

CHURCH OF GOD BIBLE COURSE

LESSON NO. 3

THE DRAMATIC RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST !

**WHEN AND WHERE WILL CHRIST RETURN? WILL HE
COME QUIETLY, OR WILL THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW?
HAS HE ALREADY RETURNED SECRETLY?**

HERE IS THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

No NEWS STORY could be more shocking. No headline could be more spectacular than: **JESUS CHRIST RETURNS!** or more ridiculed today.

To the average person, the idea of Jesus Christ returning to earth is a fantastic fable that has no bearing whatsoever on the realities of life.

Yet millions of professing Christians still expect the Second Coming of Christ - though widely divided among themselves as to why, when and how He will appear.

THE PROMISE OF CHRIST'S RETURN

Just before His death and resurrection - before His departure from the Mount of Olives more than 2000 years ago- Jesus Christ promised, "I will come again" (John 14:3).

And only moments after His ascension, the apostles were startled by the appearance of two angelic messengers who assured them: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). They confirmed Jesus' promise that He would come again and told the manner of His return.

The early New Testament Church believed what Jesus said and taught His message to others. Notice what Edward Gibbon said about the early church in His famous work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

"The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state ... was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labour and contention ... would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection" (chapter 15, subheading "Doctrine of the Millennium," (emphasis ours throughout lesson).

Not long after Jesus began His Church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2), a competing church was established that counterfeited or totally rejected basic truths of God taught by the true Church. The Church Jesus built was forced by persecution to "go underground," holding services secretly, communicating the truth of God privately. Meanwhile, the counterfeit church flourished. Notice how the truth about Christ's Second Coming came to be regarded.

Continuing in his history, Gibbon went on to show that the belief Jesus would come a second time to intervene in world affairs came to be regarded as an error. Within a century and a half after Christ's ascension, it was treated as a profound allegory - not to be taken literally. The doctrine that Christ would return to rule the earth "was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism" (ibid).

The world today continues to ridicule the idea of Christ's return. Nevertheless, this message lies at the very heart and core of the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God – the very Gospel Jesus preached more than 2000 years ago !

THREE COMMON IDEAS

Among the millions of professing Christians who still expect the Second Coming of Christ, there are hundreds of differing concepts about the time and manner of His return. The three principal ideas are the "Post-millennial Coming," the "Secret Rapture" and the "Spiritual Coming ' "

It was not until about A.D. 1700 that an English clergyman put forward the idea that Christ's Second Coming would follow the Millennium - the time during which His Kingdom was prophesied to rule the earth.. But those who maintain this idea are finding it increasingly difficult to believe that modern man can ever achieve worldwide peace and prosperity without the intervention of Christ's "strong hand" (Isa. 40:10).

Never before this modern age of nuclear weapons has it been possible to destroy all life on earth. Humanity is now literally on the brink of blasting or polluting itself from the face of this planet! That fact alone should tell us why, and partly WHEN, Christ must return..

THE "SECRET RAPTURE"

The second common idea accepted by millions of professing Christians is the "Secret Rapture." According to this belief, Jesus will return to this earth in two phases. First, He will return secretly to whisk away all true Christians to heaven to protect them from the time of "great tribulation" Jesus foretold. Therefore, it is believed that the Church's promised place of protection is not on this earth, but up in heaven. The second phase is believed to be His "public" coming, at which time all will be able to see and hear Him.

These commonly held beliefs about the "rapture" have suggested that the saints will be taken away seven years before Christ's final return, and so be spared the terrible events of the Tribulation. However a close examination of Rev 6 makes it clear that **all** experience the first four seals, and that true Christians experience the persecution of the fifth seal, verses 9-11, where many give their lives for the faith.

Next, it is important to note that there is nothing "secret" about the sixth seal, verses 12-17. First, the heavenly signs are seen, verses 12-14, and then men hide themselves from the face of the Lamb who is seen by all, sitting upon the throne. For this to occur the throne must be in the heavens, and this same scene was experienced by the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:26-28, and by the Apostle John in Revelation 4:3-6.

The throne of God then, is apparently portable and supported by the sea of glass.

