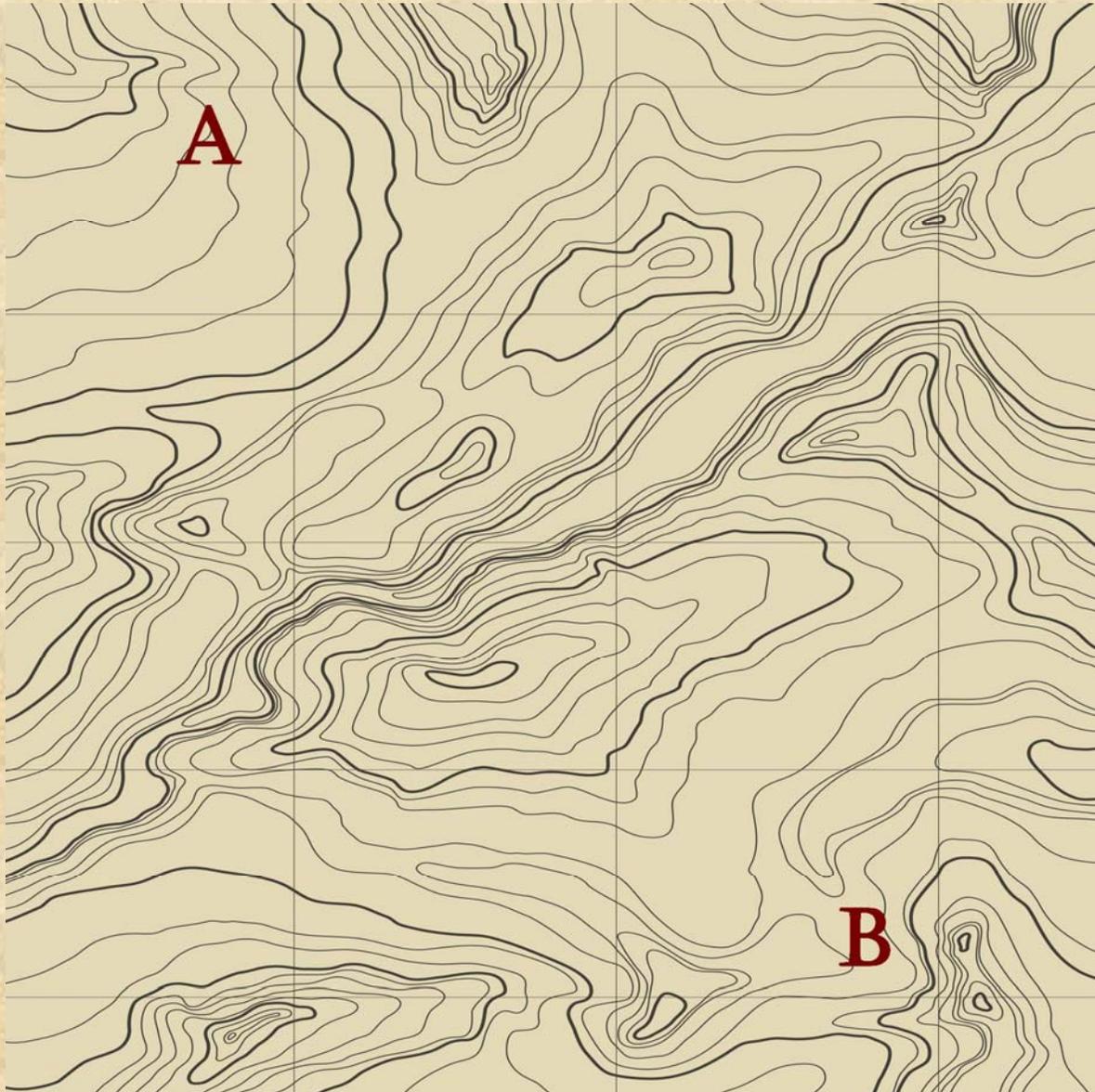


The Last Trumpet on the Last Day



Thoughts and musings on the return of Jesus

Preface

Since I was first introduced to end time prophecy decades ago I've come to realize several things about it. The first thing, which didn't take too long for me to figure out, is that the subject is a very complicated one. It describes things that take place in the supernatural realm, of which we know only bits and pieces, as well as things that occur in the natural realm. It uses a lot of symbolism and imagery to convey ideas along with parables to make points. Needless to say, it's a very widely interpreted subject and those who engage in its study are sure to spend countless hours doing so.

