier to fix our eyes on the seen verses unseen.

Here are a few reasons why Believers should see Christ’s appearing as our blessed hope. The first and foremost reason is it means we will be in the presence of our Lord and Savior. There can be no greater joy for a Christian than to be in the presence of Jesus Christ. It will be an unspeakable joy that no words could describe. Second will be the complete joy of our salvation, as Peter states, *“Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming”* (1 Peter 1:13b). The full measure of God’s grace will be revealed to us at the coming of Jesus Christ. The third reason is that at that time, we will be freed from the war against temptation and sin. *“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against*

your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). All of us battle against the sinful desires that so easily entangle us. Christ’s return will set us free from our own sinful flesh. Lastly, we will be freed from the curse and death at His coming. All of us are subject to the ravages of the curse and ultimately to death itself. Not one of us can escape the tragedies of this life because of the curse and death. But Christ’s return will bring victory over the curse and death. Paul declared, *“The last enemy to be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15:26). Jesus is the only one who can destroy death because He is the only one to have victory over death in His resurrection.

There are certainly many more reasons to hope in Christ’s return, but these four are sufficient. Let us do as Paul proclaimed and “fix” our eyes on Jesus as we look for that blessed hope.

“According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done” (Revelation 22:12).



The Returning King

By Nathan Warner

While the world does not like the Gospel, it can tolerate parts of it, particularly the first half—Jesus from His birth to His death on the cross. As such, Jesus is just a tradition of the past to them and He has no relevance or power over their lives today.

This is why the world can handle the story of the baby in the manger who was born into this world to save it—because that innocent, helpless child doesn't seem very terrifying. "And what a sweet thing that people believe God is so kind and loving to send His Son to save us," they think. In the same way, the world can live with the picture of the Son of God hanging helpless and lifeless on the Cross. He doesn't seem very awe-inspiring or powerful there, does He? "He lived a good life trying to help people," they say, "and He was killed for it – there's an end of it."

As the worldly man goes about his business, he might hear a Christian say, "Jesus died for your sins! He died in your place so you wouldn't have to. He died so that you might be saved! Won't you accept the gift of salvation?" The world can tolerate the helpless and powerless Jesus who came to "save" them from themselves, just like they tolerate friends suggesting dieting plans and stock options. People love choice – they like to think it's what makes us human. The ability to choose what is good and bad for themselves is the world's most treasured "right." They really love the sense of power it gives them. This is why most people are okay with the story of Jesus offering Salvation as a free gift. They have the power to accept or reject it, like any sales pitch. What an empowering place to be!

The worldly man listens, as he listens to everyone who tries to sell him something. He weighs the requirements of the Gospel and decides turning away from trusting the things of the world and denying the sins he enjoys is too costly. "Thanks, but no thanks," he says. "I'm glad it worked for you and you've found your

way, but I'm not a bad man, and I don't need saving. I am finding my own way. Jesus didn't need to die for me" The world loves the power it has to reject Jesus. It's up to them, and they can deny Him if they want, going about their business as if it never happened. Ah, the power of dismissal!

But before they can get away, the Christian says, "Yes, Jesus died, but He was resurrected, is alive, and is King above all kings!" The worldly man doesn't like the sound of this, because if Jesus is a King, that means Jesus is in control and should be obeyed. But the worldly man glances around and sees an unchanged world where people do whatever they want to do, where no lightning bolts fall out of the sky striking disobedient people dead. "What does that matter to me?" he asks. "There's no change to how things go – everything goes the way it's always gone, so it does not matter to me if He is alive or not. Look, you offered me your Jesus, and I appreciate it, but I'm turning you down, now let me go on with my day."


"Wait!" says the Christian. "Jesus is coming again to judge the world! You will have to stand before Him and answer for everything you've ever done. So, if you don't accept Him now, you will end up in hell." This has a peculiar effect on the worldly man. Anger comes to his face. Up until now, he's been in control; he's felt empowered. He was being offered something free and he turned it down, because he didn't need it. But now, he feels he is being threatened. How did this free gift suddenly become a threat that if you don't take it, you will suffer terribly? The helpless baby Jesus and the powerless dying Jesus has suddenly become the avenging King Jesus, coming to punish the sinful world.

