

Understanding the Second Coming of Christ

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is intended to be a source of hope (Titus 2:13) and comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) for the church, especially “as we see the day approaching”. Instead, it has become the source of confusion and even contention among many Christians so that now when hope and comfort are needed the most, many doctrinally sound churches no longer teach the “blessed hope” for fear of stirring up strife.

Most of this confusion is related to three passages of scripture in the New Testament:

A. Revelation 20

This passage teaches about a thousand year reign of Christ over the earth during which Satan is confined to the bottomless pit. This period is referred to as the Millennium. There are three different interpretations with regard to this passage as it relates to the Second Coming of Christ:

1. The Pre Millennial interpretation. Christ will return to the earth at some future time and rule the earth for a thousand years.
2. Post Millennialism. The church will convert the world, bring in the kingdom and Christ will return after the millennium.
3. Amillennialism (no millennium). There will be no future reign of Christ on the earth. The thousand year reign is symbolic of the period between the first and second coming of Christ. Satan was bound at His first coming and Christ is reigning spiritually. There are no future plans for Israel.

B. Matthew 24:21-31

This passage speaks of a period of time just prior to the return of Christ which is called the “tribulation of those days”; after which He will come with power and great glory. He will send His angels to gather together His elect.

C. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

The event spoken of in this passage is said to be a “mystery”. It refers to a future generation of Christians who will not experience death, but will be “changed”. Further details of this event are given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. It will occur when the Lord Himself descends from heaven with a shout and the dead in Christ rise first and then those in Christ who are still alive will be “changed” and “caught up” (known as the “rapture”). There are three interpretations of this passage as to how the rapture is related to the tribulation and the return spoken of in Matthew 24:30.

1. The Pretribulation Rapture View. Christ will come to take the church to its home in heaven before the beginning of the tribulation. Those elect who are gathered together by angels after the tribulation are those saved after the rapture and who survived the tribulation.
2. The Midtribulation or Prewrath Rapture View. The rapture occurs during the tribulation.
3. The Post Tribulation View. The Rapture occurs after the tribulation. The rapture and the return in power and glory are one and the same.

How has Satan succeeded in causing this confusion concerning the return of Christ? The primary reason is that Bible scholars, for the most part, have neglected the Old Testament Scriptures which speak of the return of Christ. The only way to clear up the confusion is by studying the first mention of the second coming and other key passages of the Old Testament as a background for interpreting the New Testament passages.

The Second Coming as Taught in the Old Testament.

The first mention of the return of Christ is found in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. (“The Lord your God... will return and gather you again”, 30:3). Much of the confusion can be dispelled by noting the facts concerning Christ’s return which are revealed in this passage:

1. This event will occur after Israel has been driven out to all the Gentile nations. (“when...you call to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you” 30:1-4).
Amos 9:9 “I will sift the house of Israel among the nations”
Zechariah 10:9 “I will sow them among the nations”. (This was fulfilled in A.D. 70).
2. It will occur when Israel repents. (“And you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice...with all your heart and with all your soul”, 30:2).
Jeremiah 30:1-7 “It is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it”.
Daniel 12:1 “there shall be a time of trouble such as there never was....and at that time your people shall be delivered”.
Zechariah 12:10 “They will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him”.
One of the primary purposes of the “tribulation of those days” is to bring Israel to repentance. It is the “time of Jacob’s trouble.
3. Israel will be brought back to the land which their fathers possessed. (“Then the Lord will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed”, 30:5).
Isaiah 11:11-12 “The Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people....He will...assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”.
Jeremiah 3:14-17 “I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion....At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it”.
Jeremiah 33:14-26 “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell safely” (33:16). “I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them” (33:26). In this passage God says that even though people will say, “He has cast them off”, as long as day follows night His promises to Israel are still in effect! However, in Ezekiel 20:33-44, it is revealed that not all of those gathered from the nations will enter the land. They will be gathered to a wilderness area where the “rebels” will be purged from among them before their return.
4. They will be in their natural bodies. (“He will prosper you and multiply you”, 30:5; “God will make you abound ...in the fruit of your body”, 30:9).
Isaiah 65:18-25, “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people” (65:19). “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days...the child shall die one hundred years old” (65:20). This fact is crucial to the understanding of New Testament teachings of the second coming!
5. The nations who persecuted Israel will be punished. (“The Lord...will put all these curses on your enemies...who persecuted you” (30:7).
Joel 3:1-3 “When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them on account of My people...Israel”.

Additional information about the Second Coming revealed through Daniel.