1. Are the heavenly signs described in the sixth seal of Rev 6 and the following events almost identical to those we read of in Matt 24:29-30 ?
2. Are those heavenly signs preceded by terrible tribulation in both cases ? cf Matt 24:29, Rev 6:2-11.
3. At the sight of the Son of Man on His throne, does mankind know who he is, know what to expect next, and so greatly fear ? Matt 24 :30 first part, Rev 6:15-17.
4. What else happens at the same time Matt 24 :31 ?
5. Does this event fulfil the prophesy of Rev 12:13-14 (the wilderness does not always mean a desert – it can mean a place yet in the future - cf Revelation 17:3).

IS CHRIST ALREADY HERE?

The third common idea is that Christ has already returned. Many assume that Jesus came the second time as the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection (Acts 2). His Kingdom was the Church He founded at that time, say the proponents of this theory, and therefore today all the churches together constitute the "Kingdom of God."

But such a kingdom would not fulfill dozens of plain prophecies. Also, this theory ignores the fact that the Apostle Paul and other early true Christians still looked forward to the Second Coming of Christ and His Kingdom long after that particular Pentecost!

What is the TRUTH about the Second Coming of Christ?

Let's begin to understand what Jesus taught about His dramatic return.

HAS CHRIST ALREADY COME?

Let's notice the plain statements of Christ Himself concerning His promised return.

1. Did Jesus warn that some would claim He had already come before His true return would take place? Matt. 24:23, 26; Mark 13:21.

2. Did false teachers proclaim that very idea soon after His resurrection? 2 Thess. 2:1-2. (The King James rendering "is at hand" in verse 2 is misleading. Other translations render this more accurately as "has come.") Did the Apostle Paul emphatically refute this false assumption? Verse 3.

3. Did Paul go on to warn that there must yet come a further falling into error-an apostasy from the truth-before the return of Jesus Christ? Same verse. Did Jesus also speak of this as something that would occur before He returned?

Read Matthew 24:5, 11, 24

COMMENT: All these end time events occur within one generation Matthew 24: 33-34.

4. Before His resurrection, did Jesus make it clear that His Kingdom was not at that time, nor ever would be "of this world"? John 18:36. Therefore, could any or all of the churches of this world constitute God's Kingdom, as so many seem to think? Same verse.

COMMENT: This "world" or system (Greek kosmos) encompasses all that is characteristic of the age of man. And certainly, as history reveals, the churches are a PART of this world! They have engaged in political struggles, ruled empires and caused the shedding of much blood, especially in the Middle Ages. Therefore, if indeed the churches of Christendom constitute God's Kingdom, then that kingdom is a part of this world, and Jesus didn't know what He was talking about!

Jesus stated plainly: "But now is my KINGDOM not from hence." Christ's Kingdom did not begin at that time, though His spiritual CHURCH (Matt. 16:18) did begin on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), 50 days after His resurrection.

So Jesus Christ Himself emphatically denied, in advance, the false concept that later formed the basis for church-political dominance in the Middle ages.

5. When asked by His disciples if He would restore the Kingdom in their day, what did Jesus reply? Acts 1:6-7. But were they shortly to receive power that was NOT of a political nature? Verse 8. What were they to do with this power? Same verse and Matthew 28:18-20.

COMMENT: Notice that the apostles were not given to know the time of the establishment of the Kingdom, but were to be filled with the Holy spirit on Pentecost.

Jesus' disciples did not at that time receive political power to rule the nations. The Kingdom of God was not then to be set up. But they were to receive spiritual power that would enable them to be "WITNESSES" to the world of Christ's resurrection, and to "teach all nations" God's way of life.

Jesus promised that while He was away in heaven, He would be with His disciples (and their successors) in spirit only until the end of man's rule (Matt. 28:20)-until the end of this present age of human misrule-until His return to set up the Kingdom of God on earth!

6. What scripture conclusively proves that the Kingdom of God could not have been established on earth yet? I Cor. 15:50. Would you say the people attending the various churches are still flesh and blood ?

WHEN CHRIST WON'T RETURN

Another and more modern concept is that Jesus will come AFTER peace and harmony permeate the earth for 1,000 years, with all the nations in perfect accord. Could this possibly be true in the light of the Scriptures?

1. What does Acts 3:21 tell us concerning the restoration of all things?

2. When Jesus returns, what will the ambassadors of peace be doing, and what will the general condition of the earth be like? Isa. 33:7-8.

COMMENT: Obviously the earth will be in utter CHAOS-not at peace-before Christ returns! Christ is coming to restore law and order under God's government.