The world hates the Gospel because of the living Jesus, because at some point, He can no longer be ignored, rejected, or denied. The world hates the Son of God Who will stop mankind's "progress" towards throwing off His judgments—man's power to "choose" his own way will come to an end. On that day, it will be Jesus' turn to choose whether to reject or accept them, and He will force every knee to bow to Him.

This is why the nations rage and plot against God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ—they do not want His return to be true. Jesus told a parable about this: *“A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us’”* When the King returned, He rewarded His faithful servants, but He said, *“as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me”* (Luke 19:12-14; 27). Like these faithless citizens, the world rages, *“we do not want Jesus to rule over us!”* *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us’”* (Psalm 2:1-3). While the King is away, the world plots against His return, seeking to keep their illegitimate rule by any means necessary. The Lord is patient with their plotting and scheming, *“not wishing that*

any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b), even while they align themselves with demons who they believe will help them cast off Christ’s rule. This is no surprise, for Jesus’ return means their judgment too. After all, when Jesus came the first time, the demons *“cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?’”* (Matthew 8:29), *“and they begged Him not to command them to depart into the abyss”* (Luke 8:31). They know Jesus’ return means judgment. In the face of Jesus Christ, these forces are vain, but they are very real and working in the world against Jesus, for Paul told us *“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12). The world hates Jesus so much that even when God’s wrath is poured on them, they won’t *“repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons”* (Revelation 9:20a).

As the rulers of the earth spend their time raging and plotting against Christ’s return, *“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds*



and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matt. 24:30

them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, 'As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.' I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to Me, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him" (Psalm 2:4-12), for "behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 1:14b-15).

The world should take care not to dismiss Jesus, for when He returns to rule the earth, man will no more be able to deny and reject Him. Instead, Jesus will deny and reject those who have rejected Him. Jesus said, *"Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32-33). To those who acknowledged Him before men, Jesus will say, *"Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34b), but to those who have not acknowledged Him, He will say, *"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41b).

King Jesus is alive. He is coming to rule the earth, for He has said, *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done"* (Revelation 22:12). *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"* (Revelation 22:20)

What Kind of Escapist Are You?

By Ginny Larsen


We are all escapists of some kind. We want to escape the cares of this world with its problems, sorrows, and suffering of any kind – unless you have something mentally wrong with you and enjoy pain! We are all motivated in every single thing we do by wanting to escape something. For example, we lose weight because we want to escape the judgment of others or the health risks that come with being overweight. We go to work because we want to escape poverty and suffering that goes with that. Many times, Christians who believe in the full redemption of Christ through His finished work, as consummated in the Rapture of the Church (catching up to be with Him forever, John 14:3, 1 Thess. 4:13-17, 1 Cor. 15:49-54), are said to just be “escapists” and somehow want to avoid the sufferings of Christ. I decided to do a word study on the word “escape” to clarify what the Bible says we should escape as Believers, what we will not escape, and who will escape what. I encourage you whenever you hear arguments of different belief systems or teachers to do that - study all that the Word has to say about it. In fact, in this day, when the meanings of words are being so skewed and changed, it is a good idea to look up word definitions and think critically of the many ways words are used. We are manipulated and persuaded by words so often. First of all, there are “straw-man” arguments that people set up to supposedly represent someone else’s position. They then tear down their own straw-man, and nobody catches on to what they are doing. Their argument makes sense to those who hear, so they don’t check it out any further—after all, they used Scripture. Well, so does the devil! I’ve learned, after listening to many of those type of arguments, to go to the Word to research it myself to see if these things be so, and ask myself what’s the real argument? What’s the real issue? Are they accurately portraying that? Or are they setting up a false premise? Many times the

escapist argument is set up on a false premise. It is a straw-man argument.

