

## Preparations For Christ'S Return

Are We Working Together With God?

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 05-Sep-13; Sermon #1175A

The current President of the United States—I am sure we all know who he is—is known for his frequent campaign style visits that he makes to towns and cities all over the fruit of the plain. Truth be told, his trips are not all confined to the 50 states.

But all these trips are expensive. Just think about it: Every time he uses Air Force One for an hour, \$180,000 goes out of the U.S. Treasury. So just taking a flight, say, to Charlotte, which is a little bit over an hour to an hour-and-a-half from Washington, he has already burned through more than a quarter of a million dollars.

Beyond the money, it takes also the combined efforts of hundreds, if not thousands, of people to prepare and pull off one of these Presidential visits every time any President does this. The price of operating Air Force One does not go down when a new President is installed, if he is a Republican. It just does not work that way. That is just the way it is.

But every time any President visits any location, everything is disrupted. Everything along the route that he takes comes to a near, if not a complete, standstill. I read in one place that the local economy (let us say, in New York City) which would be full of business and things going on, when a President would come through (if he is just coming in, let us say, to go to the opera or some entertainment thing), the New York City economy can expect to lose a million dollars that day. And if he stays longer, then it loses more because things have to stop when the President is there. The President comes through; along his route, every business has to close. And they have to close because that is a security risk. They can get special waivers or whatever, but usually they do not. There is no one there. No one comes to visit them.

Presidential visits are planned weeks or months in advance. So spur-of-the-moment trips are very rare and usually those are only down the road to get arugula or whatever from the supermarket. But the preparations for these trips have to be extensive and meticulous. In terms of, let us say, air travel, all commercial and private flights have to be diverted to other airports within 30 minutes of the President's arrival and they have to remain diverted as long as the President is there unless he is going to be there for an extended period and they make arrangements for that.

But, let us say, if he comes again to New York City, just think of the air traffic going into

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

JFK, La Guardia, and all those places. The air traffic that would go to New York City is diverted to Chicago airspace. Imagine the expense of that for the airlines, or if you are a private person having to divert that far. That is a lot of fuel, that is a lot of out of the way, that is a lot of time. Things are disrupted.

The President's route through town, in this preparation process, is identified and evaluated and any point of problem is checked over and corrected (maybe a rerouting would be necessary).

Did you know along the route of the President's motorcade all garbage cans and all mailboxes have to be removed? And the reason is these are likely places for explosives. Did you know that every manhole cover has to be examined? I would not doubt that they come through and they weld them down until the President comes back and then they open them back up. I do not know if they do that.

But that is the kind of level of security that they go through along the President's motorcade route.

Every building that he will enter must be inspected and spaces of course have to be provided for meetings and photo opportunities and travel companions stashed here and there while the President is doing his thing. And there is always a Green Room type thing where the President can go to relax for a minute or two before he goes up on stage or whatever. All that has to be prepared. But any rooms that are going to be used by him have to be completely cleared and inspected to ensure that the safety, protection, and security from any kind of tampering, any kind of problem, any kind of eavesdropping. So this does not mean that just a security guy goes in there and says, "Um-hm, okay. This looks good." It means that every square inch of that room is examined. Every piece of furniture is inspected top to bottom. That means filing cabinets, desks, chairs—anything—has to be visually inspected.

Beyond that, somebody comes in behind the visual inspector and it is electronically inspected to make sure there are no bugs, listening devices, jamming devices, or whatever that might be put in there by a terrorist group, foreign government, or whatever. Then, once he leaves, they bring in the bomb sniffing dog and he goes through every square inch of the room to make sure that it is safe. And that is every room that the President is going to be in or pass through. Even hallways are done like this because that is how safe we try to make our Chief Executive.

Beyond these precautions, rooms and communications networks for the White House Press Corps must be provided. People permitted to see the President have to all be

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

identified and checked and issued tickets corresponding to their level of access. If anybody is actually going to shake the President's hand or be in close proximity, he has to be completely vetted so they know exactly who he is talking to. This is why they get all upset when the President gets out of the car and starts shaking hands down the route because they have not vetted those people; they are just people off the street.

