

How Long, O Lord? (1994)

Fleeing and God's Kingdom

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All of God's festivals are intended to be days of rejoicing. Even Atonement has a large measure of joy, if only because of its wonderful spiritual significance.

Today is a day of great significance as well, but like Atonement, Trumpets has its share of sorrows as well.

The Feast of Trumpets has been a significant day all through recorded history. The Jews claim that it is the first day of creation, and it is important in that regard.

If we look at some evidence given in the Bible, it is apparently the day that Joseph was released from his imprisonment, and placed into his governmental rank in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. That is significant, apparently, regarding this national (Jewish) event, around which the celebration of Trumpets revolves.

Trumpets ranks supreme among all of the new moons of each year. In fact, it is the only new moon that the church of God celebrates. Its significance is also noted in the Bible, in that it is the only holy day in which the rams' horns—the shofar—are blown.

But by contrast, it has almost no significance at all for the billions of people that are on earth today; I do not know if any of them are even aware of it, unless they happen to be a Jew. It is simply another workday, maybe a school day, to some. Most of the people on earth are just going through their normal routine.

If you do happen to be a Jew, even in this present time, it has a more than a normal significance. It is known as Rosh Hashanah, which means the head, or beginning of the year. This year, the beginning happens to be for their year, 5755. They date from the beginning of the calendar itself, not from creation.

Undoubtedly, many of those people are attending synagogue, but I am sure that very few of even those religious Jews understands this day's real significance.

It does have a great deal of significance to you and me. We understand it as being holy time; it is a commandment of God; we observe it as a memorial of what is surely going to be the most significant event that will ever occur on this earth; it is memorializing an event that will change the course of mankind for all time. That is pretty significant.

Turn to the book of Jude.

Jude 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

This day has been prophesied by God for a long time. Enoch was born about 700 years after the creation of Adam, giving him an opportunity to come to maturity in life, and God prophesying through Enoch about the fulfillment that is just ahead of us, just a few years off over the horizon. He is been prophesying of the fulfillment of Trumpets for about 5300 years. Now, that is longer than any holy day; that is longer than any festival of God that we find prophesies about, except Passover.

Passover was prophesied as early as Genesis 3, but it was also fulfilled much sooner, about 4000 years later. And so, for people to know about Passover and Christ's death, have not had to wait near as long. That is already fulfilled, and we can look back at it as an accomplished fact.

But Trumpets has been prophesied of, now, 5300 years, and we are still waiting for its fulfillment.

Now, if you would care to look up “Trumpets” in Bible dictionaries, commentaries, or encyclopedias, you will find that those writers are unable to grasp the understanding of Trumpets any further than it seems to be the first day of the new year.

In preparation for this sermon, I looked in quite a number of commentaries that I have at my disposal, and there was only one out of that group, the *Matthew Henry Commentary*, that made any comment about its spiritual significance. What he said was that the Jews said that the shofar trumpets were blown to awaken the Jews from their spiritual drowsiness to search and amend their ways, and thus were awakened to prepare for the Day of Atonement through sincere and serious repentance.

If we understand its historical prophetic significance in terms of what is coming, that pretty much catches the essence of what Trumpets is about, and why the terrible things that are associated with Trumpets and Christ's return are going to happen. They are judgments that are coming upon this world to stir peoples' minds to the place where they will recognize that God reigns, and they will repent. And then when Atonement is fulfilled, they will be ready for it.

And so they caught the essence of it. The only difference is that they do not pay any attention to its future significance in terms of the appearing of the Messiah, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. To them, it is strictly an application for each year as it comes by for the Jews to repent and get ready for Yom Kippur.

Leviticus 23:24 "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.

There is really just one thing I want to pick out; it is a memorial of the blowing of Trumpets—plural; more than one trumpet; more than just the Last Trumpet.

Now even when we who understand a great deal about prophecy, focus our attention on end time events, there is a very strong pull for us to focus only on the Last Trumpet. That is understandable. But, there is more to the Feast of Trumpets than just the Last Trumpet.

Turn to Numbers 10 in order to look at some other circumstances in which a trumpet was blown. They have a very wide and varied use in the Bible. They applied trumpets to very many situations. We will just look at a few of them.

Numbers 10:2 "Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps."

There you see two purposes for the trumpet: Calling people to assembly (probably at the Tabernacle); and directing the movement of the camp of Israel.

Numbers 10:3-4 "When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. But if they blow only one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you."