1. The return as it relates to Gentiles.

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a young man and trained to be an adviser to the king of Babylon. Since Israel would now be under Gentile dominion, God revealed through Daniel the future of the Gentiles. The first revelation came through the interpretation by Daniel of a dream of the king, and the second, through a vision which Daniel saw.

a. The king’s dream. (Daniel 2).

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king’s dream consisted of a large statue of a man standing upright. The head of the statue was made of gold, the shoulders and arms of silver, the mid-section of bronze and the legs of iron with the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The statue was struck by a stone on its feet which crushed it. The stone then became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. It was revealed to Daniel that the four parts of the statue represented four Gentile kingdoms which would arise until Christ returns to sets up His kingdom. Babylon was identified as the head of gold. The Medo-Persians conquered Babylon and are represented by the shoulders and arms of silver. Greece conquered the Medo-Persians and is represented by the mid-section of bronze. Rome conquered Greece and is represented by the legs of iron and feet and toes of part iron and part clay. The stone will strike when the revived Roman Empire exists as a confederation of nations, represented by the ten toes. The stone represents Christ at His second coming. The great mountain represents His kingdom.

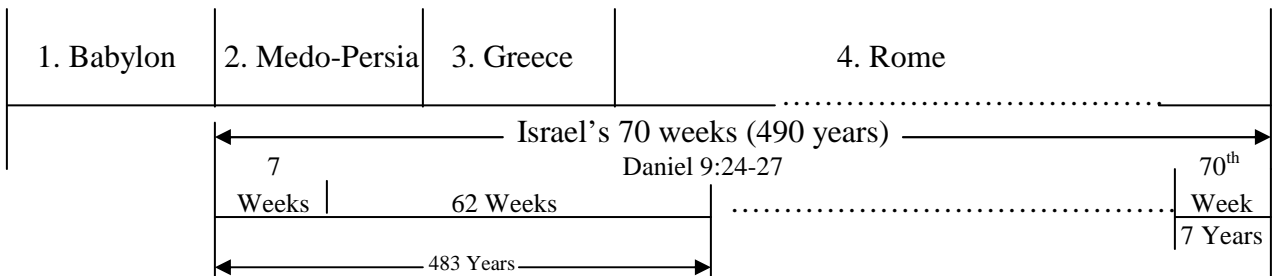
b. Daniel’s vision. (Daniel 7).

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Daniel’s vision he saw four beasts come up from the sea. These beasts represent the four kingdoms of the king’s dream. In Daniel’s vision he was given more details about the fourth kingdom. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom (Rome). And another shall arise after them...he shall speak pompous words against the Most High and shall persecute the saints of the Most High” (7:24-25). This “little horn” is the “beast” who is captured and “cast alive into the lake of fire” when Christ returns (Revelation 19:20).

1. Additional facts about the return as it relates to Israel. (Daniel 9:24-27). Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years. Daniel realized that the seventy years were complete and he was concerned about what would happen to his people and their land. It was revealed to Daniel that “Seventy weeks (of years) are determined for your people and for your holy city (9:24)”. This four hundred and ninety year period would begin when the command was given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (9:25; Neh. 2:1-8). Four hundred and eighty three years (sixty nine weeks of years) from that date Messiah the Prince would appear. This was fulfilled when Christ rode into Jerusalem on the donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:28-44). Two things are said to occur between the sixty ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week. “Messiah shall be cut off”, and the city and the temple will be destroyed by the “people of the prince who is to come”. Since the city was destroyed by the Romans in A. D. 70, this prince will be a Roman prince who will make a covenant with a remnant of Israel which will have returned to the land in unbelief (A.D.1948!).

TIMES OF THE GENTILES
Daniel 2:31-45; 7:1-27; Luke 21:24



The Second Coming as Taught in the New Testament.

The Gospels.