Of course there must be massive coordination of local, state, and federal agencies to make sure everything works out right. If it is an overnight stay, everything is ramped up higher because the President is going to be staying longer. Not only that, he has got an entourage that has to be fed and housed and coordinated, sent here and there, transported for a much longer period of time. And of course this gets very much more expensive.

But if it is a foreign visit, then the headache of preparation is exponentially greater.

I have got a quotation here from an article by a man named T. Chase Meachum. He writes on [www.policymic.com](http://www.policymic.com). This article is titled "Obama Africa Trip 2013: Why Obama's \$100 Million African Trip Isn't a Big Deal".

According to classified documents obtained this week by The Washington Post, the week-long trip, scheduled from June 26 to July 3, will involve hundreds of U.S. Secret Service agents, a Naval aircraft carrier with a fully-staffed medical trauma center stationed offshore, 24-hour continual air coverage by fighter jets flying in shifts, and 56 support vehicles, including 14 limousines for the president and first lady [I did not know they were separated like that. They come in seven pieces each, I guess. No, they have decoys and that sort. They go hither and thither just to confuse people.], a specialized communications vehicle for secure telephone and video communications, a truck to jam radio frequencies around the president's motorcade, an ambulance equipped to handle biological and chemical contaminants, a truck with x-ray equipment, and three trucks loaded with sheets of bulletproof glass to cover the president's hotel windows. The vehicles will be airlifted by at least a dozen military cargo planes. Obama will be spending five nights on the continent, in Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania.

The estimated cost to the U.S. government: \$60 to \$100 million.

Now the reason why the author says that this is not a big deal is because all foreign

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

presidential trips are involved and expensive. It does not matter who the president is—Clinton, Bush, or Reagan—back then every trip was expensive because that is how we secure our presidents.

Preparations are extensive so that the President, whoever he is, can be assured that he will accomplish his goals during his visit. All of this is a necessary thing, the government has decided, because what the President needs to do is that important. He and his staff want no delays, no distractions, and certainly, no surprises. They want to have everything planned out and everything go according to that plan so that they can call the trip successful. So all must be in readiness so that everything will go smoothly and without any unexpected incidents, and that the President and all of his entourage return home safely.

Please turn to Malachi 3. Malachi writes (it is actually God speaking):

**Malachi 3:1-3** “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

This prophecy foretells the work of John the Baptist and his preparations of the people of Judah for the coming of Messiah 2000 years ago. Some consider it a dual prophecy. In particular, he is talking about the work that Christ would do in His first coming. He was purifying the sons of Levi. He came as a purifier and a refiner. He came as “fire and soap” he said, to purify.

Unlike those who prepare for a presidential visit, John did not coordinate agencies; he did not go along the route there in Jerusalem and say “Jesus would come through here” and he had to make sure that the streets were cleared and all the post office boxes and the mailboxes were out of the way. He did not do that sort of thing. That was not John the Baptist’s job. His preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ was different. His message of repentance was what prepared the way. You could say that he was the initial barrage that softened up those who would accept Christ. He got the word and it made the message of Jesus Christ more understandable, more acceptable to those whom God was calling.

But there was more happening than this. John the Baptist only did so much. Most of the work of preparing the way was done by God Himself. Throughout the Old Testament and the intertestamental period that we do not have much biblical history on, but we know from regular history what was going on there. God Himself had maneuvered everything in the way He wanted it and so He had put the political, cultural, and religious factors in place, for when Jesus would come all of these things would be ready, all of these factors would be right there for Him to preach the gospel and make the message heard to those that God wanted to hear it. And He had also done another thing. He had also prepared two people—Joseph and Mary—to be prepared for His Son, and they raised Him to be the Man He was. So everything came together. When the time was right, everything on the ground was ready.

If you will, I will just flip quickly to Galatians 4. I just want to pick up just the thought that is in this verse. Paul writes:

**Galatians 4:4** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

So there was a time that God had set, and He said “I want to be ready by this time.” And when that time had fully come, He sent His Son and everything was prepared on the ground for the great first coming of Christ and the message that He brought to humanity, and specifically to those whom God was calling at this time.

Now let us go back to the Old Testament please, to Isaiah 40. This is another “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” passage and it is a little different.

**Isaiah 40:3** The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

You can already tell that things are different. This is much more monumental. This is catastrophic. This is like the heightened atmosphere like we hear in music with trumpets.

