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Again we find ourselves in Matthew 24:32-35. Before we look at that, however, may I say that these are amazing times in which we live. We can literally see the prophetic stage being set right before our eyes. We see that which has been predicted concerning the day when the Islamic and Arab countries and Russia will come down upon Israel. We see Israel at the forefront of the problems today in the world. I find it interesting that we see Iran, for example, ready to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. We know that someday, according to Scripture, Israel will be placed permanently in her homeland. We don't know if she is there right now or if she'll be run out again, but someday she will be there. I was reading Amos 9:14-15 which tells us, "And I will bring back my exiled people Israel...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them." It's exciting to be living in these days but it's also exciting to open the Word of God and glean some of the marvelous truths that He has given us with respect to Bible prophecy.

I think of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:14. You will recall his passionate plea to believers, and therefore us all, to be like him and to "Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Then he reminded all of us in verses 20-21 that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." Dear friends, we must never lose sight of this blessed hope we have that Jesus is coming again. This is the hope of the saints down through redemptive history, certainly since the days of the New Testament when they understood that the Messiah would be the Lord Jesus Christ. Our citizenship, the official registry of all of the saints, is in heaven. This is not our home. Our names are written there, other believers we know and love that have gone on before us are there. Our Savior is there. Our inheritance is there. Hopefully you are storing up treasure there. That's where we're longing to go. What a day that will be when we see our Lord.

As the apostle Paul tells us, we need to eagerly wait for that day when we will literally be transformed and liberated from this body of sin that we find ourselves incarcerated within. The Word of God tells us in 1 John 3:2, "When He appears we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is." As we study these great prophetic truths, I hope that it will stir within you a great sense of excitement. Someday we are going to be liberated from the very presence of sin, from this body of sin in which we now find ourselves, and we will be with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine, as 1 Corinthians 15 tells us, what it will be like to be "changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Won't that be an incredible time for those who are raptured or snatched away? Can you imagine what it will be like as Jude 24 tells us when we are "standing in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy"? Can you imagine as we read in Revelation 20 what it will be like to rule and reign upon a renovated earth for a thousand years? Absolutely inconceivable! I hope this is the passionate preoccupation of your life. I hope you are all living in the light of His imminent return. I can only pray that our study of the prophetic Scriptures will heighten your anticipation of that day when you will see your Savior face to face in all His splendor. For those without Christ, my prayer is that you will bow before Him in humble repentance, otherwise when you see Him, He will not be your Savior; He will be your judge.

The disciples lived with such anticipation. However they were confused, as we have studied. They didn't understand that because of Israel's rejection, the kingdom would be postponed; that Jerusalem would continue to struggle under the heel of Gentile domination until this very Jesus would end their world supremacy. May I remind you that the Gentile supremacy began with the end of the Old Testament theocratic kingdom. But it will end someday when the Messiah King returns in power and great glory and

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restores that kingdom to Israel as the prophets have indicated. The disciples had no idea that Jesus was about to leave, they had no comprehension of the Church Age in which we now live, and that it would somehow intervene between the time they were living and His ultimate parousia, His revealing of Himself.

In a further introduction to the text, when we look at Matthew's Gospel we see six parables in this area we are studying, right before chapters 24-25. We see six parables describing the details about the coming Messianic Kingdom. The first three were directed to the Jewish religious leaders that had challenged His authority. We read of that in Matthew 21 in the parable of the two sons and the parable of the landowner and the vineyard, and of the king's marriage feast in Matthew 22. The remaining three parables were given to the disciples in Matthew 24-25. We will look at one of them in verses 32-35 with the parable of the budding fig tree. Later in chapter 25, verses 1-13 is the parable of the ten virgins and in verses 14-29 is the parable of the talents.