3. What scriptures prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Christ returns before, and not after, peace and harmony fill the earth for 1,000 years? Rev. 19:11-21; 5:10; 20:6.

COMMENT: Your Bible shows that Christ will not come after a millennium (1,000 years) of perfect human rule. To abolish human misrule and establish the Kingdom of God to rule over the earth is the reason Jesus will come a second time. Since resurrected Christians will reign with Christ for 1,000 years, He obviously must come before the 1,000 years commence!

END-TIME COMMISSION MUST FIRST BE FULFILLED

1. Before His crucifixion, did Jesus' followers anticipate that the Kingdom of God would be established very soon? Luke 19:11. What did Jesus say in answer to this mistaken idea? Verse 12.

COMMENT: In this parable the "nobleman" refers to Jesus; the "far country" is heaven, to which He returned after His resurrection; the "servants" are true Christians.

2. Was Christ to receive a kingdom while away in heaven? Compare Luke 19:12 with Daniel 7:13-14.

COMMENT: Plainly, the parable in Luke 19 covers the time from Christ's ascension to heaven (the "far country") until His return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth..

3. While the nobleman-Christ- is away, must the servants become profitable by increasing their talents? Luke 19:13-15; Matt. 25:15-19.

4. What duty must the servants-true Christians-especially fulfill before the end of this age and the Second Coming of Christ? Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.

COMMENT: Jesus made it plain that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God would be preached to the world as a "witness" to all nations shortly before His coming to establish the Kingdom. And He commissioned His Church to be partly responsible for proclaiming that wonderful message of GOOD NEWS to the world!

5. Is there another major witness to the world? Rev 14:6-7 (the everlasting gospel is the eternal gospel of the kingdom of God).

6. How will this gospel be delivered by the angel to every man, woman and child on the earth? (all flesh) Joel 2:28-31.

THE DAY OF THE LORD – CHRIST'S RETURN : ARE THEY THE SAME ?

1. At least sixteen times it is recorded that Christ comes as 'a thief in the night', or unexpectedly - Matthew 24:37, Matthew 24:42, Luke 21:35, Mark 13:35. 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

However in 2 Thess 2: 1-4, a very explicit instruction states that notable events would occur which make it clear that it will be known beforehand when Christ's 'gathering together unto Him' of the saints is about to occur. This would seem a contradiction, for in 1 Thess 5:2 it states "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

2. The 'Day of the Lord' is the surprise event. This is a general description of the seven year 'end time' when Christ takes direct control of events on earth. At that point, the Gospel, Joel 2: 28-32, Rev 14:6-7, announces His intentions. The cry goes out that Christ is to return : Matt 25:6.

COMMENT: The return of Jesus Christ for His saints takes place three and a half years after the angelic preaching of the gospel to all the world by dreams and visions. It is at that time, the time of the angel's message, at the start of the three and a half years that the fate of the Christians is decided. Do they have oil [Holy Spirit] in their lamps or not? Is their light shining – are they doing God's work inspired by the Holy Spirit? It is this event that is quite unexpected, and catches many unprepared.

CAN WE KNOW THE EXACT TIME?

Shortly before His ascension to heaven, Jesus also made it very plain that certain events would take place before He returns. He gave an outline of these events to His disciples upon the Mount of Olives. In Lesson 2 we studied that outline as it is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. You should reread Matthew 24 and note all the events that were prophesied to occur before Christ returns.

Let's see if we can determine from these prophecies the exact time of His coming.

1. Will God's intervention in world affairs and the return of Christ for His saints be universally expected? Luke 21:34-35.

2. To what period in earth's history did Jesus compare the time of His return at the sixth seal. Matt. 24:37. Did the people before the Flood really expect God's supernatural intervention? Verses 38-39. Will people today expect God's intervention and the Second Coming of Christ? Same three verses.
3. What about those who are watching and preparing - will they know the day and hour of Christ's return? Matt. 25:13.
COMMENT: These utterances of Jesus have often been taken to mean that only the apostles would not know the day or the hour, but that we in these last days would know it. This is emphatically NOT true!
4. Did Peter ask Jesus if He meant only the apostles would be unable to know the day or the hour, or if He meant all - even those of us today-would not know? Luke 12:40-41. What was Jesus' reply? Verses 42-43. Is Jesus' warning especially for the generation of those alive "when he cometh"? Notice again Jesus' reply in verse 43.
COMMENT: How plain that none of Jesus' servants-not even of this generation just prior to His Second Coming-would know the day or the hour!