That is another one, calling the leaders of Israel to the Tabernacle.

Numbers 10:5-6 "When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; . . ."

So, they signaled to begin to move on their marches.

Numbers 10:7 "And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance."

You see, they varied the kind of sounds so the people could know the intention.

Numbers 10:8 "The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations."

This shows who was to blow the trumpets: the sons of Aaron.

Numbers 10:9 "When you go to war in your land against the enemy"

This is another purpose for which the trumpets were blown: an alarm of war.

Numbers 10:10 "Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God."

So, the trumpets were blown on the new moons; on the holy days; for the burnt, and peace offerings. And yet, there is still more!

This morning, just out of curiosity, I counted the number of times the word "trumpet," appears in the Bible. I found 61 times that trumpet appears, and 51 times trumpets (plural) appear. Combined, there are 112 times that trumpets are mentioned in the Bible. You can see that they have a wide and varied use. They were used very frequently.

Turn back to Exodus to one of the earliest mentions of a trumpet.

Exodus 19:13 “Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”

He is calling them to assembly.

Exodus 19:16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Exodus 19:19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

First we see the trumpet being used to call people to assembly, and then the trumpet was used to manifest just a tiny particle of the power of God, giving them unbearable evidence that they were in the presence of somebody of awesome magnitude. We can conclude from this, then, that trumpets are intended to be blown announcing the arrival of a king. In this case, it was the Great King.

Leviticus 25:9 Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land.

The trumpet, here, was used to announce the arrival of the Jubilee, and all of its accompanying liberties!

II Chronicles 5:12-13 and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets—indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever.”

This was at the occasion of the bringing of the Ark into the Temple. We see it being used at this auspicious occasion—a worship service—and was used to praise God.

I will give you an overview of these, since there are so many, that are so significant in the history given in the Bible, because all of them have some significance regarding the Feast of Trumpets fulfillment. All of these, together, have some significance, which we will not go into today, but understand that there is a great deal more to trumpets, than just the Last Trumpet.

In Joshua 6:16-20, when the wall of Jericho fell down, every day they went around, they blew the trumpets. On the seventh day, they blew the trumpets, and the walls fell down.

In Judges 3:26-27, when Ehud wanted to assemble the people of Israel to his side, he blew the trumpet.

The same occurred in Judges 6:34 where Gideon did the same thing.

Judges 7 is a very interesting one, where all the 300 who were with Gideon had a trumpet with them in their hand, and when Gideon gave the signal, they all shouted, and then blew their trumpets and charged into the camp, having been used as a signal, and to intensify the confusion, because it made it seem like the army was a great deal larger than it really was. The enemy thought that a real [large] army was coming at them with all that noise and everything. Here the trumpet was used as an instrument of intimidation to create confusion. And it worked.

Now, if you sum up all of the trumpets that have to do with the Feast of Trumpets, what do you have? Each one of them is an alarm! And when we finally get to the seventh one, what does it do? God assembles His people together, collecting them from all over the earth assembled to His side, just like Ehud, Gideon, Joshua; then we do our thing.

There are dozens—scores—of places in which a trumpet appears in the context. There is a consistency in the way that they are used. They announce a significant event. They are used to draw people's attention to focus their attention on what is occurring at the moment, like the time the Ark was taken to the Temple, it drew people's attention with praise of God.

The second reason is that it is an alarm of what is shortly going to occur.

These are the two main ways in which the trumpet is used although they are used in many other ways besides.

Now, if you do a little bit of reading, you will find that it seems to be pretty much divided in the Bible whether the situation was good or bad. It was used for events that were good, as well as events that are bad.

Revelation 8:1-2 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Revelation 8:7-8 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up. . . . Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea.

Revelation 8:10 Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch.

Revelation 8:12 Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars.

Revelation 9:1 Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.

Revelation 9:13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God.

Revelation 10:7 but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded.

Now, each event as John saw them unfold was announced by the blowing of a trumpet. I feel that this is the way that God illustrated it in giving the prophecy to John. However, except for the seventh trumpet, I feel it is highly unlikely that the world will hear an actual trumpet sound as each event begins. Rather, the event itself is the trumpet. It is not that you will actually hear the sound, but the event is the trumpet.

