

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

RELATING TO

THE RETURN OF JESUS
CHRIST

BY

RAY EWART

(VALID QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN A STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER)

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INTRODUCTION

No one has all the answers! This booklet is not an attempt to show that I have more answers than someone else. It is simply the outcome of inviting questions and providing answers in an attempt to advance our knowledge and understanding of the most important event that will ever occur in the future of this world, namely the return of Jesus Christ. We can be certain that more questions will arise in the future, but perhaps this exercise will encourage us to “search the Scriptures” (John 5.39), as the Bereans did (Acts 17.11), for that is the only place where we will find the correct answers.

In a previous book (“Your Redemption Draweth Nigh”) I attempted to identify where we are in God’s program of events leading up to Christ’s return and then to determine the approximate sequence of events that would lead to that climax. When I had completed the main text of the book I had a significant number of copies printed and distributed to people of varying views on the subject, requesting comments and questions on my views. Responses were encouraging and I included a brief section of “Questions and Answers” in the finalised version of the book. That exercise led me to the conclusion that a volume devoted to questions and answers is sorely needed. Hence this little volume!

Shortly after release of the finalised edition of “Your Redemption Draweth Nigh” I was invited to the Philippines for a brief preaching tour, to speak on aspects of the views I had expressed in the book. All meetings concluded with question and answer sessions and these were so profitable that I became even more enthused about producing this little

volume. There could be few more effective ways of advancing people's knowledge and understanding of the subject than to let them ask questions and then proceeding to provide answers supported by Scriptures. After the tour, questions continued to come to me by email. In the following pages I have attempted to address all issues raised.

APPROACH

For sake of clarity my approach is to make all points by way of a QUESTION and an ANSWER. To reduce the complexity of the answers I have, where possible, limited each question to one issue. Answering some questions tends to beg other questions but I have limited the answers to addressing solely the question that has been asked.

The questions are worded as closely as possible to questions that have been put to me, either by email or in Bible Study Groups or during one-to-one discussions or in "question and answer sessions" after preaching in meetings. However, in some cases I have amended the wording of the submitted questions to make either the intent of the question, or the wording of the answer more clear. The answers have been kept as short as possible but, at the same time, I have tried to answer all aspects of the questions.

Some questions and answers inevitably overlap. In these instances I have tried to avoid unnecessary repetition.

So that readers understand my personal views on the subject I have worded the first question in such a way as enables me to state what I believe.

The critically important aspect of the approach is that all answers are supported by references to the Scriptures. We have no other sound basis for our beliefs.

For consistency I have used only one version of the Scriptures for quotations and references. In my previous book, "Your Redemption Draweth Nigh", I used the King James Version, so, for any connection that may be made between it and this booklet I have stayed with that version.

In the course of answering the questions it is inevitable that theological terms and religious jargon will be used. The Appendix at the end of the book explains the meaning of all terms considered to fall into that category.

Truth is important! We need to be careful regarding what we believe and what we teach. We should take seriously WHAT WE BELIEVE on this important subject. Wrong beliefs lead to wrong attitudes and wrong actions. We should not, however, take OURSELVES too seriously. God will not alter His predetermined plans to suit what any of us believe, nor will He ask for our advice on any of His plans.

In my experience most people believe what they have been taught, without closely checking it against the Scriptures. No sincere person would teach something unless they believed it. We should not, therefore, attack one another over our beliefs, but, rather, we should discuss our

beliefs openly, not fearing questions, to discover whether or not our beliefs stand scrutiny in light of the Word of God. I trust this booklet proves useful in that regard.

In my early years as a believer I was taught by Dispensationalists. They were godly men and I respected their knowledge and sincerity. However, as I studied the Word of God for myself I began to see that such teachings as a two-stage return of Christ and the supporting belief in a “Secret” Rapture were not supported by the Scriptures. Eventually, in my reading of the Word of God, the whole dispensational system of the Church beginning at Pentecost and ending at an assumed secret Rapture with different gospels (of grace and of the kingdom) began to crumble before the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

My hope and prayer is that this booklet will encourage and assist discussion of the subject of the return of Jesus Christ and that misconceptions, including any I currently possess, will be dispelled and will give way to a true understanding of the teaching contained in God’s Word.

VIEWS REFLECTED IN THE QUESTIONS

Anyone studying the Lord’s return very quickly learns that there are many schools of thought on the subject. As questions were put to me it

seemed, to me, that the majority of them were coming from people who had a background of Dispensationalist teaching. I must admit that this did not surprise me. In my experience I have found that people of a dispensationalist persuasion have (quite rightly) a keen interest in the subject.

My reason for drawing this to the attention of those who read this booklet is to dispel any impression you might gain from reading it that I have loaded it with questions that give me an opportunity to attack the Dispensationalist position in particular. I have named and highlighted the Dispensational position (giving a definition of it in the Appendix) because it appears to lie behind so many of the questions, but the questions themselves are simply those that have been put to me.

My views are made clear in the book (“Your Redemption Draweth Nigh”) and I have, in simple language, repeated them, up front, in the answer to question 1. Naturally my views set me at odds with every other school of thought on the subject. I have not, however, named those other schools of thought, nor have I made mention of the methods of interpretation of Scripture that lead to differing views, simply because I wished to avoid theological terms and religious jargon.

In restricting myself to naming only one set of views opposed to my own I have probably named Dispensationalism in instances where they share a specific belief with other schools of thought. If so, I apologise to Dispensationalists (whom I love as fellow-believers) for any impression I have created that they are the only ones with whom I differ on those points.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

In your opinion, what is the broad sequence of events relating to the return of Jesus Christ?

ANSWER

In my opinion several prophecies have yet to be fulfilled before the Lord returns. As they are fulfilled I see the sequence of events to be as follows:

- Israel will be invaded by a confederacy of nations as foretold in Ezekiel 38 and 39
- The Jews will rebuild a temple (that the Beast will enter to fulfil 2 Thessalonians 2.4)
- There will be a falling away among believers as prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2.3
- The Beast will come on the world scene as 2 Thessalonians 2.3 foretells
- The Great Tribulation will occur as the Lord said in Matthew 24.21

- Immediately after the Tribulation the Lord will return as set out in Matthew 24.29-31
- His return is glorious as Matthew 24.30 says
- His glorious return includes the Rapture of the saints as Matthew 24.31 says.

Many more Scriptures could be referred to in support of this sequence of events. Several of them will be cited in the answers to subsequent questions.

QUESTION 2

Will the return of Christ be a single event or a two-stage event?

ANSWER

It will be a single event.

The return of Jesus Christ is described and referred to in many passages of the Scriptures (for example: Daniel 2.44 and 7.13-14, 18, 22 and 27; Zechariah 14; Matthew 13.24-30 and 36-43, 24.1-25.46 and parallel passages in the other synoptic gospels; John 14.2-3; Acts 1.9-11 and 3.19-21; 1 Corinthians 15.51-54; 1 Thessalonians 2.19, 3.12-13, 4.13-5.11 and 5.23; 2 Thessalonians 1.3-2.14; Titus 2.11-14; Hebrews 9.24-28, 10.37 and 12.25-29; James 5.7-9; 1 Peter 1.13 and 5.2-4; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2.28-3.3;

Jude 14-15 and Revelation 1.7, 25-28, 3.11-12, 6.12-17, 11.15-19, 16.15, 19.11-20.6, 22.12-13 and 20). Not one of these passages makes any reference whatsoever to a two-stage return. ALL ENVISAGE A SINGLE EVENT!

In a passage like Hebrews 9.24-28 emphasis is laid on the fact that it is ONLY ONE EVENT. Notice that in verse 26, when referring to His first coming it says, “but now ONCE in the end of the world He hath appeared”. This truth is repeated in verse 28 where it says, “Christ was ONCE offered to bear the sins of many” and it goes on to say, “and unto those that look for Him He shall appear A SECOND TIME without sin unto salvation”. Clearly Jesus is coming back ONCE. Just as there was ONE first coming there will be ONE second coming (not a second and a third coming).