1. The announcement concerning Christ's birth.
Luke 1:30-33, "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end". (2 Samuel 7:16).
2. The preaching of John the Baptist.
Matthew 3:1-12, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will ...gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff..." (Isaiah 4:4; Ezekiel 20:33-44).
3. The message and ministry of Christ at the beginning of His ministry.
Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach... 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'".
Matthew 10:5-7, "Do not go to the Gentiles... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...and preach, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'". The response to the message was, "Then He began to upbraid the cities...because they did not repent" (Matthew 11:16-20).
"This man does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24).
4. From this time He began to change His message.
Matthew 13:3-50, "Then He spoke many things to them in parables". When His disciples asked, "Why do you speak to them in parables, He answered, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'"(13:11). Since Israel did not meet the condition necessary for the establishment of the kingdom as promised in the Old Testament, the kingdom would now exist in a form not revealed before this time. The kingdom will exist in this form until the "end of this age" when "The Son of Man will send out His angels and gather out of His kingdom all things that offend"(13:41; Ezekiel 20:38; Matthew 25:31-46). From its beginning on the day of Pentecost until the rapture, the church will exist during this time. Each of these parables reveals facts about this period of time that every Christian, and especially pastors, should be aware of.
5. Christ announced a new objective.
Just as God announced that He would make a nation of Abraham's descendants, Christ announced that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). Instead of the people of God existing as a separate nation, His people would exist as the church, an entirely different entity than the nation of Israel.
6. Christ announced a new, different hope for the church.
Just as God promised Israel that He would return and gather them to the land that their father's possessed, Christ promised the church that He would come again to take its members to a place He is preparing (John 14:6).
7. Christ reaffirmed the future blessing for Israel
"After the tribulation of those days...He will send His angels and they will gather His elect..." (Matthew 24:29-31; Isaiah 65:9, 22). Acts 8:39-40, is an example of how this will be done.

8. At His return Christ will judge the people of the nations who survive the tribulation (Matthew 25:31-46). The Jews will have been judged first and are there as His “brethren” (Ezekiel 20:33-44). The purpose of this judgment is to determine which of the Gentiles will enter the kingdom. The basis of the judgment will be how they treated His brethren. When the church is caught up and the last “week” which is determined for Daniel’s people begins, God will seal 144,000 to be His witnesses during this time (Revelation 7:1-9). Proof of those who respond to their message will be how they treated the messengers.

Acts.

1. The manner in which He will come to take the church to the place He has prepared is revealed in 1:9-11, “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him....this same Jesus ...will so come in like manner as you saw Him go up into heaven”.
2. The nation was offered one final chance to repent and receive their promise (3:19-26). “Repent therefore and be converted, that your (the nation’s) sins may be blotted out so that times of refreshing may come....and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before”.
3. When some of the Jews at Jerusalem insisted that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and become Jewish proselytes before they could be saved, a church council met to clarify the matter (Acts 15).
After testimony from Peter and Paul that Gentiles were being saved without being circumcised, James, the moderator of the council, declared that God is now “visiting” the Gentiles for the purpose of taking out a people for His name (He is building His church). After this is completed He will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David. The promised return for Israel was reaffirmed.

The Letters.

More details about the promise to the church that He will, “come again and receive you unto myself”, are given in the Letters.

1. Just as the Church is said to be a mystery in that its existence was not revealed in the Old Testament (Ephesians 2:11-3:9), so, the taking of the church to the place prepared for it is called a mystery. “Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed” (I Corinthians 15:51). The mystery is that there will be a generation of the church which will not experience death. Instead, they will “put on immortality”. This will be necessary because they will be leaving the earth to go to the place prepared for them. When Israel’s hope is fulfilled, they will be brought back to the land in their natural bodies. Nothing as revealed about this until Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah (John 14:2)
2. Further details about this event are revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
 - a. Those who are said to be, “dead in Christ”, who are “absent from the body and present with the Lord” will be brought back with Him (4:14; 2 Corinthians 5:8).
 - b. Their bodies will be raised and they will again inhabit them (4:16).
 - c. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”. (4:17; Acts 1:9).The term, “rapture”, is generally used for this event by theologians. When this event occurs every saved person on earth will be changed and caught up to meet

the Lord! Since every saved person will be caught up at this event, there must be a period of time between the rapture of the church and the return in which saved Jews and Gentiles go into the kingdom in their natural bodies.

3. The church is promised deliverance from the wrath of the “day of the Lord” which comes suddenly when people are saying “peace and safety (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).
4. A mystery concerning the future of Israel as it relates to the return of Christ is also given in the Letters (Romans 11:25-26).
“Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness (full number) of the Gentiles has come in” (11:25). It was no mystery that Israel was hardened and blinded to the truth of the gospel (11:8-9). It was no mystery that all Israel would be saved and brought back to the land (11:26). The mystery was that the blindness would be removed before “all Israel is saved”. This will occur when the full number of Gentiles (the church) has come in. The removal of Israel’s blindness will be necessary at this time because the church will be raptured and there will be no witness for God left on the earth. The removal of Israel’s blindness and the results will be brought out in Revelation 7:1-14.
5. More details are revealed in the letters concerning the “little horn” of Daniel 7, also called the Roman “prince” in Daniel 9, who makes a seven year treaty with Israel which begins the 70th week of years determined for Israel (Daniel 9:26-27). Christ will return at the end of this period.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