HOW CHRIST WILL RETURN

How will Christ return? Is He coming as a "thief in the night"? Will He come silently and invisibly? Is He returning to "rapture" away His Church?

Is Christ coming in two phases - once "for" His saints to take them to heaven, and then "with" them to set up His Kingdom on earth?

The Bible gives us clear, concise answers to these questions.

1. What does I Thessalonians 5:2-3 say is to come on the world as a "thief in the night"? Are Christians to be vigilant so this period of upheaval-the "day of the Lord"-doesn't catch them unawares? Verses 4-6.
2. Is Christ also pictured coming as a "thief"? Rev. 16:15. Does this mean He will return secretly or invisibly - in a clandestine manner?

COMMENT: That's a fair question. But here's another question to ponder: When thieves or burglars come to rob a home, do they come INVISIBLY? Of course not!

A thief, however, usually comes at night when the household is away or asleep. He catches them unawares, off their guard - SURPRISES them! You never know WHEN a thief is coming. If you did, you would call the police and be prepared for him. The big question you would want answered if you already knew a thief was planning to rob your home would be when.

So it is with the coming of Christ! He will not come invisibly - any more than a thief comes invisibly. But He will come UNEXPECTEDLY! No one will know exactly when He is going to come.

Jesus Himself explained: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also READY: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:42-44). In other words, be prepared at all times for His return!

And so Jesus likened His coming to a "thief" in respect to the time of His coming and the element of SURPRISE!

How Plain!

3. Now turn to Matthew 24. Does Jesus describe a tremendous noise that will rend the air at His coming? Matt. 24:30-31. Isn't this the time when He will "gather together his elect"? Verse 31.
4. Will Christ's return from heaven also be accompanied by a tremendous shout? I Thess.4:16. Is this the time the saints are "caught up" to be with Him? Verses 16-17.

COMMENT: Obviously Christ's coming will NOT be a clandestine, secret event at all!

TO COME VISIBLY!

1. When Christ returns, will He be visible to everyone? Matt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7.

COMMENT: The Greek word *astrape* used in Matt. 24:27 may mean the lightning of thunderstorms, or any brilliant illumination. Now what brilliant light "comes out of the east and shines even unto the west? Why, the SUN, of course! Can you see the sun? Of course you can! Christ's presence will be "as the SUN shineth in his strength" (Rev. 1:16). It will be so obvious nobody will be able to miss it.

The expression, "and they also which pierced him" in Revelation 1:7 does not prove that the Roman soldiers who were responsible for putting Jesus to death, or the Jews who were living then, will be alive at His coming. It actually refers to the entire human family! The sins of all mankind-past, present and future-took Christ's life (Rom. 3:23; 5:8) Revelation 1:7 simply shows that all who are alive when He returns will be able to see Him. All the rest of humanity, including the soldiers who crucified Jesus, will see Him later in the second resurrection. (This resurrection will be covered in a future lesson.)

2. Did the angelic messengers, who spoke to the disciples right after Christ's ascension from the Mount of Olives, affirm that He would return as He left? Acts 1:10-11. What was the "manner" of His leaving? - was He seen until He disappeared in the clouds? Verse 9. Will He at His return again become visible "in the clouds"? Matt. 24:30, Rev 6:12-16.

CHRIST'S RETURN FOR THE SAINTS

1. Does the resurrection of the dead in Christ clearly take place at His return? I Thess. 4:15-16. Does it occur at the exact moment the trumpet ("trump") mentioned in verse 16 blows? I Cor. 15:51-52.

2. Is the trumpet mentioned in I Thessalonians 4:16 and I Corinthians 15:52 the same ?

COMMENT Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words explains that "the last trump" is a military allusion, familiar to Greek readers, and has no connection with the series in Rev 8:6 to 11:15," This has confused many students in the past.

WHERE WILL CHRISTIANS BE PROTECTED FROM THE TRIBULATION?

1. Does Christ promise to keep the overcomers, the 144,000 of Rev 7:4, of His Church, safe in the "hour of temptation" - the coming Great Tribulation? Rev. 3:10.

2.A "woman" is sometimes used in the Bible as a symbol for a CHURCH (see 2 Cor. 11:1-2; Eph. 5:23-32). Will God provide a place for the end-time true Church where it will be protected from the devil (the "dragon" - Rev. 12:9)? Rev. 12:13-14. Where will this place be - in heaven or on earth? Verses 14-16.