Christians throughout history have not escaped suffering. The true Believer, though suffering is not what he wants, is willing to endure suffering for the Savior he loves and counts it a privilege to be considered “worthy to suffer for His name.” He is willing out of love and gratefulness to all that his Savior has done for him to suffer for Him, if need be, though he does not go looking for it. People who say Believers waiting for the Rapture are “escapists who just don't want to suffer” have a false premise and misrepresent those who believe they will escape the Tribulation period – the 7 years of God’s wrath on this earth. In fact, I used to say that myself, because I didn't have an understanding of what the Tribulation is and what the sufferings of Christ are. The Bible tells us that all who live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer. It is true that there are Christians who think God should only bless them in this world, and they look for an escape to any suffering or trial, because they see God as some sort of good luck charm rather than

having a true understanding of Who He is and what He calls us to. While living in a fallen world, we suffer many things, just as the world does. Just being a Christian in an ungodly world will cause you to suffer, because the world hates Him and so hates those who truly believe in, trust, and follow Him and His true teachings. As the world grows more and more ungodly and takes on more of the nature of the flesh and the devil, they will all the more persecute Christians. Does the Bible say we will escape that? No. In fact, in many places, the Lord warns and assures us that if the world hated Him, it will hate us, and that we will be persecuted. Paul tells us, *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake”* (Philippians 1:29 ESV).

As Christians, then, we can expect the tribulation **in this world that Christ suffered**. This life as Believers is our time of tribulation, since Christ was crucified. If we are living truly for Christ, we won't escape that unless we hide ourselves away somewhere alone and never interact with the lost world. This world



Come, my people,
enter your chambers,
and shut your doors
behind you;
hide yourselves
for a little while until
the fury has passed by.
For behold,
the LORD is coming
out from his place,
to punish the
inhabitants of the earth
for their iniquity, and
the earth will disclose
the blood shed on it,
and will no more cover
its slain.

(Isaiah 26:20-21)

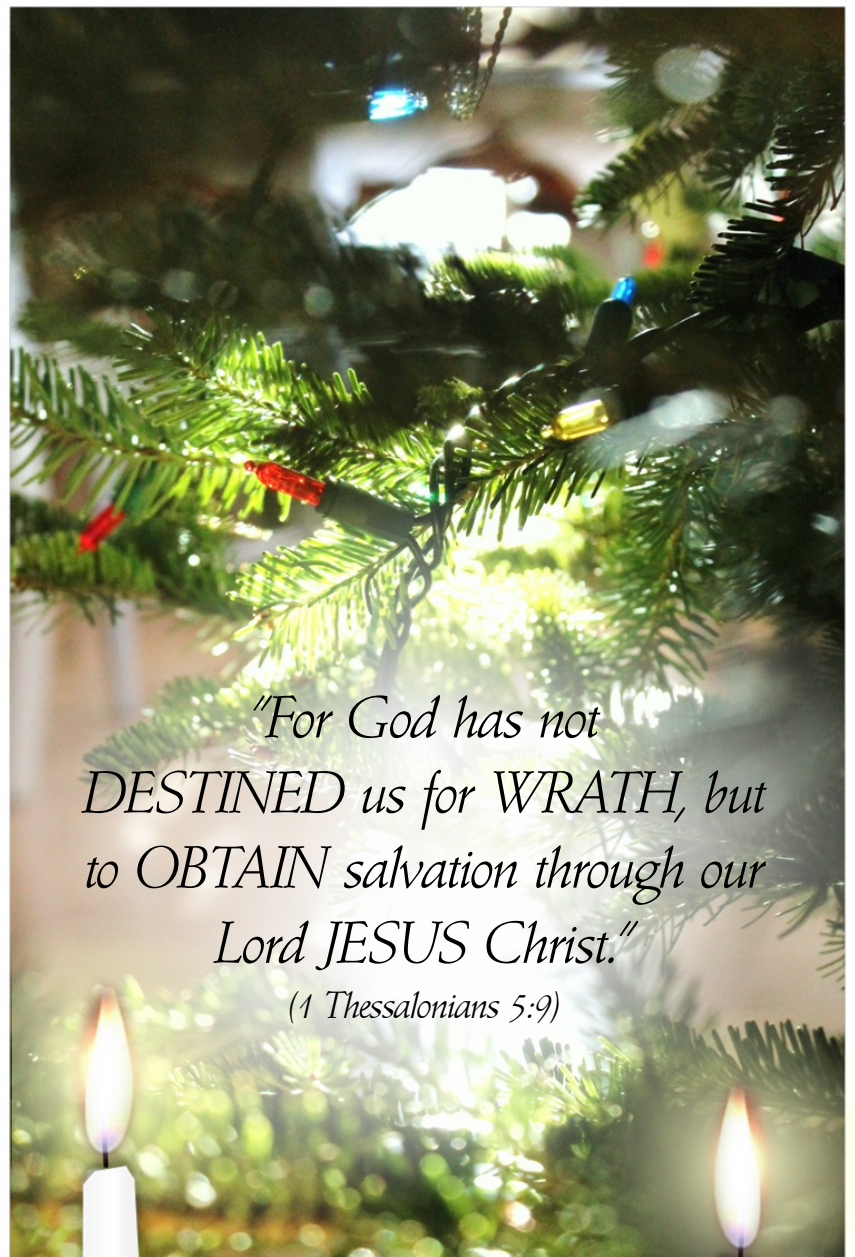
is the Christian's time of tribulation. This "tribulation" is not God's judgment – it is judgment from the world. It is also not a "finishing of our salvation" to make us "without spot or wrinkle" as though we had to go through an earthly purgatory to be ready for the Lord's coming. This negates the finished work of Christ and adds to His redemption. If you are trusting in anything other than that work alone, you will find it comes up short when you stand before a holy God. Non-believers should expect to suffer for their sin and be judged for it ultimately.