There is excellent biblical basis for this, which we will not go through today. But you can see for yourself in Amos 4, especially verses 10-13. Amos goes through one plague after another that God sent on Israel, and each time Amos said, “You didn’t wake up! You didn’t hear! You did not take warning!” See what he is telling them? The event itself was the trumpet. “I sent you a plague; you didn’t take warning. I sent you a famine; you didn’t take warning. I sent you hail; you didn’t take warning. I sent you wars; you didn’t take warning.”

I think this provides a basis to help us to understand that the events we read of here in Revelation 8, 9, and 10, are themselves the trumpet. I know that Herbert Armstrong felt the same way; it was in the old Correspondence Course, and other places like the booklet, “Pagan Holidays or God’s Holy Days—Which?” He felt the events themselves were the trumpets.

When an event actually unfolds, here in history, these things we read of in Revelation 8, 9, and 10, it should serve as a warning announcement of what is presently occurring and what is about to occur, and then, in an overall sense, as to where they are all leading. Of course, that is to the seventh trumpet, and the coming of Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Now, in Revelation 14:

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads.

Get the picture of when this is taking place—in the midst of all these things going on.

Revelation 14:2-5 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Now, I read that to you in light of all the plagues that are represented by the seven trumpets.

And, for anybody who is in the position of those people in Revelation 14:1-5, believe me brethren, it is going to be the best of times for them. Could there be anything better than to have been resurrected at that seventh trump? And to be standing on a sea of glass, getting ready to observe and participate in the fulfillment of the seventh trumpet itself?

For them, it is going to be a great time. But, for anybody else, it is the worst of times.

Revelation 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

This introduces, then, what is coming next:

Revelation 14:13-14 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

A sickle is a symbol of a harvest.

Revelation 14:15-20 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

Now the language there is highly figurative—vivid to say the least! But the harvest we are looking at here, is not the kind of harvest that you want to be a part of, because this is the harvest of the tares. If you will recall, back in Matthew 13, that Jesus used this very phrase, "The harvest at the end of the world." This is when the wheat and the tares are separated from one another.

This is not a harvest unto salvation that we are looking at in Revelation 14, but this is a harvest as grapes are harvested, which are thrown into a winepress, and then they are crushed. And so, this harvest pictures a grinding, painful, and terrifying judgment.

This begins to give us some sort of idea of why the plagues fall as they do. Each plague is pictured as being a trumpet; a trumpet calls people to an assembly. A trumpet gives warning to focus people's attention either on what is already occurring, or what is about to occur, so that they can do something. God is using the trumpets as a means to gather people together to Him to repentance! Herbert W. Armstrong used to always say that God's punishment is always corrective. He does not punish out of spite. He does not do it out of any kind of anger like we do to get even with anybody. His punishment always has a good positive edifying purpose behind it.

And so, when that first trumpet blows, it is the signal to some people to repent. When the second one blows/occurs, it signals to more people to repent. And if these people have any occasion at all in the past to read the book of Revelation, and begin to put things together, they will begin to see why these things are occurring—the alarms are going off!

You see? Six alarms go off. You have heard of four-alarm fires, five-alarm fires? Well, this is a six-alarm fire in which God gives warning six times before the final judgment comes, giving men the opportunity to repent. He is calling them to assembly before Him, to present themselves so that they might be ready for the Day of Atonement.

Turn to Isaiah 63:

Isaiah 63:1-6 Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?—"I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth."

Now, this seems to be the source of what we read in Revelation 14. The major concern seems to be that there is going to be a cataclysmic destruction of mankind, a destruction that is so great, Jesus said, that unless God intervenes, there would be no flesh saved alive.

So great is the destruction that the spilled blood is pictured in Revelation 14 as being up to a horse's chest.

Now, a winepress is a symbol of great pressure being applied in order to gather every last drop. What we are looking at here is extremely vivid metaphors. They are given that way in order to impress on people the horrors of the times that are coming—a warning to you and me. You do not want to be a part of it.

Let us look at some more prophecies that are specific in regard to these things. First of all, turn to Joel. Every year for the Feast of Trumpets we sing, "Blow the Horn, let Zion Hear!" Those words are taken from Joel 2.

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! . . .

God's holy mountain is Israel and Judah, and we can consider it to be the church, as well.

Joel 2:1-3 . . . Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame

burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. . . .

Do you not get the picture of devastation so great as it is almost beyond comprehension!

Joel 2:4-5 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire. . . .

Did you ever hear a roaring fire? I mean a really big fire? It is deafening to hear a forest fire burning.

