

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 18

[JESUS CHRIST] THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Discover and discuss. What does the Bible teach about the second coming of Jesus Christ?

A. CHRISTIANS MUST BE WATCHFUL AND FAITHFUL

The message of Matthew chapter 24 (and 25) is that Christians must be watchful and keep their eyes on the second coming of Christ as the One who judges and rewards. The prophecies in these chapters refer on the one hand to *the near future of the disciples* of Christ and on the other hand to the events in *the end-time*. The coming judgment on Jerusalem (in the near future of the disciples) and the final judgment of the whole world at the second coming of Christ (in the end-time) are woven together in one teaching about the last things. The approaching catastrophe coming over Jerusalem serves as an illustration (type) of the future reality, the definite catastrophe coming on the whole world in the end-time (the anti-type).

(1) Matthew 23:37 – 24:3. The occasion.

The occasion for this teaching was the lamentation of Jesus Christ over Jerusalem and the two questions of the disciples.

(2) Matthew 24:4-14. The beginning of the woes.

Many tribulations (e.g. wars, famines, and earthquakes) will accompany the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations in the world. All these things must happen, but these tribulations (John 16:33; cf. Revelation 7:14) are not yet the end.

Matthew 24:4-14 is a part of the long period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ.

(3) Matthew 24:15-20. The tribulation of Jerusalem.

The great tribulation at the end of the New Testament period would be preceded by the tribulation of Jerusalem in the near future.

In verse 15 Jesus refers to the prophecy in Daniel about the abomination that causes desolation that would stand in the holy place (the temple) (Daniel 9:27)¹.

The prophecy of Daniel about this tribulation of Jerusalem and Judea was fulfilled in 167 B.C. when the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes caused Jerusalem to be plundered and the temple to be desecrated. The apocryphal book, 1 Maccabees 1:41-57 describes this event as follows:

[41] Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people,
[42] and that each should give up his customs.
[43] All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.
[44] And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land,
[45] to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts,
[46] to defile the sanctuary and the priests,
[47] to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals,
[48] and to leave their sons uncircumcised.
They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,
[49] so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances.
[50] "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."
[51] In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city.
[52] Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land;
[53] they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.
[54] Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year (calculated from the foundation of the Dynasty of the Seleucids in 312 B.C., thus in December 167 B.C.), they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering (cf. Matthew 24:15). They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah,
[55] and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.
[56] The books of the law (e.g. the Bible) which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.

¹ Daniel 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven". In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

[57] Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death.

In Matthew 24:15-20 Jesus says that this prophecy of Daniel (about a great tribulation) would be fulfilled a second time. Then it would specifically concern the temple and the people *at that time* in Jerusalem.

This second great tribulation of Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman emperor, Titus, besieged and conquered Jerusalem. The heathen soldiers carried standards on which the Roman idols were depicted (thus, another abomination that causes desolation) into Jerusalem and into the temple (Luke 21:20-24)².

However, Jesus says that this tribulation of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. would not be the end of this age (i.e. it would not be the end of the whole New Testament period, which would end with the second coming of Christ), because Jerusalem would be trampled by the heathen (for a long time) until the time of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (Luke 21:24; cf. Romans 11:25; Revelation 11:2).

These tribulations of Jerusalem (in the 2nd century B.C. and 1st century A.D.) *foreshadow* similar tribulations (horrors) in the history of the world thereafter (cf. Matthew 24:4-14). The oppression and persecution of Christians will continue from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. That is why the book of Revelation calls the whole period between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ “the great tribulation” (Revelation 7:9,14)³.

(4) Matthew 24:21-26. The great tribulation shortly before the second coming of Christ.

The tribulation of Jerusalem at the beginning of the New Testament period was great, but the tribulation at the end of the New Testament period will be the greatest tribulation in human history (verse 21)! Christians will be oppressed and persecuted all over the world. This last great tribulation will be the end of all the foregoing tribulations (cf. Matthew 24:4-14). It will close the New Testament period.

During this final great tribulation there will be many false prophets and false messiahs who will perform great miracles in order to deceive the Christians. However, Jesus Christ clearly says that it is impossible to deceive the elect Christians (Matthew 24:24; cf. John 17:12)⁴!

(5) Matthew 24:27-31. The second coming of Christ.

This final great tribulation will be terminated by the second coming of Christ.

- The second coming will be visible everywhere, just as the lightning is seen from the east to the west (Matthew 24:27; cf. verse 29).
- The second coming will be audible everywhere, due to the loud command of the Lord and the sounding of a loud trumpet call that will resurrect all the dead in their graves (Matthew 24:31; John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- The second coming will be experienced by everyone: the angels will gather the elect (genuine Christians) to welcome Jesus Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40a,41a; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10), but will leave all non-Christians and unbelievers to first experience the violent shaking of the bodies in the universe (Revelation 6:12-17) and later to be driven before Christ’s judgment throne in the air on that same final day (Matthew 24:40b,41b; cf. Matthew 25:31-33; Revelation 20:11-12).
- The second coming will shake the heavenly bodies. They will flee away, disappear with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by fire (Matthew 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 6:12-17; Revelation 20:11). Thus the final judgement of people will take place in the upper regions (e.g. the air) (Matthew 24:31; Matthew 25:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 4:17) and will be accompanied by the final judgement of the universe and the old earth.
- The second coming will be sudden and unexpected (Matthew 24:36).

(6) Matthew 24:32-35. The parable of the fig tree.

See the explanation of this parable in manual 12, supplement 16. When the disciples (of Jesus Christ) *see* all these things happening that culminate in the appearance of the abomination that causes desolation in the temple in Jerusalem (in the 1st century A.D.), then they (the disciples) will know that the destruction of the temple is nearby. This is Christ’s answer to the first question of his disciples (Matthew 24:3a).

(7) Matthew 24:36-44. Christians must be watchful and ready always.

The flood during the days of Noah was sudden, unexpected and experienced by everyone! Likewise, the second coming of Christ will be sudden, unexpected and experienced by everyone! The second coming will be completely unpredictable for non-Christians and Christians alike. No one will know when it will take place.

² **Luke 21:20-24** 20 When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city, 22 for this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written.. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

³ **Revelation 7:9,14** 9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. 14 I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

⁴ **John 17:12** While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

At his second coming, Jesus Christ will not welcome each and every person in his eternal and glorious presence forever, because the Christians will be accepted and the non-Christians will be left behind (Matthew 24:40-41)!

