

End Time Prophecies

from Major Bible Themes by Lewis Sperry Chafer, 1974

Chapter 1. Events Preceding the Second Coming of Christ

A. Major Events of the Present Age

As the present age of grace unfolds, many prophecies are being fulfilled. The general character of the age is presented in seven parables in Matthew 13. In the parable of the sower, which is introductory in nature, the varied reception to the truth of God is described. Truth sometimes falls on the hard, beaten path where it is destined to be eaten by the fowls. Other falls on ground that is too shallow and stony, and while beginning to spring up it is killed for lack of roots. Other falls on good ground but is infested with thorns, which choke it. Only a portion of the seed falls on good ground and brings forth fruit a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23).

The parable of the tares sown among the wheat indicates the danger of false profession which will not be judged until the time of harvest (vv. 24-30, 36-43). The parable of the mustard seed indicates the rapid growth of Christendom from a small beginning to a large movement (vv. 31-32). The parable of the leaven speaks of evil intermingled with the good meal until the whole is permeated (vv. 33-35). The hidden treasure of Matthew 13:44 probably refers to Israel hidden as to its national entity in the present age, but nevertheless bought by Christ in His death. The pearl of great price (vv. 45-46) seems to speak of the church as that for which Christ died, a major feature of the present age during a period when Israel's national identity is somewhat hidden. The final parable of the dragnet (vv. 47-51) illustrates the separation of the saved from the unsaved as the end of the age.

In general, Matthew 13 speaks of the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ without reference to the rapture or the particulars of the church as the body of Christ. It describes the sphere of profession of faith and the mingled picture of good and evil. The dual development of both good and evil throughout the age, climaxing in judgment and separation, characterizes the period. There is no justification for postmillennialism, with its concept that the kingdom of God will finally triumph through preaching of the Gospel and human effort. On the other hand, there is no ground for pessimism, because God will fulfill His purpose. Some seed will fall on good ground and bring forth fruit. There will be wheat among the tares and

good fish among the bad. The nineteen hundred years since Pentecost have demonstrated the accuracy of this great prophecy of Matthew 13.

A similar picture of the present age with focus on the end of the age is found in Matthew 24. There, in verses 4-14, nine signs of the end are given:

- 1) false christs (v. 5),
- 2) wars and rumor of wars (v. 6),
- 3) famines (v. 7),
- 4) pestilences (v. 7),
- 5) earthquakes (v. 7),
- 6) martyrs (vv. 9-10),
- 7) false prophets (v. 11),
- 8) abounding iniquity and cooling ardor for Christ (v. 12),
- 9) the gospel of the kingdom to be preached in all the world (v. 14).

Another feature of the present age will be the growing apostasy on the part of the unsaved within the professing church. 2 Peter 2-3 summarizes the progression in four categories:

- 1) denial of the person and deity of Christ (2:1),
- 2) denial of the work of Christ that He bought us when He died on the cross (2:1),
- 3) moral apostasy over departure from moral standards (2:2-22),
- 4) departure from the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and the judgments related to it (3:1-13).

Other passages contribute to the doctrine of apostasy in the New Testament (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Jude 3-19). All these prophecies of encroaching apostasy in the church are being fulfilled beginning with the first century and continuing to the present. The ultimate apostasy will take place after the church is raptured and only the unsaved portion of the professing church is left in the world.

The present age, in terms of the purpose of God in calling out His church, will be brought abruptly to its close at the Rapture. This event – nowhere dated in the prophecies of the Old Testament – describes the dramatic removal of the church from the earth as the dead in Christ are raised and living Christians are caught up to heaven without dying (1 Cor. 15:51-58, 1 Thess. 4:13-18). This event will bring to a close the purpose of God in terms of the church as a separate company of saints, and the departure of the church will set the stage for the major events leading up to the second coming of Christ to the earth to set up His millennial kingdom.

Three major periods may be observed between the Rapture and the Second Coming:

- 1) the period of preparation,
- 2) the period of peace,
- 3) the period of persecution.

B. The Period of Preparation Following the Rapture

The event of the Rapture, removing every saved person from the earth, will be a dramatic intervention in human history. It will signal the beginning of a series of events which will rapidly move on to a great climax at the second coming of Christ. Obviously, the removal of all Christians from the earth will have an effect upon world history as a whole and will permit the demonstration of evil in the world and the fulfillment of the satanic purpose in a way never before possible.

The first phase immediately after the Rapture will be a period of preparation for the major events which follow. These events will relate to the three major areas of prophecy, which concern the church, Israel, and the Gentiles.

1. *The professing church will remain on earth after the Rapture.* Although the issue of whether the true church will go through the Tribulation has been debated, many expositors believe the church as the body of Christ will be caught up at the Rapture, leaving only the professing church – composed entirely of unsaved individuals on earth – to fulfill prophecies relating to Christendom.