**Isaiah 40:4-5** “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

This proclamation of “Prepare the way of the Lord” is different because it speaks of Christ’s second coming. He is not coming like fire and soap this time. He is coming as King and Judge, and the impact that He is going to have on the world is even greater than what it was the first time He came. The language here expresses, as I said, a far more catastrophic, earth-shaking, transforming intervention into mankind’s affairs. He has come to clean up.

Actually, putting it another way, He has come to tear down and then clean up everything. So He raises the low places; He beats down the high places; He makes straight what was crooked; and what was bumpy and rough, He is going to smooth out. Doing such a thing is going to take great power and great wisdom, and it is going to turn humanity on its ear because this is an even greater intervention into mankind’s history. In this case, a war-weary, plagued, and famine-devastated humanity will have been thoroughly prepared for the second coming of the Great King, Jesus Christ.

Remember I said that in a way we could say that John the Baptist softened up the people in Judea whom God was going to work with. Well, what we have here is an idea of the softening up that is going to be happening when Jesus Christ comes again and people then will be on their knees (most of them or some of them at least; some will still try to fight—that is how unrepentant many of them will be). But, for the most part, humanity will be ready to hear their Creator’s message.

On the Feast of Trumpets holy day, the focus is on the return of Christ. We speculated and have long speculated that He will return on this day sometime in the near future, we do not know when. That time has not been revealed to us. We see conditions building. They are not quite ready yet.

But, as Herbert Armstrong said, we need to be prepared because it is going to be a surprise finish. Even the elect will be caught off guard. But we need to be ready. It is not that simple. What I mean here is that it is not that simple just to say “Christ is coming and He’s going to be here soon.” It is all very vague. It is all very simple to say that. It does not, in a sense, mean that much. It can become rather trite just to say “Christ is coming and He’s coming soon.” If you hear that a thousand times, it can begin to just wash over you and you do not pay any attention. That is what I mean by saying it is not that simple.

Our God is a planning and preparing God. Things are at work, and He will have all the pieces in place before He gives the signal to His Son to descend to the Mount of Olives. So just like He prepared when Jesus came the first time, He is preparing now. But He

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

wants us to be planning and preparing people like Him. He wants us to be getting ready for His Son's return. That is why I say it is not that simple. Just to say "He is coming" is not enough. There must be a response. There must be a working together with God to get ready for that tremendous advent of Christ into our lives physically. He has already entered our lives spiritually, but He is going to come in and be here.

Let us go back to Leviticus and just touch on this day. We always do this. I think it is a good idea that we read the Scripture. It tells us to do this every year.

It is interesting. This shows you how my mind works. This is the middle day of the feasts; there are three feasts before, there are three feasts after. It is kind of the turning point of the feasts. I do not know why this makes a connection with me, but the instructions for this day begins in (chapter) 23 (verse) 23 and it is kind of like there is a symmetry there—23, 23—and it is the holy days, and the plan of God kind of hinge on this. So it is easy to remember—23, 23. There is that symmetry there. I know it is stupid, but you have to do these things to help you remember.

**Leviticus 23:23-25** Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.' "

This is today. We are doing what has been commanded here. We have made an offering, not necessarily by fire, but we do give a monetary offering to God in thanks for all that He does and for what He is trying to accomplish. But the key phrase here, one that separates this day from the other holy days, is this: "a memorial of blowing of trumpets." And as we have explained before, this is literally a remembrance of shouting and this thought that the word 'shouting' is a shortened or shorthand form of the Hebrew phrase 'the shout of the shofar.'

So what is happening here is that Moses is in a way reminding the Israelites of the time when they heard the shout of the shofar. The only time in their past that they had heard the shout of the shofar was when God Himself descended upon Mount Sinai and gave the law, and so that was the thing in their mind that they remembered. When someone said 'the shout of the shofar', of course, their mind immediately went to that time they were terrified that Christ or their God Yahweh was coming down on the mount with smoke and fire and all the great trembling and the sound, and this was the day that marked that.