This **they** will not escape. The only escape from this judgment of His wrath against sin is beforehand, when His grace and mercy is held out to them, drawing them to His free salvation, calling them to become one of His own dear children, simply by faith in His precious blood that was shed for them. If they refuse this, there is no more escape for them when the time of judgment comes.

*"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 5:3), "and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard" (Hebrews 2:3). "See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject Him who warns from heaven" (Hebrews*

12:25).

Is the Christian to endure a time that the Lord calls "the day of the Lord" - which is a time of wrath prepared especially for this unbelieving world? Do we need some extra "purifying" that Christians throughout history have not had by going through the time of tribulation *"that is to come upon the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth"* (Revelation 3:10b)? This time has been called *"the time of Jacob's trouble"* (Jeremiah 30:7) or "the day of judgment." How did



*"For God has not
DESTINED us for WRATH, but
to OBTAIN salvation through our
Lord JESUS Christ."*

(1 Thessalonians 5:9)

By Natalie Warner

Christians somehow make it to heaven in the past without this extra “purgatory” to cleanse them? What does the Bible say about this time regarding Christians? I believe it clearly says we will be delivered from that hour of trial and tribulation that is to come on this world. Jesus will deliver us by the Rapture of the Church before His wrath is poured out. Paul tells us we are *“to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”* (1 Thessalonians 1:10), *“for God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). *“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth”* (Revelation 3:10).

Yes, Christians are “escapists” if they believe in the power of the redemption of Jesus Christ, for He has promised that we who have “died with Him” will also be “raised with Him” and will escape His wrath. Ultimately, we will escape this body of death and be finally redeemed just as He promised. We will escape finally our sorrow in this world and enter into His joy, as He said we would. It is the blessed hope of the Believer! We will finally be with our Lord and Savior forever! Those who love Him look for His coming and long for Him. In fact, a crown is awaiting all that long for His coming as a bride longs for her groom. *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:8).

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-37). The way of escape is through faith in the only sacrifice for our sin that was able to pay

the true price of our redemption. Christ alone, is counted worthy, and only as we by faith become one with Him in His death and resurrection, as we put our faith in Him to be our salvation, can we escape. No works or suffering of our own will cut it. It is as filthy rags in His sight. Now is the day of salvation! Will you escape the wrath to come? If you have been born of His Spirit through simple faith in His saving power, He has promised you will:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24 KJV). Will you escape the sufferings of Christ in this world now by taking the side of the world, denying Him, and enjoying whatever your passions tell you that you have a right to? Will you identify with Christ or with the world in their teachings and philosophies? Or will you escape your sin and its consequences and have eternal life in Christ? I guess one way or another you are an escapist. It's just what you will escape and what you will gain that matters.

