



“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is”
(Mark 13:33).

Serving With Anticipation

Central Truth: Let us be busy, for Jesus is coming soon!

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Topic: Christ: Return of; End Times; Hope: In Christ.

Something wonderful is about to happen! It is “that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). He will come soon! How we wish God would have given us more specific details concerning the coming of the Lord. He sets out the broad outline of events, gives many details, but leaves many other areas unclear. It is enough that He has given us, however. He has given us enough to inspire faith and encourage hope, but not enough to satisfy the questions of idle curiosity.

Believers are divided in their opinions concerning details about the Lord's return and the events which will transpire. There are three great schools of thought, each with faithful Bible-believing Christians in it. Those schools of thought are identified by their opinion concerning the millennial reign of Christ (His reign on earth for one thousand years). Premillennialists believe the Lord will come before the Millennium to institute the reign of righteousness. Postmillennialists believe the Lord will come at the end of the Millennium when the gospel will have produced the period of peace on earth. Amillennialists believe there will be no thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, but the passages which speak of it in the Bible are to be interpreted figuratively.

The differences of opinion go deeper than that. Those who hold to premillennialism differ as to whether believers will go through the Great Tribulation, whether anyone will be saved (or anyone die) during the

Millennium, etc. It is impossible, therefore, for every reader to agree with the lesson comments which follow.

The lesson comments will set forth a basic outline of events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ to earth, giving some basic scriptures for reference, according to the interpretation of dispensational premillennialism.

I. THE CHURCH AGE

The period called “the church age” extends from the personal ministry of Christ on earth, when He established His church, to His return for the saints. It will witness the increase of evil in human society as “perilous times shall come” (II Timothy 3:1-5). Scoffing at spiritual things will become the order of the day (II Peter 3:3). That indicates the failure of the church to win the world to Christ through the witness of the gospel message. The church age, so called because of the presence and ministry of the Lord's churches on the earth, will see the gospel carried to the whole world. Worldwide proclamation of the gospel does not mean worldwide salvation for sinners.

II. CHRIST 'S COMING IN THE AIR

The return of Jesus Christ will be two-fold. (1) He will come in the air to catch the saints up to himself. That is called the “Rapture” and will be unseen by the unregenerate. (2) He will come to the earth, after a seven-year period, with the saints whom He had caught up. That is called the “Revelation” and will be seen by all.

The “rapture” coming in the air is described in I Thessalonians 4:13-17. Dead saints will be raised in immortal bodies and living saints will be changed into immortal bodies, both happening simultaneously, and they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with Him.

Many refer to that as the “harvest” resurrection since it includes all Old Testament saints with the believers of the church age. That will be the great majority who will be in heaven, since relatively few will be saved after that event.

The details of how the resurrection will occur are given in I Corinthians 15:23, 35-58. The fitted-for-earth body will be changed to a fitted-for-heaven body. The corruptible will become incorruptible, the dishonorable will become glorious, the weak will become powerful, the natural will become spiritual, and the “like man” body will become a “like Christ” body.

The rapture of the saints from the earth will bring a change in the

ministry of the Holy Spirit on earth. He has restrained sin through all of human history to that point. He will withdraw His restraining power and leave the world in the grip and control of evil (II Thessalonians 2:7-12).

III. THE SEVEN-YEAR PERIOD

A period of seven years will pass between the “rapture” of the saints and the “revelation” of the Lord Jesus. Events will transpire in heaven and on earth during that time.

In heaven, two great events will occur among the saints. (1) They will stand before the judgment seat (Greek, *bema* meaning judgment for rewards not salvation) of Christ to be judged and their places determined in the millennial kingdom (Romans 4:10; II Corinthians 5:10). (2) They will attend the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-8). Remember that marriage is used over and over in the Bible to symbolize complete union and agreement (Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 2:19) between God and His people. Jesus is often called the bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; 22:1; 25:10; John 3:29). The bride is spoken of in II Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7; 21:2; 22:17. That will be a glorious time in which the saints of God shall participate.

On earth, the Great Tribulation will come. The Antichrist will come into power as supreme ruler in a worldwide government. He will establish a covenant with the Jews which will permit them to return in peace to Palestine, rebuild their temple, and re-establish their ancient sacrifices (Daniel 9:25, 27; 12:7-13; Revelation 12:14). After three and one-half years, the Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews and demand that they worship him as God (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Their refusal will bring on indescribable persecution (Matthew 24:15-22). That will be the “Great Tribulation” described in Revelation 6:1—19:21. Many see it as the judgment of God upon the Jews for rejecting their Messiah, Jesus.

