

## MINISTUDY Prelude to the Day of THE LORD

Prepared by Richard Sedliacik

How would you react if God suddenly spoke to you and warned you to take drastic action to save your life from imminent destruction?

Would you listen attentively? Would you heed what He had to say? Or would you just scoff and disregard His warning?

Few realize that God has already spoken to us today: "God, who ... spake in time past ... by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2)

The words of God for mankind have been faithfully recorded in the Bible. We are told that all scripture was inspired by God for our instruction and correction (II Tim. 3:16). Therefore, when you read the Bible, God is speaking directly to you!

The book of Revelation is full of warnings of awesome, catastrophic events soon to occur. In the last chapter of this most misunderstood book of the Bible, the Revelator - Jesus Christ - concludes: "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth (acts on) the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7).

Bible prophecies are not to be taken lightly. They will have a tremendous effect on your future! As the old saying goes, "Forewarned is forearmed." If you will heed the warnings God recorded, He promises a way of escape from the coming time of great tribulation.

The scriptural warnings of Jesus' "Olivet Prophecy" recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 take on special meaning in our 20th century. The world is experiencing the conditions Christ foretold would precede these great worldwide catastrophes. Notice what He said would happen.

1. What did Jesus warn about those who would proclaim He is the Christ? Matt. 24:5, 11. What are we told elsewhere about these so-called representatives of Christ? II Cor. 11:13-15. Who do these ministers actually represent? Verse 15. How could this be? Rev. 12:9.

2. What further events did Jesus predict would take place before His Second Coming? Matt. 24:6-7.

In a world spiritually deceived through the efforts of the devil and his false ministers preaching a false Christ and substituting a false gospel in place of Christ's true Gospel, we are now in the recess between stages of world war. The first two world wars have occurred. In this interim, brushfire wars have raged and "rumours of wars" continue. Famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes will continue to grow in severity and culminate in world war. Hundreds of millions of earth's inhabitants will experience their effects.

3. But are these events only the "beginning of sorrows" - or, more properly translated, of travail or tribulation? Verse 8.

This four-part "beginning of sorrows" is also pictured by the first four seals - the four horsemen - described in Revelation 6:1-8. For a more detailed explanation of these "sorrows" - false religion, wars, famines, disease --- write for our free booklet, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

4. How is the fifth seal described in Revelation 6:9-11? What did Jesus say about this time of religious persecution and martyrdom? Matt. 24:9, Luke 21:12-17.

At this point we need to understand that the principle of duality applies to many prophecies. There is a former, typical fulfillment and then a final, antitypical fulfillment.

The religious persecution and martyrdom spoken of in Matthew and Luke did actually occur, in the typical or preliminary sense, in the nation of Judah when the Roman armies crucified tens of thousands of Jews about A.D. 70. Millions more from various nationalities were also tortured and killed by the great false church during the Middle Ages (Rev. 17:6, 18:24). Many of these were true Christians. Jesus said more Christians would be martyred at the end time; John said the same in Revelation 6:11.

This future martyrdom, of which the earlier martyrdoms were only a type, will occur at the time to which John, the inspired writer of the book of Revelation, was carried forward in vision - just prior to the "Day of the Lord."

5. How does Luke 21:20-24 describe what will happen to Judah and Jerusalem (the Jews of the modern nation Israel) just before Christ returns?

Verse 23 is made plainer in the modern English of the Moffatt translation: "For sore anguish will come upon the land and Wrath on this people."

6. Notice the parallel account in Matthew 24:15-20. Do these verses foretell a time of great tribulation in the world? Verse 21. What would happen to all mankind if Christ did not intervene in the affairs of men? Verse 22.

7. Who will be responsible for inspiring the persecution, warfare and man's inhumanity to man during this soon-coming terrible time of trouble? Rev. 12:12. Why will he be so wrathful? Notice the last part of verse 12.

This period of great worldwide tribulation is Satan's wrath. It will be unleashed upon God's Church, Jacob (the descendants of ancient Israel) and on the whole world because the devil will know he has but a short time left to work deception, destruction and death before being imprisoned for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3).

8. However, does God promise to protect those of His end-time Church - those who faithfully keep His Word and do His Work - from the wrath of the devil? Rev. 3:7-8, 10.

These promises of protection are for the Philadelphia era of God's Church, which God has raised up through His apostle, Herbert W. Armstrong. Only this Church is carrying on the Work of God today.

