

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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When Gabriel Speaks, We Must Listen: The Revolutionary Words of the Angel to Daniel

Continued from September

Gabriel informs us of 6 major accomplishments in the allotted period of 490 years. “Your people and your city” are the first beneficiaries of this amazing prophecy (Dan. 9:24). Though it is true in the NT that some of the statements about Israel are fulfilled in the church, it is also equally true that God has not forsaken forever the national Jew (Rom. 9-11). Daniel is concerned about the ruined city and sanctuary, and Gabriel points to **the end** of trouble for city and sanctuary, a process which along the way includes the coming and the death of the Prince Messiah for sin. Transgression is to be finished, sin is to have an end and wickedness is to be atoned for (Dan. 9:24). Those are the first three of the six events predicted. Then come three more, directed to the Kingdom of God: “to bring in everlasting righteousness,” the righteousness of the ages, “to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.”

This will be the complete and logical answer to Daniel’s prayer for **his people and the city**. Certainly an atonement for sin has been made, but Israel remains today in rebellion until finally her remnant welcomes the Messiah at his return. He will then reign with the saints of all the ages in righteous judgment over the whole earth, and Israel’s sin will be no more. Righteousness is characteristic of the coming age of the Kingdom of God. The anointing of the most holy place could refer to the millennial temple or possibly to Jesus himself.

When the **490 years** are over, the Abrahamic, Davidic, and Jesuanic covenants (Luke 22:28-30) will reach their final goal. Both the sufferings and the coming glory of the Messiah will have been accomplished. Until then we wait, as did Joseph of Arimathea, for **the coming of the Kingdom** on earth (Mark 15:43).

Space does not allow for a detailed account of the grammatical issues involved in the still future part of the prophecy in Daniel 9:26-27. But I now give you Keil’s translation of the Hebrew which most successfully deals with the detail of the language. Keil’s resultant version of the message of Gabriel to Daniel in 9:26-27 is as follows:

“The city [Jerusalem], together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall

come, who shall find **his end** in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong **covenant** for **one week** on the mass of the people, and **during half a week** he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of **idol abominations** [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] **he shall carry on a desolating rule**, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated” (*Commentary on Daniel*, p. 373).

Many versions take the last word to be “the desolator” (*shomem*), but the overall sense is not affected. Certainly the wicked person **comes to his final destruction** at the end of the 70th “week.” Jesus, in preaching “the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19) as the much anticipated Jubilee or Kingdom of God, predicted **the end** of the final **heptad** (period of **seven years**) and the beginning of the time of final liberation, the Kingdom of God on earth. “Never again will Israel trust in the one who struck them” (Isa. 10:20). When the Kingdom comes, then all nations and peoples will serve and obey Jesus and the saints (Dan. 7:18-27, etc.)

Critical in this translation above is the matter of the **prince who comes to his end** (cp. **Dan. 11:45**). I am certain that the obvious antecedent to “end” is the nearest masculine noun which is the people or **the [hostile] prince**. The death of the wicked person in the final events of the prophecy points definitely to the death of **the future antichrist (or Man of Sin)**, and thus *not* to the events of AD 70.

Paul confirms our point by predicting that the Man of Sin will die at the future arrival of Jesus in power and glory at his Parousia (2 Thess. 2:8). Furthermore the language of Daniel 9:27b, “a complete destruction, one that is decreed,” is found exactly in the earlier prophecy of Isaiah 10:22-23 (cp 28:22), and Paul takes up that same phrase in Romans 9:28 to tell us about the **yet decisive future** restoration of a remnant of now blinded Israel, in the end-time.