So, because God came down on the mount, we have this idea that God will return to such a sound—the sound of the blowing of trumpets. This becomes a giant clue therefore that the blowing of trumpets is a key element in the prophetic meaning of this day. Obviously we call it the ‘Day of Trumpets,’ so that makes sense. But what is it about the blowing of the trumpet that is so significant? We find that that is answered in the New Testament. Let us go to Matthew 24. During the Olivet Prophecy that Christ gave His disciples, He says (as He is talking about His return):

**Matthew 24:30-31** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then [Do you remember, in Isaiah 40, it says that everyone will see Him together? Well, here we go] 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.

So we have this connection of a great trumpet with the coming of Jesus Christ. In I Corinthians 15:52, Paul says something similar. I want to go I Thessalonians 4 and just pick up the other place where he mentions this.

**I Thessalonians 4:16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout [we have heard that before], with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

So we see there several things that have come together with this idea of blowing of trumpets. That is the time that Christ comes. He is announced and everybody sees Him together. We saw that that is also the time when the saints are raised to glory. They enter the Family of God fully, spiritually, and become the Bride of Christ. We have not seen that quite yet, but we know that that is what occurs. So we have here these elements about the trumpet and Christ’s return—specifically those two.

Let us go to Revelation. Revelation puts it all in context and gives us a lot of different additional details. I am just going to take you quickly through the process here of what is going on at the very end. I am doing this because this is the softening up process that I mentioned before. This is the preparation for the return of Christ nearest to the time when He actually comes. God is doing other things right now, He is getting everything into place. But these are the events that take place right before He comes.

**Revelation 11:15a** Then the seventh angel sounded . . .

So what does that tell us? He has got a trumpet. All the seven angels were given trumpets and they would blow and something would happen in the plan of God. Finally we get to the seventh angel.

**Revelation 11:15** Then the seventh angel sounded: and there were loud voices in heaven [Did it not say that there was a voice of an archangel in I Thessalonians 4?], saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth." Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

So the seventh angel sounds and this great announcement is made: "It is time, God, that You took up the scepter and reigned and You are willing to do that and we worship You for it. All the kingdoms of this world are Yours. You can do with them as You will. You can reward Your saints. You can punish those who are sinful and try to destroy the earth. It's all Yours." And then of course, we have these shakings and loud noises and things going on to frighten everybody to, you know, a millimeter of their lives. Did you know that there is a lot to come after this? This is just an announcement!

When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, there are seven last plagues that have to take place after this over a period of time. So, like I said, this is softening things up. If people hear this and see this and feel this viscerally, then they should know, they should realize that something big is about to take place.

We could say, specifically here, that by the time we get to this point, the return of Christ is a foregone conclusion. We are just playing things out to the end where God does all that He needs to do to prepare everything—the earth, humanity, His church—for that one specific time that He is going to send His Son to the earth. But He has decreed and

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

seen this from far back into eternity that there is going to need to be, from this point forward, seven plagues to do the job. So let us go there.

Now between these two—Revelation chapters 12, 13, and 14—there are inset chapters which tell us a lot of great information. But by the time we get to chapter 15, we are getting back on the chronological scale here of things. We want to go to chapter 16 because that is when things start happening; that is when the action starts.

But if you look there (I do not know if your Bible has paragraph marks showing what is happening here with each one of these bowls or vials of God's wrath or however you want to put it), these are the things that God said are necessary to soften up humanity to get ready for the return of Christ: malignant sores, the sea turns to blood, the freshwaters turn to blood; there is a scorching of men in the fourth vial; there is darkness and pain that happens in the fifth; the Euphrates is dried up and there is war in the sixth. There is a lot of bad stuff going on.

And so we get to verse 17—the seventh. Finally we are getting to the end.

**Revelation 16:17** Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

God had decided that enough had happened—enough devastation, enough war, enough famine, enough sores. Enough misery has happened. Things are ready. He is prepared. Everybody is prepared. Let us go.

**Revelation 16:18-21** And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

You could tell that even though humanity had gone through all this from God's wrath, there were still some who would blaspheme Him because of it.

So God manifests His wrath in all of these things for man's sinfulness. And just as bad as it is, it is truly less than what mankind deserves. Really, all of us should be just obliterated the way that we have treated God and His commands. But the culmination of all this is this seventh plague. Its main part is a final terrible earthquake and that evidently shakes the whole world. It is like God grabbed one side of the earth with one hand and the other side with the other hand and just shakes it like a dog would shake a partridge or something. The mountains fall, cities crumble, "islands fled away" (it says). It is just like a last shudder of wrath from God. Then he says, "It is done. Now the good part."

