

The Rapture, The Tribulation and the Second Coming **by Dr. John C. Whitcomb**

The Rapture of the Church

The true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, His "Body" and "Bride", which is also "the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16-17), consisting of all born-again (regenerated) Christians, baptized by Christ in the Holy Spirit beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 11:15-17; 1 Cor. 12:13), will be glorified at the end of this age just before the **Seventieth** and last **Week of Daniel** (The Tribulation) begins (Rev. 3:10). This will occur in two briefly-separated stages. First, all Christians who have died -- "the dead in Christ" -- "shall rise first" in response to the "shout" of our Lord Jesus, Who "Himself will descend from heaven" and "will bring with Him [the souls of] those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:13-16). Second, perhaps a few moments later, living Christians, "who are alive and remain" (1 Thess 4:17), instead of dying -- for "we shall not all sleep" -- "shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (like the glorified body of Jesus -- 1 Cor. 15:45-49; 51-53). This will be the second "order" of true resurrections, completed by the Second Coming, and called "the first resurrection" (1 Cor. 15:23; Rev. 20:6). Moments later, all resurrected / changed Christians will be "caught up [snatched away] together . . . in the clouds" [of glory, as at Christ's ascension -- Acts 1:9] to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). John wrote: "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on **Him** purifies himself, just as **He** is pure" (1 Jn. 3:2-3). The glorification/rapture of the Church can happen at any moment -- no predicted event will precede it -- so **the Bride** lives in constant hope and expectancy.

The Judgment-Seat of Christ

Immediately following the rapture (catching away) of the true church to meet her Lord in the air ("I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"-- Jn. 14:3), the judgment-seat (or throne) of Christ must be faced by each and every Christian. Since "there is therefore no condemnation [judgment to condemnation] for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), Christians will not appear at this throne to determine their eternal destiny. Thank God, that was settled for all believers at Calvary (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20)! Nevertheless, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12). This examination by One Who has eyes "like a flame of fire" (Rev. 1:14) must not be taken lightly by Christians, for if he has built a superstructure on Christ as his foundation that consists only of "wood, hay, straw", then "each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it [cf. 1 Cor. 4:5], because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:12-15). By this means, Christ prepares His Bride for the great Marriage Supper and to share with Him in ruling the world (1 Cor. 6:2-3; Rev. 20:4). As we look within our own hearts and also look at the Church today, we must agree that "it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). "And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 Jn. 2:28).

The Beginning of the 70th Week of Daniel

Jesus Christ our Lord, the sovereign Ruler of the universe, inaugurates the Day of the Lord by: (1) removing His Bride, the Church from the earth by rapture; (2) permitting Michael, the archangelic prince of Israel, to "arise" on behalf of the theocratic nation once again (Dan. 12:1) and to utter his "voice" (1 Thess. 4:16) of authority; (3) sending Elijah (and Moses?) to Jerusalem to "prophesy" (direct revelation) to unbelieving Israelites for 3½ years (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 17:11; Rev. 11:3-6); and (4) breaking the first of the seven seals to launch the Antichrist (the rider on the white horse) into the global spiritual vacuum ("the apostasy" -- the falling away -- 2 Thess. 2:3), "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1-2). The Antichrist, only "**a little horn**" at the beginning of this period, compared to the 10 great "horns" (kings) of the western world (Dan. 7:8, 11, 20, 24), will build a powerful base of operation by making "a firm covenant with the many [of Israel] for one week [7 years]" (Dan. 9:27). Jesus said concerning this event: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him" (Jn. 5:43). The reason why "the Antichrist . . . is coming" (1 Jn. 2:18; 4:3) is because of the presence now and especially then of "many Antichrists" which "have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour" (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:1-3; 2 Jn. 7; Matt. 24:24). Not only will all believing Jews ["a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Rom. 11:5); "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16)] be caught up with the Church, leaving a totally apostate Israel on the earth for the Antichrist to deceive (in "a covenant with death" -- Isa. 28:15, 18); but also all believing Gentiles will disappear at the rapture, leaving a gigantic apostate "church" on the earth, "the great harlot who sits on many waters [nations]...sitting on a scarlet beast [the Antichrist], full of blasphemous names, having 7 heads and 10 horns" (Rev. 17:1-3). Thus, "the little horn", by pretending to be religious (riding "a white horse" -- Rev. 6:2; as "an angel of light...a servant of righteousness" -- 2 Cor. 11:13-15), gains the support of both unsaved Jews and unsaved "Christians" in conquering the ten western kingdoms within 42 months (3½ years).

