

A scriptural examination of :

1) THE RETURN OF THE LORD The need for Bible Truth

A simple question : . . .

WHERE in the Bible does it state that **Christ returns 'secretly'** ... to take us out of the world **BEFORE** the Time of Trouble & Armageddon ??

Try to think of some supporting bible quotes. We'll come back to 'the answer' shortly.

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the anticipated 'removal' of the saints **before** the final tribulations of the last days is a very common understanding and *hopeful* expectation throughout our Christadelphian community worldwide. A widely accepted cornerstone of our faith and a foundation to our hopes and expectations for the future.

Naturally, it is the subject of our constant prayers and petitions to our Heavenly Father. A sincere and heart-felt plea heard quite literally at every memorial meeting, every bible class, every communal prayer ... that our present activities may be "interrupted" by the Lord's sudden (but welcome) return and we may be taken, delivered from our days of mortal bondage ... and also from the tribulations and judgments soon to consume this world.

This 'hope' is such a core feature of our faith, permeating and influencing our every thought, action and behaviour with the knowledge and understanding that we could very well 'be present' with the Lord at any given moment. Yet as a central pillar of our faith, one would expect there would be a ream of bible passages that fully detail our 'secret' visit and calling away with Christ ... and our merciful escape from the global terrors to come. **There is NOT !!**

Search as one may, (no matter how concerted the effort) the reader will fail to find any bible proof to support this 'hope' of an early exit. Quite simply there is **NO** definitive bible passage/s that can be advanced to prove this belief. Truly very hard to believe (given the gravity of this widely-held doctrinal understanding) but it would seem 'our expectation' that we will be removed **before** the Time of Trouble is both incorrect & misplaced.

In fact, there is absolutely **NO Bible Proof** whatsoever, that says :

- We are taken 'BEFORE' the Time of Trouble and Armageddon.

It is not unlike other biblically unsupported 'pre-tribulation' theories such as :

- Christ returns 'in secret' ... and we are taken by Him ('unknown' to the world)
- We are visited and taken 'pre-emptively' by angels (or even by 'resurrected' relatives)

Such 'notions' have for many years gained favour and standing in Christadelphia, yet they are entirely without foundation or support in God's Word. They are nothing more than empty and unsubstantiated 'speculation' but beyond this they are misleading and dangerous. While a 'pre-Tribulation removal' of the saints may be a comforting or appealing idea, it remains utterly inconsistent and astray from what the Bible tells us. Yet oddly, we still pray for it.

The dire need to dispel and eradicate these 'false hopes' cannot be overstated. In our eagerness and excitement to be joined with the Lord, we can (and are) being 'blinded' to the true realities that we're soon likely to face, all clearly revealed throughout God's Word. There is a wealth of evidence in scripture to irrefutably prove :

- 1) The Saints will remain in the world during the *Time of Trouble* (*Great Tribulation*).
- 2) The Time of Trouble is principally *God's judgments* in the form of Global Chaos and Nuclear War
- 3) The Saints will be safeguarded and protected "in their homes" by God (ie. End-Times 'Passover')
- 4) ONLY AT the time of Christ's visible "coming and appearing" are the Saints 'delivered' out of the world.

The long-held and mistaken belief that we'll soon be 'called away' **BEFORE** the outbreak of worldwide chaos, may well become a deleterious factor that not only dulls our need to understand the 'true nature' of these coming events but will also leave us 'wholly unprepared' to endure through this final period of trial and tribulation.

Returning to our question at the top of the page. The two primary areas of scripture most frequently quoted and advanced in support of a *secret return* of the Lord Jesus Christ and a 'pre-tribulation calling away' of the saints are :

- 1) References to "As a thief / Day of the Lord" (ie. Revelation 16v15-16 ~ 1 Thessalonians 5 v1-4)
- 2) The prophetic teachings and parables of the Lord (Matt 24 ~ Mark 13 ~ Luke 17 / 21 etc.)

These prophetic warnings often given by Jesus himself, we would suggest are **fundamentally misunderstood** and therefore **misapplied**. In the pages that follow we will *thoroughly examine* these sections of scripture and comprehensively demonstrate why they are utterly irrelevant in respect to both 'the timing' and also 'the nature' of the Lord's return. A clear understanding of these bible texts will be critical to our preparedness and capacity to "endure to the end". We must not just believe what we have 'always believed'. PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT TO THE END

A scriptural examination of :

1.1) THE RETURN OF THE LORD . . . “ I come as a thief ” [Revelation 16]

Whenever the secret, stealthy return of the Lord is the subject of discussion, by far the most prominent scriptural ‘*passage of proof*’ quoted is Revelation 16 v15. The Lord’s words “ *I come as a thief* ” found here in Revelation (*also* in 1 Thess 5 and 2 Peter 3) are quite literally the **ONLY** bible references used when a scriptural foundation is required to prove the Lord’s personal return will be - *in the first instance* - a secret, sudden visitation to collect his followers. For a truly ‘epochal’ event of this enormity and significance, it does seem almost incomprehensible that in the full expanse of God’s Word, this one phrase verily ‘*stands alone*’ as the **only** (supposed) evidence of the Lord’s coming being a **secretive** appearance, unknown to the world at large. Therefore it begs two questions :

1. Do we ‘*truly understand*’ the meaning of “ *I come as a thief* ” in Revelation 16 v15 etc.??
2. Is this “ *thief-like appearing* ” consistent with other bible passages that speak of the Lord’s return ?

