

WHY AND WHAT

- A. Introduction: The world is growing more chaotic with each passing day. This is no surprise to those who know the Bible. The second coming of Jesus is approaching and the Bible is clear that challenging times will precede His return, culminating in tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. Matt 24:21-22
1. In order to have peace and joy in the midst of the increasing turmoil we need to know what is happening and why. We're taking time to address these issues so that we can face the years ahead without fear.
 - a. We have been emphasizing the fact that we need to understand the second coming of Jesus in terms of the big picture. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family.
 - b. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross and open the way for sinners to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. He will come again to restore this earth to a fit forever home for God and His family.
 2. Many mistakenly think that the tribulation of these years comes from an angry God who has had enough of mankind's sinful behavior and finally lets the world have it.
 - a. But that's not consistent with the Bible. God is carrying out His plan for a family that He can live with forever. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Gen 2-3; Rev 21:1-5
 1. When we read the New Testament we find that the first Christians were eagerly anticipating Jesus' return. They weren't afraid of what He's going to do—they were looking forward to it.
 2. There is wrath and judgment associated with the second coming. But the first Christians understood it in terms of what they knew from their own history. Judgment and wrath meant God would deliver them from bondage by judging their enemies. Gen 15:14; Ex 6:6; Ex 15:7
 - b. The calamity and chaos of this final period of human history prior to the Lord's return does not come from God. It is the consequence of human behavior apart from God.
 1. When God created mankind He gave humanity the power of choice or free will. However, with free will comes not only choice but the consequences of the choices made.
 2. Human choice is responsible for much of the hell and heartache in this world, going all the way back to Adam's initial act of rebellion. His choice to disobey God affects our lives every day.
 - A. Because of his disobedience human nature was affected—men became sinners by nature. And the earth was infused with a curse of corruption and death Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - B. For a detailed discussion of this topic read my books: *God Is Good and Good Means Good* and *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?* Both are available on Amazon.
 - c. The Bible makes it clear that God is so big and so great that He is able to use human choice (even those He does not approve of) and work it for good as He causes it to serve His ultimate purpose of gathering a family (lots of lessons for another day).
 3. In this lesson we're going to discuss why all the tribulation preceding the Lord's return takes place and examine how God will use it to further His plan for a family.
- B. The Bible has a lot to say about world conditions at the time of Christ's return. It describes a world system of government, economy, and religion presided over by a Satan inspired and empowered man commonly known as Antichrist. II Thess 2:3-4; II Thess 2:9; Dan 7:9-28; Dan 8:23; Dan 8:27; Rev 13:1-18; etc.
1. Although this man will at first seem to have answers to the world's problems, he will eventually bring the world to battle at a campaign known as Armageddon (WW III). There will be nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare and millions will suffer and die. Rev 16:12-16
 - a. Prior to the Lord's return Satan will offer the world a counterfeit Christ (Antichrist). Through this man, Satan will entice the world to submit to and worship him in an attempt to hold on to his power on earth. II Cor 4:4; Luke 4:6; John 12:31; John 14:30; Eph 2:2; Eph 6:12; etc.