(8) Matthew 24:45-51. Christians must be faithful servants.

The parable of the faithful and wise servant teaches that because Christians do not know the time of the second coming, Christ must find them occupied with service in his kingdom when he comes!

(9) Different expectations about the kingdom of God.

While the Jews expected the kingdom to be limited to Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-28; Matthew 20:21; John 6:15; Acts 1:6), Jesus Christ makes the following clear in his teachings and parables:

- The kingdom of God has already come with his first coming (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 12:28-29).
- The kingdom includes people from all nations (Matthew 8:11-12; Matthew 21:42-44).
- The gospel of the kingdom (Luke 16:16; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23,31) is proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 24:14).
- The kingdom is a real, but spiritual kingdom (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36).
- The kingdom grows continually (Mark 4:26-32) until it receives its final perfect phase at his second coming (Matthew 13:36-43).

But when and how does Jesus Christ return?

B. THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

1. Jesus speaks about "the last things" (Matthew 24:1-3)

(1) Two questions.

The disciples put two questions to Jesus about the last things that will happen in human history: "When will the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem take place?" (Matthew 24:1-3a) and "From which sign (singular) will we recognise your return and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3b). The disciples thought that Jerusalem would be destroyed at the end of the age (i.e. the end of human history in this present world). However Jesus' prophetic answer points on the one hand to events that will happen in the near future (the tribulation of Jerusalem) and on the other hand to events that will happen in the end time (the great tribulation before his second coming).

(2) Jesus' answer to the first question of his disciples (Matthew 24:15-20 cf. Luke 21:7,20-24a).

He spoke of the great tribulation of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D. He said that the tribulation of Jerusalem in the time of Daniel foreshadowed the approaching catastrophe over Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and similar great tribulations that would come during the future history of the world (*Read* Matthew 24:4-14). It served as an illustration of the ultimate catastrophe that would come over the whole world in the end time! Compare the many "shadows" in the Old Testament that pointed to the "realities" in the New Testament (Colossians 2:17).

The word "and" in the disciples' second question in Greek means "namely" (or "that is")⁵. Thus, "the end of this age" will take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ! There will not be another period of 1000 years between the second coming and the end!

(3) Jesus' answer to the second question of his disciples (Matthew 24:21-31).

The sign (singular) will be the visible and audible actual second coming of Christ on the clouds (Matthew 24:29b-31). But shortly before his second coming there will be "the final great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21-29a). It will be the worst tribulation of all times as well as the close of all previous periods of tribulation (Matthew 24:4-14). In his teaching about the last things Jesus weaves the tribulation of Jerusalem in the first century A.D. and the final great tribulation before his second coming together.

2. There will be many signs (Matthew 24:4-14)

Before the second coming of Jesus Christ there will be many signs that point to the fact that this present world is coming to an end:

- (1) false Christs
- (2) false prophets from other religions
- (3) wars
- (4) hunger
- (5) earthquakes
- (6) oppression of genuine Christians
- (7) apostasy of nominal Christians (the emptying of churches)
- (8) the contempt for God's commandments
- (9) the growing cold of love

All these events must happen, but they do not signify the end (Matthew 24:6). They are merely "*the beginning of birth pains*" (Matthew 24:8).

⁵ Greek: kai explicative, i.e. a word or clause is connected by means of "kai" with another word or clause, for the purpose of explaining what goes before it. It must be translated with the words: "and so", "that is", "namely" (Matthew 8:33; 24:3; John 9:37).

These signs are also accompanied by the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations in the world (Matthew 24:14; cf. Matthew 4:23; Acts 20:24-25).

All these signs (events) will happen from “the destruction of Jerusalem” in 70 A.D. “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20,24b), that is, from the first coming of Jesus Christ to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

3. There will be three very clear signs (Matthew 24:14,21-31)

(1) A very long period.

There will first be a very long period of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all the nations (Matthew 24:14).

(2) A very short period.

This will be followed by a very short period of great tribulation. This will be the final tribulation under the final antichrist (Matthew 24:21-29a).

These two signs cannot be used to calculate the time of the second coming (Matthew 24:36,42).

(3) The second coming.

Finally there will be the awe-inspiring return of Jesus Christ on the clouds (Matthew 24:29b-31). This event will be sudden and unexpected for everyone! This is “the sign” of the end of the world and its history (Matthew 24:3).

C. THE VERY LONG PERIOD

The Book of Revelation is NOT a history book written in chronological order, but an Apocalypse in seven parallel sections and each section “describes in pictures and signs” (Greek: sémainó)(aorist)(Revelation 1:1) the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ and the coming of the final phase of the kingdom of God.

1. The long New Testament period is symbolised by the numbers “1000” and “3½”.⁶

(1) The symbolic 1000 years period.

The number “3” in the Bible represents the Triune God (cf. Matthew 28:19). The number “10” in the Bible represents completeness with respect to people on earth and the number “1000” (10x10x10) in the Bible represents the absolute completeness determined by the Triune God. Thus, the number “1000 years” is not intended to be literal, but represents the divinely determined period of time that stretches across all generations (cf. Psalm 90:1-4; Psalm 105:8) for the completion of God’s plan on earth (cf. Isaiah 14:24,26,27).

Revelation chapter 20 is parallel with Revelation chapters 17-19, chapters 12-14 and chapters 8-11. The 1000 year period:

- begins with the binding of Satan at the first coming of Christ (cf. Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:17-20; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13; 2:15, Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:5-12; Revelation 20:1-3)
- and ends with the release of Satan, the final battle (Revelation 20:7-10; Revelation 19:11-21; Revelation 11:7), the resurrection from the dead and the final judgment at his second coming (Revelation 20:11-15).

Thus, the 1000 year period symbolically represents the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

(2) The symbolic 3½ times period, or 42 months or 1260 days.

Also the number “3½” in the Bible is not intended to be literal, but represents “a period of tribulation” in the Bible (1 Kings 17:1; Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Luke 4:25; James 5:17)⁷. Here it refers to the long New Testament period as “a period of great tribulation” (Revelation 7:14).