QUESTION 3

Will there be a “secret” Rapture? By this I mean will Jesus Christ come back, unknown by the world, to take His saints away?

ANSWER

No. Scripture knows nothing of such an event.

As stated in the answer to Question 2, the Lord is only coming back once. That coming will be witnessed publicly as Revelation 1.7 confirms, “every

eye shall see Him". It will be the least secret thing this world has ever experienced. Matthew 24 confirms it when it says in verse 30, "then shall all tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory".

The saints will be Raptured (caught up) at this glorious coming.

QUESTION 4

Will the saints be Raptured before The Great Tribulation?

ANSWER

No. They will be Raptured (caught up), as the Lord returns, just after The Great Tribulation.

This is made clear in Matthew 24.29-31. Verse 29 sets the timing as, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days"(and verse 21 describes that tribulation as the worst the world has ever, or will ever, experience). According to verse 30 it is "THEN" that the Lord returns, in glory, and at this point in time, as set out in verse 31, the saints are caught up and "gathered together". As 2 Thessalonians 2.1 confirms, it is a "gathering together to Him (Christ)".

QUESTION 5

Does the Rapture of the saints occur at the same time as Christ's return in glory?

ANSWER

Yes. Many events occur subsequent to the Lord's return in glory (as referred to or described in such passages as Revelation 11.15-19 and 19.11 - 20.4). One of the very immediate events is the Rapture of the saints, as described in Matthew 24.29-31 and referred to in the answer to the previous question.

QUESTION 6

Is the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 (which I take to be the Rapture of the saints) the same event as is described in Matthew 24.31?

ANSWER

Yes. 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 is regarded as the classic description of the Rapture of the saints. Oddly enough it is used by many to try to support the false notion of a “secret Rapture”. This is very odd since the passage depicts a noisy, openly visible, world-wide event of immense proportions i.e.:

- There is the “shout”, v.16 (compare with John 5.25)
- There is the “trump”, v.16
- There are millions rising from the dead
- There are millions of saints being transformed and caught up, v.17

Portraying such an event as unseen by the world is stretching the imagination beyond breaking point. It should also be pointed out that those who believe this to be secret have been the very ones to fail to keep it a secret, for it figures highly in their public preaching and in their teaching materials and their fictional writings and movies.

1 Thessalonians 4 13-18 is completely consistent with the Matthew 24 account, as can be seen by:

- The Lord Himself descending -1 Thess.4.16/Matt.24.30
- The sound of the trumpet-1 Thess.4.16/Matt.24.31
- The catching up of the saints-1Thess.4.17/Matt.24.31
- The presence of angels-1Thess.4.16/Matt.24.31

This conclusion is confirmed when other passages of Scripture are brought into the comparison. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4.16 says that “the dead in Christ shall rise”. Revelation 20.5, as part of the detailed description of the Lord’s return (Revelation 19.11-20.6) tells us that the Rapture occurs at the end of The Great Tribulation (after the Beast is destroyed – Revelation 19.20).

QUESTION 7

Could it be that Matthew 24 is written just for the Jews and 1Thessalonians 4.13-18 is for Gentile believers (meaning that Jews go through The Great Tribulation and Gentile Christians do not)?

ANSWER

No. There are several reasons why that could not possibly be the case.

Matthew 24 tells us about many things that will happen to the nation of Israel, but the information is given for all (both Jew and Gentile) to know. Matthew chapter 24 continues into chapter 25. The Lord’s answer to the question(s) posed in 24.3 runs from 24.4 to 25.46. The whole world is involved in and affected by the false Christs of 24.5, the wars of 24.6, the upheavals of 24.7 etc.; saved Jews and Gentiles are involved in the spread

of the gospel (24.14); and most certainly the whole world is involved in the return of Jesus Christ (24.27-31) and the events that follow it (25.31-46). Clearly the passage is for Jew and Gentile, believer and unbeliever.

In addition it should be remembered that:

- There is only ONE resurrection of the just (Luke 14.14, John 5.29, Revelation 20.4-6) so there could not be two resurrection events for Christians (one for Jews and one for Gentiles).
- Saved Jews and saved Gentiles have been brought together into one body (the Church) (Ephesians 2.11-22).
- The answer to question 4 confirmed that the Rapture of the saints occurs after The Great Tribulation, so believers (Jews and Gentiles) will go through that tribulation.
- The answer to question 6 confirmed that Matthew 24.31 and 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 describe the same event.

For all of these reasons the answer to the question must be “No”.

QUESTION 8

Jesus made a promise to His disciples in John 14.3 “that where I am there you may be also”. Is this promise for the disciples only or Jews only or all of His true followers, both Jews and Gentiles? Do all true believers, whether Jew or Gentile, have the same ultimate destination?

ANSWER

John 14.3 can be linked to other Scriptures (such as John 12.26 and 17.24) but the same promise is made to all the saints caught up to meet the Lord when He returns (1 Thessalonians 4.17 “so shall we ever be with the Lord.”).

All true, born again believers (the Church) whether Jew or Gentile, will have the same ultimate destination. I believe that when Jesus made that promise in John 14.3 He was referring to the new heaven and the new earth described in Revelation 21. In that chapter we see the Church, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (v.9). The “Lamb” is with His bride (vs.3 and 22-23).

QUESTION 9

In referring to the return of Jesus Christ Scripture uses three different words, namely parousia, epiphaneia, and apokalupsis. Do these words describe one and the same event or do they suggest that He will return more than once for different purposes?

ANSWER

Each of the words refer to exactly the same event, namely the one and only return of Jesus Christ.

- “epiphaneia” refers to His return IN GLORY (Titus 2.13)
- “apokalupsis” also refers to His return IN GLORY (1 Peter 4.13)
- “parousia” and “epiphaneia” are a used of the same event (2 Thessalonians 2.8) – His return IN GLORY

2 Thessalonians 2 is an interesting chapter in that TWO OF THE WORDS OCCUR IN REFERENCE TO THE ONE EVENT. Verse 1 says “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming (“parousia”) of our Lord Jesus Christ...” and verse 8 goes on to speak of that coming by saying that the Lord “shall destroy (the Beast) with the brightness (“epiphaneia”) of His coming (“parousia”)”.

It is obvious that the words are used interchangeably.

It is also worth noting that, while “epiphaneia” is used to refer to the return of the Lord, the other two words are by no means used exclusively to refer to the return of Jesus Christ. Parousia is used of the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16.17), the coming of Titus (2 Corinthians 7.6) and the coming of Paul (Philippians 1.26) etc. and apokalupsis is used to refer to the light to lighten the Gentiles (Luke 2 32), the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8.19) and spiritual revelations (2 Corinthians 12.1 and 7) etc.. This dispels any notion that these words are designated for some particular purpose of defining a doctrine or revealing hitherto unknown details about the return of Jesus Christ.

- Dispensational Teaching says that “epiphaneia”, translated “appearing, manifestation, or brightness” and “apokalupsis”, translated “revelation” both refer to the post-tribulation return of Jesus Christ WITH His saints, but that, “parousia”, translated “coming, presence or advent” refers to the pre-tribulation coming of the Lord FOR His saints. Most certainly “epiphaneia” and “apokalupsis” refer to the post-tribulation return of Jesus Christ, but so does “parousia”, for 1 Thessalonians 3.13 speaks of “the coming (parousia) of our Lord WITH His saints”. The truth is that it is ONE, POST-TRIBULATION RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST both WITH and FOR His saints, as is portrayed in 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 where “the Lord Himself” (v.16) descends from heaven bringing them “which sleep in Jesus” (v.14) WITH Him as He comes FOR those who “are alive and remain” (v.17).

QUESTION 10

Where did the false teaching of a two-stage return of Jesus Christ come from?

ANSWER

It did not come from the Scriptures!

By that I mean that it did not come from correct interpretation of the Scriptures. It came from Mis-interpretation. I need to say this because my purpose in writing this booklet is to give answers from the Scriptures.