The professing church after the Rapture is symbolized by the harlot of Revelation 17, pictured astride the scarlet-covered beast bespeaking the political power of that time. Her dominion is over the whole world, symbolized by the many waters (Rev. 17:1, 15). From the description it seems clear that the world church now in its earlier form is seen here in its stage of complete apostasy with every true Christian removed. Religiously, the period after the Rapture accordingly will be a movement toward a world church and a world religion, devoid of redeeming features of true Christian doctrine.

2. *For Israel the period of preparation will be a time of revival.* According to Romans 11:25, Israel's present blindness will be alleviated, and many in Israel will have their eyes opened to the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed their Messiah and Savior. In the days immediately following the Rapture, thousands of Jews will probably turn to Christ, availing themselves of Scripture and books on Christian doctrine which Christians leave behind, as well as works relating

Scripture to the hope of a Messiah which many Jews already possess. They undoubtedly will have an insatiable curiosity to answer the question as to what happened to the Christians who disappeared. Their search will be rewarded and many will be converted. As in the first century of the church, the Jews will immediately become the ambassadors for the Gospel, winning both their own people and Gentiles to Christ; the renewed work of evangelism will thereby be undertaken throughout the world. The fact that Jews are already scattered all over the world, knowing many of the world's languages, points them up as natural missionaries to their particular locale so undoubtedly many will be brought to Christ. As in the first century, however, not all Jews will turn to Christ and salvation will be only for those who believe.

3. *Politically in relation to the Gentiles, the time of preparation will involve the revival of the ancient Roman Empire.* As brought out in previous discussion, the feet stage of Daniel 2 and the ten-horn stage of the fourth beast of Daniel 7:7 have never been fulfilled. This prophecy, with the added light given in Revelation 13, indicates that the Roman Empire will be revived in the form of ten nations banding together into a confederacy. The Common Market in Europe may well be the forerunner of it, but the center of political power would seem to be in the Mediterranean rather than in Europe and probably will include the major nations of North Africa, Western Asia, and Southern Europe.

Once again the Mediterranean will become a "Roman lake." When these ten nations are joined together, a ruler will emerge described as the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8, who apparently will be a dictator who gains control, first of three, then of all ten nations. He will be the strong man politically of the Middle East and will work with the world church to gain world power. Once he is firmly established, the stage is set for the second major period, the period of the covenant.

C. The Period of Peace

According to Daniel 9:27, when the dictator of the Middle East emerges as the "Prince that shall come" (Dan. 9:26), he will make a covenant with Israel for a seven-year period. The details of this covenant are not given in Scripture, but it is implied as a covenant of protection. Apparently the dictator desires to settle the controversy between Israel and the nations surrounding Israel; he uses the device of setting up a protectorate for Israel and by this means brings a measure of peace and tranquility to the political situation in the Middle East. While there is no indication that this will be a period of complete peace, Israel is made secure, relatively speaking, and apparently is granted privileges in commerce and a freedom from

tension which has not characterized her life since the nation was formed in 1948. Undoubtedly the changed situation will inspire many more Jews to return to their ancient land, and Israel will prosper financially.

During this period also, the world church will continue to grow in power, working with the ruler in the Mediterranean area to accomplish worldwide religious dominion. In like manner, the evangelization of Israel will continue and many will turn to Christ. On the other hand, many will also return to Orthodox Judaism. In this period a temple will apparently be built in Jerusalem and Orthodox Jews will renew the Mosaic system of sacrifices which have not been offered since the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. This is implied in Daniel 9:27, where it is predicted that the sacrifices will cease, a fact supported by Daniel 12:11 which speaks of the daily sacrifice being taken away. Obviously, sacrifices could not be stopped unless they had been reactivated, and reactivation of the sacrifices requires a temple in Jerusalem. Exactly when the temple will be rebuilt no one knows, but it will be in operation apparently during this time of peace.

The tranquility of the Middle East will be shattered, however, by a dramatic event described in Ezekiel 38-39, an attack upon Israel by Russia and her allies. Interpreters of Scripture have disagreed in their analyses of this event and their placing of it in the chronology. According to Ezekiel 38, it comes at a time when Israel is at peace and at rest, a period which corresponds to the situation following the covenant with the Roman ruler. The attack, moreover, is more than an assault on Israel because it challenges the whole covenant relationship between the Mediterranean ruler and Israel and is, in effect, a Russian bid for control of the Middle East politically and commercially. Because it is a surprise attack, however, there is no record of armies being marshalled against the invaders. Instead God intervenes supernaturally to save His people and wipes out the invading force by a series of catastrophes described in Ezekiel 38:18-23. This war shatters the period of peace and prepares the way for the next and final period.