[We will consider the **first question** in this article, with the second being examined in a follow-up article]

REVELATION 16

- v13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet
- v14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, **to gather them** to the battle of **that great DAY of God Almighty**
- v15 Behold, **I COME ‘AS A THIEF’**. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments lest he walk naked, and they see his shame
- v16 **And he gathered them together** into a place called in the Hebrew tongue **Armageddon**.

The pouring out of the *Sixth Vial* recorded in Revelation 16 v 12-16 is a well-known depiction of the geo-political events and conditions in the ages leading up to (and culminating in) the event of Armageddon itself. The final ‘*gathering of the nations*’ to the battle is detailed in both verses 14 and 16. Yet, inserted between these two verses is a warning from the Lord “ *Behold, I come ... as a thief* ”. It is widely and automatically ‘*assumed*’ that these verses are chronological and sequentially ordered according to their happening. We are also led to believe verse 15 describes the very moment of the Lord’s ‘*secretive*’ return to collect his bride. But is this the case ? And is the Lord Jesus Christ *actually* speaking here of his own ‘*personal appearance*’ to the believers . . . or is it something else ?

The answer lies in a ‘*true understanding*’ of a phrase consistently used in conjunction with the phrase “ *as a thief* ”.

Outside of Revelation 16 “ *as a thief* ” is only ever mentioned ‘*four*’ other times in relation to prophetic events in the Bible. These are 1 Thess 5v2 / 1 Thess 5v4 / 2 Peter 3v10 / Rev 3v3. It is **most significant** that in the first 3 of these 4 passages the words “ *as a thief* ” are in each instance directly linked to the phrase “ *The Day of the Lord* ”. This is no random co-incidence. There is an underlying reason for this and it reinforces the deeply meaningful connection and relationship between these two bible phrases.

A thorough examination of all the bible references to this apocalyptic “ *Day of the Lord* ” is tremendously revealing and sheds stunning new light on this pivotal verse (Rev.16 v15) and the ‘*true meaning*’ and import of “ *as a thief* ”.

While the *fourth* of these “ *as a thief* ” occurrences (Rev.3v3) is quite ‘*different*’ ... it is *just* as significant and revealing. We shall look at this later, after we have first considered this biblical theme of “ *the day of the Lord* ”.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

As we consider the use of this phrase throughout scripture, at the outset we should also note the actual span of “ *THE DAY of the Lord* ” is not a single (solar) day but rather it refers to a ‘*fixed or extended period of time*’ or ‘*epoch*’. This is the identical principle we highlight in our accompanying article with “ *the Day / Time of Trouble* ”. It is most important to be clear on this, as any perception of this time span being merely a single day then impedes a correct understanding of what this phrase ‘*the day of the LORD*’ is actually referring to.

If we look at the wide swathe of bible passages that mention the “ *Day of the Lord* ” and their context and setting, in *almost every instance*, we find that **overwhelmingly** these passages are NOT referring to the ‘*personal*’ return of the Lord, but rather they speak clearly and consistently of a fearful period of ‘*war and conflict*’ between the nations.

In fact, the “*Day of the LORD / Lord*” is referred to some 29 times in the bible. Of these, 22 speak incontestably in the context of military battles and war between the nations in the last days. A further 5 instances are less definitive, these having a mixed blend of contextual language that could be describing ‘either’ man-made wars or alternatively divine judgment in the form of the forces of nature etc. In only 2 instances (1 Cor 5v5 / 2 Cor 1v14) is the context speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Conspicuously on both these 2 rare occasions - and quite unlike every other instance - the phrase “*Day of the Lord ..*” is also uniquely suffixed with the Lord’s name “*Jesus*” thereby eliminating any doubt concerning the actual context in these two verses. Most revealing of all, is that **neither instance** of “*in the day of the Lord Jesus*” offer any definitive description of the ‘actual nature’ of his appearing whatsoever.

With only 2 of these 29 passages referring to the Lord Jesus (*even then*, only of his ‘presence’ *after* His return) we can conclude that “*the Day of the LORD*” is definitely not a term related to, or descriptive of his personal appearing.

