

Parousia

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Surviving the Tribulation

FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FAITH ?

The Jerusalem Discourse of Christ ©

Luke 21:5-38

Surviving the Tribulation

FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FAITH?

The Jerusalem Discourse of Christ ☺ Luke 21:5-38

by Charles Cooper

Having spent the better part of the last 25 years preaching the escapism of the pretribulation rapture, I never thought seriously about having to survive the great tribulation of Satan/Antichrist. Even if I was fortunate enough to be on earth just prior to the beginning of Daniel's Seventieth Week, the Rapture would take me away before the persecution began. This is what I was taught and this is how I thought. It was not easy to give up this view. My flesh was comforted by thoughts of taking the easy street to glory. However, like so many others, once the reality of the teachings of Scripture is taken at face-value, my mind was flooded with questions of survival. If my generation has been chosen by God to be that final generation of mankind to experience the events of the Seventieth Week of Daniel, what would I do? How would I survive Satan/Antichrist's world-wide persecution of God's elect? Should I stockpile food, guns, gasoline and coal in caves? Once Antichrist takes his seat in the temple of God, should I hide or publicly proclaim "the gospel of the imminent arrival of the Son of God?" What about my children? What about my grandparents who are in bad health and in constant need of medical attention? What about my Christian friends who only recently trusted Christ as their personal sin-bearer and have not had time to grow in their personal walk with the Lord? They have neither the experience nor the knowledge of God to trust Him in the midst of the greatest crisis this world will ever know. Can millions of Christians successfully hide in America for two to three years and not be discovered by Antichrist's demonic forces? Should I seek to survive the persecution of Satan/Antichrist or should I seek martyrdom? Questions, questions and more questions flooded my mind.

The Problem

Many of you like myself have fully and totally adopted the prewrath view of the timing of Christ's return to gather together His church and punish the wicked who remain with God's wrath. We understand that

Satan/Antichrist's persecution of God's elect will be cut short by Christ's sudden appearance in the heavens just after the sun goes dark, the moon stops giving light, and the stars fall from the sky. This is what Jesus teaches in the Olivet Discourse, Peter teaches in Acts 1-2 and I and II Peter, Paul teaches in I Corinthians 15 and I and II Thessalonians, and John teaches in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to his bond-servants. Once we understand the scriptural teachings regarding the timing of the rapture of the church, we must then face the sobering prospect of facing Satan/Antichrist's persecution. Our first inclination may be to run away and hide or perhaps to stop and physically fight.

Neither of these responses is correct. The Bible is staggeringly silent about offensive strategies against Satan/Antichrist's persecution. At no place do the Scriptures indicate that New Testament believers are to take up armed resistance against Satan/Antichrist's persecution. One will look in vain for instructions in the writings of Paul, Peter, James and John concerning the activities that have as their purpose the personal preservation of life through gorilla warfare or hiding out until Christ comes. With the lone exception of Matthew 24:16 which states, "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," Scripture does not indicate that *believers* are to run and hide or stay and physically fight (the one lone exception specifically refers to believers in Jerusalem when Antichrist begins his persecution). One would think, given the nature of the "great tribulation" and the amount of material committed to the events of the end-times presented in the New Testament, that believers would be given a very specific plan detailing exactly what God expects us to do.

Some might argue that the lack of instruction concerning how the church should respond to the great tribulation is an argument for the Rapture to precede Daniel's Seventieth Week. In other words, if the church has no instructions, maybe she is not present on earth during this time. The problem is that pretribblers uniformly associate passages

that give instructions about end-time conduct with Christ's coming at Armageddon instead of correctly understanding their significance for the Rapture at the beginning of the Lord's *parousia*. Pretribblers insist that there are no Rapture passages in the Gospels with the lone exception of John 14:1-4. All other passages refer to the Lord's coming at Armageddon. However, once one understands that the *parousia* of Christ is initiated by the Rapture of the church, one immediately sees that the Gospels do tell believers what they should do to remain alive until the Lord comes. One passage of particular interest is found in Luke 21:5-38.