COMMENT Why John used the word 'wilderness' is not clear. The "wilderness" does not always mean desert. In John's vision he used wilderness in Rev 17:3 - a place in the future unlike any other he had seen. To find out where that place actually is we need to refer to other scriptures that do explain clearly what it means.

3. Where are the resurrected saints next seen ? Rev 15:2

4. Where is this sea of glass ? Rev 4:1-6

5. How many saints are found there ? Rev 7:4, Rev 14:1,3.

COMMENT So, Christ returns first at the 6th seal for the saints who are then seen on the sea of glass before God's throne. This return is quite unexpected by most, as Christ comes as a "thief in the night" 1Thessalonians 5:2, Revelation 3:3, 16:15, Matt 24:40-42.

6. For how long are the saints protected and nourished on the Sea of Glass Rev 12:14 ?

COMMENT So, His final return to the Mount of Olives **with** the saints, takes place 3 ½ years later.

WHO RETURNS WITH CHRIST?

When Christ returns to the Mount of Olives in the same manner as He departed (Acts 1:11), He definitely will not be alone. Notice who will come with Him.

1. Will all the "saints" (true Christians) be with Jesus Christ when He returns to the Mount of Olives? Zech. 14:4-5. Notice the last few words of verse 5.

2. Did the Apostle Paul speak of Christ coming "with" His saints, who are now sleeping in death? I Thess. 3:13; 4:13-14.

COMMENT They return from the heaven of God's throne, on the sea of glass, where they have been during the 7th seal or Great Tribulation.

3 What will they do then ? Revelation 5:10 and 20:6 once again.

4. Who else is scheduled to come with Christ at this time? Mark 8:38; Rev. 19:14.

COMMENT: When Christ came to the earth the first time, He was mocked, tortured and killed. But when He returns as King of kings to set up the Kingdom of God, He will return with GREAT POWER AND GLORY (Rev 19:16), and a great army of angels will accompany Him!

WHAT WILL CHRIST WILL DO WHEN HE FINALLY RETURNS ?

Jesus Christ came more than 2000 years ago as a meek lamb to be slain for the sins of the world. But when He finally returns, He will be wrathful -ANGRY-toward all evil! He will use His mighty power to change the ways that have caused all the sorrow and suffering on earth.

1. What does Revelation 6:15-17 foretell concerning the time of God's wrath on this rebellious world? Did Zephaniah foretell this same time? Zeph. 1: 1 4-15; 2:2-3. Turn also to Isaiah 13:6-7 and Ezekiel 7:19.

COMMENT: Most people have heard little or nothing about the "day of the Lord" - and yet the day of the Lord is described in more than 30 different prophecies scattered throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

2. At the very time when the last (the seventh) trumpet sounds (Rev. 11:15), and Christ returns with His saints, is God wrathful? Rev. 11:18.

COMMENT: The wrath of the "day of the Lord" is manifested in the seven "trumpet" plagues (Rev. 8 and 9; 11:15-19), which are unleashed consecutively over a period of 3 ½ years, culminating in the Second Coming of Christ. It is likely that the 7 last plagues are contemporaneous with the 7 trumpets (Rev 15:1, 16:1-21)

3. Is the great personage mentioned in Revelation 19:11 to make war? What is His title? Verse 16. What else is He called? Rev. 17:14. Who is the "Lamb" of God? John 1:29.

COMMENT: These verses plainly show that Christ will come with an army of angels to punish and conquer the rebellious nations of the earth.

4. Exactly WHY will God have to punish mankind? Rev. 1 1: 1 8, last few words; Zeph. 1: 1 7.

COMMENT: God is love (I John 4:16). God and Christ love all of humanity (John 3:16). But Christ will be angry at the sins of mankind when He returns. To SAVE the human race ALIVE (Matt. 24:22), He is coming to punish in love! Otherwise, man would destroy all life upon the earth!

In love God revealed His WAY of life that leads to everything good and desirable-including eternal life-to our first parents, Adam and Eve. But they rejected that way. Their descendants have continued to reject God's way for nearly 6,000 years!

Therefore, as any wise and loving father punishes his children for their own good when they refuse to respond to kind and loving verbal admonition, an all-loving, all-wise God will have to punish this world to bring it to its senses! The glorified Christ is coming in all the splendor, power and glory of God to STOP escalating wars, nuclear mass destruction, human pain and suffering. He is coming to usher in peace, abundant prosperity, happiness and JOY for all mankind.