The answer to question 2 makes it clear that there is only one return of Jesus Christ and Matthew 24.29 tells us that it will be “Immediately after the tribulation”.

The modern form of Dispensationalism traces its beginnings to the teachings of John Nelson Darby from the Plymouth Brethren Movement. At the third Powerscourt Conference in 1833 Darby introduced his pre-tribulation Rapture theory. Other leaders disagreed with his views and ensuing debates led to a split in the movement. Darby’s views gained wide acceptance leading to the establishment of an elaborate dispensational system.

His views are seen to have closely followed those expressed earlier by the charismatic, defrocked Scots Presbyterian Edward Irving, who established the Catholic Apostolic Church, and similar beliefs can be traced back to sixteenth century Roman Catholic scholars, but, in a sense, the origins of the belief are irrelevant. The important thing is to identify wrong doctrine and avoid it.

QUESTION 11

The Great Tribulation is prophesied in the Old Testament (Daniel 12.1) and it is spoken of as the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30.7)

indicating that it is for the nation of Israel. Why should we believe that members of the Church will go through it?

ANSWER

It is true that Israel will go through The Great Tribulation. However, it is not exclusively for them. The Old Testament made it clear that it is for “all the inhabitants of the earth” and “all flesh” (Jeremiah 25.30-31), and the New Testament confirms that it shall come upon “all the world” (Revelation 3.10).

A great deal of information is given in the book of The Revelation as to what will happen in the world during that period (particularly in chapters 6 to 19) but it is clear that the children of God (i.e. born again believers, both Jews and Gentiles) will be here on earth during that time. In the chapters referred to they are called “the servants of our God” (ch. 7 v. 3), those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (ch.12 v.17) and “the saints” (ch.13 v.7).

The reason “Why” we should believe it is simple, namely, because the Scriptures tell us so. In some ways, though, it is strange that we ask why they will be there. The saints of God have gone through every other period of tribulation in the world. Why should they not go through this one?

QUESTION 12

Do you think that the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11.15 and the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15.52 are one and the same?

ANSWER

Yes. There are several things that lead me to this conclusion, namely

- The seventh trumpet of Revelation 11.15 is the LAST of the seven trumpets referred to in Revelation 8.2 and 6.
- We are told in Revelation 10.7 that “in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished,”.
- When the seventh angel sounds, the Lord returns (Revelation 11.15-18).
- The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15.52 is called “the LAST trump (trumpet)”.
- When the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15.52 sounds the Lord returns (1 Corinthians 15.51-57).

There can be only ONE last trumpet, so both passages must refer to the same trumpet.

QUESTION 13

Are the seven churches mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 future congregations?

ANSWER

No. They are churches that existed in John's day. John was instructed to write to them (Revelation 1.11, 2.1, 2.8, 2.12, 3.1, 3.7, 3.14).

However, the messages sent to these churches have lessons for all churches at all times, and a reasonable case can be made to suggest that the condition of the churches selected for the messages give an indication of the condition of churches in general, down the ages.

Scriptures have a primary intent but they can have more than one application.

QUESTION 14

Revelation 16.15 and 1 Thessalonians 5.2 refer to the Lord coming as a thief in the night. Do these verses prove the secret Rapture?

ANSWER

No. They confirm that we do not know the timing of the Lord's return, but when He returns it will be the most public event that has ever occurred (Revelation 1.7).

Both Scriptures, in their context, show that the Lord's return will be very public and will occur at the end of The Great Tribulation.

Revelation 16.15 sees the Lord making the promise just before the gathering at Armageddon (V.16). The battle with the Beast and his armies has arrived and the Lord has not yet returned! His return is described in detail (19.11 - 20.6) and as He returns He destroys the Beast (19.19-20) and sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 5.2 is part of a narrative that runs from chapter 4 verse 13 to chapter 5 verse 11. In this passage we see the Lord return (4.16), the resurrection of the saints (4.16), the transformation of the living saints (4.17) and the destruction of the wicked (5.3).

The passages support each other and are consistent with all other passages describing the Lord's return.

It is worth noting that verses 4 and 5 of I Thessalonians 5 tell us that the day of the Lord's coming will not overtake believers as a thief.

QUESTION 15

God's wrath will be poured out during The Great Tribulation (Revelation 15.1). 1 Thessalonians 5.9 says "God has not appointed us to wrath". Does this not contradict a post-tribulation Rapture?

ANSWER

In 1 Thessalonians Paul mentions God's wrath more than once. In chapter 1 verse 10 he says they are waiting for the return of "Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". The wrath to come when Jesus returns is eternal wrath in hell. This is the wrath referred to in chapter 5 verse 9. The saints have not been appointed to that wrath, but rather they have been appointed to salvation. This is what the verse clearly says, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,".

The verse makes no reference to The Great Tribulation and it has nothing to say about the timing of the Rapture.

If the saints needed to be removed from the earth to be protected from times of God pouring out His wrath then they would have had to be removed many times in the past and we should not be on the earth today. Just take a concordance and look up the references to God's wrath. It has been poured out in the past (Exodus 15.7) and it will continue to be poured out (Ephesians 5.6). It makes no sense that God should choose

one particular period of the pouring out of His wrath to take His children out of the world.

During The Great Tribulation God will, as you say, pour out wrath (Revelation 15.1) but the saints will be protected from it (compare Revelation 7.1-3 and 9.4) (and, of-course they are protected from it BECAUSE THEY ARE ON EARTH DURING IT!). At this same time Satan will be pouring out his wrath (Revelation 12.12) and evil men will be pouring out their wrath (Revelation 13.7) and the saints will suffer from both of these sources (Revelation 12.17 and 13.7).

The answer is clear. There is no contradiction. 1 Thessalonians 5 records the facts:

- The wicked will suffer destruction – V.3
- The saints will receive salvation – V.9
- Both events will occur on “the DAY of the Lord” – vs.2-4 (after The Great Tribulation).

QUESTION 16

In my understanding THE CHURCH was built by Jesus Christ when He was on earth (Matthew 16.18) and this is the secret revealed in Ephesians 2.13-19 and 3.1-6. Is it not correct, then, to conclude that ISRAEL and THE CHURCH must be separate and be distinguished from each other?

Consequently, what God promised to ISRAEL (an earthly kingdom) cannot be given to the Church and what has been promised to THE CHURCH (a heavenly kingdom) cannot be given to Israel?

ANSWER

This is an important question. It has, however, some errors, mixed with some truths. We need to separate the two before clear answers can be given.

TRUTHS: * Yes, ISRAEL and THE CHURCH are different and separate

- ISRAEL is a nation (Romans 9.1-5 + 11.1)
- THE CHURCH is Christ's body (Ephesians 1.18-23)

* Yes, ISRAEL will receive the earthly kingdom promised to it

* Yes THE CHURCH will receive the heavenly kingdom promised to it

ERRORS: * No, Jesus did not complete the building of the church when He was here on earth.

- Matthew 16.18 confirms that the church is a work in progress

* No, Ephesians chapters 2 and 3 do not show the church as a completed work

- It is seen as a work in progress

Having said this, a few statements should clear the way for straightforward answers.

First, Israel is a nation. From it was first formed (as promised to Abram in Genesis 12.2) until the end of time it will remain a nation (Jeremiah 31.35-37). God cannot lie (Titus 1.2) so He will fulfil every promise He has made to it, including the earthly kingdom (which will see its ultimate fulfilment in the Millennial Kingdom – Micah 4.1-4, Zechariah 8.23, 14.9 + 16, etc.).

Second, The Church, as Christ's body, consists of all true believers (Old Testament and New Testament – Ephesians 2.19-20, Jew and Gentile – Ephesians 3.6). In this regard, the "mystery" (Ephesians 3.4) revealed in the passages referred to in the question is that Jews and Gentiles are part of the ONE body (Ephesians 3.6). This is the whole thrust of both passages and Paul is seen to be involved, by grace (Ephesians 3.2) in the ongoing work of building The Church (Ephesians 3.7-12). This is consistent with Christ's statement in Matthew 16.18 that He "WILL" build His Church i.e. it is a work that is not yet finished (nor will it be finished until the last member of the Church is brought within the fold - John 10.16). God will fulfil every promise made to The Church, including the heavenly kingdom (Revelation 21.9-27).