LUKE'S JERUSALEM DISCOURSE OF CHRIST ¹ 21:5-38

A Hermeneutical Matter

Before we overview Luke's record of the Lord's end-time prophecies and look in great detail at its specific concluding application, we must first discuss a hermeneutical matter. A principle of biblical interpretation with respect to prophecy is the matter of near/far fulfillment. That some prophetic passages of Scripture can have both a near fulfillment and far fulfillment is generally accepted by conservative Bible scholars. An example of this phenomenon occurs in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (near) and the final and ultimate destruction of Jerusalem (far) during the conclusion of this age. The "far" fulfillment of this prophecy begins during the Seventieth Week of Daniel and concludes near the end of the 30 day reclamation period just prior to the battle of Armageddon. That Luke's Jerusalem Discourse contains both a near and far fulfillment is supported by Dr. Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary when he writes,

In Luke's view, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is part of God's plan and judgment. This fall pictures the end... Given that *short-term events mirror long-term events* and that these earlier events represent a pattern for God's ultimate judgment, it is clear that someone interpreting Jesus' remarks could focus on *either side of the temporal mirror* and reflect appropriately on his comments... The discourse is rich in teaching, but no one writer presents the full picture. The other Gospels tend to focus slightly more on the *end-time*, while Luke tends to stress the *near future*. Thus, reports of Jesus' teaching can focus on only a single element of the picture. Each writer shows his interest by which side of the portrait—*the near or the far*—he emphasizes... In addition, the similarity within the mirror might make it hard, in the original setting, to know whether one is speaking of the *near term, the long term, or both*. (Emphasis added)²

How one interprets Luke's discourse is largely determined by how one understands the relationship between Matthew/Mark's Olivet Discourse and Luke's Jerusalem Discourse. Each begins immediately following the Lord's prophetic prediction that the then standing temple in Jerusalem would be totally destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2; Mark

13:1-2 and Luke 21:5-6). Each account immediately follows with one or more questions by the Lord's Disciples. It is imperative that the reader notice that all three Gospel writers indicate by their questions a connection between the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the conclusion of the age. All three writers use the plural pronoun "these things" which indicates that Jesus must have said more than what is reported here. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the temple—a single event. Yet, each refers to that single event with a plural pronoun which suggests more than one antecedent or object of discussion. The fact that all three writers tied Jesus' prophecy of the temple destruction with the conclusion of the age indicates that Jesus must have indicated to the Disciples a prophetic relationship between the two events. What He said must have indicated a relationship between the temple's destruction (a near event) and the persecution of Satan/Antichrist (a far event) at the *parousia* of Christ. This is the only logical explanation. This would explain the plural pronoun "these things" and the fact that Matthew, Mark and Luke tied the conclusion of the age with the destruction of Jerusalem in their questioning of Jesus. Matthew asks, "*when* will these things be? And *what* will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Matthew does not give any indication as to why he connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the final conclusion of the age. Mark does the exact same thing as Matthew. Mark asks, "*when* will these things be? And *what* will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" The close parallelism between Matthew and Mark demands that their questions have the same basic meaning.

Luke equally asks two questions: "*when* will these things be? And *what* sign will there be when these things are about to take place?" Notice that Luke's questions are very similar to Mark's questions. They basically have the same meaning. Each gospel writer includes a "when," and a "what" question. Assuming that the first question refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, neither writer indicates that Jesus gave a direct and unambiguous answer. Judging from what is recorded in Matthew and Mark, it is clear that Jesus either did not answer the first question at all in His Olivet Discourse recorded in their books or Matthew and Mark did not focus on that part of Jesus' answer. We know that Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Since the Disciples asked a direct *timing* question, a direct answer would give a specific date and time in the future. It is highly unusual to answer a "when" question with a "what" answer. Much confusion and many mis-

