1 Corinthians 13:2

"Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

(Montgomery Translation)

Tell It
Like It Will Be

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PREFACE

If a preface needs a text, perhaps the most appropriate one for our purpose is 1 Cor. 13:13, “And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” The subject-matter of this book deals with the Christian’s faith and hope. But unless the spirit of love breathes on every page, the study will prove largely fruitless.

Another objective of the author is simplicity. One of the obstacles that confronts the Christian pilgrim, according to Emile Cailliet in his book, “Journey Into Light”, is the aridity of soul born of an intellectual preference for the complex over the elementary and the godlike pretensions of superiority. While it is true that some of the prophetic passages of Scripture are difficult of interpretation, it is my conviction that some expositors have combined much of the plainest teaching of the Bible into a complex scheme that goes far beyond God’s revelatory purpose while it feeds the author’s intellectual pride and confuses the readers. Whether my purpose has succeeded must be left to the judgment of the readers.

The second coming of Christ is more frequently mentioned in the New Testament than anything else concerning Christ. The first divine revelation concerning Christ after His departure to heaven came within minutes of His ascension when two “men” in white appeared to the astounded disciples on the Mount of Olives, assuring them that “This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” This timely and comforting assurance confirmed His own word to the disciples spoken shortly before His death when He said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.” Shortly after when on trial before Caiaphas He said, “And ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Further details of the blueprint of the future are provided in our Lord’s extended Olivet Discourse and the writings of the New Testament authors, in addi-
tion to prophetic intimations in the Old Testament prophets. Nowhere is to be found a complete picture, and therefore all passages are to be carefully read if we would gain an understanding of God’s plan for the future, both for the Church and the world.

Of the writing of books on this glorious theme there has been no lack. My justification for adding another is found in the fact that much of the literature has been of such a technical nature and slanted to men who have enjoyed a theological training that it has not met the need of the average thoughtful layman who is looking for a tool that will help him get a firm grasp of this important subject. On the other hand, some books have been written by men whose apparent purpose has been to enlist followers in their particular school of interpretation rather than offer a broad picture of the entire prophetic field. While I have my own firm views concerning certain minor points of interpretation, the endeavor will be to present the picture with as little personal bias as possible so that the reader may have the utmost liberty under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his effort to discover precisely what God has promised in His Word.

Since the second advent of Christ is incomparably the most fantastic event on the horizon of the future it is natural that earnest Christians have permitted their imaginations unlimited scope as they have tried to visualize what it will be like when the heavens suddenly open and the Son of God comes down in great power and glory, accompanied by myriads of angels and believers of bygone generations. Hence it is of the greatest importance that one first of all discover precisely what the Bible teaches so that when the books of men are read one will be able to separate the wheat of revelation from the chaff of human opinion. And that includes this book. If the people of Berea checked the accuracy of Paul’s message by the Old Testament Scriptures in that day, we cannot afford to do less, even though the books we read are produced by greatly beloved and respected Bible teachers.

The importance of prophetic study cannot be exaggerated in our day of world crisis. While it is probably true that there has not been a generation since the early church when men have not predicted the return of Christ in their day — which should be a warning against dogmatism on our part — it seems to me that the prophetic pattern for the “last days” is rapidly forming and man’s failures will before long be set aside for God’s triumph.

Within this closing framework the earnest Christian will not permit prophetic study to so involve him as to leave him indifferent to his fellowmen whose plight will indeed be tragic in the final day unless Christians bring to them the only message of hope. Instead of prophetic study dulling him to sleep in clouds of prophetic speculation it should spur him to renewed sharing of the faith.

Many years ago when I was a candidate for a certain pulpit I was entertained for several days in the home of a leading member whose hobby was a study of the book of Revelation. Soon after arriving I was asked: “Who do you think is the man on the white horse in Rev. 6:2?” Not having made a detailed study of Revelation I had to say I didn’t know. In the course of the five-day visit I not only spoke three times in the church and once over the church’s radio broadcast but the men’s Gospel team asked me to speak in a downtown hall for down-and-outs. I asked my host if he had gone down there with the team and he said “No.” I may be forgiven for concluding that my host was more concerned for the man on the white horse than the man on the road to hell. Incidentally I consulted fifteen or twenty commentaries on Revelation after I arrived home and discovered about fifteen different theories as to the identity of the man on the white horse. So my embarrassment found some relief. It is my hope that this study of prophecy will not only “comfort your hearts”, as Paul puts it, but “establish you in every good word and WORK.”

R. B. Girdlestone, one-time president of Prophecy Investigation Society and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, has well said in his book, “The Divine Program” (1915): “The strange thing is that we are so
busy looking for great and startling events that we forget what is quietly going on all round us. There is no flourish of trumpets when another soul is saved. The advance of spiritual life is as quiet as the growth of plants in our gardens in spring. Nevertheless it is a real and lasting work which is being done; and when the Lord’s house is full, the Lord will come in to see the guests.”

A necessary presupposition of our study is that the Bible is a dependable revelation of the divine mind. Such an assumption naturally involves an element of faith, even as does any scientific assumption. Faith that God is speaking in the Bible will have its reward since God, like man, likes to be believed. Those who believe God and seek to fit in with His plan are assured of rich reward both now and hereafter.

Unless one is fully convinced of the trustworthiness and integrity of Holy Writ, one would do well first of all to read prayerfully some standard work dealing with the divine inspiration of the Bible, such as Gausen’s “Theopneustia”, one of the older works, or “Revelation and the Bible”, edited by Dr. Carl F. H. Henry and published in 1958 by Baker Book House of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Scripture claims (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) to be fully inspired and therefore profitable. Happy is he who is convinced of this.

An obvious inference is that none of its statements contradicts other affirmations. If the meaning of a passage is not immediately obvious, this will not occasion surprise when we consider the variety of authors God chose to use, the condensed character of much of the material, the fact that it was presented many centuries ago in an oriental frame of thought which often was expressed in figures of speech, and the wide variety of intellectual equipment and educational tools that modern students bring to the task of understanding the Book. In the midst of one of the most difficult of prophetic passages the apostle Paul, in 2 Thes. 2, interjects: “Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” Therefore he did not elaborate as much as he might have which makes the task of understanding more difficult for us who did not have the privilege of sitting at his feet.

He who would profit richly by prophetic study must bring to it not only the clearest thinking he can muster but a crucifixion of self that will seek to subordinate human interpretation to a desire to discover precisely what God has said in His Word. Too many prophetic students in their pride have claimed as much authority for their interpretations as for the Word of God itself. One modern author claims his book was made possible by four things, the fourth being “the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit.” If this be so, it is dangerous, even blasphemous, to take issue with any of his interpretations! Another modern author of a book on the second advent of Christ claims that those who do not see eye-to-eye with him are devil-inspired! Thus the whole study of prophecy has become in some quarters a seriously divisive element among those for whose unity Christ gave Himself in earnest prayer.

Many outstanding men of God, if asked whether it is right to assume the role of prophet, would vehemently deny it. But the temptation is extremely subtle. For example, there is surely no more godly expositor of the Bible in modern times than Bishop J. C. Ryle of England. In his “Coming Events and Present Duties” (1867) he says in the preface:

“I have purposely avoided everything that can be called speculative or conjectural . . . I have not attempted to expound . . . Ezekiel’s temple, or the symbolical visions of Revelation. I have not ventured to fix any dates. I have not tried to settle the precise order or manner in which predictions of things to come are to be fulfilled, There is nothing I dislike so much in prophetic inquiry as dogmatism or positiveness. Much of the discredit which has fallen on prophetic study has arisen from the fact that many students instead of expounding prophecy have turned prophets themselves . . . I do not put forth my prophetic views as articles of faith, but only as my private opinions. I do not say nobody can be saved who does not agree with me about prophecy. I am not infallible. I am very sensible that holier and better men than myself do not see these subjects with my eyes, and think me utterly mistaken. I condemn nobody; I judge nobody. I only ask liberty to hold and state distinctly my own views. The Day will decide who is right. It is the new heart and faith in Christ’s blood which are absolutely necessary to salvation. The man who knows these two things experimentally may
be wrong about prophecy, but he will not miss heaven . . . I do not forget that we are poor judges of our own days, and are very apt to exaggerate their importance."

While he decries those who play the role of prophet in our day, he has unwittingly been guilty of that which he abhors. He warns (p. 20): "Above all, avoid dogmatism and positiveness . . . None have injured the doctrine of the second coming so much as its zealous friends." And yet he writes (p. 18): "The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The gathering out from all nations will soon be accomplished. The heralds and forerunners of the King will soon have proclaimed the Gospel in every nation. The night is far spent. The King will soon be here."

And those words were penned over one hundred years ago! But J. C. Ryle is not the only man of God who has fallen into the trap against which he warned others. Another example may be found in the "Memoirs" of the saintly Robert McChyne of Scotland. We find a seemingly contradictory statement in the closing of a letter to a friend, on p. 308: "Soon we shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. May you be kept faithful to death." Each of these sentences seems to contain an error. The dogmatic assurance that Christ's coming would be soon was made over 100 years ago! If he had written, "Soon we may see Him coming," there could be no objection. If He was coming soon, why should death rather than the coming be emphasized?

Prophetic literature is full of such oracular certainty. Since the field of prophetic study requires much diligent effort we need to approach it with the deepest humility, avoiding a superficial study of the Word that frequently results in a dogmatism concerning obscure details that is obnoxious to the last degree. May God keep us in this study from veering off on tangents and fanaticism.

While there is much that is clear, we shall have to admit there is much that is still unrevealed, particularly the time-sequence of coming events. For this reason you will find no "charts" in this book. The late Dr. Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Theological Seminary, a former professor of mine, has well said in his book, "The Return of Christ" (p. 56): "The order of events which are related to the return of our Lord is so imperfectly defined in the New Testament that those who expect His coming should not allow dissensions or divisions to arise because of divergent views as to the time when believers are to be 'caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.' I may add that wrongly dividing the Word of God too often has led to wrongly dividing the people of God. Claims to superior learning are too frequently substituted for a clear "Thus saith the Lord" which alone can settle issues.

One recent author of a large work on prophecy criticizes a man with whom he disagrees for using the term "sophistry" to designate the thinking of his opponents, and then on another page he himself unwittingly uses the same term to characterize the tactics of the man whom he had criticized for using that term! He also makes a claim of superior scholarship for his particular view saying it is popular among men who have specialized in prophetic study. Perhaps we should be reminded of Frank Lloyd Wright's definition of an expert as "a man who has stopped thinking. He knows."

So as we enter into this study let us be much in prayer that we may exemplify the spirit of the late Eric Sauer of Germany. In his book "From Eternity to Eternity", p. 137, we read: "The Holy Scripture gives no detailed description of the course and sequence of final events. We are permitted only to discern the chief stages and chief stations. But even here is no complete unanimity among all believing Bible expositors. Therefore it becomes us to be careful not to dogmatize, to remain open for fresh instruction from the Scripture, to esteem one another highly, even when there is difference of understanding, and on our side to bow always to every word of God which grants us any new light, or correction of former convictions, or deepening of assured knowledge already gained." Again on p. 139: "Let all of us who believe on Christ and in the testimony of the prophets respect and love
one another even if in questions greater or smaller differences in understanding remain. Here it behooves us to listen to one another, to foster mutual understanding and enrichment, and each to esteem the other as higher than himself." Dr. W. Theodore Taylor of New York City well said in a lecture given at the Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver in 1957: "We may dot every 'i' in Millennialism and remain as carnal in spirit as those who through unbelief shall be excluded from its reign of righteousness and peace." There has probably not been a century since apostolic times when men did not dogmatically claim the end was imminent. A few examples will suffice.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians: "The last times are come upon us." He was devoured by lions in the Roman amphitheatre in 107 A.D.

Clement of Rome wrote in about 96 A.D.: "Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, 'Speedily will He come and will not tarry.'"

Hermas, a Christian slave in the second century in Rome who was set free by his owner, became a merchant and wrote "The Shepherd of Hermas" in the third vision of which he pictured the Church as a tower that is being built. "When the tower is finished and built then comes the end; and I assure you, it will be soon finished."

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in north Africa, died in 258 A.D. In his treatise No. 6 he wrote concerning Christ: "In a cloud spread around Him He was lifted up into heaven... soon to come from heaven for the punishment of the devil and to the judgment of the human race."

Lactantius, a Roman Christian, tutor to the son of emperor Constantine, died about 320 A.D. In his "The Divine Institutes", chapter 25, after mentioning signs which will awaken a day-by-day expectancy of Christ's advent, he goes on to say concerning the consummation of all things: "The fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place."

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, lived from 339 to 397 A.D. He considered the wars between the Goths and the Romans, and the widespread preaching of the Gospel, as signs of the end. "The preaching of the Gospel has gone out into the whole world, and therefore we see the end of the world approaching."

Chrysostom, the brilliant bishop of Constantinople, wrote about 400 A.D.: "We are now at the twelfth hour: the purity of justice is leaving the world; the sun is gathering in his rays, and darkness is covering the whole earth."

Jerome who lived from 342 to 420 A.D., an eminent scholar who translated the Bible into Latin from the original tongues, called the Latin Vulgate, taught the earth would last but 6000 years and Christ would return in the year 500.

Peter Waldo of Lyons, France, who organized the sect of Waldenses, said: "We ought always to watch and pray, for we see that the world is near to its end... Daily we see the signs coming to their accomplishment, in the increase of evil and in the decrease of good." He wrote about 1150 A.D.