Third, saved Jews are part of the Jewish nation by natural birth. They do not cease to be Jews when they are saved, just as I did not cease to be British. During the Millennium The Church (through the "first Resurrection" – Revelation 20.4-6) will be on earth to enjoy that kingdom (Daniel 7.27), and saved Jews as members of The Church and members of the nation of Israel, will share in that kingdom (Luke 22. 28-30).

On the basis of these facts the answers are straightforward. Yes, Israel and the Church are separate and, yes, each will receive what God has promised to it.

QUESTION 17

Some dispensationalists, on the basis of Matthew 24.12-13 + 22, teach that during the tribulation people will be saved by works. Is this true?

ANSWER

No. Scripture is clear regarding the ONE AND ONLY way of salvation. It is by means of the rebirth alone (John 3.3). It is “by grace”, “through faith” and definitely “not of works” (Ephesians 2.8-10).

No salvation results from human works (Romans 3.20). As Isaiah 64.6 says, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” in God’s sight. Many Scriptures could be quoted to reinforce this truth.

As you say, some dispensationalists teach salvation by works during The Great Tribulation. False cults teach salvation by works during all times. All such teaching is wrong.

Matthew 24.22 is talking about “flesh” being saved, so it is not talking about eternal salvation. It is referring to physical survival. Matthew 24.11-12 refers to the difficulties and persecutions of The Great Tribulation causing many to grow cold in the faith and testing the genuineness of their faith. The genuine will endure, but those who are not genuine will fall away (1 John 2.18-19).

QUESTION 18

Some dispensationalists say that “the gospel of the kingdom” (referring to the earthly kingdom promised to the Jews) was preached to the Jews (Mark 1.14), but, when they rejected Christ the “gospel of grace” (Acts 20.24) was introduced to include the Gentiles. Is this correct?

ANSWER

No. Many titles are used for the gospel and each title draws attention to a different aspect of the gospel, for example:

- The gospel of your salvation (Ephesians 1.13) for it leads us to salvation
- The gospel of peace (Ephesians 6.15) for it brings peace
- The gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1.1) for Christ died for our sins,

and many other relevant titles could be quoted, but they are the same gospel. The title “gospel of the kingdom” is appropriate because, by salvation, we are made citizens of Christ’s Kingdom (Colossians 1.13-14) and the title “the gospel of grace” is appropriate because we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2.8-10). They are, however, THE SAME GOSPEL.

Some people teach that God changed His plans when the nation of Israel rejected Christ. This is false teaching. God knew they would reject Christ. It was written in Isaiah 53. God knows everything that will happen before it happens (Isaiah 46.9-10) so He never needs to change His plans. This is

exactly what James was saying in relation to the spread of gospel preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15.13-18).

The “gospel of the kingdom” is the very title used in Matthew 24.14 for gospel preaching that will continue until the Lord returns.

One of the gospel’s titles is “the everlasting gospel” (Revelation 14.6) indicating that it is the ONLY gospel FOR ALL TIME. Paul rejects any and all other gospels as false and prays for a curse on those who preach them (Galatians 1.6-9).

It is interesting that the title “everlasting gospel” is used during The Great Tribulation (another period when false teaching says there will be salvation by works).

QUESTION 19

Who or what is the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2.6?

ANSWER

The answer involves both a WHO and a WHAT!

The New King James Version of the Scriptures refers to “WHAT is restraining” in verse 6 and “He WHO now restrains” in verse 7 of 2 Thessalonians 2. The King James Version uses the words “WHAT

withholdeth” in v.6 and “he WHO now letteth” in v.7, but the meaning is the same.

Paul had spoken to the Thessalonians before on this subject (see v.5) so he only had to add a little information and he was confident that they would understand what was to happen before the “man of sin” (the Beast) would appear on the world scene (v.6). In 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 he had told them about the Rapture and everything that would happen then. Now he tells them that the Rapture will not occur until the Beast appears (v. 1-3) and is destroyed (v.8). In 1 Thessalonians 5.3 he had told them that times of supposed safety in the world would prove to be times that would bring sudden destruction and would herald “the day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5.2-4). He had warned them against slackness (1 Thessalonians 5.6) in light of the “falling away” there would be among professing Christians (2 Thessalonians 2.3, compare Matthew 24.12, 1 Thessalonians 4.1 etc.) and he gave them further warning (2 Thessalonians 2.1-5).

He was talking to well instructed people in 2 Thessalonians and, consequently we need to have background knowledge to enable us to understand its teaching. The restrainer/withholder is in view in verses 3 to 8. It refers to WHATEVER has to happen before the time comes for the Beast to arrive on the world scene. This would include the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem for him to defile (v.4) and every other “sign of the times” that has to be fulfilled (so that is the WHAT part of the answer). God controls all events (so He is the WHO side of the answer). God may choose to do things Himself or He may choose to do things through agents (either angels or humans). If agents are used they become part of the WHO.

Oswald J. Smith in his booklet “Tribulation or Rapture – Which?” comments on v.7 saying he concludes that the first “he” is God, since He controls all things, and the second “he” is the Beast because the last part of the verse should be translated, “is revealed in the midst”. Oswald’s comments would lead to a translation of the verse somewhat as follows: “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only God who now restrains will do so until the man of sin is revealed in the midst”.

Whatever the wording of verse 6 may be the message of the chapter is clear:

- The Rapture will not occur until the Beast appears and is destroyed
- The Beast will not appear until everything that has been prophesied as prior occurs
- When those prophecies have been fulfilled the Beast will appear
- When the Lord returns He will deal with all evil and complete our salvation
- In all this, as in all God’s plans and purposes, we can take comfort.

QUESTION 20

1 Corinthians 15.25 and Hebrews 10.13 speak of enemies being put under Christ’s footstool. Does this refer to Christ’s millennial reign? Will these enemies be spiritual beings or human beings?

ANSWER

1 Corinthians 15.25 says, “For He (Jesus Christ) must reign, till He hath put ALL enemies under His feet”. Clearly it encompasses ALL enemies, whether they be “principalities and powers” (Ephesians 6.12), human beings (Revelation 20.13-14) or inanimate things (such as “death” as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15.26). Jesus will reign until every last enemy is defeated including:

- All enemies at the end of this age (Revelation 19.11-21),
- Satan and those who follow him at the close of the Millennium (Revelation 20.7-10),
- And all enemies who are present at the final judgement (Revelation 20.11-15).

QUESTION 21

Will the second coming of Jesus Christ be the same as His first coming, in that He will come to and live on the earth?

ANSWER

Yes, those aspects of His first and second advents will be the same. There will be many differences in His first and second comings (as Scriptures like

Hebrews 9.24-28 point out). At His first coming He came as a baby to spend some 33 years here, be rejected, to die for our sins, and to rise again as Saviour and Lord. At His second coming He comes as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”(Revelation 19.16) to set up His Millennial Kingdom on earth (Revelation 20.4-6), to judge (Revelation 20.11-15), to set up a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21.1) and to reign for ever (Revelation 22.3-5).

However, on your specific points, He will return to this same earth that He came to at His first advent (Acts 1.11 and Zechariah 14 4 +9). He will rule on this earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20.4-6) before carrying out the remainder of His plans (Revelation 11.16-18).

QUESTION 22

At the Rapture the saints will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4.17). Why do we meet Him in the air when we are going to return to the earth for the Millennium?

ANSWER

We live on a globe. Jesus will return to one place on this globe (Zechariah 14.4, “His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east”). In 2 Thessalonians 2.1 the Rapture is described as “our gathering together unto Him”. The only way the saints

from all parts of the world can be gathered unto Christ, in the one location, is for them to be” caught up” as described in 1 Thessalonians 4.17 and “gathered together” as described in Matthew 24.31.

