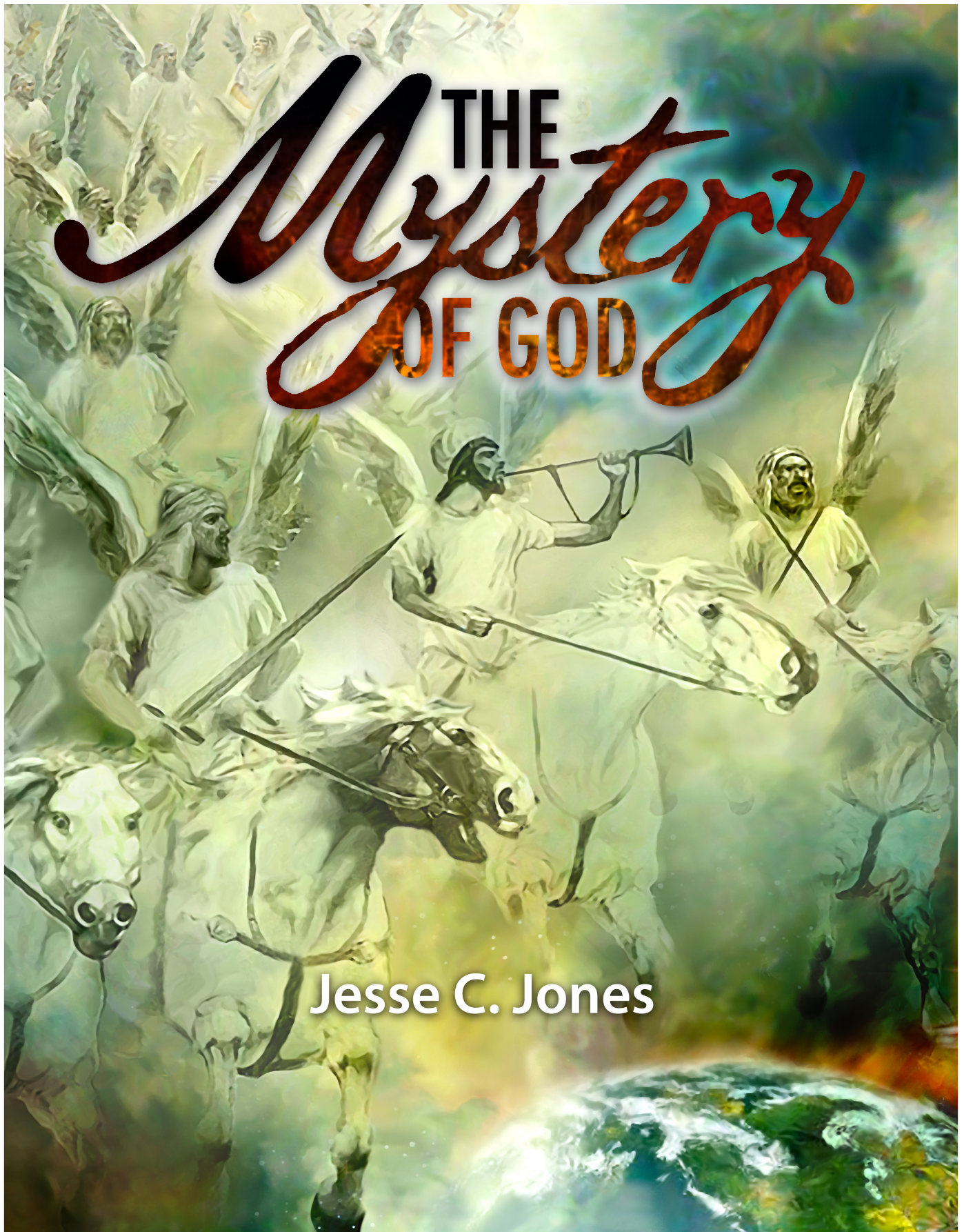


The Mystery of God by Jesse C. Jones



# THE *Mystery* OF GOD

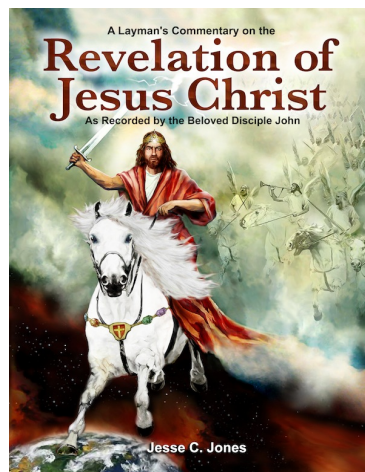
**Jesse C. Jones**

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*A Layman's Commentary*  
*on*  
*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*  
*(As Recorded by the Beloved Disciple John)*

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## Preface

This book presents an analysis of the biblical scriptures that prophesy events that must come about just before and after Jesus Christ returns to earth in the clouds to gather His elect in what is referred to as the rapture/resurrection. His coming to earth occurs in two phases: 1) to gather those identified in the Bible as the elect given to Him by God the Father, and 2) to bring Satan's rule as prince of this world to an end by defeating his hordes at the battle of Armageddon. It is the first phase of Christ's coming that is the focus of this writing.