The Two Witnesses in Jerusalem -- # 1

The very moment God's witnesses on earth -- Christians -- are removed by rapture ("he who now restrains [the Antichrist from functioning] will do so until he [the Holy Spirit] is taken out of the way" -- 2 Thess. 2:7), the two witnesses of God will appear in Jerusalem. The assumption here is that God always has a witness somewhere on earth, just as in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 11:7). The fact that these two men will be killed after 3½ years of ministry to Israel ("they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth [like Daniel when he prayed for captive Israel in Babylon - Dan. 9:3]...and when they have finished their testimony, the beast [Antichrist]...will kill them" [Rev. 11:3, 7]), proves that they have mortal bodies. Angels and glorified men do not preach to lost men on earth. But who are these two witnesses? Malachi 4:5 identifies one of them as "Elijah the prophet" whom God will send to Israel "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord [the last 3½ years]." (The Jewish scribes understood this to refer to the literal Elijah -- Matt. 17:10). When Jesus' disciples saw Elijah (and Moses) on the Mount, the Lord assured them that "Elijah is coming and will restore all things," namely, he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6), thus indicating the application of the New Covenant to Israel as a nation (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26). The other witness may be Moses, for he appeared with Elijah on the Mount (Matt. 17:3-4). Moses and Elijah were divinely-ordained specialists in prophesying to Israel in times of extreme apostasy, and departed this life under supernatural circumstances. As in ancient days, so again, Elijah will be protected [from Antichrist] by fire he calls down from heaven (Rev. 11:5; cf. 2 Kings 1:10-12), and will be vindicated again by a 3½ year drought throughout Palestine (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17). Likewise Moses demonstrated his divine authority in the Satanic power-center of Pharaoh's court by changing water into blood (Ex. 4:9; 7:17) and by inflicting many plagues upon the land (Ex. 7:14; 12:36). The identical nature of these judgmental sign-miracles strengthens the possibility that Moses, as well as Elijah, will actually be brought back from the dead like Lazarus and others, and will be instrumental in bringing the nation of Israel back to their God. (See paper by J. C. Whitcomb, "Elijah is Coming")

The Two Witnesses in Jerusalem -- # 2

What will be the theological content of the 1260 days of prophesying on the part of God's two witnesses in Jerusalem immediately following the rapture of the Church? This is crucially important, for it will provide the teaching model for the 144,000 witnesses and for millennial teaching-priests as well. The principle of progressive revelation requires that their teaching not ignore or contradict any of the 66 books of the Bible. Thus, they will teach the finished work of Christ and the absolute necessity of faith in the infinite and eternal efficacy of His blood for spiritual salvation. They will teach, just as Moses and all the prophets taught, that eternal salvation is a matter of the heart and cannot be attained through the blood of bulls and goats (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:1-14; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Ezek. 44:7, 9). In other words, Old Testament prophets believed in the New Covenant even before the Old Covenant had fulfilled its temporary purpose. But the final outworking of Israel's [not the Church's part in the] New Covenant includes a holy place in Jerusalem and an altar for animal sacrifices and a Zadokian priesthood with a Melchizedekian High Priest (Psa. 110:4; Zech. 6:10; Heb. 5:1-10, etc.). Like the previous "two olive trees," Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:3, 11, 14; Rev. 11:4), they will re-institute legitimate sacrifices on a Jerusalem altar even before the Temple is rebuilt (cf. Ezra 3:2-6). Antichrist will be forced to allow for this in his seven-year covenant with Israel, but "in the middle of the week [of seven years] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering" (Dan. 9:27), just after killing the two witnesses who will have been supervising these sacrifices. It was not sacrifices of animals in the Tribulation Temple ("Holy Place") that concerned our Lord. Rather, it will be their termination and their replacement by "the abomination of desolation" which brings His warning: "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matt. 24:16). Thus, the Israelite aspect of the New Covenant will achieve the perfect balance of heart-regeneration unto eternal life along with distinctive Israelite theocratic functions which will accomplish their own limited, but divinely enforced purposes within Israel. This is the only way the "natural branches [Jews]", broken off during this Church Age, can ever be grafted back into the tree (Rom. 11).

