

OUR BLESSED HOPE,  
THE RETURN OF CHRIST



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**A PROPHETIC WORD FOR THE CHURCH**

# OUR BLESSED HOPE, THE RETURN OF CHRIST

## *Introduction*

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The day that Christ gave up His life on the cross, and the day when He returns in glory are the two most important days in the history of mankind! Unfortunately, many Christians have relegated the subject of His return to a study of current and historical events in order to estimate when He will come, who the antichrist will be, and to view His return as a divine escape-hatch from tribulation. For this reason, it is important to understand the Lord's purpose in the church concerning His return. A mighty revival lies ahead! The Lord will restore and prepare the church for His return, and will manifest His glory through her to bring in a final, great harvest of souls. This tract examines His purpose in the light of the following subjects:

1. Prepared for our Lord's return.
2. The final harvest.
3. Inheriting the kingdom.

Near the end of His ministry on earth, the disciples asked Jesus two questions. Part of His answers contained six simple but important truths that are safeguards to keep one from falling into error on this subject.

The first question was asked just before Jesus was delivered up for crucifixion.

*. . . "Tell us, when will these things happen (i.e. destruction of the temple), and what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)*

The Lord's answer is recorded in the following scriptures: Matthew 24:4-51 and Matthew 25:1-46. The first two of the six important truths were part of His answer.

1. Do not be misled concerning My return (Matthew 24:4, 5, 11). This subject has historically been the focus by many, if not all, of the religious cults. It is a major theme by false prophets and false christs. Even some Christian groups have erred in their teaching on the return of Christ. That is why these six truths are safeguards.
2. Do not set dates for My return (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44). Many Christians have failed to heed this warning, and they have crippled their testimony and ministry by setting dates for His return.

The second question was asked of Jesus near the end of His forty days with the disciples after His resurrection.

*“. . . Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)*

Jesus replied that His Father would determine the time, and they were not to be concerned about it, but they were to give themselves wholly to preaching the gospel. Jesus then used two angels to give the disciples the remaining four truths as He ascended back to heaven.

*They (the angels) also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, **will come in just the same way** as you have watched him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)*

The remaining four truths concerning His return are:

3. Jesus will return bodily, not as a Spirit-being.
4. His return will be visible to all.
5. He will return in the clouds of heaven.
6. Angels will be present at His return.

The following are other scriptures that confirm these truths.

*Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him . . . . (Revelation 1:7)*

*For just as the lightening comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be . . . . And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:27, 30, 31)*

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17)*

It is important to keep these six simple truths in mind as we consider other aspects of the return of Christ.

## *Prepared For Our Lord's Return*

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Jesus is not coming back for a weak, divided church; He is coming for a victorious, overcoming church, a bride who has prepared herself for her Bridegroom!

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Revelation 19:7-8)*

These righteous acts are a reflection of the glory of God. The Lord has defined His glory by seven attributes of His character. He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, full of mercy and truth, willing to forgive and He is just (Exodus 34:6-7). These qualities also define His love, and they should be seen in the lives of those who preach the

gospel! The love of God, along with signs and wonders, confirm the gospel.

When the disciples asked Jesus for a sign that would mark His return, He first warned them of things that would precede His coming, such as famines, earthquakes, wars, false prophets, tribulations, etc. He then completed His answer with four parables. These parables are very important, since each one deals with specific character and actions that He desires and expects to be present in the church when He returns, and how failure in these areas would be judged. Such qualities point to the righteous acts of the saints mentioned in Revelation 19:8. These four parables thus provide a sign of how well prepared the church is for His return, and therefore they are areas of great importance to us today. Let us examine each parable.

1. Matthew 24:45-46. How faithfully and timely do we, especially leaders, share His food (the word of God) with one another in His household?
2. Matthew 25:1-13. Are we filled with the Holy Spirit, and is our relationship with Jesus the most important concern of our life? All ten virgins were asleep, but only five were anointed and ready to meet the bridegroom. Are we ready for marriage to the Lamb of God, or is our heart still yoked to the world?
3. Matthew 25:14-30. Are we using the spiritual gifts, talents and ministries that have been given to each of us by the grace of God? Are we reaching out to the lost and edifying others in the body of Christ? God expects an increase of all that He has invested in us; and we will have to give an account of our stewardship.
4. Matthew 25:31-36. Is the love of God the motivation for how we live and what we do? Do we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, practice hospitality, visit the sick and those in prison, and do everything as unto the Lord? These acts express the glory of God!