The second thing I've noticed, which I believe stems from the first, is that discussions about end time prophecy tend to become contentious. Because the subject is so widely interpreted, it's highly unlikely that any two people are going to agree on everything. And since so much time and effort has been put into understanding it, it's not surprising that where there is disagreement that one would want to defend their view, especially since they perceive it to be the truth. Far too often, though, these disagreements turn into manifestations of fleshly behavior (Galatians 5:19-21). I know for certain that God did not give us the prophetic scriptures for us to use them as a platform for such. It's not required that we be in complete agreement on how we view prophecy and those who insist that their view is correct have missed the point. Prophecy was not given for us to become prideful in our understanding of it. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 19:10). And it is the Holy Spirit who reveals to us the things to come (John 16:13). It's not about us. It's about Him, and when we become contentious about it, we make it about us.

Everyone that I've talked with about prophecy has been under the impression that their understanding of the subject was correct, which is what you would expect. However, given that many of the different interpretations are mutually exclusive, such cannot be the case. And I expect that in some cases, none of the conflicting viewpoints are actually correct. This leads me to the third thing that I've noticed about the study of prophecy. There is God's truth about it, and then there is our perception of that truth. God has declared the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and things will come to pass exactly as He has declared. Our understanding of prophecy will in no way change that. The goal of those who engage in an honest study of the prophetic scriptures should be to have their perception of prophecy transformed to become aligned with God's truth of the matter. It's a process that requires humility and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I don't view prophecy the same way I did forty years ago, and I assume that as time goes on, my understanding of the subject will continue to evolve, especially as we see the day of His return drawing nearer. The thoughts and musings presented in this booklet have been shaped over the years through discussions with people of varying viewpoints. The purpose is not to present a definitive conclusion of the subject but rather to provide food for thought for those who are engaged in an honest pursuit of God's truth of the matter. Jesus told us ahead of time what His return would be like so that we might be better prepared for that day should we be alive to see it. We aren't exhorted to have it all figured out but rather to be ready and alert. There is something particular about the return of Jesus that will require that we be vigilant. Staying awake, being prepared, and persevering are all themes associated with His return and the more we understand why, the better we are likely to fare should we be here during those days.

While it's not imperative that we all agree in our understanding of prophecy, it *is* a must that we all be ready. Jesus used a parable about ten virgins who were waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom to illustrate that point (Matthew 25:1-13). Five of them were ready and five of them were not. Jesus referred to the ones who were ready as wise, and the ones who weren't ready He calls foolish. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus uses another parable to explain the contrast between one who is wise and one who is foolish (Matthew 7:24-27). Both the wise and the foolish man heard the teachings of Jesus. The wise man acted on them. The foolish man ignored them. From these two parables it's clear that if we are to be ready for His return, we need to incorporate the teachings of Jesus into our lives. That is how we worship God in spirit and truth and that is the imperative for being ready. A lifestyle of obedience to the will of God has been the foundation of faith through the ages. The time of His return will test the faith of believers, not the accuracy of our prophetic understanding. What good will it do a person to have a perfect understanding of prophecy if their life is built on the sand?