5. Will the nations of the world also be angry at this time? See Revelation 11: 1 8 once again.

Will they actually attempt to fight Christ? Rev. 17:14.

COMMENT: This world doesn't want to change. Humans desperately want to preserve the society they have established upon this earth. They do not want God to intervene and teach them the way to world peace and prosperity. Instead, they want peace on their own terms-even though man's ways to "peace" lead inevitably to more wars and would eventually lead to cosmocide if allowed to continue.

When Jesus Christ comes to stop world suicide, the nations will quickly drop their own quarrels. The joint military forces of the world will then turn their efforts against Christ and attempt to fight and destroy Him!

WHAT IS "ARMAGEDDON?"

"Armageddon" is a biblical term directly associated with the Second Coming of Christ. Almost everyone has heard of it. World leaders and scientists frequently use this term when speaking of the inevitability of nuclear warfare, and the destruction of mankind.

Yet few know what "Armageddon" really is!

When World War I broke out, many excitedly proclaimed "This is the Armageddon war!" Then a generation later many assumed that World War II was the war that would end with "Armageddon."

Now the commonly accepted idea is that "Armageddon" is the last battle of a coming war between the Western democracies and Communism. It supposedly will be a battle between atheistic Communism on the one side, attacking Jerusalem; with the British and American armies on the other side, defending it. And at the precise instant of this battle, it is believed, the Second Coming of Christ will occur.

But is this really what biblical prophecy foretells? You may be surprised at who will be fighting whom at Christ's coming, and where!

Make no mistake. World War III is on the way! World Wars I and II were merely small forerunners of the DESTRUCTION that will break suddenly upon the nations. This time it will be so hellish, only the Second Coming of Christ will be able to save mankind from extinction.

That's why God commands us to "WATCH" (Luke 21:36)-to watch our own conduct, God's word and world news so we may be AWARE of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy-and "pray" to be accounted worthy to ESCAPE the catastrophic events soon to fall upon this heedless, rebellious world!

Let's understand exactly how "Armageddon" fits into Bible prophecy - especially with regard to the dramatic return of Jesus Christ.

1. In what is the wrath-the punishments-of God "filled up?" Rev. 15:1.

COMMENT: The seventh or last trumpet (Rev. 11:15) consummates-COMPLETES God's punishments on rebellious mankind.

2. How are these plagues symbolically represented? Rev. 15:7. (Some translations use the word "bowl" instead of vial.) Upon what will they be poured? Rev. 16:1. Will they cause great suffering upon unrepentant men? Verses 2-11.

COMMENT: Despite this severe punishment, the nations will adamantly refuse to repent of their sins and turn to God!

3. What will occur when the sixth symbolic vial of God's wrath is poured out? Verse 12. Notice the same event is the 6th trumpet – Rev 9:13-19. Notice from which direction these kings will come. What else happens at this time? Verses 13-14, 16. Let's carefully analyze what is being depicted by these verses.

WORLD'S ARMIES ASSEMBLE

1. Against whom will the kings of the earth fight? Rev. 17:14. (We have already seen that the "Lamb" is Jesus Christ.)

2. Who will incite the nations to fight against their Creator God? Rev. 16:13-14. Who is the dragon? Rev. 12:9.

COMMENT: The word "devils" in the King James Version ought to be rendered demons. There is one fallen archangel (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-17) called the "devil," but there are many fallen angels (Jude 6; Rev. 12:7) of lesser rank called "demons."

3. Are these demons responsible for gathering the armies of all nations together? Rev. 16:16.

(The proper translation of the Greek in verse 16 should read: "And they gathered them together.")

COMMENT: At this time, the demons mentioned in verse 14 will quickly stir up worldwide resistance to Christ, who will by this time already be in Jerusalem with His angels and resurrected saints. And so the battle is actually stirred up, not by men or nations alone, but by spirit demons of Satan the devil.

4. What will these evil spirits do to cause the armies to gather? Verse 14.

COMMENT: Notice that these spirits directly influence the leaders of nations-deceiving them with miracles-stirring them to a fever pitch of hatred to fight Christ.

5. Exactly where do the demons cause the armies of the nations to be GATHERED TOGETHER in preparation for the great battle against Christ? Read Revelation 16:16 again for the answer.