Paul, Daniel, Isaiah and Jesus thus agree about the reference of the seventieth “week” (period of seven years) to the future. Desolations are coming **finally to an end**, and the 490 years will be over, just as relief and restoration came at least in part to Israel historically at the end of the 70 years of desolation under Babylon (Dan. 9:2). Of course the “42 months,” “1260 days,” “time, times and half a time,” mentioned 5 times in Revelation, I am sure, has its obvious source in Daniel 7:25; 12:7, as the final half (3½ years) of that seventieth

“heptad” or period of seven years. This is its obvious location. Jesus and John, in other words, are reading the 70th “week” (period of seven years) of Daniel **as future to us**, just before the glorious arrival of Jesus. Jesus also reads the Abomination of Desolation, located in Daniel’s 70th week, as an event initiating the final great and unique tribulation (Dan. 12:1 = Matt. 24:21) **immediately prior** to the Second Coming (Matt. 24:21, 29-31; Mark 13:24).

These great truths were taught by Paul and Jesus. They provide us with vision and insight into God’s great plan to bring peace to this tortured earth and immortality to believers (2 Tim. 1:10). “May your Kingdom come.”

Paul taught them this as *basic Christian faith* when he founded the church in Thessalonica: “Don’t you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you about all this?” (2 Thess. 2:5). ✧

Did the Apostles Expect the Any-Moment Coming of Christ?

by John Cunningham, Northern Ireland

Millions of Bible students around the world would immediately answer, “Yes, of course they did” to this question, and would no doubt add that believers today have the same expectation. This view, the “any-moment” coming of Christ, is a key doctrine in the interpretative system known as Dispensationalism and is linked with a corresponding belief in the so-called “pre-tribulation rapture” of the church, alleged to occur *before* the Great Tribulation and the coming of Antichrist.

Space does not permit a complete examination of this system. But what I want to do is to look at a few of the Scriptures which are alleged in support of the any-moment coming and to show that none of them can fairly be used to say, “Yes, the Apostles did believe that Christ could come at any moment.” And in conclusion I want to show that there is a definite sequence of events which must take place before Christ can return, and that this sequence can be seen clearly in the Scriptures.

“We who are alive and remain...”

The first argument is based on the use of personal pronouns in some passages concerning the coming of Christ. Paul says to the Thessalonians, “**We** who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord...” (1 Thess. 4:15). This is a leading text in support of the any-moment coming. Paul appears to include himself in the group who would be alive at the Lord’s coming, and at first glance this appears to be quite convincing.

1 John 3:2 uses similar language: “Beloved, now **we** are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what **we** will be, but **we** know that when He is revealed, **we** will be like Him, for **we** will see Him as He is.” John

here appears to say that he might be alive at the coming of Christ.

The use of personal pronouns in this way does not however prove the point, for this is the regular and consistent way that the Bible writers referred to the community to which they belonged. “**We** who are alive, who are left until the Parousia,” can fairly mean no more than “those of the Christian society who will be alive at the Parousia.”¹ Proof of this is found in the following passages.

In Numbers 14 the unbelieving Israelites were sentenced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and it was made plain to them that none of them would enter the promised land. Yet we read in Numbers 15:2, “When **you** have come into the land...” The pronoun “**you**” here cannot mean the people who had been sentenced to die in the wilderness, even though the words were addressed to them. Clearly it refers to their descendants, those who would enter the land. We might say that this use of the word is “corporate,” that is, it refers to the group and does not necessarily include the people being addressed.

Deuteronomy 11:7: “But **your** eyes have seen every great act of the Lord which he did.” This was said at the close of the wanderings, and preceding verses show that this referred to the miracles which occurred at the Exodus. Yet the vast majority of the nation had not personally seen these at all. Again it refers to the group, in this case their ancestors.

Judges 2:1: The angel of the Lord said, “I led **you** up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers...” Again, the pronoun refers to their ancestors and not personally to themselves.

Amos 5:25-27: “Did **you** offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? **You** also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun **your** idols, the star of **your** gods which you made for **yourselves**. Therefore I will send **you** into captivity beyond Damascus.” This passage looks back to the wilderness wanderings which occurred centuries before this, yet it addresses the Israelites as if they had been there and committed these sins. It also predicts that they would go into captivity in the future, but many, if not most, of those who heard this would have died by the time of the first captivity by Assyria in 721 BC, and none would have survived until the second captivity to Babylon.

