A Place of Safety

When, how, and why God will protect faithful people at the end of the age

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The time Christ described as "great tribulation" is drawing near. This worldwide sequence of events will consist of extreme violence, famine, pestilence, and horrific plagues. But God said there is a way of escape. Now is the time to understand what the Bible says about a place of safety.

A Place of Safety

> But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:14).

A calamity of unimaginable proportions is coming. The entire world will be thrust into a colossal upheaval, punctuated by extraordinary violence. Political, economic, and natural disasters will soon mushroom into what the Bible calls the great tribulation. This will be the time Christ described as worse than any in the past, or that ever will be in the future (Mat. 24:21). Mountains will collapse, valleys will rise, and islands will sink into the sea. War, famine, and disease will run rampant. Death will reach enormous proportions. Millions will suffer inhumanity on a scale that will surpass the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and even the Holocaust.

God has powerfully and miraculously intervened to alter the course of human history when the world became extremely wicked. Moses recorded such a point in humanity's early years, writing:

> The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:11-13).

The Scriptures proclaim that the world will again become filled with unprecedented evil and violence; in which the Almighty will forcefully intervene.

> For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved (Mark 13:19-20).

Who Will Be Affected by the Tribulation

The great tribulation that comes upon the whole world will consist of both Satan's fury and God's wrath. The Almighty will allow Satan to unleash his ferocity in a series of seals, while God's wrath takes place during a year of trumpet and bowl plagues (Rev. 12:12; Isa. 61:2). These events will affect everyone on earth, but the brunt of Satan's violence will be directed toward specific people. The Jews, the lost tribes of Israel, and members of the Church of God will be targets of the devil's wrath. As the Prophet Jeremiah quoted God, saying:

> Now these *are* the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah. "For thus says the LORD: 'We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man *with* his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and **it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble**, But he shall be saved out of it'" (Jeremiah 30:4-7).

Jacob's progeny eventually became many of the nations that now make up a significant portion of the world's population. The modern descendants of Jacob include the Jews, Americans, British, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and many Europeans. All of these nations will be caught in this horrible time of tyranny. For more information on this subject, send for our free booklet—*The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

The tribulation will strike many without warning. Hundreds of millions will be drawn into a horrifying holocaust. The loss of human life will escalate to staggering proportions. Included in the vast numbers of people affected by Satan's wrath will be members of God's Church. As Christ foretold:

> And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17).

The passage above refers to the last days. Realizing his time is short, the devil will turn his vicious fury toward the woman which is a symbol of God's Church (Eph. 5:31-32). Christ foretold that these future events will be so devastating that, if left to continue, no living creature would remain alive:

> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).

Some Believe God Will Not Protect People

Some are convinced that there will be no protection for true Christians during this terrible time. Pointing out that God's people in the past have suffered severe persecution, they reference Hebrews 11 and state that many great men and women of God have suffered and died for their faith. However, to say that God will not protect His faithful people in the future tribulation, simply because He has not always protected everyone, is shortsighted.

The Bible documents many examples of God guarding faithful people. He took Enoch out of harm's way. He protected Noah and his family. He spared Lot and his daughters. He intervened to save David from Goliath. He delivered Israel from cruel taskmasters in Egypt. He also dramatically destroyed the Assyrian army in order to protect Jerusalem from destruction (2Kin. 19:35).

One of the most recent examples is found in the history of the early Church. Jewish separatists provoked Rome in a skirmish in 66 A.D. The uprising escalated resulting in more than three years of great persecution for both Jews and Christians. The Roman general Titus was sent to annihilate Jerusalem which he accomplished in 70 A.D. During the siege, the Jewish general Josephus was captured and became a prisoner who was forced to translate for Rome. While in custody, he wrote of a miraculous sign

that occurred during Pentecost in 69 A.D. There was a formation in the clouds that appeared to take the form of troops and chariots surrounding the city. As Josephus explained:

> I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a multitude, saying, "let us remove hence" (*Wars of the Jews*, bk. vi, ch. v, sec. 3).

In this little-known account, faithful people hearkened to the sign and, in full view of Roman soldiers, they fled Jerusalem. These faithful had to avoid the armed forces as well as Jewish Zealots who may have considered them traitors. Without God's intervention, they would have encountered enemies on both sides and perished before they reached the Jordan River. With God's protection, these exiles proceeded northeast to the little town of Pella. Within months, after experiencing horrible suffering and starvation, Jerusalem fell to the Romans. The city lay in ruins and the Temple was destroyed, but God's faithful people were protected (Mat. 24:1-2).

God has sheltered people in the past, and the Scriptures declare that He will also protect His faithful people during the end-time crisis. Now, more than ever, we need to know exactly when, how, and why.

There is a Way of Escape

Luke also wrote of this future horrific time that will come upon people like a shocking trap. Many will find themselves caught in the carnage when it strikes. But what will happen to God's faithful during this era of horror? Will they be ensnared and suffer along with everyone else? God explained that it will depend on their moral fiber.

Christ admonished the end-time Church explaining that God's people will be divided into two distinct groups. One will

remain alert by paying attention to the state of their character; assiduously living by every word of God. These faithful will receive supernatural protection while others will not (Rev. 3:7-13).

Mired in a state of complacency, and neglecting their first priority to live by every word of God, this second group deems important spiritual issues as trivial. They rationalize aspects of God's Word resulting in disobedience. They will ultimately be caught off guard and forced to endure various severe trials or even great tribulation (Rev. 3:14-19). Speaking of this time, Luke recorded the following warning from Christ:

> But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass**, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34-36).

Christ indicated that those who stand guard over their character, and stay spiritually connected to God, will be protected. They will be considered worthy to escape the famine, disease, war, imprisonment, and persecution of the coming tribulation.

Not a Rapture

It must be understood that God's protection will not be the fulfillment of a rapture that whisks believers into the clouds before the tribulation begins. Those who believe in the theory of a rapture have been misled. In fact, the term "rapture" was not found anywhere in the Bible until the fourth century when the *Latin Vulgate* translated the words of Paul, "caught up" in 1Thessalonians 4:17, as "raptured." That verse is a prophecy of the resurrection of chosen saints. Not understanding what was intended, some theologians created a false doctrine.

Protestant communities continue to propagate the concept of a rapture by arguing whether it will occur pre-tribulation or post-tribulation. One side emphasizes verses showing the church going through the tribulation while others point to passages depicting the

church being protected. Ironically, both sides misinterpret verses by trying to prove their respective points regarding a doctrine that was never true in the first place.

All of God's people found in the scattered groups existing during the end-time will remain on the earth throughout most of the tribulation. While the Scriptures do not corroborate rapture theories, they do speak of individuals who have been less faithful enduring the tribulation while others are protected. They also foretell of an eventual resurrection of chosen saints occurring at the seventh and last trumpet plague (1Cor. 15:52; 1Ths. 4:16-17). Rapture theorists confuse these events, and have created doctrine based on misconception. For more on this subject, read our book—*Three Resurrections of the Dead*.

Why This Book

Since the death of the Messiah, many false ministers have arisen and confused people with erroneous doctrines. Christ warned His followers that many would come and attempt to mislead believers (Mark 13:6). While our tendency is to think that we cannot be deceived, the Apostle John spoke to each of us when he said:

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1John 4:1).

False teaching has also affected the Church of God. It is for this reason that this book was written. Its purpose is to protect readers from being misled into some kind of "Jim Jones" scenario. Many ministers today are teaching their congregations that God will reveal to them when and how to go to a place of safety. They claim that the ministry will instruct the brethren what to do. Some even proclaim that people must be a part of their organization or they have no chance of being protected. This is simply not true! No matter what minister we listen to, regardless of which fellowship we attend, we must prove all things and hold fast to only that which is true (1Ths. 5:21).

This error of the ministry telling people when to go may have found its start years ago after the Church developed a "telephone alert system." A hierarchy was set up to keep members informed

within the Church. If some kind of emergency came up, headquarters could promptly contact regional men who would in turn contact the local pastors who would call the elders. They would then call various deacons who had the phone numbers of local members. Each would then call the people on his or her list. It was a wonderful system. If someone was sick or needed help, the entire Church could be informed in a matter of minutes.

However, some began to speculate and inflate the importance of this system. Many came to believe that God had a hand in creating this efficient network so the Church could quickly organize a departure to a place of safety. It was not long before some ministers began to make similar statements in sermons.

To the vast membership, it all seemed plausible at the time. Later, a totally unsuspected and terrible apostasy struck the Church. Members began to flee the now apostate organization. A number of ordained men started to form their own congregations, and a competition for members ensued. Confusion reigned as the flock began to decide which men God was using while many ministers claimed their work was the one God was supporting.

One interesting outgrowth of this development was that, as people moved to join the various splinter groups, the concept of the phone system went with many of them. They began to mistakenly think that God was primarily using the man they chose to follow. In their minds, their organization was the only true Church and they were convinced that people must belong to their group in order to know when it was time to go to a place of safety.