On the other hand, given the ‘overwhelming’ use of the “*Day of the LORD*” phrase to repeatedly describe all these ‘wars and conflicts’ between the nations (principally in the last days), we can say with absolute confidence that this biblical term was ‘purposed by God’ to define a far broader, more protracted series of events than simply Christ’s secretive return. Therefore, when the phrases “ (*I come*) as a thief ” and “*the day of the Lord*” are used together they are **NOT** speaking of the twenty-four hour period heralding the Lord’s personal return ‘in secret’ . . . **NOR** is it a day or period ‘exclusively’ about the *forces of nature* being unleashed by God to punish the nations.

“*The Day of the Lord*” encompasses a series of apocalyptic events that ‘all together’ represent the **full** outworking and execution of ‘God’s judgments’ on the nations. These ‘*righteous judgments*’ begin with social and economic chaos worldwide and escalating conflict and wars raging between nations (primarily centred around events in the Middle East). This finally culminates in the Lord Jesus Christ intervening at the height of this ‘man-made’ maelstrom of war and bloodshed, first to save His people Israel and ultimately to crush the godless armies of the world.

While these dreadful battles *between the nations* may ‘appear’ to be in the normal course of ‘worldly’ happenings (as has occurred so many times before) nevertheless, they indisputably form **part of** God’s judgments on mankind. On so many levels, the context that consistently accompanies references to “*the Day of the Lord*” repeatedly confirm this ‘wider understanding’ of God’s judgments (ie. includes BOTH man-made wars and divine judgments)

1 THESSALONIANS 5

- v2 For yourselves know perfectly that **THE DAY of the Lord** so cometh **as a thief** in the night
- v3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then ‘**sudden destruction**’ cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape
- v4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that **THAT DAY** should overtake you **as a thief**.

In **1 Thessalonians 5** we are told it is “**THE DAY of the Lord**” that comes **as a thief** . . . **NOT** the Lord himself !! To ensure that we simply cannot miss the point, we are told this TWICE in three verses. Furthermore, we are told at this same moment of time “*sudden destruction*” comes *just* as the nations proclaim ‘*peace and safety*’. It is not the result of divine power, but rather of man’s own evil doing. The apostle Paul then reaffirms once more, that this is ‘**the day**’ (and also the **sudden destruction**) which comes “**as a thief**” . . . and it need not overtake ‘*the faithful*’.

2 PETER 3

- v10 But **THE DAY of the Lord** will come **as a thief** in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a ‘**great noise**’ and the elements shall ‘**melt with fervent heat**’, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be ‘**burned up**’
- v12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of **THE DAY of God**, wherein the heavens being ‘**on fire**’ shall be dissolved, and the elements shall ‘**melt with fervent heat**’ ?

In **2 Peter 3** we have graphically illustrated the horrific nature of these man-made wars amid “*the day of the Lord*”. Continuing the theme of ‘*sudden destruction*’ taken from the previous passage, Peter provides a vivid portrayal of exactly what “*the day of the Lord*” will involve as *the heavens, the earth and all the elements* are engulfed in **fire, heat** and **great noise**. This description penned by the apostle two thousand years ago, is precisely as would be expected from modern-age warfare and entirely consistent with the use of both nuclear and conventional weapons systems that of a certainty would be deployed in any international wars in the future. Surely we see in this terrible vision, this is ‘**THE**’ *sudden destruction* that comes “**as a thief**” upon the world during “*the day of the Lord*”.

Most critically we note, Peter’s description completely **omits** any reference or allusion to ‘*natural*’ forces such as earthquake, whirlwinds, volcanoes, hailstones etc. It is clear this destruction is the direct result of mankind’s actions

but they do still form an integral part of God's righteous judgments on the nations. We are expressly told this in yet another "*day of the LORD*" bible passage in **Isaiah 13** concerning the judgments upon **Babylon** (modern day **Iraq**) :

ISAIAH 13

- v5 They come from 'a far country' (**Russia**) from the end of heaven, **even the LORD**, and 'the weapons of His indignation', to **destroy the whole land (Iraq)**
- v6 Howl ye; for **THE DAY of the LORD** is at hand; it shall come '**as**' a destruction from the Almighty
- v9 Behold, **THE DAY of the LORD** cometh, **cruel** both with wrath and **fierce** anger, **to lay the land desolate** and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it

Could it not be any clearer than is articulated in this passage? As God's judgments are soon to be executed upon Babylon (**Iraq**) verse 5 reveals '**the instrument**' He will use to carry out these punishments (*exactly as described in Jeremiah 8v19*) is '**a people**' who "*come from a far country*" (**Russia**). In the very same verse "*they*" are also specifically described as "*the weapons of His indignation*". So we see God uses a foreign military power to perform His 'righteous judgments' and to destroy the whole land. Even *more astonishing*, verse 5 seems to describe the LORD '*accompanying*' this rampaging horde, "*They come ... even the LORD AND the weapons of His indignation*". Clearly, we know He does not actually accompany them, but it is through the use of a '**metaphor**' that Yahweh shows the Gogian host is performing *His* will and purpose ... just '**as if**' it was the LORD himself.