All but the parable about the two sons in these first six parables picture a future kingdom. They picture a divine King who's going to come in sudden judgment. A King who will come and judge the wicked and reward the righteous. A time when the mediatorial kingdom of the Old Testament prophecy is finally realized. A time when all of the royal blessings once promised to the nation Israel will be poured out upon her. The Church will be snatched away, and ultimately God will fulfill His covenantal promises to His people the Jews. This will be the time when the fullness of the Gentiles is over. Israel's time of suffering will be past someday. It will be a time when her judgment will be over; when her spiritual eyes will suddenly be opened and she will behold the One whom she has pierced. As promised in Romans 11:26-27, a time when "all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this My Covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'"

In Jesus' day, although most—not all—of Judaism was apostate, they nevertheless had a very accurate understanding of eschatology, or the study of the end times. They had this without the help of the New Testament. In Emil Schurer's classical work entitled, "A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus" he outlines their understanding of the *eschata*, the Greek word for the last things. You will see that the concepts that they derive from the Old Testament bear an undeniable resemblance to the premillennial themes and motifs we have been studying, those that are presented in the New Testament. In that book he outlines the basic essence of Jewish eschatology in Jesus' time and here's what they believe in summary:

- The coming tribulation and confusion, called Messianic woes
- Elijah will appear before the Messiah
- The appearance of the Messiah will come
- The final attack on the Messiah will then occur
- There's going to be the destruction of powers against the Messiah
- There will be a restoration of the Jews according to Ezekiel 40-48, and in case you don't remember, that is the climax of Ezekiel's prophecy where he provides explicit details concerning the millennial reign of Christ.
- There would be a return of the dispersed Israel
- There will be a kingdom glory with Jerusalem at the center
- A renewal of the world
- General resurrection and final judgment

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They had a fairly accurate understanding of eschatology. It's amazing to me to think that someday during Daniel's 70th week, during the time of the tribulation, there will be many desperate people trying to understand prophecy. The world will be falling apart. They'll want to understand what's going on. In the midst of unimaginable devastation and chaos, many Jews and Gentiles will refine their ancient eschatology by reexamining the Old Testament prophecies in light of New Testament revelation.

In fact, God spoke to Daniel at the close of His revelation concerning the end of the age, and here's what He told Daniel in 12:2, "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." The Hebrew verb for back and forth, in some translations it's to and fro, is a verb that denotes someone who is desperately searching for something. It also tells us that knowledge is going to increase. What are they searching for? For prophetic truths, especially here in Daniel's prophecies, not to mention the other parallel prophecies, including the ones in Matthew 24-25 in the Olivet Discourse. It's amazing to think that someday, many people are going to be pouring over the prophetic Scriptures. Who knows, some of them may listen to these messages and others like them.

We return to Matthew's Gospel. You will recall that after His scathing denunciation of the Jews' disbelief in chapter 23 and then His ominous prediction of their temple's demise, Jesus concludes with a message of hope and He quietly slips away from the multitudes with His disciples. Then in chapter 24 we begin to see that the disciples naturally have some questions about what Jesus has said. They want to know the when and the what, the nature and duration of Israel's desolation, and the sign of His coming. Jesus gave them six specific signs, He called them "birth pangs" in verse eight. He also described the sign of the abomination that causes desolation. That will occur just before His coming.

After He elaborated on the sequence of events that will lead up to His glorious appearing, that unmistakable sign of His very presence that will be visible to all the world, notice what He says in our text in verses 32-35 of Matthew 24: "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Here Jesus gives yet another very uncomplicated parable to help the disciples understand that when these signs that He's been describing begin to emerge, the parousia is going to occur. The parousia is the manifestation, the glorious presence and return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Which again is the dominant theme of the discourse. He's speaking to the disciples, which are representatives of the Jewish remnant that will be alive during that time when the Lord returns.