This idea has continued among many of the churches of God. Numerous individuals still think that the Almighty will reveal instructions to the leader of their particular group who will then direct people when and where to go to a place of safety. One church leader actually went to Petra in the Middle East which was once thought to be the place of safety. He attempted to befriend Jordan's leadership for the purpose of leasing the area in preparation for the time to flee.

This scenario may sound absurd, yet remnants of this belief continue to linger. Some members will do nearly anything their leader requests because they are convinced that he is "God's man,"

and following him will lead to divine protection. This thinking is extremely dangerous.

What the Bible Tells Us

A system in which the ministry will relate a message from God when it is time to flee might seem plausible. However, it is not biblical. The Bible never relates that God will contact evangelists, pastors, or elders and tell them it is time to go. In fact, Christ never said that the Church will need to take measures to flee. Instead, He clearly stated:

> I tell you, in that night there will be two *men* in one bed: the one **will be taken** and the other will be left. Two *women* will be grinding together: the one **will be taken** and the other left. Two *men* will be in the field: the one **will be taken** and the other left (Luke 17:34-36).

Historically, God would send a prophet to warn people to repent of their sins. Those who followed that prophet's advice would be saved. But that advice was based on biblical truths. The idea that God will only tell some self-proclaimed prophet or minister when it is time to go to a place of safety has become a tradition of men. For this reason, it is extremely foolish to follow the directions of a man who leans toward human traditions instead of God's Word. Consider that Christ confronted this same type of religious leader during His ministry:

> He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Mark 7:6-7).

An enormous potential for harm awaits brethren who would follow a man making claims that God will tell him when it is time to flee. Adherents would abandon everything in an effort to save their lives, but the Scriptures demonstrate that it will not be the choice of leaders or members to go to a place of safety.

Another False Teaching

When reading Christ's prophecy that some will be taken before His return, many have drawn a wrong conclusion. They believe that this means selected individuals will be taken by calamity or death while those who are left will be spared. Such a belief is the result of misunderstanding the context and the terms that Christ used. Consider again His words:

> But as the days of Noah *were,* so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:37-41).

Christ began by saying that the tumult of end-time events will begin much like they did in the days of Noah. Evil will abound, but the main point that He made is people will be caught off guard! This is evident by the very next sentence when Christ said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Mat. 24:42). The context is a striking element of astonishment. Those who were swept away by the flood had no idea that such a disaster would come upon them just like most at the end will refuse to recognize the sign of the times. Then, Christ described some being taken while others are left.

Because many translations say that the flood came and "took" them all away, and Christ said that select individuals will be "taken," these two terms appear to be identical. This has led some to equate being "taken" as a negative, horrific, even tragic experience. However, the literal Greek terms reveal a different meaning.

The word "took" is the Greek *airo,* and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* explains that this word means "to take away or remove out of this world by death" (Spiros Zodhiates, G142, IV, A). *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* explains that this Greek term relates to a Hebrew word meaning "to expiate sin" (G142). It is the same term Christ used in

John 15:2 where it was translated, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He **takes away**." For this reason, more than ten different translations use another word in Matthew 24:39 stating, "the flood came and swep**t** them all away."

On the other hand, when speaking of those who will be taken, Matthew used the Greek word *paralambano* which means "to *receive near*, that is, *associate with* oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy to *assume* an office; figuratively to *learn*; to take to, to join to one's self" (*Strong's; Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* G3880). As we can see, this term is a positive one. Those who will be taken at the end time will be removed from harm's way, taken to a place of safety, and protected during the great tribulation.

Taken to a Place of Safety

The Bible states that people will not choose to go to a place of safety. It is not the individual's option, but God's choice of who and how. All indications are that those who considered worthy will be selectively taken.

When a religious leader claims that people must remain focused on the ministry, so that they can be told when it is time to flee, it is little more than a scare tactic to gain or retain members. Understand that such a claim is not biblical. Instead, the Scriptures indicate that no man or woman will decide if and how they will be protected. This is expressed in a number of biblical examples.

Christ reminded His disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Christ also said that nobody could come to Him unless the Father called them (John 6:44). Christ also said to "pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass" (Luke 21:36). He did not say that people can consider themselves to be worthy. It is God who will choose. God will select who and how people will be taken. The decision will not be made by any man minister!

The primary purpose of this book is to warn the scattered flock through the wider Church of God. We are nearing the end of the age. If anyone tells you that Christ can be found in some remote location—do not go! The Scriptures declare this warning in three separate gospel records. These are the words of Christ:

> Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!' do not believe *it* (Matthew 24:26).
>
> Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or, 'Look, *He is* there!' do not believe it (Mark 13:21).
>
> And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after *them* or follow *them* (Luke 17:23).

Remember this, "by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Deu. 19:15; Mat. 18:16). God set before us these three witnesses to remove all doubt that this warning is true. If we are told by men to go to a place to seek Christ, do not believe it. If we are told by men to flee to a place of safety, do not follow them. Remember, the Scriptures repeatedly state that the faithful will be "TAKEN." They will not take themselves. To that end, the rest of this booklet explains more biblical details regarding when, how, and why those whom God selects will be taken to a place of safety.

Understanding Church Eras

A major reason for the confusion surrounding a place of safety is the failure to understand Church eras. The Apostle John's vision began with letters that Christ dictated to seven particular churches on a specific mail route. These congregations were prophetic symbols representing seven eras of God's Church that would begin in John's time and conclude at the end of the age. They define the history of God's Church as it progressed through changing times and circumstances.

There are a multitude of facts supporting Church eras. One is that John served eleven congregations on this mail route, but Christ only addressed seven because this number represents the complete Church down through time. Christ also stated that he would come quickly while speaking to Philadelphia, yet the physical congregation in that location no longer exists. Therefore, the main objective of the letters was to encourage and warn these respective Church eras. For a complete understanding of this subject, please read our book—*Evidence for Eras*.

While each era has its own distinct characteristics, the last two are of special interest. These currently exist simultaneously and will continue throughout the great tribulation. However, only one is shown worthy to escape the terrible events occurring at the end. Christ speaks to that Church era saying:

> These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Revelation 3:7-11).

Christ is telling the sixth era that He will come quickly. These words indicate that this era will exist during the end-time. He also promised to keep faithful Christians from the "hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world." This time of trial refers to a great tribulation at the end of the age.

However, not all who consider themselves members of God's true Church will be protected. Some are making their own judgments regarding how God's commandments should be kept. Like the Pharisees who were the last era of the Old Covenant, the last era of the New Testament commonly puts their thoughts and traditions ahead of what God's Word actually says. Consequently, many will be caught off guard, and forced to experience the horrors of the great tribulation.

These people are represented by the seventh era of the Church—Laodicea. This name means a people who judge or people fit for judgment (*Strong's*, G2992, G1349). To this era, Christ warns:

> And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent (Revelation 3:14-19).

Speaking symbolically, Christ related that these people believe they are rich in the knowledge of God's truth. The reality is that they are poor. They halfheartedly apply the knowledge God has given them. Christ also tells this era that they are blind. They don't see their spiritual condition as it really is. Because they are not actively watching their character, they are unaware of how it has deteriorated. The Savior warned that He will spew this era out of His mouth while encouraging them to buy gold refined in the fire. Gold is a symbol of an individual's character (Mal. 3:3). This gold must be purchased in the fire which is another symbol picturing trial or tribulation (Jer. 15:14; Eze. 21:31). Tragically, those who display the characteristics of Laodicea must obtain their moral fiber and godly devotion in fiery trials or even great tribulation.

A parallel set of verses also reveals two different groups of believers existing at the end of the age. After discussing events destined to befall the earth, Christ admonished His Church with the well-known parable of the virgins. The following illustration tells us to be diligent and prepared:

> Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with

> their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was *heard:* 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, '*No,* lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (Matthew 25:1-13).

This set of verses describes two prevailing attitudes within God's Church at the end of the age. One group is faithful and are portrayed as having sufficient oil—a symbol of God's Spirit. Having patiently kept God's Word, they will be prepared for Christ's return and will be spiritually ready for Him.

The other group does not have enough oil. Their spiritual apathy is quenching the Spirit of God (1Ths. 5:19). They have not kept their eyes open to the condition of their own moral fiber. They cannot see clearly because their lamps have now gone out. This group must purchase sufficient oil in trials and/or tribulation.

Philadelphia is Protected While Laodicea is Not

Chapter twelve of Revelation relates a brief timeline of God's New Testament Church from the birth of Christ until the years persecution at the end of the age. It is at that time Satan will direct his anger toward all people of the earth—triggering the end-time great tribulation. He will also persecute those in the Church who are not protected. John wrote:

> Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, **he persecuted the woman** (Revelation 12:12-13).