Even though God's Church is relatively small, Jesus has opened the powerful "doors" of radio, television, the printing press and personal evangelism to His Church that it may preach and publish His Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a warning witness to the world. And for faithfully obeying His Word and doing His works, Christ promises to spare His servants from the "hour of temptation" - the terrible wrath of Satan.

9. Revelation 12 also speaks of God's end time Church, personifying it as a woman. Will God provide His Church with shelter away from the wrath of the devil? Rev. 12:13-16.

This end-time prophecy tells of an escape from the terrible tribulation caused by Satan the devil. God's Church will be in a "wilderness" place untouchable by Satan or by his

human agents or by the devastation of a world at war around them. Regardless of where the place of protection is, the way to make sure you will be there is clear.

10. Unfortunately, will there be some of God's people who will not qualify for this protection, who will have to go through the coming time of Satan's wrath? Rev. 12:17. Why will those of the Laodicean era of God's Church not be accounted worthy to escape? Rev. 3:14-19.

Some truly Spirit-begotten Christians will have become so "lukewarm," so out of contact with God and consequently lackadaisical in living the Christian life and doing their part in God's Work, that they will have to go through the Great Tribulation and face even torture and martyrdom to wake them up! Because God loves them (verse 19) and wants them in His Family, He will allow this to happen as a punishment (Heb. 12:5-8) so they may see their spiritual "nakedness" and therefore repent before it's too late.

11. How is the sixth seal described? Rev. 6:12-13. Will a great earthquake occur at this time? Verse 12. Where else are these spectacular events described? Matt. 24:29. How soon after the fifth seal does all this occur? Same verse, first word.

The sixth seal consists of awesome heavenly signs - sun and moon becoming dark and the "stars" falling. Spectacular meteor showers will make the starry heavens appear to be crashing earthward!

12. What other great heavenly sign occurs at this time? Matt. 24:30, Rev. 6:14. Are all these events intended to warn the world that God's wrath upon rebellious mankind is about to begin - that the "Day of the Lord," with its punishments for sin, is about to commence? Rev. 6:15-17, Joel 2:30-31, Zeph. 1:14-18, Isa. 2:19-21

13. What is the reason for the punishment God is soon going to bring upon this world? Isa. 24:4-6. Notice especially verse 5.

14. Will this punishment in reality be a manifestation of God's great love for the humanity He created? Notice again the principle in Hebrews 12:5-8. To what end will God's punishments be directed? I Tim. 2:3-4, II Pet. 3:9.

As any wise and loving father punishes his children for their own good when they refuse to respond to kind and loving verbal admonition, so an all-loving, all-wise God will finally plead with rebellious humanity in the only language humanity will be able to understand.

God is going to punish this world with righteous judgments - with plagues so terrible many will at last recognize God is dealing with them. Many will then heed and turn from their wicked ways to seek God and His law of love.

That coming period of punishment, described in more than 30 different prophecies scattered through both Old and New Testaments as the "Day of the Lord," shall lead directly into the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and world peace at last. E

(This subject to be continued.)

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## Qualifying to Rule With Christ

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In the previous two ministudies we learned that we were born to rule. We are destined, if we overcome and grow in God's character, to rule this earth with Christ during the Millennium and afterward to rule the rest of the universe for eternity!

But some doubt that they could ever rule over people, while others have no desire to rule at all. Perhaps you have thought: I don't want to rule in the world tomorrow. I just want to serve God.

Jesus Christ was God incarnate - God made flesh (John 1:1-2, 14). Before Jesus became a human being He was the Creator of the universe and of mankind (Eph. 3:9). At His return to earth He will occupy the greatest position of rulership under God the Father in God's coming Kingdom (Rev. 19:16).

Yet while Jesus was on earth, He was a servant to His fellowmen. He came to serve, not to be served (Luke 22:27, Matt. 20:27-28). And even now, exalted again at the right hand of the Father, Jesus continues to serve us as our High Priest and Advocate (Heb. 4:15-16) and as Head of His Church (Col. 1:18).

Let's understand exactly how and why service to God actually entails rulership.

1. How can a Spirit-begotten Christian express service to God? Matt. 25:31-40.

We serve God when we serve our fellowman. Christ said, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (verse 40).

This wretched world is filled with needy, sick and lonely people who desperately need help. Hundreds of millions in today's world would benefit from even basic instruction in how to improve the quality of their physical lives, including their basic nutrition and everyday hygiene. Above all, they need to know the truth of God - God's purpose and plan for mankind. This whole world desperately needs to understand God's Word.