During the tribulation period, the “gospel of the kingdom” will be preached by Jewish leaders. Many interpret that to be a different message from the gospel of grace preached during the church age; a message that proclaims a Messiah (whom they do not think is the Jesus of Nazareth) is coming to deliver them. It seems difficult to accept that there is more than one gospel—the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The severity of the Tribulation will make many open to the gospel, so a great spiritual harvest will be reaped (Revelation 7:9-17). So severe is that trouble that no one would be left alive if God did not intervene (Mark 13:20).

IV. THE RETURN OF CHRIST TO EARTH

The tribulation period will end with a great effort by the Antichrist to exterminate the Jews. He will gather an immense army and invade the land of Palestine. That will lead to the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21; Zechariah 14:1.). At the very time when it seems all hope is gone, the Lord will appear.

The “revelation” part of the return of Jesus Christ will be in the view of all mankind (Revelation 1:7; Matthew 16:27; Zechariah 12:10). Many of the Jews will recognize Him as the true Messiah, turn to Him in repentance and faith, and “a nation shall be born at once” (Isaiah 66:8). Jesus will defeat all the Satanic forces by the word of His lips (Revelation 19:11-21). He will bind Satan and cast him into the bottomless pit for a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3). The binding of Satan will be accomplished by one angel, with no help from any other, because the power of Satan has been cancelled by the sovereign power of God. Many see the second phase of the “first resurrection” (meaning the resurrection of the saved) occurring at this point. Those who became believers during the Tribulation are raised in the “gleanings” of the first resurrection.

V. THE MILLENNIUM

The term millennium is derived from two Latin words (*mille*, meaning “one thousand” and *annum*, meaning “years”) and means “one thousand years.” It is used to refer to the thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth in absolute righteousness.

The Millennium will be initiated with a judgment of the nations to determine which nations will exist as nations during the Millennium. Nations will be approved or disapproved and separated as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Jesus will establish His millennial kingdom on earth with its headquarters in Palestine and with Jerusalem as its capital city (Revelation 20:4-6). He will rule the world in absolute justice and righteousness (Isaiah 11:1-5). His twelve apostles will govern the twelve tribes of Israel in Palestine (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30), and other Christians will reign over the rest of the world (I Corinthians 6:2). The Jews are considered as being the dominant nation and all other nations will be blessed through them (Isaiah 2:1-4; Zechariah 14:16-21). Since Satan is bound, good will dominate the world as men have one last chance to do right without Satan's

influence (Isaiah 11:1-10).

VI. THE LITTLE TIME

At the end of the Millennium is a time of indefinite duration called “a little time” in contrast to the thousand years which went before (Revelation 20:3, 7). Satan will be loosed from his prison (the “bottomless pit”) and will lead the unbelievers who lived in the Millennium in a final revolt against the rule of Christ. Those unbelievers will be as numberless as the sands of the sea (Revelation 20:7-9). They will lay siege to the capital city, Jerusalem, in the battle of Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:8, 9; Ezekiel 38, 39). They will be defeated, and Satan will be cast into hell forever (Revelation 20:10).

All the wicked of all the ages will be raised from the dead to stand before God in judgment. (Those who hold that believers will die during the Millennium see their resurrection at this time, also.) There will be a great judgment to condemn the unbelievers, called the “great white throne” judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). All the unsaved will be condemned to the lake of fire.

VII. ETERNITY

The old heavens and earth will pass away with great noise and fervent heat (II Peter 3:10-13). A new heaven and earth will come into existence to replace them (Revelation 21:1). The redeemed will live upon the new earth and enjoy the personal presence of God with them in their heavenly city, their glorious temple, and their beautiful garden (Revelation 21, 22).

Faithful Bible scholars differ concerning details of the schedule of events outlined above. Such differences do not detract from the importance of the coming of the Lord.

What does it mean to you and me? Let us not get caught up in arguing about unclear details. Let us rather heed the word of the apostle Peter, “*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless*” (II Peter 3:11, 14). Let us get on with the blessed privilege of faithful service as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

1. How would you define *premillennialism*, *postrnillennialism*, and

amillennialism?

2. What is "the church age"?
3. How is "rapture" different from "revelation" at Jesus' return?
4. How is the resurrection performed according to I Corinthians 15?
5. What happens in heaven during the seven-year period?
6. What happens on earth during that time?
7. What will happen during the Millennium?
8. What is the eternal destiny of the saved?
9. What is the eternal destiny of the unsaved?
10. How should this study inspire you to faithful service?