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interpretations of Matthew and Mark's Olivet Discourse would be avoided if interpreters would simply understand that Matthew and Mark do not record the Lord's answer to the first question. Luke, however, does answer this question as recorded in His Jerusalem Discourse in Luke 21. Not recognizing this one fact has given rise to a whole theological system called *preterism* which is the false notion that most of the events recorded in Matthew 24 and Revelation have happened already. Notice the writing of R.C. Sproul,

The main problem with Jesus' predictions in the Olivet Discourse is that they include not only predictions regarding Jerusalem and the temple, which did come to pass with astonishing accuracy, but also predictions of his own coming in glory, or his parousia.³

Both Matthew and Mark concentrate on the "what" question only. They only record the Lord's answer concerning "what" would be the sign of the end of the age and "what" the sign will be that signals the beginning of His *parousia*.

However, Luke's Jerusalem Discourse distinctly differs from Matthew and Mark's Olivet Discourse. Luke incorporates both the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the final conclusion of the age into a perfect example of a near/far prophecy of the Lord's teachings about the end-times. That this is the case can be supported by the following facts. First, Luke clearly interrupts the final end-time sequence as recorded by Matthew (24:4-8) and Mark (13:5-8) with a temporal section (Luke 21:12-24) that pertains primarily to the Twelve Disciples. Notice how verse 12 begins, "But before *all these things*, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons..." "All these things" refers back to verses 8-11 which state,

And He said, "See to it that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is at hand'; do not go after them. "And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately." Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

One can easily see that Luke 21:8-11 is the same end-time sequence of events outlined by both Matthew and Mark. In verse 12, Luke then indicates that before this end-time sequence begins, the Disciples will experience persecution up to and including death.

A second fact that supports a near/far prophecy in Luke's Gospel concerns Luke's usage of the key end-times phrase "that day" in his conclusion to the Lord's teachings on end-times. Luke 21:34 states, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and *that day* come on you suddenly like a trap..." (emphasis added). "That Day" refers to the Day of the Lord which indicates that Luke's emphasis in his conclusion is the "far" fulfillment. The first proof for this conclusion is the

fact that the context is clearly one of universal judgment which only occurs during the day of the Lord (cf. Mat. 24:30, Is. 2:19). The second proof is the fact that Luke describes the signs (sun, moon and stars) that indicate the imminent arrival of the Day of the Lord's wrath in Luke 21:25-26 (cf. Joel 2:31; Rev. 6:12-17). The third proof that the phrase "that day" refers to the Day of the Lord concerns Luke's promise that those who watch and pray can "escape *all these things* that will come to pass." "All these things" in Luke 21:34 refers to the events mentioned in verses 34-35. There are several reasons for this conclusion. First, the "all these things" that the disciples should pray that they might escape certainly would not involve the persecution associated with the destruction of Jerusalem (the near fulfillment). Christ warned the disciples that they would suffer that particular persecution (Luke 21:12-19). The only promise given concerning that period of persecution concerns eternal security (Luke 21:18).⁴

The context is a second reason that "all these things" in Luke 21:36 refers to the events mentioned in verses 34-35 which involve both the conduct of the world and the day of the Lord's wrath. It is the day of the Lord that will come upon the whole world as a trap. It is this trap that believers should seek to escape. This is consistent with other N. T. passages which promise faithful believers deliverance from the eschatological Day of the Lord (the far fulfillment, I Thess. 5:9).

So we are able to conclude that Luke incorporated both the persecution of the Disciples connected with the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem (the near fulfillment) and the final conclusion of the age when Jerusalem will be the epi-center of Satan/Antichrist's persecution of God's elect (the far fulfillment). This point must be kept in mind when analyzing the Jerusalem Discourse in Luke's gospel.