There are several important scriptures that seem to clearly point to the timing of Christ's coming in the clouds to gather those that are His. This study will analyze these scriptures and attempt to prove that they do indeed focus on the timing of the rapture/resurrection. Notice that I have used the word "timing" rather than "time". The word timing has to do with the initiation of an event so that it is most effectual: that is certainly what God does when He gives the "go-ahead" for the return of Christ. We will identify the order of events leading up to and following the rapture/resurrection and thus, we will be

able to establish the time period during which it occurs. The Bible is very clear that the day and hour of Christ's return is known only to God the Father. However, the prophecy of Christ in the book of Revelation provides a great amount of information about the events that occur prior to, and following the rapture. The books of Daniel, Matthew, and Thessalonians also provide information on this subject.

In this writing I have used several NT word studies and Bibles including Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, The Analytical Testament of NT Greek by Maurice A. Robinson and Mark A. House, Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised by Harold K. Moulton, The New Analytical Bible by John Dickson Publishing Company, The Interlinear Greek NT by Jay P. Green, Sr., and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

Scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

## Chapter 1

### Background

Several years ago I wrote a book entitled: “A Layman’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation”, in which I tried to interpret what Jesus Christ prophesied to John the apostle regarding the timing of the cataclysmic events that occur during the last seven years of man’s rule on earth: the last seven weeks of Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy regarding the end-time (Da. 9:24-27). Obviously, one of the most significant events that occurs during this period of time is the resurrection/rapture, when Christ comes in the clouds to gather His elect from the earth (Da. 7:13; M’t. 24:30, 26:64; M’r. 13:26, 14:62; 1 Th. 4:17; Re. 1:7). The specific time of this momentous event has been the subject of many visionaries over the years, all of which have proven to be false as the appointed day came and passed without incident. I think that most believers watching for Christ’s return believe the statement of Jesus in Matthew 24:36, that only our Father in heaven knows the day and the hour of this earth-shaking visit. However, we have been given a very detailed revelation of the things which must come to pass during the last seven years in the book of Revelation (Jesus Christ’s prophetic revelation to John the apostle). Although our Father in heaven is the only One who knows the day and hour of Christ’s second coming, those of us

that have “eyes to see” have been given this remarkable prophecy so that we can be prepared as the “end” approaches.

There is a principal that seems to thread its way through many important Bible teachings that applies to this event: God often provides guidance about His significant actions, teaching, and intension in more than one telling, by using parables and other allegories, as well as other means. Jesus used this same technique when He taught the disciples: Mark 4:9-12 records Jesus' discussion with the disciples after teaching the parable of the sower to the crowd, *“And He said to them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said to them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted [turn again], and their sins should be forgiven.”* This seems to be a hard teaching, but it presents one of the ways that deep mysteries could be taught in such a way as to reach those that were prepared (by previous instruction and followup) to receive the guidance. I believe this is the meaning of the phrase, *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”*. In other words if you have been prepared to receive the teaching, you will understand it. I have found this to also be true about

Bible study: if you persist in understanding some teaching from God's Word, and have the right motive in searching the scriptures, God will bless your importunity (see Lu. 11:5-8, 18:2-7).

In our study concerning the time of Jesus' return we find an amazing corollary in the ancient Jewish marriage rite and God the Father's choosing and arranging the marriage of the bride of Christ (the church). We shouldn't be too surprised at this, for (as indicated above) this repetitious pattern is often followed in the fulfillment of biblical prophecies: prophecies often have more than one fulfillment. In the ancient Jewish marriage the father of the groom determines when (the day and hour) the bridegroom is to go and "steal" His bride away from her family. The groomsmen run ahead of the groom, sound a ram's horn trumpet (shofar), and shout that the groom is coming. In Matthew 24:36 Jesus tells us that His Father in heaven is the only One that knows the day and hour that He is told to go and snatch (resurrect/rapture) His bride (the church) from the earth. 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 describes Christ's coming to earth in a manner similar to that of the Jewish marriage: "*For the Lord shall descend from heaven with a **shout**, and the **voice** of the archangel, and with the **trump** of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*" (emphasis mine). He decides the time and manner of Christ's return to earth to gather His elect just as He estab-

lished the time and method for the ancient marriage rite of the Jewish people. The time in both cases is based on the completion of the preparation of a chuppah (wedding chamber) for the Jewish bride, and a “place”, or “building” of God, for the resurrected/raptured believer (Joh. 14:2-3; 2 Co. 5:1-2). When the father of the groom determines the “chuppah” is ready he will tell the groom to go for his bride. Likewise, when God the Father determines that Christ has completed the preparation of the “place” or “building” for the believer, He will tell Christ to go and gather His own.

Recently, during a home group meeting, a comment was made about the true church of God holding back the full revelation of the antichrist, which according to 2 Thessalonians 2:3, is one of the precursors to Christ’s return. This comment piqued my interest, so I set out to revalidate my understanding of the meaning of the applicable scriptures. Although there seemed to be a somewhat general agreement in the sources I consulted as to the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7: *“And now ye know what withholdeth [that which restraineth to the end] that he might be revealed in his time [own season]. For the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work: only he who now letteth will let [only there is one that restraineth now], until he be taken out of the way”*, I was surprised to find that none of the sources seemed to connect Revelation 10:7 to Christ’s return: *“But in the*

*days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets*". In view of this seeming oversight it seemed worthwhile to document my understanding of the significance of this passage of scripture, and how it fits into the timing of the return of Christ for the rapture/resurrection of those that have been sanctified. Since much of what had previously been written in the commentary referred to above applies to this subject, I want to set the background for this short study by quoting from that commentary:

1. Christ will appear a second time to those that look for Him (Heb. 9:28).

Christ's second coming is referred to most often in the GNT as the Parousia, a Greek word which means appearing, manifestation, or coming (1 Th. 3:13, 5:23).