Revelation chapter 11 is parallel to Revelation chapters 12-14. The long period:

- begins at the first coming of Christ and the Church (here symbolised by “the woman”) that is taken care of in the desert during “the long period” (Revelation 12:5-6)
- and ends at the great persecution against the Church (here symbolised by “the two witnesses”) (Revelation 11:7-10), the resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 11:11-12), the last judgement (Revelation 11:18; 14:14-20) and the establishment of the kingdom of God in its final phase (Revelation 11:15).

The number “3½” suggests that throughout the long New Testament period, the Satan and his allies: the antichrists, the false prophets and the prostitutes will try to lengthen this period of his evil authority to the divine number “7”, but having reached halfway (the number “3½”) he is suddenly and unexpectedly cut short!

⁶ All the numbers in the Book of Revelation represent symbolically literal realities that far surpass the literalness of the number. See manual 1, lesson 10, key 5.

⁷ The number 3½ symbolises different periods of oppression within salvation history.

Thus, also the period of 3½ times, or 42 months, or 1260 days symbolically represents the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

2. At the beginning of the very long period Satan has been bound (Revelation 20:1-6)

- (1) At his first coming Jesus Christ came with the purpose to destroy the devil's works
(John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14).

Through his completed work of salvation by his death and resurrection Jesus Christ "bound" (Greek: δεό)(aorist actief) (Matthew 12:29) Satan (symbol: "the strong man"). He curtailed/curbed and severely limited Satan's powers to do evil. Through his death he disarmed and triumphed over the demonic powers and worldly authorities (Colossians 2:15). Through his being lifted up (on the cross, by his resurrection, by his ascension and by his enthronement in heaven) he drove the prince (note: not the King) of the world (Satan) out of his former position and power and draws people from all over the world to himself (John 12:31-32).

- (2) Satan still has lots of power to do evil.

He is still the murderer and father of all lies (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4), but "he has been bound (Greek: δεό)(aorist, active) (the same word as in Matthew 12:29) in order to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the (symbolic) thousand years were ended" (Revelation 20:2-3).

3. During the very long period the gospel is proclaimed (Matthew 24:14)

- (1) During this symbolic period of 1000 years
Satan "can no longer deceive the nations" (Revelation 20:3).

Before the first coming of Christ Satan kept the nations under his control (Daniel 10:12-13,20). But after the first coming of Christ, the elect are rescued from his dominion and are brought into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). Before the first coming of Christ, Satan accused believers before God's throne (Job chapter 1 and 2), because their sins were not yet atoned for. But after the first coming of Christ, Satan can no longer accuse believers before God (Revelation 12:7-12; Romans 3:23-26).

Satan can no longer deceive/make go astray (Greek: planaó)(aorist active) the nations, that is, he can no longer keep Jesus Christ (and Christians) from proclaiming the gospel to all the nations and making disciples within all nations in the world! Jesus taught that: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14) (The future tense expresses not merely a future prophecy, but an absolute certainty)! Disciples will be made in all nations (Matthew 28:18-20)! The end of this present world will thus only come when according to God the proclamation of the gospel to all nations (Greek: ethné)(people groups, like businessmen, students, religious groups, etc) has been completed!

- (2) During this symbolic period of 1000 years

Jesus Christ goes out as Conqueror bent on conquering (Revelation 6:1-2; cf. Matthew 28:18).

He sows the sons of the kingdom in the whole world (Matthew 13:37-38). He gathers his wheat into the barn (Matthew 3:12a). He draws people from all the nations to himself (John 12:32; cf. Philippians 2:9-11).

In summary, the God of the Bible brings an uncountable number of people from all the nations in the world out of the dominion of Satan (i.e. the kingdom of the evil world) into Christ's kingdom (Colossians 1:13). In this way, Jesus Christ builds his Church and the gates of hell will not be able to overcome it (Matthew 16:18)!

- (3) During this symbolic period of "1000 years" or "3½ times"
Satan and his allies will oppose Christians and Christ's Church.

Throughout the long New Testament period, "the dragon stands on the shore of the sea", while the beast comes up out of the sea (Revelation 12:18; 13:1). "The dragon" represents Satan (Revelation 12:9). "The sea" represents the nations of the world (cf. Daniel 7:2-3). And "the beast" represents the antichrist in its various forms. The antichrists will emerge from the nations of the world and Satan will give them his power, his throne and his great authority (Revelation 13:2). But the Satan himself has been sidelined onto "the shore of the sea". This means his ability to influence the unbelieving nations has been severely curbed.

Throughout the long New Testament period the antichrists (plural)(symbol: "the beast coming out of the sea") in history trample on the worship of the God of the Bible in the world (Revelation 11:2b), claim to be "god" (Revelation 13:3-6,11-14a) and even invade the Christian Church (symbol: "the temple of God") as an organised witnessing institute in the world (symbol: "the two witnesses") (Revelation 11:1-2a,3; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16).

Throughout the long New Testament period Satan rules only over his evil "kingdom of the world" by means of his allies:

- "The beast coming out of the sea" (antichrist) represents Satan's antichristian political powers (Revelation 13:1-10)
- "The beast coming out of the earth" (or false prophet) represents Satan's antichristian religious powers (Revelation 13:11-18)
- "The great prostitute" (Babylon) represents Satan's antichristian cultural and moral powers (Revelation 17:1-18)

- The people who receive “the mark of the beast” (Revelation 16:18) (or “the weeds among the wheat”) (Matthew 13:38) represent Satan’s antichristian followers (Revelation 16:18).

Throughout the whole New Testament period “the whole (antichristian) world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19), because Jesus Christ (the One who was born of God) keeps him (the Christian, the one born of God) safe the evil one cannot harm/take hold of (Greek: haptomai) (present tense) the Christian (1 John 5:18)!”

Throughout the long New Testament period the enemy (Satan) “sows the sons of the evil one” among (not alongside) (Greek: ana meson tou sitou) (Matthew 24:25,30,41) the Christians in the world. The present kingdom of God (or Church) is therefore mixed.

4. At the end of the very long period Satan will be released (Revelation 20:3b,7).

Shortly before the second coming of Jesus Christ, Satan will be released from his position of being “bound” (curtailed, curbed, limited) and he will gather the evil world for “the (last) war” against the Christian Church.

D. THE VERY SHORT PERIOD

The release of Satan from being “bound” is the beginning of the very short period (cf. Matthew 24:22) at the end of the history of this world. This short period is symbolised by “3½ days” (Revelation 11:9,11). Then the last antichrist will destroy “the two witnesses” (a symbol of the Christian Church as a witnessing institute). Satan will deceive “the nations” and gather them for the final battle in human history (Revelation 20:7-8). “The nations” is a symbol for all people from all the nations who do not believe in Jesus Christ (the non-Christians, the unbelievers) (Matthew 24:29).