John Wycliffe, an English reformer who died in 1384, revealed in a tract entitled "The Last Age of the Church" his belief that, in the light of destructive earthquakes and the ravages of pestilence that swept away a third of the population of Europe, "The great designs of God were hastening to a close. With the fourteenth century the world would come to an end."

Philipp Melanchthon, German reformer who died in 1560, said "This aged world is not far from its end."

Luther wrote: "The great day is drawing near in which the kingdom of abominations shall be overthrown." (The general view of the reformers was that the Papal kingdom was the kingdom of Antichrist) The day of judgment is quite close at hand."

Hugh Latimer, born in 1470, said: "Antichrist is already known throughout the world, wherefor the day is not far off."

Nicholas Ridley, who was burned at the stake with Latimer, wrote in 1554: "The world without doubt... draws toward an end. Let us with John, the servant of the Lord, cry in our hearts unto our Savior Christ,
‘Come, Lord Jesus, come.’

Samuel Rutherford, professor of divinity at St. Andrews, Scotland, who died in 1661, wrote: ‘Indeed our fair morning is at hand, the day-star is near the rising, and we are not many miles from home. The day of the Lord is now near at hand.’

Pierre Jurieu who died in 1713 wrote: ‘We are now in those last days when Christ should come and not find true piety or true faith upon earth.’

John Napier, Scottish inventor of logarithms, wrote a book on the Revelation in which he calculated the day of judgment as taking place between 1688 and 1700.

Benjamin Newton in his “Aids to Prophetic Inquiry” (1881) writes, p. 141, (speaking of Antichrist setting himself up in the temple at Jerusalem): ‘It is possible that men now living may behold these things, for the time is at hand.’

W. Trotter in his “Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects”, written over 100 years ago, says on p. 21 “Ere long He will come.”

Spurgeon, that prince of preachers, wrote in a sermon published in 1857 and entitled “The Enchanted Ground”: “Do you not know, servant of the Lord, that you are to appear before the King in His beauty, and to see Him soon on earth?”

Similar dogmatic claims are being made today by wellknown preachers and others who apparently have not yet learned the lessons of history. To be sure, there can be no objection to saying: “It seems to me that in the light of the ‘signs of the times’ the Lord’s return cannot be long delayed.” But with complete assurance to affirm He is coming soon, as if one had been given a special revelation, seems to me the height of folly. The true believer who loves Christ with all his heart will be constantly seeking to be ready for the Lord’s coming while in humility of soul he has to admit he does not know when.

Some, in the light of past mistakes of eminent scholars, may be tempted to set aside the whole subject of prophecy as unprofitable, even harmful, because so many with unyielding tenacity adhere to their particular views and split believers into warring camps, evidently overlooking the apostle Paul’s emphasis upon love in contrast to faith and hope. Bickersteth in his “Practical Guide to the Prophecies”, p. 315, brings a timely warning at this point.

“An exclusive and speculative regard to it (prophecy) leads to a dangerous shutting out of primary and important duties, and to controversies and divisions; but the subject of prophecy forms so large a proportion of Scripture, that no one can slight it without disobeying the plain direction of the Scriptures. There have indeed been so many opposing interpretations, and so much self-confident and controversial statement of prophetic views, that Christians are really in danger of condemning that which God requires them to take heed to. (2 Pet. 1:19) ... Only let us attend to it in the spirit of prayer, humility, forbearance, practical application, patient research and waiting, suspending our judgment in doubtful matters, and being open to conviction ... Some of those who have taken up the subject of prophecy warmly and speculatively have expressed themselves so confidently, with such sharpness and bitterness against others, with such assumption of superior wisdom, and such despising of those who have differed with them, as not only to pain their fellow-Christians, but to lead to much doubtful disputations, and excite great prejudices against the study of their favorite subject. Others have been ready to exclude from Christian communion all who differed from their particular sentiments, and to admit at once the Christian fellowship, as partakers of divine grace, all who concurred with them. These great errors are carefully to be guarded against by the true Christian. They are very injurious, and corrupt the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ. (1 Cor. 13:1-2)”

Prophecy is a large segment of God’s Word which Paul tells us is profitable, and the true believer will not want to be guilty of assuming that anything that God has spoken is unimportant. Prophecy is intended to be a light when we are in a dark place, a light that strengthens faith and spurs us on to renewed endeavor for Christ. And let us remember that the Lord said He would send us His Spirit to lead us into all the truth. Nor did He limit the promise to preachers. While I would not underrate scholarship I must say with all the force at my command that the humblest believer who meditates on the Word of God may come to possess a clearer understanding of divine truth than many a scholar who, conscious of his intellectual attainments, is tainted by a subtle pride that is blinding. If those who dogmatically air their views as if they
were inspired revelation had the humility to join the brilliant Apollos at the feet of the simple tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla, there would be fewer Christians who turn away from prophetic study in disgust.

Some years ago a minister was asked to speak at a banquet in Minnesota. Right at the outset of his message dealing with prophecy he said: "Now don't come up afterwards and tell me that my view is wrong for I have already made up my mind!" If that is the attitude of any who read this book, I would recommend you set it aside at once.

This book is intended to help beginners in prophetic research get off to a good start. Think of this book as the first stage of a prophetic exploratory rocket which in time you will slough off as the Lord thrills you with a growing knowledge of the deeper things related to His program for the future. Questions of time and order will be examined but I pray that problems of interpretation will be seen in perspective and not permitted to divide Christ's own. If some passages are not wholly clear to us, let us be willing to hold our judgment in abeyance until further light comes.

Perhaps our best preparation of mind and heart would be by the prayerful consideration of Paul's advice to the church at Philippi: "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ . . . that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel . . . Be ye like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." If we take these words to heart, we shall avoid the acrimonious debates that have destroyed Christian unity and turned many away from a serious consideration of the Christian faith. If we feel there must be some degree of "strife", let it be the "striving together" of Phil. 1:27 on behalf of a common Gospel.

Our conviction that the study of prophecy is important should lead us to use the remaining time in earnest and faithful witness amidst the wreckage and darkness of this modern world so that many others will be ready to welcome our Lord when He comes.

According to "The Expository Times" of November 1945 "The late Sir Nevile Henderson, once British ambassador at Berlin, . . . when he was told by his doctors that his days were numbered, made up his mind to employ 'the little while between' by writing an appreciation of his dog Hippi to whom he was deeply attached. One of his friends has told how the booklet came to be written. 'When I met Sir Nevile one day, he said to me: 'I am under sentence of death. My doctors give me only six weeks to live, but I'll write that book. It'll take my mind off things.'" But he lived for six months and his book about Hippi was accepted by his publishers just after his death. Sir Nevile had a stout heart."

Dear reader, how will you use "the little while between"? Let us not forget that the coming of Christ will not only be the beginning of the culmination of the Christian's hope; it will be the crystallization of the doom threatened to all whose hearts will have none of Him!

"TIME" magazine in the fall of 1969 reported a musical on the Isle of Wight attended by 100,000 youth. Like many of these gatherings in modern times it was marked by crass sex-displays and the use of drugs. Reports the magazine: "In the cool evening air, as evident as the sweet odor of marijuana, hung an almost palpable yearning for some sort of transcendent experience."

Let us who know Christ tell all who long for a "transcendent experience" that God has precisely this in His plans for mankind, and it will far transcend the momentary pleasures of sensual indulgence and have no destructive after-effects. But it will be a pleasurable experience only to those who have welcomed Christ into their lives as Savior and Lord.

One further word. Beyond cavil, the second coming of Christ is the pivotal event in unfulfilled prophecy. Bible students are not agreed on the number of future comings of Christ from heaven. His first coming, all are agreed, was to die for man's sins on the cross. Some believe there are two future comings of
Christ, first to catch away all true believers, and again to deal in judgment with unbelievers and set up His earthly kingdom of 1000 years. Others believe in but one future coming when He accomplishes His purposes for both the Church and the unbelieving world. Generally those who hold to two future comings designate the latter coming the “second” because, they say, when He comes for the Church He does not actually come to earth. Therefore the Church cannot be looking for the “second” coming but only for the preceding coming or Rapture, as they call it. However, those who believe in but one future coming point to the only verse in the New Testament that specifically designates the coming as a “second” (Heb. 9:28) and in this verse Christians are urged to “look for” the second coming, which would be quite impossible if they were not on earth at that time.

Into this controversy I do not plan to enter in this book. Inasmuch as there is no clear Biblical statement affirming two future comings of Christ I shall assume there is but one future or “second” coming, leaving it to you to draw your own inferences concerning the correct view. But I would emphasize that human inference is not infallible regardless of which view it is used to support.

My basic belief is that the Bible is the fully inspired and authoritative Word of God and my aim is to set forth its teaching as clearly as possible. I fully agree with Dr. J. Stuart Russell whose book, “The Parousia”, was published anonymously in 1878 — a book that Dr. Wilbur Smith has called the best book ever published on the second advent. Dr. Russell says his “single aim has been to ascertain what saith the Scripture” and his “one desire to be governed by a loyal submission to its authority.”

The teaching is brought to us through nine personal prophetic channels in the New Testament, namely, Jesus Christ, two angels (Acts 1:11), Paul, Peter, John the Baptist, James, Jude, and John. While the Old Testament contains some teaching concerning events that are future to our time, we shall limit our study to what is found in the New Testament.
CHAPTER 1

NAMES USED FOR THE SECOND ADVENT

At least 21 terms are used to refer to the climactic event that brings the present age to an end at the coming of Christ from Heaven.

Because of the variety of activity involved in the various contexts relating to both the saved and the unsaved, there are some Bible students who assume that God will not deal with the saved and unsaved on the same occasion. To support this belief they assign technical meanings to certain of these terms. For example, it is claimed that Christ will first return and gather the Church believers to Himself, and some seven years later, following unprecedented Satanic activity in the great tribulation, return again to deal with unbelievers in judgment and set up His earthly millennial kingdom. They claim that a term such as "day of Christ" relates to that first return, and the term "day of the Lord" refers to the final return.

Other scholars, however, believe there will be only one future coming of Christ when He will deal with both believers and unbelievers. They base their belief on the fact that nowhere does the New Testament clearly state that there will be two future comings of Christ. They also argue on the basis of Peter's witness in Acts 2:34-35 and 3:20-21 that, since Christ cannot leave heaven until He comes to bring about the restitution of all things, therefore He cannot leave heaven to snatch away the Church seven years before the time He comes for the restitution of all things which must be the setting up of His righteous kingdom.

Those who believe in but one future coming of Christ are called posttribulationists because they believe He comes after the great tribulation. Those holding there will be two future comings, both before and after the tribulation, are called pretribulationists.

Since the term "day of the Lord" is used in the Old Testament in contexts that involve divine judgment, as in Mal. 5:4, the posttribulationists believe that when the term appears in the New Testament it must imply judgment and nothing else. At this point the posttribulationists reply that the term "Lord" occurs five times in three verses (1 Thes. 4:15-17), a passage that all agree refers to the coming of Christ to gather His Church. Furthermore, in the same context (1 Thes. 5:2) the term "day of the Lord" appears, and v. 1 makes it clear that it is the same coming that is under discussion, Paul simply adding a reference to the time element. Furthermore, they would add that if terms referring to Christ's advent are to be taken in a specialized sense, consistency would demand belief in at least 21 future comings of Christ since there are at least 21 different terms used.

NAMES USED FOR THE SECOND ADVENT:

"The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8); "The day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14); "The day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); "The day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10); "The day of the Lord" (1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Thes. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10); "That day" (2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8); "The day" (Heb. 10:25; 2:16; 13:12); "The coming of the Lord" (James 5:8); "The appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7); "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13); "The day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12); "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:7) "The end of all things" (1 Pet. 4:7); "The end of the world" (Matt. 13:39; 28:20); "The end" (Matt. 24:6, 13, 14; 1 Cor. 15:24); "The day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12); "The great day of His wrath" (Rev. 6:17); "The last day" (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48); "The last time" (1 Pet. 1:5; 1 Jn. 2:18 — probably here in the sense of "last times", that is, the period just prior to the final day); "The time" (1 Cor. 7:29); "The last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:52).
CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE SECOND ADVENT

The New Testament contains a preview of the most moving spectacle that mankind will ever behold from this earth—the coming of Christ from heaven in dazzling glory and power. We shall examine twenty-one aspects of this coming which together will give us a comprehensive view of what will happen not only before the eyes of all men but in the hearts of all.

1. IN LIKE MANNER AS HE LEFT THE EARTH

Acts 1:11

We have it on angelic authority that Christ will return “in like manner” as He left the earth. What is implied by “like manner?” We do not wish to read too much into this but at the very least it would seem to mean His return will be personal, visible, bodily, local and in a cloud. Zechariah (14:4) tells us His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, the very place from which He ascended to heaven. Obviously His return will be miraculous even as were His birth and ascension.

The angelic question, “Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?”, seems to imply He will be gone for a considerable time. Could they have forgotten so soon the words just spoken to the disciples by their Lord that His own would be witnesses to Him to the “utmost part of the earth?” That would involve a long time. In the light of this huge assignment there is no time for mourning and regret over His departure. There is work to be done, and it will be accomplished in the strength to be derived from His assured spiritual presence and from the hope of His glorious return after the task is completed. (Matt. 24:14).