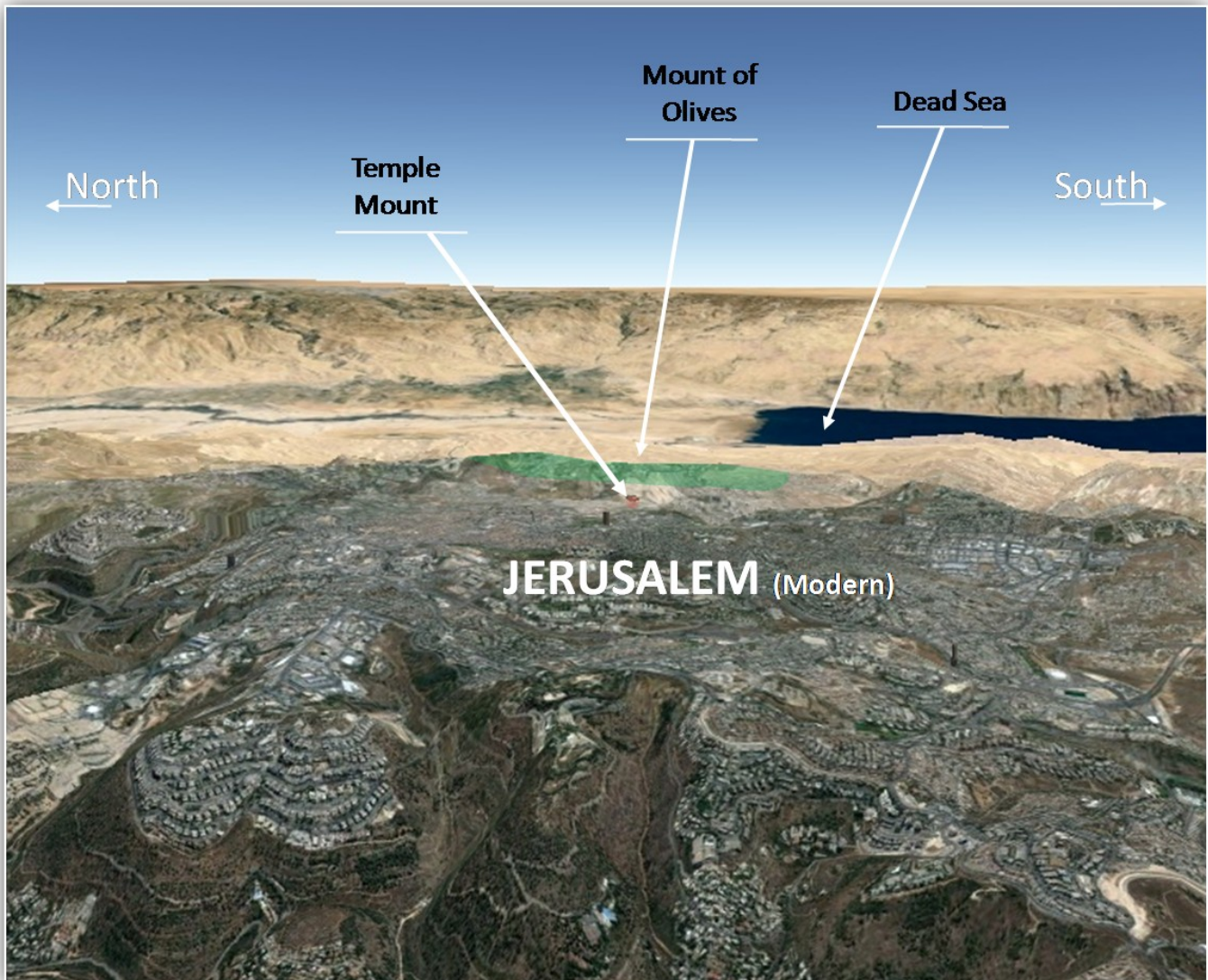
“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26). Jesus said, *“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”* (Luke 9:23-25)

A Study in Scripture

Christ's Return—the Day of the Lord

The artwork on the cover is a study in Scripture regarding Christ's return. The artwork is superimposed over the image below. This image is a Google Earth map view, looking East, overlooking Jerusalem with the Mount of Olives as the last green ridge in the image. You can see that the Temple Mount stands in front of the Mount of Olives, which rises between the Temple and the Dead Sea. Let's look at a few Scriptures that describe this geography in the context of Christ's return and the events surrounding His return.

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, the Resurrected Jesus was with His disciples one last time before He ascended into Heaven, “so when they had come together, they asked Him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in



Google Earth

white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the **mount called Olivet**, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away" (Acts 1:6-11 ESV).