QUESTION 23

Dispensationalists tell us that at the Rapture there will be absolute chaos with millions of Christians disappearing, planes crashing because their pilots disappeared, cars, trains and buses crashing because their drivers have disappeared, children left without parents etc. If the Millennium follows the Rapture how can there be peace on earth such as is described for the Millennial Kingdom?

ANSWER

The dispensational teaching regarding a secret Rapture before The Great Tribulation (at least seven years before the Millennium) is false. The timing is wrong and the alleged secrecy is wrong, as has been shown in the answers to earlier questions. The chaos is also wrong.

The only true assertion in the question is that there will be peace on earth during the Millennium (Micah 4.1-4). You can depend on that.

Jesus will rule, as promised (Zechariah 14.9) and His rule will be marked by peace and justice (Isaiah 9.6-7).

QUESTION 24

When and where will the judgement of saints and the marriage of the Lamb be?

ANSWER

As regards THE JUDGEMENT OF THE SAINTS, The Lord will return to the earth (Zechariah 14.4) to reign on the earth (Zechariah 14.9) for the millennium, with His saints (Revelation 20.4-6), so, the judgement of saints will be ON THE EARTH, JUST PRIOR TO THE MILLENNIUM. Having been judged (Matthew 25.30-32, Romans 14.10-12), they will receive their rewards during the Millennium (Matthew 19.27-30 and 25.14-23 +33-34, 1 Corinthians 3.13-15 and 6.2 etc.).

As regards THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB, it can only occur when the last saint is saved and THE BRIDE (the Lamb's wife) is complete. It would, therefore, occur after the Millennium. The last search of the Lamb's book of life (for names of saved people) is at the final ("great white throne") judgement (Revelation 20.11-15), and it is only after this that John is invited to see the Lamb's wife (Revelation 21,9). All of this leads me to believe that the marriage of the Lamb will take place ON THE NEW EARTH AFTER THE FINAL JUDGEMENT.

In Revelation chapter 19, when the return of the Lord is being anticipated by the great multitude in heaven (vs. 1-6) the following words are recorded, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (v.7). I take this to be a parallel passage to Revelation 11.16-19 where the twenty four elders are anticipating the same event (the return of the Lord) and the following words are recorded, "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath has come and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." (vs.17-18). This does not, as we know, mean that all of these things will happen immediately the Lord returns, for example, the judgement of the dead does not occur until a thousand years has passed (Revelation 20.5). The events are not even recorded in chronological order (for the saints are rewarded before the final judgement). Revelation 19.5 does, on this basis, not mean that the marriage of the Lamb occurs immediately after the Lord's return.

QUESTION 25

How and when will Israel and the Gentiles find peace and happiness?

ANSWER

It is highly unlikely that peace will be experienced for any lengthy period, for either Jew or Gentile, until the Lord returns. Scriptures like Matthew 24.6-8, Luke 21.25-26 and 2 Timothy 3.1-5 convey a picture of troubled times as the return of the Lord approaches. Times of peace will, however, come when “The Prince of Peace” returns and takes over the reins of government (Isaiah 9.6-70).

His reign (in the Millennial Kingdom) will make Jerusalem a place of peace and happiness (Isaiah 65.18-25). The Jews will be happy and the Gentiles will be reconciled to them (Micah 4.1-4 and Zechariah 8.23). Even old, traditional enemies will be reconciled (Isaiah 19.23-25).

QUESTION 26

Will there be any survivors from The Great Tribulation? If, as some teach, the believers are taken to heaven at the Rapture and all unbelievers are damned, because they followed the Beast and received his mark, there will be no one left to populate the Millennial Kingdom.

ANSWER

Yes, there will be many who will survive The Great Tribulation. The teaching that believers are taken to heaven at the Rapture is false, as is the teaching that all people on earth who have not been converted before Jesus returns will be sent to hell when He returns. As I expand on the answer to this question, I will explain what I believe Scripture teaches on these matters.

Several mentions are made of groups that survive, for example:

(i) Daniel 7.7-14+19-27 describes the last world empire before the return of Jesus Christ. It lasts a long time and experiences several changes (as also shown in Daniel 2.33-35 + 40-45). The “little horn” of verse 8 (being also the “the other” horn of verse 20) is the Beast and it is during The Great Tribulation that he makes war with the saints (v.21). At the end of the tribulation we have the return of Jesus Christ and His reign on earth (v’s 13-14 & 27). As all of this is described verses 11-12 tell us that when the Beast is slain the “rest of the Beasts” (i.e. other world powers) continue to live (i.e. survive The Great Tribulation). This means there will be many unconverted people of many nations who will live through The Great Tribulation and pass into the Millennium. This is seen in other Scriptures dealing with this time period, for example Zechariah chapter 14, where the Lord’s return in glory, at the end of The Great Tribulation, is seen in verses 1-4, His reign on earth is confirmed in verse 9 and, while multitudes are slain (verses 12-15), many are left (verse 16) and verses 17-18 show that, even during the Millennium

- (i) they will be rebellious. Another example would be Micah 4.1-4 where Gentiles from “many nations” are seen, during the Millennium, going up to the “house of God”. They obviously came through The Great Tribulation or were born to those who did.

- (ii) 1 Thessalonians 4.17 refers to believers who are “alive and remain” until the Lord returns. They take part in the Rapture and the coinciding “first resurrection” (1 Thessalonians 4 16-17, expanded on in 1 Corinthians 15.51-54 and set in context by Matthew 24.29-31 and Revelation 19.11 - 20.6 as being at the end of The Great Tribulation). Thus we see that many believers survive The Great Tribulation.

- (iii) Zechariah chapters 12, 13 and 14 tell the moving story of what is to be experienced by the Jews during The Great Tribulation. Many will perish (13.8) but many will survive (13.9). The survivors will say, “The Lord is my God” (13.9) for they will have been to the “fountain” for “sin and uncleanness” (13.1) and they will recognise their Messiah when He appears (Revelation 1.7). Thus the promises will be fulfilled that the nation of Israel will go through The Great Tribulation but will be “saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30.7).

We see, therefore, that many Jews, many unconverted Gentiles and many believers (“of all nations, kindreds and people” just like the great multitude spoken of in Revelation 7.9-17) will survive The Great Tribulation.

QUESTION 27

Does 2 Thessalonians 2.12 imply that every person who is unconverted when the Lord returns will be lost for all eternity and be immediately sent to hell? If it does not mean that does it mean that they are having a second chance? (And if people think they can just wait till Jesus comes, and then accept Him would this not breed complacency?)

ANSWER

This is an important question and each part needs a clear answer.

We have seen from Scriptures used in answering question 26 that many people who are unconverted will come through The Great Tribulation and continue to live into the Millennium, so the answer to the first part is, “no”.

This does not, however, mean that they have a second chance. The verse referred to (2 Thessalonians 2.12) says, “That they ALL might be damned WHO BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” To BELIEVE NOT the truth you have to HEAR and REJECT it. There will be many, many people in the world, when the Lord returns, who will never have heard the gospel. This will be the case, even though the gospel will have been “preached in all the world” (Matthew 24.14). In my younger days, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, a fellow workmate (in his mid twenties) asked me a question and I said, “The answer is in John 3.16”. He then asked, “Who is John?” I could hardly believe that a person of his age, living in Northern Ireland at a time when the gospel was preached on

almost every street corner, did not know the books of the Bible and, as it turned out, had never heard the gospel. I had the joy of seeing that young man converted several days later, but there are millions of people in the world today who have had no opportunity to respond to the gospel because they have never heard it (even though it is preached in their language). You cannot have a second chance until you have had a first chance.

There are several ways of thinking about the subject of a second chance. My own understanding of a second chance is the teaching that you have a chance of being saved after you die. This is false as is made clear in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31 – see v.26), and as is clear from the Lord's words in John 8, "if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (v.24) and, "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go ye cannot come" (v.21). When I think of my own circumstances I recall hearing the gospel many times before I accepted Christ as my Saviour and Lord. How many chances did I get? This would be true of many people! Would we then deny the right of some to a first chance?