The passage above refers to the last days. Realizing he has but a short time, the devil will turn his vicious fury toward "the woman"—a biblical symbol of the Church (Eph. 5:31-32). His rage will continue throughout the tribulation; during which those having the character of the Philadelphian era will receive God's protection, but the Laodicean members of the Church will not. Consider the details of this prophecy:

> But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and **he went to make war with the rest of her offspring**, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:14-17).

Notice that both eras keep God's commandments. This being the case, why will God allow the latter group to be exposed to Satan's end-time wrath? The answer is because they are keeping God's commands according to their own interpretation and not in the spirit that He intended. In some cases, members may keep the letter of the law, but they have not developed the mind of Christ that would motivate them toward the kind of obedience He requires (Php. 2:5).

For instance, they might believe they are properly observing God's Sabbaths, but are seeking to do their own pleasure during His holy time (Isa. 58:13-14). Although they might attend Church services, they may do business, or knowingly cause others to work for them on God's sabbaths (Neh. 13:16-18). Perhaps they go through the motions of tithing, and refraining from unclean meats, but they are not wholeheartedly seeking to apply God's laws in both the letter and intent. In such cases they are allowing their personal desires, or their organization, to dictate their behavior (Mat. 15:3; Mark 7:9).

They are Protected for 3½ Years

The most important message in this booklet is found in Revelation 12:14 where Christ explained that God will TAKE the faithful to a place in the wilderness—not heaven. God will nourish them in this place for a time, two times, and a half time. The expression "times" refers to years (Dan. 4:16). This reveals that the duration of protection and nourishment will be 3½ years. In a parallel Scripture, Daniel recorded:

> Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who *was* above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half *a time;* and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished (Daniel 12:7).

It is important to understand that a biblical year is equal to 360 days. For example, the period of time between the beginning of the flood and the ark coming to rest in the mountains of Ararat was exactly five 30-day months—the equivalent of 150 days (Genesis 7:11-24; 8:4). This means that a 12-month year in the Bible is exactly 360 days. Additionally, a study of biblical prophecy reveals that a time, times, and half a time is equal to 3½ years—the equivalent of 42 months or 1260 days (Rev. 11:2; 12:6).

When They Will Be Taken

All members of God's Church would like to know when God will take some people to safety, and Christ provided the answer during His ministry. As He and His followers were leaving the Temple, His disciples called attention to the beauty of the buildings. Christ replied that every stone would eventually be cast down. This occurred exactly as He prophesied in 70 A.D. Not one stone of that Temple is left standing today. As Matthew recorded:

> And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him

> privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:2-3).

Having been asked by the disciples about the end of the age, the Savior summarized what would occur. He began by describing events that were later identified in the book of Revelation as seven seals. False teachers will come in Christ's name. There will be wars, rumors of wars, famine, and pestilence. People will turn on one another during that time, and there will be signs in the heavens. He then explained that the gospel would first be preached as a witness to all nations, saying:

> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world **as a witness** to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

What Kind of Witness?

The previous verse is interesting to explore. Most understand it to mean that the good news of the Kingdom will be preached, and all people on earth will have heard it. However, the word "witness" carries a much deeper meaning. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* states that the original Greek word is *marturion*, meaning:

> Something *evidential*, that is, (generally) *evidence* given or (specifically) **the *Decalogue*** (in the sacred Tabernacle): -- to be testified, testimony, witness (G3142).

"Witness" means more than simply delivering a message of the world to come. It is a legal term meaning evidence such as that given as testimony in a court of law. Those chosen to give this witness will declare the Kingdom is coming, but will also indict the world's inhabitants for not obeying "the Decalogue"—the Ten Commandments (Rev. 11:3). Coinciding with this unique witness is an incident sparking the flames of the great tribulation. Matthew recorded Christ as saying:

> Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place whoever reads, let him understand (Matthew 24:15).

Christ told us that the members of His Church who read these words are to understand. What are we to understand?

The Abomination of Desolation

Many mistakenly regard Antiochus Epiphanies' act of placing an image of Zeus in the temple in 167 B.C. as the abomination Christ spoke of. However, that abomination happened long before Christ prophesied of a future event. The Savior's words explain that Antiochus' blasphemous act was only a forerunner of a latter fulfillment.

That forerunner took place while Greece was waging war against Egypt. Antiochus received orders from Rome to abandon his assault or he would suffer the wrath of the powerful Roman Empire. This enraged Antiochus. Therefore, passing through the holy land on his return home, he vented his anger on the Jewish people by attacking them mercilessly. As Jewish history records:

> Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery (2Maccabees 5:11-12).

In an attempt to consolidate his rule over the holy land, Antiochus outlawed the Jewish religion and ordered the people to worship Zeus as the supreme god. When the devout among the Jews refused, Antiochus destroyed both the people and the city; building a Greek fortress in its place. This evil king then profaned the Jewish temple by dedicating it to Zeus and making a pagan offering on the altar (1Maccabees 1).

Many have considered this desecration of the temple as the "abomination of desolation." However, there is a duality to the prophecy. The references to Antiochus in Daniel 11:15-34 are not speaking of the end-time. Daniel said that people will be tried right up to the very end—a time that had not yet arrived:

> And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify *them,* and make *them* white, *until* the time of the end; because *it is* still for the appointed time (Daniel 11:35).

The horrible acts of Antiochus were indeed a type of tribulation, but it was not the fulfillment of the abomination spoken of by Christ. The Savior's prophecy will be fulfilled by an individual and his empire who is referred to in the Scriptures as the man of sin, the king of the north, and portrayed as a beast.

The King of the North

Notice that the previous verse concludes with "*it is* still for the appointed time." That means its ultimate fulfillment remains in the future. The scriptures that follow discuss events leading up to people being taken a place of safety. Those Scriptures addressing Antiochus foreshadow a much more powerful man the Bible calls "the beast" (Rev. 13:4). His corrupt values, judgments, and military actions will bring this age to its horrible and climactic end. The Scriptures speak at length regarding the activities of this man and his empire. Consider some of the following details:

> Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above *them* all. But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which

> he shall acknowledge, *and* advance *its* glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain. At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm *them,* and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many *countries* shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians *shall follow* at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him (Daniel 11:36-45).

Provoked by the king of the south, the beast will take over the Middle East and establish a headquarters in Jerusalem between the Mediterranean and Dead Sea. From there he will control the temple area and put an end to the sacrifices. As God showed the Prophet Daniel:

> And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there shall be* one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed *is* he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days (Daniel 12:11-12).

Many have argued over the interpretation of the 1290 and 1335 days, but only one conclusion can be reached within the context of these verses. The period from the beginning of the great tribulation to the first resurrection will be "a time, times, and half *a time.*" Other scriptures indicate this time frame is 42 months or 1260 days (Rev. 11:2; 12:6,14). Daniel described three significant achievements of the king of the north that will lead up to the beginning of this 3½ year period.

1. The beast will come down like a ferocious storm and take over the Middle East.
2. He will then establish a residence in the holy land and stop the sacrifices.
3. The abomination of desolation will be set up; initiating the tribulation.

The Apostle Paul also prophesied of this man's ultimate blasphemy, stating that he will sit in the temple and declare himself to be a god:

> Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2Thessalonians 2:3-4).

This wicked leader is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Christ. It is his act that will ignite the tribulation. When we consider the other significant events foretold by Daniel, we come to the following conclusion.

1335 days before the resurrection, the king of the north invades the Middle East. The invasion culminates 45 days later when the beast establishes residence in the holy land. 1290 days before the resurrection, the beast takes control of the temple and stops the sacrifices. Thirty days later, he sets up the abomination of desolation. The tribulation will begin and will last for more than three years. Therefore, the events leading up to the first resurrection total 1335 days (Dan. 12:11-12; Mat. 24:15; Rev. 12:6).

- 1335 - The king of the north invades the Middle East, and establishes residence in the holy land within 45 days.
- 1290 - The beast stops the sacrifices 30 days prior to the abomination of desolation.
- 1260 - The abomination of desolation is set up and the tribulation begins.

Christ gave a warning to people in Jerusalem. Once the abomination is set up, they must flee immediately:

> Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. **For then there will be great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be (Matthew 24:15-21).

Christ spoke of the time when the beast will invade the Middle East. This prophecy was previously mentioned in detail by the Prophet Daniel who described a king of the North that will come down with armies and great weapons of war (Dan. 11:40-45). God said that this end-time beast will establish a headquarters in Jerusalem "between the seas and the glorious holy mountain." There will be a functioning Jewish third temple in existence at that time.

The Sabbath will be observed by the majority both in and around this area. Gates in secured parts of Jerusalem will be closed if this invasion occurs on the Sabbath making attempts to flee difficult. Travel on foot will be grueling for those pregnant or nursing babies. If it is wintertime, this will also create demands on those trying to flee. The tribulation will begin shortly after this invasion. That is why Christ warned people not to go back for anything—simply get out while you can!