D. The Period of Persecution

The destruction of the Roman army not only ends the peace of the preceding period, but brings a dramatically changed world situation. Apparently, at that time there is a balance of power between (1) the ruler of the Middle East and the nations aligned with him, and (2) Russia and the nations aligned with her. With the Russian armies temporarily destroyed, the ruler of

the Middle East seizes the opportunity to proclaim himself a world dictator. Overnight he seizes control politically, economically, and religiously. He proclaims himself ruler over every kindred, tongue, and nation (Rev. 13:7), and Daniel predicts that he “shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces” (Dan. 7:23). He likewise seizes control of the entire world economically, and no one can buy or sell without his permission (Rev. 13:16-17).

For Israel it is also an abrupt reversal, as the ruler breaks his covenant with her and overnight becomes her persecutor. This introduces what Jeremiah 30:7 describes as the time of Jacob’s trouble. Elsewhere, the same period is described as the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14). Israel’s trials begin with the sudden stopping of their sacrifices (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Matt. 24:15). Israel, accordingly, is advised by Christ to flee at once to the mountains (Matt. 24:16-20). It will be a time of unprecedented trouble for Israel, and thousands of Jews will be massacred (Zech. 13:8). The Temple itself will be described and an idol of the world ruler set up in it (Rev. 13:15), and at times the ruler himself will sit in the Temple to be worshiped (2 Thess. 2:4). This is the abomination of desolation described in connection with the stopping of the sacrifices. The world ruler will also set himself up as god and demand that everyone worship him under pain of death (Rev. 13:8, 15).

This final period will begin in the middle of the seven years originally planned for the covenant and, accordingly, will last for forty-two months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5; cf. Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:11-12).

Because of his complete blasphemy and persecution of both Jew and Christian, the world ruler of the Mediterranean – often referred to as the Antichrist and described in Daniel 9:26 as “the prince that shall come” – will become the object of fearful divine judgment. All this is described in Revelation 6-19. Details of these events are recorded in the breaking of the seven seals (Rev. 6:1-8:1), the sounding of the seven trumpets (Rev. 8:2-21; 11:15-19), and the outpouring of the seven vials or bowls of the wrath of God (Rev. 16).

Unprecedented judgments will take place on the earth. Christ has described it in Matthew 24:21-22 as a period so terrible that if not stopped or terminated by the second coming of Christ it would have resulted in the extermination of the entire race. Wars, pestilence, famines, stars falling from heaven, earthquakes, demon possession, and great disruption of natural forces in the world apparently destroy a majority of the world’s population.

The resulting disorder brought on by these disasters creates opposition to the world ruler of the Middle East. He is unable to fulfill his promises of peace and plenty. As a result, world-wide revolution takes place and major portions of the world rebel against his authority. This climaxes in a gigantic world war described in Daniel 11:40-45 and in Revelation 9:13-21;

16:13-21. The nations of the world are locked in struggle, the battle seesawing back and forth with great armies from the South, great armies from the North, and a huge army from the Orient descending on the Holy Land to fight it out. At the height of this conflict, Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to bring to judgment the wicked men gathered in this struggle and to establish His own millennial kingdom.

Taken as a whole, the events leading up to the second coming of Christ are described in considerable detail in both the Old and New Testaments. The period is a dramatic sequence of tremendous events unequaled in any other portion of history or prophecy. Many indications that the world is moving on to just such a climax makes all the more pointed the teaching of Scripture concerning the imminency of the Lord's return for His own at the Rapture.

Chapter 2. The Great Tribulation

A. *The Great Tribulation in Contrast With the General Tribulation*

Much confusion has arisen in the doctrine of the Great Tribulation because of failure to distinguish between the general trials and sufferings of the people of God and the specific period of the Great Tribulation described in the Old and New Testaments. The concept of tribulation implies a time of pressure, affliction, anguish of heart, and trouble in general. A situation of tribulation is, accordingly, a common experience of the human race resulting from its sins and rebellion against God and from the conflict between God and Satan in the world.

According to Job 5:7, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Christ assured His disciples in John 16:33, "in the world ye shall have tribulation." The trials of Job in the Old Testament and the problems of Paul with his thorn in the flesh in the New Testament are symptomatic of the human race constantly in trouble and bearing many types of affliction. These have characterized the human race since Adam and will continue to some extent until human history has run its course, although greatly alleviated in the time of the millennial kingdom.

In contrast with these general intimations of trial and trouble as they afflict the race, Scripture speaks of a special time of trouble at the end of the age, specifically a time of great tribulation which will continue for forty-two months leading up to the second coming of Christ.

B. *The Old Testament Doctrine of the Great Tribulation*

As early as Deuteronomy 4:29-30 Israel was warned to turn to the Lord when she was in her time of tribulation in the latter days. This particular time is brought into focus by the prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 30:1-10, he predicts that this time of trouble will be preceded by a partial return of the children of Israel to their land: "For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the *land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it*" (v. 3).