Joel 2:5-11 . . . that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color [great anxiety]. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks [showing a great disciplined army approaching]. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

Jesus says that he who endures to the end the same shall be saved. But He also said that it is going to be so bad that unless God stops it, no flesh shall be saved alive.

Now, please understand one of my major points here: Each one of these trumpets is a warning. God is not doing this without warning. He is giving people the opportunity to repent. And if you are familiar with the book of Revelation, especially when you get to chapters 16 and 17, you begin to hear God saying that they still do not repent. And still, they do not repent. He says that three or four times. And still they do not repent.

Joel 3:9-16 Proclaim this among the nations: "Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong.'" Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great." Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

That is comforting. You need to keep that in mind.

I think that you can begin to see that the destruction that is coming is not going to occur all at once, but rather it is coming in waves. God will put the pressure on. Remember He has set the pattern

already in Egypt, putting the pressure on, and then what? He eased the pressure off. He gave the people an opportunity to repent. He gave them an opportunity to think. What did Pharaoh do? Each time the pressure was off he relented, and went back to what he was before.

Is the pattern going to be repeated at the end? Yes, it is! God brings pressure, and then He eases the pressure off. Then the next one comes, then He eases off, giving people an opportunity.

His own principle is at work because He says, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." So Pharaoh is typical, but God's action was also typical.

What we see in the book of Revelation is waves of destruction coming, and then a little easing. And then another wave comes, another alarm sounds.

But Joel, like John and Isaiah, paints a vivid picture of a punishment that is virtually impossible to escape; the pain seems to be virtually unendurable.

Turn to Zephaniah 1.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse." Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

I want you to notice the words in this passage, beginning in verse 14: great, bitter, wrath, trouble, distress, devastation, desolation, darkness, trumpet, alarm, blind, blood, refuse. Now tell me, is that day hanging over the disobedient like the sword of Damocles, or what?

Turn to Zechariah 14. We are going to link these next 3 sections together, here.

Zechariah 14:1-7 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle [pay attention to that]. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You.

It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.

Hang on to that thought. Turn to Revelation 16.

Revelation 16:17-21 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!" 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.

Turn to Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:11-21 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. 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 [here you can see Who is going to direct the punishments at the end]. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Now, each of those three passages represents the turning point in the Trumpet prophecies. Each was seen from a somewhat different perspective, and each one contributes to clarifying the picture. Together, what they do is they show the Lord appearing first to complete the punishments, and then to stop the destruction, and save mankind from himself.

With that in mind, turn to Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Now, I think we can understand from scriptures like the one in Isaiah 63, that these three verses which I just read, encompass a period of one year. I said Isaiah 63:4, because in that verse it says, "It is the day of God's vengeance; the year of recompense." The Day of the Lord is one year long. The Day of the Lord will begin immediately after the Tribulation, and it will last until the resurrection, and those things that occur immediately thereafter. The trumpets will unfold—unwind—over the period of one year.

Now, there is going to be a great deal happen during that one year period; it is going to be jam-packed with events that we just read of there in Revelation 8, 9, 10, 11, and so forth. There are a lot of prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled. Did you know that there are over 500 prophecies that cover this period of time we are now in? And most of them have not even begun to be fulfilled yet! Things are going to be happening left and right, in a very short period of time.

Now, in the Bible and for mankind, the return of Jesus Christ is an extremely significant event! And even though quite a number of details are given here in the Bible, and especially here in Matthew 24 (which encompasses the bulk of the end-time events, giving us an overview or summary from Jesus Christ's own lips of what is going to occur), there is one thing that has been obviously omitted—when! When are these things going to occur?

We have all kinds of details about so many other things. Look at how many I just read! And I only scratched the surface of those five hundred. We have all kinds of details of things that are going to occur, and yet what we might think to be the most important things of all—when—is left out. Would it not be nice to know when?

Let me tell you something. If God is any judge of what is the loving thing to do—the righteous thing to do—maybe He could not have done anything more loving or righteous than not telling us.

Brethren, we do not need to know, or He would have told us. God does not withhold any good thing, and if He did not tell us something, that means that it is not good for us to know. That might be hard to take.

We all have such an innate curiosity about, "When is it going to be?" I mean, you can hardly go through a week around here in the southeast Bible belt, that somebody is not talking about the time of the end—listening to all these radio talk shows, and they talk about those things pretty frequently. It is in the newspapers and magazines; it is on people's minds—I am sure it is on your mind, too.