That's not to imply that prophecy has no merit. If that were true, we wouldn't have been forewarned about those days. Jesus said "Behold, I have told you in advance" and "When you see all these things" which implies that we are to be familiar with the signs of the time (Matthew 24:25,33). However, we need to be careful not to confuse our understanding of prophecy with being prepared. Putting into practice the teachings of Jesus makes one wise and is what will train one's spiritual senses to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:14). And since the end times are characterized as being extremely deceptive, such discernment will be a must. Understanding prophecy is somewhat analogous to having a map that will help one to get from point A to point B, whereas the strength and stamina to make that journey will come from a lifestyle of obedience to the will of God. The map will be of no value unless one is prepared for the journey. It's important to view prophecy from this perspective

This booklet is what makes the most sense to me at this point in time. Agree with it or not, that's not really the point. It's not like God is waiting for us to arrive at a consensus so that He'll know what to do. He already knows and has revealed it to us. This biblical look at the nature and timing of the return of Jesus is simply food for thought. May we all have the discernment and strength to persevere in the faith and stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

The Return of Jesus

I think that most of us will agree that the return of Jesus is **the** central theme of end time prophecy. As such, it's important that we get as much information about that event as possible.

- Acts 1:9-11 – In this passage, Jesus had just finished instructing His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. After those instructions, He was lifted up and a cloud took Him out of the sight of the disciples. Then two angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus would return **in the same way** that He went up into heaven. This means that He will leave heaven, appear in the clouds, and then descend to earth.
- Revelation 1:7 – This verse confirms what the two angels told the disciples in Acts 1. It not only says that Jesus is coming with the clouds but also states that **every eye will see Him** when He returns. I consider that aspect of His return to be among the most important if not **the** most important one to remember. The reason why is because there will be false prophets who will be able to perform great signs and wonders in order to deceive people into believing lies (Matthew 24:24). We are told that there will be one false prophet in particular who will claim to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Since we know that every eye will see the Son of God when He returns, the claims of deity by the false prophet can easily be discerned as lies regardless of the supernatural wonders that he might be able to conjure up.
- Matthew 24:23-27 – This passage reiterates the need to understand that the return of Jesus will not be unnoticed. It states that as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, so will His return be. It will be seen by all. This particular characteristic will be the most effective countermeasure to the lies and deception being propagated in the days leading up to His return. If you personally did not see Him return, then He hasn't. Jesus made a special mention of this truth and we would do well to remember it (Matthew 24:25).
- Daniel 2:34-35, 44-46 – This chapter in Daniel uses the image of a great statue to give an overview of a succession of kingdoms beginning with Babylon. The last kingdom, which is described as the statue's feet, is struck by a stone which in turn has the effect of destroying the entire statue. That stone becomes a great mountain, or kingdom, which fills the whole earth. What this prophecy of the great statue is depicting is the return of Jesus which will bring about the ultimate regime change in the world. He will destroy the kingdom of Satan and establish the kingdom of God which will endure forever.
- Acts 3:21 – After Jesus had risen, He was talking with His disciples over a period of forty days about things concerning the kingdom of God and they asked Him if it was now that He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus replied that it wasn't for them to know the timing of such things that the Father had fixed by His own authority (Acts 1:3-7). The disciples knew that there was unfinished business that the prophets had spoken about but the time for fulfillment was not at that time. This verse in Acts 3 indicates that Jesus will remain in heaven until the time comes for the restoration of all things that the prophets spoke of.

Every time that the return of Jesus is mentioned, it is always described as a singular occurrence. Some interpretations of end time prophecy suggest that Jesus returns more than once but I can't see anywhere that such an idea is supported by scripture. If it were true that Jesus returns more than once, wouldn't we read about the returns (plural) of Jesus or the second comings (plural)

of Christ? But such is not the case. His return is only ever referred to as a singular event and the passages above describe that event. When the time comes to begin the restoration of all things, Jesus will leave heaven and appear in the clouds where every eye will see Him. He will then destroy the kingdom of Satan as he descends to earth where He will establish the kingdom of God. That is the essence of the return of Christ as described in the Bible.

Why Did Jesus Leave?

The answer to that question will shed some light on His return. It has to do with fulfilling the promise that God made to Abraham (Genesis 22:18). In Abraham's seed, who is identified as Jesus (Galatians 3:16), all the nations would be blessed. This would be fulfilled by the preaching of the gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins around the world. Jesus stated that after this promise to Abraham was fulfilled, then the end would come (Matthew 24:14). This time when the gospel is being spread around the world is known as the times of the gentiles. The words gentiles and nations are used interchangeably.