A simple outline of this very important chapter is as follows:

The Signs Before the End of the Age: Luke 21:7-11

And they asked Him, saying, Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? And He said: Take heed that you not be deceived. For many, will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Then He said to them, Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilence; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

The Disciples' Persecution Before the Destruction of Jerusalem: Luke 21:12-19

But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be deliv-

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ered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

The Destruction of Jerusalem: Luke 21:20-24

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

Unlike Luke 21:7-19 which is rather straightforward and clear, what follows in Luke 21:20-24 is much more complex. The line between the near/far prophecy is very difficult to draw. Both the A.D. 70 destruction (the near) and the final destruction of Jerusalem (the far) are in focus. Luke's emphasis differs greatly from the emphasis of Matthew and Mark at this point. There is no mention of the "abomination of desolation," no mention of the intense nature of the great tribulation, no mention of the cutting short of the great tribulation that some flesh might survive, and no mention is made of the fleeing in winter. The importance of these differences are highlighted by Dr. Darrell Bock when he writes,

They [the differences between Luke and Matthew/Mark] indicate that Luke emphasizes a different element in Jesus' teaching at this point. He focuses on the nearer fulfillment in the judgment pattern described here, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 rather than the end (which he will introduce directly in 21:25). The end is indirectly alluded to by the language of 21:23-24, which shows Luke's linkage and concern. It would seem that Luke sees in Jerusalem's collapse a preview, but with less intensity, of what the end will be like. So the instructions he offers here are like those that appear in the description of the end in 17:23, 31. He wants to make clear that when Jerusalem falls the first time, it is not yet the end. Nonetheless, the two falls are related and the presence of one pictures what the ultimate siege will be like. Both are eschatological events in God's plan, with the fall of Jerusalem being the down payment and guarantee of the end-time.⁵

The Sign of the Day of the Lord Initiates the Parousia of Christ: Luke 21:25-28

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expecta-

tion of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

At this point, Luke returns to the same sequence of end-time events that is strikingly similar to Matthew (24:29-31) and Mark (13:24-27).

The Fig Tree Parable: Luke 21:29-33

And He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all [these] things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

The Application of Luke's Jerusalem Discourse: Luke 21:34-36

Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

The Exposition: Luke 21:34-36

A word-by-word analysis of this very important text will yield several very important principles concerning the conduct of believers in the face of the events of the end-times. It is here that believers are specifically told how to respond to the events of the end-times which will include the persecution of Satan/Antichrist. Having integrated both the near and far destruction of Jerusalem and given a broad overview of the events that lead up to and constitute the end of the age, the Lord concludes His discussion with a call to personal watchfulness. *Given the judgment that will fall upon the earth and her inhabitants, believers must guard themselves against any notion of engaging in the conduct of the world.*

This particular section begins with a very important word. It is the Greek word *prosecho*. English translations suggest several possible translations of this word in Luke 21:34. The King James Version of the Bible uses "take heed." The NASB uses "be on guard." The NIV has "be careful" as a possible translation. Louw and Nida in their Greek lexicon suggest the meaning of *prosecho* is "to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately."⁶ A good modern translation would be "pay attention to." The Lord commands believers "to pay attention to themselves." The Lord then explains the possible alternative if one fails to pay attention to oneself. The Greek particle *mepote* (lest) introduces a clause that gives the result if a believer fails to pay attention to him or herself. One's heart will be weighed down (*bareo*). A weighed down

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heart is a figure of speech that basically means “to be insensitive.” The Lord is warning believers against developing a callous heart which will be demonstrated by “dissipation, drunkenness and the worries (cares) of life.”

“Dissipation” literally means “dizziness or staggering.”⁷ It refers to “the nausea and the headache that are caused by heavy drinking.”⁸ Luke’s point is not physical, but spiritual drunkenness.⁹ Isaiah 29:9b which states, “They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink,” gives the sense intended here. “By spiritual drunkenness we are probably to understand unsteadiness of conduct and a want of spiritual discernment.”¹⁰ The point seems to be unclear thinking which leads to stupid conduct, not that unlike the characteristics Paul describes to Timothy about society, including the church, going into the last days, (II Tim. 3:1-5).

The second item mentioned by the Lord is “drunkenness.” This will be one of the great problems during the end-times, (Matt. 24:38, 49). This is obviously the result of the over consumption of alcoholic beverages. The Apostle Paul warns the Romans about this very problem in the context of the last times, (Romans 13:13).