Isaiah 64 is the prayer of the remnant of the last days, crying out for God to come down, and they look back to the days of Sinai saying, “when You did awesome things which **we** did not expect” (v. 3). The future remnant were not at Sinai. Again it refers to their ancestors.

¹ G.H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 25.

The prophet Daniel associated himself with the sins of his people in Daniel 9:5-6, even though he personally lived a blameless life. The Apostle Paul likewise says in Titus 3:3, “we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures...” See 2 Timothy 1:3, Acts 23:1 and Philippians 3:6 for Paul’s account of his actual way of life.

Note that in 2 Corinthians 4:14 Paul said that God “will raise **us** also with Jesus, and will present **us** with **you**.” Here he clearly anticipates dying and being resurrected at the coming of Christ. Has he changed his mind since 1 Thessalonians? Liberal theologians believe he did, but what does this do for our doctrine of inspiration? Which statement is inspired and which one is wrong? Both are inspired. Paul was consistently applying the corporate language of Scripture and speaking of the group to which they all belonged.

This use of the pronouns is consistent throughout Scripture and may be regarded as the “default language,” meaning that wherever we see pronouns used in this way, the use is corporate. Those who wish to apply Scripture language in a way different from this will really have to bring some convincing proof.

The Language of the Second Coming

In the interests of fairness we should summarize what the Dispensationalists believe concerning the second coming. The following quotation is from *The Approaching Advent of Christ* by Alexander Reese, and is compiled from his study of the writings of various Dispensationalists. This passage emphasizes several terms which are important for understanding the subject, as Dispensationalists see it:

“The Second Coming of Christ is to take place in two distinct stages; the first, which concerns the Church alone, occurs at the beginning of, or prior to, the last or apocalyptic Week of Daniel; the second, which concerns Israel and the world, takes place at the close of that Week. Between Christ’s Coming in relation to the Church, and His Coming in relation to the world, there thus intervenes a period of at least seven years — the period of the apocalyptic Week, during which Antichrist is manifested. At the first stage of the Advent all the dead in Christ, together with the righteous dead of the O.T., will be raised in the image and glory of Christ; these, together with those Christians who live to see the Lord’s Coming, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This is the *Coming* of the Lord, and is the true hope of the Church.

“At the second stage, *seven or more years later*, Antichrist will be destroyed, Israel converted and renewed, and the millennial kingdom set up. This is the *Day, Appearing, or Revelation* of Christ, and is entirely distinct from the *Coming*, for it concerns the Church

alone. The second stage of the Advent has this, and this only, that it concerns the Church, that it will be the time for the judgment and rewarding of the heavenly saints for their service on earth. Some, however, refer the rewarding to the time of the *Coming*, or *Rapture*, as the first stage is generally called” (p. 19-20).

This passage emphasizes several terms which are important for understanding our subject. *Rapture, Coming, Appearing and Revelation* are all technical terms in the Dispensational scheme, and we should examine them briefly to see if they actually have the meaning claimed for them by Dispensationalists.

Rapture is derived from the Latin word *rapere*, which is the equivalent of the Greek word *harpazo* used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air. As such there is no problem with using it to describe that event. But since this event is wrongly interpreted by Dispensationalists and is applied to a supposed coming *preceding* the tribulation, our use of it would have to be qualified by explaining what we mean. Perhaps it would be better not to use it at all to avoid misunderstanding.

Parousia is the Greek word for *coming*. Paul’s use in 1 Thessalonians 4 is central to the discussion. “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And in this way we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

It is difficult to find anything secret in this passage. The *parousia* is the event at which Christ comes *with* his saints: “At the parousia of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13). This contradicts a key distinction made by Dispensationalists. The *Parousia*, they say, is when Christ comes *for* the saints. He only comes *with* the saints, they say, at the *revelation*, or the *appearing*.

However, 2 Thessalonians 2:8 shows that it is at the *parousia* that Christ will destroy the Man of Sin: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to an end by the appearance of his *parousia*.” This verse is contrary to the Dispensationalist scheme of things. According to Dispensationalists, the Parousia is supposed to occur before the rise of the Man of Sin (the Antichrist), yet here we have it happening at the destruction of the Antichrist.