Notice what He says in verse 32. He begins by saying "Now learn." In the original language this denotes more than simply grasping a basic understanding, but rather it denotes a wholehearted reception. "I want you to absolutely understand and live consistently with the truths that I'm about to tell you. I want this to motivate your life." This same term was used in Philippians 4:11 when Paul said that he "learned to be content in whatever circumstances" God had placed him. Paul grasped the glorious truths of divine sovereignty to such an extent that his understanding shaped his life. No matter what God brought his way he could relax in God's sovereign care and he wouldn't complain.

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Likewise Jesus is saying to the disciples "I want you to learn the parable from the fig tree." Not just the disciples but all who will read these words in years to come. Let this simple and very important analogy regulate your life. What are they to learn? Ultimately Jesus is answering the questions that the disciples had posed to Him early in chapter 24. I want to divide these verses into three very simple sections that will give you an outline. We're going to look firstly at the *season of His return*, secondly the *span of the signs*, and thirdly the *surety of His return*.

First of all, as we look at the *season of His return*, look at verse 32. Here's what they are to learn from the fig tree. "...when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near." This is simple to understand, whether it's a fig tree or any other kind of tree, everyone knows that in springtime when the sap begins to rise the branches of the tree soften and become pliable and tender, and the leaves begin to bud. That's a sure sign that summer is right around the bend.

In verse 33, "even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door." What things? All of the things; all the signs that He's so graphically described. He's saying, even as you know summer is near when a fig tree begins to bud in the springtime, likewise when you see these signs, recognize that He is near, right at the door. The pronoun "He" can also be translated "it" or it is near, referring to the glorious appearing of the King and the inauguration of the kingdom. In Luke 21:31, a parallel to this passage, Jesus declares, "the kingdom of God is near." When you see these things, the kingdom of God is near.

As a footnote, there's no contradiction here, just because Luke records something a little bit different than Matthew. You must understand that the inspired authors are quoting Jesus, who undoubtedly discussed and elaborated these things beyond the record of one Gospel writer's recollection. So the Holy Spirit graciously gives us an expanded understanding of that which the Lord has said so that we can grasp these important truths. Jesus helps us understand the general time period, or season of these events. When you see these signs, know that it's about to happen.

Next He goes on to describe the duration, or *span of signs* that lead up to His appearing. Notice secondly, the span of the signs, beginning in verse 34. "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." These signs are not going to be stretched out over thousands or even hundreds of years, they are going to occur within the lifespan of the generation alive at that time. There are other prophecies that give us great mathematical precision with respect to the length of Daniel's 70th week. It will be seven years according to Daniel 9. The last half of the tribulation, which Jesus called the great tribulation in Matthew 24:21, is going to last three and a half years. There's great detail given to these time frames described in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 11:2-3 and 12:6. I would humbly add that when you see the great detail with respect to the time periods, not to mention measurements, I believe it gives further evidence that these prophecies are not to be spiritualized. They are not to be treated as a mysterious allegory and forced into the events of A.D. 70.

The span or duration of these signs, the "birth pangs," are going to occur before those witnessing them pass away, during their generation. Those who experience the birth pangs will experience the birth. It's important for you to understand this. Throughout His discourse Jesus has been addressing those who will be living in the future, not merely His disciples. In verse 4 He says, "See to it that no one misleads you." In verse 6, "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars." In verse 9, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation...you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." In verse 15, "When you see the

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abomination of desolation,” and verse 25, “Behold I have told you in advance.” Jesus has been consistently prophesying to a future generation, even as Daniel and the other prophets did.

Some will argue that the phrase “this generation” refers to the Jewish race that is not going to pass away until their Messiah ushers in the kingdom. I would humbly argue that that seems contrived and confusing, a bit obtuse and pointless. Of course the Jewish remnant will be alive when the Messiah comes, we can understand that. If Jesus wanted to say that, He would have simply stated “Israel” or “My people” or something to that effect, will not pass away.