Jesus gave us a marker so that we could know when this promise to Abraham had been fulfilled. He said that Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). That's how we will know that the gospel has been preached to all the nations, the Jews will again exercise autonomy over Jerusalem. And since such is currently the case, the times of the gentiles is over and God is in the process of bringing about the end.

It is important to make the distinction between the **times** of the gentiles and the **fullness** of the gentiles. It's the same distinction as exists between sowing and reaping. The *times* of the gentiles is the worldwide sowing of the seed of the gospel. The *fullness* of the gentiles is when the crop has reached maturity and is harvested. We are currently in between the time of sowing and reaping when the crop is in the process of reaching maturity. The fullness of the gentiles, or harvesting, will occur when Jesus returns and Israel receives their Messiah (Romans 11:25). This will take place after Jerusalem is once again trampled by gentiles for 42 months (Revelation 11:2).

The Timing of His Return

We have seen that the return of Christ is a singular event where Jesus leaves heaven, destroys Satan's kingdom, and begins governing the nations. There are also several other passages in scripture that give us additional details about **when** that event will occur. In order to get an accurate picture of the events of those days, we need to consider **all** of them as a whole. When we do, the end time picture starts to come into focus.

- Immortality – Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that when Jesus returns, those who are His are made immortal. In fact, Paul states that there are three times when people put on immortality. The first was at the resurrection of Jesus. The second will be when He returns. The third will be at the end, after He has defeated all enemies, the last of which is death. This includes everyone who was not made immortal during either of the first two times, be they righteous or unrighteous (1 Corinthians 15:22-26). This

characteristic of His return is an important one to understand because there are other verses that tell us when this putting on of immortality takes place.

- The Last Day – There are four verses in John 6 where Jesus states that those who believe in Him will be raised up, or resurrected, on the last day (John 6:39,40,44,54). When we combine this with what we just read from 1 Corinthians 15, we can conclude that Jesus returns on the last day. I'll go into what the last day is in a later section but for now, it's important to know that believers are made immortal when Jesus returns on the last day.
- The Last Trumpet, the Trumpet of God – Paul describes the time when believers put on immortality in two different letters. In 1 Corinthians 15, he says that the dead will be raised imperishable and that those alive will be changed when the last trumpet sounds (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). This same event is recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul describes the last trumpet as the trumpet of God. He says that when Jesus returns that He will descend from heaven with the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will be raised first and those alive will be changed. He also says that after this putting on of immortality, those who were made immortal will be caught up to meet Jesus in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). When we look at these two passages together, we see that Jesus will descend from heaven to the clouds where He will sound the last trumpet, the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ are raised immortal and those believers who are alive at that time are changed to become immortal. Then all of those who were made immortal at that time are gathered together to be with Jesus in the clouds.
- The Day of the Lord – We learn from 2 Thessalonians that when Jesus returns, our gathering to Him takes place on what Paul identifies as the day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). There's a lot to be said about the day of the Lord (including it being the last day) and I plan to expound on that later on but suffice it to say for now that the return of Christ, and our gathering to Him, happens on the day of the Lord.
- Like a Thief in the Night – The day of the Lord is described as coming like a thief in the night. While people are saying "Peace and safety!" destruction will come upon them suddenly (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). This in and of itself doesn't really shed any light on when the return of Christ takes place, however, when we combine it with Revelation 16, it becomes quite clear. In Revelation 16, the people of the world have just endured some of the worst plagues imaginable. The two witnesses have just died which causes the effects of the plagues to subside. The world rejoices at their deaths but things get complicated. The two witnesses come back to life and are caught up into heaven. This is the time when the armies of the world gather together at Armageddon, presumably as a defensive measure against any retaliation that might be coming. It's during this time that Jesus makes the statement that He is coming like a thief (Revelation 16:15). After a period of time without retaliation, the people express their confidence in the armies that have gathered by declaring "Peace and safety!" It is then that Jesus returns like a thief in the night and sudden destruction comes upon the wicked.