2. The second coming of Christ is referred to over 300 times in the NT. Many of the predictions concerning Christ in the OT also have to do with His second coming.

3. At physical death the spirit/soul of one who belongs to Jesus Christ returns to God who gave it (see Ec. 3:21, 12:7; Job 34:14; Is. 57:16; Zec. 12:1), and the body returns to the dust (Job 34:15). When Christ comes for His bride (resurrection and rapture), accompanied by the spirit/souls of the physically dead be-

lievers, our vile body will be changed in a moment, and He will give us a glorified body like His (Ph'p. 3:20-21).

4. The initial stage of Christ's second coming (rapture/resurrection) will not be in secret, as some have attested, but will be announced with great fanfare. 1

Thessalonians 4:16-17 says:

*"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall ever be with the Lord"* (see also M't. 24:30, 1 Co. 15:52, Re. 1:7). The voice of the archangel is a loud shout, an arousing outcry, and the trump is described in Matthew 24:31 as the *"great sound of a trumpet"*. The dead saints will be resurrected first in their glorified bodies; then those that are alive will be *"changed"* during their flight to meet Him in the air. This *catching up* of those that are still alive is referred to as the *rapture*. The rapture occurs at the last (seventh) trumpet, during the Great Tribulation (1 Co. 15:52).

5. Revelation 10:7 GNT states, *"but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, also should be completed the mystery of God, as he did announce the glad tidings to his bondmen the prophets."* Colossians 1:27 indicates

that the mystery of God is "*Christ in you*". When Christ returns for His bride, the Holy Spirit's (Christ's Spirit) ministry within believers is finished.

6. Matthew 24:27-31 describes the coming of the Lord for His elect. This passage seems to show that the rapture comes following signs in the heavens that occur during the Great Tribulation. This may refer to a sign in the stars similar to that when Jesus was born. Matthew 24:28 is a verse that has received widely divergent interpretations, but to read it in context seems to indicate that it refers to the resurrected bodies of believers (carcass, or dead body) meeting and joining with the spirit/souls (eagles), who return with Christ when He comes to gather His elect (Lu. 17:37; 1 Th. 3:13, 4:14). From this we see that Jesus Christ will return to earth in the clouds to gather those that belong to Him (the elect) during the last 3 1/2 years, during a time referred to in the Bible as the Great Tribulation. His coming is presaged by signs in the heavens, by the voice of the archangel, and the sound of the seventh angel blowing the last trump. The dead in Christ will rise first, to be followed by those still living who will be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

When we meet Christ in the clouds our new, eternal body will join our spirit/soul, which has returned with Him from heaven, and we will ever be with the Lord. Man is identified as being tripartite: "divided into three parts; three-

fold". 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says that man consists of three parts: soul, body, and spirit. Two of the three constituents of man, viz. spirit and soul, are immaterial, formed and implanted by God (Ec. 12:7; Job 33:4; Zec. 12:1), and (in the case of believers) destined to return to Him in heaven (Job 34:14; Ec. 3:21, 12:7; M't. 10:28; Ac. 7:59; Rev. 6:9), or, in the case of unbelievers, to descend into the abyss (bottomless pit) to join Satan. Ezekiel 18:4 indicates that all souls belong to God, and the soul that dies in unforgiven sin is the one that breaks this bond and receives death (separation from God) as payment. The spirit and soul are very closely entwined (Heb. 4:12), and, in fact, they accompany each other to heaven or hell at the death of the body (Ps. 86:13; 1 Ki. 17:22; Ec. 12:7; Job 34:14; Eze. 18:4; M't. 10:28; Re. 6:9). The Hebrews of the OT did not recognize a separate human spirit, but considered the attributes of both spirit and soul to be vested in the "inner man", referred to as the soul. The body is the third constituent of man, and God creates it through ordained natural processes within the womb of the expectant mother's body. It is material in nature, and is formed by programmed physical processes, whereas the spirit and soul are formed by the direct action of God, with no contribution from man. The capabilities and functions of the human spirit and soul are thus determined by God, although man by his actions can cause his spirit anguish, sorrow, and bro-

kenness; and his soul to be downcast and bitter. At physical death the believer's sinful body cannot enter God's Kingdom of the Heavens, but must return to the earth as a seed to die and give life to a perfected immortal body that will arise at the resurrection (see 1 Co. 15:37, 42-44).

From the above we see that when a believer dies his/her spirit/soul returns to God in heaven to await Christ's return to earth for the second time (the Parousia). It is at the time of Christ's return that the prophecy in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is fulfilled: *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

For those that are dead their immortal bodies shall rise from their graves to join their spirit/souls in the air to be with Christ forever as a tripartite heavenly being.

With this background I would now like to focus on the purpose of this writing, which is to determine who or what is it that is withholding the antichrist, and when and how he is to be revealed. We will also attempt to validate the meaning of the term "the mystery of God". I propose to do this by analyzing the pertinent biblical scriptures.