Paul's epistle to Titus reveals how one is to conduct himself while looking for the Lord's return.

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14)*

God has purposed to fill the earth with His glory (Numbers 14:21; Habakkuk 2:14). While this will take place when Christ returns in glory, it begins with the Lord manifesting His glory in His body today. It is more than signs and wonders. The godly qualities that make up His glory are the character traits that the Lord seeks to develop in His people; qualities that will reveal Christ to the world.

We know that Christ in us is our hope of glory, but how is glory developed in our every day life? It requires faith, not only in the Person and work of Christ, but also faith in the trials and difficulties that He will bring into our lives to discipline us.

It is historically true that persecution, tribulation and even martyrdom have brought forth glory in believers, while apathy and complacency begins to emerge once society has accepted the church. It has been said that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. How true this statement is!

The relationship of glory with tribulation is well established in New Testament scriptures, as well as in the lives of the first century saints (1 Peter 2:21; 4:12-14; 5:8-10; James 1:2-4).

*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory. (2 Corinthians 4:17)*

*. . . if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to (in) us. (Romans 8:17-18)*

*. . . we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character . . . . (Romans 5:2-4)*

The Lord is in control even when we are under attack by Satan.

*The Lord has made everything for His own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Proverbs 16:4)*

Just as tribulation can bring glory to a church, the presence of sin and lawlessness can destroy churches. Before He returns, the Lord will use persecution to purge out those who only profess to be Christian; the tares from among the grain, while He keeps and protects those who are His. The wheat and tares will eventually be separated from each other forever (Matthew 13:30, 37-43).<sup>1</sup> Tribulation at the end of this age will be a time of restoration and preparation of His people for the glory of His appearing (1 Corinthians 1:7-8; Colossians 3:1-4).

The overcomers will be visible in the purging and refining, while those without root in Christ will fall away (Daniel 11:33-35).

*. . . for if we died with Him, we also will live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him . . . . (2 Timothy 2:11-12)*

The words of Jesus to His disciples were very clear that great tribulation would mark the days prior to His return (Matthew 24:21, 29-31).

The climax of Satan's persecution in the closing day of this age will be the "man of lawlessness," the antichrist, who appears on the earth before the Lord returns (2 Thesalonians 2:1-4). The prophet, Daniel, was shown how he will persecute the saints (Daniel 7:21-27). This persecu-

tion is also described in the book of Revelation (Revelation 12:7-11; 13:7-10). It is during the great tribulation that Christ returns to catch up the church to Himself.

*After these things I looked, and behold a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all the tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . . These are the ones **who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9, 14)*

The phrase, “a great number which no one could count, from every nation, and all tribes and peoples and tongues,” can only refer to the whole church, who are the seed that God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:5; 6:10).

The third chapter of Acts contains Peter’s exhortation to fellow Jews at Solomon’s Portico. He exhorted them to repent of their sins and turn to Christ, who will come again, but *not until the “period of restoration”* of all things as spoken by God’s holy prophets.

*Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, **whom heaven must receive** (or retain) until the restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21).*

From this scripture we recognize that one thing which had to happen before Christ returns was the scattering of Jews and the regathering of them back to their land as a nation. This scattering began with destruction of the temple in 70 AD. While their regathering is taking place today, the nation has yet to recognize their Messiah, or to occupy all of the land promised to them by God.

The early church began to decline in the second century and fell into apostasy during the dark ages. Since the reformation there has been a restoration in the church of some spiritual qualities of the first church.