If a person has heard the gospel and not accepted Christ (which is, in effect, the same as rejecting God's offer of salvation) then that person is INCLUDED in the number who will be damned according to 2 Thessalonians 2.12.

This, to me, means that there is no room for the foolishness of complacency. The only time we can be saved is when God The Father draws us (John 6.44). We do not know when He will cease to draw us, so it is only the fool who would be complacent. We do not need to die, nor does the Lord need to return, for that to happen. Whilst we do not need

to die for it to happen, our opportunity to be saved ends at death and we do not know when that will occur (Luke 12.20).

QUESTION 28

Philippians 1. 21-24 makes it clear that when a believer dies he/she goes directly to be with the Lord. If all the dead believers are now in heaven with the Lord, who will be resurrected when Jesus Christ returns?

ANSWER

When a Christian dies it is their soul and spirit that go to be with the Lord. The body dies and remains here on earth. Acts 7.54 - 8.2 records the death of Stephen. He sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing beside God The Father (7.56) and he asks the Lord to receive his spirit (7.59). His body is buried (8.2) and it is the body that will be resurrected, in its new, incorruptible form (1 Corinthians 15.44).

1 Thessalonians 4.13-17 describes what happens as the Lord returns. He brings WITH Him the souls and spirits of all the saints who have died as He comes FOR their resurrected bodies. Verse 16 says, “the dead in Christ shall rise” (that is, their bodies will rise to be reunited again with their souls and spirits and make them complete). As complete people we have body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5.23). This is the “first resurrection” (Revelation 20.5). Immediately after the resurrection of the saints who died the living saints are transformed and caught up (I Thessalonians 4.17). This is the Rapture.

So the answer to your question is clear. The bodies of ALL THE SAINTS WHO HAVE DIED will be resurrected when Jesus Christ returns.

QUESTION 29

I was reading Matthew 8.5-12 and was puzzled about two things. First, why will “the children of the kingdom” be “cast into outer darkness”? Second, if there is OUTER DARKNESS is there also such a thing as INNER DARKNESS? As I read on I came to Matthew 13.38 and it again uses the phrase “children of the kingdom”. Are these the same people as mentioned in Matthew 8.12?

The three questions seemed to me to be linked so I did not separate them.

ANSWER

In Matthew 8.5-12 Jesus is comparing the faith He found in the Gentile centurion with the lack of faith He had found in Israel. Through Abraham God had promised the nation of Israel a great future (Genesis 12 1-3 and 22.16-18). Paul reflects on it in Romans 3.1-2 and 9.4-5. As members of that nation they looked on themselves as “children of the kingdom” (i.e. God’s Kingdom) but, as a nation, Israel rejected Christ at His first coming (John 1.11). This led to Christ rejecting them (Matthew 21.42-43).

So it happened that people whom you would have expected to be in the kingdom were cast out, and this is what the Lord is referring to in Matthew 8.12. The answer to your first question is that they were excluded for lack of faith that led them to reject Jesus Christ. No true children of the kingdom will end up in outer darkness (John 8.12 and Colossians 1.12-13).

Whilst not part of your questions, a few things are worth noting, namely that membership of God's kingdom is a personal matter (John 3.3), the means of salvation is the same for everyone (John 14.6) and the earthly kingdom promised to Abraham and his descendants will be enjoyed by the faithful remnant (Romans 11.7)

As regards your second question, yes there is such a thing as INNER DARKNESS. Jesus warned us about our tendency to love darkness (John 3.19). If we do not follow Him that inner darkness is intense (Matthew 6.22-23) and Satan wants to keep us that way (2 Corinthians 4 3-4).

The answer to your third question is, no! Reading Matthew 13.38 in the context of the parable and the explanation the Lord gave of it (Matthew 13.24-30 and 36-43) "the good seed" are "the children of the kingdom". They are, therefore THE TRUE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM ("the righteous" of verse 43).

QUESTION 30

Revelation 13.8 seems to say that everyone on earth during The Great Tribulation will worship the Beast. Is this the case?

ANSWER

Whatever answer you come up with must stand the test of being in agreement with the teaching of other parts of the Scriptures that deal with the same subject (and there are many parts of the Scriptures that deal with this subject).

Take, for example Daniel 7.19- 27. The “saints” mentioned in Verse 27 are on the earth during The Great Tribulation. Many will be killed for their faith (others will survive and be Raptured when the Lord returns) but none of them will receive the mark of the Beast and each one has their name written in “the book of life of the Lamb”.

To save repetition, the answer to question 26 identifies Jews, unconverted Gentiles and believers of every nation who survive The Great Tribulation and enter the Millennial Kingdom. The answer to your question must, therefore, be “no”.

A careful look at Revelation 13.8 shows that the “ALL” spoken about have TWO QUALIFICATIONS, namely:

- (i) They are on earth during The Great Tribulation
- (ii) Their names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb

With the latter of these two qualifications they are doomed (Revelation 20.15)

The same group of people, with the same two qualifications, are spoken of in Revelation 17.8.

All the verse is saying is that everyone who is on earth during The Great Tribulation AND RECEIVES THE MARK OF THE BEAST will be lost.

QUESTION 31

Do we know who the 144,000 are who are spoken about in Revelation 7.1-8 and 14.1-5 and do we know whether, being Jews, they will serve the Lord in Israel only or more widely throughout the world?

ANSWER

No. All we know is what we are told:

- They are Jewish (7.4)
- They are numbered and the tribes they belong to are named (7.5-8)
- They are “sealed” for protection (7.3-4 and 9.4)
- They are servants (7.3)
- They are redeemed (9.1-5)

They are evidently a company who will serve the Lord in a significant way during The Great Tribulation. Being linked (by where they are spoken about) with the “everlasting gospel” (9.6) it is possible that they are evangelists. Also being linked to the “great multitude” who are saved from every nation during that period, it is likely that their ministry is worldwide. Chapter 7 starts by drawing our attention to “the four corners of the earth”, which may support the thought that their ministry is worldwide. This is, however, just speculation.

Identifying them is not essential for us (otherwise the Lord would have told us who they are) but it is encouraging for us to know that the Lord will be at work IN GRACE during The Great Tribulation.

QUESTION 32

Do we know who the “two witnesses” are who are spoken about in Revelation 11.1-13?

ANSWER

No. Some have speculated that one will be Moses and one will be Elijah (who both appeared with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration - Matthew 17 1-8) because they represent the Law and the Prophets.

Others have suggested that one will be Enoch and the other Elijah because they have not died (and all humans are under condemnation to die – Romans 5.12).

As in the case of the 144,000, it is not essential for us to know their identity, but it is encouraging to know that testimony and witness will be so openly displayed during The Great Tribulation.

QUESTION 33

Some dispensationalists say that the Lord's return is IMMIDENT. Do you believe He could return at any moment?

ANSWER

No. When the Lord was asked about His return (Matthew 24.3) He told His disciples that many things would happen before He would return (Matthew 24.4-31) The scope of the predicted happenings is such that it must have been obvious to His disciples that it would be a long time, in human terms, before He would return. There would be wars involving nations and kingdoms (v.5-7) and that would only be the start (v.8). The Jews would be dispersed (see the parallel passage in Luke 21.24), there would be worldwide preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24.14) and unprecedented tribulation (v.21-22) and only after it would the Lord return (v.29-30).

Paul did not expect the Lord to come back while he was alive for he said, “the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Timothy 4.6). He went on to say that he had finished his course and looked forward to receiving a crown of righteousness “at that day”, which he saw to be in the future when others would receive the same (2 Timothy 4.7-8). He spoke of what would happen after he died (Acts.20.29-30).

Peter did not expect the Lord to come back before he died, for he said, “shortly I must put off this my tabernacle” (2 Peter 1.14). He had known that to be true even before the Lord ascended (John 21.18-19). He was giving teaching that he hoped would be helpful to others after his death. He spoke of apparent delay in the Lord’s return, that would give rise to scoffers challenging whether He would return (but confirming that in the Lord’s timing, which could be thousands of years away, He would come!) (2 Peter 3.3-10).