The last item the Lord mentions is “the worries (cares) of life.” The idea concerns that “feeling of apprehension or distress in view of possible danger or misfortune.”¹¹ This word is used four times in the New Testament. Luke 8:14 which parallels Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19 uses this same word in the parable of the sower. Notice, “And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with *cares* [worries], riches, and pleasures *of life*, and bring no fruit to maturity,” (emphasis added). Here the Lord explains that “the worries (cares) of life” can choke out the fruitfulness of the Word in a disciple’s life.

1 Peter 5:7 which states, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you,” indicates that God is to be our “care-taker.” The results

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of the troubles that Satan attempts to bring our way in the form of persecution must be given to God. In the examples stated above, the noun for *care* or *worry* is used, however the verb is used 19 times in the New Testament. Believers are specifically warned not to worry (care) about: (1) how long one’s physical life is (Matt. 6:27, 34); (2) the necessities of physical life like food, water, clothing and shelter, (Matt. 6:19-34, Luke 12:22-34); and (3) what a believer must say when brought before kings

food, fuel and shelter for His people, He will continue to do so during the great tribulation. This allows believers to remain focused on representing the righteousness of God on earth during this critical time just prior to the end of the age.

Those believers who become callous to the demands of God—an insensitive heart—will result in “that day [coming] on [them] suddenly like a trap,” (Luke 21:34). This is the reason believers are not to allow their hearts to become callous (insensitive) to the teachings of Christ. “That day” will come suddenly and unexpectedly for unbelievers and those believers who have ignored the Word of God. This is confirmed by the words of Christ in Revelation 3:3b. The church at Sardis had grown insensitive to the teachings of Christ. He exhorted them by saying, “Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” Peter, picking up the same thought, explains that

The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat; and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat? (II Pet. 3:10-13).

“That day” in Luke 21:34 refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord. In the New Testament “that day,” the “day of the Son of Man,” and the “day of the Lord” all refer to the same period when speaking of end-time events. Matthew 24:36, 44, 50 state, “But of that day and hour no one knows... but My Father only. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him... the master of that servant will come on a *day* when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of...” Mark 13:24-32 states,

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven. Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Here the cataclysmic disturbances are tied directly to “the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 state, “For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the

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moon will not cause its light to shine...All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; and their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree.” Joel prophesied that “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before the great and terrible day of the Lord*,” (Emphasis added). The relationship between the day of the Lord and the coming of the Son of Man is clear. They are one and the same.

“That day—the day of the Son of Man—the Day of the Lord” speak of both deliverance and judgment. Those who have allowed their hearts to become callous to the teachings of Christ will be unexpectedly surprised by the coming of Christ. “And that day [the day of the Son of Man/the Day of the Lord] come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth,” (Luke 21:35). The fact that the whole earth is in view supports the conclusion that the end times are the subject of the Lord’s application. Since the whole earth will receive judgment at Christ’s coming, the insensitive worldly disciples must fear. The reason the disciples should fear is because “that day” will involve judgment.

The Apostle Paul also taught that the Day of the Lord would come suddenly and unexpectedly for unbelievers in I Thess. 5:2-3. He writes, “For you yourselves [the Thessalonians] know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they [unbelievers] say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” Interestingly, Paul uses the exact same Greek word for *escape* that Luke used in 21:36. Unbelievers will not escape the Day of the Lord’s wrath, but faithful believers will (I Thess. 5:9). Paul reminded the Thessalonians of this fact in II Thessalonians 2:3. There he indicates that believers will witness the revelation of Antichrist and subsequent purging of the church before the Day of the Lord comes. This exact same promise is given to the Church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 which states, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, 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.”¹²

Given the judgment that will result at the coming of Christ, those disciples who want to pay attention to themselves are told what they must do. The goal is to stay alive until the Lord comes, not because believers are afraid to die, but because believers want to stay alive to see the literal victorious descent of the Lord in royal splendor and glory. A second reason to survive and be alive at the *parousia* of Christ is to be able to answer in the affirmative the question asked by Jesus in Luke 19:8, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Paul puts it this way:

This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction,

away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power... To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power... (II Thess. 1:5-9, 11).