## Chapter 2

### Timing of the Lord's Return

No Bible subject seems more misunderstood than when the Lord will return to gather His elect in the clouds, for them to be with Him forever. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 provides an explanation of this great event: “*Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.*” Paul is here responding to the church at Thessalonica, which was very disturbed about a forged letter that had been supposedly sent by Paul to some in the congregation there implying that “*the day of Christ [the Lord is just] at hand*”. Paul reassures them by bringing up two significant events that must occur before the return of Christ: 1) there will be a great falling away from the church, and 2) the man of sin (the antichrist) must be revealed. Some have raised arguments about the meaning of the term “*falling away*”, but the Greek word used here is defined as “defection”, or “apostasy”, which does not leave much wiggle-room for other interpretations. The state-

ment that the “*man of sin be revealed*”, has also been questioned. The meaning of the word “*revealed*”, according to Moulton’s Lexicon is “to be manifested, appear”. This could be understood to refer to the antichrist’s rise to power at the beginning of the last seven years. Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy (Da. 9:24-27), indicates the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel at the beginning of the last seven-year period of man’s rule on the earth, allowing the priests to practice sacrifice and oblation. In the middle of the seven years (~3 1/2 years) he will break his covenant, force the Jews to stop the sacrifice and oblation, raise up an idol of himself in the temple, and cause all people to worship the idol on the penalty of death. It is also near the middle of the seven-year period that the antichrist receives a severe head wound, from which he is subsequently healed/resurrected (Re. 13:12). We know that Satan is the great imitator of God, and here he attempts to identify his false christ, the antichrist, by imitating Christ’s death and resurrection. I would argue that this is more likely the time of his being fully revealed, for his true nature is made obvious to all at this time.

It is not absolutely clear from the Bible that the antichrist dies (physically) from this wound, but we know from the book of Revelation that he did recover and return to power as an absolute fiend. Revelation 17:10-11 says, “*And*

*there are seven kings: five are fallen and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition*". When John wrote Revelation the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek kingdoms had ceased to exist. Rome is the "*one is*" kingdom in this verse, for it existed at the time of the prophecy. When the antichrist first rises to power he will "*continue a short space*", which we assume means until near the middle of the seven-year period, when he suffers the "deadly" wound referred to above. This is the seventh kingdom, and the antichrist king is "*of the seven*", which seems to say that he rises out of the confederacy of nations originally referred to as the old Roman empire.

After the antichrist becomes ruler of the world, about seven months into the first half of the seven-year period, he seems to maintain relatively peaceful conditions for a short time. However, things start to deteriorate as his true nature begins to manifest itself, and conditions get so bad that an assassination attempt is supposedly made on his life. He is miraculously healed from the deadly wound he receives, and he returns to power as the eighth king. If he was actually resurrected here it would seem that he came back to life under the full and unbridled spiritual control of Satan. There is some justification for

this in Revelation 13:1, where the antichrist is first described as rising out of the sea (turbulent nations) to become the seventh king. Revelation 11:7, and 17:8 describe his second persona as rising out of the bottomless pit (abyss), supposedly after his “resurrection”. His nature becomes even more evil after he is “resurrected”, and recovered from his deadly wound.

Another passage of scripture that provides information about the time of the Lord’s return is Matthew 24:23-31, which describes the return of the Son of man to gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Verse 28 of this passage describes the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return in this mysterious manner, *“For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together”*. Luke 17:37 GNT says, *“. . . Where the body (is), there the eagles will be gathered together.”* The key words here are “body” and “eagles”.

The Greek word “*soma*” is interpreted as “body” approximately 150 times in the NT in a variety of nuances, and in several different contexts; thus, it is difficult to be dogmatic about its usage here. However, if we consider the context of this passage, which is Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question, *“Tell us, when will these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?”*, we can be reasonably sure we have interpreted it correctly. The entire Chapter 24 of Matthew is a description of events transpiring from the beginning of the

last seven years to the coming of Christ for His elect: through the “Beginning of Sorrows” and early part of the Great Tribulation to the resurrection/rapture.

One of the definitions of “*soma*” in Vines Expository Dictionary of Bible Words is, “Bodies undergoing the miracle of resurrection are indicated in Matthew 27:52, Acts 9:40, 1 Corinthians 15:35”. Matthew 27:52 says, “*And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose*”; Acts 9:40 says, “*But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up*”; and 1 Corinthians says 15:35 says, “*But some will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?*” I believe logic would demand that we conclude that the Greek word “*soma*” interpreted as “*dead body*” in Matthew 24:28 GNT, and “*carcase*” in the KJV, describes the bodies of the dead saints being resurrected by our Lord Jesus Christ when He comes to collect His elect from the earth.

## Chapter 3

### The Sights and Sounds of Christ's Return

Many expositors of the Bible maintain that the coming of Christ the second time will without fanfare, and those that are left behind will be surprised when many of their acquaintances suddenly disappear. This belief is largely based on the passage in Revelation 3:3 which says in part, *“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”* (see also M’t. 24:42-43; 1 Th. 5:2). We know that Christ’s return like a thief cannot refer to the lack of loud noise and signs in the heavens, for, as documented below, the scriptures seem clear and unambiguous on this point. What we conclude is that the meaning must be related to the **unexpectedness** of His coming, and the context of the scriptures referring to His coming like a thief seem to be related to encouraging watchfulness, and preparation. A good example of this is given in Matthew 24:44 *“Therefore, be ye ready: for in such an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh”*, as well as in Hebrews 9:28 *“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation”*.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 GNT says, *“Because the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with a trumpet-call of an archangel’s voice, and with God’s trumpet. And the dead in Christ will rise again first.”* The Greek word interpreted trumpet-call is defined in Moulton’s Analytical Greek Lexicon, Revised as “A loud shout, an arousing outcry”. The Analytical Lexicon of New Testament Greek by Robinson and House defines the Greek word interpreted “trump” as “A bugle, a war trumpet, used for signals and commands; hence in eschatological passage as signal for judgment or Resurrection.” To paraphrase the above verse with these definitions we would have “Because the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with the arousing outcry of an Archangel’s voice, and with God’s trumpet signaling those on earth that He is coming to resurrect/rapture those that belong to Him”.