However, He would not actually be gone during this long period but simply invisible. He promised to be with His followers, even to the end of the age, in the person of His Spirit. Today we do not wait for the Spirit. The Spirit is waiting for us! It is no wonder, as Luke puts it, the disciples “returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” (Lk. 24:52)

2. THE SECOND ADVENT COMES AS A THIEF AND A SNARE

Lk. 21:35 1 Thes. 5:2, 4

2 Pet. 3:10  Rev. 3:3  Rev. 16:16  Matt 24:43 (Lk. 12:39)

Since a thief does not send word in advance concerning his coming, the return of Christ will be a complete surprise to men but mainly to unbelievers, as Paul points out in 1 Thes. 5:4 “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that Day should overtake you as a thief.”) The Lord’s advent will be sudden to believers and unbelievers alike, but principally unbelievers will be taken by surprise. Christians who have the light of the prophetic Word are not in darkness. They are familiar with the predicted signs of the advent, hence will be in a heightened state of eager anticipation. However, there will be some exceptions—certain Christians who will have slipped into intemperance, hence will not be watching. (Rev. 3:3).

James Denney points out that unbelievers will be in a twofold darkness, the darkness of ignorance of what is impending plus the darkness of moral vice which leads them to try to keep out of God’s sight.

The second advent, so far as unbelievers are concerned, will not only be as a thief but as a snare or trap. Not only will it be a complete surprise but the results for them will be inescapable. They will be like fish in a strong net. John says they will rush into caves and call on the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the terrifying glory of the Savior whom they have rejected and who now will be their Judge. (Rev. 6:15-17).

3. COSMIC DISTURBANCES


In the Olivet Discourse Jesus gave a number of signs that will herald His second advent, the culminating series affecting the normal cosmic processes in the heavens and on earth. Sun and moon will be darkened, stars will be falling, and the heavens will be shaking. Perhaps the shaking of aurora borealis will
be seen in that day. In his report, Luke adds there will be distress and terror among men and the sea waves will be roaring. Possibly the roaring of the sea will be the result of huge tides occasioned by a change in the gravitational influence of the moon.

The darkness that will prevail around the earth in that day will make it possible the better to witness the falling stars and the dazzling glory that will mark the return of Christ immediately after. Mark tells us that there will be false Christs and false prophets who, apparently familiar with Bible prophecy, will produce some startling wonders to mislead humanity into believing Christ has already arrived (Mk. 13:1-2). Christ warns His own not to be misled, for the final sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens (Mt. 24:30) and then He will start His descent to earth. The appearance of Christ in His glory will be like dawn following night, but a dawn more dazzling than ever has been seen on earth.

The pretribulationist claims that the glorious coming of Christ here described will not be seen by the Church, for the Church will have been raptured to heaven seven years before. The posttribulationist, however, believes that there is but one future coming of Christ and this glorious coming will be witnessed by Christ's own here on earth. In support of this view they point out the distinction between “they” and “your” in Luke 21:26-28. Jesus is speaking to His followers. He says “they”, that is, men in general, will be terrified by the frightening portents of that day, but “you” (My followers) should lift up your heads because “your” redemption draweth nigh. This will be the day when the redemption begun at Calvary will be completed. Since there were earthquakes and fearful signs the day of the Cross, the day of redemption, the greatest day of blessing the earth has known, it is not inconceivable that the future day when redemption is completed will also be marked by astounding disturbances in the natural world. Since by the Cross Jesus has delivered us from the wrath to come, He will snatch up His own to meet Him in the clouds on that final day just before His wrath will descend upon His rejectors.

Peter describes a coming day (2 Pet. 3:10-13) when the earth burns up and the heavens disappear with a great noise. If you hold the amillennial position you will interpret this as occurring on the same day as has just been described. If you believe in an earthly millennium, you will place this final destruction 1000 years later at the end of Christ’s earthly reign.

4. CLOUDS Mt. 24:30 Mt. 26:64 Mk. 13:26
    Mk. 14:62 Lk. 21:27 Rev. 1:7

In four books of the New Testament we find that there are six verses that plainly state Christ will appear in clouds at His second advent. It would seem that God anticipated there would be some who would spiritualize the prophecies that speak of His return and therefore warned us against this by arranging to have two angles appear immediately after His ascent to heaven who said Jesus would return “in like manner” as He left the earth (Acts 1:9-11). This would seem to necessitate literal clouds.

A modern novelty of interpretation held by a few students is that the “clouds” are to be regarded as “clouds of believers,” basing the view on the term, “cloud of witnesses,” which appears in Heb. 12:1, which, incidentally, is not a prophetic passage. The Greek term nephos, meaning “cloud,” is found only in Heb. 12:1 in the New Testament. According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, it is the general term for “cloud,” referring to “the great shapeless collection of vapor obscuring the heavens.” The usual word for “cloud” is nephele which occurs 25 times in the New Testament, and means a particular and definite mass of vapor “suggesting form and limit.” While this modern view of “clouds” may be possible as far as the Greek is concerned, it seems most unlikely to most scholars in view of that angelic prediction couched in the words, “in like manner.” Of course all must agree that Christ will be accompanied by the host of believers who previously have died and are returning to receive resurrection bodies.

Strangely enough, several large modern books on prophecy whose Scripture indices contain hundreds of verses ignore Mt. 26:64 where Jesus says to the high
priest Caiaphas: “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man ... coming in the clouds of heaven.” I believe, with Bishop J. C. Ryle, Jesus was not referring to Caiaphas as an individual but to the Jews as a people, and surely the “us” in v. 63 would support this view. Further support is found in Rev. 1:7 which specifically states that those who pierced Christ (the Jews) will see Him.

5. VISIBLE TO ALL Mt. 24:26-7, 30 Mt. 26:64
   Mk. 14:62 Lk. 17:22-4 Jn. 3:2

Although Jesus will land on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), His coming will be witnessed by all men on the earth. Since men by their inventive genius have already made it technically possible for all men around the world to witness an event at one time, we need not be concerned as to the means God will employ to enable all to see the descending Christ. Christ said His coming will be like the lightning that flashed across the horizon. While some regard this as emphasizing the suddenness of His coming, it seems more logical to believe the emphasis is on its visibility by all. This view is supported by the context, for Jesus had just warned of the error that may be promulgated in the last days that His coming will be in secret (Mt. 24:26). One danger involved in this error is that if some uninstructed believers are told the Church has been secretly raptured to heaven, they will be overwhelmed by the thought they have missed it. John tells us we shall see Jesus in that day “as He is.” No longer will we need to depend upon our imagination concerning what our Lord looks like, nor upon certain ancient traditions.

6. THE DEPARTED BELIEVERS RETURN WITH CHRIST 1 Thes. 3:13 1 Thes. 4:14 Jude 14

Paul tells us that accompanying Jesus from heaven will be all His saints who have been sleeping in Jesus, that is, upon death, their spirits went to be with Christ. Jude emphasizes the number, “ten thousands”, which means in the Greek an unlimited number. It is the rendering of the Greek word μυριας from which we get our English word “myriads.” Their spirits return for the purpose of resurrection.

7. TRUMPET Mt. 24:31 1 Thes. 4:16 1 Cor. 15:52

Not only will this climactic event appeal to sight but also to sound. Angels scatter around the earth to gather the elect to the accompaniment of “a great sound of a trumpet.” (Mt. 24:31). This is designated by Paul “the trumpets of God” (1 Thes. 4:16). The great resurrection chapter, 1 Cor. 15, says the “last trumpet” will sound and the dead will rise from their graves (v. 52). According to Isa. 27:13 “the great trumpet” will be blown and Israel will be gathered to Jerusalem. Very likely this will be in preparation for Israel’s salvation in that day (Rom. 11:26).

8. SHOUT 1 Thes. 4:16

Paul says the Lord descends with a “shout.” The context speaks of the resurrection of the saints, the shout suggests the means of awakening them from their long “sleep.” Death is spoken of as “sleep” (1 Thes. 4:14). The term “shout” is the translation of an old word meaning a military command.

Shouting has long been a means of getting attention—from the small child to the rabble rouser. Shouting may be the natural expression of deep feeling—from lyric joy to extreme pain. When Christ, who has been studiously ignored by the masses of men, returns to earth to deal with all mankind, He will catch the ear of every soul and thus make it clear that God will no longer be pushed aside but insist upon enforcing His righteous will. When the Lord shouts in that coming day, the Jericho walls that men have erected to exclude God from their lives will come tumbling down in final and irreparable ruin, and God’s idea of a kingdom of righteousness will become a reality. As Balaam expressed it from Mt. Pisgah: “And the shout of a King is among them.” “God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent; Hath He said and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19, 21b) The traditional meekness of the Lamb now gives way to the majesty of the King.

9. IN POWER AND GLORY Mt. 24:30 Mt. 25:31
   Mt. 26:64 Mk. 13:26 Mk. 14:62 Lk. 21:27
   2 Thes. 1:9 Ti. 2:13 1 Pet. 4:13 1 Pet. 5:1
If it took enormous earth-shaking power to launch three men on their flight to the moon, think of the power display when Christ, accompanied by “armies” of angels and millions of believers, comes down the heavens to earth! What the precise nature of this power is we do not know.

Not only will there be an impression of enormous power but an unprecedented display of divine glory. The night of man’s ripened evil and rebellion will become dazzling with an outburst of divine glory, the glory of Christ who is the Light of the world.

Peter wrote (1 Pet. 5:1) he expects to be a “partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.” In what sense will he be a partaker of the glory? As a winner of souls he will share Christ’s glory, according to 2 Thes. 1:10! When Christ comes He will be “glorified in His saints.”

I once heard G. Campbell Morgan say: “The grace of God had its epiphany at Christ’s first coming; glory will have its epiphany at His second coming.” If by faith we receive the grace, we shall share in the glory.

10. CHRIST COMES IN FIRE 2 Thes. 1:7-8
Rev. 1:14 (2:18; 19:12)

Fire in the Bible is associated with the glorious presence of God and with His anger against unrighteousness. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and on the summit of Sinai. The risen Christ appeared to John with flaming eyes. At the second advent Christ will appear in the midst of fire as He comes to take vengeance on those who have opposed Him and persecuted His followers. At the same advent He is said to bring “rest” to believers (2 Thes. 1:7) as He is “glorified in His saints” (v. 10).

I believe some have misinterpreted John the Baptist’s prophecy of Christ’s first coming when He would baptize people with the Holy Spirit, adding He would also baptize with fire. Some suppose a baptism with fire is the same thing as being baptized by the Spirit. But the context clearly distinguishes between the Spirit-baptized “wheat” that will be gathered into the Lord’s garner and the unbelieving chaff which will be burned up with “unquenchable fire.” (Mt. 3:11-12).

Obviously the baptism of fire takes place at the second advent, not during the present age of grace. Christ’s appearing in fire clearly points to judgment. At the second advent Christ first gathers His own, the wheat, to be with Him, then deals in judgment with the unrighteous. Fire will also be a means of testing the works of men (1 Cor. 3:13-15), but not literal fire, of course. The works pleasing to God will abide and receive reward.

11. CHRIST COMES ON A WHITE HORSE
Rev. 19:11

John sees Christ leaving heaven for earth riding on a white horse. In ancient times a white horse was symbolic of victory. Our Lord is pictured as a royal commander followed by a dazzling retinue. We are told His purpose is to institute His righteous judgment of men. No longer is He in the form of the meek and suffering Lamb. He comes to deal in force with the antichristianity which will have become so firmly entrenched on the earth at the end of the age. The ungodly will be consigned to a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Only He who is “Faithful and True” is qualified to deal with the end-time deceivers of men.

12. HEAVEN’S ARMIES FOLLOW CHRIST ON WHITE HORSES Rev. 19:14

Not only is Christ pictured riding down the heavens on a white horse but He is followed by the “armies” of heaven mounted also on white horses, the symbols of victory. The followers are clothed in pure white but their Leader’s cloak is stained with blood for He alone has experienced earthly conflict culminating on the Cross. Some, however, claim it is not His own blood but the blood of His enemies who are soon to feel the heavy hand of judgment.

Some scholars think the “armies” consist of the elect from among men who after death went to heaven. Others prefer to regard the “armies” as angels. This latter view may be substantiated by Rev. 12:7 which speaks of two armies in heaven, one led by Michael and the other by the dragon. Since the scene in Rev.
19 is highly symbolical, we must not be dogmatic in its interpretation.

13. CROWNS UPON CHRIST'S HEAD Rev. 19:12

John sees Christ coming down from heaven with many crowns on His head. John had seen the red dragon, Satan, with seven crowns on his seven heads (Rev. 12:3) and the beast from the sea with ten crowns on his ten horns, representing Satan-authorized regal power over ten nations (Rev. 13:1). But the “many” crowns on Christ’s head would suggest His regal authority extends not only over the earth but all sections of the universe, for He claimed “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.” We recall that Satan wanted to assign Christ power over all kingdoms (Matt. 4:8-10) at the time of Christ’s temptation in the wilderness but Christ properly refused, preferring to wait for this authority to be given Him by God the Father.

14. SWORD PROCEEDS FROM CHRIST’S MOUTH Rev. 19:15 Isa. 11:4 Jn. 12:48
Jn. 18:5-6 Heb. 4:12

The sword that proceeds from Christ’s mouth is not a literal sword, of course, but symbolic of His Word which, according to Heb. 4:12, is “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.” When Christ’s Word is heard by His enemies in that last day they will be convicted of their sin of disbelief and disobedience.