It has indeed proved to be a long time, in human terms. This accords with the parable of the kingdom of heaven the Lord told, concerning the servants who received the talents (Matthew 25.14-30) in which He says the lord returned “After a long time” (v.19).

I could not count the number of times I have heard preachers say, “The Lord could come back tonight”. It has never been true and it never will be true until every last prophecy that must occur before the Lord returns is fulfilled. One very significant prophecy is that the Beast must appear on the world scene before “our gathering together to Him” (the Rapture) (2 Thessalonians 2.1-3).

Some preachers use this false teaching to emphasise to unbelievers the urgency of coming to the Lord. There is no need to use false teaching to

do that. The truth that anyone of us might die tonight, and go before the Lord for judgement, is sufficient to do it (Luke 12.20 and Hebrews 9.27).

The time for the Lord's return is not an any-moment matter. It is a fixed, appointed time (Acts 17.31), set to the very day and hour (Matthew 24.36) when everything that has to be fulfilled before it, has been fulfilled, even to the last martyr (Revelation 6.9-11).

QUESTION 34

Christ's disciples asked Him, "what shall be THE SIGN of your coming" (Matthew 24.3). From His answer, what do you think THE SIGN of His coming is?

ANSWER

The disciples may have thought that there would be ONE SPECIFIC SIGN that would have heralded His coming. What Jesus reveals, in His answer, is that there would be many "signs of the times" (to use a phrase the Lord uses in Matthew 16.3) that would PRECEDE His coming (Matthew 24.4-7 and 11-12)but, as the time of His return draws near, the signs WOULD BECOME MORE SPECIFIC (Matthew 24.14-29). THE FINAL SIGN would be THE LORD HIMSELF APPEARING IN THE HEAVENS (Matthew 24.30).

QUESTION 35

Is the “generation” referred to in Matthew 24.34 the generation living at the time the Lord was on earth, or is it the generation when the Lord returns?

ANSWER

It is the generation when all the specific, end time signs are fulfilled (Matthew 24.14-34) so, clearly it is the generation that will be on earth when the Lord returns. The implication is that when the final group of specific signs are fulfilled they will ALL be fulfilled in quick succession (within the course of one generation).

QUESTION 36

I have heard some dispensationalists say that the “falling away” in 2 Thessalonians 2.3 is the Rapture. Is this possible?

ANSWER

No. At the Rapture we go UP. The “falling away” has the connotation of going DOWN.

The Greek word “apostasia” translated “falling away” in 2 Thessalonians 2.3 occurs only twice in the Scriptures. In its other setting (Acts 21.21) it is translated “forsake”. The meaning is made clear by the context. In 2 Thessalonians 2 the subject is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him” (v.1). Verse 3 tells us that the man of sin (the Beast) will appear BEFORE the Lord comes and verse 8 tells us that the Lord will destroy the Beast AT His coming. The saints will not be Raptured (“gathered together unto Him”) until the Lord returns. The sequence of events is, therefore, clear:

- The Beast appears on the world scene
- The “falling away” occurs
- The Lord returns, rapturing the saints and destroying the Beast

The “falling away” and the Rapture are TWO SEPARATE EVENTS, one occurring before the other can take place. The interpretation suggested by the dispensationalists in question is, therefore, impossible!

The “falling away” is a reference to what will happen in church circles in end times, when “the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24.12) and sound doctrine will be rejected (2 Timothy 4.3-4) with true Christianity being replaced, in many instances, by a mere “form of godliness” that lacks reality (2 Timothy 3.1-5).

The decline in church attendance and an increase in professed atheism in several countries indicates a current “falling away”, but the “falling away” spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2.3 is likely to be more dramatic.

QUESTION 37

How do you explain the popularity of the false teaching concerning a secret Rapture?

ANSWER

I have many genuine, sincere Christian friends who believe in the secret Rapture. Most believe it because they have been taught that it is true. Many would not have searched the Scriptures to check whether or not it is true. Others have checked the Scriptures and think there is a case for it.

For my own part, I was taught by dispensationalists who believed in a secret Rapture but when I studied the Scriptures I came to the conclusion that the Rapture is a very open, visible, noisy, public event (1 Thessalonians 4.16-5.4, Matthew 24.29-31, Revelation 1.7 etc.).

I believe it is popular because the dispensationalists also say it will happen before The Great Tribulation (another of the many errors associated with their teachings – Matthew 24.29-30) and this leads people to believe they will escape the worst of the end time troubles.

To me it falls into the category of telling people what they wish to hear. There is a hymn that starts, “Am I a soldier of the cross?”. The second verse starts, “Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease” and that is what this belief promises. I am not surprised at its popularity, nor am I surprised that it is the most preached about subject at most dispensationalist prophetic conferences.

Regardless of the fact that many true, born-again believers hold to this doctrine, it has, to my mind to be placed in the category of “fables” to tickle “itching ears” spoken of in 2 Timothy 4.3-4. The many novels written about it are rightly classified as fiction.

QUESTION 38

How should we react to sincere Christians who have different views to our own on the interpretation of Scripture concerning the return of Jesus Christ?

ANSWER

Our attitude to fellow believers should always be motivated by love (John 13.34-35). We are always learning and the Lord can teach us much through other believers so, we should discuss our beliefs with other believers, in light of the Scriptures, humbly trying to advance our knowledge.

No one knows everything (1 Corinthians 13.9, “we know in part”). We dare not assume that we have got everything right. Nevertheless we should share what we believe clearly, openly and with conviction, quoting the Scriptures that have led us to our conclusions. We should listen attentively to what others have to say about our conclusions and take what they say into account. We should also not be slow to point out obvious errors in views that are expressed during discussions. Needless to say, if, in the midst of study or discussion, you discover that some of your hitherto held beliefs are wrong, you should forsake them and follow the teaching of Scripture.

We should avoid bitterness, personal attacks and divisions.

All of these things are brought out in the Scriptures as to how we should behave towards one another.

Understanding of many truths concerning the Lord’s return is helped by observation of what the Lord is doing in the world as time goes by, for example, those who believed God had finished His dealings with the nation of Israel (despite Romans 11.1 and its surrounding verses) would have had to revise their thinking when Israel became a nation again, in part of their promised land, in 1948. Strangely enough, many of that view thought the return of a remnant of Israel was of no consequence, so it can be difficult to predict peoples’ attitudes.

Acts 15.1-29 is a good example of sensible discussion. Everyone who had relevant input spoke up (vs.7, 12 and 13). What God was doing in the world was taken into account (v.7-11). The Scriptures were the essential guide (v. 13-21).

QUESTION 39

Do you foresee the possibility that an increasing number of believers will come to a united view regarding the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ?

ANSWER

Yes. As the return of the Lord approaches I am hopeful that an increasing number of true believers will study the Scriptures, relating to the subject, more seriously. It is also likely that as more prophecies are fulfilled more people will forsake false beliefs. The return of Israel, as a nation, to part of their own land, should (as I said in my answer to question 38) have reduced the number of people who followed Replacement Theology (i.e. the belief that Israel, as a nation was replaced by The Church).

Certainly, when the Beast appears on the world scene (2Thessalonians 2.3) and makes his covenant with the Jews (Daniel 9.27) it will show that there is to be no secret, pre-tribulation Rapture, so people will forsake that belief.

All of these things will lead to more unity of belief on the subject.

QUESTION 40

Is Matthew 24.37-42 a description of the Rapture? There is a similar passage in Luke 17.26-36.

ANSWER

No. Careful reading of the passages shows that the ones TAKEN are the LOST whereas, at the Rapture, the ones “caught up” are the saints (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17).

Matthew 24.37-39 refers to the time of Noah. The ones “taken away” were the people who were drowned. Noah and his family were the ones who were LEFT. Luke 17.26-27 is the same.

Luke 17.28-29 refers to the days of Lot. The ones taken away were the Sodomites.