1. Some were teaching that the day of the Lord had already come and that they would not be delivered from it as promised in 1 Thessalonians 5:9. Paul reassured them by reminding them of two things which must first occur:
 - a. The “falling away” (apostasy) of the church as an organization (2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). In Revelation 17, the apostate church is seen as a rich harlot who sits on (controls) “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (language groups). This is why people will be saying “peace and safety” (2 Thessalonians 5:3) prior to the day of the Lord. Paul is pointing out that such was not the case at that time.
 - b. The revelation of the “man of sin”, whom the Lord will destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2:8). A seven year treaty with Israel had not been signed by the Roman prince (Daniel 9:27). Therefore, the day of the Lord had not come.
2. Another clue as to the relation of the revealing of this man and the rapture of the church is found in the fact that his revealing is being restrained until the One who is restraining is “taken out of the way” (2:6-8). Paul said that the Thessalonians knew what was restraining his revelation. Some have suggested that the restrainer is human government because he will overthrow human government and will rule the world. Two facts make this unlikely:
 - a. He cannot be revealed until the restrainer is removed. He could only overthrow human government after he is revealed.
 - b. Kings and their armies will come against him “at the time of the end” (Daniel 11:40).

A logical explanation of the restrainer is that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in believers will be “taken out of the way” at the rapture of the church. Between the time that the church is raptured and the 144,000 Israelites are sealed (Rev. 7) there will be no restraining influence in the world. Paul had told them of this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Revelation.

Chapters 2 and 3 as they relate to the second coming of Christ.

Of the many churches in existence at the time John wrote, seven were chosen to receive a message from the Lord. Starting with the first church, Ephesus, and ending with the last church, Laodicea, their location on a map in the order given forms a rough circle. The meaning of the names of the churches and the conditions which existed in them correspond to periods in church history. Since God revealed the future of Israel and the future of Gentile kingdoms, it is reasonable to expect that He would do the same for the church age. The sixth church, Philadelphia, was given the promise, "I will keep you from the hour of trial which will come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (3:10). Since this church will be kept from the "hour" of trial it will not be on the earth during the trial. Laodicea represents the apostate church organization left on earth as part of the harlot system of Revelation 17.

Chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter 4, John is told to "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this". He sees a "throne set in heaven" and around the throne were twenty-four "elders" who are said to be clothed in white robes and wearing crowns of gold (4:4). They have appeared before the judgment seat of Christ and received their rewards (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). In chapter 5 they are identified as those from all nations who have been redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb (5:9-10). These are in heaven before the seal judgments begin. After chapter 3, the church is not mentioned again as being on the earth.

Chapter 7

In chapter 7, the blindness is removed from Israel by the sealing of 12,000 from each tribe (Romans 11:25). This occurs before the earth is harmed by the hour of trial (7:3). The result will be that a multitude that no one could number is saved during the last seven years determined for Daniel's people.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 records the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Christ's return to punish the world for its evil (Isaiah 13:11), and establish His earthly kingdom. His bride, the church, which has previously been caught up to the place prepared for her (John 14:3) is now, as His wife, ready to come with Him for the marriage supper to which those who are called will attend (19:7-9; cf. Matthew 25:1-13).

Chapter 20

In Chapter 20, more facts about the establishment of the future kingdom are revealed:

1. At Christ's return to establish the kingdom, Satan is bound and confined in the bottomless pit.
2. Those who were saved during the tribulation and died, as well as all the Old Testament saints who died and were not part of the church, will be resurrected (20:4; Daniel 12:1-2; John 5:28-29; Luke 14:14). The "dead in Christ" will have been resurrected at the rapture of the church. This will complete the "first" resurrection (20:5).
3. The kingdom will last a thousand years (20:4).
4. Satan will be released and once again go out to deceive the nations. Those who were born during the kingdom and were not saved will join Satan in one final rebellion against God. Fire will come down from heaven and devour them (20:7-9).
5. The devil will be cast into the lake of fire (20:10).
6. All lost people will then be resurrected to be judged to determine the degree of their punishment(20:11-15)

Summary.