15. RESURRECTION 1 Thes. 4:16 1 Cor. 15:51-52
Rev. 20:4-6

All down the centuries men have raised the question voiced by Job., “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 11:14a). Daniel believed in resurrection, as expressed in Dan. 12:2 (“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”) Daniel does not make it clear whether there will be a general resurrection of both righteous and unrighteous or two separate resurrections.

Bible students do not agree concerning the number of resurrections, some teaching but one, others two, and others three. The Amillennialist, not believing in the earthly millennial kingdom, believes in one general resurrection of all men. The Posttribulationist believes there will be two resurrections, pointing to Rev. 20:4-6 which states there will be two, separated by 1000 years of the kingdom. He also sees hints of two resurrections in other passages such as Lk. 20:35 which speaks, literally, of a resurrection out of the midst of the dead, implying not all the dead are raised at once.

The Pretribulationist believes in three resurrections: the “first” resurrection of Rev. 20:5, the second resurrection that follows the millennium, and a “first” some seven years prior to the “first” mentioned in Rev. 20. This takes place before the great tribulation at the coming of Christ to take away the Church. Although in no place in the New Testament does it state there will be a coming and resurrection prior to the tribulation, their belief that the Church will not be in the tribulation necessitates this assumption. They cannot think of the “first resurrection” of Rev. 20:5 being actually the first because there it states that martyrs under the antichrist, who is the chief figure in the tribulation, share in the “first resurrection” which would make it necessary for them to believe in the Church passing through the tribulation.

My personal conviction is that to assume a first resurrection takes place before the “first resurrection” explicitly referred to in Scripture is a case of adding to Scripture which, according to Rev. 22:18, carries with it a very severe penalty, if deliberate. The only New Testament passage that gives any time reference to the second advent of Christ in relation to the tribulation is Matt. 24:29-30 which explicitly places the coming of Christ after the tribulation. Doctrine must be based on clear affirmations of Scripture, not upon human inferences which may be right or wrong. Once you have a clear statement of Scripture, there is nothing wrong with reinforcing it with other passages that have inferential value only.

16. ANGELS Mt. 16:9 Mt. 24:31 (Mk. 13:27)
Mt. 25:31 1 Thes. 4:16 2 Thes. 1:7
The angels who accompany Christ to earth at His second advent are described as “holy” and “mighty”. None will be left in heaven for we are told that “all” of them will come (Mt. 25:31). Their function will be to separate the wicked from among the just at the end of the age (Mt. 13:49) and to gather together Christ’s elect to rise and meet Him in the air (Mt. 24:31). This tremendous occasion will be marked by sound as well as sight. The voice of the archangel (chief angel) will be heard. Jude in v. 9 tells us his name is Michael and that on one occasion he had an argument with the devil concerning the body of Moses.

Perhaps as Michael comes sailing down the heavens with Christ he will shout defiance at the devil whose modern Sodom and Gomorrah are ripe for judgment. In view of the moral collapse of modern times (I just read that my alma mater, Columbia University, is very likely going to have coeducational dormitories as have some other colleges already!) one wonders how much longer the patience of God will endure these modern Sodomites who are increasingly contaminating modern life with their filthy hedonism.

17. SEPARATION OF BELIEVERS FROM UNBELIEVERS Mt. 13:49 Mt. 24:40-41 Matt:25:32-33 Lk. 3:17 Lk. 17:29-37

When Christ appears in the sky the angels accompanying Him will proceed ahead of Him to the earth to separate Christ’s own from those who do not belong to Him. As examples, two will be laboring together in a field, two will be at a grinding mill, two will be in bed. One will be taken to meet Christ and the other left behind. It will be like separating wheat from chaff (Lk. 3:17) and good fish from bad fish (Mt. 13:48-50). Those left behind are left for judgment. The form of the judgment is described in Mt. 13:50 as being cast into a furnace of fire.

In two passages in the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24:37-40 and Lk. 17:26-30) we are told there is a parallel between what happened at the Noahic flood and the destruction of Sodom and the coming of Christ. First Noah and his family were in a place of security and then the judgment overwhelmed the rest. First Lot escaped from Sodom and then the same day the city was destroyed by fire. And Jesus adds: “Thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.” (Lk. 17:30). In the light of this verse, it seems to the post-tribulationist beyond question that Christ will deal with both the just and the unjust on the very same day when He returns, with no seven-year interval between.

There is a statement in Mt. 13:39 the significance of which has probably been missed by many. We are told “... at the end of the age the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just.” It doesn’t say the unjust will be taken out of an ungodly world system although this is true. It says the wicked will be taken out of the midst of the just! In other words, some of the wicked will have infiltrated the Church. Apparently it is not enough to have one’s name on a church roll or even to attend once in a while.

18. ANGUISH AMONG UNBELIEVERS Mt. 24:30 1 Thes. 5:3, 9 Rev. 1:7

The emotional reaction at the sight of the returning Christ will be simply indescribable. Among unbelievers there will be the utmost in anguish. We are told all tribes of the earth will mourn (Mt. 24:30), all kindreds of the earth shall wail (Rev. 1:7) and there will be sudden destruction and wrath (1 Thes. 5:3, 9), from which there will be no escape. They will make a try at it (Rev. 6:15-17), rushing to hide in caves and calling on the mountains to fall on them. The latter will not be unrealistic for the context just described the mountains as moving about. Suicide will not be a means of guilty man sidestepping the wrath of His Maker.

19. REJOICING AMONG BELIEVERS 2 Cor. 1:14 1 Pct. 4:13

In sharpest contrast to the state of the unbelievers, the believers are filled with great joy in knowing they will momentarily meet Christ. They will also rejoice in the people who had led them to receive Christ, even as they will rejoice in those whom they have brought
to Christ (2 Cor. 1:14). The joy will be in sharpest contrast to some of their previous experiences brought on by their identification with Christ by faith which involved being partakers of Christ's sufferings (1 Pet. 4:19).

20. BELIEVERS LEAVE TO MEET CHRIST IN THE AIR Jn. 14:2-3 Col. 3:4 1 Thes. 4:17
2 Thes. 1:10 Rom. 8:18-19

Living believers together with resurrected believers will rise up to meet Christ in the air, a levitation that defies the law of gravitation. This is made possible by instantly being given new bodies which are adapted to the spiritual realm. Our physical bodies at the resurrection are not replaced with new physical bodies. The new spiritual bodies will evidently have properties like that of Christ's body after His resurrection. They will be visible and yet can disappear at will. They will be able to rise up into the air to meet Christ without jet or other human-developed propulsion.

And who can describe the thrill of meeting the One who once hung on a cross for our redemption? We have met with Him in our church assemblies for He promised to be in the midst of every worshiping group however small. But this meeting in the air will include all believers of all the ages and Christ will be visibly present.

Christ has been preparing a place in the heavens for His own. Once it is complete, He returns to receive them that thereafter they might always be with Him. (Jn. 14:2-3). Christians in their sufferings for Christ have often been treated as the scum of the earth. Their true dignity as sons of God is not recognized. But when Christ comes He will be glorified in His saints (2 Thes. 1:10) who in that final day will be unveiled as sons of God and part of the royalty of heaven. How can we help constantly praying that last prayer in the Bible? ("Even so, come, Lord Jesus.")

21. CHRIST DESTroys THE "MAN OF SIN"
2 Thes. 2:8

According to 2 Thes. 2, in Paul's day there were some who, claiming to speak in Paul's name, were spreading the story that the second advent was near or present. Paul sternly warns his readers not to let themselves be deceived since that day cannot come until two things take place, the falling away or apostasy from the faith on the part of many and the unveiling of the "man of sin" (Lit. lawlessness) who will blasphemously claim divine honors, supporting his claims by Satanic power which enables him to produce signs and lying wonders. This man is commonly identified by Bible scholars with the "antichrist", mentioned by John in his first and second epistles.

Christ will come from heaven and instantly deal with this Satanic "antichrist", consuming him with the "spirit of His mouth" and destroying him by the "brightness of His coming." The "spirit of His mouth" is very likely another way of referring to His powerful Word, as pictured in Rev. 19:15 by a sharp sword that proceeds from His mouth.

Once Christ has dealt in judgment with all who have vigorously opposed His dominion over the lives of men, He will proceed to establish His righteous kingdom on earth, the kingdom for which believers have long been praying in the Lord's Prayer — "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
CHAPTER 3

THE TIME OF THE SECOND ADVENT

There are about 38 verses in the New Testament that make some time reference to the second advent. In some the teaching is clear. In others it is so vague as to have occasioned considerable controversy among Bible scholars. Time has to do with the event, whether it is sudden, brief, or a protracted process. Time also has to do with the relation of the second advent to other unfulfilled prophecies. One should not hastily base a conclusion on one or a few passages but take all of them into consideration in an effort to make a rational harmonization.

THE SPECIFIC DAY AND HOUR

A. KNOWN ONLY TO GOD THE FATHER

Mt. 24:36 “But of that day and hour knoweth no man... but My Father only.”

B. NOT KNOWN TO

1) ANGELS Mt. 24:36 “... no, not the angels of heaven...”

2) CHRIST Mk. 13:32 “But of that day and that hour knoweth... neither the Son.”

3) MEN Mk. 13:55 “... ye know not when the Master... cometh, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning.”

Mt. 24:42 “... ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

Mt. 24:44 “... in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.” Could this suggest that if men are foolish enough to set a time, we may be sure it will not be then?

Lk. 12:46 “The Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and at an hour when he is not aware...” The reference is to the unfaithful servant. See Rev. 9:5.

1 Thes. 3:2-5 “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child: and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” Evidently the unbeliever who makes no profession of being a servant of Christ will be totally surprised as by a thief’s coming. Plainly the coming as a thief does not apply to those who are watchful and ready, the “children of the day.”

HOW MUCH TIME WILL BE CONSUMED BY THE ADVENT?

A. “QUICKLY” Rev. 3:11 Rev. 22:7, 12, 20

The Greek word means either “quickly” or “soon.” In the light of the centuries that have elapsed since that word was spoken, and still Christ has not come, the meaning “quickly” seems inevitable. Once He starts from heaven the coming will be speedy. The same Greek word is rendered “shortly” in Rev. 22:6 where is seems to carry the meaning of “soon”, referring not to Christ’s advent but to “the things which are” in chapters 2 and 3, the present church activities. However, we would not labor this point.

B. “SUDDENLY” Mk. 13:35-36. “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.” Does it mean “quickly” or “without warning?” Very likely the latter, since the context urges watchfulness. The mention of “evening” etc. suggests the signs have appeared and the coming may be a matter of only hours or minutes. If so, in this case “watch” means more than just watching for the signs.

Some have read the meaning of “suddensness” into the phrase “like lightning” in Mt. 24:27. But the context makes it clear it is not primarily the suddenness of lightning that is referred to there but rather the visibility of the advent to all men. Christ had just stated His will not be a secret coming involving or known only by a few, and then He uses the lightning to illustrate His point. According to Rev. 1:7 “Every eye shall see Him.”

RELATION OF THE ADVENT TO JUDGMENT

Acts 2:34-35 “For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.” (See also Heb. 1:13; 10:12-13) Christ will not leave heaven until He comes to make His foes His footstool. Clearly, then, Christ’s coming will be immediately prior to the day of judgment.
RELATION OF THE ADVENT TO THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

Acts 3:20-21 “And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

It is pretty generally understood that “the restitution of all things” refers to the institution of the earthly kingdom. Peter states that heaven must hold Christ until He comes to set up His kingdom, the immediate preparation for which consists of His dealing with His enemies. He will first have to destroy the Satanic kingdom of Antichrist before He can set up His own kingdom. At this point the Posttribulationist finds one of his strongest arguments against the view that Christ will come first from heaven to snatch away His Church, pointing out that Christ cannot get out of heaven until He comes to set up His kingdom.

RELATION OF ADVENT TO THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Mt. 24:29-30 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun 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: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

His advent, then, follows the great tribulation. There is no equally clear statement in the New Testament in support of a coming prior to the tribulation. Human inferences may or may not be correct. If inferences do not jibe with plain statements, then obviously they are incorrect.

WAS THE ADVENT IMMINENT IN APOSTOLIC TIMES?

There are several passages that seem to teach this — not only momentarily imminent but certain to take place soon.

Rom. 13:12 “The night is far spent, the day is at hand . . . .”

Phil. 4:5 “. . . the Lord is at hand.”

Rev. 1:3 “. . . the time is at hand.”

Heb. 10:37 “For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

Jas. 5:8 “. . . the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

1 Jn. 2:18 “. . . it is the last time . . . even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time.”

1 Pet. 4:7 “The end of all things is at hand . . . .”

Mt. 24:34 “. . . This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” This verse creates no problem if we assume that by “this generation” Jesus referred to the generation living at the time of the second advent. Some suggest that the word “genera”, translated “generation,” is sometimes translated “family” or “race” and therefore may refer to Israel, as still existing at the advent.

Mt. 16:28 “. . . There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” It would seem the coming referred to here was the coming on the Mt. of Transfiguration which is described in the immediately following verses, or His spiritual coming at Pentecost.

Mt. 10:23 “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.”

In this context Jesus is giving orders to His disciples before sending them out on an evangelistic mission through Israel. The “end” mentioned in v. 22 may be the end of their journey when Christ will rejoin them. Some think the “end” in v. 22 refers to His coming at the Transfiguration. If the “end” in v. 22 refers to His second coming, then Christ was mistaken — a thoroughly unacceptable theory.