So, when we put it all together, we have a pretty clear picture of the return of Christ. After the armies of the world gather together at Armageddon and the people start to declare peace and safety, Jesus leaves heaven to begin the time of restoration of all things. He appears in the clouds and sounds the last trumpet, the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ are raised immortal and those who are alive are changed to become immortal. These who have just become immortal are gathered to Jesus in the clouds. He then descends to earth destroying both Satan's

kingdom and the wicked. This begins the last day, the day of the Lord when Jesus rules the nations for a thousand years.

The Last Trumpet, the Trumpet of God

Paul tells us that those who are Christ's are going to be made immortal when the last trumpet sounds. He describes this last trumpet as being the trumpet of God. Needless to say, there is a lot of speculation as to what Paul was referring to. The description of it being God's trumpet means that it is a trumpet that God sounds. The fact that it is the last trumpet implies that there was one or more that will have preceded it.

The sound of God's voice is heard as a trumpet sound (Revelation 1:10-11). This can also be seen in the account of the exodus where God spoke to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai which was heard as a loud trumpet sound (Exodus 19-20). There will come a day when all who are in the grave will hear His voice and be resurrected (John 5:28-29). Since we know that a resurrection occurs when the last trumpet of God sounds, and that a resurrection occurs when the voice of God is heard, it's reasonable to conclude that the trumpet of God that Paul was referring to is the trumpet sound of His voice. The first trumpet of God was at Mount Sinai. The following passages are consistent with what we know of the return of Christ when the last trumpet sounds.

- Zechariah 9:14
- Isaiah 30:30
- Isaiah 27:13
- Matthew 24:31

The Last Day, the Day of the Lord

Jesus told us numerous times that the resurrection of those who believe in Him will take place on the last day (John 6) and Paul stated that our gathering to Jesus, which is associated with the resurrection, takes place on the day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2). Putting the two of those together, we see that the day of the Lord is synonymous with the last day.

It will help to understand what's meant by the term "the day of the Lord" if we don't think of it as 24 hours long but rather as a general reference to a period of time. While it begins on the specific day that Jesus returns, which is also the last day of Satan's kingdom, it also includes the time when Jesus rules the nations. When we read about the day of the Lord, it begins with a time of retribution and wrath for those who oppose God. It becomes a time where there is no war (Isaiah 2:4) and the wolf and the lamb will graze together (Isaiah 65:25). We also learn that it is a time when the earth and its works will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10). Since we know that the return of Jesus will bring His 1000-year reign, the day of the Lord will last for a minimum of 1000 years before the new heaven and earth are made. There is some activity that takes place after the 1000-year reign of Christ when Satan is released (Revelation 20:7-9) but the length of time involved is unknown.

For roughly the last 6000 years, the world has been subjected to the influence of Satan and his evil angels. It is what might be described as Satan's day, or his time of exercising dominion. When Jesus returns, He will destroy Satan's power structure and throw him in the abyss. That will mark the beginning of the day of the Lord, a time when the nations are ruled by Jesus. The end of the day of the Lord will be when the new heavens and new earth are made and the kingdom is given to the Father. Then, the restoration of all things will be completed, a process that will have begun when Jesus left heaven to return.

Being Vigilant

A consistent theme that accompanies the teachings of Christ's return is the need for believers to be vigilant. This is expressed in different ways (be on guard – Luke 21:34, be ready – Matthew 24:44, be on the alert – Mark 13:37) just to give a few examples. We know from certain passages that being ready comes from persisting in faithfulness to God (Matthew 24:42-51) and not allowing ourselves to become entangled in the things of this world (Luke 21:34-36).

The days before the return of Christ are described as being very deceptive (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10) and a time when sin will increase and cause the love of many to grow cold (Matthew 24:12). Believers are called on to endure to the end (Matthew 24:13) and persevere in the faith (Revelation 13:10) no matter what the cost. It is for this reason that we are to encourage one another to love and good works even more as we see the time of His return getting closer (Hebrews 10:24-25). Our focus should be on the eternal things above in order to keep us from being distracted by the temporary things here on earth.

As I mentioned in the preface, God is not waiting for us to come to a consensus on prophecy so that He'll know what to do. He already knows what He's going to do. The important question is, "how will we respond?"