This absolutely must be understood. The Scriptures make it clear that the abomination of desolation in the holy place is the trigger point for the beginning of the tribulation. Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies that will be eliminating resistance and protecting this wicked man known as the king of the north (Luke 21:20). It is immediately after this time that God's faithful will be taken to safety. But exactly how will they be taken?

How They Will Go to Safety

The Scriptures state that, when the abomination of desolation is standing in the holy place, and armies surround Jerusalem, the people in Judea are to immediately flee to the mountains (Mat. 24:15-16). However, these instructions have no relationship to the place of safety. Christ's warning only pertains to those living in Judea, and their escape takes place prior to faithful members of His Church being taken to safety (Rev. 12:14). The Savior's admonition is to warn people in the area to get out of harm's way.

Notice that these people are not to stop to gather food, clothing, Bibles, or anything else. They are to get out quickly because the king of the north will already be surrounding Jerusalem with armies for his own protection. His blasphemous claim to be God will generate protests, riots, and armed conflict. The air will be punctuated by the smoke and furor of grenades, automatic weapons, bombs, and Molotov cocktails being exchanged between the beast's armies and Jerusalem's mixed religious community. It will be an extremely dangerous time, as the gospel writer attests:

> But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near… And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20, 24).

This will mark the beginning of the most terrifying time in human history—a period during which select individuals will be kept safe. If Christ were not to intervene, the tribulation would generate a war so devastating that nobody would survive (Mat. 24:22).

We can be thankful that Christ explained what the Church will experience. He first warned us not to make the mistake of believing unscriptural teachings or prophecies. False religious teachers will rise up, and some will seemingly perform miracles. Others will say that Christ is in some remote location, and we should go to Him. Christ's instructions are DO NOT GO! As the Master stated:

> Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.* For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!' do not believe *it* (Matthew 24:23-26).

Christ warned us not to take it upon ourselves to go where we think He might be! If we are told to organize a journey to go to a place of Safety—do not go! The Bible plainly and clearly says that He will TAKE the faithful Church to her place!

It is Not Our Decision

A hierarchical system of ministers notifying congregants of a time to flee to safety is a grievous error. It is merely speculation with no foundation in the Bible. Not a single verse in the Bible even hints that God will tell some man to organize such a trip. Not a single detail of such a scenario is ever mentioned.

Despite this, some church organizations have used this theory to instill a fear of missing the call. Their ministers are teaching that the call to go to a place of safety will come through them. This teaching disregards the fact that Christ is the Head of the Church!

It would not be hard to suspect that their motive might be driven by ego and retaining members—along with their tithes and offerings. It is also not that difficult to envision a church leader who would try to save face by making outrageous claims of supposed God-given instructions if his work began to unravel financially. In such circumstances, a minister might claim that God told him it was time to take his congregation to safety. Moreover, it is entirely possible that a majority of congregants would follow such a man wherever he might lead them.

It must be understood that this booklet does not advocate disrespect toward God's ministry. He has placed these individuals within the body of His Church. They are ordained as His servants, and should be treated with respect (1Cor. 12:18; Heb. 13:7). Therefore, brethren should support the ministry and heed their teaching as it adheres to God's Word. As the Apostle Paul reminded the brethren:

> Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ (KJV, 1Corinthians 11:1).

However, when some teach contrary to the Scriptures, we must always obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). We must not thoughtlessly rely on the advice and instructions from leaders without first verifying it through the Bible. We must receive the word with readiness, and search the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Too many are filled with ego, pride, vanity, and a desire for power. For this very reason—and we cannot repeat this enough—Christ tells us that if someone says the Savior is in the desert, and we are to go out to meet Him, DO NOT GO! (Mat. 24:26).

The time to go to a place of safety will not be revealed by anyone in God's Church. Neither will the brethren decide for themselves whether they will go. Were it our choice, vast numbers might go specifically to avoid the terrible conditions during the impending tribulation. Of those, many would be unconverted bringing problems such as that caused by Korah (Num. 16). In such cases, power struggles that currently exist in the Church would likely become greatly exaggerated. In that context, God's Word leaves an indelible ring of truth in the words of Jeremiah:

> O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *it is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps (Jeremiah. 10:23).

God is not going to leave such an important decision in the hands of men. The choice will be God's, not ours, and it will NOT be based on the group we associate with. God will make His decision, as He always has, based on our consistent moral character. He will determine who is taken by the way they have lived each day—it will not be a decision members make on a single day of their lives.

On Eagle's Wings

When it is time for divine protection, those found worthy of escaping the tribulation will not need to acquire transportation to a wilderness. The Scriptures state that the Church "flies" to her place.

This word may be symbolic, but it denotes a miracle! The Greek word *petomai* means simply to "fly" or "flying" (*Strong's*, G4072). Those who are taken will travel in a miraculous way to God's designated place of safety.

Because the Scriptures say that the saints will "fly into the wilderness to her place," some have thought they might take an airplane of some kind (Rev. 12:14). Not only is such a conclusion speculation, such a scenario is impractical. God's people are scattered all around the world. Some can be found in remote areas such as the border of Brazil. Others dwell in areas of Estonia, Africa, and Madagascar where airplanes and other motorized vehicles cannot travel. Some may be in prison. There are many genuine Christians who have no access to airports.

In addition, faithful brethren are scattered among several hundred congregations that now comprise the Church of God. It is absurd to think that men could organize such an enormous and complex exodus across the lines of so many divisions and diverse locations. Also, the Scriptures indicate that faithful people will be taken at the same time—supernaturally, and the Bible provides information regarding how this will occur.

Angelic Assistance

In a parallel pattern, God brought Israel out of Egypt "on eagles' wings," yet the Scriptures do not say they flew—they literally walked, but notice what God had stated:

> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself (Exodus 19:4).

When God spoke of bearing the people on eagle's wings, He was referring to angelic assistance. The words are symbolic of miraculous events, and they refer to an angel that performed miracles for the sake of saving the people of Israel. Notice how the Exodus account speaks of an angel who led the way:

> And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of

> cloud went from before them and stood behind them (Exodus 14:19).
>
> Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared (Exodus 23:20).

While we do not know who the angel was that performed these miracles, it is interesting that God frequently used Gabriel as His messenger. Gabriel's name includes traits as "valiant" and "mighty" (*Strong's*, H1397, H410). He brought messages to Daniel, Zacharias, Mary, and others. However, when God acts against the enemies of Israel, or punishes His people, He enlists another angel named Michael. Michae's name means "God-like" (*Strong's*, H4317). He is a chief angel who commands legions of other angels (Rev. 12:7). He fought against the spiritual prince of Persia and even disputed with Satan himself (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9). During the time of the tribulation the Scriptures indicate that he will again be directly involved. As Daniel wrote:

> At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book (Daniel 12:1).

Michael is a chief prince among the angels. In other portrayals of high-ranking angels, some are described as having animal-like features such as the face of an eagle; and cherubim at God's throne are also depicted to have great wings that stretch out over the mercy seat (Eze. 1:10, 10:14, Rev. 4:7, Exo. 25:20).

Recall that, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, they were symbolically carried on the wings of an eagle and yet they were delivered by miracles performed by an angel or angels. In the future, during the world's worst time of trouble, Michael will stand up and God says that those designated to be protected will not merely be carried on the wings of an eagle—they will be "<u>given</u> two wings of a great eagle" (Rev. 12:14). This leads us to wonder what will

Michael do? What is this "book of remembrance" indicating who will be delivered?

A Book of Remembrance

The Bible mentions several extra biblical books, and Malachi mentioned one that is helpful to understanding a place of safety. While prophesying of the Laodicean attitude during the end-time, the prophet mentioned a book of remembrance:

> Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them;* so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him (Malachi 3:16-18).

God remembers those people who faithfully serve Him. The prophet indicated that a *book of remembrance* was written for those people who meditate on God's name. They revere Him and dwell on His perfect law of liberty. The Almighty spoke of sparing these individuals as His children. During the last days faithful people will be spared from the tribulation.

This *book of remembrance* is reminiscent of an event recorded in the Persian chronicles. Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king and saved the king's life by reporting this information to Queen Esther (Est. 2:21-23). Sometime later, the king could not sleep so he called for the book of the records of the Persian chronicles to be read in his presence. Hearing about Mordecai's honorable act, and learning that this man had never been rewarded, the king ordered that Mordecai be honored before the entire city (Est. 6:1-11).

In like manner, God remembers those He deems have earned special honor (Heb. 6:10). These are people who will not water down His law. They are not half-hearted in their obedience to God. They will not neglect the meaning of His name or the offices it

represents. They will focus on God and speak about His way as they fellowship with others. They will not be found gossiping or judging other people or groups. They will observe the Sabbath the way God commanded by not doing their own pleasure and calling the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13). These people humbly meditate on the ethics of the Creator. They strive to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. They do not minimize God's moral standards and they stand in awe of Him. For these reasons, God will protect certain individuals as His own children by taking them to a place of safety.

