

GOD PROVIDES AND PROTECTS

- A. Introduction: We are discussing the soon return of Jesus to earth to try do deal with fear and confusion that arises out of misinformation and lack of knowledge about this subject.
1. We've emphasized the point that the Second Coming is not a freaky science fiction event stuck on the end of the Bible in a strange book called Revelation. It will be the culmination of God's plan of redemption or His plan to deliver both men and the earth from bondage to sin, corruption, and death..
 - a. God's been talking about the end since the beginning because a plan is unfolding. Only the doctrine of salvation is mentioned more often in scripture than the Second Coming. This is appropriate because Jesus' return will complete the salvation provided through the Cross.
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so it could be removed and men and women can transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ and His redemptive work. Isa 53
 2. He will come again to renovate the earth and establish the visible kingdom of God on the new earth where God and His redeemed family will live forever. Rev 11:18; Rev 21,22
 - b. The Bible gives much information about the years just before the Lord's return. The final seven years (particularly the last half) will bring the greatest tribulation the earth has even seen. We're not going into detail about the chaos and destruction of this period. We've done so in other series.
 1. In the years just before the Lord's return, Satan will offer the world a ruler (his counterfeit of Christ) as he attempts to hold on to his kingdom on earth and prevent the Lord's return.
 2. The actions of this Satan-inspired man of sin, this son of perdition or destruction (II Thess 2:3), and the responses of the people of earth to him will cause much of the destruction of the that occurs in these years. Through peace he will destroy many (Dan 8:25).
 2. One of our goals in this short series is to "de-freaksize" the Second Coming. Some of the information written in the books of Daniel and Revelation sound like these men were describing something like a zombie apocalypse on earth. But they were using symbols as they wrote.
 - a. Both men were given information from God about events thousands of years in the future. They received revelations in their spirit that their minds couldn't fully comprehend.
 1. Daniel was a fourth century B.C. man (535 B.C.) and John was a first century A.D. man (95 A.D.) and both were writing about twenty-first century life, technology and warfare.
 2. Their prophecies use so much symbolism -- not because the events surrounding the return of Jesus are freaky (a ten headed dragon wearing crowns, etc.) -- but because these men had no other way or words to describe what they were seeing.
 - b. Rev 9:1-12--John described a locust swarm coming up out of the pit. Various interpretations have been given by Bible commentators through the centuries, changing as technology developed.
 1. For years it was said this will be a demonic horde that has been confined underground to be released at the end. In the 1990s that interpretation changed when Apache combat helicopters which could be said to resemble locusts ware developed.
 2. Because of genetic engineering occurring in laboratories around the world now, some speculate that these creatures are man-made chimeras (several species merged together) or possibly drone technology with a with a swarm/hive neural network.
 3. It will be clear what all of these symbols mean when the events occurred. Until then we need to focus on what it clearly revealed in scripture about these years leading up to Jesus' return.
 - a. It is clear that we (the Church) won't be here for this final kingdom and ruler. We will be taken off the earth back to Heaven. The events of these final years will not begin until we are removed.
 1. When Paul revealed what Jesus had told him about the catching away of His people before the final seven years begin (I Thess 4:13-18; II Thess 2:3) they would have heard it as specific information about how God is going to preserve His people unto His kingdom.
 2. They would not have thought: The rapture!! Who's going? Who will be left behind? Is it

pre, mid, or post tribulation? They did not yet know the word rapture. When the New Testament was translated into Latin in the 4th century A.D. the word RAPTUS was used for HARPAZO (catching away) in the Greek.

- b. But the conditions that produce the tribulation of these years won't come out of a vacuum. They'll be a natural culmination of a progression of events occurring now, and we must deal with them.
- c. We will see increasingly difficult times on this earth prior to our departure. But the Bible assures us of God's provision and protect. That is what we want to focus on in this lesson.