The church today is divided by many factions and denominations. It was said of the early Christians, “Behold, how they love one another.” The ministry of the first apostles, such as Peter and Paul, sought to build the saints in each area as a local expression of the body of Christ. To them, the church was a spiritual organism under the headship of Christ (John 17:21-23). Without His life and anointing there simply was no church! It was not an organization under the apostle’s leadership! Each member was encouraged and equipped to find and fulfill his or her calling as a servant in their local body. Spiritual gifts and ministries, with signs and wonders, were a part of normal body life. Unlike many today, local churches were overseen by a plural company of godly men in an accountable eldership. The church of that day impacted the entire known world because Christ was kept central and preeminent in everything.

While the church today is numerically far greater, most of it lacks many spiritual qualities of the first century church. Restoration of these spiritual qualities, in my opinion, will be a major part of the restoration referred to in Acts 3:19-21.

To this end, the greatest revival that the church has ever known lies just ahead! As more of these early church truths are restored, there will be a dramatic increase in maturity and evangelism, and the great final harvest will be completed that ends this age.

## *The Final Harvest*

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Three distinct events make up the final harvest. They are as follows:

1. A final number of souls will be won to Christ from all nations of the world.
2. The gathering out of all tares from God’s kingdom made up of stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness (Matthew 13:30, 37-42).

3. The bodily return of Christ in glory to harvest the church (Revelation 14:14-16).

God's word declares that this harvest will end the age we live in today, and Christ will then reign in His kingdom.

*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (Matthew 13:43)*

We must not presume that the Lord will return *before* He reaches all who would come to Him. He died a most painful death to pay for the sins of all men. His heavenly Father promised Him an inheritance of souls from *all* nations.

*Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. (Psalms 2:8)*

The Lord's strategy for His harvest is to receive the promise of His Father by sovereignly touching all nations!

*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the **whole world** as a testimony to **all the nations**, and then the end shall come. (Matthew 24:14)*

*"I will shake **all the nations**; and they will come with the wealth (desire) of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of Hosts. (Haggai 2:7)*

*"Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **all creation**." . . . (Mark 16:15)*

Many church statisticians state that the church is living in the middle of a great ingathering. America and Europe have not been impacted yet, but this will change. I believe that we are experiencing the beginning of a great wave of evangelism that has yet to crest. Communication technology is exploding with satellites bringing radio and television into all remote parts of the earth. The Internet provides person to person communication across national boundaries.

The Islamic nations, who make up approximately 20% of the world's population, have little or no knowledge of the true God who loves them. All Israel is yet to be saved, which is certain to happen (Romans 11:12-26). There will be a great Semitic harvest.

If God pours out His Spirit in renewal of the church so that the virtues of His glory are seen and broadcast over the earth, expressed by signs and wonders in concert with demonstrations of grace, mercy, forgiveness, repentance and love; who can even imagine the harvest of souls that would result?

Another encouraging sign is the growing movement of worship, intercessory prayer and fasting for revival.

Evil will be great, even as we see it growing today (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13). Spiritual warfare is a part of the harvest. The gospel of the kingdom, along with spiritual gifts, ministry and prayer, will destroy demonic activity in localities. The Lord will bring down rulers and authorities that Satan has placed over localities, as His people stand united in prayer against the forces of wickedness (Ephesians 6:10-18).<sup>2</sup>

A renewed church with the glory of God resting upon her is the true sign of His coming! The following scripture expresses this spiritual phenomenon:

*Arise and shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, and your daughters will be carried in the arms. Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the **wealth of the nations will come to you.** (Isaiah 60:1-5)*

The next two verses of this scripture point to the Islamic harvest to come. Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah; Ephah was the son of Midian, and Sheba was his grandson. Nabaioth was the first-born son of Ishmael, and Kedah was his second born. Thus, all five names were the seed of Abraham. Because they were not born from the womb of Sarah, they represent today's Muslims. The spread of Christianity through Islamic lands will almost certainly result in many martyrs. The present day Islamic terrorism is a sign of the conflict to come.

The prophet Daniel was given a vision of the end-time renewal work of God among His people, and of the harvest that followed.

*Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. (Daniel 12:10)*

*Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of the heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)*

Finally, much of the harvest will be from the poor and crippled and blind and lame, from orphans and the impoverished of less developed nations, from the drug addicts, prostitutes, homeless and refugees of all nations. The material that society throws away will be transformed into precious material by Christ which He will use to build His house (Luke 14:16-24).