Immediately following, in verses 4-7, is described the period of trouble which will come upon them after they have returned to the land. Israel will be in travail as a woman giving birth to a child. The time of tribulation is described specifically in Jeremiah 30:7: "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."

Israel is given the promise that, though she will endure this great time of trouble, God will eventually break her yoke of bondage and she will no longer serve the Gentiles. Instead, according to verse 9, "they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." This prophesies the millennial kingdom, when David will be resurrected and with Christ reign over the house of Israel. Accordingly, Israel is given reassurance not to be dismayed; it is God's purpose that eventually "Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (v.10).

The time of Jacob's trouble, or the Great Tribulation, is in view in Daniel 9:27 after the covenant is broken. Here it is revealed specifically that it will be half of the seven-year period, or three and one-half years. "The prince that shall come" (Dan. 9:26) "shall confirm the covenant with many for one week" (v.27), that is, will make a covenant for seven years. He will break the covenant in the middle of the week – that is, after three and one-half years – and "he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" and will bring about the abomination of the Temple.

Daniel 12:11 adds the information, "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days." This is approximately three and one-half years with a few days added, and the time period apparently includes the second coming of Christ and the early judgments which follow. The blessing described in Daniel 12:12 which will come after 1,335 days includes not only the time of great tribulation, the second coming of Christ, and the judgments, but also the establishment of Christ's blessed millennial reign upon the earth. Accordingly, the time period for the Great Tribulation is specified as forty-two months, or three and one-half years.

The Great Tribulation clearly will end with the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to Daniel 7:13-14, the period concludes with the Son of Man coming from heaven and all nations coming under His dominion. The wicked king and government which precede the second coming of Christ will be destroyed (Dan. 7:26), and the everlasting kingdom will be brought in which will, of course, be characterized first by the millennial kingdom, then by the ultimate government of God in the new heaven and the new earth. The Old Testament doctrine is relatively complete, but to this, New Testament revelation can be added.

According to Daniel 11:36-39, the end time will be characterized religiously by an atheistic religion headed up by the world ruler. He is described in these verses as an absolute ruler who disregards all previous gods and magnifies himself above God. He honors only the god of forces, that is, the god of war. He is a materialist and an atheist. His kingdom ends in a

gigantic war described in verses 40-45. Armies from the South, from the North, and from the East push on him. Although apparently he is able to resist them for a time, the battle is still raging at the time of the second coming of Christ, which ends the Great Tribulation.

C. The Doctrine of the Great Tribulation in the New Testament

When asked by His disciples when His second coming would occur and the age would end, Christ gives to them first of all a series of signs which have been for us, for the most part, already fulfilled, events and situations which characterize the age between the first and second comings of Christ (Matt. 24:3-14).

Then, in Matthew 24:15-29, Christ, in answer to their question about specific signs, describes the Great Tribulation itself. He warns that it will begin when men see “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place” (v. 15), referring to the desecration of the Temple and the Mediterranean ruler’s putting himself in God’s place in the Temple. He warns the children of Israel that when this event occurs, which will apparently be identified as a specific event on a given day, they are to flee for their lives to the mountains.

Christ declares in Matthew 24:21-22, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” Christ here clearly identifies the period as the Great Tribulation in contrast with all other periods of trouble. It is going to be so great in its extent that it will eclipse anything the world has experienced before.

The Tribulation will be so severe that unless it is shortened (literally, terminated), no human being would be left alive upon the earth. This does not imply, as some have taken from the word “shortened,” that it will be less than forty-two months. It simply means that unless it were terminated by the Second Coming, the Great Tribulation would exterminate the entire human race. “For the elect’s sake” – whether referring to saved Israel or saved Gentiles or both – Christ’s return, while a time of judging for the world, will be a time of deliverance for the saved.

In the verses which follow, our Lord describes some of the characteristics of this period. There will be false prophets and false christs (Matt. 24:23-24). There will be false reports that Christ has come secretly (v. 26). He warns His disciples that no one should be deceived at that time, for the second coming of Christ will be a public event as the lightning shines out of

the East even unto the West (v. 27). The Tribulation itself is also described in verse 29 as a time when “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” This will be followed by the return of Christ.

The description of the Great Tribulation given by Christ in answer to the disciples’ question is confirmed by additional information in Revelation 6-18. A scroll with seven seals, described in Revelation 5:1, is unrolled in chapter 6.

As each seal is broken, great catastrophes begin to overtake the world. This begins with the first seal, describing world government (Rev. 6:1-2). This is followed by war (vv. 3-4), famine (vv. 5-6), and the death of the fourth part of the earth (vv. 7-8). The fifth seal represents the martyrs who die in that period (vv. 9-11), and great disturbances in the heavens – including the stars falling from heaven and a great earthquake on the earth, with the sun becoming black and the moon like blood (vv. 12-14). The impressive display of divine power in the world inspires fear on the part of unbelievers, who call on the mountain to fall on them to save them from “the great day of his wrath” (vv. 15-17).