During this very short period of time, the following events will take place:

- the reign of the final antichrist
- the final great tribulation
- the final battle.

The end of this short period is the sudden and unexpected second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead (Revelation 11:11), the rapture of the believers into the air to meet and welcome Christ while their enemies look on (Revelation 11:12), the last judgement (Revelation 11:18; 14:6-12) and the establishment of the kingdom of God in its final phase (the new heaven and the new earth) (Revelation 11:18; 14:1-5; 21:1-2) where only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13).

1. The reign of the final antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

(1) What is holding the final antichrist back?

Although many antichrists arise throughout world history (1 John 2:18; 4:3), there will be one final antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3b). During the long period the coming of this final antichrist (the man of lawlessness) is being held back by “something” or “someone” (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8). Most probably this is a reference to “the laws” and “the enforcers of law and order” in the world.

When laws are no longer enforced in the world, the final antichrist (symbol: the beast out of the Abyss) will come to destroy the Church as an organised witnessing institute in the world (Revelation 11:7).

(2) The final antichrist will oppose the God of the Bible

and exalt himself over everything that is called “god” or is worshipped.

He will set himself up in the organised Christian Church (symbol: God’s temple), proclaim himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:14b-15) and spread his lies there (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). True Christians will continue to oppose him (James 4:7) and will refuse to worship and serve him. But this will lead to the final great tribulation against Christians and the final battle (*Read* Revelation 13:11-17).

(3) The antichrist will exercise his evil power for a symbolic period of 3½ years.

Other symbols for this period are: “a time, times and half a time”, “42 months” en “1260 days”. The number “3½” is not literal, but represents “a period of van oppression” in the Bible (1 Kings 17:1; Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Luke 4:25; James 5:17; Revelation 11:2-3,9,11; 12:6,14; 13:5). The number 3½ suggests that the antichrist will try to extend the period of oppression to the divine number 7, but halfway (the number 3½) he will suddenly and unexpectedly be cut short!

The highest number that the final antichrist is able to reach is 666 (Revelation 13:18) (it symbolises that the antichrist is “only a man and will completely fail to become as God” (777)!

2. The final great tribulation of Christians (Matthew 24:21-26)

Although Christians throughout history will experience troubles and tribulations (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 7:14), there will be a final great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-26; Revelation 3:10) at the end of the history of the world.

(1) Some characteristics of “the last days”.

People will feign safety, live careless and worship materialism (Matthew 24:37-39). People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of evil and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. They will be boastful, arrogant, heartless, unforgiving, slanderous (abusive), without self-control and brutal. They will be treacherous, rash, and conceited (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Nominal Christians will abandon faith in Jesus Christ and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons through hypocritical liars (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Many nominal Christians will turn away from the Christian Faith (2 Thessalonians 2:3a).

(2) The final antichrist will conquer the world and the Church.

God will permit the final antichrist to receive power over all countries and all peoples. God will also allow him to make war against Christians and in a particular sense “conquer” them (Revelation 11:7; 13:7-8; cf. Job chapter 1-2). This probably refers to the destruction of the Christian Church as an organised witnessing institute (the destruction of the visible churches and other Christian organisations. It does not refer to the destruction of every Christian on earth. There will be Christians on earth at Christ’s second coming!

(3) Christians will pass through the great tribulation.

Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:3-31) and the apostles Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:1-8), Peter (2 Peter 3:3-13; cf. 1 Peter 1:6-7) and John (Revelation 13:5-10,15-18; 14:14-19) unanimously teach that all Christians living in the end-time must pass through the final great tribulation before the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ! There will not be a so-called “secret rapture of the Church” that would remove all Christians from the earth before the great tribulation!

“There will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equalled again” (Matthew 24:21). False christs (messiahs) and false prophets of other religions will appear, perform great signs and miracles in order to try and deceive Christians (Matthew 24:24a)!

(4) But genuine Christians need not fear!

It is impossible to deceive genuine Christians (Matthew 24:24b)! Christians will overcome this evil world because they have been born-again and believe (1 John 5:4; Revelation 17:14). They will stand firm to the end (Matthew 24:13; Romans 11:20; 14:4)! God, who began a good work in them, will carry it on and perfectly complete it at Christ’s second coming (Philippians 1:6)! No one and nothing can snatch genuine Christians out of the hand of Jesus Christ (John 10:28-30)! Jesus Christ will not lose one genuine Christian (John 18:9)! No one and nothing can separate them from God’s love for them (Romans 8:37-39)!

(5) The length of the period of the great tribulation.

The tribulation period will not last for a *literal* period of 3½ years, because the number “3½ days” (Revelation 11:9-12) *symbolises (represents)* “a period of tribulation” without specifying its length. Nevertheless, Jesus teaches that the period of tribulation “will be cut short for the sake of the elect” (the born-again Christians) (Matthew 24:22)!

3. The final battle against Christians

At the end of this short period (the great tribulation), Satan will go out to the four wind directions of the whole earth (symbol: “the four corners of the earth”) in order to deceive the (non-Christian) nations and to gather them for the last battle against Christians (symbol: “the saints”) (Revelation 20:7-9a).

The final battle is also depicted in other Bible passages (Revelation 16:12-16; 17:14; 19:17-19). The Bible does not refer to specific nations by name, because “the nations” are a symbol for non-Christians out of all people groups who have become enemies of Christ and Christians (Matthew 24:9).

The second coming of Jesus Christ brings this final battle and the period of great tribulation to an end (Revelation 19:11-16,20-21; 20:9b-10).

E. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE IN HEAVEN

1. The transient life in a human body on earth.

The transient life on earth is contrasted with the eternal life in heaven. In the Bible this is depicted as follows:

- Abraham (2000 B.C.), lived as an alien and stranger in tents in a foreign country, looked forward to the city with foundations (the heavenly Jerusalem), whose Architect and Builder is God (Hebrews 11:8-16).
- The earthly tent (tabernacle) (1446 B.C.) served as God’s house dwelling during the journey through the desert and is contrasted with the temple building on Mount Moria, or better, with the heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:5).
- The Feast of Tabernacles (1446 B.C.) during which people lived in tents/huts was a commemoration of the camp life of the Israelites during their forty year journey through the desert. This is contrasted with living in permanent houses in the Promised Land that flows with milk and honey as a type of the eternal inheritance of God’s people.
- The mortal human body of Jesus Christ and his life on earth (his incarnation: “the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us”) (Greek: eskénosen) (John 1:14) is contrasted with his glorious resurrected body (John 2:19-22) and his eternity with God in heaven (John 1:1; 12:27-28; 20:17).