Matthew 24:31 GNT says, *“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of (the) heavens to their ends.”* For the Greek word interpreted “great” the Robinson and House Lexicon gives, “Large, great, in the widest sense”.

1 Corinthians 15:52 GNT says, *“In a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet, for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall*

*all be changed.*” This verse makes it clear that the resurrection/rapture occurs when the last trumpet sounds.

Revelations 11:15 GNT says, “*And the seventh angel trumpeted. And there were great voices in Heaven saying, The kingdoms of the world became our Lord’s, even of His Christ, and He shall reign to the ages of the ages.*” At this point He has gathered the dead and living believers, and is prepared to pour out the wrath of God on the earth.

Hebrews 9:28 GNT says, “*so Christ, having been once offered of many to bear (the) sins, (He) shall appear a second (time) without sin to the (ones) expecting Him for salvation.*” His coming will be visible to the believers expecting Him.

Titus 2:13 GNT says, “*looking for the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Believers should be looking for Christ’s return.

Matthew 24:27 GNT says, “*For as the lightening comes forth from (the) east and shines as far as the (the) west, so also will be the coming of the Son of man.*” Another sign in the heaven announcing Jesus Christ’s return.

Luke 21:17 GNT says, “*And then they will see the Son of man coming with power and much glory.*”

Acts 1:11 GNT says, “*who also said, Men, Galileans, why do you stand looking up into the heaven? This Jesus, the (One) being taken from you into the heaven, will come in the way you saw Him going into the heaven.*” Jesus Christ’s return will be like His departure described in Acts.

Revelation 1:7 GNT says, “*Behold, He comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and the ones who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him, Yes, Amen.*”

## Chapter 4

### Who is He That Withholds (Restrains)

**2 Thessalonians 2:6-7:** *And now ye know what withholdeth [that which restraineth to the end] that he might be revealed in his time [own season]. For the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work: only he who now letteth will let [only there is one that restraineth now], until he be taken out of the way.”*

The Bible does not tell us who or what it is that keeps the man of sin from being fully exposed. Who or whatever it is must have greater power than Satan because Satan is surely anxious to break any restraints on his man (antichrist). Jude 9-10 records the archangel Michael contending with the devil over Moses body; however, he did not dare to accuse (judge) the devil, but said “*The Lord rebuke thee*”. It seems obvious that someone (or some thing) with greater power than Michael would be needed to restrain the advent of the man of sin. We know that Satan does not have the power of God, for God created him, and subsequently confined him to earth when he claimed to be a god and sit in God’s seat (Ez. 28:2). Revelation 12:4 says that Satan took a third of the angels with him when he was cast to earth. We see from this that the one keeping Satan from introducing the antichrist must be God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit, for they only have the power over Satan and all his actions. However, I want to make an alternative suggestion that involves God in

a slightly different way. The church is Christ's body, and thus the church **is** Christ to our world. I refer to the church as God sees it: committed believers into Christ everywhere, without regard to particular denominations or church organizations to which they may belong, or have membership. Ephesians 1:22-23 says that God the Father put all things under the feet of Christ and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body. Just as our head (brain/mind) controls all the actions of our body through the central nervous system, so Christ was designated by the Father to be head over the church, and to control all its actions through the members of the body.

When Jesus left this world He established the church, which is His body, to continue the work He came to do. So what is this work He came to do? Luke 4:18-19, which quotes Isaiah 61:1-2, provides the answer to this question, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance [proclaim release] to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*" He emphasized this in Matthew 25:35-36, when He was judging the nations after the battle of Armageddon. To the righteous He said, "*For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I*

*was sick , and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me.”* What we see here in these two passages of scripture is that we are to **be** Jesus to our world, a charge that (in my opinion) we have not fulfilled. Nevertheless, the Lord continues His task of mediation (Heb. 8:6, 12:24), sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and doing everything He can to conform us to His own image (Ro. 8:29). We are His hands and feet (His body), fully able to do the work of Christ on earth as we let the Holy Spirit renew our minds (Ro. 12:2). It is the church, Christ’s body, that restrains the revealing of the antichrist on earth, and I believe it is apparent that the time is drawing near, for the influence of Godliness on earth is diminishing rapidly: the falling away prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 seems to be upon us.

That evil is increasing rapidly seems self-evident; in the US we can hardly pick up a newspaper without being confronted by a story about some horrendous crime. We are no longer a God-fearing nation: our government seems determined to stamp out any mention of God, whether it be on our national and patriotic monuments, our celebration recognizing the birth of Jesus, in public prayers, or by Salvation Army bell-ringers, in public schools and universities, by military chaplains, ad inf. Until recently the US Army was conducting briefings that label evangelicals and pro-family organizations as domestic hate groups.