While the verses quoted do raise difficult questions of interpretation, they must not be allowed to set aside the clear teaching in other verses. Paul tells us that we “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). “Darkly” is the translation of a Greek word from
which we get the English word "enigma." Some day
the enigmas will all be solved.

Meanwhile we hold tenaciously to the blessed hope
of our Lord's coming, and we look for the signs that
will herald its near approach, and we shall make our-
selves ready by obeying His commands for a holy life
and sharing the Gospel with a lost world. Jesus re-
buked His enemies because they were ignorant of the
"signs of the times." One of the greatest needs of
ancient Israel was men who had "understanding of the
times." (1 Chron. 12:32).

Those with an inordinate curiosity concerning the
details of the prophetic plan should be reminded of
our Lord's reply to Peter when he asked whether John
would survive to the second advent. He said: "If I
will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?
Follow thou Me." The future will be determined by
the will of the Lord. Therefore we may well drop our
speculations and put first things first, such as pro-
claiming the Gospel. If Peter's first concern was to
"follow" Christ, it should likewise be ours today.

When the risen Christ met with His disciples the
latter asked if He planned to set up His kingdom at
that time. Jesus replied: "... It is not for you to know
the times or the seasons which the Father hath put
in His own power." (Acts 1:7). Then Christ proceeded
to give them His commission to evangelize the earth.
He did not mean to contradict what He had previously
said about "signs" in His Olivet Discourse, but first
things must come first. Detailed prophetic speculation
is a crime if the man next door is heading for hell and
we do nothing to give him a hope for eternity.

Dean Alford, one of the greatest evangelical schol-
ars of all time, in his "Greek Testament," discussing
Acts 1:7, asks: "What individual or portion of the
Church has ever read plainly these "times or seasons"
in that mysterious Book?" And he adds: "God has
them in his foreknowledge, and, while He announces
the events, conceals for the most part in obscurity the
'times.'"

In sharp contrast to the humility of Dean Alford
was another British Bible student, H. Grattan Guin-
CHAPTER 4

CONDITIONS AND EVENTS THAT SERVE AS SIGNS

The Bible foretells certain conditions that will characterize human society, the Church, and the cosmic system just prior to the second advent. These conditions will constitute signs of the imminency of the advent, serving as warnings to believers against compromise with an evil world system and encouragements to faithfulness in the midst of trials. Thus they are indicative of the Lord’s love and concern for His own.

While it is true that many of these predicted conditions have appeared ever since apostolic times, their significance as signs of the coming of Christ rests upon their virtually simultaneous appearance at one relatively brief period of time. Men down the ages have believed the second advent near because they fell into the error of thinking a few signs could settle the matter. Others have fallen into the error of believing that all the signs had appeared in their day. For example, Dr. Charles G. Trumbull of happy memory among evangelicals, late editor of the Sunday School Times, wrote in the edition of April 10, 1937: “The difference between this present day and earlier generations, when some of God’s people have mistakenly supposed that, because of certain signs, the end of the age was upon them and the Lord’s return was at hand, is simply this: in our generation for the first time since the risen Lord ascended to heaven, all the predicted major signs of the end of the age are synchronizing. (His italics). One or more of these signs have occurred in earlier generations; never before have they all occurred simultaneously, as we see them today.”

Well, if all the major signs were synchronizing a whole generation ago, why didn’t the Lord come? Obviously, the answer is, they were not all synchronizing. Dr. Trumbull lists some of the signs in the Olivet Discourse such as wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences but ignores the fact that Jesus proceeds to mention the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15) and an unprecedented tribulation (v. 21), neither of which has put in its appearance yet. In other words Dr. Trumbull was dogmatically following the precedents of so many of his predecessors which he deplores, assuming that “some” means “all.” We can perhaps understand why in the light of another statement in the same article. Speaking of the second advent he writes: “That last great event must be preceded by the rapture, or catching away of the Church to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51-54); therefore, if the signs of the Lord’s return in glory have begun to appear, His return for His Church is still nearer, and may be at any moment.” In other words, he believes in two future comings of Christ. Incidentally, the two references he gives to prove a coming for the Church before the “second” advent do not so much as mention two comings in such a historical relationship, nor is there anywhere in the New Testament a single verse that distinguishes between the rapture and the second advent. My position is that today there are many signs appearing which would indicate the second advent may be rapidly nearing but not all the signs our Lord gave are clearly present. We should be particularly careful to avoid the errors of the past as seen in the countless dogmatic statements that Christ’s coming is near.

There are some who object that, since the coming of Christ will be sudden, signs can have no practical value today to those looking for Christ. They claim we can know nothing concerning the time of our Lord’s return. And they would substantiate their claim by quoting from Acts 1:7 (“... It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power.”) Still, Christ had already given signs to His disciples, saying that when they would see these signs they would be sure His coming is near. To illustrate this He used the parable of the fig tree (Mt. 24:32-33). As the arrival of leaves indicates summer is near, so the signs will indicate the imminence of Christ’s return.

Some claim the signs are “Jewish”, that is, in-
tended only for Israel in the tribulation. To this S. P. Tregelles in his "The Hope of Christ’s Second Coming", pp. 66-68 (Ambassadors for Christ edition) replies: “If signs were ‘Jewish’, indicating the glorious appearing of the Messiah, since there is but one Christ, and His coming in glory is His promise to His Church, they would be of equal significance to us, for they would instruct us as much as they would Jews. But on what grounds are ‘signs’ said to be Jewish? Our Lord’s words are: ‘A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas.’ To the generation of Israel, rejecting the resurrection of Jesus (‘the sign of the prophet Jonas’) no sign shall be given. But the Lord has promised signs ... and these signs can only be for His believing people.”

So far from looking for the signs as a waste of time, the eminent Bible student, B. W. Newton, writes: “Attention to signs predicted in the Word of God is a duty ... it is the prescribed means to that watchfulness which should characterize the servants of Christ at His appearing.” (“Aids to Prophetic Inquiry,” p. 8).

One danger in the study of prophecy is that the Christian is tempted to become immobilized in the face of increasing world need for the Gospel. As Dr. Vance Havner has well said: “It is possible to sit on the shore discussing the signs of the times when we ought to be driven by the signs of the times to launch out into the deep and let down our nets for a draught ... After all, we do not actually believe any more than we are willing to put into practice.” (Moody Monthly, July 1940).

Still, it is important to know what conditions will be at the age-end. As Tregelles in his “Daniel” (p. 5) has written: “If I see from the Word of God that these things are to be, I shall be one of those who know these things beforehand, and this knowledge is to be used for my safeguard, that I be not carried away with the error of the wicked.”

In Heb. 10:25 we read: “... exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.” How can we see the day approaching apart from divinely-given signs of its nearness?

Following is my classification of the New Testament signs in eight principal classes. I make no claim this list is exhaustive.

A. SOCIAL UNREST

1. WIDESPREAL LAWLESSNESS Mt. 24:12

   2 Thes. 2:3, 7 2 Tim. 3:2 2 Pet. 2:10.

   In the last days of this age there will be a rapidly spreading spirit of rebellion against all proper constituted authority, whether the rightful authority of God over men, or the proper authority of men over each other. This spirit will find expression in complete disregard for the rights of others, in a crass moral breakdown, in blasphemous remarks about God, and widespread anarchy. 2 Tim. 3:2 (disobedience to parents). 2 Pet. 2:10 (walking after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness). Matt. 24:12 (widespread lawlessness). Jude 8 (Men will despise dominion and defile the flesh). 2 Thes. 2:3-10 (A man will appear just before Christ appears who is called “the man of sin” — literally, "the lawless one" who will claim to be God, and be the final Satanic incarnation of this lawless spirit. Christ will soon return and destroy him).

   Is such a spirit abroad in the world now? To ask the question is to answer it. One could fill volumes with evidence. The New York Times reported (June 26, 1965) that India’s trains are badly overcrowded, due in part to the fact that some thirty million passengers each year are traveling without tickets. They will often pull the alarm cord a few hundred yards before coming into a station and leap off. Conductors who demand tickets are physically assaulted. And what shall be said of the shameless conduct at rock music festivals? Or of a New York church that displayed on the platform a nude couple in tight embrace?


   Jesus said that the distress among men will result in an abject state of terror. They will lose all hope of better conditions being restored. Isaiah 35:4 is a word of encouragement to God’s people in that final
age: “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance; He will come and save you.”

3. GENERAL DISTRESS AND PERPLEXITY
1 Jk. 21:25

Jesus predicts there will be “distress of nations with perplexity.” All kinds of problems will be mounting up so that no way of escape seems possible. International conflicts will seem insoluble. Internal disorder will be beyond the powers of society to rectify. Today we find universities that find it difficult to fill the presidents’ chairs since campus problems interfere with the educational processes.

4. COVETOUSNESS 2 Tim. 3:2 2 Pet. 2:3, 14, 15  
Jas. 5:1-5 Rev. 3:17, 18 Lk. 17:26-30

Paul predicts that in the last days men will be lovers of self and lovers of money, since money is the primary means of satisfying selfish desires. According to James there will be, apparently, a concentration of wealth in the hands of a few who will have gained their wealth by withholding a just wage. Of course a love of money is not a mark of the rich alone. Men in general will think that money is the solution to all their problems. Christ exorciates the Laodicean church which is materially wealthy and thinks it needs nothing, whereas it is “poor, blind, and naked,” so far as true spiritual wealth is concerned. Are there any churches of that type today? Jesus predicted that in the last days men will be preoccupied with materialistic interests, even as they were in the days of Noah just prior to the judgment of the Flood.

5. PLEASURE-LOVING 2 Tim. 3:4 Jas. 5:5

While God wants men to be happy, there is a pleasure that is selfish and debilitating. A mark of men in the last days, according to Paul, will be a greater love for pleasure than for God. This pushing aside the will of God for selfish pleasure is certain to be fatal. James says the rich will live voluptuously or riotously, sparing no fleshy indulgence. Helen Gould Shepard once told me her sister had run up a bill of one million dollars at a certain Paris outfitters. This is a far cry from the dedicated wealth of Mrs. Shepard and of Robert LeTourneau who set aside nine-tenths of his estate for the work of Christ.

6. CLAMOR FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
1 Thes. 5:3

This craving for peace and security implies there will be actual and threatened wars. Or possibly, it should be interpreted that men will be rejoicing in a temporary synthetic peace brought about by the antichrist—a false peace that will be suddenly brought to an end by the coming of Christ in judgment.

At any rate, we do see determined efforts in our day to bring about international peace by men who do not know that the only genuine and lasting peace can be ushered in by the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

7. SELF-WILLED 2 Pet. 2:10

Men will be guilty of such complete self-will that they will have no fear of God. The context speaks of their submersion in a morass of immoral conduct. While there have been such people all down the centuries, this state of affairs will be specially marked in the last days of the age. In view of the pornographic publications flooding the world today, the increasing obscenity in what have previously been respectable magazines, the venereal disease that is reaching epidemic proportions in the larger cities, and the advocacy of the so-called “new morality” even by some churchmen, one can with difficulty withhold the belief that we are living in the closing period of this age.

Campus Crusade published in 1969: “Immorality as a practice is being widely accepted . . . Venereal diseases increased 232% in the 15- to 19-year-old group from 1957 to 1964 and has continued to increase. In spite of new contraceptives, pregnancy in most large high schools has increased nearly 40% in the last five years.” God has been amazingly patient with self-willed man, not willing that any fail to have an opportunity to be saved, but it does seem that time is running out and His judgment cannot be withheld much longer.

8. UNTHANKFUL 2 Tim. 3:2

Ingratitude is a mark of thoughtlessness. In the
increasing rush of life men don't know the wisdom of setting aside periods for thoughtful meditation on the meaning of life. We are not thankful for health until we lose it, then on a bed of illness we are forced to think. If with vast numbers of men God is no longer a live option, whom is there to thank?  

9. BRUTALITY  2 Tim. 3:3  
Since in the last days there will be a cooling of love we are not surprised to learn that men will be fierce and brutal in their conduct. Rauschning in his book, "The Voice of Destruction", p. 80, quotes Hitler: "We must shake off all sentimentality and be hard. Some day, when I order war, I shall not be in a position to hesitate because of the ten million young men I shall be sending to their death." This spirit is not confined to political dictators. The powerful Cosa Nostra gang in the United States doesn't hesitate to shoot anyone who refuses to bow to their will.  

Dr. Wilbur Smith in an article in the Sunday School Times of Jan. 29, 1949 quotes Dr. Willard L. Sperry of Harvard Divinity School who said it is his conviction "that the most sinister portent of our time is the renaissance of cruelty... The deliberate wholesale sanction of cruelty, which is gaining headway everywhere, is one of the reasons why this so-called period of peace is morally plague-ridden."  

The late Ernest Gordon in his column in the Sunday School Times quoted from a letter from a Baptist pastor in Russia, concerning conditions in the Nikoleyevsky district: "The population has died and their bodies have been eaten up. In Samara as soon as it gets dark it is best not to go out. They are kidnapping people with sacks and ropes, taking them home and making meat pies of them which they sell on the streets. Women disappear when going after water or to visit a neighbor. A physician called to attend the sick is overpowered and eaten by his patient." (Sept. 23, 1922).  

10. UNPRECEDENTED SUFFERING  Mt. 24:21, 22  
(Mark 13:19, 20)  
In our Lord's Olivet Discourse He answers the question of His disciples concerning the "sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age" (Mt. 24:8), by giving many signs that will indicate His return is near. One is a period of affliction and tribulation, unprecedented in history. It will be one sign of His soon return to establish His righteous kingdom on earth.  

