

END TIMES

(A study given by Pastor Wayne Pratt in Houston from 11/30/06 – 12/3/06)

II. WHEN WILL JESUS CHRIST RETURN?

In Luke 12:35-40, Jesus compared His return to three different “watches”: *“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. **It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.** But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

The “Second Coming” is not a single event—it actually consists of three different phases as follows:

A. **First Watch:** occurs before the Great Tribulation – called the “Rapture”

1. It is the Spirit-baptized, sanctified Church that will be “caught up” at this time (1 Thess. 4:15-18)
2. Examples from the Old Testament of others who were also caught up
 - a. Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24; Heb. 11:5)
 - b. Elijah (2 Kings 2:11)
3. Certain features of the Rapture which distinguish it from the other two phases of Christ’s return:
 - a. It will be secretive, sudden, and without any kind of warning (1 Thess. 5:1-6; Mark 3:32-37; 1 Cor. 15:51-52)
 - b. Those caught up will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17)
 - c. It will be a day of comfort and joy and not a time of darkness or trouble (1 Thess. 4:18)
 - d. It will be “select” - only those watching and ready will be taken (Mat. 24:40-44, 48-51; Luke 17:34-36; Heb. 9:28)
4. The Rapture will be an escape from the Tribulation which will immediately follow (Luke 21:34-36)
 - a. True Christians are willing to go through any trial, suffering, or persecution for righteousness’ sake gladly (Acts 14:22). But the Great Tribulation will be for a completely different purpose. It will be a time when God’s Judgment for wickedness falls upon the whole world at one time.
 - b. Those Christians who are left behind can only be saved by dying as martyrs during the first 3½ years of the Tribulation.

B. **Second Watch:** The middle of the 7-year Tribulation

1. Scripture reveals the fact that Jesus will come (with His angels) a 2nd time during the Tribulation
 - a. Mark 13:24-27 tells us that there will be an appearing of Christ after certain signs have occurred - the sun darkens, stars fall, etc. These same signs occur in Rev. 6:12-14 referring to the opening of the 6th seal.
 - b. A careful study of the seven seals (Revelation chapters 6-8) reveals that they occur in sequence during the first 3½ years of the Tribulation. This places the 6th seal at the Middle of the Tribulation. The opening of the 7th seal begins the 2nd 3½ years (Revelation chapter 8)
2. The main purpose of Christ’s appearance after the first 3½ years is to resurrect the martyrs of the Tribulation. His angels gather them up to heaven [By this time all true Christians will have been persecuted and put to death by the antichrist]. Concerning these “Second-Watch Saints” we see the following:

- a. There will be a “*great multitude*” who “*come out of the Great Tribulation*” (Rev. 7:9-14).
- b. They will be “*gathered up*” or “harvested” by the angels (Mark 13:26-27; Rev. 14:12-16)

C. **Third Watch:** The end of the 7-year Tribulation

1. ALL nations see the Son of Man and mourn – it will not be secretive nor sudden (Mat. 24:30; Rev. 1:7)
2. Jesus returns and “stands” on the earth - no one will be “caught up” at this time (Job 19:25-26; Zech. 14:4; Rev. 19:19)
3. It will be a horrible day of judgment and not a day of comfort or joy (Zech. 14:1-4)
4. The Marriage of the Bride and Groom [the Rapture] is already past by this time (Rev. 19:11-14). Jesus returns with “*thousands of His Saints*” in order to make war and execute judgment upon the wicked (Jude 14-15; 2 Thess. 1:7-10); there is NO rapture or resurrection at this time.