The *Parousia* will be a glorious, visible event witnessed around the world and occurring at the end of

the Olivet prophecy. "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the *parousia* of the Son of Man" (Matt 24:27).

At this point Dispensationalists will argue that *Parousia* means "presence" and therefore covers the entire period, including either the *rapture* or the *revelation* at the end of the seven-year period. *Parousia* can indeed mean "presence" and is so translated in Philippians 2:12, but its usual meaning is "arrival." When *Parousia* is used of Jesus, it always means his arrival, Second Coming. The discoveries of scholars over the last 150 years have added vivid meaning to this term as used of Christ. Alexander Reese has this to say: "It is one of the great contributions of modern scholarship that we now understand what the early Christians felt when they read in Paul's epistle of the Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scholars and archaeologists have been digging in the rubbish heaps of Egypt and found this word used in scores of documents in everyday life for the *arrival* of kings and rulers, or the visit following." He goes on to quote the great scholar Adolph Deismann who says, "From the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd Cent AD, we are able to trace the word in the East as a *technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor.*" The application of this to the coming of Christ is obvious.

Revelation is a translation of the Greek word apocalypse (*apokalupsis*). According to Dispensationalists, the *revelation* is supposed to occur after the tribulation when Christ comes to judge the world and set up his Kingdom. The church, having been raptured, as they claim, *before* the tribulation, should not be waiting for the *revelation* but for the "rapture." Yet this is not what we find. We are "waiting for the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). The *revelation* is the event at which the saints receive their rest and relief after a period of affliction: "It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us at the *revelation* of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:6-8). But again, according to Dispensationalists, the saints had already experienced rest at the rapture. Peter also refers to a period of affliction which will be terminated at the *revelation*. "But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, so that at the *revelation* of his glory you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Pet. 4:13).

The *revelation* is then the object of Christian hope together with the *Parousia*, and the same is true of the *epiphaneia*, a Greek word meaning "manifestation," the third distinctive word used of the coming of Christ. This word is actually used along with *Parousia* in 2

Thessalonians 2:8 which speaks of Christ destroying the Man of Sin at the "*epiphaneia* of his *parousia*." Paul exhorts Timothy to "keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing (*epiphaneia*)," again showing that it is an object of hope. Paul looked forward to it: "In the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day; and not to me only but also to all those who have loved his *epiphaneia*" (2 Tim. 4:8).

We can only conclude from the scriptural usage of these words that they all refer to the same one event, the glorious return of Christ to destroy the forces of Antichrist and to give his people rest in the Kingdom of God. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could possibly have thought otherwise. In no case can this evidence be reconciled with the idea of a pre-tribulation any-moment Coming.

The Prediction about Peter

Now let us look at the predictions the Lord made to his disciples before ascending into heaven. Here we will find once again that the evidence is wholly against an any-moment coming of the Lord. One of his more interesting predictions was concerning Peter, found in John 21:18-19. "Most assuredly I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.' This he said, indicating by what kind of death he would glorify God." We may assume that Peter was about the same age as Christ at this point. Peter therefore could expect about thirty or forty years of life before his martyrdom. Thirty years later Peter himself wrote, "I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, even as our Lord Jesus showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease" (2 Pet. 1:13-15).

This conversation was evidently widely known throughout the Church, and it is not possible to conceive how anyone could imagine that the Lord might come at any moment given this prediction. As long as Peter was alive and had not been martyred such an event was impossible.

The Program for the Gospel

The Lord's instructions concerning the preaching of the Gospel also rule out an any-moment coming. There are several accounts of this, but we will use the one in Acts: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is the program for the

Church, and each of its phases is clearly marked out in Acts. The witnessing in Jerusalem takes up several chapters up to the end of chapter 7 with the martyrdom of Stephen. The consequence of Stephen's death led to the beginning of the fulfillment of the second and third stages, witnessing in Judea and in Samaria. The Samaritan mission commenced in chapter 8 through the work of Philip and probably took place several years after the ascension.