- The Christian lives in his tent dwelling (his body) on earth until it is dismantled (Greek: analúo) (Philippians 1:23; 2 Timothy 4:6) or (Greek: katalúo) (2 Corinthians 5:1) by death.

2. The interim state without a glorious human body in heaven.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... They will rest from their labour, for their deeds (on earth) will follow them (Revelation 14:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The intermediate state between death and resurrection is described in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and Philippians 1:21-25. The apostle Paul longs for a speedy second coming of Christ, even before he dies, because he does not look forward to be found “naked”. He does not wish to be unclothed” (Greek: ekdusasthai) (i.e. having a human spirit without a human body), but “be over clothed” (Greek: ep+endusasthai) (2 Corinthians 5:4).

Because dying is a reality of life, he “desires to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Philippians 1:23). He realises that “remaining in the flesh/body is more necessary for the Christians that have been entrusted to him (Philippians 1:24). He realises that “as long as he is at home in the body, he is away from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6). he is torn between these two considerations, but nevertheless he “prefers to be away from the body (Greek: ekdémésai ek) and at home with the Lord” (Greek: endémésai pros) (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Now that he still dwells in his body, he “longs to be clothed (literally: over-clothed) with his heavenly dwelling (i.e. his resurrected body), so that what is mortal may be (completely) swallowed up (Greek: katapínó) (aorist tense) by life (2 Corinthians 5:2-4). God will not abandon the mortal body of a Christian in the grave (cf. Acts 2:23-28). Nothing and no-one can separate a Christian (or even his dead body, his dust in the grave) from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39)! The resurrected body is called “a building from God”, “an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1). That is to say, the resurrected body of a Christian is not built up by means of human parents (cf. Matthew 22:30), but exclusively by God. The new immortal resurrected body will completely swallow up the old mortal body. It over-clothes (Greek: ep + enduomai) the mortal dust as an overcoat over under clothing (2 Corinthians 5:2-4)! The resurrected body will not be a newly created body. It will be the original body (elements, dust) that is over-clothed, that is, completely renewed! The resurrected body will be like the glorious resurrected body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20-21)! It will be “immortal” (cf. Revelation 21:4), “glorious, powerful and spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Paul does NOT refer to some kind of “body” during the intermediate state in heaven, because he is “unclothed” (he only has a human spirit, but without a human body). He DOES refer to the resurrected body at the resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ. Then he will “put on” his heavenly dwelling. He will receive a glorious resurrected body from Christ.

3. The interim state with a glorious human spirit in heaven.

The moment a Christian dies, his imperfect human spirit is transformed to be like the perfect human spirit of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:1-3).

At the resurrection of the dead the glorious human spirit is re-integrated with the glorious resurrected body in an incorruptible union. The resurrected Christian will be “a life-giving spirit” that bears the perfect likeness of the resurrected Christ. This means that Christians will spiritually and physically be completely and perfectly led by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45-50; cf. Galatians 5:16,18,25).

God prepares Christians for this glorious future by giving to them in the present time the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing that this will certainly take place (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5)!

F. THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. There will be only one second coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:27-31)

The Bible teaches only one second coming of Jesus Christ.

(1) The words: coming and appearance.

Both Jesus and Paul use the words “coming” (Greek: parousia) (Matthew 24:39; 2 Thessalonians 2:1) and “appearance” (Greek: apokalupsis) (Luke 17:30; 2 Thessalonians 1:7) for one and the same event!

(2) The second coming in the parables.

In the parables (Matthew 13:36-43; 25:10-13; 25:19) and in all the teaching passages of the Bible (Matthew 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-32) the second coming of Jesus Christ is a single and all-encompassing (all-enfolding) event!

2. The second coming of Christ will be sudden and unexpected, but very visible and audible to all people.

(1) The second coming of Christ will be sudden and unexpected.

It will be “as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2; Acts 1:7). No one knows or can predict the day or hour (Matthew 24:36,42). The unbelievers will not be ready when Christ returns (Matthew 24:37-41). The Christians ought to be ready. Nevertheless, Christ will return when also Christians do not expect it (Matthew 24:43-44)!

(2) The second coming of Christ will be very visible.

It will be as the lightning that is seen from the east to the west on earth (Matthew 24:27-28). All people on earth will see Jesus Christ coming on the clouds of the sky (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7).

(3) The second coming of Christ will be very audible.

It will be as a loud trumpet call. All people on earth will hear the loud command of Christ and the trumpet call of the archangel (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16) that will awaken all the dead (John 5:28). Everyone will know at once who He is.

(4) The second coming of Christ will be accompanied by great signs.

Christ will end the final battle of Satan and his allies against Christians by overthrowing them with the breath of his mouth, by destroying them with the splendour of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8) and by devouring them with fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9b). He will throw them all into hell (Revelation 19:20-21; 20:9b-10).

There will be a great earthquake that removes mountains, islands and the sky. The bodies in the universe will recede. Thus the old creation will make way for the renewal of everything (Matthew 24:29; Hebrews 1:10-12; Revelation 6:12-17; 16:17-21; 20:11; 21:1)! Thus, there will be no so-called secret first return of Christ (a secret rapture of the Church) before the so-called second return at his second coming (as dispensationalists teach)!

3. On the one and only day of Christ's second coming there will be five important events:

- The resurrection of all who already died
- The transformation of Christians still living
- The welcoming of Jesus Christ by all believers
- The final judgment of all people
- The renewal of all things.

G. 1ST EVENT.

THE RESURRECTION OF ALL WHO ALREADY DIED

In the history of salvation several people were raised from the dead (2 Kings 4:32-35; Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:14-15; Luke 8:53-55; John 11:38-44; Matthew 27:51-53; Acts 9:36-42; Acts 20; 8-11), but later on died again! The only One who was resurrected from the dead with an imperishable and glorified body was the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus Christ is called "the Firstborn of the dead" (Colossians 1:18). "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits (2000 years ago); then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come ..." (1 Corinthians 15:22-24a).