The Angels said Jesus would return to earth as He had left from the Mount of Olives, and we see God foretold this very thing through the Prophet Zechariah, who describes the day of His return as a dire day for Israel (the climax of the Tribulation): "Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on **the Mount of Olives**, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!" (Zechariah 14:1-5).

We get a New Testament perspective of this same event at the close of the Tribulation in the Revelation to John: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for You have taken Your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth'" (Revelation 11:15-18).



"I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle"

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called

The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS' (Revelation 19:11-16).



"His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley"

The armies of Heaven (referred to as "the holy ones" by Zechariah) are likely identified in Revelation 19 as the Church, for we see that just before Jesus' return, "*'the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to **clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints**'*" (Revelation 19:7-8). This is the same garb worn by the "armies" that are with Jesus. This is a strong indication that the Church will be "caught away" before the Tribulation, for we see that they return WITH Jesus.

Paul describes the enemy on that day, and he confirmed what the prophets before him had said Jesus would do, "*for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who*

perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12).

In his introduction to Revelation, John shares some details of Christ's return: "*John to the seven churches that are in Asia:*

Grace to you and

*peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. **Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen**"* (Revelation 1:4-7).

Zechariah affirms that Israel will see Jesus and mourn over what they did to Him: *“On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo”* (Zechariah 12:8-11).

The Prophet Ezekiel gives us another perspective about the enemy on the day Jesus returns and confirms the other prophecies about the earthquake: *“But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, My wrath will be roused in My anger. For in My jealousy and in My blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the people who are on the face of the earth, shall quake at My presence. And the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all My mountains, declares the Lord GOD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur. So I will show My greatness and My holiness and make Myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD”* (Ezekiel 38:18-23).

“And you, son of man, prophesy against

Gog and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal[...] I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD. And My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord GOD. That is the day of which I have spoken. Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years, so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord GOD. On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers, east of the sea. It will block the travelers, for there Gog and all his multitude will be buried. It will be called the Valley of Hamon-gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. All the people of the land will bury them, and it will bring them renown on the day that I show My glory, declares the Lord GOD. They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, so as to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make their search. And when these travel through the land and anyone sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog. (Hamonah is also the name of the city.) Thus shall they cleanse the land[...] And I

will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed, and My hand that I have laid on them. The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward" (Ezekiel 39:1-16;21-22).

The Prophet Isaiah also described the return of Christ, His destruction of the wicked with the breath of His mouth, and His pure righteous reign that would follow: *"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; **And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.** Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious"* (Isaiah 11:1-10).

"In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is re-

corded for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain" (Isaiah 4:2-6).

"Indeed, the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places. And her wilderness He will make like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the Lord; Joy and gladness will be found in her, Thanksgiving and sound of a melody" (Isaiah 51:3).

"For the Lord has built up Zion; He has appeared in His glory" (Psalm 102:16).

"Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Even so, Amen.

Revelations

Yesterday, we skied along the shoreline of Pelican Lake. I am watching the sky often now. Who are those who fly like a cloud and like doves to their lattices (Isaiah 60:8)? I have treasured up many things and ponder and wait much like Mary, yet I see so darkly the deep riches.

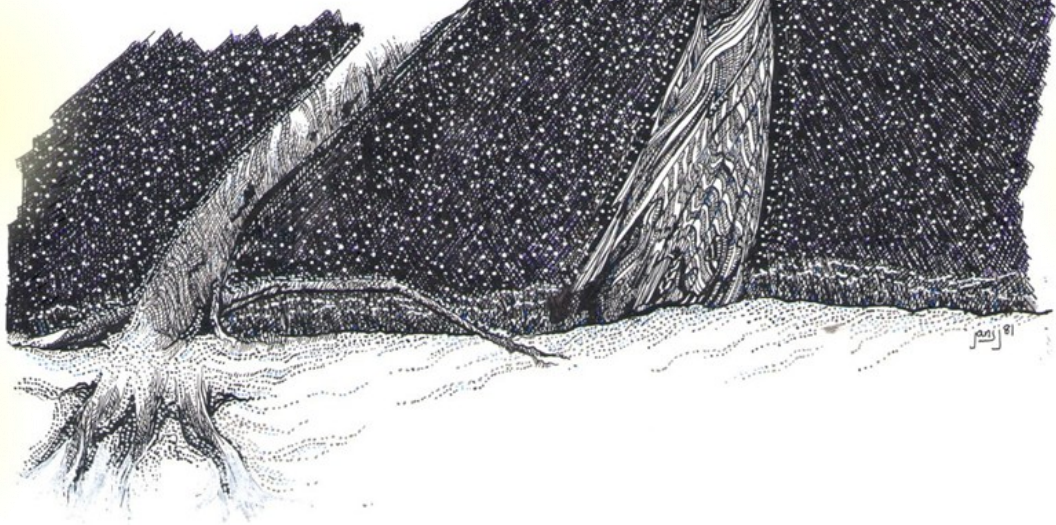
And the sky I watched yesterday was cast over with swelling clouds until the snow fell out and the stars suddenly appeared by thousands of ten thousands and the sky and the ground are the same swelling with snow.