## *Inheriting the Kingdom*

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Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God! All that the Lord has taught us, or has brought into our lives, has been to prepare us for His kingdom. However, one must be changed into His likeness before he can inherit the place prepared for him.

*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, **we will be like Him**, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)*

Paul's epistle to Corinth expresses this truth as follows:

*Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we all will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last (seventh) trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:49-52)*

Christ is God's mystery; how He lives within us and changes us into His image is part of that mystery. On the day when the seventh angel sounds the last trumpet, the mystery of God will be finished; we shall be like Him for eternity.

*But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished. . . . Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven saying, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 10:7; 11:15)*

The prophet Daniel prophesied of this eternal kingdom.

*Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of **all the kingdoms under the whole heaven** will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; **His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom**, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him. (Daniel 7:27)*

Those who have died in Christ shall be the first ones to experience resurrection to immortality.

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so **we shall always be with the Lord.** (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17)*

Just as this first resurrection closes the present age, it also begins a new age for the earth. All of creation has been eagerly awaiting this revelation of the sons of God to deliver it from the corruption that came as a result of Adam's sin.

Our adoption as sons is not complete until we have received glorified bodies. When this takes place, we will reign with Christ in His kingdom. After the Lord judges the nations, glory will fill the earth as He reigns over all creation (Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 20:5-6)

## *Conclusion*

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The gospel of the kingdom prepares the way for Christ to return and establish His kingdom. If the greatest revival in the history of the church is soon to break forth, how will it affect traditional church life? I believe that the answer to this question will be found in the following nine areas of change:

1. The revival will be centered around Christ Himself and not around the charisma of a man, or men.

2. The traditional church will not be able to contain the number of new converts. There will be an explosive growth of house churches to accommodate them.
3. Many new leaders will emerge from these house churches who will stand united in their vision of Christ and His body. Instead of dividing into competing factions, they will stand united as one body. They will be a dilemma to leaders of existing denominations; some of whom will embrace this new dimension of church life, while others will resist it to their shame.
4. There will be a falling away of many in liberal churches. God has begun to shake the Roman Catholic church, by exposing pedophilia among priests. There will be many thousands of disillusioned Catholics swept into the kingdom when they see the reality of the gospel of the kingdom.
5. Humility will be a Holy Spirit emphasis when teaching on character. Spiritual maturity is the process of being changed into the image of Christ, which begins when a believer denies himself, picks up his cross and follows Christ. This process will be encouraged by an environment of tribulation and suffering. Although it will vary by nation and region, persecution will grow throughout this revival to bring forth the character and glory of Christ. Martyrdom will become common, especially in Islamic nations.
6. Although noted evangelists will emerge, much of the harvest will be brought in by the testimony and life of ordinary believers. The driving force for all ministry will be intercessory prayer. The glory of heaven and the reality of hell will become very, very real.
7. Some of the new leaders who emerge, primarily from house churches, will be recognized as valid apostles and prophets. They will be trustworthy, accountable men who point everyone to Jesus Christ. As practiced by the first church, the new churches in a locality will be overseen by an eldership, rather than by one man.
8. As the revival takes place, the theology of dispensationalism and a pre-tribulation rapture will begin to fade.

9. The emphasis of only clergy ministering to laity will change to body ministry, where every member can fulfill their place of service. Even children will be anointed and used by the Lord (Psalm 110: 1-3; Malachi 4: 5-6).

The disciples asked Jesus to tell them what sign would signal His return, and the end of the age. The glory of God resting upon a restored church, where multitudes are being saved, is that sign!

And that is where our heart is to be as we prepare ourselves for His return.

*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 John 2:28)*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus . . .

### *End Notes*



1. Dale Rumble, BEHOLD THE HARVEST, Destiny Image, 1998, pp. 42-46, 163-168.
2. Dale Rumble, BODY, SOUL & SPIRIT, GOD'S BUILDING BLOCKS, Selah Publishing Group, 2003, pp. 115-132.

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