God knew that we would want to know, God knew that we would be aching to know, we would give our eye-teeth to know; but He did not even tell Christ! How about those apples? There is nobody closer to God than Jesus Christ. And yet He did not tell Him.

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Now this intrigued them! Just like it does you and me, and perhaps, millions, or billions of people down through the centuries have been intrigued by this. It has driven people to make foolish predictions, and to do things like selling all their property, quitting their jobs, forsaking their families, sequestering themselves in churches, in deserts, and mountain tops. You have probably read of people getting up on their roofs in white gowns waiting it out until the Lord came!

They were curious; they thought they knew. It is even in the paper today, here in Charlotte, N.C. Harold Camping predicting that today, Sept. 6, 1994 is the day that Christ is going to return.

Matthew 24:6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

It almost seems that Jesus avoided directly satisfying their curiosity. He continued to give a fair amount of detail, at least an overview of what is going to occur. He even went so far as in verse 13 to say, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved," and then He gives a little clue that, "The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then will the end come."

Well, I think we are getting close! I think that the gospel has been preached in all the world, but it has not really blanketed the world. I think that the real preaching of the gospel to all the world is going to be done by the Two Witnesses, and in that sense it has not been done yet.

So, difficult times still lie ahead. And we are going to have to live through those difficult times in the same condition that we are now, not knowing when, "How long, O Lord?"

Matthew 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

He finally says that He does not know either! He may know it now, but I do not know of anybody He has told. If He does know, He has not told anybody yet.

This is important because it provides us with important instruction regarding what we should do with our time as we look forward to the fulfillment of this significant event.

Turn to Deuteronomy to an interesting verse:

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Now, what has not been revealed, what is still secret, we do not need. We do not need it to satisfy God. But what He has revealed, we do need, so that we then can keep His law.

Now, this verse is even more interesting because of the context that it is in. If we go back we will pick this up in verse 23:

Deuteronomy 29:23 'The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and His wrath.'

What is He talking about? He is talking about a time of destruction. The whole land is like Sodom and Gomorrah after God bombed it out of existence.

Deuteronomy 29:24-28 All nations would say, 'Why has the LORD done so to this land? What does the heat of this great anger mean?' Then people would say: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

The secret things belong to the Lord. Is that not the condition that the Israelites are going to be in when that Day of the Lord comes? They are going to be in captivity, their land has been devastated, they have been uprooted, they have been cast out because of idolatry, and God's anger is being vented. If you were in that condition, what would you be thinking of? "Oh, when is this going to end?"

"When," God says, "is My secret."

Is the same God still inspiring things? Yes, He is! It is not good for the Israelites in their captivity to know when they are going to be released. Even them!

You know, when people go to prison, they pretty much know when they are going to get out. But with God, you never know. You do not know when your trials are going to end.

What would you do if you did know when?

I know exactly what you would do! You would probably do the same thing that I did. You begin to relax. "I'll wait until the last minute to rush." That is the way we are. You procrastinate, you put things off. You say, "I've got a little more time."

That is not so good with God. So He said, "I will just withhold that information."

And so we have to keep asking, "How long, Lord?" And even when you ask, you know you are not going to get an answer.

Acts 1:6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Does this sound like God, or what?

Acts 1:7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

Now, here He was—God! This is different than Matthew 24. Now He is God again. He is resurrected. And He says the same thing. "It is not for you to know the times or seasons."

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Look at this in its context. It tells you that God's purpose, His work, our preparation for His Kingdom is best served by our not knowing when the most significant thing ever to occur is going to happen.

Now, you can see from just those three verses that what God had in mind for the first century church was a great deal different from what they were thinking about. What was on their mind? "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." What question did they ask? "When are you going to do it, Christ? When are we going to sit on thrones? When is all the trouble going to be over? I want it now!" That is what was on their minds, in their heart. They did not have it in their minds to do a work. They did not have it in their mind to witness. They did not have it in their mind to die for Christ some 30 years later.

And so, in order to help keep them on the right track, the right track was for them to do what God wanted them to do. They were His servants, He bought and paid for them, and so rather than satisfy their curiosity, He just withheld it from them, and said, "This is what I want you to do; you have a work to do; you are going to witness for Me."

God's pretty smart! He withholds what we do not need, because if He gave that to us, it would actually deflect us from His purpose for us. And so, He reveals to us what we need to do His work, not what we think we need to satisfy our curiosity.

Witnessing begins with a person's life, and how he lives. And so, Christ is saying let the world see a demonstration of what the power of God can do through a fellowship of those who trust Him. That is what happened.