A birch tree is falling into the lake year by year, leaning heavily over the frozen water—its roots exposed to the air and falling snow.

Some things are not meant to be seen, like the roots, or they would result in death, like the tree that belongs to those roots. What God has revealed belongs to us, but what He has hidden belongs to Him.

So, He has hidden the time of Jesus coming for His Bride—Jesus the Holy Root, Who came that we might be rooted and grounded in love—hidden in the love of Christ.

*I ponder and I wonder. Is the bride making herself ready?
My heart fills me and aches towards Him,
the Lover of my soul.
I long to see You.
O, come quickly! Amen.*



Preparing for Christ's Return

By Jane Titrud

Before Jesus left this earth to go to the Father, He comforted His disciples by promising them He would return again to receive them unto Himself: *"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:1-3, NASB).

In addition, the Bible says that the Lord is coming to rescue Israel from the Antichrist and the armies that will be gathered together against them in the last days: *"Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south"* (Zechariah 14:3-4). We know this is referring to the return of Christ because, after this, it says He will rule and reign on the earth (Zechariah 14:9-11).

Many people consider these revelations about the future return of Christ as merely describing different aspects of one great event. Thus, they tend to group them together within the same timeframe. Others believe that these revelations describe two separate and distinct returns of Christ that bracket a period of time known as the Great Tribulation Period, a time in which God's wrath will be poured out upon the earth. In this latter scenario, Christ will first come back to deliver His Church from the wrath to come. This is commonly known as the rapture of the Church. Then, a literal Second Coming of Christ to the earth will occur at the end of the Great Tribulation Period.

There are good reasons for considering these two separate and distinct events as op-

posed to different aspects of but one return. The most significant is that the Bible assigns different and seemingly conflicting characteristics to the return of Christ when it is viewed as merely one event. When the Lord comes for His church, for example, He will meet His people in the air without touching His feet on the earth: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). By contrast, the Lord will physically stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem when He comes back to rescue Israel from the armies of the Antichrist (Zechariah 14:4). At this later time He will furthermore come back *with* His saints rather than *for* His saints (see Revelation 19:11-14). Moreover, His return to rescue Israel from complete destruction requires the fulfillment of definite prophecies, whereas the return of Christ for His Church could seemingly happen at any time with no prophecies left to be fulfilled. For this reason, Christ warned His people to be watchful and ready for His coming: *"Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming"* (Matthew 24:40-42).

I believe this distinction is important for Christians to understand because the elements of both surprise and imminence with respect Christ returning for His Church seem to be the very things the Bible uses to encourage Christians to be ready for His return. Jesus, for instance, compared the coming of the Son of Man to the days of Noah: *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah[...], and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man"*

be” (Matthew 24:36-39). His parable of the Ten Virgins also speaks of the need to be ready: *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom... Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the prudent answered, saying, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too[...].’ And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut[...]. Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour”* (Matthew 25:1-13).

But, since everyone who has accepted

Christ as his or her personal Savior is said to be “saved,” one might then ask why the Bible still speaks of the need to be ready for the Lord’s return. Being delivered from the wrath to come is part of the promise of salvation: *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11). So, how can one be more ready than being saved in the first place? Either one is saved or one is not.