1. The first and second resurrection in the Gospel of John.

Jesus speaks of two resurrections in the Gospel of John:

The first resurrection of Christians is the regeneration of their human spirit whenever they believe the gospel. This happens throughout the whole New Testament period (John 5:24-25).

The second resurrection of Christians is the resurrection of their human body at the second coming of Jesus Christ (John 5:28-29).

2. The first and second resurrection in Revelation.

In a similar fashion, Jesus speaks of "the first resurrection" (of Christians) and "the second death" (of non-Christians) in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 20:4-6) and thereby implies "the first death" (of all people) and "the second resurrection" (of all people).

The Bible does not teach two physical resurrections from the dead, but only one resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12-13).

Revelation 20:4-6 is a figure of speech (a chiasmus)⁸!

1 st resurrection (spiritual)	X	2 nd resurrection (physical)
1 st death (physical)		2 nd death (spiritual)

"The first resurrection" and "the second death" are symbolical/figurative expressions for literally real events (the spiritual eternal life and the spiritual eternal death)! "The first death" and "the second resurrection" are likewise literally real events (the temporary physical death and the eternal physical resurrection)!

⁸ Chiasmus. The second phrase is the reverse order of the first phrase.

Before the second coming of Christ only Christians will be transferred into heaven (Revelation 20:4-6; cf. Revelation 6:9-11; Hebrews 12:22-23). And after the second coming of Christ only non-Christians will be cast into hell (Matthew 25:46).

The first death (implied) refers to the physical death of both Christians and non-Christians, when their human spirits are separated from their human bodies (Ecclesiastes 12:7). “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). That is why the present perishable body must die!

The first resurrection is a figurative expression for a literal event, namely, not the resurrection of the body, but for the resurrection of the spirit (soul) (Greek: psuché) (Revelation 20:4), that is, the transfer of the spirit of the person who died on earth into the presence of God/Christ in heaven (cf. Luke 16:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1,8; Philippians 1:23) during the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ.

The Greek word “ezésan” (aorist) means: “they lived once for all”, a reference to their literal spiritual life in heavenly glory after their physical death. Their human spirit/soul is “transferred” from the dead body to heaven (Ecclesiastes 12:7)!

The Greek word “live” has the same meaning in:

- Luke 20:37-38. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God of the (physical) dead (Greek: nekrón), but of (the spiritually) living (Greek: zóntón)(participle, perfect tense, active). In God’s view, the patriarchs are “living” (Greek: zósin) (present tense).
- John 11:25. Even though he must die (physically) *once* (aorist), he (his spirit) will *surely* “live” (Greek: zósetai) (future tense).
- 1 Thessalonians 5:10. Whether we (our bodies) sleep (in death)(Greek: katheudó), we (our spirits) will “live” (Greek: zósomen) (aorist) at the same time (Greek: hama) together with (Greek: sun) Christ (in heaven).

The second resurrection (implied) refers to the (one, only and simultaneous) physical resurrection of the body of both Christians and non-Christians at the (one and only) second coming of Christ (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12a,13-14). “For the perishable (body) must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal (body) with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). The (spirits of) Christians who have died in Christ, will be brought with Jesus at his second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14). And the (bodies of the) dead who have fallen asleep in Christ, will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Then the glorified human spirit (1 John 3:2) will be re-integrated with the glorified human body (Philippians 3:21) into a imperishable unity. The resurrected Christian will be “a life-giving spirit” that will bear the same perfect likeness of the resurrected Christ. This means that Christians will be completely and perfectly led by the Holy Spirit and walk by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45-50; cf. Galatians 5:16,18,25). God prepares Christians for this glorious future by giving the Holy Spirit to them in the present time as a deposit that guarantees that this transformation will certainly take place (2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Corinthians 5:5)! Both the spiritual resurrection and the physical resurrection are literally real events!

The second death is a figurative expression for a literal spiritual event, namely, not physical death (because that already happened in the past), but “eternal death”, that is, when the body and the spirit (soul) of the unbeliever and disobedient (the unholy and unrighteous) is cast into “the fiery lake of burning sulphur” (a symbol of “hell”) (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:6,4; Revelation 21:8) on the last judgement day. Both physical death and eternal death are literally real events!

1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 speak only about the resurrection of Christians and not about the resurrection of non-Christians. But this does not mean that non-Christians are not resurrected simultaneously with Christians (John 5:28-29).

H. 2ND EVENT.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIANS STILL LIVING

The mortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) and imperfect spirits (cf. Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4) of Christians who are still alive when Jesus Christ returns will be transformed in a flash. “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

I. 3RD EVENT.

THE WELCOMING OF JESUS CHRIST BY ALL BELIEVERS

1. After the resurrection only Christians will be caught up into the sky to meet and welcome Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:31,40a,41a; cf. Luke 16:22).

Angels will snatch the resurrected and transformed Christians up together in the clouds to meet Jesus Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This is the biblical “rapture”.

The word “caught up” (Greek: harpazó) (future tense) means “to snatch up” or “to take by force” (John 6:15; 10:28; Jude 1:23; Revelation 12:5).

The phrase “to meet” (Greek: eis apantésin) refers to the custom of people to go out from where they live to welcome an important person and then to return together with him (cf. Acts 28:15; Matthew 25:10).

Thus, only the resurrected and transformed Christians will welcome Jesus Christ in the air at his second coming! They will marvel at him and glorify him (2 Thessalonians 1:10)!

2. Later on that same day non-Christians will be gathered before Christ’s throne for the last judgement (Matthew 24:40b,41b).

The second coming will be experienced by everyone. Although Christians and non-Christians will be resurrected simultaneously (John 5:28-29), angels will first gather the elect (that is, all genuine Christians) to meet and welcome the Lord Jesus Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40a,41a; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

All unbelievers and non-Christians will be left behind to first experience/see the violent change in the heavenly bodies (Revelation 6:12-17) and later on that same last day be driven before the judgement throne of Christ in the air for the one, only and simultaneous final judgement (Matthew 24:40b,41b; cf. Matthew 25:31-33; Revelation 20:11-12)!