What we have here, at the end of Revelation 16, is the fulfillment of Isaiah 40 and what we read there: "Prepare the way of the Lord." At this point it is all ready. Everything is ready. It is like this great earthquake and these sounds—the thundering, and the lightning—all of this is telling people: "Look, your God returns as King over all the earth. Are you ready? He is coming. Now!"

Let us move forward a little bit more to Revelation 19. There are more announcements being made. I want to read a good part of this chapter. I want you to think, as I read this, of the announcements about Christ that are happening: announcements about what He is coming for, what He is doing, what roles He fills.

**Revelation 19:1-7** After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Now down to verse 11:

**Revelation 19:11-16** Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse.

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LOORD OF LOORDS.

This follows immediately after what we just read in Revelation 16. God shakes the earth. There is the great loud noises and thunderings, and suddenly Christ returns and He gets all this worship and praise on His way down, you could say, from all of these creatures and such around the throne in heaven.

But they announce Him in His various offices. If you noticed, this chapter announces Christ as righteous Judge and avenger of His servants. He is announced as God and King, taking up His rule over the earth and its people. He is announced as the Husband of the church. He is announced as the Lamb of God, the One who gave Himself for us.

And then we see Him in action. He comes down riding a white horse with a sword in His mouth and striking the nations who deserve every bit they get. So He comes as Judge and Warrior-King and He puts down the rebellion against Him. Of course, we could have gone on to verses 17-21 where He pretty much takes care of the instigators among humanity that do that, and then, in chapter 20, He goes and gets Satan the Devil. The valleys are raised up, the mountains are brought down. Everything is made smooth. He does the job that He and everyone who is with Him have been prepared to do.

This may seem to be the end of it, but it is really only half the story. Because what we have seen here—in Revelation chapters 11, 16, and 19—are the major revealed events that lead directly to Christ's return in that last year or so. We could say, if we wanted to, that they are God's macro-preparations for the return of Christ. They are the obvious visible things that everyone will see, and of course they are very necessary. Those are the things that He does in view of all the unconverted out there in the world so that they have a direct witness of His wrath and the coming of Christ so that it makes an impression on them.

So, as sovereign governor of all things, God is making all the pieces move on the board

where He wants them to until He gets them to this point, and then it is going to be all revealed to mankind. Everything will go according to plan. And even people who are out there in the world who call themselves Christians—who have read these things and know these things—when they see them, they will know that Christ's return is near; they will not know when. But, especially these great things that happen in that last year, they are going to have a light bulb turned on in their minds and know that something is happening—what they read about, what the church preached about.

We could chase out to all the things that God does to prepare Israel for His Son's return, but we will not because that has been done by a great many men and it would really sidetrack the purpose of this sermon.

A quick summary though is that we know that God will bring the nations of Israel down from their heights. For many years they have been the leading nations of this world. They have made a great deal of money. The people have lived pretty well. We have taken our culture all over this world.

But God says, at some point that is going to stop and Israel will be humbled. Decimation and war and cruel captivity will humble them down to their core. And many Israelites, in their captivity, will realize that what God's church preached all those years was right and true because a witness has been made and a witness will continue to be made, and they will remember when these things begin to happen. Those who survive will return to the Holy Land weeping and repentant and they will be ready to accept Christ as King. And, as the Bible says, that second exodus will be greater and will be so much greater that it will be the one that is remembered, not the exodus from Egypt. But we will leave God's preparations of Israel with that. I do not want to go any more into that.

More apropos to us is how God prepares the members of His church for that time and we need to review this from time to time. I know we see it every time a 'CGG Forerunner' comes out, preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God, but we need to be reminded maybe a little bit more definitively every once in a while. So let us do that for the remainder of this time. Let us go to Romans 9.

This is the beginning of a section that Paul does in Romans to explain to the reader 'What about Israel?' God, through Jesus Christ, has called a body—the church. But He already had a body, in a sense; He had the children of Israel. So if He now has a new body, a spiritual body which is the Israel of God, His church, what about the old one? What about the congregation of Israel? What about all those people and all those tribes? Where are they now? That is the main gist of Romans 9, 10, and 11.