When the seventh seal is broken (8:1), there comes out of it another series of seven described as trumpets of the angels (Rev. 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19). These great judgments for the most part are catastrophes upon the natural world which result in great loss of life, with the third part of the earth consumed with fire, a third part of the sea becoming blood and destroying a third part of the creatures in the sea, and stars from heaven falling upon a third part of the rivers (8:7-11). The fourth trumpet concerns the stars; a third part of the sun, moon, and stars is darkened, and prediction is given of the terrible disasters which will follow with the next three trumpets.

The fifth trumpet (9:1-12) pictures unsaved men tormented by demons for five months in terrible agony, but unable even to take their own lives. The sixth trumpet (9:13-21) relates to the great army which comes from the Orient and crosses the River Euphrates to participate in the great war at the end of the tribulation period. The seventh trumpet (11:15) is near the end of the period and anticipates the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

The seventh trumpet, however, issues into another series of seven judgments which fall in rapid succession, described as vials or bowls of the wrath of God in Revelation 16. Each of these is even more destructive than the trumpet judgments, and they constitute the final outpouring of the wrath of God upon the earth preparatory to the second coming of Christ Himself.

The sixth vial is related to preparation for the great battle of God which centers in a place called Armageddon, giving basis for calling this the battle of Armageddon. Here the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered to battle according to Revelation 16:14. The seeming contradiction of Satan inspiring the kings of the earth to rebel against the ruler which Satan himself has put upon the throne of world government is apparently solved by this fact: Satan gathers his forces under their illusion that they are fighting it out for world power, but actually they are marshalled by Satan to oppose the armies that will accompany Christ when He returns to the earth (Rev. 19:14).

The final vial, described in Revelation 16:17-21, consists of a great earthquake which levels the great cities of the world and brings Babylon into judgment and causes islands and the mountains to disappear. The climax is a great hailstorm, with hailstones weighing a talent – that is, over a hundred pounds – which destroy what is left. The world is in chaos and in destruction and in war at the time of the second coming of Christ.

What a false dream it has been for some theologians to imagine a world getting better and better, gradually being subdued by the Gospel, and in this way being brought into obedience to Christ! Rather, Scripture describes the world in an awful climax of wickedness and rebellion against God headed by a world ruler who is an atheist, a blasphemer, and a persecutor of all who are identified with God.

The righteous kingdom of God on earth will be brought in by the second coming of Christ, not by human effort, and will be a dramatic judgment upon wickedness in the world as well as a wonderful deliverance for those who have put their trust in Christ in those tragic days.

The fact that the Great Tribulation is so terrible, designed for the unbeliever and for the blasphemer rather than for the child of God, is another reason why many believe that the rapture of the church will occur before this awful time of trouble. Significantly, the church is never mentioned in any passage relating to the Great Tribulation; though men will come to Christ who are described as saints or holy ones, never are the specific terms used that would relate them to the church. Instead, they are saved Jews and saved Gentiles, many of them subject to martyrdom, and only a relatively few survive in the period.

Taken as a whole, the Great Tribulation is a prelude to the second coming of Christ, making clear how necessary divine intervention in the world scene is – both for judgment of the wicked and for deliverance of the saints – and providing a sharp contrast between the darkness of the hour of the Tribulation and the glory of the kingdom which will follow.

Chapter 3. The Second Coming of Christ

A. *The Importance of the Second Coming*

In previous study of the doctrine of the Second Coming, the major facts concerning the Rapture, the coming of the Son of God for His saints (Chapter 12), and the coming of Christ with His saints (Chapter 13) have already been presented. Here, the second coming of Christ with His saints to establish His kingdom will be considered in its place as a major event in the prophetic program. Coupled with this study are the chapters which follow, dealing with the important themes of the resurrections, the judgments of God on Israel and other nations, and the millennial kingdom. These great themes combine to provide the scriptural goal of history, which in large measure determines the interpretation of the entire Bible.

In both the Old and New Testaments the importance of the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom is set forth in many passages. The doctrine, as revealed, is far more than a simple ending of human history; it is rather a grand climax which brings the program of God to its highest point. For this reason, all systems of theology which tend to ignore or minimize the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and the extensive volume of Scripture dealing with Christ's kingdom on earth are inadequate and can be justified only by denying the plain, literal meaning of the many prophecies and ignoring extensive scriptural revelation.