Other departments and organizations of the Federal government are also being used to harass Christian organizations. The “Defamation of Religions” resolution being promoted by 57 Islamic countries before the UN would make sharing our Christian faith a crime.

The prophesied falling away is not as apparent as the visible and newsworthy removal of God from the public square, but its impact is even more devastating. A Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Survey for 2013 reports that the number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16.1%) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children. Among Americans ages 18-29, one-in-four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion. The Survey confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations now stands at barely 51%. But even these statistics do not tell the real story. In many, if not most churches, there is a total lack of interest in studying the Bible, and little awareness of the work Jesus left the church to do after He ascended into heaven, and little interest in standing up against the advance of evil in the public square. Acts 1:8 records the charge Jesus gave the apostles (and us) as He left this world: under the

power of the Holy Spirit we are to be witnesses to Him in the world. Witnessing to someone means telling the truth about them, and what is this truth? It certainly must include what He came to earth to do (see Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:34-36).

Tolerance seems to be the “in” word in today’s world, at least in the US. Christians worship the same God as Muslims according to our leaders, and there are more doors into heaven than through Jesus Christ, in spite of what John 14:6 states. Without a solid foundation built upon a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and little or no understanding of what the Bible teaches, is it any wonder that many will deny their Christian identity and will join the secular crowd of unbelievers? When it begins to cost something to be identified as a believer, the only hope of continuing to stand as a child of God is to have Him “in you” and knowing that you are “in Him” (see John 17:20-26).

When we as a people abandon the foundation of faith passed on to us by the founders of our nation we fast become a nation of heretics, with little or no virtue (goodness of character). John Jay, one of the founders in commenting on the importance of (Christian) faith to having virtue said, without virtue “men are certain to shed their responsibilities for licentiousness and this great experiment (America) will be doomed.” President Abraham Lincoln’s Proclama-

tion on April 30, 1863 addressed this same point: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness”.

I recently read two books that make strong cases for the “falling away” presently occurring in America from different points-of-view: one spiritual, entitled “Bad Religion” by Ross Douthat, and one based on the founder’s belief that freedom requires virtue, and virtue requires faith, entitled “A Free People’s Suicide” by Os Guinness. “Bad Religion” offers an in-depth account of how American Christianity has lost its way, and why it threatens to take America with it. “A Free People’s Suicide” argues that the ultimate threat to America is

Americans. Guinness writes that “The problem is not wolves at the door but termites in the floor. The future of America depends on whether Americans will rise to the challenge of living up to America’s unfulfilled potential for freedom, both for itself and for the world.”

Falling away from Christian belief and doctrines is a precursor to the coming of the man of sin.

## Chapter 5

### Revealing the Man of Sin

From 2 Thessalonians we see that the full revelation of the antichrist is a vital precursor to Christ's return to gather His elect. His return is an event that has often been predicted in the past, but has never occurred. There are at least three major beliefs regarding the timing of Christ's return to gather His elect: 1) Pre-tribulation, in which Christ comes to resurrect/rapture those that belong to Him before Daniel's prophesied period of the final seven years begins; 2) Mid-tribulation, in which Christ comes at the mid-point (3 1/2-years), of the tribulation; and 3) Pre-wrath, which occurs just before God's wrath is poured out on the earth, as recorded in Revelation Chapter 16. God's wrath is poured out on the earth sometime after the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which starts near the middle of the seven-year period. There are also two somewhat less popular beliefs: 1) Post-tribulation, when Christ comes at the conclusion of the last seven-years, and 2) the belief of those identified as Amillennians or Preterists, which hold the view that the events in Revelation have already passed; or that we are in the millennium period at the present time.

I need to clarify a point of confusion associated with using such expressions as pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation to designate the return of Christ. The KJV of the Bible cites the word “*tribulation*” (meaning “trouble”) 22 times, none of which have anything to do with the time of Christ’s return. The Bible divides the last seven years of man’s rule on earth in two distinct  $\sim 3\frac{1}{2}$ -year periods, viz. “The Beginning of Sorrows”, and “The Great Tribulation”. In addition, there are several other sub-categories used to designate important events occurring within that time frame. Unfortunately, use of the word tribulation has become so commonly used to designate the entire seven-year period of time that we are forced to use the terms mentioned above to define the beginning, middle, and end of this period.

To return to our purpose of revealing the man of sin we need to start with his identity. Considerable information about the antichrist and his background is given in the book of Daniel Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 11. Each of these chapters describe different visitations of God’s messenger to Daniel, and each visitation provides information about the antichrist, and his harbinger Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 to 164 BC. The key to understanding this prophecy is being able to determine when the prophecy refers to the antichrist and when it refers to Antiochus Epiphanes. This remarkable prophesy pro-

vides background information about the antichrist not available in any other part of the Bible:

1. The antichrist is represented by the fourth beast in Daniel's dream (Da. 7:7-8). He arises from the embers of the fallen Roman Empire: quite possibly from the Syrian/Babylonian area, the Northern kingdom of Alexander's divided empire (Da. 8:8-9).
2. He rises to power by subduing three kings (Da. 7:24), and possibly remains in power for 6 years, 4 months, and 20 days (2300 days according to Da. 8:13-14).
3. He rises to power through intrigue and coercion (Da. 8:23-24).
4. He makes a covenant with the Jewish people (and possibly others) for seven years, but breaks the covenant after three-and-one-half years and takes away the sacrifice and oblation (Da. 9:27).
5. He tries to change the times and the laws (Da. 7:25).
6. The end time saints are under his control for three-and-one-half years (Da. 7:25).
7. He erects an image of himself in a wing of the Jewish Temple (the abomination of desolation), and requires (on penalty of death) that all people worship him (Da. 11:31-33).