Others will argue that since Jesus admitted in Matthew 24:36 that He didn't know “the day or the hour,” only the Father knows, that this generation was just a bad guess. He was guessing and was referring to the disciples' generation but He really didn't know for sure. Well, so much for the divine authority of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ if that's the case. Indeed, during the time of His incarnation, the Lord Jesus deliberately and temporarily set aside certain aspects of His divine attributes, and in His incarnation He admittedly did not know the specific moment of His future arrival. But He did know the signs that were going to lead up to it. That's what is at stake here.

Others will argue that “this generation” refers to all who were alive in Jesus' day, a rather popular position, thus those people, including the disciples, experienced all the events that Jesus is describing here during A.D. 70 when Rome conquered Jerusalem. As a footnote, I fear this position is fueled by a commitment to preserve the philosophical system of Covenant theology than exegetical and contextual considerations. If one begins with what I believe to be an errant position that would insist the Church has replaced Israel, then one must interpret all of the prophetic literature in such a way so as to avoid any possibility that Israel as a nation will ever again be the undeserved recipients of divine blessing. Therefore, if that is your philosophical presupposition, then naturally when you come to the prophetic literature you're going to have to spiritualize much of it in order to maintain your position consistently.

One respected proponent of this view is R.C. Sproul, whom I have enormous respect for with respect to his soteriology, but I would vastly differ with him in this regard. He would argue all we've been studying in Matthew 24 in this way. “The Olivet Discourse contains a continuous and homogenous prophecy regarding the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the parousia of Christ. Several signs will portend these events: the appearance of false christs and false prophets, great social disturbances, natural calamities and convulsions, the persecution of the apostles, the apostasy of professed believers, and the publication of the gospel throughout the Roman empire. The great tribulation refers to the siege of Jerusalem. The Olivet Discourse is not about the end of the world but about the end of a definite time period, the ‘age of the Jews’ or the Jewish dispensation. The graphic language used by Jesus to describe the attending events is metaphorical and consistent with the poetry of fervor used by Old Testament prophets.”

There are numerous reasons why the dispensational position would not agree with our brother, who would be called a *moderate preterist*. Some preterism goes to the point of being utterly apostate, but his would not be in that category. I've detailed much of that in part two of this series when I gave you a number of reasons why what is depicted here in Matthew 24 is future, way beyond the events of A.D. 70, so I'll not repeat that here. Bottom line: nothing that occurred in A.D. 70 in Jerusalem compares to the universal scope and cataclysmic severity of the staggering events that Jesus has described.

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Furthermore, given the exceedingly more horrific slaughter of the Jews, for example in the holocaust and other times in history, how are we to interpret Jesus' words in Matthew 24:21-22 if all of these events occurred in A.D. 70? Jesus said "There will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." If all that happened in A.D. 70, how do you explain the holocaust? That far exceeded what happened in A.D. 70. "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved." I would humbly add that a view such as the preterist view discounts the undeniable parallels in content and sequence that are found in the book of Revelation that was written in A.D. 96, many years after A.D. 70.

John MacArthur adds perhaps the greatest single refutation of that view when he said: "Most important of all, Jesus certainly did not appear then. It is strange logic to argue that Jesus could accurately foretell the destruction of Jerusalem some forty years hence but be mistaken about His returning at that time. Or if, as some suggest, the teaching here was merely symbolic and allegorical, with the limited destruction of Jerusalem representing the vastly greater destruction of the end time, what event in A.D. 70 could possibly have symbolized Jesus' return, which is the main subject of the discourse?" I believe that the generation of which Jesus refers is that generation of people living during the tribulation.

The question arises: What will be the makeup of this future generation? There are essentially two groups of people that have opposing views regarding the makeup of this generation. Each group has a different understanding of the nature of that future generation. There are the posttribulationists and the pretribulationists. The posttribulationist view, which has several competing camps with varying positions, argues that the rapture of the Church will occur sometime towards the latter part or perhaps even at the end of the tribulation, thus, posttribulation. Therefore, believers who are alive during the tribulation will make up the generation that Jesus described. That could be our generation. We could find that before long the Antichrist begins to arise and all these prophetic events begin to occur and so on. They would argue that the generation refers to believers who are alive during the tribulation. They would also say that those who survive this horrific seven year holocaust will finally be raptured sometime toward the end or the very end and then almost immediately return to the earth with the Lord for His second coming and the establishment of the millennial kingdom. That's the posttribulationist view.