If there remained any doubt, about the meaning of this *symbolism* it is further '*repeated and reinforced*' in the next verse, when a *simile* "**as**" is used to liken "*the day of the LORD*" to a destruction from the Almighty. In other words, the destruction that the Russian confederacy will soon wreak upon Iraq is so devastating, it is '**as if**' it comes from Almighty God himself. The ironic truth is ... it does !! In one sense, IT IS '*the coming*' of the LORD, but only through the use of a divinely appointed 'proxy' (**Russia**). It is NOT speaking of the '*personal*' return of the Lord Jesus at this early stage of "*the DAY of the LORD*". That comes later at the end of this tumultuous epoch.

JOEL 1

- v6 For '**a nation**' (**Russia**) is come up upon **my land (Israel)**, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion
- v15 Alas for **THE DAY**! for **THE DAY of the LORD** is at hand, and '**as**' a destruction from the Almighty shall it come

The small explosive prophecy of **JOEL** is a narrative centred entirely around the events of "*the Day of the LORD*". Within just three chapters it has no less than 9 direct references to this "**DAY**". Quite astoundingly, we also see repeated in Joel Ch.1 the *identical simile* we just examined in Isaiah 13 (that *likens* the Russian destruction - to - judgment from the Almighty) only this time in Joel 1 the '*divine*' judgment (wrought by Russia) is upon Israel not Iraq.

We can therefore see how God will use the Russian forces as '**His sword**' of (divine) judgment in the last days as it sweeps through the Middle East. Similarly in both **Ezekiel 30** and **Jeremiah 46** (below) this same scenario plays out further in "*the Day of the LORD*" as '**the sword**' is brought down "*out of the north*" upon the land of **EGYPT**.

EZEKIEL 30

- v3 For **THE DAY** is near, even **THE DAY of the LORD** is near, a **cloudy day**; it shall be **the time of 'the heathen'**.
- v4 And '**the sword**' shall come upon **EGYPT**, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in **EGYPT** and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down

JEREMIAH 46

- v1 The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against **the Gentiles**
- v2 Against **EGYPT**
- v9 Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let '**the mighty men**' come forth the **Ethiopians** and the **Libyans**, that handle the shield; and the **Lydians**, that handle and bend the bow
- v10 For this is **THE DAY of the Lord GOD** of hosts, **A DAY of vengeance**, that he may avenge him of his adversaries and '**the sword**' shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates
- v20 **EGYPT** is like a very fair heifer, but **destruction** cometh; **it cometh 'out of the NORTH'** (**Russia**)

These two passages above clearly illustrate the ‘*true nature*’ of this event. In fact, with the accompanying context speaking of “*the time of the heathen*” and destruction coming “*out of the north*”; of *mighty men* with their implements of war [*horses, chariots, shields, bows*] coming out *against* the Egyptians, it is fully evident that this “*day of the LORD*” is all about the forces of men and NOT the open manifestation of divine power. We also know from other passages of scripture the kingdom of Egypt will indeed fall victim to the imperial ambitions of the latter day Assyrian, but what remains absolutely clear is there is no hint of the Lord’s *secret* personal/physical return here.

Other references to the “*Day of the Lord*” continue this end-times narrative as ‘*the sword*’ of the LORD (Russia) cuts through the nations in the last days. In Isaiah 34 we are told of *Idumea* and *Bozrah*, being modern day **Jordan** (*heavily populated by Israel’s most inveterate enemies, the Palestinians*) falling amid this Russian-led onslaught. Yet, despite this fearsome destruction being executed by Russia, the prophet Isaiah still clearly labels these events as “*the day of THE LORD’s vengeance*” further underlining the visual imagery of this ‘*sword*’ is simply a **metaphor** for the commission God has given to Russia to fulfill His purposes. “*Bathed in heaven*” speaks to its ‘*divine*’ origin.

ISAIAH 34

- v5 For ‘**my sword**’ shall be ‘**bathed in heaven**’ ...
Behold, it shall come down upon **IDUMEA (Jordan)**, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment
- v6 The ‘**sword of the LORD**’ is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats ...
... for the LORD hath a sacrifice in **BOZRAH (Jordan)** and a great slaughter in the land of **IDUMEA (Jordan)**
- v8 For it is **THE DAY** of the LORD’S **vengeance**, and the year of recompences for the controversy of **Zion**

As these prophetic events spill even deeper into this apocalyptic period known as “*the day of the LORD*”, the brutal rampage of the Gogian-led confederacy continues unabated, eventually leading to God’s people, Israel. Once again the tiny prophecy of **Joel** reveals both the terror and the enormity of this impending disaster. Chapter 2 opens with the ominous sounding of an alarm; the inhabitants panic stricken, trembling and overwhelmed with fear as this vast and fearsome horde of armies descend upon their land. It’s a terrible vision of utter desperation and hopelessness .. of unthinkable savagery and brutality as this colossal force floods into and overwhelms the Holy City and its people.