Considerable information about the antichrist is also provided in the 13th Chapter of the book of Revelation. In Revelation 13:1 a beast (antichrist) rises up out of the sea, which is suggestive of wild and restive nations. The description of the antichrist in this verse is almost identical to that of the dragon (Satan) in Revelation 12:3. The difference between these two visions relates to the "crowns" (or diadems), which were on the seven "heads" in Revelation 12:3, and on the ten "horns" in Revelation 13:1. Revelation 12:3 refers to the past six kingdoms that had kings (represented by the crowns), plus the seventh kingdom, which will be ruled by the antichrist. All seven of these kingdoms were under the power of Satan even though we see glimpses of God's power under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Cyrus, and Alexander. Revelation 13:1 refers to the future time of the antichrist's rise to power, when kings are appointed over ten kingdoms supporting him. The seven heads refer to the seven kingdoms leading up to the eighth kingdom of the resurrected antichrist (see discussion on Re. 17:10-11 above). The NT Greek word "*drakon*", interpreted by the English word "*dragon*", is used 13 times in the book of Revelation, and in every case it refers to Satan, or the devil. The English word "*beast*" is used to interpret two different Greek words, 1) "*Zoon*", which means a living being, or animal,

and 2) “*Therion*”, which means a wild beast. The book of Revelation uses the Greek word “*Therion*” exclusively to describe the antichrist and the false prophet.

Revelation 13:3 records the apparent assassination of the antichrist who suffers a

deadly head wound. Satan is obviously trying to imitate the death and resurrection of Christ in this act, and he does make all the world marvel after the antichrist. When the antichrist is healed of this wound he comes back to power as ruler of the eighth and final kingdom. Revelation 17:8 describes this:

*“The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is [shall come]”*. When he comes back from his wound his spirit rises from the pit, now totally under the control of Satan, *“speaking great things and blasphemies; and authority was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations”* (Re. 13:5-6). This is also prophesied in Daniel 7:8, 19-25

where the antichrist is described as a “little horn”, who rises to power by overcoming three of the ten horns (kingdoms, or possibly the leaders of the kingdoms). The antichrist is described herein by his eyes, which were the eyes of man, more “*stout*” than his “*fellows*” (greater than his contemporaries), and a mouth speaking great things against God. The prophecy also says that he will be given power over the saints of the most High for 3 1/2 years. We noted earlier that the antichrist is also prophesied to rule for 2300-days (6 years, 4 months, and 20 days). This provides a clue as to when he rises to absolute power over the whole world (7 years = 2520 days - 2300 days = 220 days or 7 months, 10 days). This tells us that the antichrist comes to power over all nations 7-months, 10-days after the beginning of the last seven-years.

Revelation 7:14-17 describes action of the false prophet (antichrist’s spiritual leader) in constructing an image of the antichrist to be placed in the temple. This image (the abomination of desolation) is also referred to in Daniel 9:27; 12:11. Matthew 24:15 indicates that the image is erected in the “holy place” (Jewish temple). The Jewish people are told to flee to the mountains in all haste when they see this come about.

Matthew 24:21 indicates that this all leads up to the Great Tribulation, which begins near the middle of the 7-year period. Matthew 24:22 indicates

that many of God's elect will be martyred by the antichrist during this time, which leads God to shorten the days of this period. I believe this means that He will shorten the time to the resurrection/rapture for the elect's sake. Revelation 13:13-17 records that all people must worship his image located within the temple on penalty of death, and he requires all to receive a mark on their right hand or forehead in order to buy and sell. God identifies this man by giving us his number (666), which is a mystery that no one has yet deciphered correctly. Matthew 24:28-31 then tells us that immediately after the trials and affliction of those days the sign of the Lord Jesus Christ coming for His elect will appear, and He will send His angels with the sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

## Chapter 6

### The Mystery of God

**Revelation 10:7:** *“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.”*

The argument has been presented herein that it is the believers into Christ, loosely identified as the church, or Christ's body on earth, that is withholding manifestation of the antichrist. I do not believe the church is aware of this awesome responsibility, for if they did they would surely be more proactive in fighting the evil that is overtaking our land (and world). Further, we have discussed the falling away that is (in large measure) allowing evil to spread at a rapid pace. We now need to consider what will happen when the church is removed from the earth in what we have identified as the rapture. Of course, it is the power of the Holy Spirit and the direction of our mediator, Jesus Christ, acting within and through believers' lives that is the power restraining the full-blown revelation of the antichrist. When all believers are removed from earth, the purpose(s) of the Holy Spirit as comforter and sanctifier within each believer still alive will have been completed. I know of no scriptural word that tells us where the Holy Spirit goes or what He does after this, but I think it is

reasonable to assume that He continues to do the bidding of the Father and the Son as they bring all things to conclusion.