As you know, I don't hold that view, I hold the pretribulationist view. The pretribulationist view, which I believe is the most biblically defensible position, says that the generation that Jesus described will not include any believers of the current Church Age because they've all been raptured before the seven year tribulation. Hence, pretribulation. In part three of this series I discussed why I believe the Church will be translated, or raptured, before that seven year period, or Daniel's 70th week, begins. I will briefly review some of those reasons because they are germane to this issue here in verse 34. Let me give you an overview of why I believe in a pretribulationist rapture.

First of all, I believe that only a pretribulationist rapture preserves the New Testament doctrine of imminency, that the Lord could come at any time, which I believe is a doctrine that is essential to a proper understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. Second, I believe it because of the specific promises that God gave the Church saying they will not be exposed to this time of divine judgment. In Revelation 3:10 He says to the church of Philadelphia, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world," translated literally this can mean the inhabited earth, something far beyond just something localized with the church at Philadelphia, "to test those who dwell upon the earth."

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As I've taught before, these promises are relevant to all churches, not just the church at Philadelphia. Greek students will understand, He uses the term *tereso ek*, that you are going to be kept from the hour of trial. He did not use the preposition *en* in Greek, which is in English, nor did He use the preposition *dia* which means through. He didn't use any of those. If He had, then clearly that would indicate there would be some type of miraculous preservation through or in the midst of this hour of trial. But He didn't use any of that. Why would He preserve saints through the consequences of this great catastrophe, all of these judgments, and many of them are still going to die a martyr's death? That doesn't make sense to me. Jesus used a similar phrase in John 12:27 when He was praying to the Father, "save me from this hour." He used the same exact Greek phrase. Not save me through it, that makes no sense. Also the promise in Revelation to keep them from testing is not some localized Philadelphia church only tribulation but rather it is one that will come upon the whole world, the testing of the entire inhabited earth—all those who dwell upon the earth.

Now some will say "Yes, but the Church has always suffered persecution." I have no argument with that. They have and they will. But dear friends, nothing that is comparable to the eschatological judgments of the great day of divine wrath that is described in the prophecies with respect to Daniel's 70th week. There is nothing like that. So again, the argument that the Church will endure the tribulation holocaust by some sort of miraculous intervention simply does not stand the test, for me, of Revelation 3:10.

The third reason why I believe in a pretribulational rapture is that the Church is mentioned on earth in Revelation 2-3, and in chapters 4-5 the Church is described in heaven. But from chapter 6 on, where we have all the graphic description of the tribulation judgments, there is no further mention of the Church. I realize that's a nuance, but so too is the doctrine of the Trinity. I feel it's a very important nuance, or inference. As I've said before, in the book of Revelation John uses the Greek term *ekklessia* twenty-one times. That's the Church, the called-out ones. Twenty of those times are in reference to the seven churches mentioned in the first three introductory chapters. That's always in connection with churches on earth, never in connection with saints in heaven.

Never does the term *ekklessia* then appear in chapters 4-19 and the discussion of all the judgments. It's just not there. To me, this would be a very odd omission if in fact the *ekklessia*, the called-out ones, were present during that period of judgment upon the earth. Although no references of *ekklessia* on earth are found in Revelation 4-19, we do find three fascinating references to a vast body of saved individuals in heaven, each one being designated by terms used to describe the *ekklessia* during the Church Age. For example in Revelation 4-5 we read of the twenty-four elders. I believe this to be a description of the raptured Church. In Revelation 13:6 we discover that the Antichrist blasphemes three distinct objects of his hatred which would be God, His name and tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. In Revelation 19:1-9 we read of the bride who has made herself ready for the Lamb. So, while there is no reference to the *ekklessia* on earth in chapters 4-19 in Revelation, we do find references to these saved individuals in heaven.