At no time could the Lord have returned until at least these events had taken place. But the commission to go to the "end of the earth" could not commence until the Gospel went to the Gentiles and this is recorded in chapters 10 and 11. Commentators are uncertain what exactly "end of the earth" signified, but it must at least include the remainder of the book of Acts. Note that Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 to the Gentiles in Acts 13:47. The commission in Isaiah 49 is actually given to the Servant, who is Christ himself, and it refers in context to the light going to the Gentiles **before** the people of Israel are re-gathered. (See verses 4, 5 for the chronology here.) This verse is the background to the Lord's commission, and Matthew 24:14 is based upon it. It is clear that it again rules out an any-moment coming of the Lord.

Paul's Commission

The door to the Gentiles had been opened by Peter at God's command, but it was Paul who was pre-eminently the preacher to the Gentile world, confirmed to him by the Lord when he struck him down on the Damascus road. "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18; cp. 9:15).

Now Paul, after his initial appearance in chapter 9, completely disappears from the record until Barnabas goes to find him (Acts 11:25). Paul's commission does not commence until his association with the church in Antioch, and in particular the first journey beginning in Acts 13. Chronologists place this event about 12 years after his conversion. What he had been doing in the meantime was unknown. But until he began the Gentile mission, there could be no question of a return of Christ. Just as with Peter, the Lord's command to Paul rules out an any-moment coming.

But there is a further detail about Paul's life which the Lord revealed to him in Acts 23:11. Several years after the Thessalonian letters when the secret, any-

moment coming of Christ was supposedly revealed, the Lord told him, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

G.H. Lang makes the following important observations in relation to this prediction. Firstly Paul could not expect the coming of Christ until at least after his testimony in Rome. Secondly, if Christ had revealed a secret coming in the Thessalonian letters, he must now be annulling it and teaching something different, clearly an impossible viewpoint. Lastly, if any of the Apostles *had* taught an any-moment coming of the Lord, they were not doing so through the Holy Spirit. Lang states, "But admission of error on this so important part of their message will challenge their teaching and authority in general."²

Sequence of Events

Before we look at the events leading up to the coming of Christ, we should note several clear indications in his teaching that there would be a long time before his return. In Luke 19 he tells the parable of the nobleman who "went to a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return" (v. 12). This was in response to an expectation that "the kingdom of God would appear immediately" (v. 11). Matthew 25:19: "After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them." The warnings to be on the alert in Matthew 24:36-51 indicate uncertainty about the specific timing of this coming but cannot possibly be construed in the light of an any-moment coming.

There are two passages which trace the events leading up to the coming of Christ. The first is the Olivet prophecy, given in response to the disciples' question as to his return (*Parousia*) and the end of the age, and the second is the Book of Revelation. Many commentators have noted that the plain prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) actually parallels the seven seals of Revelation. I remember being taught this view in my former denomination. Space forbids a detailed look at each of the events, but I do want to draw your attention to what is said about the fifth, sixth and seventh seals. Note that the sixth seal is the heavenly signs (Rev. 6:12-17) and that Jesus predicts this to occur **after** the tribulation: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." (Matt 24:29). The Great Tribulation is dealt with in Matthew 24:9-28, forming the bulk of the prophecy. Looking at Revelation we see that what precedes the heavenly signs of the sixth seal is the vision of the souls under the altar of the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-11).

Link this information with the statement in Joel 2:30-31: "And I will show wonders in the heavens and

² *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 27.

on the earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood **before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord.**" The Day of the Lord therefore follows the heavenly signs and forms the entirety of the seventh seal: "The great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

This simple chronological point is missed by the majority of futurist, Dispensational writers whom I have read. (Lang and Anderson are exceptions.) Many Dispensationalists continually assume that the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord are one and the same event.

Let us outline briefly the events of the Olivet discourse and Revelation to see if we can pinpoint the time of the Second Advent. We realize of course that Jesus said that no one would know the day or the hour of his coming.