In my understanding the key passage of scripture in determining when the rapture occurs, and time is to be no more, is Revelation 10:5-7, *“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that time should be no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.”* In this part of the prophecy we come to the end of time, which must refer to the end of Satan’s power as the ruler of this world (Joh. 12:31; 2 Co. 4:4), and the beginning of Christ’s rule on earth during the 1000 years millennium (Re. 20:1-6). We note that the phrase *“days of the voice of the seventh angel”* indicates that the events leading up to the rapture/resurrection will occur over an unspecified period of days. The seventh angel doesn’t actually sound his trumpet until Revelation 11:15, which announces the fact that the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, forever. The Revelation prophecy then continues with Chapter 12, which is an overview of all that has happened in heaven and earth from the be-

ginning to the end; Chapter 13, which gives information about the antichrist and his false prophet; Chapter 14, which describes the Lord coming to earth for the last battle; Chapter 15, which gives a snapshot of the raptured saints in heaven; and Chapter 16, which records the angels pouring out the wrath of God on the earth. Pouring out of God's wrath is a significant event, for many places in the Bible state that God will not pour out His wrath upon those that belong to Him (M't 3:7; Lu. 3:7; Ro. 1:18, 5:9, 13:4; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Th. 1:10, 2:16, 5:9; Re. 11:18, 14:19, 15:1, 15:7, 16:1, 16:19). Therefore, we know that the rapture must occur before the angels pour out the wrath of God, as recorded in Revelation Chapter 16. This provides additional corroboration as to the timing of the rapture.

We now need to return to the statement "*the mystery of God should be finished*", in Revelation 10:7. What is this mystery of God that is finished in the days of the last trumpet. The Greek word "*musterion*" interpreted by the English word "mystery", is used 23 times in the KJV of the Bible. In all but five of these citings the meaning can be summed up by the usage in Colossians 1:27, "*To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*". It is Christ (and all His benefits) within us through the Holy Spirit that is the mystery of God. When the

rapture occurs the ministry of the Holy Spirit in individual believers is finished, and Satan will realize that he has but a short time left.

Another point worth mentioning here that further validates the fact that Revelation 10:7 announces the rapture is given in Revelation Chapter 4 in which John is transported to heaven in his spiritual vision. John records what he saw around the throne, and there is no mention of anything he sees that we could construe as being the raptured saints. However, in Revelation 7:9, John again has a vision of the throne in heaven where he sees “*. . . lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands*”. If we had any doubts about who this multitude represents the answer is provided by verse 14, which adds that “*. . . These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*.” What John sees here is the raptured/resurrected saints delivered out of the Great Depression who are now before the throne, praising God and the Lamb of God (Jesus). 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 gives us some additional information regarding this, “*Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed*.” This

scripture confirms what we have concluded: that when the angel prepares to sound the last trump, which is the seventh trumpet of the prophecy, the dead (bodies) in Christ, as well as those still alive, will rise to be joined with their spirit/souls, which have accompanied Christ (M't. 24:28; Lu. 17:37; 1 Th. 3:13 GNT). They will join Christ in the clouds, to be with Him forever. Just as Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:15-31, this multitude endured great persecution just before and during the beginning of the Great Tribulation, but were raptured/resurrected before the wrath of God was poured out as described in Revelation Chapter 16. No man knows the exact day and hour that the church departs this earth, but we do know that the slaughtering of the elect grows so intense that the number of days (after the beginning of the Great Tribulation to the time of rapture/resurrection) were shortened.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions From This Study

1. When the influence of the church (Christ's body) is reduced the power of goodness, worthiness, right action and thinking, virtue, generosity, manliness, efficacy, love, compassion, etc. gradually fade away, and we are left with ever-increasing evil. This is a necessary occurrence for the man of sin to be revealed, and to be accepted by the general populace of unbelievers, as well as many baby Christians.
2. The man of sin will gradually begin to show his true nature, and in a little over seven months into the last seven years he will be recognized as the ruler of the whole earth. Thereafter, he will break his covenant with the Jews: no longer allowing sacrifice and oblation in the temple.
3. Later he begins to persecute believers, and near the middle of the seven-years he erects an image of himself in the temple, and requires all people to worship the idol on penalty of death. He will also require that all people receive a mark on their hand or forehead in order for them to buy and sell.
4. The Great Tribulation starts near the middle of the seven-year period. God will instruct His angels to begin to pour out His judgments on the earth and

there shall be tribulation “*such as was not since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*”.

5. Christ’s second coming will be announced with great fanfare, including signs in the heavens, loud shouts of the seventh angel, and the great trump(et) of the Lord.

6. When the seventh (last) trumpet sounds the dead (bodies) in Christ will rise first, followed by the bodies of the extant believers, to meet Christ in the clouds, where they will be joined with their spirit/souls accompanying Christ ( 1 Th. 3:13 GNT; 1 Th. 4:16-17; M’t. 24:28-31; Re. 10:7, 11:15).

7. The antichrist’s slaughter becomes so terrible during the Great Tribulation that God shortens the days before He comes for His elect. Christ’s coming in the clouds is identified as the rapture/resurrection, and it will be introduced by signs in the heavens, by the loud voice of the angel, and and by the last (seventh) trumpet of God (see M’t. 24:29-31; 1 Th. 4:16-17; Re. 10:6-7, 11:15).

8. The rapture/resurrection will occur before God pours out His wrath on the earth. Thus, we note that this event will occur after the Great Tribulation starts but before God pours out his wrath on the earth as described in Revelation Chapter 16.

9. Important scriptures that describe events occurring during Daniel's prophesied last seven years include Daniel 9:24-27, 12:1-13; Matthew 24:3-31, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; and Revelation Chapters 4-22.

## Appendix

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