The second coming of Christ, along with the kingdom which follows it, is in fact, the very heart of the progress of Scripture and is the major theme of Old Testament prophecy. The great covenants of Scripture relate God's program – especially these covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David, and the new covenant. Much of the revelation of the Psalms and the major and minor prophets revolves around this great theme. Great prophetic books like Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation focus on the subject of the second coming of Christ and the consummation of history and the kingdom. For this reason, the doctrine of the Second Coming in large measure determines the total theology of the interpreter of the Bible and justifies the attempt to order prophetic events yet to be fulfilled in considerable detail in faithfulness to the extent of scriptural revelation.

B. The Old Testament Prophecies of the Second Coming

While the rapture of the church is a New Testament doctrine and is never mentioned in the Old Testament (because the church as such was a mystery, not revealed in the Old Testament), the second coming is embedded in many Old Testament passages.

Probably the first of the clear prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ is in Deuteronomy 30:1-3. In this prophecy concerning the regathering of Israel to her land, it is predicted that Israel will return to the Lord spiritually and that then the Lord “will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee” (v.3). The expression “will return” indicates an act of intervention of God in the situation, and in the light of later Scripture it is clearly linked to the return of Christ Himself.

The Psalms, although they constitute the book of worship of the Old Testament, frequently refer to the return of Christ. After the introductory description of the righteous, in contrast with the wicked in Psalm 1, Psalm 2 immediately describes the major contention of God with the nations. Although the rulers of the world desire to reject God and His rule over them, God declares His purpose: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (2:6). The psalm goes on to predict that this king in dealing with the wicked “shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v. 9).

The trilogy of Psalms 22, 23, and 24 presents Christ as the Good Shepherd, who would give His life for His sheep (John 10:11); The Great Shepherd, who ever lives to intercede for His own (Heb. 13:20); and the Chief Shepherd, who is coming as the King of Glory to reward faithful shepherds (1 Pet. 5:4). Psalm 24 pictures the millennial situation: “The earth is the LORD’S” (v.1). The gates of Jerusalem are exhorted to be lifted up to admit the King of Glory (24:7-10).

The reign of Christ from Zion is mentioned in Psalm 50:2. As will be seen later, in the study of the Millennium, Psalm 72 describes Christ as having come to the earth to reign over all nations. Psalm 89:36 speaks of Christ’s throne as being established in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant following His second coming. Psalm 96, after picturing the honor and glory of God, exhorts the heavens and the earth to rejoice “before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth” (v. 13).

The present position of Christ at the right hand of the Father is described in Psalm 110, but it is also predicted that the day will come when He will rule over His enemies and His power

will go out of Zion (vv. 2, 6). It is clear from these many prophecies that the truth of Christ's second coming and His reign on earth is a major, not a minor, revelation of the entire Old Testament.

This is confirmed as a principal theme of the major and minor prophets. In the great prophetic utterance of Isaiah 9:6-7, Christ is described as a child born who is at the same time the "mighty God." His government upon the throne of David is described as never terminating. An extensive picture of the results of the second coming of Christ in establishing His kingdom is painted in Isaiah 11-12, which will be discussed in the study of the millennial kingdom. The introduction of the kingdom reign, however, depends upon the doctrine of a literal second coming to the earth and the display of divine power judging the wicked. The scene is also mentioned in Isaiah 63:1-6, where the judgment of Christ upon the earth at His second coming is graphically described.

In the prophecies of Daniel concerned with the times of the Gentiles and God's program for the nation of Israel, the consummation of both is related to the coming of the Son of Man from heaven (Dan. 7:13-14). This passage gives a clear description of the Second Coming: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Daniel had anticipated the same truth in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's vision and had predicted in Daniel 2:44 "a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

Most of the minor prophets likewise take up this theme, and especially the Book of Zechariah. According to Zechariah 2:10-11, the Lord declares, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee." This is clearly a reference to the millennial earth and the reign of Christ subsequent to His coming. Even more specific is Zechariah 8:3-8: "Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be call a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain" (v. 3). Verses 4-8 picture the streets of Jerusalem full of boys and girls playing and the children of Israel gathered from all over the world dwelling in the midst of Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:1-4 dramatically pictures the second coming of Christ Himself, coming at the height of the world war which has engulfed the Middle East and the city of Jerusalem. Zechariah states, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is

before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (v. 4).

This graphic description of the division of the Mount of Olives at the time of the second advent of Christ makes clear that no event of the past can compare with His second coming. The ridiculous interpretation that the Second Coming was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost or in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is not only contradicted by later prophecies which look forward to the second coming of Christ as a future event (as in the Book of Revelation), but is here supported by the fact that the Mount of Olives today remains unchanged.