However, the route to staying alive is radically different from what one would expect. *It is not hiding or fighting, but holiness.*

The Jerusalem Discourse closes with a final call to *faithfulness* in the midst of the pressure present on earth during the last days just prior to the Lord’s *parousia*. The first thing disciples must do is *watch*. This is not the normal word used in the New Testament for *watch*. This particular word literally means “to go away from sleep.” It is used as a metaphor to mean “to be watchful.” With the phrase, “at all time,” the Lord instructs his disciples to be on a constant watch. If the Lord is coming and consequences of not being ready when He comes are bad, then the only thing a wise person can do is be on a constant watch for any sign of His coming. This is exactly what the Lord teaches. Coupled with watchfulness is the need to pray. The constant watching must be accompanied with prayer for strength to face the temptation that will come from the persecution which the Lord mentioned in Luke 21:12-19. The temptation believers will face in connection with persecution is to compromise. The choices will be either to blend in with the world or remain steadfastly committed to the Lord. One will be in trouble either with Satan/Antichrist or the Lord Christ.

The word used for prayer in the Greek has the sense of asking with urgency. The disciples are to ask for strength. The disciples do not have within them the strength necessary to stand against the troubles they will face. Instead, they are to pray to God for the strength to “escape all these things that are about to take place.” To *escape* “has the force of coming unscathed through the terrible events of the last days...”¹³ The key here is the object of “all these things.” In the context, it would appear that the “things” that the disciples are to pray to escape from are the events connected with the end times. One escapes not by hiding or fighting, but by faith in the sovereign God who has a plan for each and every individual’s life.

The final thought in verse 36 is very important. The disciples are to pray for strength to stand before the Son of Man. The infinitive to *stand* is used in the sense “to cause to be in a place.” It can be used in

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FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FAITH?

a literal or figurative sense. Here it is used in a figurative sense. The emphasis is not on literally, physically standing, but having the moral correctness—the legal standing to receive a positive verdict from the Lord. Scripture clearly indicates that all men will stand before Jesus Christ to be judged, (Heb. 9:27). Paul indicates that believers can receive either negative judgment or positive judgment when they stand before the Lord in judgment. He writes in II Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Jude tells us exactly how to receive a positive judgment. He writes, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” God can and will help those who seek His help in order to stand before Him faultless. God has already given believers the resources necessary to live in such a way to please Him. We are given the specifics in Ephesians 6:13 which states,

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, *to stand firm*. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with *truth*, and having put on the breastplate of *righteousness*, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of *peace*; in addition to all, taking up the shield of *faith* with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of *salvation*, and the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the *word of God*. (Emphasis added)

Therefore, God has provided everything necessary for the faithful disciple to navigate the end times. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God are all the equipment necessary to successfully live through the persecution of Satan/Antichrist. For those who trust in the Lord and utilize His apparatus for daily living, the persecution of Satan/Antichrist will not overcome them.

Conclusion

How then are we to survive the great tribulation of Satan/Antichrist until the Lord’s *parousia* cuts it short with the rapture of the church, the single event that initiates the beginning of God’s Day of the Lord wrath? Are we to run and hide? No! Are we to turn and physically fight? No! First, we are to pay attention to ourselves by not allowing our hearts to become insensitive to the teachings of Christ by copying the world’s conduct. Second, we are to watch for the signs. With the

passing of each sign during Daniel’s Seventieth Week, the coming of Christ grows closer and closer. Third, we are to pray for divine strength to escape unscathed the events of the end-times. Fourth and finally, we are to pray for divine strength to have moral correctness before the Lord. The Apostle John wrote, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that if He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” (I John 2:28). Confident not in ourselves, but in the grace of God that makes it possible for us to stand in His presence at His *parousia*.

