

THE TIMING OF THE LORD'S RETURN

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

1Thes 1:9-10(KJV)

The New Testament sets forth the coming of the Lord Jesus as the *hope, comfort, and encouragement* of the Christian. The Christian's hope does not rest in reforming this world, in politics, science, medical advances, technology, or education. We who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are waiting:

"...for his Son from heaven." (*1Thes 1:9-10 KJV*)

With eager anticipation we are looking for Him, watching not for an event so much as for our Savior.

For our conversation[citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Phil 3:20 (KJV)

The church, consisting of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in this age, is instructed from the Bible to watch and wait for His return. The expectation of His return *encourages* us to live holy lives (I Jn 3:2-3). This *hope* properly held in the heart motivates us and spurs us on to serve, labor, and witness for our Lord (1Thes 5:6,7). The knowledge of that great reunion is a source of *comfort* as we in this life are separated from those who have died "in the Lord" (I Thess. 4:13-18).

While the Savior Himself emphatically declares concerning His return,

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father (Mark 13:32 KJV).

The Bible does not leave us in doubt as to the general timing of the Lord's return.

The next event to occur in God's timetable is the Rapture, or the Removal of the Church (John 14:1-3; I Thess. 4:13-18). The Lord Jesus will return to the air and "catch up" from the earth living believers whose bodies will be transformed and equipped to live in Heaven. Those believers who have died in the Lord will at that time be raised and will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. When will this great event take place?

The Lord's return is first of all *Pre-millennial* There are three major views held concerning the return of the Lord in relation to the establishing of His kingdom. All three use the word "millennial" which is from the Latin for 1,000 :

1) **A-millennial** No literal kingdom; no future for Israel as a nation. A General judgment to occur after the Lord's return Relies heavily on the "*spiritualizing*" method of interpreting Scripture.

2) **Post-millennial** The Lord comes after the kingdom is brought in. The millennium is ushered in by the preaching of the gospel (or by "social/political reform". This view has been revived today under the title of "Christian Reconstructionism")

3) **Pre-millennial** The Lord comes before the 1,000 year reign. Implies belief in a literal kingdom reign on earth by the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes in power and glory to set up His kingdom. The 1,000 years (see Rev. 20:1-7) represent a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ. The promises to the nation of Israel to be literally fulfilled.

Why such a divergence of views? A person's approach to interpreting the Bible will determine their eschatology, that is, doctrine of last things. *The Pre-millennial view is arrived at by the application of a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture* (cp. Daniel 2:35;45 Isaiah 7:14 Isaiah 11:6-8 Luke 1:32,33) While most who believe in the Bible as God's Word interpret the Bible literally, many abandon this approach when interpreting the prophetic portions of God's Word. For example, When in Zechariah 14:4 it states that His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives the pre-millennialist interprets that to mean that His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives. When it says in Luke 1:31,32

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: all would agree that this was literally fulfilled at the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where the interpretive roads part is on the remaining portion of the verse which states that,

*and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:
And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1:31-33 (KJV)*

One either has to spiritualize this part, that is ascribe to it some other meaning than what it says, or **consistently**, **literally** interpret the entire verse.

The Lord's return is also Pre-tribulational One of the questions that has faced students of Bible prophecy is whether or not the church will go through any or even part of the time of tribulation that the Bible declares is to yet come upon the earth. Though volumes have been written on this subject, the following are four reasons from the Bible that show that the church will not go through the tribulation.

1) The Nature of the Tribulation The tribulation is a period of time that is designed specifically for the nation of Israel. This is not to say that it will not effect the Gentile nations or that they will not be involved. But note in the following verses the references to "Jacob", "Israel", "thy people" referring to the Jewish people.

And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah Jer 30:4

Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. Jer 30:7

*Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. Jer 30:10
(See also Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:15-24)*

The tribulation is not a period of time that involves the church.

2) The Nature of the Church

a.) A Mystery The church which is His body did not exist in the Old Testament. It could not come into existence until the death of Christ and His resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit of God to form the church, His body. Though the church was in the eternal plan of God it was not revealed and could not be known until the Lord chose to make it known by divine revelation as the following verses show.

Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

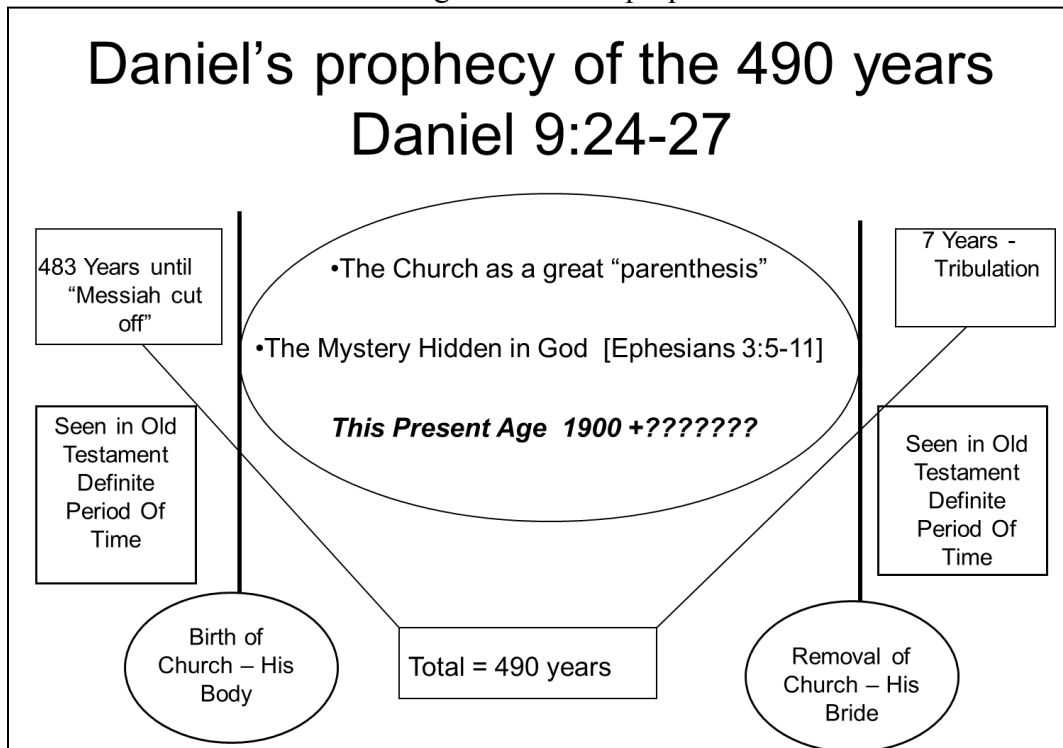
Eph 3:5,6,9

Because the church is a New Testament entity and was not seen by the prophets of the Old Testament the church is not the subject of Old Testament prophecy. The Tribulation is the subject of Old Testament prophecy.

b.) A “Parenthesis” This age has been likened to a “great parenthesis”. The age in which we are living is a period of time not seen in the Old Testament. The parenthesis began with the birthday of the church at Pentecost . Something must close this parenthesis. That event will be the rapture of the church. Thus this church age will end and God’s dealings with His Old Testament people will resume.

Note the following diagram:

The Nature of this age and God's "prophetic time clock"



As the diagram seeks to illustrate, the tribulation is a definite period of time mentioned in the Old Testament. The church is not mentioned in that period of time. The age in which we are living is an indefinite period of time. Something must close the great parenthesis so that God's prophetic time clock will once again begin to tick. Since the primary activity of God in this age is the calling out of the church, and since this age began by the formation of the church, it seems reasonable to conclude that the event concluding this period of God's dealings will be the removal of the church.

3) The Absence of the Church in the Tribulation Passages of the Book of Revelation

The church is not mentioned in the book of Revelation from 4:1 until ch.19! Although there are "saints" seen these are not to be confused with the church.

4) The Stated Teaching of the New Testament Revelation 3:10; I Thessalonians 5:9 compare. Revelation 6:17

While space will not permit at this point a complete exegesis of these passages, a simple reading of these verses reveals that the church has not been appointed to experience that time of tribulation.

I Thessalonians 1:9,10 express the hope and confidence of the church:

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

The Lord's Return is Imminent - "any moment"; "soon to happen" This term is used to express the fact that there are no intervening signs that we are to look for, no great event to be fulfilled before the Lord's return. Nothing awaits fulfillment before the Rapture can take place. ***This is not true concerning the Revelation of the Lord in power (see Matt. 24).*** The doctrine of His Imminent return stresses the fact that He may come at any moment, that the time of His arrival is uncertain, and that no prophesied event stands between the believer and that hour. This produces in the believer a constant state of expectancy and incentive for service and holy living.

As the coming of the Lord certainly draws nigh may we be reminded of the closing words of the last book,

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly (Rev 22:20)

And may our hearts respond as did John's in that day,

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.(KJV)