Christ Gathers Philadelphians to Himself

Christ makes it clear that we will not decide to go to safety. He is going to bring the faithful to Himself. Carefully notice the timing of the following verse:

> Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!' do not believe *it* (Matthew 24:26).

The previous verse does not refer to a time during the great tribulation that comes upon the whole world. At this point, God's people found in the Church are still free to travel. The next verse shows why believers are not to go out into the desert to meet Him. God promises to intervene by gathering people to Himself:

> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles **will be gathered together** (Matthew 24:27-28).

Not the Resurrection

There are several reasons why the gathering mentioned in the previous verses is not the resurrection of the saints. First, it occurs prior to the sixth seal consisting of heavenly signs. Notice the next verse where Christ describes this seal occurring before the first resurrection:

> Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars

> will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matthew 24:29).

Verse 29 describes the signs that will occur during the sixth seal. These signs are confirmed in the book of Revelation:

> I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind... For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:12-17).

These signs occur before "the great day of His wrath." This "great day" begins with the seven trumpet plagues. Therefore, the gathering of "eagles" takes place before the seventh trumpet sounds and the resurrection of the saints. Notice the next verses in this sequence of future events that finally speak of the first resurrection:

> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

Notice the difference between these verses and Matthew 24:27-28. When it comes to gathering people to the place of safety, the Savior describes it as lightning coming from east to west (v. 27). The resurrection differs in that angels will gather the elect from the four winds, or four corners, of the earth with a great sound of a trumpet—the last trumpet (1Cor. 15:52).

Wherever the Carcass is the Eagles will Gather

We should also consider Matthew 24:28 which states "wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered." The word "wherever" is *hopou* in the Greek and means "*at whichever*

spot: -- in what place, where" (*Strong's,* G3699). It is referring to a specific place. What place could it possibly be alluding to? It can refer only to "her place"—the place of safety!

In that context, some believe Matthew and Luke's use of different words to describe Christ indicate that these are separate events. Matthew uses the term "carcass" and Luke refers to a "body" (Luke 17:37). It should be recognized that Christ would not appear to His disciples in His full glory. As God had previously indicated, if humans were to see His glorified face it would destroy them (Exo. 33:20). Therefore, it's possible that Christ described Himself in the same form He would later assume when He told Thomas to stick his hands in His wounds and believe (John 20:27). On the other hand, Luke's account described Christ appearing in a sound body which was the case on several other occasions. It is important to realize that, in both cases, these men documented Christ's words describing the same event.

Finally, consider the reference to eagles. The Scriptures state that eagles will be gathered together. The term is the same used in Revelation where it says the woman (the church) will be given two wings of a great eagle to fly to her place (Rev. 12:14). Consider that cherubs are depicted as transporting God's throne, and one of the faces of a cherub is an eagle (Eze. 1:10; Rev. 4:7).

Could it be that "wings of a great eagle" means the wings of a cherub? Is it possible that this expression indicates many angels that are under a cherub's authority? If this is the case, Revelation 12:14 was not written to mean that one angel will take all the people to safety. It would indicate that each person accounted worthy to escape will be taken by direction of a cherub. After being miraculously delivered to a safe place, they will be nourished for 3½ years.

Which Generation?

As we continue through the prophecies in Matthew 24, Christ started a different thread. He warns those in the Church who are still alive at the end-time not to get caught off guard:

> Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you

> know that summer *is* near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place** (Matthew 24:32-34).

Christ was not speaking of the people alive during His ministry. He was referring to the generation who would live to see the events mentioned in the previous verses. He went on to say:

> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only (Matthew 24:35-36).

No One Knows the Day or Hour

When Christ spoke of the day and hour that no one knows, the context shows that He was talking about events leading up to the end-time tribulation. Were He speaking of the resurrection, the entire Church, along with the angels, would know that it would occur exactly 1260 days after the abomination of desolation was set up. Instead, the "day and hour" which "no one knows" will be an altogether different event taking everyone by surprise.

Since these verses are not speaking of the 1260-day period from the abomination to the resurrection, the Savior must be referring to a time prior to the resurrection when His intervention catches the Church off guard. The truth is that it refers to the time when He will protect certain people from the tribulation by taking them to a place of safety. The next verses clarify this further:

> But as the days of Noah *were,* so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37-39).

Notice that the Savior compared the protection of His faithful to the time when He rescued Noah and his family. In Noah's

day, the vast majority lived their everyday lives without heeding God's warning. The flood took them completely by surprise. Christ's future intervention will be similar. The example of Noah foreshadows a time when God will save His faithful while others perish. Christ then stated that something of enormous importance will suddenly occur:

> Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40-41).

Some will be taken and others left. As explained previously, Christ's words indicate that they will be removed from harm's way and gathered to a place where the Savior Himself will appear to them. They will be personally taught in this location for the purpose of eventually assuming offices in God's Kingdom. This is referring to the place of safety. Still, some might attempt to argue that this verse may apply to the first resurrection, but Christ made it clear in the next verse that it does not; when He said:

> Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming (Matthew 24:42).

This cannot be speaking of the resurrection. Believers will not have to watch to know when the resurrection will come once the tribulation begins. It will not catch them off guard. For example, we are told that the tribulation will begin just after the abomination of desolation (Mat. 24:15-21). The Scriptures also tell us that the resurrection will occur 1260 days later. The prior verses are speaking of Christ coming when people are unaware, caught off guard, and surprised. This is not the resurrection at the end of the trumpet plagues. It takes place prior to both. Notice how the following verses confirm this:

> But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. "Who then is a faithful and wise

> servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:43-51).

Some members of God's Church will be caught off guard during a time of relative normalcy. In fact, that time is occurring now! Many ministers are attacking and trying to discredit one another in an attempt to validate themselves. Brethren are doing likewise (Eze. 34:19-21). This passage goes on to say that the ministers will be eating and drinking with the drunken. While this can have an application to partying like ungodly people in the world, these words likely have a religious meaning. This is especially true when we consider who the drunken in this world are. It refers to those who have imbibed the wine of false doctrine. As Isaiah wrote:

> In that day the LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people, for a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment for all tables are full of vomit *and* filth; no place *is clean* (Isaiah 28:5-8).

Some of the churches of God today are increasingly putting tradition before God's commandments. In an attempt to attract new members, some publications are worded in such a way as to not offend the Protestant community. Their vision is becoming

doctrinally blurred by a desire to appear more like the churches of this world. It is at a time such as this that Christ will intervene. Church leaders have become divided and are no longer focused on Christ's work. Some teach there is no longer a need to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. Instead of zealously preparing for the Bridegroom's coming, they are in a state of spiritual slumber.

What occurs when the Church is in this lackadaisical state? Christ's parable of the virgins tells us that the Bridegroom will come for His bride when many are asleep. For this reason, the Savior gave another warning after this parable that is directed toward those who should be getting ready at this time:

> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming (Matthew 25:13).

Exactly what coming is the Son of Man talking about? In answer, it has been demonstrated that Christ will gather His faithful people to a place of safety after the abomination of desolation and before the great tribulation. Christ will supernaturally take some individuals but not others. This will come as a surprise, and many will be caught off guard!

Other Scriptural Evidence

The verses discussed so far are not the only ones proving when and how people will be taken to safety. Other Scriptures make this conclusion certain. For instance, Luke recorded Christ's words clarifying the prophecy in Matthew 24:

> Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see *it.* And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after *them* or follow *them* (Luke 17:22-23).

After His final ascension to heaven, Christ's disciples would desire to see Him teaching on the earth again. But it would not happen for them. However, another generation would see one of the days of the Son of Man. In this section of the book of Luke, Christ continued with the same words found in Matthew 24:

> For as the lightning that flashes out of one *part* under heaven shines to the other *part* under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day (Luke 17:24).

Christ will again miraculously intervene in humankind's affairs. Like the sun comes up in the east and moves across the earth to the west, He will direct His angels to move across the earth for the purpose of gathering His faithful. Only then will future disciples see a day when He will again teach on the earth.

Many generations would pass before this happens. Christ finished the first part of his earthly ministry, suffered crucifixion, and was resurrected. He ascended to the Father where He now serves as High Priest to the Church. The Messiah will again intervene to miraculously protect His faithful people—just as He did Noah and his family. Luke recorded His words, stating:

> And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27).

As Christ explained the circumstances of His intervention on behalf of Noah, He indicated that He will also intercede on behalf of faithful Christians prior to the devastating tribulation. While continuing His prophecy, the Savior took His explanation to another level by speaking of events in which Lot was taken to safety:

> Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. **Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed** (Luke 17:28-30).