- b. Jesus alerted His followers to this development, warning that great religious deception will precede His return to earth (Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24). Even now we are witnessing the development of a false Christianity, an apostate church that will welcome this final world ruler. Apostate means one that commits apostasy or renounces (abandons) the faith.
 - 1. This developing church denies cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. It states that it doesn't matter what you believe or how you live your life as long as you are sincere and trying to be a good person. After all, God is inclusive and there are many paths to God.
 - 2. In the context of the days preceding the Lord's return, Paul wrote that: (People) will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly (II Tim 3:5, NLT).
 - 3. Paul further wrote that seducing spirits will be unleashed on the earth that will draw people away from the true faith (I Tim 4:1). These apostates will not be wild-eyed crazy men and women, but appealing people with beguiling doctrines.
- 2. Jesus Himself taught Paul the gospel message that he preached (Gal 1:11-12). Part of Paul's message was that the Lord is coming back (I Thess 1:9-10). We get some important information from two epistles that Paul wrote to a group of believers who lived in the city of Thessalonica in northern Greece.
 - a. The church had received some false information that the day of the Lord (Christ's return) had already begun. Remember, the term day of the Lord was the Old Testament name for what we call the second coming of Jesus to cleanse the earth of sin, corruption, and death.
 - b. II Thess 2:3-4—Paul reminded his readers that two things must happen before this time of judgment begins. There will be a falling away and the man of sin (final world ruler) will be revealed.
 - 1. The Greek word that is translated falling away is *apostasia* which means to depart. The word is used here, and one other time, for those who forsake the Law of Moses. Acts 21:21
 - A. In II Thess 2:8 Paul refers to this final ruler as the Wicked one. The Greek word Paul used means lawless or lawlessness. Jesus used this same word when He warned of signs that will precede His return. He said iniquity or lawlessness will abound. Matt 24:12
 - B. The ultimate form of lawlessness is the rejection of Almighty God because He is the ultimate authority.
 - 2. Paul explained that the mystery of iniquity (same Greek word, lawlessness) has been at work since the fall of man, but that there has been a restraint on it which will be removed at the end.
 - A. The mystery of lawlessness—the hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority—is already at work in the world, [but it is] restrained until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. Then the lawlessness one will be revealed (II Thess 2:7-8, Amp).
 - B. That restraint has come through the presence of godly men and women and the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in and through them. As Christian influence and Judeo-Christian ethics and morality have decreased, particularly in the western world, we are seeing an unprecedented surge of religious deception and lawlessness.
 - c. The final blow to the restraints will be the removal of the church. Remember that Paul previously taught the Thessalonians that the Lord will come in the clouds and take believers off the earth.
 - 1. The root of the Greek word translated falling away in II Thess 2:3 is used 15 times in the New Testament and 12 times it means a departure from one place to another. A number of Bibles translate the verse this way: except the aforementioned departure [of the Church to heaven] comes first (Wuest, Tyndale, Amplified in a marginal note). The idea is that Antichrist cannot come on the scene until the church departs for Heaven with the Lord.
 - 2. All the arguments we have about a pre, mid, or post trib rapture developed centuries later. Note this quote from an Eastern Orthodox Church Father named Ephraim the Syrian wrote in AD 373: All the saints and the elect of God will be gathered together before the tribulation, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion that

overwhelms the world because of our sin.

3. There are serious consequences to abandoning God. Not only do you experience the results associated with your choices, it has a progressively destructive affect on society (many lessons for another day).
 - a. In Rom 1:18-32 Paul describes the downward spiral that occurs when people willfully abandon the Lord. It leads to increasingly debased behavior and ultimately results in a reprobate mind.
 1. A reprobate mind is a mind that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests. Sin has a darkening, corrosive effect on the mind (II Tim 3:8; Heb 3:13; etc.). Apostasy and lawlessness make sense to the reprobate mind.
 2. Paul further states that when people choose this path of willful rejection of the truth of God, the Lord gives them over to their choices and the resulting consequences. Rom 1:24; 26; 28
 - b. When the final leader comes on the world stage, the entire planet will reject Almighty God in favor of Antichrist. And God will give them over to their choice and all the ensuing consequences. You don't want Me? You want Satan's counterfeit? You've got it, along with all that comes with him.
 1. The consequences of their choice will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. With all restraining forces gone, the wickedness of Satan and human hearts apart from God will be demonstrated as never before. If Jesus did not return, every human being would die.
 2. The Book of Revelation is primarily a description of this horror. In this book John describes catastrophe warfare in the 21st century in 1st century terms and symbols (apocalyptic literature).
 - c. In his vision John saw Jesus open seven seals on a scroll. When Jesus opened the first seal, a man on a white horse (identified elsewhere as the man of lawlessness) goes forth and begins his destructive work. Rev 6:1-14
 1. Jesus does not bring this man to power—Satan does (II Thess 2:9). The appearing of Antichrist and the horrific events that follow (warfare, famine, disease, death, and tremendous damage to the earth) is a direct result of their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 2. The events on earth are connected to Jesus to make it clear that the calamity the people of earth experience in this period is a direct result of their rejection of Him to embrace a false Christ.
4. God's purposes are always redemptive. He is looking to save (not destroy) as many people as possible. That will be true in this final tribulation period. If God's heart was to destroy sinners, immediately after the rapture would be the perfect time because there won't be any believers on earth right then.
 - a. This time of tribulation is different from any other period in the history of man. Once it starts, in just seven years, this present age will come to an end because a new age, the time of the restoration of all things, is at hand. Acts 3:21
 - b. Billions of people who are alive on earth then will have only seven years to make a definitive choice for or against the Lord. Radical action is necessary to save as many as possible.
 1. Not only will wickedness be demonstrated as never before, there will also be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given during the tribulation than ever before in the history of man. They will be like the plagues of Egypt—demonstrations of God's power designed to draw men to Him by showing that He is the only God. For example:
 - A. Two witnesses with supernatural power will oppose Antichrist for three years. He will kill them, but God will raise them from the dead in front of the whole world. Rev 11:3-12
 - B. An angel will preach the gospel. The entire world will hear him. This is the only time in human history that such a thing has happened. Rev 14:6-7
 2. The result? There will be a great harvest of souls out of the tribulation. Multitudes will be saved by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Rev 7:9-14; Matt 24:14
 - A. They will wake up to the goodness of God and the wickedness of Satan and cry out for mercy. Others will be hardened and continue to reject the Lord. Rev 11:13; Rev 9:20-21
 - B. The same sun that melts wax also hardens clay. The difference is not in the sun, but in the