This has been recognized by Bible scholars down the centuries including Tertullian of North Africa who in his writing against Marcion, Book IV, chapter 39, says: "These tribulations are the signs of the kingdom." Tertullian was converted about the year 185.  

11. FAMINES AND PESTILENCES  Mt. 24:7  
Mk. 13:8  Lk. 21:11  
The twentieth century, in spite of its agricultural advances, has seen some great famines. There was one in Russia in 1921. An article in Action Magazine, Nov. 1966, by Mrs. Phyllis H. Moehlle, assistant to the vice-president of the National Association of Manufacturers, states: "World population in the last five years has been growing twice as fast as food output... One billion people today, or a third of the world's population, are constantly hungry... One billion children, die daily of starvation... this adds up to 3,000,000 lives a year... The total appropriations to alleviate world starvation and misery are still only the smallest fraction of the sums used for atomic and rocket research."  

Because of a shortage of food, pestilences or diseases spread rapidly. This, the Bible tells us, will be a mark of the final days of the age before Christ returns.  

12. UNIVERSAL SORROW  Mt. 24:30  
By the time the final sign of the age-end appears, namely the sign of the Son of Man coming in the skies, universal anguish and sorrow will come to a peak. Jesus says all tribes or nations will be in the deepest mourning.  

B. ATTACK UPON CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIANS  
While Christianity has been bitterly opposed ever since it made its appearance on earth nearly two millennia ago, the close of its earthly history will be marked
by such sharp threats to both spiritual and physical security that many will no longer dare to wear the label "Christian." Even Christ once raised the question, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8b)

Many of the attacks in the last days will be of a very subtle kind, made even by men who profess the faith themselves! Therefore the situation will be specially dangerous for those who think of themselves as Christians when these attacks are launched by men who teach in their seminaries and preach from their pulpits. Now let us look at the methods they will use.

1. TIMES OF GREAT PERIL 2 Tim. 3:1

Paul warns that "in the last days perilous times shall come." They will be perilous not only for men in general but particularly for those who are genuine believers in Christ. This is emphasized as he proceeds to give details of those final days, mentioning among other things deception and persecution.

2. PRIDE 2 Pet 2:18 2 Tim. 3:2, 4 Jude 16 Jas. 4:6

1 Pet. 5:5

This is the basic human trait that leads men insanely to oppose God and His plan of salvation for men. In so doing they are virtually deifying themselves. This spirit will finally flower in the antichrist who will demand for himself the worship due alone to God.

George A. Dorsey writes in his "Hows and Whys of Human Behavior", p. 298: "All preceding civilizations have created or inherited a Savior and worshiped Him as God — and failed. Our civilization, to endure, must save itself." This writer claims to be a biologist and psychologist. Already men are saying what the ancient Jews said of Christ: "We will not have this Man to reign over us." Hating the claims of God and His Son upon their lives, they will be saying, in the words of the prophetic psalm, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us!" But they will find they are dealing with a powerful God, a God who "resisteth the proud" (Jas. 4:6 1 Pet. 5:5), and they will have to eat the "great swelling words" (Jude 16) that proud mouths will spout.

3. DESPISERS OF GOOD PEOPLE 2 Tim. 3:3

Good people have never been popular among God-haters and ungodly. We have heard the old story of how utterly miserable was a liquor dispenser who rushed down to the pier to go on an excursion with other men of his trade and got on the wrong boat, and had to spend the day with Christians on a Sunday School picnic. Good people make bad people utterly miserable. Christians will be a despised minority in the final days of this age.

4. CLOSED MINDS 2 Tim. 3:7, 8 2 Tim. 4:4

Paul warns that in the last days men of corrupt minds will "resist the truth" and will "turn away their ears from the truth" as they prefer fables. Their minds will be closed to truth because their hearts will be closed to the moral demands that divine truth makes.

5. FALSE PROPHETS AND FALSE CHRISTS

Mt. 24:11, 24 (Mk. 13:21, 22) Lk. 21:8

2 Thes. 2:3 2 Tim. 3:13 1 Tim. 4:1

We are told these false teachers and false christs will be very successful in their antichrist propaganda, deceiving large numbers of people, and will do their best to rob the very elect of their precious faith. However, in their successful deceiving others they will be caught in the web of self-deception (2 Tim. 3:13). Closing their ears to Christian teaching they will gladly receive the "doctrines of demons." (1 Tim. 4:1). Even the most poorly-informed reader is sure this portion of prophecy is being fulfilled in our day.

Many a college and seminary in America started out as a Christian institution. Today they no longer maintain even a nominal relationship with organized Christianity and certainly do not consistently believe in and teach the historic faith. The University of Chicago was established by God-fearing Baptists. Not only is it no longer a Baptist institution, it has men on the faculty who do not adhere to the Christian faith.

Some years ago Dr. Robert Hutchens, the presi-
dent, wrote a book entitled "The Higher Learning in America" in which he said the chief mark of education today is disorder. He said the present university has departments from "art" to "zoology" but neither student nor professor knows the relation of one departmental truth to another. What should be the principle of unity? he asks. He said the medieval university, chose theology on the assumption that only God gives meaning to the whole of truth. But he says we are living in other times. "Theology is based on revealed truth, and on articles of faith. We are a faithless generation and take no stock in revelation. To look to theology (knowledge of God) . . . is futile and vain." Well, where would he look? He would go back to the pagan philosophy of the Greeks. When such men arise within institutions that started out with an assured belief in God and Jesus Christ, you know the days of the "false prophet" predicted in the New Testament are with us today.

Dr. Will Herberg in his book "Judaism and Modern Man" quotes Sartre (p. 31) as saying "To be a man means to try to be God." Herberg comments: "And so this sober, self-possessed disillusionment consummates in the most monstrous illusion of all — in man's deification of himself." He says that Bertrand Russell's "A Free Man's Worship" "manages to convert a bleak, proud stoicism into an idolatrous cult. Its 'atheism', its renunciation of all gods, turns out, after all, to be no more than clearing the ground for the deification of man." (p. 31). And he adds: "Even the flattery of self-deification cannot forever seduce the human spirit; there are moments when man, looking within, knows that he is the last thing on earth worthy of worship." (p. 31).

False teaching has sometimes rejected certain Christian doctrines while still retaining belief in God. But when it becomes sheer atheism and self-deification it can go no farther. Does this suggest we may be living in the last days?

6. SCOFFERS AND MOCKERS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND ADVENT
2 Pet. 3:3, 4  Jude 18

Men will arise in the last days who with utter derision will ridicule the Bible teaching concerning the second advent of Christ to earth, saying "Where is the promise of His coming?" And for "proof" they fall back on their uniformitarian philosophy that assumes all things have continued as they were since the creation. But Peter would remind them that they are not only wrong about prophetic truth; they do not even prove a familiarity with history, overlooking the fact of the destructive deluge in Noah's day, adding that the next time God comes in judgment it will be with fire, not water.

Critics of the teaching of a second advent of Christ have appeared in the most unlikely places in our day, even in the churches of Christ. Speaking of the early disciples who thought Jesus would return soon, the Methodist senior Sunday School quarterly for Jan.-Mar. 1934 states: "It would not be long, they thought, until the Master Himself would return. There would be a divine intervention. God would break through into human experience in some marvelous way. The kingdom of goodwill would be supernaturally established. Even today there are thousands of devout souls who comfort themselves in the hope of the visible return of Christ among the clouds of heaven to make an end of evil."

God grant that our readers are among the "devout souls" who are anticipating the advent of our Lord on the clouds of heaven, even as He promised! And who else can make an end of evil?

7. PERSECUTION 2 Tim. 3:12 Mt. 24:9
Mk. 13:9, 12, 13  Lk. 21:12-17

Paul makes it clear that part of the peril of the last days will consist of persecution of those who "live godly in Christ Jesus." Although we have heard of open and violent persecution of believers in some countries in the twentieth century, the form that it takes today is generally more subtle, if not less bitter and determined. Paul recalls the afflictions he endured at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra and then triumphantly adds: "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." (2 Tim. 3:11). Jesus said His followers will be hated
by all nations "for My name's sake", but he that endures to the end shall be saved.

It is very likely that persecution will take a more violent form as the age comes to its end. Some today are even predicting that the Church will have to go "underground" some day in the United States as it did in the first two centuries in the Roman Empire. That is, its meetings will have to be in secret. Loyalty to Christ will really be put to the test. There will be a preliminary separating of the wheat from the tares before the final separation at Christ's return.

RESULTS OF ATTACK UPON CHRISTIANITY

1. APOSTASY FROM THE PROFESSED FAITH
   Lk. 18:8 2 Thes. 2:3 1 Tim. 4:1 2 Tim. 3:1-9, 11
   2 Tim. 4:3, 4

Those who would destroy the historic Christian faith use methods that are subtle and deceptive. Frequently they try to give the impression that no intelligent and educated person still adheres to these ancient doctrines.

That there is a noticeable departure from the faith today is proved by the results of a questionnaire submitted to delegates at the National Council of Churches' assembly at Miami Beach in December of 1966. According to Christianity Today (July 21, 1967) 33% were unable to say, "I know that God really exists and I have no doubts about it." 36% were unable to affirm, "Jesus is the divine Son of God and I have no doubts about it." Only 28% believed in the virgin birth of Christ.

We are not surprised there is a falling away from the faith in the light of Paul's prophecy in 2 Thes. 2:3. The Greek word there for "falling away", namely "apostasia", is recognized by practically every interpreter as meaning "rebellion." There are very few who accept the recent novelty of interpretation that it means the removal of the Church at the coming of Christ.

Lamentable as is the apostasy from the faith, we are assured that not all the professing Church will turn away. Did not Jesus say "The gates of hell shall not prevail against" the Church? Our primary obligation is to proclaim the Gospel until the end comes (Mt. 24:14) while we pray for the reclamation of the apostate.

2. COOLING LOVE Mt. 24:12

A fellow pastor told this writer that he has 1800 members on the roll of his church. The auditorium seats 300. There are two morning services, the first one filling the room, the second service sparsely attended. A few years ago a church of 4000 members in California built a new auditorium which only seats about 1800. Making allowances for the sick and infirm and students away at school, what can be said of the rest? As the age approaches its end and the persecution of the Church becomes more active, will it be surprising if the love of many more cools?

3. FORMALISM IN RELIGION 2 Tim. 3:5

If love for Christ cools off in the last days, is it surprising to learn that some worship will degenerate into mere formalism when men will have "a form of godliness but denying the power thereof?" We are reminded of our Lord's description of Pharisaic formalism in His day as He spoke of "whited sepulchres," "wells without water," trees without fruit, lamps without oil — a religion destitute of the Holy Spirit.

4. SECULARISM Lk. 17:26-31

As men find their love for Christ cooling and their attendance at church becoming more and more perfunctory, their primary interests are transferred from things spiritual and eternal to things secular and materialistic. Jesus said it will be as in the days of Noah and Lot when people were completely absorbed in eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and building, planting and reaping. God is pushed right out of His own universe. Such will be the picture in the closing days of this age.

5. LACK OF SELF-CONTROL, FLESHLY INDULGENCE 2 Tim. 3:3 1 Th. 21:34

With God safely (?) out of the way man will proceed to run his own life according to the dictates of his own desires. Paul tells us man will be "incontin-
ent," literally, "without strength" to resist what he himself knows is harmful. Jesus warns against overeating and drunkenness and preoccupation with the cares of this life lest the day of His coming catch them unawares.

One of the four major destroyers of life in the United States today is alcoholism. We are told that half the male population of Chile are alcoholics or on the way to becoming alcoholics. It was recently reported that an English pastor has opened a bar next to his church near Bemerton, England!

6. IRREVERENCE Jude 8, 10 2 Pet. 2:10
Jude tells of men who will "speak evil of dignities" and "of those things which they know not." They will have no more spiritual sensitivity than wild beasts and "will utterly perish in their own corruption." Many modern youth seem rapidly to be fitting this description. Outbreaks of hepatitis in hippy camps and heavy drug addiction with its mentally and physically destructive consequences might suggest we are fast approaching the days predicted by the prophets if we are not already in those days. At family devotions I saw some verses that are descriptive of the hippies today: "They toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!" I know those verses are applied to flowers, but don’t the hippies call themselves the "flower children?"

7. SPIRITISM 1 Tim. 4:1
When God, the true Spirit of the universe, is ejected from the house of man’s soul, other spirits from Satan will come to occupy the empty house. Paul says, as some depart from the faith they will give attention to "seducing spirits and doctrines of demons." The late bishop James Pike is an example of what can happen to one who no longer accepts the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Just before his tragic death when lost in the wilderness of the Jordan he displayed an avid interest in spiritism. The "spirits" assured Mrs. Pike he was still alive but his dead body was found on a rock. When the historic Christ is abandoned, Satan has his chance to take over the soul. Yes, when Christianity is attacked, many and tragic are the results for those who refuse to remain loyal to Jesus Christ.

D. WORLDWIDE MISSION ACTIVITY
Matt. 24:14
Concurrently with a departure from the faith on the part of many within the organized church there will be a great acceleration of mission activity throughout the world on the part of the minority that will remain true to Christ. This is becoming very pronounced in these days as new missions are formed to reach neglected fields and new methods are being employed to get out the Gospel with dispatch, thanks to developments in the realm of science. The Bible is rapidly being translated into the languages of the world. Powerful Christian radio stations are being built which broadcast the message of life in many languages across the physical barriers that men have erected.