Sodom was filled with sin. Sexual perversion was not only accepted, it was rampant. Christ came with two angels to tell Abraham what would become of Sodom. The angels then went to the city and met Lot at the gate. Having been invited into his home,

the angels warned Lot of Sodom's coming destruction. Lot then told his sons-in-law about the impending devastation, but they mocked him, and Lot returned home and slept that night:

> When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and **they brought him out and set him outside the city** (Genesis 19:15-16).

Lot seemed reluctant to flee and "lingered." But the impending inferno was upon them, so the angels took hold of the hands of Lot and his family and brought them outside the city. There is considerable insight in these verses. The angels forcibly brought Lot outside the city.

The expression "brought him out" has a variety of applications that do not always render the exact same meaning. The definitions include "to *go* (causatively *bring*) *out...* bring forth (out, up), carry out, come (abroad, out, thereat, without)... fetch forth... pluck out, proceed, pull out... spring out" (*Strong's,* H3318).

These definitions suggest that Lot did not leave under his own power. There is no Scripture stating that his family walked, ran, or passed through the gates in order to escape the approaching calamity. The impression given is that no time was left, and the angels had no choice but to instantly, and forcibly, take Lot and his family to safety. Notice how several other literal translations render these words:

> The men lay hold of his hand, and the hand of his wife, and on the hand of his two daughters, Jehovah having mercy on him. And they caused him to go out, and **they put him down outside the city** (*The Interlinear Bible, The Literal Translation of the Holy Bible,* Vol. 1, p. 43).

> And he lingered. And the men lay hold of his hand and his wife's hand, and on the hand of his two daughters, Jehovah having mercy on him. And they caused him to go

> out, and **they put him down outside the city** (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible).*
>
> But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and **put him outside the city** (*New American Standard).*

Once the angels set Lot and his family down, they were told to, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed" (Gen. 19:17). This means they were now to flee by their own strength.

Because the expression "brought him out" may have several applications, some may argue against this scenario using other translations or various interpretations of words. It is important to understand, however, that many "translations" are mere paraphrases of Scripture and often portray the translator's personal impressions. Most literal translations indicate that Lot and his family did not leave Sodom under their own power. The angels did not lead them or even drag them through the guarded gates. They supernaturally took them and set them outside the city.

This concept of being supernaturally taken somewhere at the hand of an angel is not new. We are told that Enoch was "taken" (Heb. 11:5). The LORD took the body of Moses and buried it in an unknown location (Deu. 34:5-6). Elijah was supernaturally taken and relocated to Judah (2Kin. 2:1; 2Chr. 21:11-15). Philip was taken to the area of Azotus after baptizing the eunuch (Acts 8:39-40).

Similarly, Lot and his family had to be taken by the hand and brought outside the city. The Bible says the time of God's protection will be similar to the situation of Lot. God's faithful will not go to a place of safety by their own power. They will be taken!

In That Night

It has been demonstrated that certain people will be taken to a place of safety just before the great tribulation begins, but what else does God reveal regarding the timing of this miraculous event? The Savior prophesied of the day the abomination is setup, stating:

> In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods *are* in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (Luke 17:31-33).

Christ again described the same events outlined in Matthew 24. It will be when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies, and the abomination is set up in the temple. Once this occurs, people in this location are warned NOT to return to their homes for ANY reason. They must flee to the neighboring mountains to get out of harm's way, but this is not the flight to a place of safety. Christ has something else planned for them. In His next statement, He said:

> I tell you, **in that night** there will be two *men* in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two *women* will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two *men* will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:34-36).

God's people in Jerusalem will flee to the mountains on the day they see the abomination of desolation set up. But those who are faithful will not be there for long. They will not have time to get hungry or cold. Christ emphatically stated that He will take them to safety "THAT NIGHT." This obviously will not be a long-drawn-out process taking days, weeks, or months. It occurs "that night." On one half of the planet, it will be night, and most people will be soundly asleep. On the other, it will be daylight and time for work. That is why Christ said some will be in bed and others at work. This is when He will take them to the place of safety where He will nourish them for a time, times, and half a time—3½ years.

When Christ revealed that people will be taken, the disciples had an obvious question?

> And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Luke 17:37).

The faithful at the end-time will be accounted worthy to escape the tribulation. They will be given the wings of a great eagle so that they might fly to safety. Where will this eagle take them? The Scriptures boldly state that the eagles will be gathered together where the body of Christ is on this earth; a location called "her place" (Rev. 12:14).

Why They Will Be Taken

We have seen that Christ will take faithful people to a place of safety on the night that the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. We have seen how they will be taken. It will be supernaturally and according to God's decision, not ours. However, a question remains. Why would Christ take these people to a place of safety? After all, most of God's faithful, the prophets, and many others were forced to lose their lives. Why will Philadelphians be protected from the same fate so many others have suffered in the past? We can be certain those taken to safety will not be chosen just to save their skin. There is a far more important reason.

It must first be understood that God will not take only those who belong to a certain church organization or who follow a specific leader. It will not necessarily be those who appear the most successful in life. They may not be the most socially skilled, likeable, or fun to be around. God is only going to take a certain kind of person to safety. It will be genuine Christians who sincerely strive to think like Christ and live the way He lives. It will be those who have a personal relationship with Him and are striving to keep that relationship intact, whole, and strong. They will be like the Apostle Paul who did not think he had already attained (Php. 3:12). They will be humble people who do not demand that everything must be their way. He will take those who are meek and teachable.

This leads to the question of why Christ will protect and nourish these people for 3½ years. Is it possible that Christ will take sincere Christians to a place of safety for the purpose of personally teaching them—a form of spiritual nourishment? Consider the example of His first coming.

Hundreds of years ago, the Father called certain individuals to become apostles. He chose them because, as Christ said of

Nathanael, "behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). Nathanael was not great in the eyes of men, but he was the kind of person God intended an Israelite to be. The Savior worked with specific men and women because of their sincerity and desire to live the way of God. He personally taught them so that they could assist Him in His ministry. Christ will repeat this process by gathering specific individuals to protect and to instruct.

A Mission Complete

Seven is a number prophetically representing completion. Seven days complete a week. There are seven high holy days in a year. Seven weeks complete the count to Pentecost. Each seventh year is called the year of release, and seven sets of seven years complete the count to the Jubilee. In the Book of Revelation, we read of seven stars or messengers, seven spirits of God, seven church eras, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, and seven bowl plagues preceding Christ's glorious and triumphant return.

Based on this biblical theme that is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the Bible, Christ's 3½ year ministry by itself seems incomplete. The Scriptures also indicate that His ministry on earth was cut in half. The angelic messenger Gabriel relayed this to the prophet Daniel, saying:

> Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. **Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering**. And on the

> wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate (Daniel 9:24-27).

These verses are known as the "70 weeks prophecy." Gabriel told Daniel that it would be 70 weeks until the Messiah would come. A day for a year principle indicates that there would be 490 years from the time the Jews were freed from captivity until the Messiah would appear (Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6). Christ would confirm the Covenant for a prophetic week during His ministry (Rom. 15:8).

This indicates that His ministry on the earth would take place over a period of seven years. However, Christ's sacrifice ended His earthly ministry just 3½ years after it began. Since Christ was cut off in the middle of seven years, could this mean that He has another 3½ years left in order to finish His ministry on the earth?

If this is the case, does the Bible mention another 3½ year period? The answer is, and it mentions only one other time that is 3½ years long. That time is during the great tribulation which includes the concurrent work of two witnesses and the period of protection in a place of safety. Notice the following verses:

> He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (Daniel 7:25).

> But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months. And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth (Revelation 11:2-3).

> Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days... But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished

> for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:6-14).

These Scriptures are clearly speaking of the tribulation at the end of the age. All of the previous verses relate to the same time. Therefore, the Bible speaks of only two 3½ year periods. One is Christ's human ministry on earth. The other is the great tribulation; during which God will shelter His faithful disciples in a place of safety. These two periods together add up to seven years. Is there a connection between them?

Is it possible that Christ will complete the second half of His week to fulfill a seven-year ministry? Will His faithful disciples at the end of the age see that day when the Son of man will personally teach His followers again on the earth? Will Christ spend 3½ years instructing them in the wilderness?

Paul Was Not Personally Taught by Christ in Arabia

Many have thought that Paul was taken to Arabia where he was taught in person by Christ for three years. They believe it was Paul's education during this period that qualified him as an equal among the apostles. It is also thought that, after this believed period of training, Paul went to Jerusalem to assure Peter that he held the same beliefs. Some have taken this thought a step further by suggesting that Paul's time spent in Arabia fulfilled the second half of Christ's ministry. However, an examination of his recount of this period of time reveals a different conclusion.

First, Paul began to preach that Christ was the Messiah shortly after his vision was restored. He confounded the Jews, proving that Jesus was the Christ even before he went to Arabia (Acts 9:19-22). Second, Paul did not say that he spent three years in Arabia alone. He actually said that he went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. The concluding statement indicates that the amount of time Paul spent in both of these locations was a total of three years:

> But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the

> Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days (Galatians 1:15-18).