A fourth reason why I believe in a pretribulational rapture is that it seems strange to me that if the Church was supposed to and destined to go through this unbelievable holocaust, why do we not have any New Testament instruction concerning how we're supposed to function during this time of unprecedented persecution? It seems odd to me.

A fifth reason I hold the pretribulational position is in keeping with the Jewish marriage traditions where the groom prepares a place for the bride and he comes unannounced to receive her and so on. Jesus speaks

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of this concept in the New Testament; of coming for His bride in John 14:2-3 which is another veiled description of the rapture. This is where He said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." Who's the you? His bride. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." As I read that, there's nothing here that speaks of Christ coming in judgment, coming in power and great glory to destroy the wicked. No, He's coming to snatch away His bride. He's coming to celebrate with us the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is the time we receive our rewards in heaven, at the judgment seat of Christ. Then after that, the glorified Church returns with the Lord Jesus Christ in the second coming to establish His kingdom.

A sixth reason I hold to the pretribulation position is what I call the "quick turn around rapture" problem. In the posttribulation position, you have the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, coming for His Church, and the bridal Church meets the Groom in the air, and then supposedly we go immediately with Him to this place He's prepared for her, and suddenly we immediately turn around and come back to earth? That doesn't make sense to me, especially in light of what we just read in John 14:3 where He says, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." For a few minutes, hours, days? It seems like something far greater than that.

A seventh reason I hold this position is that although God's economy in dealing with Israel finds numerous fulfillments in the Church, nevertheless, Daniel's 70th week is distinctly Jewish in its context pertaining to the covenants of Israel. They cannot be describing anything in the Church Age. I ask you, why would the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel's 70th week prophecy concern the nation of Israel, but the very last one is supposed to be focused on the Church? That doesn't make sense to me. This is the time of Jacob's trouble, according to Jeremiah 30:7. This is a period of unprecedented oppression for Israel. The whole context describes her final restoration. It is not the time of the bride's trouble. It's the time of Jacob's trouble. Moreover, Jesus clearly indicates in Matthew 24:15-16 and Mark 13:14 that the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy is to be the template for the chronological sequencing of all of the prophecies, the beginning of the "birth pangs" in Matthew 24. These are pre-Kingdom judgments consistent with God's purposes and plan for Israel, not the Church. I see two very distinct and different economies that God works.

The prophetic literature is replete with the Jewishness of this coming period of time. We read in Revelation 7:4 how God supernaturally saves and seals 144,000 sons of Israel, 12,000 from each tribe, to become a massive missionary force upon the earth. In Revelation 11 we read how the temple is being measured, and how the Gentiles will tread it under foot for three and a half years. It has so much Jewishness in all of these contexts. In Revelation 11:19 there's the reappearance of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. In Revelation 11:3 we have the two witnesses which is the Jewish requirement to confirm a testimony. These two witnesses are supernaturally granted power to prophesy for 1,260 days. How do you spiritualize that?

Even the plagues in Revelation 11:6 are reminiscent of those enacted upon the enemies of Israel in the days of Elijah and Moses. When you look at Revelation 12, there's clearly the identification of the woman, which is to be the nation of Israel, the very nation that's consistent with the nation in Old Testament history. It's going to be persecuted by the beast during his diabolical reign. Ultimately, the very final act, this final conflict against Israel, reveals that the great archangel Michael is going to defeat Satan. Who is Michael? He was the great protector of Israel. I believe it is forced to get the Church in all of this.