The Mid-Point of the 70th Week -- # 1

In Heaven: “The Lord will punish the host of heaven, on high...” (Isa. 24:21). Michael's imprecations against Satan in 1405 BC (“the Lord rebuke you” - Jude 9) will be finalized at this time when God empowers him to defeat Satan and to throw him and his angels (demons) “down to the earth” (Rev. 12:9). This forever ends Satan's function as “the accuser of our brethren” before God's throne (Rev. 12:10; Job 1:11; 2:5; Zech. 3:1; Lk. 22:31; 1 Pet. 5:8), and launches him into earth-bound activity with the Beast and False Prophet for 3½ years.

On Earth: The Jerusalem-centered ministry of the Two Witnesses nears its culmination, with vast numbers of Israelites having accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord, protected from persecution by the sign-miracles of Elijah and Moses. The Little Horn now controls all 10 western kings, and most of Israel. Now Gog, the King of the North, brings his massive army and navy down into Palestine (Ezek. 38; Dan. 11:40) from Russia and the Black Sea (because several “countries” must be passed through to “enter the Beautiful Land” - Dan. 11:40-44). However, Edom, Moab and Ammon are protected from his hand. As he moves south, he delivers a “deadly wound” (with “the sword” -- Rev. 13:14; cf. Ezek. 38:4) to the Antichrist and then conquers Egypt (his former ally, the King of the South) with the help of Iran, Ethiopia and Lybia (Ezek. 38:5). With the Little Horn now dead (Rev. 17:8-11), Gog practically rules the world (except for Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish -- Ezek. 38:13 -- and the two witnesses, still in Jerusalem). Gog is “the one of whom [the Lord] spoke in former days through [His] servants the prophets” (Ezek. 38:7; cf. Joel 2:20; Isa. 10:12-27; Micah 5:5). Though not mentioned in the New Testament, the career of Gog, the King of the North, helps to explain the astounding global power which the Beast acquires during the last half of the 70th Week (cf. Rev. 11, 13 and 17).

The Mid-Point of the 70th Week -- # 2

Under God's sovereign direction, Satan heals the "deadly wound" of the Antichrist (Rev. 13:3, 12, 14) which had been inflicted by "the sword" of Gog from Magog (cf. Dan. 11:40-43), and he emerges from "the abyss" to begin a second life of mortality (like Lazarus). He is thus the eighth, as well as the seventh, world empire in reference to Israel (Rev. 17:8-11). Electrified by the news of Antichrist's return to life, the King of the North halts his N.E. Africa campaign, and hurries back to Palestine, with his armies, to attack him "between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain" (Dan. 11:45). "Yet," mysteriously, "he will come to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan. 11:45). Ezekiel explains that the Lord will "rain on him...hailstones, fire, and brimstone," and thus he will "fall on the mountains of Israel" (Ezek. 38:22; 39:4). Doubtless, Antichrist will confirm his claim to deity by making "fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men" (Rev. 13:13), insisting that he, not the Lord, destroyed the King of the North (compare similar counter-miracles in Pharaoh's court). He now kills the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7), breaks his 7-year covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27), putting a stop to sacrifices on the altar, setting up the Abomination of Desolation in the Temple (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15), namely, an image of himself which becomes alive! This event, said Jesus our Lord, will be the signal for all Jews to "flee to the mountains," for the Great Tribulation (lasting 3½ years) begins at this point. This will be the awful "time of Jacob's distress" (Jer. 30:7); but, thank God, "he will be saved from it." God will then say, "Come, my people, enter into your rooms, and close your doors behind you; hide for a little while, until indignation runs its course. For behold, the LORD is about to...punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (Isa. 26:20-21). Most believing Israelites will survive (cf. Rev. 12:13-16), but the apostate "church" is now totally destroyed by Antichrist (Rev. 17:16).

The Mid-Point of the 70th Week -- #3

The Two Witnesses, killed by Antichrist, are resurrected after 3½ days (the first Israelites to be glorified) and visibly ascend to heaven. It is at this point, apparently, that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26) because: **(1)** The Two Witnesses will “have finished their testimony” to Israel (Rev. 11:7), with not just 7,000 believers as in Elijah’s day (1 Kgs. 19:18), but now with 144,000 believing Israelites! Also, **(2)** when the King of the North collapses under divine judgment, “the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward” (Ezek. 39:22). Furthermore, **(3)** this nation will be spiritually “brought forth all at once” because “as soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons” (Isa. 66:8). The 144,000 will be “sealed” by God from destruction by Antichrist, and through them “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come” (Rev. 7:3-8; Matt. 24:14). As a result, vast numbers of Gentiles will be saved and will also suffer martyrdom for Christ (Rev. 7:9, 14; 20:4). Other regenerated Israelites (“the woman”) will flee “into the wilderness” for 1260 days, protected by God (perhaps in Edom, Moab, and Ammon -- Transjordan -- Dan. 11:41), just as David and his men fled from King Saul until God killed him (1 Sam. 26:10; 1 Chron. 10:14). Some Israelites, either unable or unwilling to obey the warning of Jesus (Matt. 24:16-20), will remain in Jerusalem during the final 3½ years when it will be “given to the nations, and they will tread under foot the holy city for 42 months” (Rev. 11:2; Zech. 14:1-2). Antichrist is not only staggered by the ascension of Elijah and Moses (which will confirm the divine removal of the Church 3½ years earlier), and their replacement by 144,000 sealed disciples/witnesses (who, however, are not said to be empowered to perform sign-miracles), but also now by the shattering of Jerusalem by an earthquake which kills 7,000 people (Rev. 11:13).