Paul preached Christ before leaving for Arabia. He continued with this same message after his return. It was not until he left for Jerusalem that Paul spoke of a three-year span of time. The conclusion is that Paul must have either spent three years in Damascus, or that those years included his time spent in Arabia.

Paul also did not say that he received hands-on instruction by Christ in those locations. He said that he was taught by revelation from God. He indicated times that he and others received revelation through revelation meaning guidance of the Holy Spirit:

> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it,* but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12).

> If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:2-5).

> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven... how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words... (2Corinthians 12:2-4).

> Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with *me.* And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-2).

Paul's own words make it clear that he did not claim to be taught by Christ for three years in Arabia. Therefore, his instruction could not have fulfilled Christ's ministry.

Possible Parallels of Christ's Ministry

Christ did not appear to Paul and teach him for three years in the desert. Understanding this, the only other period of time matching Christ's 3½ years of ministry is the 1260 days at the end of the age. There are numerous parallels indicating that this is when Christ will complete His earthly ministry.

For example, during the last era of the Old Covenant, Christ preached to people for 3½ years. John the Baptist was an Elijah figure who pointed to Christ as the promised Messiah. The Savior called a limited group of disciples and taught them for 3½ years. Yet few others responded positively. Compare that time with the 3½ year period to come.

As we read in the seventh letter, the New Covenant Laodiceans will not have whole-heartedly responded to him. Another Elijah figure will be fulfilled by one of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:6). Christ will choose a group that He will bring to Himself and teach in a place of safety for a 3½ year period (Rev. 12:14).

Parallels from Israel

The Apostle Paul pointed out that the events in ancient Israel's history were recorded to foreshadow those things Christians would experience. One of the most recognized examples was that God took Israel out into the wilderness where He taught them His way and personally cared for them. We are also taught that physical Israel was a type of spiritual Israel—the Church (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16). The Apostle Paul further wrote that those events serve as an example for us at the end of the age:

> Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1Corinthians 10:11).

We can learn much from Israel's example. For instance, just as physical Israel wandered as pilgrims through the Wilderness of

Sin, members of the New Covenant Church are also strangers and pilgrims wandering in a spiritual wilderness of sin (Heb. 11:13; 1Pet. 2:11). Pharaoh was a type of Satan, controlling a vast and powerful, but corrupt political and religious system. Moses and Aaron foreshadowed the two witnesses as they confronted Pharaoh's two magicians who were types of the beast and false prophet (Rev. 11:3-6).

Paralleling the plagues inflicted on Egypt, God's final plagues will destroy this world's religious, political, and military systems. In yet another example, just as the Red Sea opened for the fleeing Israelites and closed on Pharaoh's pursuing army, God will cause the earth to open and swallow an army of people pursuing those taken to a place of safety (Rev. 12:15-16; 17:15).

Although these types are obvious parallels, they are seldom identical. For instance, while the sea opened for Israel and crashed down on Pharaoh's army, the earth in the end-time prophecy will open up and swallow the army pursuing the Church. Ancient Israel was led to safety, but symbolically taken on the wings of an eagle. As God said:

> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself (Exodus 19:4).

Because Israel actually walked while being guided by an angel, many believe that the faithful at the end will physically travel or even walk to a place of safety. However, it must be recognized that God sent an angel to supernaturally guide Israel out of Egypt and bring them to God's predetermined location:

> Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared (Exodus 23:20).

Unlike Israel whom God symbolically "bore" on the wings of an eagle, leading them to Sinai, the Scriptures clearly state that the end-time faithful Church will be "given" two wings of an eagle and will FLY into the wilderness:

> But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Rev 12:14).

We can be certain through these examples that God can and will take His chosen and protect them at the end of the age. He already performed it as a witness to us by protecting more than two million people after freeing them from bondage. As Paul indicated, all this was done as an example to those at the end of the age. The Scriptures fit together to perfectly reflect this. As the psalmist wrote:

> He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "*He is* my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler *and* from the perilous pestilence. **He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge**; His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, *nor* of the arrow *that* flies by day, *nor* of the pestilence *that* walks in darkness, *nor* of the destruction *that* lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; *but* it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge, *even* the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways (Psalm 91:1-11).

The impending events at the end of this age will comprise the most horrible time in human history. Even now, wars are raging with more expected to come. While the world's technical knowledge has increased, wisdom has not been the result. Nations that were once blessed for worshiping God are now pushing Him out of their lives. True religion is being rejected while pagan religions are encouraged. Abortion and homosexuality are rampant. Those who speak out against such behavior are met with hatred and anger not seen since Sodom and Gomorrah—two cities that reflect a tragic end

of the wicked. As this trend approaches its climactic end, the Eternal promised He will protect His faithful people. Notice the comforting words found in the following inspired Psalm:

> I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help *comes* from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD *is* your keeper; the LORD *is* your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore (Psalm 121).

The world is becoming evil and perverted in the worst possible ways. It is filled with hypocrisy. People are consistently lying and cheating. Societies are filled with violence and corruption. People widely turn a blind eye to evil for personal pleasure or gain. As the parable of the ten virgins reveals, a significant portion of God's church will be affected by such influence and will not be ready for Christ's coming.

A few, however, will remain steadfast—praying, studying, meditating, and fasting to develop Christ's character. As the vast majority of the world is consumed with pride and materialism, a relative handful of faithful Christians will be seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness (Mat. 6:33). They will be striving to be unspotted from the world by carefully choosing what kind of music they listen to, and discriminating in the entertainment they seek. They will humbly seek to help others while being honest, sincere, and without guile. Christ will bring those He deems worthy to Himself. Angels will gather these faithful to where His body is. They will see Him just as the apostles saw Him in His resurrected state (Acts 1:3). As Isaiah stated:

> The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with

> everlasting burnings?" He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: He will dwell on high; His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water *will be* sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off (Isaiah 33:14-17).

During this terrifying end-time, the Church of God will be separated into two categories found in the two last eras. One holding fast to God's truth and genuinely striving to live by it, and the other lukewarm toward many of the ways of God. Those who walk wholeheartedly in righteousness will be protected and provided for.

Christ's Garden

A poetic scene in the Song of Solomon illustrates the predominant state of God's Church at the end of the age. This section of Scripture is known by most to reflect the love Christ has for His future bride, but it is also prophetic as are many of the Psalms. The time frame of the fifth chapter is just prior to the tribulation. The following verses are well worth careful study:

> I have come to my garden, my sister, *my* spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones! (Song of Solomon 5:1).

Christ comes to His garden—a symbolic reference to a place of nourishment for His Church. The following verses support this:

> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry (Isaiah 5:7).

> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and

> he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building (1Corinthians 3:6-9).

These Scriptures help us to understand that the Church is referred to as Christ's garden. Yet the Church is His sister as well as His spouse. Eighteen times in the book of Revelation a church is described as a woman. Christ is espoused to the Church, and she will be His wedded bride after the resurrection. Moreover, Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb. 2:11). He said, "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). They are spiritually familial terms. The members of the end-time faithful Church are not only the espoused bride of Christ, but also His brethren and His friends.

Contented and Comfortable

The first verse of Song of Solomon five depicts Christ as having prepared provisions for His Church. He is ready to share food with His loved ones. However, verse two begins to reflect the state of the Laodicean era of His Church when Christ calls on them to accompany Him:

> I sleep, but my heart is awake; *it is* the voice of my beloved! He knocks, *saying,* "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night" (Song of Solomon 5:2).

This represents the time when the last era of the Church will be slumbering and sleeping (Mat. 25:5). She is comfortably lying in bed when her beloved knocks on the door. Notice a parallel Scripture from Christ's letter to Laodicea:

> Behold, **I stand at the door and knock**. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me (Revelation 3:20).

The Church hears Him calling for her to open the door and let Him in, but she is too comfortable in her current state to respond. The Scriptures reveal her thoughts at this time:

> I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on *again?* I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? (Song of Solomon 5:3).

She is in that comfortable place we have all experienced when partly awake. Answering His knock in such a condition could seem like too much effort. As she awakens further, she becomes aware of her inner desire for Him:

> My beloved put his hand by the latch *of the door,* and my heart yearned for him (Song of Solomon 5:4).

She now realizes her need to respond to His call, but it is too late. He has already gone:

> I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped *with* myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away *and* was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer (Song of Solomon 5:5-6).

The majority of the Church today is in a similar position. She feels comfortable in her current spiritual condition. Christ's knock is like a sound that awakens us in the night. We feel the need to get up and investigate, but we are so warm and cozy that we simply want to lie where we are, and bask in a state of undisturbed contentment. God related this scenario elsewhere, stating:

> Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. "Then they will call on me, but I

> will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me (Proverbs 1:24-28).

The Church in Tribulation

Many Church members will realize that they have missed their opportunity. This is represented by the woman going out to seek her beloved, but she will not find Him. Many will experience violent persecution during this time of great tribulation:

> The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me (Song of Solomon 5:7).