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

And he answers: "Don't worry. All Israel will be saved." He says that right at the end of chapter 11. God has not forsaken His people, but He is doing something else right now. He is God. He is sovereign. He can do whatever He wants. If He wants to put Israel aside for the moment, He can do that. He says here very succinctly that God has mercy on whoever He wills, and whoever He wills He hardens. So, as the clay, quit being the one who tries to take down the potter. It does not work that way. Do not question the Master. This is just the way it works. That is the gist of this section here.

But we are going to pull out a section where he has some interesting principles that he brings out that apply to us.

**Romans 9:22-24** What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Do you understand his question: What if God decided He wanted to do it this way?

**Romans 9:25-28** As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."

That is all I want. I am taking this out of context because it has a few interesting principles that we need. The primary point of course is that God has decided to go to the Gentiles at this point rather than specifically to the Jews because they had rejected Him, and so He said: "Okay, fine. I'll go to a people who were not My people, and I'll give them the opportunity to be the sons of the living God."

But these few incidental points are important to us in terms of preparation.

First, in verses 22-23, Paul uses the word 'prepared' twice here, once saying that God prepared vessels of wrath and the other time saying that He had prepared vessels of

mercy. The vessels of wrath receive destruction. He had prepared them for doom—for a bad thing. But to the others, the vessels of mercy, they are rewarded with glory. They get a great reward. Now the first point that I want to pick out here is, no matter whether they are vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy, that they are both prepared. God was working with both of them—the bad ones and the good ones—getting things ready for His purpose.

Now this does not mean that the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction will not, sometime in the future, get a chance for salvation; that can take place in the second resurrection, in the White Throne Judgment. But, right now, He is working things out for these vessels of mercy and so He is preparing things to bring that about.

Just as we saw that God will make sure all the players at the endtime are in their proper positions, He will make sure that His chosen people are ready for that time, all the way into the glorious resurrection into the Family of God.

I am saying this to you because I want you to understand that God is sovereign and in control of the preparations. As much as we think that we are doing something in helping in going along the way, really it is God working in and through us. I do not want to say that we cannot prepare on our own; there are things that we have to do to prepare. But it is God that is doing the great bulk of the work.

I told you, right at the beginning, our God is a planning and preparing God. Like those Secret Service agents that help the President's visits run smoothly, He is out there making sure that our route is fully inspected and ready for us as we go forward because He is taking us to the Kingdom of God and He wants to make sure we get there. And so He is clearing out any kind of surprises and whatnot along the way so that we can get there. If we need to be tested, He can throw them in there.

But He is making sure that we get to the Kingdom of God because we are the vessels of mercy that he is talking about here and He is going to bring us to glory. He is preparing everything. He is working. He will save the remnant that He has chosen. Paul says it right there—verse 27: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved."

The second point is that God promises to finish His work. He is not going to prepare three-quarters of the way and then let it go to chance. Very clearly, the remnant will be saved and He will finish the work. He will even cut it short in righteousness. Jesus says that the time will be cut short to save all flesh, not that all flesh will be wiped out from the face of the earth.

But God does not leave things undone. He plans it all the way through and then He guides it as it goes along. He dots every 'i' and He crosses every 't.' He has many thousands of 'Child of God 1.0' projects going all at the same time and He will bring every one of them to completion. They will have the same character programming, if you will, as the prototype: Jesus Christ. He is now putting us all through the final (we hope we are that close) testing modes to ensure that we are all functioning according to His strict specifications.

I am putting this in a kind of engineering term so you can understand. He has got a process; He has a way of doing these things, He thinks about them; He has a blueprint that He is working against. These are things that we can understand. They are human things.

But God is working along that same line. He is trying to make us all look like Christ in our hearts. So, by the time He is done, because His plan calls for it, all of these 'Child of God 1.0' projects are going to be perfect. They will be exquisitely prepared for their jobs in His Kingdom.

Do you remember the song 'His Mercy Never Fails' that we sing? God never fails. That is just the way He is. He always gets things done. He always does things perfectly. He always finishes what He starts.

Let us go back to Isaiah 40 just for a moment.