B. The Bible reveals that just prior to the Lord's return this final world leader will preside over a worldwide government, economy, and religion (Rev 13). This information is not given to scare believers in Jesus but to help us recognize what's going on in the world around us. Conditions are now setting up which will pave the way for this final ruler and his worldwide kingdom.

1. Up until the end of the 20th century and its massive technological innovations, worldwide systems were not possible. The fact that it is now possible and well underway shouldn't frighten us. It should help us recognize that the return of Jesus is near. Don't be troubled by what you see.
 - a. America has to decline as a world power so that the center of power can shift back to the lands of the former Roman Empire, the region identified in scripture as the hub of this final kingdom.
 1. America's decline has begun and will continue. As we see our political leaders make decisions not in the best interests of America's national sovereignty, don't scream at the T.V.
 2. Look up (be elated in joyous expectation, Luke 21:28) because redemption is near.
 - b. The idea that we are global citizens of a global world who must come together in peace to solve global problems has worked its way into human consciousness. We will give up more and more of our national sovereignty to world organizations. Don't be afraid or frustrated.
 - c. An apostate church that has abandoned the basic doctrines of the Christian faith is developing. It will accept and worship Satan's counterfeit of Jesus.
 1. Seeker friendly churches have left orthodox doctrine in favor of cultural relevance and inclusiveness. People such as Oprah Winfrey mix Christian principles with eastern religions, concluding that all paths lead to God who is within us.
 2. True Christians will increasingly be labeled as "haters" and "bigots" because we adhere to what the Bible says. These people will be happy when Christians are taken off the earth.
 3. Both Jesus and Paul said the times leading up to the Lord's return would see increased sin and religious deception (Matt 24:4,11,24; II Tim 3:1-5). If there was ever a time to get good, solid Bible teaching, it's now (II Tim 3:13-14).
 - d. Paul said that when people abandon God it leads to a downward spiral that results in the development of reprobate minds. Rom 1:21-32
 1. A reprobate mind is a mind that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests. We are going to see more and more "reprobate" decisions in government and society.
 2. It is and will be increasingly difficult to watch this unfold. Righteous Lot was vexed by what he saw around him when he lived in Sodom. II Pet 2:7,8
 3. Our lives will be increasingly affected by these reprobate decisions in negative ways. We need wisdom from God's Word about how to navigate through it all.
2. How bad will conditions get before we are removed from the earth? We can't say definitively. But consider these points.
 - a. Society will not collapse before we leave the earth. Jesus said that it will be like the days of Noah prior to His return. That means many things, but one thing is clear: normal activities of life (eating, drinking, and marrying) were going on. Matt 24:38
 - b. The final ruler must have something to rule over. Once he comes on the scene there will only be seven years until Jesus returns. That's not enough time to rebuild if civilization is destroyed.
 - c. Will our standard of living change? We cannot say. But poor leadership, reprobate decisions, and

increased warfare in the world will have an effect on our economy and we'll reap consequences.