COMMENT: The "way of the kings of the east" will have been made ready by the drying up of the River Euphrates (verse 12). This will enable the nations to the east to easily marshal their armies and armaments at a place called "Armageddon."

The word Armageddon is a Greek form of the Hebrew name har Megiddo. It means "hill (or mountain) of Megiddo." This is the site of the ancient city of Megiddo, which is about 55 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Anciently, Megiddo and the Valley of Megiddo (on the southern border of the Plain of Esdraelon) was an important military site that guarded a nearby strategic pass.

For ancient Israel, Megiddo and the Plain of Esdraelon (also known as the Valley of Jezreel) became the battleground of the centuries. Time after time the blood of battle was shed there. Over and over again the 13-acre mound of Megiddo was refortified. Today the site is nothing more than an unoccupied, silent mound of historic rubble. Occasional tourists and archaeologists traverse its rocky face, but it is not a major site at this time.

But Megiddo is a symbol!

It is a symbol of war and human conflict. It overlooks the Plain of Esdraelon and stood at one of the great crossroads of the ancient world. And as the prophecy of Revelation 16 indicates, Megiddo and the Plain of Esdraelon will become the staging ground or mustering area for the greatest concentration of military might ever assembled!

Prophecy tells us that "ten kings" (Rev. 17:12-14) will comprise the modern and final end-time revival of the ancient Roman Empire. It will be a political, military and religious alliance of incredible power. A vast and mighty army will be formed and will find its way into the Middle East. The religious control of Jerusalem and oil will undoubtedly be major factors prompting the maneuver.

Thus the army of this religious "beast" power will confront the armies of the atheistic "east." But instead of fighting each other in a battle that would end in the nuclear extinction of all life (Matt. 24:22), they will, ironically, UNITE their forces and march southward toward Jerusalem in an attempt to destroy their common "enemy" - Jesus Christ!

THE GREAT "BATTLE OF GOD ALMIGHTY"

1. What is the name of the ensuing great battle between God and man? Rev. 16:14, last part.

COMMENT: You will notice the battle is not called "the battle of Armageddon" - it is called the "battle of that great day of God Almighty!"

2. Exactly where does the Bible say this battle will take place? Joel 3:1-2, 9-13. Compare verse 13 with Revelation 14:18-20 and 19:15.

COMMENT: Jehoshaphat means "judgment of Yahweh" or "judgment of the Eternal." The focal point of the battle will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, also called the "valley of decision" in the Bible. This valley is a deep ravine having

steep sides. It borders the city of Jerusalem on the east. The Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is situated between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, is known today as the Kidron Valley.

3. How is this great climactic battle pictured? Rev. 19:11-21. How does Zechariah describe the frightening manifestation of the righteous judgment of God in fighting against His enemies? Zech. 14:12. Will the nations wage war against each other anymore after Christ's overwhelming victory? Isa. 2:2-4.

COMMENT: Here you have a graphic description of the war that will end war! Jesus Christ will utterly destroy those who, in attempting to enforce human world government, would have destroyed the earth through nuclear warfare (Rev. 11:18).

The returning Christ will be forced to deal with rebellious nations in the only language they understand - overwhelming force! Only then will men be willing to try God's way of life and come under His government, which leads to genuine peace, happiness and prosperity!

CHRIST IS COMING SOON!

Through the first three lessons of this Bible Course, you have seen that we are indeed living in the very END TIME of Bible prophecy! You've seen that God, through His prophets, apostles and servants, has revealed that certain world events would be taking place just before the dramatic return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Events are shaping up that indicate we are indeed in that last generation. Matthew 24:34. Therefore, you need to "watch" and "pray" (Luke 21:36). Be vigilant. Keep abreast of world news. And by all means study your Bible and pray to God every day, living by every word of God so you may be "accounted worthy to escape" the coming time of great world trouble! Remember, Christ will come unexpectedly for His saints and many will be unprepared !

You have clearly seen in your own Bible that Christ will come visibly, and with great POWER to a God-rejecting world to save it from itself. His dramatic final coming will usher in the beginning of the Millennium - 1,000 years of peace and prosperity for all mankind!

People will finally learn to lead happy and abundant lives under the righteous rule of Christ. The entire world will begin to reap God's abundant blessings as mankind learns to obey His commandments. But more about that wonderful world tomorrow in the next lesson!