A deeply converted Christian will want to

help change this world and teach others God's wonderful way of life. This is, in fact, what the return of Christ and the establishment of His ruling government on earth are all about. All Spirit-begotten Christians are now in training for significant roles in helping to teach the world God's way and to administer the government of God for the good of all mankind.

2. What does the Bible say resurrected saints will be doing in the Kingdom of God during the Millennium? Rev. 3:2 1, 2:26, 5: 10, 20:4-6.

We read of "thrones," "judgment" and "reigning." These scriptures clearly tell us that in the world tomorrow Christians will receive positions of rulership - opportunities to do great good in serving this world. All who are Spirit-begotten and overcoming now will become kings and priests (teachers), various administrators and administrative assistants in the Kingdom of God.

And so the Christian life today is one of overcoming, growing, preparing and developing spiritually for great service through rulership in tomorrow's world.

3. In the course of living their physical lives, are God's children to be learning to rule and judge? I Cor. 6:1-3.

Born-again Christians will be able to carry great responsibility with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God. That is because they will have learned a great deal about rightly applying the laws of God to many different situations during their mortal lives.

4. By what great principle can a person of ordinary ability and humble opportunity in this life qualify to take on far greater responsibility in the Kingdom of God? Luke 16:10. (Notice also verses 11-12.) What will Christ say to those who have been faithful over the little that He entrusted to their care? Matt 25:21. (Read verses 14 through 30.) We learn to rule by being faithful - conscientious - in whatever we do, living the principles and laws we learn from God's Word. Even the person who considers himself or herself as having only little ability and natural talent can qualify to rule - serve - in God's Kingdom.

5. Notice further the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. In what way did the rich man (Christ) divide up his goods? Verse 15

Notice that the quantities were not equal. He gave responsibilities according to each servant's natural ability. (The word talent in the King James Version refers to a measure of weight having a certain value.) Similarly, not everyone has been given the same ability. God knows some have more education, greater innate aptitudes, more personality or more physical strength than others.

But the important lesson Christ intends to teach us by this parable is that God expects us to increase our talents and abilities, no matter how small we may think they are. God wants His Spirit-begotten children to grow, both in spiritual character and their inherent abilities. He knows that in order to fulfill our purpose for being called into His ruling Family, we need to be using and developing our aptitudes now.

We learn to rule and successfully carry responsibility for the good of ourselves and others in the world tomorrow by learning to better manage the affairs, responsibilities and powers in our control today, no matter how small they may be.

Unfortunately, all too often we overlook or fail to appreciate the opportunities to grow and develop right on the job, at school or in the home - in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves.

6. Does this parable reveal that each servant who is faithful "over a few things" - that is, over his or her limited talents and opportunities of this life - will be rewarded with "many things"? Verses 20-23. Isn't it clearly rulership that Christ promised? Verses 21, 23.

Notice how fair God is. In verses 21 and 23, even though each person was originally given responsibility based on his natural abilities, both of the first two servants grew 100 percent. Christ therefore puts both essentially on an equal level in rewarding them. The Bible here reveals the principle that God will judge and reward us according to how well we do with what we have to do with.

7. To whom has God promised rulership over the reunited nation of Israel? Ezek. 37:21-22, 24. What positions of rulership did Jesus promise to give each of His 12 apostles under David? Matt. 19:27-28. Has God alluded to others who will be in His Kingdom? Heb. 11:4-40.

Other overcomers have gone before us and are to be in God's Kingdom. Having lived and died in the faith, they have already qualified and will be rewarded with responsibilities in God's ruling Family, though God has not specifically revealed most of their positions to us in the Bible. But every individual will have a significant and rewarding job to do, for an entirely new civilization in harmony with God's law must be built on earth during the Millennium.

8. But will there really be enough opportunities to serve for all who will have overcome? John 14:1-3.

The phrase "My Father's house" refers to the same house spoken of by Jesus when He drove the money changers and the animals out of the Temple (Matt. 21:12-13).

By speaking of the Temple having many "mansions" ("rooms" in the Revised Standard Version and other translations), Jesus illustrated the concept that there would be places for many assistants in the government of the Kingdom of God on earth, when Jerusalem will be the millennial capital of the world. "I will come [back to earth] again and receive you to Myself; that where I am [headquartered in the Temple of God on earth], there you may be also" (John 14:3).

Christ assures us that there will be ample opportunities and challenging, interesting positions of responsibility for all who are born into God's ruling Family!

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