JOEL 2

- v1 Blow ye the trumpet in **Zion (Israel)**, and sound an alarm in **my holy mountain**
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for **THE DAY** of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand
- v2 **A DAY** of darkness and of gloominess, **A DAY** of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains
a great people and **a strong**; there hath not been ever the like,
neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations
- v9 **They** shall run to and fro in the city; **they** shall run upon the wall, **they** shall climb up upon the houses
they shall enter in at the windows ‘**like a thief**’

It is the final horrendous judgment ordained of God upon His people and mercilessly executed by the Russian Gog in accordance with the prophetic requirements. It is entirely consistent with the long established pattern of using foreign armies [*Assyrians / Persians / Romans / Nazis* etc.] to effect His judgments upon His people or more broadly upon the nations. Why would we expect the ‘*divine judgments*’ during the final Time of Trouble to be any different ?

Yet to this point of time (in the scriptural record), there continues to be absolutely no mention nor reference to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and certainly no allusions to his secret return “*as a thief*”. To this moment “*The DAY of the LORD*” continues to be the “*the time of the heathen*”, fully concerned with the corrupt and unrestrained ‘*works of the flesh*’ engulfing the nations ... and totally exclusive of the Lord’s direct involvement.

Throughout scripture, references to “*the Day of the LORD*”
‘speak overwhelmingly’ of war and conflict between the nations
and NOT of Christ’s secretive return - *or* - the open manifestation of divine power

Most fascinating though, is that amid these grim and brutal events depicted in **Joel 2** there is presented yet another confirmation that bible references to “*as a thief*” have been misapplied to the Lord’s return. As if to purposefully dispel this misconception, God (*through his prophet Joel*) stunningly characterises these marauding soldiers of the Russian ‘Gog’ as they storm onto and into the houses, as coming upon their victims “*like a thief*”. This is the ‘*only time*’ in all scripture this exact phrase is used. Can it be merely *co-incidence* these ‘*forces*’ are coined with the identical language? It’s NO co-incidence. It is “*they*” who deliver God’s final judgments upon His people, and “*they*” who are the power ‘appointed’ to sweep in with stealth and wreak this sudden destruction ... “**AS A THIEF**”.

This final murderous destruction that comes upon Israel is but a microcosm of the *wider judgments (of the LORD)* that also befall all mankind, not directly of 'divine power' but of the sudden outbreak of war world-wide, on a truly catastrophic scale. It is precisely as we are warned by Jesus in the Olivet Prophecy :

LUKE 21

- v34 Take heed to yourselves , lest at any time your hearts be overcharged
with surfeiting, and drunkenness , and cares of this life , and so **THAT DAY** come upon you 'unawares '
- v35 For **as 'a snare'** shall **it** come on all them that dwell on **the face** of the whole earth

In speaking of "**THAT DAY**" the Lord is **NOT** referring to the timing of His own personal / physical return 'in secret ' but rather of 'The Day ' (or epoch of time) that will unleash a sudden avalanche of global events (principally war) which take mankind "unawares". Remember, *as a snare "shall IT come"* on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. It is these chaotic and distressing **global events** that creep up "**as a thief**" upon an unsuspecting world.

It's not **UNTIL 'almost the end'** of Joel's prophecy in chapter 3v16 do we have incontrovertible evidence of the arrival and 'visible' presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ as he proceeds forward mightily in righteous anger against the nations , followed by the unleashing of the *forces of nature* as "*the heavens and the earth shall shake*". This sudden tumultuous arrival of the Lord is similarly detailed in other passages (Daniel 12 v1 / Zechariah 14 v3-5 / Isaiah 63 v1-7 / Habakkuk 3 v3-6) that speak unmistakably of ' his personage ' at this dramatic moment in history.

This final phase of the "*Day of the LORD*" will represent the apocalyptic climax of the 'Time of Trouble' as the all-powerful and irresistible march of the Lord Jesus Christ wreaks havoc and destruction upon the nations who seek to destroy His people Israel. This will be the moment when the anger of the LORD explodes into righteous fury , unleashing the full arsenal of the 'forces of nature' upon the nations, crushing and humiliating the armies of mankind.

So in the lead up to this final moment (when Christ makes his appearance to the world), we have seen and fully demonstrated both the phrases "**as a thief**" and "*the day of the Lord*" literally always refer to the sudden outbreak of war and chaos between the nations and **NOT** the personal 'secret' return of the Lord. Quite simply, this idea cannot be found anywhere in scripture. This 'fact' leads us to a consideration of our final "**as a thief**" bible passage.