ENDNOTES

1. Unlike Matthew/Mark, Luke does not tell us where and what time of day Jesus gave this discourse. However, since it focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem which pictures the ultimate judgment of God at the end-time, I have named this section “Luke’s Jerusalem Discourse of Christ,” what Robert Van Kampen refers to in *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple* as “Christ’s Temple Discourse.”
2. Dr. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1656-57.
3. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 14.
4. Since Luke 21:16b clearly indicates that martyrdom will happen to some of His Disciples, verse 18 cannot apply to the physical loss of life. Hair “represents a small feature of one’s body...” says Leland Ryken, et al in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 360. It declares the extent to which God will protect or spare a person. It can only refer to an ultimate sense. The loss of physical life does not affect a faithful believer’s ultimate salvation with God.
5. Dr. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1675.
6. J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, s.v. προσεχω.
7. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 449.
8. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 1029. Anthony Lee Ash, *The Gospel According to Luke, Part II: 9:51-24:53* (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1973), 118.
9. I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 782.
10. Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 465.
11. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, s.v. μεριμνα.
12. In the next issue of Parousia a detailed analysis of this verse will be given to support this conclusion.
13. I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, 783.

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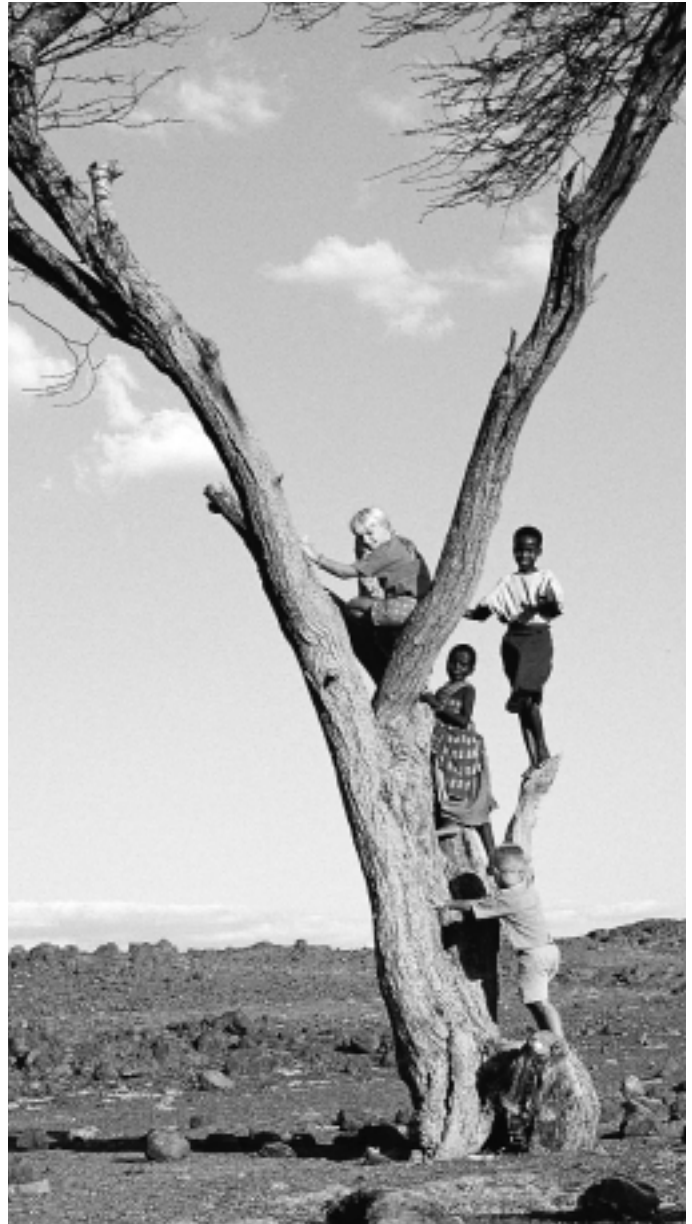
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Commentary



One more year, and we will be there—the year 2000. There has been an abundance of speculation as to what will take place when 2000 finally arrives. There are those prophecy teachers with a preponderance toward sensationalism who have been busy setting dates and writing books relating to the coming of Christ, most of which have absolutely no biblical significance. And then there is the Y2K problem which has captured the attention of the media and the business world, as well as those who insist that it has great significance as related to the biblical explanation of end time events.