- False prophets either claiming to be Christ or, more likely, claiming that Jesus is the Christ yet presenting a false Jesus. Note that the first seal has a rider on a white horse mimicking the true Christ in Revelation 19. Matt. 24:4-5; Rev. 6:1-2.

- Wars and rumors of wars. Matt. 24:6-7; Rev 6:3-4.

- Famines. Matt. 24:7; Rev. 6:5-6.

- Death as a result of all these. Matt. 24:7; Rev. 6:7-8.

- The Great Tribulation divided into two parts. The saints are persecuted in both halves but seemingly by different groups. Persecutions in synagogues could only take place in Israel and seems to indicate the triumph of religious Judaism, unlike the present day. The second persecution is brought about after the Abomination of Desolation by the Antichrist. Both persecutions are clearly mentioned under the fifth seal. Other passages in Revelation fill out the details of the Tribulation. Chapters 11, 12, 13 describe what will be going on during that time and make it clear that they take place within a period of 3 ½ years. Matt. 24:8-28; Rev. 6:9-11.

- The heavenly signs. Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 6:12-17.

The next event in the Olivet prophecy is the sign of the Son of Man, gathering his people from the four quarters of the earth (Matt 24:29-31). But the next thing to happen in the book of Revelation is "the great day of his wrath" (Rev. 6:17). Clearly then Jesus returns during that period of time. But the day of the Lord occupies the whole of the seventh seal (for there are only seven) and includes the events of chapter 8, chapter 9 and chapter 16. The Olivet prophecy does not give much detail about this, except that Luke's version mentions "The sea and the waves roaring and men's hearts failing them for fear" (Luke 21:25-26), which seems to refer to the results of the first four trumpets in particular.

A major contention of Dispensationalism is that the church will *not* go through the wrath of God. "For God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). And this of course is true, but by confusing the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, and seeing that the tribulation is a time of suffering for God's people, Dispensationalists then conclude that the church has been removed at the pre-trib *Parousia* and that the people who do go through tribulation are not the church but Jewish converts during the tribulation.

It is true that God will not allow His people to be affected by His wrath, but He does not need to take them to heaven to protect them. In Revelation 7 we see the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish converts. It is clear from Revelation 9:4 that they are still on earth as the locust plagues are not permitted to harm them in any way. Psalm 91 gives us a beautiful picture of the way in which God will protect His people during that time.

When does Christ come? Revelation 16:15 contains the following warning: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk naked and they will not see his shame." This is just *before* the seventh plague, the last event of the entire sequence, and Christ still has not come. The only remaining event is the battle of Armageddon, the great earthquake, the plague of hailstones. This is described in more detail in chapter 19, Ezekiel 38-39 and many other passages. We need not suppose that these events will take place within a few days. The invading armies assembling at Armageddon will no doubt require some time. Invasions do not occur spontaneously overnight as you might recall from the two invasions of Iraq in recent decades. At some point during the period Christ returns to resurrect his people (1 Cor. 15:23; Dan. 12:2), and destroy the forces of Antichrist. We cannot be more specific than this but we can look forward to it in hope.

The coming of Christ during the Day of the Lord is remarkably confirmed in the two Thessalonian epistles. Ironically, these two letters have been used to prove the pre-tribulation view, but they both witness against this in a remarkable way.

1 Thessalonians 5:1: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." The chapter division obscures the connection with what has been said in chapter 4. The antecedent to "times and seasons" can only refer back to the *Parousia* mentioned in the previous chapter. The Day of the Lord is not therefore a new subject but a continuation of the same message.

The second letter also joins the *Parousia*, our gathering together with Christ, and the Day of the Lord, and warns them against the notion that the Day of the Lord had already commenced. It *cannot* take place "until

the apostasy and the revealing of the Man of Sin take place first” (2 Thess. 2:3).

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 does not contain any note of time sequence, and there is certainly nothing in it which would require that the coming of Christ would take place before the tribulation. The mention, however, of the last trumpet (15:52) links it with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and with the seventh and final trumpet of the Book of Revelation (11:15; 20:1-4). This creates perfect harmony.