wax and the clay and the way that they respond to the sun.

- C. Although believers in Jesus will be taken off the earth prior to the coming of Antichrist, the circumstances that will give rise to him are setting up now and increasingly affecting our lives
1. Not only is an apostate church well under way with plummeting morality in the name of diversity and tolerance, we see people becoming more and more accepting of lawlessness in the name of social justice. All of this makes society more chaotic and potentially dangerous.
 2. There is a move toward globalization (not just in our own country but around the world), and it will continue. Any country that opposes globalism will at some point have to come on board—including the United States. We are currently the biggest roadblock to globalism.
 - a. Because we love our country (and our freedoms and standard of living) we all feel the pressure to try to preserve what we have. There's nothing wrong with that. But we must remember that this world as it is, in its fallen condition, is coming to an end at some point. And that's a good thing!
 1. By all means, vote in the upcoming election. I certainly intend to. But remember that our hope is not in a political party or leader. Our hope is in Jesus.
 2. Many feel that if "our guy" doesn't win the election, the end of America as we know it will soon follow. You must understand, that day is coming, whether it's this election cycle or the next.
 - c. Never forget that this present world is not our final destiny. Our destiny is this world renewed and restored when Jesus returns. Never forget that the most important thing is not that people embrace your political point of view, but that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus.
 2. As Christians, what is our responsibility to our government? There are those who say it is up to us to save our country through prayer and fasting. I'm not opposed to praying and fasting for the nation. I want our standard of living to continue as it is until we leave. But we must understand some key points.
 - a. Jesus did not die to save and preserve America. He died to save human beings from every nation, tongue, and tribe. And He is coming back to restore the entire earth for all of His family.
 - b. America is not a covenant nation. I realize that our founding fathers established the government on covenant principles before God, and many of the concepts they incorporated into our founding documents are based on biblical principles.
 1. But God has entered into covenant with only one nation—the descendants of Abraham (Israel) (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15:1-21). He did so for the purpose of bring the Redeemer of mankind into the world through this people group. (lots of lessons for another day)
 2. This doesn't mean that we can't pray for America. But we must recognize that the end is coming and America will pass off the scene as the major capitalist democracy. If "our guy" wins, we have some breathing room. If "our" guy loses, Jesus' return is closer that we thought.
 3. I Tim 2:1-4—The Roman Empire required prayer and sacrifices for the emperor. The first Christians offered public prayer for Roman emperor to demonstrate loyalty to their secular ruler in the hope that it would help the gospel spread more freely.
 - c. I personally believe that the days of national revival with prayer and the Bible being returned to the schools are over. We've produced several generations of youth who believe that America is the worst country in the world and that Christianity is a bigoted, outdated religion.
 1. This doesn't mean that there won't be revival in the hearts of individuals and thriving remnant groups around the country—because there are and will continue to be.
 2. Our main focus should be seeing people come to saving knowledge of Jesus. Our prayer should be: Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Matt 6:10
- D. Conclusion: God is good and good means good—even in the worst period of tribulation the world has ever seen. We can trust Him to take care of His people in the tumultuous years ahead. More next week!