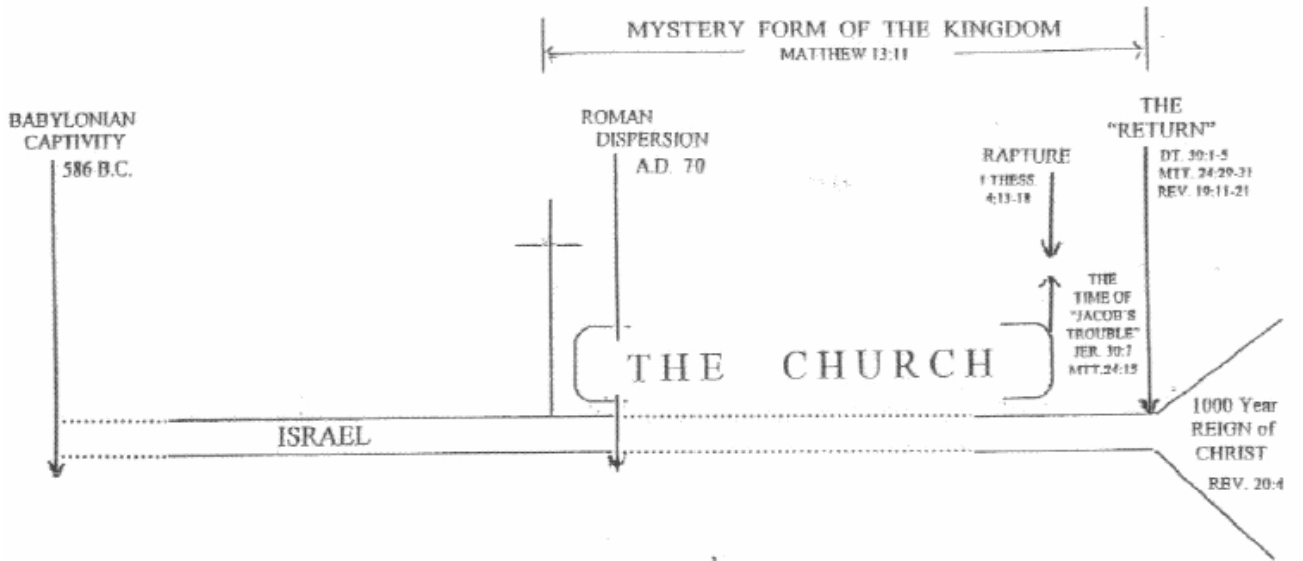
1. Old Testament teaching concerning the second coming is related primarily to Israel.
 - a. It will occur when Israel repents (Deuteronomy 30:2; Zechariah 12:9-10).
 - b. Israel will repent as a result of “The time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:1-7).
 - c. Israel will be gathered in their natural bodies back to the land given to Abraham’s descendants (Deuteronomy 30:3-5; Isaiah 11:4-12; 65:18-23; Matthew 24:30-31).
 - d. At His return, Christ will rule from David’s throne (2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:31-33).
 - e. This kingdom cannot begin until Christ returns. Therefore, it will be pre millennial.

2. The return for the church is a separate event from the return to re-gather Israel.
 - a. It will occur when the church, which Christ is building, is completed (Matthew 16:19; Acts 15:14-16; Romans 11:25).
 - b. The church will be caught up in glorified bodies to the place prepared for it (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Therefore, a period of time must elapse between the two events, otherwise, there would be no saved people left on earth to enter the kingdom in their earthly bodies.

3. The “tribulation of those days” occurs during the last seven years determined for Israel. Both the tribulation and the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy conclude with the return of Christ (Daniel 9:24; Matthew 24:29-30). The seventieth week begins when the Roman prince (Antichrist) makes a seven year treaty with Israel. Three and one half years later he breaks the treaty and enters the restored temple claiming to be God (Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). At this point he is given “authority to continue forty-two months” (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 11:2; 13:5).

4. There are inferences that the church will be caught up before the tribulation begins:
 - a. The last seven years before Christ returns to set up His earthly kingdom are determined for Daniel’s people, Israel (Daniel 9:24, 27). The spiritual blindness will be removed from Israel when the church is complete and caught up (Romans 11:25). This will occur before the earth is harmed (Revelation 7:3). Since there was a period of nearly two months between the end of the sixty ninth week and the beginning of the church there may well be a similar period between the rapture of the church and the beginning of the seventieth week.
 - b. As pointed out, the seventieth week for Israel begins when the Roman prince (Antichrist) makes a seven year treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27). He cannot be revealed to make the treaty until “He who now restrains....is taken out of the way and then the lawless one will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8). The restraining influence of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in believers will be removed at the rapture.

5. There are promises to the church concerning the tribulation.
 - a. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief....For God did not appoint us to wrath (of the day of the Lord), but to obtain salvation”.
 - b. Revelation 3:10 “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth”.



TIMES OF THE GENTILES
 Daniel 2:31-45; 7:1-27; Luke 21:24