The Tribulation and the Second Coming

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(The Church at the $\beta\eta\mu\alpha$ of Christ →

→ The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

7 seals broken
by Christ.

7 trumpets sound.

7 bowls
poured out
upon godless humanity.

Satan and demons
defeated by Michael
and cast out of heaven.

Antichrist Killed by the
King of the North, who
is soon destroyed by the Lord.

Antichrist conquers 10 western Kings (covenant with Israel)



Two Witnesses in Jerusalem
Discipling Israelite Converts and
Protected by Sign-Miracles.

Antichrist Killed and descends
Antichrist rises to mortal life again

Abomination of Desolations in the
Jerusalem Temple (7-year Covenant
with Israel broken). False Prophet
in charge of this image of Antichrist.
Apostate "church" destroyed by Antichrist,
and all mankind forced to worship him as God.
Vast numbers of believers martyred.

144,000 evangelize all nations →
Israel ("the woman") hides in the wilderness

← 3 1/2 years →

← 3 1/2 years →

ABYSS

Battle of Armageddon

Christ's Second Coming in Glory with His Bride, the Church



The Resurrection/Change and Capture of the Church

The Second Coming of Christ

Winona L. Indiana, USA

Heaven: (The marriage of Christ and the Church climaxes the Judgment Seat examination)

Earth: The last half of Daniel's 70th Week (of years) is "cut short" to exactly 1260 days or "no life would have been saved" (Matt. 24:22).

This is the "Great Tribulation" Jesus described (Matt. 24:21, 29; cf. Dan. 12:1; Mal. 4:5), with the Abomination of Desolation in Jerusalem.

(3½ years)

While the "Gospel of the Kingdom" is being preached in "the whole world" (Matt. 24:14), and God is destroying the earth through cosmic catastrophes (Isa. 24; Rev. 6-16), Satan, Antichrist and the False Prophet are killing vast numbers of people converted through the 144,000 witnesses (Rev. 13:7, 10, 15; Rev. 20:4; Dan. 7:21, 25). Finally, God destroys Antichrist's power center in Babylon (Rev. 18) and all of his armies at Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21). God will use Israel's army also at this time (Zech. 12:1-9).

Christ descends visibly from heaven with His Bride.

glorified Church and non-Church saints rule with Christ over the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4) as Kings and priests. Holy angels will no longer rule over men (Heb. 2:5).

At the end of the Tribulation all non-church saints will be resurrected (Dan. 12:1-3); all living Israelites will be gathered and examined for faith at "the wilderness of the peoples" (Ezek. 20:33-38); the Temple will be cleansed of defilement within 30 days (Dan. 12:11); all Gentiles still alive will be gathered to the Kidron Valley near Jerusalem for eternal separation as "sheep" or "goats" (Matt. 25:31-46; Joel 3:1-3, 14), with all unbelievers ("goats") being removed by death to judgment (Matt. 24:37-41, with the wicked being "taken" as in the days of Noah, by angels, to the flames of Hades — Matt. 13:40-42), all within 75 days following Christ's coming (Dan. 12:12). Then His glorious millennial Kingdom officially begins, with only believers alive on the earth (Isa. 11:9), universal peace enforced among the nations (Isa. 2:2-4), and the Edenic Curse greatly modified (Isa. 11:6-9; Ezek. 47:1-12; Rom. 8:18-21; Acts 3:21).

All dead unbelievers remain in Sheol/Hades until the Great White Throne judgment after the Millennium. Many demons remain in Tartarus since the Flood.

↓ Satan locked into the abyss for nearly 1,000 years →
↓ Antichrist and the False Prophet cast alive into the lake of fire →

Antichrist ascends from the abyss