Finally we come to **Revelation 3v3**. While this verse is *distinctly different* from the other three "**as a thief**" passages (in so much as it's not directly linked to "*the day of the LORD*") it is no less revealing and conclusive in its import.

REVELATION 3

- v3 Remember therefore how '**thou**' hast received and heard , and hold fast , and repent
If therefore thou shalt not watch , **I will come on thee 'as a thief'**
and **thou shalt NOT know** what hour **I will come upon thee**

Many proponents of the "pre-Tribulation" removal theory would fervently argue this verse is '**proof**' the Lord is speaking of his own 'secretive' return to collect the saints , as he clearly says "*I will come on thee as a thief*" and "*I will come upon thee*". We automatically interpret these words "*I will come*" (as spoken by Jesus), as being 'entirely literal' in meaning, that *he* will come upon the reader personally and physically . . . *but are they literal ?*

We readily accept the Lord's prolific use of 'figurative' language in his earlier teachings in the parables found in the Gospel records. Here also, in Revelation 3 he frequently uses metaphors / symbolic language , whether in verse 1 "*thou livest and art dead*" ; verse 5 "*the book of life*" ; verse 8 "*I set before thee an open door*" ; verse 12 "*Him ... will I make a pillar in the temple*" ; verse 16 "*I will spue thee out of my mouth*" ; verse 20 "*I stand at the door*". We have no problem understanding these are visual metaphors, yet for some reason in reading verse 3 we too easily fail to realise (and even dismiss the possibility) Jesus is actually speaking '**entirely**' in metaphorical terms.

We know "**as a thief**" in verse 3 is indisputably a descriptive metaphor, therefore why cannot the preceding words "*I will come upon thee*" also be figurative ? That is, "*I will*" is **a metaphor** that describes - *not the Lord's return* - but rather the 'divine punishments ' (the Lord's Judgment) in "*the day of the LORD*". These events (judgments) being the direct outworking of **His** will and purpose. In other words "*My judgments will come upon thee*". It would seem this is perhaps the 'key element' that's long been overlooked in correctly interpreting this pivotal verse of prophecy, and understanding the **clear distinction** between '*the day of the LORD*' and the actual return of Christ.

To illustrate the accuracy , consistency and importance of this metaphorical interpretation , we have listed at the end of this document all relevant passages with the specific 'metaphors' substituted / overlayed in the bible text to provide a clearer sense of its true meaning.

If any doubt remained concerning the true meaning of “*I will come upon thee*” (Rev 3v3), then just a few verses later there is *conclusive proof* that verse 3 is **NOT** speaking of any ‘*secret pre-emptive return*’ by the Lord to collect His saints, as we’re told of the LORD’s promised protection of the saints *throughout* the coming global tribulations :

REVELATION 3

v10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience ... I also will ‘**KEEP thee**’ from the ‘**HOUR of temptation**’ which shall come upon **ALL THE WORLD**, to ‘**try them**’ that dwell upon the earth

v11 Behold, I **COME QUICKLY** : hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown

NOTE: G5083 ‘KEEP’ τηρέω tereo. tay-reh'-o

From τηρός teros (**a watch** ; perhaps akin to G2334) => ‘**to guard**’ (from loss or injury ‘**by keeping the eye upon**’)

MOST IMPORTANT : ‘**NO REMOVAL**’ OF SAINTS FROM THIS **HOUR OF TEMPTATION** (ie. ‘**Time of Trouble**’)

In vs.10 - 11 we are explicitly told that the faithful believers in Christ will in fact ‘**remain in the world**’ during the ‘*Hour of Temptation*’ and that the LORD will “**keep**” them safe from the ravages of this global period of tribulation because they have kept and trusted in His Word. As noted, if we look at the Hebrew meaning of “**keep**” it has the specific idea of ‘*guarding*’, ‘*watching*’ and ‘*keeping the eye upon*’. There is absolutely no connection or allusion to the *removal* or *calling away* of the saints during this fearful epoch of time. It’s further bible proof that the notion of the saints being *taken out of the world* before these cataclysmic events is baseless and unsupported in God’s Word.