We have had calls to our ministry from people who are at the point of panic, not knowing exactly what to do. Some are ready to sell their homes in the city and move to rural areas. Others are considering drawing their money out of the bank and changing their investments to gold and silver and other precious metals. There are those who are led to believe that as a result of the Y2K problem Antichrist will arise quickly and take over the world. This problem has become a major topic of conversation, even among evangelical Christians.

The year 2000 has no prophetic significance whatever as to the coming of Christ and the Rapture. There is nothing magical about this next year. The basic theory for those who are suggesting that Christ will come at this time is the “1 day as 1000 years” theory. Since God created the earth in 6 days, and the 7th day He rested, they are suggesting that the year 2000 brings us to 6000 years since the beginning. They then suggest that the next 1000 years will be the Millennium. Now let me pose just a couple of the many problems with this thinking. First, calendars have changed through the years from lunar to solar, in fact this is 5759 in the Jewish calendar. Secondly, we have no record of when God created the heavens and the earth. Studies done using biblical genealogies try and calculate a date for creation, but this strategy is undermined by the fact that those same genealogies very well may skip generations. Can you see the questions that immediately arise? There is no indication in the Bible that Christ will come in the year 2000. Now with history on our side and ap-

proaching the Bible from a face value hermeneutic, I can dogmatically say that Christ is not coming in the year 2000. There is, however, certainly the possibility that the events preceding the end-times could begin.

Well, what about Y2K and its significance to Bible believing Christians? It remains to be seen how much difficulty will result because of the computer glitch. It could be rather significant; we don't really know at this point. I have read articles from prophets of doom who with great paranoia suggest it will cause major problems and bring about total chaos in all areas in our world. I also have read the so-called experts who suggest that, although there may be some problems, they will not be of a significant proportion.

Let's take a worst case scenario and suggest that the Y2K problem will bring about major chaos in the world and drastically affect our way of living. What should we as Christians do about it? I believe we begin by understanding who our God is. He, indeed, is the Almighty sovereign God of the universe who has promised us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that He will never leave us or forsake us. Peter reminds us that we are “aliens and strangers” in this present world and that we are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation (deliverance) ready to be revealed in the last time.” Things are going to change in the world that we live in, and the chances are that they will get worse rather than better. That should not alarm us who know who we are in Christ Jesus.

Let me leave with you God's words found in Isaiah 46:9b, 10, 11b, “For I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure;... truly I have spoken: truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.” If we will rest in a sovereign heavenly Father, He will lead us in the right things to do. We serve a sovereign God whose children we are. We can be assured that He will care for us even under the most difficult of situations.

From the Emailbag

Thank you ever so much for... *The Rapture Question Answered*. You would not believe how much it has changed my life... I was a pre-tribber for the first 22 years of my Christian life. Now that I have discovered the Olivet Discourse and *The Rapture Question Answered*, I have left pre-trib. I thank you for your clear writing.

— M.G.

This is just a note to tell you all there how much your ministry has meant to me. I have always believed that the pre-trib position was not quite correct, but did not know why... Your books and materials have been most helpful.

— P.M.

I love receiving your newsletter and I was thrilled to read books written by Mr. Van Kampen... Searching out the truth with the help of these faithful teachers has allowed Christ to change me in so many ways... I'll continue to pray for your ministry, and may God keep you till that blessed day!

— J.M.

A friend of mine recently laid out the Bible's end times teaching (primarily following the book *The Sign*) and for the first time Revelation actually made sense, and it is exciting! So thank you for all you do!

— E.W.

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We are currently scheduling conferences and seminars for Spring and Summer, 1999.

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