The passages referred to in the question are consistent with the parable the Lord told and explained in Matthew 13.24-30 and 36-43. When the Lord comes He will “send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom ALL THINGS THAT OFFEND, AND THEM THAT DO INIQUITY” . This certainly is NOT a description of the Rapture.

QUESTION 41

At this stage we do not know WHEN the Lord will return (Matthew 24.36) and it would be foolish to try to predict when it will happen. However, will there be a time in the future when we will know, within certain limits, the timing of His coming?

ANSWER

As you say, it would be foolish, at this stage, to try to predict the time of the Lord's return. Several people have tried and, of-course they have failed and made themselves look foolish. Not only that, they have caused people to do rash things and brought criticism on the people of God in general.

There will come a time, though, when, as you say, we will know within certain limits, when the Lord will come. For example, believers who are on earth when the Beast appears (2 Thessalonians 2.3) and makes the covenant with Israel (Daniel 9.27) will know that it is approximately seven years away. Believers on earth when the Beast breaks that covenant (Daniel 9.27) will know that it is roughly three and a half years away. However, there will always be an element of surprise (Mark 13.35-37) and we will never be in a position to know, beforehand, the DAY nor the HOUR (Matthew 24.36).

The important thing is that we be ready (Matthew 24.44)

QUESTION 42

Many people find the prophecies concerning the Lord's return difficult to understand. Why do you think the Lord made them so?

ANSWER

The prophecies are typical of the Word of God in general. Some parts are easy to understand and some parts are not. The parts that are easy to understand leave us without excuse (Psalm 119.9, Isaiah 35.8). The parts that are difficult to understand require us to spend time studying them. This has a refining effect on us and is part of the process of being cleansed by God's Word (John 15.3 & 17.17 and Ephesians 5.26).

I Believe the Lord has made it so to draw us aside from the things of the world. If we wish to grow in knowledge of the things of the Lord we need to draw aside, seeking God's help, and take time to study. If we follow His plan, in this regard, we can be assured of the help of the Author of the Scriptures, The Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1.21) to understand its truth (John 16.13, 1 John 2.20).

Of some believers who will live in the last days before the Lord returns it says, "the wise shall understand"(Daniel 12.10). We should strive to be counted among the wise (John 7.17).

APPENDIX

It is impossible to answer a wide range of questions on this subject without using some theological terms and religious jargon. I have set out below definitions of words used, in the questions and answers, which might not be familiar to some readers. In defining the words I have tried to convey, in plain language, the sense in which I have used them.

The words have been arranged in alphabetical order.

BEAST The Beast is an individual who will be born shortly before the Lord returns. He will rise to prominence as a ruler in the last phase of the last world empire, eventually becoming the most prominent leader. He will fulfil many prophecies, including proclaiming himself to be God. He is given several titles in the Scriptures, including “little horn” (Daniel 7.8), “that man of sin” and “the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2.3) and, of-course, “the beast” (Revelation 19.19).

BORN AGAIN This is a term used to describe a person who has become a Christian. When a person realises that he/she is a sinner, acknowledges that he/she can never merit salvation, repents of his/her sin confessing it to God and asking God to save him/her, God saves that person by rebirth. It is a spiritual rebirth brought about by God The Holy Spirit. It is the only way anyone can become a member of God’s family and be assured of a place in heaven. It is spoken of in Scriptures like John 1.11-13, John 3.1-8, 1 Corinthians 12.13, etc. It is the most important thing that can happen to you in the course of your life. If you have not experienced it you should ask your pastor about it. If you do not know whether or not you have

experienced it then it is almost certain that you have not, for it transforms your life (2 Corinthians 5.17) and gives you an inner assurance that you are a child of God (Romans 8.14-17) with a place reserved for you in heaven (1 Peter 1.3-5).

BRIDE The “bride of Christ” is THE CHURCH (see below), also referred to as “the Lamb’s wife”.

CHURCH The Church is the total number of saints as a group. It consists of ALL the saints from every age of time and every nation. It is referred to in Scripture by many names, for example, the “body” of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1.22-23), the “Household of God” (Ephesians 2.19), an “holy temple” (Ephesians 2.21), an “holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2.5), an “holy nation” (1 Peter 2.9), a “fold” (John 10.16) etc. The word church (singular and plural) is also used in Scripture to refer to local congregations like the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 asked about in question 13, but when the reference is to “THE” church it is the body of Christ that is in view.

CONCORDANCE A book containing an alphabetical list of the principal words in the Bible, defining their meaning and showing where they are used.

DISPENSATIONAL A system of interpreting the Scriptures by assuming that God acts differently towards mankind during various time periods. For example, John 1.17 says, ‘For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’ **DISPENSATIONAL TEACHING** interprets this as meaning that there was a “DISPENSATION” when “THE LAW” governed God’s dealings with mankind, but now we are in the “DISPENSATION” of “GRACE” and God relates to mankind in grace. This is why a **DISPENSATIONALIST** would conclude that the “gospel of grace” is

just for this current “DISPENSATION”. They have a different gospel for different “DISPENSATIONS”.

This system of interpretation divides all time into “Dispensations”. Dr. Schofield, a noted dispensationalist, names seven dispensations (Innocence / Conscience / Civil Government / Promise / Law / Grace / Kingdom) and says (on page 5 of the Schofield Reference Bible) that each is “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God”. Later dispensationalists have named more than seven.

IMMINENT This is a term used, mainly by dispensationalists, to describe the return of the Lord. They see His return as being in two stages and they believe the first stage could happen immediately, or “AT ANY MOMENT”. This View requires you to believe that there is no prophecy to be fulfilled before the Lord returns. It has been taught for more than a hundred years, even though prophecies have been fulfilled during that period.

JEWS I have used this word to refer to the whole nation of Israel

LAMB This is used to speak of Jesus Christ, Who is referred to in Scripture as a “Lamb” (Revelation 5.6) and as “the Lamb of God” (John.1.29).

MILLENNIUM This word is used for the one thousand years that Jesus Christ will reign on this earth when He returns (Revelation 20.4-6). This part of His reign is referred to as THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM.

RAPTURE This is the name given to what the saints will experience when the Lord returns (1Thessalonians 4.16-17). The word does not occur in Scripture. It comes from the Latin word “rapere” (meaning “to seize,

snatch out or take away”) which is claimed to be the equivalent of the Greek word “harpadzo” (translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4.17).

The “SECRET RAPTURE” is a teaching of the DISPENSATIONALISTS who believe (according to what I was taught as a young believer) that the Lord is coming back unannounced, imminently, unnoticed by the unbelievers (apart from its after-effects), before the great tribulation, to take a specific group of saints (those saved between Pentecost and The Secret Rapture) to heaven, to become Christ’s bride. They believe He will return, with this group, after the tribulation. They believe all other saints (Old Testament, Tribulation and Millennial) miss out on being part of THE CHURCH.

SAINT A saint is a sinner saved by grace (Romans 1.7)

SCRIPTURE The books of the Bible (Typically as included in the King James Version) (Luke 24.27 + 44-45, 2 Timothy 3.16, 2 Peter 3.16 etc.).

SEALED The word is used to describe how God marks His people as His own (compare Revelation 7.3 with 14.1)

SOUL Humans are TRI-PARTITE (made up of three parts), namely BODY, SOUL and SPIRIT (1 Thessalonians 5.23). The body is the physical side and the spirit and soul are the spiritual side. At physical death the spiritual side parts company with the body. For the believer, spirit and soul go to be with the Lord (Philippians 1.23, Acts 7.59 and Revelation 6.9). The SOUL is that part of you which defines you as an individual (Genesis 2.7).

SPIRIT Your SPIRIT is that part of you which promotes communion with God (Romans 8.16).

SYNOPTIC A term used to describe the records called the gospels of **MATTHEW, MARK and LUKE** because they give a **SYNOPSIS** (a brief account) of the life of Jesus (on earth, at His first coming).

TRIBULATION This term is used of trouble (1 Thessalonians 3.4). The term **THE GREAT TRIBULATION** is used to describe the worst period of trouble the world will ever endure (Matthew 24.21). It is still future.