Jesus predicted that when this work of evangelization has been completed, the end of the age will come, marked by His own coming on the clouds of heaven. This should be a tremendous spur to all true believers to give with renewed sacrifice that the Lord’s commission may rapidly be completed. It should also deter Christians from investing huge sums in unnecessarily plush church edifices that there may be more for Gospel proclamation. Just think! It is in our hands to hasten the Lord’s return!

E. RESTORATION OF ISRAEL TO PALESTINE
Lk. 21:24
Jesus said Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Surprisingly enough this seems to be the only reference in the New Testament to the state of Israel in a context of prophecy relating to Christ’s return with the exception of Romans 11:26, and in this instance in Luke’s report of the Olivet Disclosure the restoration seems implied rather than clearly stated. However, there are Old Testament supporting passages,
the study of which does not come within the purview of this book. I would recommend that the reader consult Dr. Arthur W. Kac's "The Rebirth of the State of Israel" (Moody Press) which is a very illuminating discussion of Israel in the light of prophecy.

F. COSMIC SIGNS


These cosmic signs will take place just prior to the Lord's descent from heaven, indicating the end of the age is close at hand. Interest in the moon in modern times has been greatly stimulated by man's landing on the moon. While some scientists are studying moon dirt in the search for some signs of life, some are blind to the God of creation. The Wall Street Journal of July 16, 1969 reports Dr. Robert Jastrow as saying that the study of moon dirt may hold the key to understanding the first billion years of the 4.5 billion year history of the solar system. Dr. Jastrow, the physicist who has been heading the Goddard Institute of Space Studies, is quoted as saying: "Since this same billion-year period is the interval in which, according to the fossil record (of later years) life appeared on the earth, the interest attached to this question goes beyond the boundaries of the physical sciences." The article continues: "Better knowledge of the conditions that existed on the primeval earth could help them to establish the conditions under which nonliving chemicals could coalesce into the complex molecules that form the basis of living matter."

While the above statement may not completely eliminate God from the universe, it seems to me that such theorizing makes it extremely difficult to detect Him through the cracks of such a world-view.

When finally the sun and moon are darkened there will be no time for scientists to make a study of the phenomenon, for Christ will promptly appear in the heavens as He begins His descent to earth.

2. STARS FALLING Mt. 24:29 Mk. 13:25 Lk. 21:25 Rev. 6:13

With sun and moon darkened it will be dark indeed, the better to see the stars that will be falling.

3. POWERS OF HEAVEN SHAKEN Mt. 24:29 Mk. 13:25 Rev. 6:14

Unimaginable convulsions in the heavens will impress men that "God is not dead," and He is about to engage in His final controversy with men.

G. CONVULSIONS IN NATURE ON EARTH

1. EARTHQUAKES Mt. 24:7 Mk. 13:8 Lk. 21:11 Rev. 6:12

2. MOUNTAINS AND ISLANDS MOVE Rev. 6:14

3. ROARING SEA AND WAVES Lk. 21:25

Everything that happens in that final day is calculated to awaken awe and wonder to prepare men for their final confrontation with God.

G. THE LAST SIGN

1. SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN IN HEAVEN Mt. 24:30

This sign will appear after the cosmic disturbances. It is not just clear what will be the nature of this sign. Possibly there will be an opening in the heavens or clouds and a burst of heavenly glory surrounding the person of the Son of God who proceeds to earth.

First He will gather together His own who will be caught up to meet Him in the air. When a large magnet is lowered over steel filings in a box of sand, they become agitated and start to quiver. They seem almost conscious of something attracting them upwards. When the magnet gets nearer they leap out of the sand to meet it according to the strange law of magnetism. And so when Christ's coming is near, His people will know He is at hand as they see the predicted culminating signs reaching fulfillment. Jesus said to His own: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." (Lk. 21:28)
CHAPTER 5

EFFECTS OF THE SECOND ADVENT
UPON MEN

The coming of Christ from heaven will have sensational and far-reaching effects upon all men, both Christians and nonbelievers. Man’s long period of probation will be at an end and his final destiny will be consummated.

A. EFFECTS UPON BELIEVERS

1. WILL BECOME LIKE CHRIST 1 Jn. 3:2, 3

When Christ appears there will be a two-fold change in the Christian. The first will be a bodily change to fit him for his new eternal existence. If he will have died before that event, he will receive a resurrection body. If not, his living body will suddenly be transformed to correspond with the resurrection body, (1 Cor. 15:51-53) a body not subject to death.

The second change will be an inner spiritual change that will conform the soul to the moral perfection of Christ. According to John, those who entertain this hope are already enjoying the purifying effect of the presence of Christ, the completion of which will come when Christ comes.

2. THE CHURCH OF THE AGES WILL BE
UNIFIED Eph. 1:10

Paul envisages the day when God will gather together all who are in Christ, when the heavenly and earthly branches of the Church will be merged at the second advent. The spirits of the dead will return with Christ and receive new bodies, and, together with those who will have lived to the advent on earth, will be caught up in one great body of the redeemed to meet the descending Christ in the sky.

Christ’s prayer for the Church (John 17:21, 24) was basically two-fold. First He prayed that “they all may be one.” For what purpose? “That the world may believe that Thou has sent Me.” The spiritual unity of believers in a manifested mutual concern and love is the strongest evangelistic thrust the Church can make upon an unbelieving world. This oneness is primarily spiritual, not organizational.

Christ also prayed that believers “might be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.” This prayer will be fully and finally answered at His second advent.

3. COMPLETION OF CHURCH’S REDEMPTION
OR SALVATION 1 Pet. 1:5,9 1 Thes. 5:9
2 Pet. 3:15 1 Pet. 1:13 Eph. 1:14 Eph. 4:30
Phil. 1:6

The salvation or redemption of the Church is consummated in two comings of Christ from heaven. First He came and died, shedding His blood for our sins. But the saving process will reach completion at the “revelation” (1 Pet. 1:13) or unveiling of Christ at His second advent. All who will have received through faith salvation from the guilt of sin will also receive the final salvation from the very presence of sin when Christ comes the second time. This is guaranteed to all true believers in Christ by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Thus God takes it upon Himself to guarantee the eternal security of the believer. He who has begun a good work in us will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6).

4. REST FOR ALL BELIEVERS 2 Thes. 1:7-10

While the experience of the Christian on earth is filled with deep joy, at the same time there is a degree of suffering involved in the relationship with the One who was the “Man of sorrows” and acquainted with grief. To be misunderstood, maligned, opposed, and even persecuted is not pleasant. But the true Christian has the hope that relief and rest will come when Christ comes. Paul makes it clear that Christ’s advent will spell the end of trouble for the believer who will enter into rest even as it will be the beginning of real trouble for all Christ-rejectors and particularly for all who have caused Christians trouble. According to this passage in 2 Thes. Christ will deal with His friends and His enemies at the same advent.
5. BELIEVERS WILL BE FOREVER WITH CHRIST 1 Thes. 4:17

Paul assures us that once we are caught up to meet the returning Christ in the skies we shall evermore be in His presence. This will be the full realization of the gift of eternal life. According to Christ, eternal life is primarily the process of becoming acquainted with God and His Son. Since they are infinite beings, it will involve an infinite amount of time to become acquainted with them, hence eternal or unending life. (John 17:3).

6. CHRISTIANS WILL REJOICE IN EACH OTHER 2 Cor. 1:14 1 Thes. 2:19-20

Christians today do not always rejoice in each other because we are conscious of each other's failings but a day is coming when our weaknesses will be a thing of the past and Christian fellowship will be perfected. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that it made him happy to know of their rejoicing in him and what he had done to bring them into the light. He added that it will be a thrilling day for him when he sees them, the fruit of his evangelistic labors, caught up with him to meet the returning Christ. And I may add, that will be a specially rewarding day for all of us who will have brought others to Christ.

B. EFFECTS UPON UNBELIEVERS

1. CHRIST WILL BE ASHAMED OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN ASHAMED OF HIM Mark 8:34-38 Lk. 9:26

Speaking to a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers, Christ made it clear that a decision to follow Him involves a complete renunciation of selfish ambition. He asks how one can possibly compare the value of the soul with material values. He who believes that money is the chief thing to be desired will shie away from Christ and be ashamed to welcome His sovereignty over his life. But a day is coming when Christ will return and be ashamed of him.

2. JUDGMENT 1 Thes. 5:2-4 2 Thes. 1:7-10

It will be a tragic day for all who have felt quite comfortable in a state of estrangement from Christ when the Lord suddenly confronts them at His coming in power and glory. The "peace and safety" of man's devising will become suddenly shattered and they will face "destruction" that is both "sudden" (1 Thes. 5:3) and "everlasting" (2 Thes. 1:9).

C. EFFECTS UPON ISRAEL

1. SALVATION Rom. 11:26 Acts 3:19-20

In the final day the Jews will see the signs and as a nation become convinced that Jesus Christ is their true Messiah after all. As they repent of their sins they will be cleansed of ungodliness and made ready to welcome Christ.

These will indeed be "times of refreshing" as they are brought out of age-long darkness, rejection and suffering to complete commitment of their lives to the Savior.
CHAPTER 6

PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND ADVENT

Since the coming of Christ and related events constitute the supreme hope of the Christian, it is obvious that he should make the most thorough moral and spiritual preparation for this climactic culmination of the ages. Men have withheld neither effort nor expense in their scientific exploration of space. Should Christians be any less dedicated as they look forward to joining with millions in a sudden entry into space to meet the returning Christ?

The New Testament has much to say concerning not only the believer’s attitude toward this glorious hope but his daily conduct in his relations to Christ and to his fellow men. In fact, his attitude toward the hope will help to govern his conduct. Attitude means little unless accompanied by action. Not only will the coming of Christ introduce a radical change in the world of mankind but the hope of His coming will change Christians for the better as they daily anticipate this glorious denouement of the centuries.

A. SPIRITUAL LIFE ENRICHED

1. PRAYER LIFE WILL BE STIMULATED BY THIS HOPE Mk. 13:33 Lk. 21:36 1 Pet. 4:7

A familiar phrase in this connection is “Watch and pray.” We should watch for the signs and pray lest we become so involved in selfish and worldly pleasures that our spiritual sensibilities become dull and Christ’s advent will catch us napping.

2. OUR ABIDING IN CHRIST WILL BE STRENGTHENED 1 Jn. 2:28

Following John’s expressed concern lest Christians be seduced by false teachers he urges believers to abide in Christ lest by coldness or compromise they be overwhelmed by a sense of shame the day Christ returns.

3. GODLINESS OF LIFE WILL BE A MARK OF THOSE WHO HOLD THIS HOPE 2 Pet. 3:11,

14 1 Thes. 3:13 1 Cor. 1:8 1 Thes. 5:23 Phil. 1:10

Our lives should be so transparently sincere and consistent that people who see us will not adopt a low view of Christianity. Three times in the prophetic passages we are urged to be “blameless,” that is, not the objects of accusation. We are also to live “in peace.” Quarreling Christians constitute a contradiction in terms. Paul urges us to be “without offence” until the day of Christ. This means literally “not causing others to stumble.”

B. MORAL LIFE DEVELOPED

1. PURITY 1 John 3:2, 3

We are to hold tenaciously to the hope of Christ’s coming because of the purifying effect of this hope. We are to be like Him in meekness, in gentleness, in sweetness, and in love. This is the glory that one day is to be ours, the glory of Christ Himself. The day is coming when it shall be revealed not only to us but in us. What a glorious day when we see God as He is! The hope of thus seeing deity will be a purifying agent, and therefore in that final day the change into His likeness will not be so violent as it must be if we are not being gradually molded into His likeness by His Spirit today.

2. FAITH 1 Thes. 5:8 Rev. 2:25 Rev. 3:3, 11

Paul assures us the wearing of the breastplate of faith will provide security for God’s people who will be living in the turbulent end-times. Three times John echoes Jesus’ word to hold fast to the truth, with the added promise that those who grasp firmly their faith in the testing time just prior to His return will be kept “from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world.”

3. HOPE 1 Thes. 5:8 Ti. 2:13 Heb. 6:18, 19 1 Pet. 1:13 Rom. 5:2-5

The Christian’s hope of Christ’s coming plays a very important role in his life. It is pictured as a helmet for protection. It is also represented as an anchor for the soul in days of storm and stress. Peter
urges us to hope right on to the end, namely Christ's glorious unveiling. And Paul shows the importance of hope as a means of rejoicing in the midst of tribulations.

Arthur Hedley well said in "The Life of Faith" (Nov. 26, 1941): "Our fathers found their inspiration, joy, and strength in the hope and vision of that City 'whose builder and maker is God' (Heb. 11:10). How heartily, joyously expectantly they sang 'We're marching to Zion . . . the beautiful city of God,' and how they loved to speak of the glories of the eternal. Heaven was as real to them as their own existence . . . It was this hope which made our fathers strong, not only in prayer but also in work; which enabled them to do things of which our generation only talks — real things."

Frank Boreham in one of his immortal stories tells of the dreams of youth that are never realized. One day after a heavy downpour he walked up the street of an English town and saw a boy with a stick and string with hook attached, fishing in the swirling waters rushing down by the curb. He asked the boy if he had caught anything. "Not yet, sir!" the boy cheerily replied. The fact is, many of man's hopes are not firmly based. But the hope that Christ implants in the human soul is firmly established on God's infallible Word. The believer can look on cheerily to the fruition of hope in God's perfect time. Boreham well adds: "The day on which a man relinquishes hope . . . is the day on which he begins to grow old!"