When the feet of Christ touch the same Mount of Olives from which He ascended in Acts 1 it will signal a change in the topography of the whole area about Jerusalem, in preparation for the kingdom which will follow. Accordingly, the second coming of Christ in the Old Testament is not to be explained away as some past event, some contemporary spiritual experience – such as the coming of Christ for saints when they die – or any of the other explanations which are totally inadequate to explain the scriptural revelation. Rather, the second coming of Christ in the Old Testament is the grand consummation of world history, in which the Son of God comes to claim the world for which He died and to exert His power and His authority over the world that would not have Christ reign over it.

C. The Second Coming of Christ in the New Testament

In the New Testament revelation concerning the second coming of Christ, a new factor is introduced with the revelation of the rapture of the church. In the Old Testament the predictions of the first and second comings of Christ were often mingled, and prophets had difficulty distinguishing the two events. With prophecies concerning the first coming now fulfilled there is no longer any problem in distinguishing the prophecies relating to His suffering as contrasted with those relating to His glory.

In the New Testament, however, because of similar terminology in describing the coming of Christ *for* His saints and the coming of Christ *with* His saints, it is not always clear which event is in view; the decision in each case must be based upon the context. The subject of a future coming of Christ, however, is a major theme of the New Testament, and it is estimated that one out of twenty-five verses refers to it in one way or another. At least twenty major

passages may be selected as contributing the major elements of the New Testament revelation

(Matt. 19:28; 23:39; 24:3-25:46;	1 Cor. 11:26;
Mark 13:24-37;	2 Thess. 1:7-10;
Luke 12:35-48; 17:22-37; 18:8; 21:25-28;	2 Pet. 3:3-4;
Acts 1:10-11; 15:16-18;	Jude 14-15;
Rom. 11:25-27;	Rev. 1:7-8; 2:25-28; 16:15; 19:11-21; 22:20).

In addition to the facts brought out in the previous study of Matthew 13, major points of emphasis may be noted.

The second coming of Christ is posttribulational and premillennial. The literal interpretation of the prophecies relating to the second coming of Christ not only makes clear that it is the prelude for the casual event which establishes the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, but also serves to distinguish it from the rapture of the church, Christ coming for His saints.

The tendency has been, on the part of those who spiritualize prophecies relating to a future kingdom on earth, to merge the prophecies of the Rapture and the prophecies of Christ's second coming into one event, occurring at the same time, thereby making the Rapture a posttribulational event. The same literal interpretation of the Second Coming which leads to the conclusion that it will be followed by the millennial kingdom of earth also serves to distinguish it from the rapture of the church. The events are clearly different in their purpose, character, and context.

In *The Rapture Question*, by John F. Walvoord, fifty reasons are set forth for holding that the Rapture is pretribulational and the second coming of Christ to establish His kingdom is posttribulational. Likewise, in *The Millennial Kingdom* by Walvoord, the arguments for a literal kingdom on earth are set forth, historically and theologically. While theologians will continue to disagree on these subjects, the issue is determined largely on the principles of interpretation employed. Those who interpret prophecy literally, and who consistently take into consideration the details of prophecy, can support adequately the conclusion that the second coming of Christ is posttribulational and premillennial.

The descriptions of the second coming of Christ in all the major passages relating to it make clear that His return is personal. This is, of course, supported by the revelation of the angels in Acts 1:11, who informed the disciples as they were gazing up into heaven, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." This refers to the second coming of Christ to the earth, rather than

to the Rapture. Just as He personally went to heaven, so He will personally return. This, of course, is supported by other major passages such as Matthew 24:27-31 and Revelation 19:11-16.

The same passages which indicate that His return will be personal also make clear that it will be a bodily return. While the deity of Christ is omnipresent and can be in heaven and earth at the same time, the body of Christ is always local and is now at the right hand of God the Father. In His second coming, Christ will bodily return – just as He bodily ascended. This is supported by Zechariah 14:4 – “His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives” – and by the fact that His return is said in Acts 1 to happen the same way as His ascension.

In contrast with the Rapture, where there is no evidence that the world as a whole will see the glory of Christ, the second coming to the earth will be both visible and glorious. Christ Himself described His return as lightning shining from the East to the West (Matt. 24:27). Just as the Ascension was visible in Acts 1:11, so His second coming will be visible, and Christ “shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

Christ said in Matthew 24:30, “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” The main point of the Book of Revelation 1:7, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” They will see Christ not as the lowly Nazarene in suffering and in death or even in His resurrection body in which the glory was somewhat veiled while Christ was yet on earth.

The second coming of Christ will fully display the glory of the Son of God as revealed earlier to John in Revelation 1:12-18 and described in detail in Revelation 19:11-16. The Second Coming, accordingly, will be one of the most dramatic events of all time and will be the climax of the whole program of God beginning in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned and lost the right to rule.