**Isaiah 40:10-11** Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

He comes with this grand smash-bang arrival on the Mount of Olives with all of this stuff happening, as we see in verse 10, but as verse 10 ends, He says He brings His reward with Him and His sheep are with Him as well. They are the ones that receive that reward. God is going to make sure, as the Good Shepherd, that we are guided to that place and that time so that we will be there with Him when it comes. So, clearly, God is doing His part. He is up there working and He will continue to work until the process is complete.

The question is: Are we making our own preparations? That is, are we coworkers

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

together with Him in this process of salvation? Are we cooperating, or are we, as I mentioned before, the clay that questions the potter? That is bad if we are doing it. We should be repenting of that and getting back on the program. That is the question. Are we coworkers together with Him in our salvation?

Let us go back to the New Testament please, to Philippians 2. Very well-known memory scriptures. We read this quite often. We probably have it going around in our brains every once in a while, pops in, and we agree with it. Of course, we agree with it. But do we realize what it requires of us? That is the question. Like I said, we can hear that we are being prepared for the Kingdom of God; we can hear that Christ is coming soon. We can hear these things and they can become trite after a while. Do we hear this tritely?

**Philippians 2:12-13** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

It sounds great. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is working to do that with us. That is essentially what it says: He is working with us so that we will do His will, we will do His good pleasure.

But do you really see what is going on here? This is not easy. Let us go on and read.

**Philippians 2:14-16** Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

What we see in this passage alone, when we look at it with new eyes (and I am not talking about any other place in God's Word), just in these six verses, what we are asked to do in working out our own salvation is almost crushing in its magnitude and its intensity. Do you realize that? The absolutes that Paul says that we need to be are just stunning. Our preparations for Christ's return are spiritual ones. But spiritual things take work; they do not just *happen*. God gives us gifts, yes, but for them to be put on our hearts requires our cooperation with God in making them permanent in us, as part of us—part of our character. And they include things like obedience, as Paul says here.

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

But do you notice he does not say “Be obedient”? He says, “I know you’re obedient. But now it’s required, now that I’m gone and not there watching over you like a hawk, that you obey when no one is looking, when you don’t have me encouraging you. Now that you don’t have a master,” let us say, “are you still obeying to the same extent that you did before when someone was prodding you to obey?”

I remember years ago Mike Ford had an article in the *Forerunner*. It was called ‘Character is What You Do in the Dark.’ Character is what happens when no one is looking.

Are we obeying when there is no one in the church around? Paul says this is part of working out your salvation—that you can be on your own and still do what is right in God’s eyes and not give into the temptation to do it just this once.

Then he goes on. He says live without complaining or arguing. That is a tough one. That hits right where it hurts because we all complain all the time about every little thing. It points out that we get disgruntled about stupid little things that do not matter, but it shows our character inside. We are complaining about everything that does not go our way perfectly.

On social media, all you see is argument. You see it in talk radio; you see it in politics; you see it everywhere. People argue about dumb things that do not matter. It has become part of our character. Paul says that working out our own salvation is getting rid of our complaining and getting rid of our ‘I got an argument for that’ attitude.

Some people argue just to argue. Would they say to Jesus Christ when He came, “You came at the wrong time. It doesn’t suit me. You should’ve come this way, and I can prove it to you from the Scripture”? There are people like that who are so hooked on their own way of thinking that they are willing to challenge God and argue with Him because it is such a part of their character. Paul says we need to rip that out. Do everything—all things—without murmuring and disputing, he says. That is an absolute—*all things*. Can we go a day without murmuring and disputing? It is a challenge, I know, but try it.

Then he goes on. Be blameless. Is there anything that you could be blamed for? If so, then you have failed this test. Be without blame, guilty of nothing. Do you know what that is telling you? You better be perfect. That is the mindset—to be perfect in everything. And innocent, he says here—harmless. We are to not at all hurt anybody else by the things that we say, the things that we do.

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I would say right now, if I could take the things that have come into my observance of the way things are, what we say is primary there. We do not hurt people; we do not pull out a knife and do that. But it is what we say about people that is so hurtful. We go behind their backs. We gossip. That is not “blameless and harmless.” That is mean spirited; that is ungodly. But that is part of preparing for the return of Christ.

So in a sense, we could say, this all boils down to moral purity. God wants us to be absolutely stunning in our moral purity before the world and He gets to that. He wants us to be a shining witness of His way of life.