NO WHERE in the full breadth of scripture is there any ‘definitive passage’
that speaks of a ‘*SECRET*’ personal return of the Lord
to collect His followers BEFORE the Time of Trouble / Armageddon

So in summary, and after a thorough examination of the biblical phrases “*as a thief*” and “*the day of the LORD*” we can emphatically conclude the following :

- “*The DAY of the LORD*” describes a period of ‘*war and conflict*’ principally between the nations.
 - This is the ‘**sudden destruction**’ that comes upon mankind “*as a thief*”
 - “*As a thief*” is **NOT** a reference to a ‘*secret*’ return of Jesus to collect His saints (unknown to the world)
 - It is definitely **NOT** a term related to - or descriptive of - his personal *appearing*
- (In one sense - it ‘**IS**’ the Lord’s coming ... specifically of ‘**His judgments**’ coming upon the nations)
- The saints are **NOT** taken / called away to judgment in a ‘*pre-tribulation*’ removal
 - The saints will remain in the world during the Time of Trouble / Tribulation (*protected in their homes .. ie. Passover*)
 - The wars and conflicts (*in the Day of the LORD*) form a **major part** of God’s ‘*divine judgments*’ on mankind
 - This period of unprecedented war and chaos ultimately ends with the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ

It appears these escalating global events (‘*judgments*’) all foreshadow and point to ‘**the GREAT DAY of the LORD**’ (when ‘*His anger*’ will be finally and fully vented upon the nations - via The Lord Jesus Christ & truly divine power)

We have conclusively shown through this paper, that the doctrine of a ‘*pre-tribulation*’ return of Christ to collect His saints for judgement is biblically wrong and cannot be substantiated anywhere in scripture. Bible passages containing the phrases “*as a thief*” and “*the day of the LORD*” are the central pillar upon which this misleading doctrine is based, yet we have herein demonstrated these handful of verses are in fact deeply misunderstood and the doctrinal inferences mis-applied. Also as stated at the outset, other bible passages which are similarly claimed to speak of a secret return of the Lord (ie. Gospel records / Parables) will be further examined in a follow-up article.

To be perfectly clear, we are NOT suggesting it is wrong to pray for the Lord’s return, it is absolutely essential. Nevertheless we do need to be extra-ordinarily careful in ‘**what sense**’ we are praying for it. In the same manner as we rightly and appropriately pray for ‘*the establishment of God’s Kingdom*’ - or - ‘*the Peace of Jerusalem*’, we are clearly praying for ‘**THAT time**’ when God’s plans and purposes will be fulfilled in the earth. Similarly, when we pray for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ we do so in the joyful expectation and foreknowledge that His advent will bring ‘**THAT time**’ of blessing.

However, we cannot (and must not) engage ourselves in a wishful praying for a 'secret and pre-emptive' return of the Lord to collect us before the final tribulation if this is **not** in God's expressed purposes. It is both wrong and inappropriate to pray for something that - not only cannot be found in anywhere in scripture - but actually is completely 'contrary' to all the prevailing bible evidence which declares God's intentions concerning both the experience of the saints in 'the last days' and also the coming and appearing of His beloved Son. All of these details being widely and comprehensively found throughout God's Word.

As enumerated in our accompanying document (*The Time of Trouble : A Thematic Study*) there is an extraordinarily deep reservoir of bible passages – in both old and new testaments – that clearly and unmistakably attest to “ *the saints / the righteous / the upright* ” (being the followers of Christ) who will most certainly remain in the world throughout the final Time of Trouble and endure until 'the end'. Again, 'dozens' of bible passages making plain that *the faithful* remain in the world through this dreadful period. Can the same number of bible passages be supplied to support the theory of a 'secret' pre-emptive return of Christ ?

Similarly throughout God's Word, every scriptural reference (virtually without exception) which either alludes to or describes the revelation of His personage speaks to a **literal**, **visible** and **evident** 'coming and appearing' of the Lord Jesus Christ, “ *when every eye shall see him* ”. If we examine all these scriptural passages [including the Hebrew and Greek terms ... ' *bo / ra'ah / parousia / erchomai / phaneroo / phainoo / epiphaneia / apokalupsis* '] we find overwhelming and irrefutable proof of His 'open manifestation' at His return. By stark contrast , any bible evidence cited as support for the notion of a *secret* appearing of the Lord exclusively to the household of faith (and undisclosed to the world) is *at best* sparse, and oblique in the extreme. When these few vague references are studied and then correctly understood, the supposed evidence to support His return 'in secret' vanishes completely.

As we consider this long-held '**misconception**' of an *early calling away* with Christ (that is built upon the phrases “ *as a thief* ” and “ *the day of the LORD* ”) we do need to be absolutely sure we are *rightly* discerning God's Word. The prophet Amos (using this key phrase once again - both pointedly and repeatedly) delivers a sober warning to the supposed 'spiritually enlightened' who thought they had a correct understanding concerning this prophetic time.

AMOS 5

v18 Woe unto you that 'desire' **the day of the LORD** ! to what end is it for you ? **The day of the LORD** is **darkness** and not light

v19 As if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him ; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him

v20 Shall not **the day of the LORD** be **darkness**, and not light ? even **very dark**, and no brightness in it ?