4. LOVE (of God, Christians, and others) 1 Thes. 3:12, 13 1 Thes. 5:8 1 Jn. 4:17 Jude 21 1 Pet. 4:8 2 Thes. 3:5

Peter regards love as the most important preparation for meeting Christ. John sees a perfected love providing us with boldness in the day of judgment. Jude would have us keep in the love of God as we anticipate the divine mercy that introduces us into eternal life. And Paul prays our love towards Christians and all men may be constantly increasing so that Christ will find us firmly entrenched in a godly life when He comes. Paul thinks of love as a breast-plate, as well as faith, adding that perfect love casts out fear.

5. COMPOSURE 2 Thes. 2:2 2 Pet. 3:14

Paul urges Christians to remain composed when people dogmatically claim that Christ's coming is at hand before some of the predicted signs have appeared, specifically the apostasy from the faith on the part of many and the unveiling of the "man of sin." Peter is concerned that Christ find us "in peace" when He comes.

6. PATIENCE 2 Thes. 3:5 Jas. 5:7, 8 Rev. 3:10

Paul urges a "patient waiting for Christ." James would have those who are disturbed by inadequate income to be waiting patiently for the Lord to come. Jesus says those who have kept the word of His patience He will "keep from the hour of temptation."

Our supreme example of patience is God. God is never in a hurry, we often are. In the natural world there is no hurry. It takes time to grow a mighty oak. We plant the seed of the Word and want instant results, like the child who digs the next day after planting to see if the seed is growing. Impatiently we yank out the tares, expelling new converts because we want a "pure" church. If anyone needs patience it is the teacher in Sunday School. He may forget that the harvest is often long delayed and reaped by others.

Patience is the product of love. With patience born of amazing love our Lord endured the Cross as He bore the infinite weight of our sins. And it is only by daily reliance on Him that we can learn to endure. James cites the prophets as examples of "suffering and of patience." They were men who stood alone and walked a solitary path in the midst of evil and in the face of public opinion.

7. SERIOUS-MINDED 1 Thes. 5:6 1 Pet. 1:13 1 Pet. 4:7 Ti. 2:12

Three times Christians are urged to be "sober" as they anticipate Christ's coming. And Titus would have us live "soberly" or temperately.
8. SINCERITY Phil. 1:10
Paul urges Christians to be absolutely pure and unsullied by the evil that will be so rampant in the last days.

9. NOT ASHAMED OF CHRIST Lk. 9:26 Mk. 8:38
When Christ comes He will be ashamed of any who are ashamed of Him.

10. WORRY-FREE John 14:1-3
Jesus urges His own not to worry, for He is preparing a place in heaven and will come some day for them. The problems of time will be set aside for the perfections of eternity. As Prof. C. S. Lewis has put it: "All that is not eternal is eternally out of date."

11. JOY Lk. 24:52
Joy and happiness are two very different experiences. Happiness, as the word suggests, depends on what happens, the circumstances around us. If the sun shines we are happy. If the day is overcast we are gloomy. Happiness is the result of horizontal relationships but joy is the result of a vertical relationship with God. The Christian, then, who through forgiveness has come into a new relationship with God should be the most joyful person on earth. A man who was in prison, chained to a soldier, wrote a letter in which he said: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, rejoice." Paul had known more of trials and hardships and poverty than most men and yet he could urge men to rejoice - to rejoice in the very Man who had been charged with sedition and executed as a common criminal.

The reason we can rejoice in a Lord who was treated as a criminal is that His very suffering was the price paid for our redemption. The man of the world thinks money can buy true happiness. Nathan Rothschild of London was one of the world's most devoted worshippers of wealth. With the profits on a single loan he bought an estate worth $750,000. Yet, he was a miserable man and when people congratulated him on his colossal wealth he shook his head sadly and said, "Happy, me happy?"

But even among Christians, the habit of joy must be diligently fostered, hence Paul's exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord." And our joy will reach its acme when our Lord returns and we see face to face Him who endured so much anguish for us. John wrote "that your joy may be full." Too often the Christian's cup of joy is less than half full!

No wonder the early disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy after being told by the angel of the blessed hope of Christ's return. How much I appreciate the following remark by Harold W. Fife in "The Life of Faith" (Feb. 8, 1968): "Our Christian faith is being stripped of its joy, and in this way denuded of its strength. In many evangelical circles, sermons have become either attacks against the "unfaithful" or exhortations to the loyal, with very little feasting on our riches in Christ."

C. MAINTAIN RIGHT ATTITUDE

1. GIRD UP LOINS OF THE MIND 1 Pet. 1:13
To gird up the loins in ancient times involved pulling up and fastening the long outer garment in preparation for a journey or a race so that stumbling might be avoided. We are on the way to meeting the coming King. How sad if we stumble and fall and defoul our garments before meeting the altogether lovely one! Our minds will miss God's purpose for them if they are permitted distraction by the interests of an evil world instead of concentrating upon the glorious goal ahead through a sharing of the Gospel of hope.

2. LOOK FOR Phil. 3:20, 21 Ti. 2:13 Heb. 9:28
2 Pet. 3:12, 13 Jude 21
There are many pleasant things we look for in this life - a week-end rest, a wedding, a summer's holiday. In view of who Christ is and what He did for our redemption, every Christian should be looking forward to the day of His coming with eager anticipation. This is certain to have a practical day-to-day effect upon our conduct. Paul in his message to Titus says, as we look we should live "soberly, righteously,
and godly.” Peter, sick of the destructiveness of sin, looks for the new earth “wherein dwelleth righteousness.” And we too do not look for something in everyday life with less intensity because we know something else must happen first. Peter looked for “new heavens and new earth” even though that is not the next event in God’s calendar.

3. WATCH Lk. 12:37 Mt. 24:42 Mt. 25:13 Mk. 13:33, 34, 35, 37 Lk. 21:36 1 Thes. 5:6 (Be wide-awake) 1 Pet. 4:7 Rev. 3:2, 3

We are to watch for the Lord’s coming in various ways. We must watch ourselves lest when He comes He finds us sleeping, sleeping in the spiritual sense of not being alert and not ready to leave to meet Him at an instant’s notice. We are also to watch for the signs that His coming is near. This is made clear in Rev. 3:3. His coming will be as a thief to those not watching. Paul emphasizes this in 1 Thes. 5:4-6 where he says the children of the day or light will not be surprised at Christ’s coming which will not be as a thief to them.

4. WAIT FOR Lk. 12:36 Gal. 5:5 1 Thes. 1:10
1 Cor. 1:7

We wait for His coming in the sense that we look longingly and earnestly for His advent as the only hope of men for better things.

5. BE READY Lk. 12:40 Mt. 24:44 Mt. 25:10

Constant readiness is enjoined because we know not the hour or moment of His coming. The folly of not being ready is illustrated by the five foolish virgins who were gone to buy oil when the Bridegroom arrived and they were excluded from the marriage feast.

6. FINAL ATTITUDE Lk. 21:28

This is the attitude of lifting up the head and looking up into the sky, once the cosmic signs indicate the imminence of the second advent.

D. MAINTAIN RIGHT ACTION

1. BE FAITHFUL Mt. 24:45-51 Mt. 25:21, 23 Lk. 12:42-48 1 Pet. 1:7-9

Christians are challenged to use their God-bestowed talents in serving their fellow-men. There are two reasons why we should be faithful. God requires much today from him to whom He has given much. And tomorrow when Christ comes and finds a faith that has nobly survived the many tests we will be found worthy of praise and honor and glory.

2. OCCUPY Lk. 19:13

Before the Lord returns we should make good use of the resources He has given to us.

3. HELP THE NEEDY 1 Thes. 4:18 Mt. 25:35-40

The help we may render should take two forms—spiritual and material. After Paul speaks of the coming of Christ, he adds: “Comfort” (literally, “help”) “one another with these words.” We help others by telling them of the coming of Christ some day. Then too, we must not withhold help from the materially needy. Jesus said that when we feed the hungry and clothe the naked we are really giving these things to Christ Himself.

4. AVOID COVETOUSNESS 1 Tim. 6:10-14

Paul warns that selfish acquisition of material things can rob of spiritual and eternal values. The covetous will not help the needy. He urges Christians to avoid covetousness right down to the return of Christ. Why? Because the love of money is the root of all evil.

5. AVOID FLESHY AND WORLDLY INDULGENCE Lk. 21:34

We must avoid the things of the flesh lest we be found in a spiritual stupor when Christ returns.

6. OBSERVE THE LORD’S SUPPER 1 Cor. 11:26

This communion service has a two-fold purpose: Not only is it to turn back our thoughts through history to the cross of redemption, it has an anticipatory side as we observe it until the Lord comes again, and then, as He said, He will “drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom.”

7. DEFEND THE FAITH 1 Tim. 6:12-14

Paul makes it clear that defending the faith is
not simply argument, it involves a life of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." We are to keep this commandment without "spot" or exception until Christ comes. Any inconsistency of conduct on the part of Christians helps to destroy the faith. As a minister in the Church of England put it over a hundred years ago: "The only effectual way for the enemy to injure Christianity is to profess himself a Christian."

8. WITNESS TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH
Mt. 24:14 Lk. 12:35, 36 Mk. 13:10

Since Christ will not return until the Gospel has been proclaimed to the ends of the earth, we who long for His coming will keep busy letting our light shine by publishing the Gospel in all nations. This is the final test of a genuine faith in Christ. As Rev. Edward Hoare of the Church of England so ably put it in a message published in 1856 in a book entitled, "The Light of Prophecy:"

Speaking of the ten virgins, and the cause of their slumber as they await the coming of the Bridegroom, he said: "The first cause to be noted is, the long delay of the Lord's coming. 'While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.' There is nothing that tests character more than time; and many persons who can behave brilliantly in a crisis break down completely when required to show constancy and perseverance. There are few things like delay to try the sterling character of either faith or watchfulness . . . A watchful spirit is kept alive by expectation; and if hope is long deferred, the heart becomes sick and the eye begins to slumber . . . It is impossible not to perceive that a vast amount of unbelief and languor has crept over the great body of His professed disciples. It is but a little flock who are really looking for their Lord, and there are multitudes, even of those who are not scoffers, who are ready to say, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' . . . The students of prophecy have pointed out the signs of His appearing, and the observers of history have thought they have seen these signs . . . But the calculations have failed, the earthquakes have passed away, the storms have settled into calms . . . till at length the scoffers begin to doubt the whole matter, and even the children of God begin to lose the vividness of their hope, to grow languid in their expectation, and to be in great danger of being caught as slumberers when the cry is made, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh!' But such slumbering is not from faith but from nature. The return is promised though the time is not revealed; and the man of God must not allow his faith in the known promise to be shaken by the disappointments of those who have formed an opinion as to the unknown times. Man's misapplication of a prophecy can never affect the certain truth of God's promise, and ON THAT TRUTH WE Lean. We know His Word is truth . . . We know, therefore, that 'He that shall come, will come,' and we desire to be found in the earnest, watchful, and believing attitude of the psalmist: 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait; and in His Word do I hope'."

Henry Alford, former dean of Canterbury Cathedral, in a series of messages on the ten virgins, published in 1879 under the title, "The Coming of the Bridegroom," concludes one message with these words: "To have been baptized into Christ — to have followed Christ — to have perhaps preached Christ — and then after all to be repudiated by Him — disowned — disclaimed as friends. O my brethren, what scenes there will be in that day of His coming, when many whom men have thought peculiarly His, shall turn out never to have belonged to Him at all! . . . And what is meant by 'Watch'!? . . . The true watch of God in our times is rather to look to Christian conduct . . . Seek, each one, every opportunity of nourishing the sacred flame by thoughts, by words, by acts of purity, justice, charity. . . . It is not by rigid observance of religious seasons and rites, it is not by denouncing all who cannot utter our passwords, that we shall be preparing for the day and hour of which we know not: not by loud echoing of uttered beliefs, but by intensity of inward faith . . . by serving Him in
our generation, and letting our light shine before men of our generation."

For those who find it more pleasant to speculate concerning the identity of the man on the white horse and many other of the minutiae of prophetic exegesis than to buckle down to the work of sharing the Gospel with today's starving souls, I would relay some timely words found in a sermon by Dr. H. Thielicke entitled "Time's Up!" "This brooding over the position of the hands on the clock of the world is something that does not concern you. God alone knows when the midnight hour will come . . . Speculation about this question only leads you away from the real question and the real task which is assigned to you . . . Who knows why the five foolish virgins ultimately fell asleep? Perhaps it was precisely because they had talked themselves to sleep discussing when the Bridegroom would come. After a while it is easy to fall asleep talking about such religious problems; indeed, such discussions inevitably put one to sleep. And who knows why the foolish virgins neglected to fill their lamps with oil? Perhaps again because they were discussing this problem and thus forgot the essential thing . . . Micah 6:8 . . . Use the time, which may perhaps be short, to practice love wherever you can, and be a joyful flowing fountain in the midst of the desert of paralysis, hopelessness, and sullen disillusionment. And be humble before your God, by accepting what He sends to you and surrendering your own false and romantic plans for your life to His mysterious fatherly will. . . . All questions that do not issue in action and have nothing to do with the command of God lead us straight into a confused underbrush of problems and drop us there."