In order to answer, let us first consider whether the warnings in Scripture regarding the Lord’s return are for true Christians or only for nominal Christians—those who might *think*

“See that you do not REFUSE Him who is SPEAKING. For if they did not ESCAPE when they REFUSED Him who warned them on earth, much less will WE escape if we REJECT Him who warns from HEAVEN.” (Hebrews 12:25)

By Natalie Warner

they are saved but are not truly serving Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus compared two so-called servants: *“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 24:45-51). This is an example of a warning that might only seem to pertain to those who were never saved in the first place—those who are not true Believers. The idea then is that such people are not ready to meet the Lord. They need to get saved and cease their hypocrisy. Nevertheless, we are all slaves. Our lives are not our own. We need to be about the Lord’s business faithfully until He comes.

Yet, another aspect of being ready for the return of the Lord has to do with the need to pursue sanctification or, in other words, to grow in holiness. It is to this end that we were saved in the first place. *“For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you”* (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8). *“But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Failure to pursue sanctification can have dire consequences. Christians are called to *“pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord”* (Hebrews 12:14). Moreover, such a

directive is not for unbelievers but only for Believers, for growing in holiness is ultimately a work of the Spirit in the lives of true Believers.

Seeing sanctification as a necessary element in preparation for the return of Christ has nothing to do with promoting salvation by works. Nor is the last generation of Believers before His coming expected to achieve a level of holiness which surpasses that of previous generations. Growing in holiness merely involves submitting to the Holy Spirit more and more as we learn to walk in Christ. Moreover, every generation since the birth of the Church has been expected to submit to the control of the Holy Spirit.

True, no one can add to the perfect and completed work of Jesus Christ to affect the salvation of mankind. As He said on the cross: *“It is finished”* (John 19:30b). For one thing, this means that He paid the price in full for every sin that had been committed up to that point in time and all that ever would be committed in the future. *“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward until HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET”* (Hebrews 10:11-13). He sat down because there was nothing left for Him to do.

But God accomplished something more on the cross besides having Christ pay the price for the sins of mankind. By *“sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:3-4). In other words, He provided a way to deal with the principle of *sin* itself—not just sins. Jesus’ death on the cross paved the way for the gift of the Holy Spirit and herein makes up God’s provision for victory over the power of sin in the Believer’s life. *“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but*

if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14).


By faith, we are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Yet, we are also told to *“lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit” (Ephesians 4:22)* and to *“put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:24).* This is something each of us can and must do by faith in God’s provision of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this the only real way of demonstrating God’s complete victory over sin on the cross. What kind of salvation would it be if Christ only paid the penalty for our sins but could do nothing to keep us from sinning in the first place?

Sanctification is a process which involves failures as well as victories. No one can expect sinless perfection in this life. Nevertheless, we are called to pursue holiness:

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Giving up and becoming complacent about sin basically amounts to saying that the saving power of Christ is inadequate when it comes to deliverance from the indwelling principle of sin. And, in that case, what then do we believe, and wherein is our hope?

The imminent return of Christ should spur us on to walk more and more by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than yielding to the flesh. Herein is the essence of the Lord’s return being a purifying hope, as it says in 1 John 3:2-3. The Believer is merely expected to increasingly exercise faith in the provision of God and thereby walk in victory. *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6)*—that is, by faith. *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:21-22).*



“BEHOLD, I am coming SOON, bringing My recompense with Me, to REPAY each one for what he has DONE.” (Revelation 22:12)

By Nathan Warner

CHRISTMAS SCRIPTURES — *The Birth of Jesus*

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore He shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of His brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He shall be their peace." (Micah 5:2-5a)

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

"For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her." (Luke 1:26-38)

January/February Newsletter Theme— THE WORD OF GOD

Submission Deadline: January 31

Publish Date: February 9

The Word of God...

- What is the Word of God?
- Is Scripture the same thing?
- Why is Jesus called the Word of God?
- What is the value of the Word of God to a Believer?
- Can the Word of God change?

Verses on The Word of God (from the NASB version)

Genesis 15:1 — *“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.’”*

2 Samuel 22:31 — *“As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.”*

Isaiah 40:8 — *“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”*

Isaiah 55:11 — *“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”*

John 1:1-5 — *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”*

Colossians 3:16 — *“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

Hebrews 4:12 — *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

Further Out—Mar/Apr 2016: THE MILLENIUM