Perhaps speaking to *those* who most assuredly believed “ *the day of the Lord* ” would bring the return of the Lord, Amos continually contrasts their misguided expectations of a glorious day of 'light and brightness' against the dark, foreboding 'reality' of the events that this period of unparalleled chaos would actually bring and , which shockingly would have a direct impact *on them*. Could we likewise be making the very same mistake, through this biblically unsupported doctrine of a '**secret**' return of Christ ... and the misplaced and futile hope of an 'early' calling away ?

As we enter into 2020, enduring peculiar and unprecedented circumstances amid the global *Coronavirus* pandemic and as the whole planet plunges further into darkness, confusion and escalating chaos, is there not a gnawing uneasiness within us asking “ *If we believe in Christ's secret return (as a thief) . . . WHY are we still here ??* ”

We can see the world is on the very edge of disaster. A global contagion of confusion, fear and hopelessness is gripping all humanity. By every measurable metric mankind is facing perplexing and unmitigated crises ... socially , morally, economically, politically and most concerning, militarily. The nations are teetering on a terrifying precipice.

As the '*saints in Christ*' are we truly aware of - and prepared for - WHAT is coming ? OR are we placing our hope and confidence in an ill-founded and illusionary expectation of an 'early exit' ? (that is found NO where in scripture)

As this terrible 'closing chapter' of the kingdoms of men begins, we all have a personal and a collective responsibility to urgently investigate and verify these matters from God's Word of Truth. If we're to endure through this time together, we need : 1) a clear Bible-sourced 'foreknowledge' of events to come 2) to be spiritually prepared and 3) an unwavering trust in our God , to see through this unprecedented *Time of Trouble* and chaos.

We strongly recommend a complete and thoughtful reading of the following two articles : [CLICK on Blue Links]

2) [The Time of Trouble ... A Thematic Study](#)

Comprehensively catalogues and examines the extensive array of bible passages that unmistakably **PROVE** the Saints in Christ 'remain in the world' amid the final Time of Trouble & details the circumstances of 'the faithful' during the coming tribulations

3) [Global Nuclear War ... & The 'Final' Passover \(for the Household of Faith \)](#)

Written & published in **EARLY-2019** (many months 'before' the arrival of COVID-19 & the world-wide 'lock-down') this treatise lays out the clear bible evidence detailing : all aspects of the coming Nuclear War ; God's protection of His saints during the Time of Trouble (while in their dwellings/ homes) ... & their ultimate deliverance through an 'end-times Passover'.

APPENDIX : Relevant passages with the **metaphors** (ie. ' Judgment ') substituted / overlayed in the bible text

REVELATION 16

- v13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon
v14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world , **to gather them** to the battle of **THAT GREAT DAY of God Almighty**
v15 Behold , **MY JUDGMENTS COME 'as a thief'**.
Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments lest he walk naked, and they see his shame
v16 **And he gathered them together** into a place called in the Hebrew tongue **Armageddon**.

REVELATION 3

- v3 Remember therefore how '**thou**' hast received and heard , and hold fast , and repent
If therefore thou shalt not watch , **MY JUDGMENTS will come on thee 'as a thief'**
and **thou shalt NOT know** what hour **MY JUDGMENTS will come upon thee**

REVELATION 3

- v10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience ... I also will '**KEEP thee**' from the '**HOOR of temptation**' which shall come upon **ALL THE WORLD** , to '**try them**' that dwell upon the earth
v11 Behold , **MY JUDGMENTS COME QUICKLY** : hold that fast which thou hast , that no man take thy crown

NOTE: G5083 'KEEP' From τῆρος (**a watch ; to guard** ' from *loss or injury* '**by keeping the eye upon** ')

MOST IMPORTANT ►► 'NO REMOVAL' OF SAINTS FROM THIS HOOR OF TEMPTATION (ie. 'Time of Trouble')

LUKE 21

- v34 Take heed to yourselves , lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness , and cares of this life , and so **THAT DAY (of the Lord's judgments)** come upon you '**unawares**'
v35 For '**as a snare**' shall **it** come on all them that dwell on **the face** of the whole earth

1 THESSALONIANS 5

- v2 For yourselves know perfectly that **THE DAY of the Lord ('s judgments)** so cometh **as a thief** in the night
v3 For when they shall say , Peace and safety ; then '**sudden destruction**' cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child ; and they shall not escape
v4 But ye , brethren, are not in darkness , that **THAT DAY** should overtake you **as a thief**.

2 PETER 3

- v10 But **THE DAY of the Lord ('s judgments)** will come **as a thief** in the night ;
in the which the heavens shall pass away with a '**great noise**'
and the elements shall '**melt with fervent heat**' , the earth also and the works that are therein shall be '**burned up**'
v12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of **THE DAY of God** , wherein
the heavens being '**on fire**' shall be dissolved, and the elements shall '**melt with fervent heat**' ?