The second coming of Christ is also intimately related to the earth and is not a meeting in space as in the rapture of the church. Many passages speak of Christ as reigning in Zion, coming to Zion, or going from Zion, all references to the literal city of Jerusalem (Pss. 14:7; 20:2; 53:6; 110:2; 128:5; 134:3; 135:21; Isa. 2:3; Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2; Zech. 14:1-4; Rom. 11:26). According to Scripture, not only will His feet touch the Mount of Olives, but His return is in connection with destroying the armies which will be attempting to conquer Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-3).

The second coming of Christ will be attended by all the holy angels and all the saints of all ages who are in heaven. It is the coming of Christ *with* His saints rather than *for* His saints.

Although an important purpose of the Second Coming is to deliver afflicted saints still living on earth, the description of the event in Matthew 25:31 states that all the angels will be with Him. Revelation 19:11-21 is even more explicit, where the armies from heaven are described as following Him. These undoubtedly include both the holy angels and the saints in heaven. The Second Coming will be a time of the gathering of all the elect – those resurrected, those translated, and even those in their natural bodies on the earth. All participate in one way or another in this dramatic event related to the Second Coming.

The stated purpose of the Second Coming is to judge the earth (Ps. 96:13). This will be brought out in subsequent studies of the judgment of Israel, the judgment of the nations, and the judgment of Satan and the fallen angels. In Matthew 19:28 Christ told the twelve apostles they would join Him in judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 25:31-46 describes the judgment of the Gentiles on earth at the time of the Second Coming. Ezekiel 20:35-38 predicts the judgment of Israel at the time of the Second Coming. Those who die during the time of persecution preceding the Second Coming will be raised and judged, according to Revelation 20:4.

The same truth is brought out in the various parables dealing with the end time in the Gospels, and frequent mention of this truth is found in Scripture (Luke 12:37, 45-47; 17:29-30; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2:8; Jude 15; Rev. 2:27; 19:15-21). The earth – which is now being permitted to manifest its sinfulness and its unbelief and, for the most part, is living as if God did not exist – will be brought under the righteous judgment of God.

The judgment, as extensive as it is, however, will not completely destroy the earth. The judgment by fire, describe in 2 Peter 3:10, will not take place until the end of the Millennium when the present earth and heaven are destroyed and a new heaven and a new earth created.

The day of the Lord, which begins at the Rapture and includes in its introduction the judgments preceding and immediately following the Second Coming, concludes with the end of the millennium and with the final destruction of the present heaven and earth. The triumph of sin in our modern world is temporary. The triumph of the righteousness of God is sure.

The major purpose of the return of Christ is to deliver those who have survived martyrdom during the Tribulation, both among Israel and among the Gentiles. If the second coming of Christ were delayed indefinitely, according to Matthew 24:22, the catastrophic judgments poured out on the earth would destroy the entire race. This Tribulation is cut short by the second coming of Christ to deliver the elect from this fate. Israel is described as saved or delivered in Romans 11:26-27. This is supported by Luke 21:28; where the second coming of Christ is referred to as “your redemption.” In the Old Testament, passages such as Zechariah 14:4 also describe this deliverance.

The second coming of Christ, however, not only brings judgment on the wicked and deliverance for the righteous, but introduces a new spiritual state which will be considered in the study of Millennium. The same event which brings judgment to the wicked brings a new spiritual revival to those who have trusted in the Lord. This is supported by Romans 11:26-27 and is embodied in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Christ's return has also the central purpose of reestablishing the Davidic kingdom. In the discussion of the relationship of the church to the Gentiles in the counsel at Jerusalem in Acts 15, it is brought out that the earlier prophecies of Amos 9:11-15 predicted the order of Gentile blessing first, to be followed by reestablishment of the tabernacle of David. This was to coincide with Israel's regathering and reestablishment in the land, never to be scattered again (Amos 9:14-15; cf. Ezek. 39:25-29). The physical return of Israel, the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom, and the outpouring of the spirit of God upon the house of Israel (Ezek. 39:29) combine to prepare Israel and the world for the glories of the kingdom to follow. According to Ezekiel 37:24, the Old Testament saints will participate in the kingdom, with David raised up to be a prince over Israel under Christ. It was the purpose of God, as announced to the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:31-33, that Christ should come to reign over the house of Israel forever.

Taken as a whole, the second coming of Christ is a tremendous event occurring at the close of the Great Tribulation and introducing the millennial kingdom. It will be a personal and bodily return which will be visible to the entire world and will be the manifestation of the glory of God. It will be related to the earth rather than to heaven and specifically to Jerusalem in the Mount of Olives.

Christ in His return will be accompanied by the holy angels and the saints. His purpose in His return is to judge the world, to deliver those who have trusted in Him whether Jews or Gentiles, to bring spiritual revival to Israel and the world, to reestablish the kingdom of David and to introduce the final dispensation of His kingdom on earth for a thousand years. In the context of this event, the doctrine of the resurrection and judgments relating to the Second Coming may now be considered.