Now, it is human to speculate. And so we find in I Thessalonians that was what the people there were doing. They were speculating that the return of Jesus Christ was going to occur quickly. They were curious about it. And so Paul wrote the letter. He reminded them of what he had previously taught them, recorded in chapters 4 and 5. Turn to I Thessalonians 5.

I Thessalonians 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons [what did Jesus say?—there is no need for you to know those things], brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

Does that sound familiar, or what? "You have no need that I should write you." It sounds like the same God who was inspiring Paul, who inspired Jesus.

I Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

What is he saying? “We don’t know!”

I Thessalonians 5:3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

See? Paul is just as vague as Jesus was. The same God who inspired Jesus Christ inspired Paul to say that the time will come, and it will be unexpected in the same way that the coming of a thief is unexpected at one’s home.

Look—a thief is capable of coming at any time, depending on how bold he is. And, if a thief is really bold, really desperate, they can come into your house during daylight, at any time. And so, what do we do? We take care, and we prepare as best as we can, but at the same time, we know that a thief does not announce the specific time that he is going to arrive at your home.

That is the way it is with God, too. He can come at any time, and God's very bold. He is coming to a *round* earth. Regardless to the time He comes, somewhere on the earth there is going to be daylight. Somewhere it is going to be midnight. In some places it will be 3 AM, while other places it will be 3 PM. It is a round earth. So, we know that the “thief” (God) can come at any time. But, He is not announcing the time that He is going to come. And we have to be satisfied with that.

There is an interesting experience in II Thessalonians 3, and virtually every commentary I have ever read on this chapter says that the story behind this was that these people had quit working, while they were waiting for the return of Christ. And Paul called them disorderly. This is not what you do as a Christian.

Now, do you see the lesson that is there? If we think we know that Christ is going to come at a certain time, we will quit working.

Remember I said we cut an article out of the *Charlotte Observer* about Harold Camping. He is predicting that Christ was going to come today, and as you read the article, you will find that people quit their jobs in order to be prepared for this day. It is human nature that when we think that something is accomplished, or that there is a deadline, we will put things off until we get as close to that deadline as we can. And so God in His mercy and wisdom has withheld that information so that we will be motivated to keep on pushing to keep on working so that we will be prepared whenever the thief comes, so that we will not let down our guard!

Preparation for the most significant event that will ever occur never stops, because you always have to be prepared for the thief.

I Thessalonians 5:4-6 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

Remember, pay attention to this passage in its context and what this advice is tied to—the return of Jesus Christ. Paul understood what happens when people think they know. They let down their guard. “I will get prepared when the thief shows up.”

I Thessalonians 5:6-11 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do [keep alert], but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

He is saying, “Don’t be indifferent. Be alert. Don’t let your guard down. Keep your guard up. Get ready for that time,” when Jesus Christ will be returning.

Now, I think that is just about as far as I need to go with this. I could go a great deal further, because there is an awful lot of information regarding this particular aspect of our life; that there are times that we relax, but a time that we cannot afford to relax is the time when we know that the thief is probably very close to coming to our house.

Let us finish up in II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:1-4 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

The scoffers will scoff. In the book of Jude, he says that the mockers will mock. But, Peter says, “No matter, because these things that have been prophesied of are absolutely sure.”

Jump down to verse 14:

II Peter 3:14-16 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

Now you know that the time of the end is the context of chapter 3. And Peter’s concern is that the people are becoming weary, becoming tired. Time is going on. And people are growing restless with having to keep their guard up as it were; always having to be alert, and on attention.

And so,

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

So, be found in Him; be steadfast; grow in the grace and knowledge, because that is what important.

It is not important that we know when Christ is going to return. And it is always going to seem longer than we would like it to be. We would like it to be soon. I will not say, "Right now," because I do not know if I am ready right now.

But, let us trust God to have the wisdom to know when His people are ready, and account that the time that He has given is for our benefit, for our good, and that we need the time to continue to grow, to continue to become perfected and prepared for what He wants to use us for in His Kingdom, because if He came before the time that we are ready, then we would not be prepared. We could not work for Him as well as we should.

In addition to that if we knew the time that He was coming, believe me brethren, it would work to our detriment, and we would begin to let down; we would not grow; we would go to sleep; we would quit working, just like those in II Thessalonians.

Let us thank God for His wisdom, and continue to ask Him, "How long, O Lord," but do not expect an answer.