An eighth reason is that Paul spent the entire first epistle to the Thessalonians pleading with them to be watchful, pleading with them to wait expectantly for Christ's return to snatch them away. He was constantly encouraging them and having them encourage one another with this wonderful hope that the Lord is going to come. But as you read 1 Thessalonians and even in the second book, you quickly find that some of those people were very concerned about not only the persecutions they were experiencing, thinking that "Oh my, maybe we've missed the rapture. We're confused. What's going on? Not only that, but what about our loved ones who love the Lord Jesus Christ but have died? Are they going to miss out on the Lord's return?" They were confused.

If the Church was destined to go through the tribulation, why did Paul speak words of comfort and encouragement in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17? If the Church was destined to endure such a holocaust, Paul should have led them in a song of rejoicing saying, "Isn't it wonderful that your loved ones have escaped all of this?" But he didn't do that. Furthermore, many of the Thessalonian believers were confused by false teachers that had convinced them that somehow the persecutions they were suffering was consistent with the divine judgments associated with the day of the Lord, which is an expression which always refers to a time of apocalyptic judgment in the Bible. That's why Paul writes to them, to clarify this, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. He says, "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him," a clear reference to the rapture, "we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come." That is the day of the Lord, which is the phrase found in older manuscripts.

In other words, he is saying "Dearly beloved, the sufferings you are now experiencing are not the apocalyptic judgments that signal the day of the Lord. You have not missed the rapture." If the Church was supposed to go through the tribulation these would be no words of comfort. All of this would beg for relevance. I believe what Paul was telling them is what we all need to hear. We're not looking for the Antichrist, we're looking for Christ. Bottom line: I would argue that this generation of Matthew 24:34 will not include the Church because it's been raptured, but rather it will be made up of those alive during the hard labor pains of the tribulation.

We've seen the season of His return, the span of the signs and finally let's look at verse 35 at the surety of His return. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away." In other words, Jesus, as He has promised, is telling them, "All of this universe, all of this world filled with sin, this earth that I have subjected to futility, according to Romans 8, all of it is going to pass away. But My Word is not going to pass away."

There's some evangelical activism going on regarding global warming and the environment. I saw Rick Warren, with the purpose driven church, being interviewed. He's part of this. He was urging evangelical leaders to join with him and others in combating global warming. Friends, this is another whole sermon, but I cannot imagine anything more misguided. What a misguided endeavor. I would say in all humility: that is based on something even beyond a superficial and shallow understanding of the Scriptures and God's mandate for the Church. Do you think I'm now going to start spending my time fighting global warming? Especially when I understand, as I read the Scripture, this world, this universe is winding down? Do you realize that? We see that in the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy.

In fact, the Lord has made it clear in Romans 8 that He has subjected it to futility. Someday, as we read in 2 Peter 3:10, at the end of the millennial kingdom, He says, "the heavens will pass away with a roar and

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the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” This is a disposable earth. I’m all for keeping clean water and having a good landfill, but as John MacArthur has said, “if you don’t like what we’re doing to the earth, wait until you see what Jesus does to it!” I hope you don’t get caught up in this type of thing. The mandate of the Church is to preach the Gospel of Christ, the great commission. We want to see people come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Along with that, we are to worship the Lord God, we are to be the pillars and support of the truth. Our citizenship is in heaven. I’m not going to get caught up in all this political nonsense.

So the Lord says with respect to the surety of His return, ‘heaven and earth is going to pass away but My Words aren’t going to pass away. What I have declared is going to happen just as I have said.’ Dear child of God, what comfort we have in the unassailable and unchanging sovereignty of a God who declares the end from the beginning. May all of us rejoice in the certainty of the promises that are ours in Christ Jesus, and be able to sing as I used to sing when I was a little boy. We sang John Peterson’s great old hymn “Jesus Is Coming Again” and I will close with a verse and chorus from that hymn.

Marvelous message we bring;
Glorious carol we sing!
Wonderful word of the King:
Jesus is coming again!

Coming again, coming again!
Maybe morning, maybe noon,
Maybe evening and maybe soon!
Coming again, coming again!
O what a wonderful day it will be,
Jesus is coming again!

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