- d. Will we in America experience persecution? We already are in terms of increasing attacks on the freedom of religious expression directed at Christians. How far will these attacks go? Will it go beyond curtailing freedom speech to physical persecution. It's impossible to say at this point.
3. That's why we need to take our attention off of details that are not clear at this point (such as who the Antichrist is and what 666 means) and build our faith in God's provision and protection.
 - a. When Jesus told His followers the Temple was going to be destroyed in answer to questions they asked Him about signs of His return (Matt 24) that news did not scare them.
 1. They already knew from the prophets that the Lord's establishment of His kingdom on earth will be preceded by war in Israel (Zech 12:2,3; 14:2). They knew the leader of the final kingdom in place at that time will bring great tribulation to the world. And they knew he will war against God's people, succeeding for a time (Dan 7:21). But they were assured God will protect and provide for His people (Dan 12:1,2; Zech 14:3)
 2. Jesus reaffirmed that in His answer to their questions. He gave instructions to those who will live in these final years: When you see Satan's counterfeit the Temple (Matt 24:15, Dan 9:27) get out of Judea (the region around Jerusalem) immediately. Head for the mountains.
 3. That agrees with the prophet Zechariah (14:5; Amos 1:1) who said at the coming of the Redeemer you will have to flee for the mountains. It was revealed to John that the earth will hide those who have come to faith in Christ from this ruler. Rev 12:14-16.
 - b. Let's back up for just a minute. When the Church is removed from the earth there won't be a single believer in Jesus on earth. But that won't last long.
 1. There will 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 Exodus -- demonstrations of God's power designed to draw men to Him.
 - A. There will be signs in the heavens and on earth, including three massive earthquakes. Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12; Joel 2:30,31; 3:9-17
 - B. Two witnesses with supernatural powers will oppose the final rule. When they are killed by him God will raise them from the dead in front of the whole world. Rev 11:3-12
 - C. God will sovereignly call 144,000 Jewish men like He did the apostle Paul to preach the gospel. Rev 7:3-8; 14:1-5
 - D. An angel will preach the gospel (the only time in history that such a thing has happened). Everyone will hear him so they can make a deliberate choice for God. Rev 14:6,7
 - E. There will be a book available which describes to people exactly what is going on, telling them what will happen before it happens -- the Book of Revelation.
 2. The result? There will be a great harvest of souls out of the tribulation. Multitudes will be saved, acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord. Rev 7:9-14; Matt 24:14
 - c. It is clear from the Book of Revelation that many of these people will be martyred for their faith in Christ (Rev 6:9-11). But the disciples soon got to see how God helps His people in that situation.
 1. The death of Stephen, the first martyr, shows God's grace. His death is described as going to sleep. Heaven opened up to him, Jesus met him, and he was strengthened to the point of forgiving those who killed him. Acts 7:54-60
 2. John saw some of these martyrs in Heaven, giving us the eternal perspective. They will join us in Heaven and await their return to earth with Jesus. Rev 6:9-11
4. One theme we see over and over in scripture is that God protects and provides for His people. Consider some examples.
 - a. Israel experienced a calamity that was a direct result of foolish, sinful choices on the part of the nation's leadership -- a severe famine due to lack of rainfall (I Kings 8:35; Deut 28:23; etc.)
 1. I Kings 17:1-6--But God provided for a man who refused to abandon God, Elijah. And God lead him to a specific brook for water and bread and meat twice a day (delivered by ravens).

2. v7-10--When the brook ran God directed Elijah to the city of Zarephath where a woman was living whom God said would provide for him.
 - A. All she had left of flour and oil was enough to make one last meal for herself and her son.
 - B. Elijah told her: Make me a small loaf of bread first (v13) and God says you will always have enough to last until the famine subsides.
 - b. The theme of Psalm 37 is: Don't fret when evildoers seem to prosper because it is short lived. They will ultimately be removed "but those who wait and hope and look for the Lord, [in the end] shall inherit the earth" (v9, Amp).
 1. The psalmist states several more times that the righteous shall inherit the earth (v11,22,29)
 2. And in the meantime, God does not abandon His people no do they have to beg for food (v25). God is their strength in time of trouble and he helps and delivers His people from the wicked because they trust in Him (v39,40).
 - c. Ps 33:19--They will survive through hard times; even in famine they will have more than enough (NLT); v18,19--But the Lord watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine (NLT).
- D. Conclusion: Peter was a man who was familiar with the writings of the prophets. He was a man who walked and talked with Jesus about both His first and second comings.
1. Peter knew from the prophets and from what Jesus said that times will get worse before they get better, But in the context of the Second Coming he said that we are kept or guarded by God's power through our faith. I Pet 1:5
 2. If there was ever a time to build our faith in God, His protection and provision, that time is now.
 - a. Don't feed on the headlines and the news shows and let that produce fear in you. Don't feed on Christian T.V. shows that tell you to store up food for the coming tribulation. Don't send them money to buy you and your family protection from calamity.
 - b. Feed your faith on what the Bible says about the days ahead. Feed your faith with God's promises to protect and provide for His own and preserve us unto His kingdom on earth.