Tormented and beaten, she will now be fully aware of her situation. It will become obvious that prophecy is being fulfilled and that she has taken her Fiancée for granted. Seeking Christ in earnest, she will begin to preach about the importance of following the true Christ. Those who hear will ask "why should we join you in your search?" She will reply:

> I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I *am* lovesick! What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, O fairest among women? What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, that you so charge us? (Song of Solomon 5:8-9).

Many have accepted false concepts of Christ (Mat. 24:5). Those who hear the message from God's Church will want to know, "What makes your Christ better than the one we have heard about for centuries?" Speaking in poetic language, Song of Solomon reveals the manner in which this remnant Church will explain why her beloved is superior, saying:

> My beloved *is* white and ruddy, Chief among ten thousand. His head *is like* the finest gold; His locks *are* wavy, *and* black as a raven. His eyes *are* like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set. His cheeks *are* like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips *are* lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His hands *are* rods of gold set with

> beryl. His body *is* carved ivory inlaid *with* sapphires. His legs *are* pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance *is* like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth *is* most sweet, yes, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem! (Song of Solomon 5:10-16).

This sounds much like a woman describing the man she loves; but as we view this poetic metaphor, it becomes clear that this is no ordinary man. Notice that while He is her lover—He is also her friend (Sol. 5:16; John 15:15)

The Church that must suffer tribulation relating that Christ is unlike any other being ever worshiped. He is the embodiment of truth. He is pure, righteous, and good. He is completely faithful and always seeks positive results. He is confident and filled with hope. His judgments are always perfectly correct. He carries Himself with a quiet strength, and does not flaunt His awesome power. And when He speaks, His beloved's heart melts. He is both loving and loyal. He is our Lord and Master, as well as our closest friend.

Where Christ Will Be During the Tribulation

Chapter five of the Song of Solomon ends with the persecuted Church preaching the true Christ, but where is He during this time? The story continues in chapter six where the daughters of Jerusalem ask:

> Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you? (Song of Solomon 6:1).

The Church of God has often generated more converts when suffering severe persecution. Others see their obvious devotion and a willingness to suffer for their beliefs. Such a show of faith can be more convincing than words. Through their steadfast conviction, they persuade others to seek Him. These ask, "Where has your beloved gone?" The Church in tribulation will know that Christ has taken His faithful to a place of safety, and will reply:

> My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed *his flock* in the gardens, and to gather lilies (Song of Solomon 6:2).

The Scriptures state that Christ will have gone to His garden where the eagles have gathered God's faithful. He will teach them (a spiritual form of nourishment, Rev. 12:14), much as He prepared the apostles, to become pillars in His Kingdom. The evidence suggests that the place of safety is where Christ will fulfill the final 3½ years of His ministry.

Dependent Family Members

Some have wondered what will happen to the children of those taken to safety. We see God working within families throughout the Bible, and the example shown in the situation with Lot may answer this question. Christ compared Lot and his family to people being taken to the state of affairs at the end of the age (Luke 17:28-36). This could reflect of God's concern for families when great tribulation begins.

It is not God's nature to split up families and strand children who might need parental care. Moreover, children accompanying their parents to the place of safety will have a chance to be taught more thoroughly the ways of God. With the understanding and instruction that they will have experienced, who else would be the best candidates to function as human leaders under those who have been made spirit beings in the World to Come? It is likely that those children will eventually be used in the physical government of God on earth? Consider the words of the psalmist who expressed:

> Instead of your fathers shall be your sons, whom you shall make princes in all the earth (Psalm 45:16).

Christ revealed that, like Lot and his family who were "taken" and "set" outside the city, God's chosen will be taken by the wings of angels. Lot's example serves as evidence for those at the end of the age. It also suggests that the spouses and dependent children of those accounted worthy will likely be taken with them.

Elderly and Infirmed

Some have also wondered about the elderly or those who have some sort of ailment that could hinder their activities of daily living in a remote location. Would God take them? It must first be recognized that nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37). The Exodus serves as an example of God's limitless abilities, and it includes a parallel in which an angel brought Israel out of Egypt. Consider a Psalm that answers the question:

> He also brought them out with silver and gold, and *there was* none feeble among His tribes (Psa. 105:37).

Of the hundreds of thousands of Israelites in Egypt, there would have been elderly. There would have been some who suffered injuries during their abusive slavery. Yet, when God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, not one of them was physically infirmed. The fact that none were feeble indicates that God healed them before the people left. This example suggests that God will miraculously heal those He determines to take to safety.

Many are Called, but Few Chosen

Many assume that everyone taken to safety will automatically be in the first resurrection. However, this assumption is not validated by Scripture. Consider the children of converted parents that might be nurtured prior to the resurrection. Knowing the nature of God, He would also ensure their protection during the final plagues. Nonetheless, they will not be resurrected if they are not converted, tested, and proven faithful. Those taken to safety will still be human. They will have ego, pride, and all the tainted characteristics of human nature, just like all Christians today.

On another level, consider the parallel between the Israelites taken out of Egypt and those taken to safety. Some under God's care during Israel's exodus were disobedient. Even with His direct leadership and the display of astonishing miracles, many complained about a lack of food and water. Others, such as those who joined Korah, desired leadership positions. Some were paralyzed by fear. In another case, Achan stole what belonged to God.

These examples indicate that it would be foolish to think everything will be a paradise in the place of safety. Though there will be a level of protection and provision, it will be a continuation of training and testing. Being taken to a place of safety will not be a cakewalk into the Kingdom.

In a prophecy God gave to Ezekiel, there is evidence that the place of safety will not just contain spiritually mature individuals. While the rest of humanity experiences extreme suffering, God's place of safety will be a haven, but people will still have various issues to overcome. As Ezekiel wrote of the destruction of Jerusalem, there is duality in God's words that apply to those at the end-time:

> And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass *it* over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair. You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around *it* with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them. You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your *garment.* Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

Ezekiel was a captive taken with Judah 120 years after the House of Israel had been conquered by Assyria. Jerusalem had already fallen when this prophecy was given. Therefore, it must also reflect something that will happen in the future.

Much like the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the tribulation will come upon the modern-day descendants of Israel. Many will perish while cities are in flame. Some will flee while armies pursue to destroy them. A third will go into captivity, but God will bind a few in his skirt and protect them. However, even some of these will prove to be unworthy.

The place of safety will include genuine Christians, their dependent children, cooperative spouses, and some who may have been feeble. However, those who are taken and choose to disobey

will be removed from God's protection. They will suffer severe trials and even the fire of tribulation.

Not all who go to safety will be in the first resurrection. Still, for those who can hear it, there is an enormous reward for righteous behavior during that time. It is a great hope for those who wish to see a day of the Son of Man when He will again spiritually nourish a group of select people on earth. It will be the most memorable experience a person could ever have.

The Privilege of a Lifetime

We are living in the last era of the New Testament. Still, a remnant remains that God considers Philadelphian. Christ speaks to these people with words of immense encouragement:

> Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Revelation 3:10-11).

This is good news if we will heed it. If we patiently strive to abide by God's Word, He promises to keep us from the great tribulation that will come on the entire world (Mat. 4:4). This means there is still time to be accounted worthy to be taken to a place of safety where Christ will provide for and personally teach His faithful people. Even more important is a unique reward that awaits those who will ultimately be chosen. As Christ told the Apostle John:

> He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple** of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name (Revelation 3:12).

Those who are taken to a place of safety have the opportunity to become pillars in God's Church—just as the apostles Christ personally taught. The verses above certainly imply such a leadership role for those people in God's eternal Kingdom (Gal.

2:9). Will those in safety be in training to assist in the expansion of God's government? Will they have more involvement and personal contact with Christ and the Father in the future World to Come? The likelihood is that this unique period of 3½ years will qualify certain Christians to attain the first resurrection. This is a greater reward than the human mind can imagine.

For God's faithful, the place of safety is not just about saving their lives. It can lead to much more—a hope beyond our greatest dreams. It means being close to Christ forever in His Kingdom. It could mean living and serving on a level with the apostles and other heroes of faith as leaders in Christ's Kingdom. This would be an honor in the highest degree.

We must not be complacent and neglect this marvelous hope. The Church is currently in a state of slumber. We must wake up and respond to the Master's knock. Listen again to Christ's words as He speaks to those living in the last era:

> As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:19-22).

We need to repent of any spiritual apathy we harbor and do it now! Expose every area of our lives to Him. Open the door for our Savior so that He can dwell in us and we in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). What God is doing in our lives, and understanding the truth about a place of safety, should stimulate zeal and passion. Let's strive to overcome so we can be considered worthy to escape those terrible things that will occur at the end of the age. Those who do will not only be taken to a place of safety, they will be personally taught by Christ and given the chance to become the kings and priests that God desires in His Kingdom.

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