The second coming will violently shake the heavenly bodies. They will disappear (flee away) with a roar, the elements in the universe will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will melt/be dissolved (Greek: tékó) (Matthew 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 6:12-17; Revelation 20:11). Thus, the final judgement of people in the higher regions (the air) (Matthew 24:31; Matthew 25:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 4:17) will take place simultaneously with the final judgement of the universe and old earth!

J. 4TH EVENT.

THE FINAL JUDGEMENT OF ALL PEOPLE

1. The Bible teaches only one final judgement.

(1) Only one final judgement in the air.

At the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ there will be only one resurrection from the dead (Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29). This will be immediately followed by the one and only final judgment of all people that ever lived in history (Matthew 3:12; 13:30,40-43; 19:28; 24:39-42; 25:31-46; Luke 17:30,34-35).

All three the following terms refer to one and the same final judgment day!

- The last judgment of believers and unbelievers before “the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10)
- The judgment of all the nations (including Israel) before “the glorious throne of Christ” (Matthew 25:31-32)
- The judgment of all the resurrected dead before “the great white throne” (Revelation 20:11-12)

Just like the various different names for Jesus Christ do not refer to different persons, likewise the various different names for the final judgment do not refer to several different judgments.

In the Bible “the throne” is depicted in the upper regions (1 Kings 22:19; Daniel 7:9-10; Revelation 4:2; 20:4; cf. “air” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

(2) The final judgement of people according to what they have done.

Until the final judgement day Christians and non-Christians will live mixed among one another (Matthew 13:30).

But at the final judgement day Christians will be separated from the non-Christians (Matthew 13:41-43; 25:32).

After the angels have gathered all the people before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ in the air, Jesus Christ will speak the final word (John 5:22,27). He will publicly reveal everything which Christians and non-Christians have done (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:5-8). Everyone will have to give an account to him (Hebrews 4:13; cf. Matthew 10:26) regardless whether he belongs to Jesus Christ or not and regardless whether he lives in obedience to his Word or not. “Whoever has done good will rise to live and whoever has done evil will rise to be condemned” (Matthew 25:46).

Only those whose names have been recorded in the Book of Life, will inherit the kingdom of God in its ultimate phase (the new earth) (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 20:12,15).

(3) The final judgement of the old earth.

At the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ the present heavens (the universe of stars) will disappear with a roar and the elements of the present earth will be disintegrated by fire (Read 2 Peter 3:7-13).

2. The non-Christians will be publicly condemned.

(1) They are personally condemned before their physical death.

The people who do not believe in Jesus Christ (the non-Christians and unbelievers) are not going to be sentenced on the last judgment day, because the Bible says that they are already condemned on earth before they die! They are condemned (doomed) for:

- their unbelief (John 3:18,36; cf. Romans 8:1)
- their neglect to live righteously (Matthew 25:41-46)
- the unrighteous deeds they have committed (2 Thessalonians 1:6,8; Revelation 21:8).

At the second coming of Christ, even the non-Christians will submit themselves (“bend their knees”) and acknowledge that Jesus Christ was indeed the Lord (Philippians 2:11)! But then it will be too late for them!

(2) They are publicly condemned after their resurrection.

At their physical death their spirit (soul) is separated from their body and cast into hell (cf. Luke 16:23-26). At the resurrection, their bodies will be resurrected together with the bodies of Christians (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). They will be driven before Christ’s judgement throne in the upper regions (Matthew 24:40b,41b) where they will be publicly condemned. They will be sentenced to the eternal fire of hell (Matthew 3:12b). Especially their neglect of doing what is right in God’s eyes will be openly mentioned (*Read* Matthew 25:41-46), so that everyone will know that God’s judgment has been completely righteous (Luke 12:47-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; cf. Revelation 15:3-4).

(3) They are eternally punished in hell.

Then they with spirit (soul) and body will be cast into hell (Matthew 10:28; 13:42; Mark 9:47-48; Revelation 20:15; Revelation 21:8). Hell is the place which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). It is the place where devils and people for ever remain separated from God’s presence, love and glory (2 Thessalonians 1:9). It is an everlasting punishment and torment in the unquenchable fire (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:47-48; Revelation 21:8).

What this precisely means has not been revealed. In the Hebrew the word “eternal” (Hebrew: “olam”) means “a long time”, “the duration of a life”. The God of the Bible is at any rate “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (unless their sins have been atoned for) (Exodus 34:6-7). His judgement will be absolutely righteous. How “his mercy will triumph over his judgement” (James 2:13) has not been revealed.

3. The Christians will be publicly rewarded.

(1) They are personally justified before their death.

The people who believe in Jesus Christ (the Christians, believers) are already acquitted (declared just, completely forgiven) on earth before they die (John 3:18a; Romans 3:22,24; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:7-8; Hebrews 10:17-18). They already possess eternal life before they die (John 5:24-25; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13).

(2) They are publicly justified after their resurrection.

At their physical death the spirit (soul) of Christians is separated from their body and translated into heaven (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 16:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1,7; Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23b).

At the second coming of Jesus Christ, the human spirits of departed Christians will accompany him (1 Thessalonians 4:14), their dead bodies will be resurrected together with the bodies of non-Christians (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15) and their glorified human spirits will be re-integrated with their glorified human bodies in an incorruptible union. Then they with their spirit (soul) and glorified body will be caught up into the clouds to welcome Jesus Christ and to be judged how they lived on earth.

Also Christians will have to give an account of how they have lived in accordance to God’s Word (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 4:13). But they will be publicly declared to be perfectly righteous because the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been ascribed to them (2 Corinthians 5:21). Especially their good deeds will be remembered (Matthew 25:34-40), so that everyone will know that God’s judgment has been completely righteous. All Christians and all angels will sing about God’s righteousness even in his final judgement (Revelation 15:2-4; 16:5-7).

(3) They are eternally rewarded in the kingdom of God in its final phase.

Every Christian will be rewarded according to his deeds (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Genuine Christians will never be condemned (doomed) (John 5:24; Romans 8:1; Hebrews 10:17-18) and they will never perish (John 10:28)! They will receive the kingdom of God in its final phase (Matthew 25:34). The kingdom of God in its final phase is symbolically “the Heavenly Jerusalem” that after the final judgment will descend onto the new earth as “the New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10).

(4) There will be no more opportunity to repent and be saved.

From the moment Jesus Christ returns there will be no more opportunity to repent and to be saved (Matthew 25:10-13; cf. Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2)!