He also adds: Hold fast to the Word. Are we holding fast? Are we enduring? Are we keeping up the teachings and the traditions that we have received, or are we letting them fall by the wayside a little bit at a time here and there? Will we do this all the way to the bitter end, no matter what comes at us? How much are we willing to compromise in order to get along?

Let us go forward to Titus chapter 2. There is a similar section here.

**Titus 2:11-14** For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

We look for this glorious appearing of Christ. That is what we are here today observing, that Christ is coming and it is going to be wonderful and glorious, and we will get our reward at that point and rise in glory with Him. But Paul clearly implies here that our looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ is not a static activity. I mean, you could stand here and you could be looking, or you can be looking forward mentally. But that is not a static activity when it comes to what we are to do in preparing for the return of Christ.

Peter, in I Peter 1:3, calls it a “living hope.” What he means there is an active hope. It just does not stand there; it moves, it thinks, it does. That is what our hope is: It is something we do. And notice what we are busy doing in this hope.

On the negative side, we are denying ungodliness and lust, meaning we are getting rid of the sin. We are saying ‘No’ to things that are bad, to the ways of this world, to the

temptations and desires that are thrown up at us from Satan and this world. We are saying 'No' to that.

On the positive side, we are living soberly, meaning we are living sensibly. We are living with self-control over our lives and over our words and over our actions. We are living righteously, meaning we are just, we are fair. We live with integrity before the world. And then we live godly, meaning we live with great reverence and true devotion to God, not wanting to displease Him in the least.

He reminds us that we owe all of this to Jesus Christ. He redeemed us. He started that process. He picked us out among all the people of humanity. He says, "I want this one and I want this one to work with Me in this process of salvation." He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people. He called us to be in a special category, but to be in that category you have got to be pure. That is what He has called us to do. Notice what it says:

**I John 3:1-2** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

What a wonderful hope we are working toward, that we can be like God and that we will be able to see Him with our eyes and know Him for what He is and realize that we are the same. We are His people, His own special treasure. Wonderful, is it not?

**I John 3:3** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Wow! Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect—Matthew 5:48. If you have this hope that Jesus Christ is coming and that He has selected you to be on His team or, better yet, to be His bride to be with Him for eternity, to be just like Him, then we need to be coworkers together with Him in purifying ourselves so that we reflect Him perfectly.

Like I said, it is not an easy thing that we have been called to. Purifying ourselves is not something that just happens to us, which the Protestants seem to think that is the way it is. "Take me as I am and don't change me or whatever You do, God, because I like

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

myself. And I want to be this way forever. I don't need to change, I just need to believe." That is the approach that they take. You do not need to believe like that.

You definitely need to believe, but believing is hard work. Believing that the Sabbath day is the day that we come to worship our God on is hard work. Everything that we do is against this world and to hold fast to—that is difficult.

So what happens out there in the world? They look at the Bible and say "God says the seventh day is the Sabbath" and they admit it. But they say, "No, we would rather do it on Sunday because that's what everybody else does, and we'll find a good excuse for it somewhere. Oh, that was the day Christ rose. Okay, we'll do that. That's good"—even though He does not say one word in the Scripture that that is what we are supposed to do.

But believing that the Sabbath should be kept is difficult, and doing it is even more difficult. Jesus says that if we believe Him, we will take up our cross and follow Him. That means we take upon ourselves the means of execution. We take on that burden of dying daily in order to believe the truth and follow it. Like I said, belief is hard work. That is our preparation for the return of Christ and for the Kingdom of God.

So let us finish in II Timothy 2.

**II Timothy 2:19-21** Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [he said if you cleanse yourself from dishonor and iniquity], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

When a dignitary like the President comes to town, those whom he is coming to see make diligent and exhaustive preparations to receive and honor him properly. Jesus Christ is coming someday in the near future and we have been charged with preparing ourselves for the thousand-year reign on earth that will begin when He does.

I ask you: How are our preparations proceeding? He is doing His job of sanctifying us. How prepared are we to be useful to Him in doing every good work?

Preparations For Christ's Return by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

That is a question each one of us needs to answer for himself or herself. I encourage you to think about this as we near the Day of Atonement.