The importance of understanding prophetic events correctly, most notably the coming of Christ, is shown clearly by Paul’s attitude towards the Thessalonians. He had spent only three weeks in the city, yet it is clear from 2 Thessalonians 2 that he had fully instructed them on the coming of the Man of Sin, the apostasy, the Day of the Lord and the coming (Parousia) of Christ. Furthermore, he did not treat the erroneous, new views as permissible and unimportant unlike many contemporary Christians. ✧

The First Martyr of Unitarianism as a Movement

“In Poland, the scene of Socinus’s major mission, Iwan Tyszkiewicz became an ardent Socinian. His abandonment of Catholicism, his prosperity, and his spirited advocacy of his new faith in an area dominated by Catholics made him a marked man. His refusal to swear an oath by the Trinity or on a crucifix led to his conviction by a local court. On an appeal that went all the way to the royal court in Warsaw, in 1611, the public prosecutor pressed the charge of blasphemy. The Catholic sovereign influenced the judges to return a verdict of death. The executioner cut out Tyszkiewicz’s tongue, because of his blasphemy, before burning him for blasphemous heresy.”

(Levy, *Blasphemy: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred*, p. 73-74)

Many of our readers are looking for fellowship and have been in contact with Robin Todd and his Worldwide Scattered Brethren Network. He is sending out updates to you on current plans to start new fellowships in some parts of the country, but is experiencing a lot of outdated email addresses. Therefore you may be one of those who isn’t receiving his updates. If you want to stay in the loop with Robin’s efforts to connect believers together, please email him if you have changed your address since you last wrote to him. Robin’s email is robinsings4u@comcast.net. His phone number is 360-701-9219. Thank you for your desire to connect! The writer of Hebrews would agree with your enthusiasm in this regard (Heb. 10:25).

“Of the multitude of applications of 2 Thessalonians 2 since the Apostle wrote it, only one has had historical importance enough to be of interest to us — I mean that which is found in several Protestant confessions, including the Westminster Confession of Faith, which declares the **Pope of Rome**...to be ‘that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, who exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God.’ As an interpretation, of course, that is **impossible**. The Man of Sin is one man and not a series like the Popes. The Temple of God in which a man sits is a Temple made with hands and not the church...

“2 Thessalonians 2: **The restraint and its removal**. Christ cannot come, the Apostle has told us, until the falling away has *first* come, and the Man of Sin has been revealed. In the verses before us, we are told that the Man of Sin himself cannot come in the full sense of the word, he cannot be revealed in his true character as the counter Christ, **until a restraining force known to the Thessalonians** but only obscurely alluded to by the Apostle, is taken out of the way. The final Advent is thus at two removes from the present. **First**, there must be the removal of the power which holds the Man of Sin in check; then the culmination of evil in that great adversary of God [the Man of Sin]; and not **until then** can the return (Parousia) of the Lord in glory as savior and judge happen” (James Denny, D.D., *Expositor’s Bible*, 1956, Vol. 6, p. 369).

Comments

“For a few years I have received the newsletter Focus on the Kingdom but have just glanced at it. I happened to take a closer look today in the Sept. issue and the writing ‘When Gabriel Speaks, We Must Listen.’ I liked what was written in this one and it led me to search out the Facebook page and who is involved. I had no church growing up. We were Catholic but never attended. I had a desire to know God from very young. I was 22 years old living in CA and I picked up the phone and started calling churches to know how to be saved. I reached one who had me come in and accept Jesus as my atoning savior and be baptized. I never bonded with the church or any church ever. I attended non-denominational church when I was first married and kids growing up but it’s been at least 15 years since we have attended. That does not mean every waking moment of my day is not searching to know God and His truth.” — *Minnesota*

“I am now studying Professor Buzzard’s works on the Trinity and other complex topics. I read many of the reviews of his book on the Trinity and surprisingly, the one that convinced me the most to purchase it was the one who berated him vehemently!” — *Alabama*