K. 5TH EVENT.

THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS

1. The renewal of all things will take place at the second coming of Christ.

At the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ the renewal of all things will take place. The “coming” (Greek: parousia) of the Lord (2 Peter 3:4) will be “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7; cf. Matthew 19:28-29), “the day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:10), the day on which restoration (Greek: apokatastasis) of all things will take place (2 Peter 3:10-13; Acts 3:21).

2. The present state of the universe will be terminated.

The day of the second coming will be the very last day in the history of this present old earth. The present creation will be liberated from its frustration and bondage to decay (Romans 8:19-22). Everything above the earth as the sun, moon and stars, and everything on the earth like mountains and islands, will be shaken (Matthew 24:29) or “tremble” (Hebrews 12:26-27; Revelation 6:12-14; 16:17-21; 20:11; 21:1). The elements will melt (disintegrated) by fire and the earth and everything in it will *certainly* “be laid bare” (i.e. will be found out, exposed by the light) (Greek: *heuriskó*) (future tense as an absolute assurance) (2 Peter 3:10). Nothing in creation and in history will remain hidden anymore (Matthew 10:26; Hebrews 4:13)!

3. The creation will be renewed and perfected.

The renewal of everything will take place at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21), cf. Revelation 21:5). Jesus Christ will establish the new heaven (universe with all its stars) and the new earth (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Isaiah 65:17). He will make everything new (Revelation 21:5)! Thus, the kingdom of God will reach its final and perfect phase (Matthew 25:34).

4. The wedding of the Lamb.

- (1) Before the second coming of Christ the Church is the Heavenly Jerusalem preparing herself for the wedding of the Lamb.

Throughout the whole New Testament period the Church prepared herself for the wedding with the Lamb (Ephesians 5:25-27). Before the second coming of Christ the Church is called “the Heavenly Jerusalem” (Galatians 4:24-27; Hebrews 11:10,13-16,39-40; 12:22-24; 13:14) (*Read* Isaiah 54:1-5,11-12). The Church is the community of people whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), but who function as prophets, priests and kings on earth (1 Peter 2:9-10). The lives of Christians are “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-4).

- (2) After the second coming of Christ and the final judgment of all people, the Church is called “the New Jerusalem” or “the Bride of the Lamb”.

She descends together with Christ from the upper regions (where the last judgement took place) onto the new earth (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10).

“The New Jerusalem” is a symbol of the complete community of believers from the Old Testament period (Hebrews 11:10,16) and the New Testament period (Hebrews 13:14). It is a symbol of the Church throughout all ages, that is, the Church (Greek: *ekklésia*) in the Old Testament period (Psalm 107:32) and the Church (Greek: *ekklésia*) in the New Testament period (Matthew 16:18). It is a symbol for the absolute “full number” of the elect who cannot be deceived between the creation and the renewal of all things (Matthew 24:22,24,31; Romans 8:28-30,33; Romans 11:4-6,25-26)!

- (3) Thus the second coming of Jesus Christ is completed with “the wedding of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7-8).

The book of Revelation consists of seven parallel sections (chapters 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-14, 15-16, 17-19 and 20-22). The second coming of Jesus Christ is completed with “the wedding of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7-8). The wedding of the Lamb shows that Revelation 21:1-2,9-10 *is a parallel description* of Revelation 19:7-8. Also “the last battle” shows that Revelation 20:7-10 *is a parallel description* of Revelation 19:11-21.

- Revelation 20:1-6 (about the thousand year period) does not follow chronologically Revelation 19:11-21, but rather precedes it chronologically!
- Revelation chapters 17-19 is thus parallel to Revelation chapter 20!

5. Eternity.

- (1) On the new earth God’s covenant reaches its perfection!

In the Old Testament the covenant began with: “I (God) will walk among you and be your God, and you (the believers during the Old Testament period) will be my people” (Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:2-7; Leviticus 26:12).

In the New Testament this covenant is continued and expanded (enlarged) to include the believers in Jesus Christ coming from all the nations on earth (2 Corinthians 6:16).

And at the second coming of Christ this covenant comes to completion and perfection, because the Christians from all the nations in the world will be “his peoples” (plural) and dwell in his presence on the new earth (Revelation 21:3).

- (2) On the new earth all people and everything will be completely perfect!

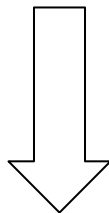
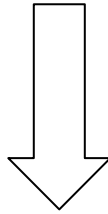
There will be no more tears, death, mourning, crying or pain. Everything will be made new (Revelation 21:4-5). The new earth will blossom and bear abundant fruit (Revelation 22:1-2; cf. Isaiah 27:6). The wild animals will be tame and live in peace with domestic animals. No one will harm another (cf. Isaiah 11:6-9). The new earth will be a place where only righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13)!

(3) On the new earth the kingdom of God will reach completion and perfection

(Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28; Revelation 11:15-18)!

Jesus Christ as the Son (as Mediator) will hand over the kingdom (kingship) to God as the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24) and will be made subject to God the Father who had put everything under him (as Mediator) so that God may be all in all, that is, so that God (without a Mediator) may rule directly over all and everything (1 Corinthians 15:28). This means that the work of Jesus Christ as Mediator between God and man during the history of salvation will then be completed. *The different tasks* of God the Father and God the Son will then come to an end. They will have the same functions. From then on “God and the Lamb are the temple and the lamp of the New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:22-23).

But the kingship of Jesus Christ is an eternal kingship (1 Chronicles 17:12b,14; Isaiah 9:6; 2 Peter 1:11) and his kingship together with God the Father will continue forever (Revelation 11:15)! “The throne of God and the Lamb” will remain forever (Revelation 22:1,3).



L. HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS LIVE BEFORE THE SECOND COMING

Be patient and persevere. Be patient with imperfect people and persevere in suffering, because the Judge is standing at the door (James 5:8)

Be watchful in your trials. Do not eat and drink too much and do not worry about your livelihood. Be watchful and pray that you may escape the trials (Luke 21:8-19) that are about to happen (in the period of tribulation) and that you may be able to stand before the throne of judgment (Luke 21:34-36).

Be holy and godly in your life. Let the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and let him strengthen your heart (your resolve and dedication) so that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of God at the second coming (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13; 2 Peter 3:11-12).

Be faithful in your task. Fulfil the task Jesus entrusted to you faithfully and wise (Matthew 24:45-47; Luke 12:42-48).

M. OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

