

8. THE MESSIAH'S GLORIOUS RETURN

The sign of the Son of Man will then appear in the sky and all the tribes of the land will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory (Mt 24:30).

Chronological order of events at Jesus' return

There seems to be no reason why the following eight paragraphs cannot occur in 24 hours.

1. The Messiah returns on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt 24:30).
2. The righteous dead are resurrected and meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:16, Rev 20:4) in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52). Living saints are caught up with them (1 Thess 4:17, Rev 14:14–16).
3. The Messiah continues his descent to the Mount of Olives, where every eye will see him and the Jews who pierced him will now mourn because of him.
4. A great earthquake occurs in Israel (Rev 6:12, 11:13, 16:18), splitting the Mount of Olives in two from East to West, and forming a great valley. Earthquakes spread worldwide and the cities of the world collapse (Rev 6:12–17, 16:17–21), and the mighty world empire of Babylon falls (Rev 17 – 18). The sun turns black and the moon blood-red. The seismic activity is mentioned under the 6th seal, the 7th trumpet and the 7th bowl of wrath. Destruction prior to the Lord's arrival is caused primarily by the wrath of man.
5. The Messiah enters the temple in Jerusalem from where he will reign and his glory will be seen (Ezek 43:1-7).
6. The Messiah inflicts vengeance on the godless rebels (2 Thess 1:7) who are laying siege to Jerusalem and empowers Israel to destroy the world's armies and kings at Armageddon (Rev 16:16, 19:11–16).

7. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are defeated and cast into hell (2 Thess 2:8, Rev 19:19–20). Satan is captured and incarcerated in the Abyss during the length of the Messianic reign (Rev 20:1–3).
8. The resurrected saints dwell in New Jerusalem which descends from heaven. It is the eternal home of God and the Messiah, angels and the redeemed (Rev 21:2 – 22:5). The reunion of the Church with their Lord is called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The symbolic description of gold streets, jeweled foundations, and pearl gates indicates that New Jerusalem is in the heavenly realm but also in close connection with the Earth. Its glory is visible over Jerusalem and its light envelops the city (Isa 60:1-3, Rev 21:24).
9. From Zion, the Lord banishes ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26) and pours out his Spirit upon the whole nation. Their conversion is too late for them to be included in the monarchy. With Jesus' return and the resurrection having taken place, the door to the Church is shut. But Israel is glorified in another way. They will all come to know the Lord and will be the Messiah's people on Earth responsible for the temple worship, a house of prayer for all nations (Isa 56:7, Mt 21:13).
10. The nations on earth at this time are the unbelieving survivors of the Great Tribulation. They'll live normal human lives as subjects of the Messianic kingdom and will go on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, acknowledging the Messiah as King and Lord. They'll walk by Jerusalem's light and instruction, and their leaders will bring their wealth to it (Rev 21:24-26).
11. The saints will rule the world with the Messiah for 1000 years (Mt 19:28, Rev 20:6).
12. Heaven and Earth will be renewed (Rev 21:1, 5) as the curse is progressively lifted from the world and the animal kingdom lives in harmony with man. The Messiah and his government will rule the nations forcefully with justice and righteousness (Acts 3:21, Rom 8:19-21).

The name of the final book of the Bible, Revelation, is a translation of the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις which means unveiling. Hundreds of

prophecies about Jesus in the OT are revealed at his second coming. When he was born, he revealed himself to the people of his day, but they only saw his human side. They were impressed by his healings and other miracles, but his humble circumstances and sufferings caused many to doubt that he could be the Messiah. The NT reveals more about Jesus the Messiah, especially Paul, as he describes his person and work in theological terms as revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. But it is the final book of Revelation that unveils Christ for us.

The climax of the book is Christ's visible return from heaven to earth when all will see him. This culminates in his victory over evil and his glorification as he is worshipped and adored by the resurrected Church in the heavenly, his earthly people Israel on Earth, and even by the unredeemed nations who survived the tribulation period. His future heavenly abode, New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven to Earth simultaneously and remains visible for pilgrims to see in the sky above the earthly Jerusalem. Jesus will strike down the rebellious nations and rule them with a rod of iron. He will judge the wicked and renew the heavens and the Earth so that the Earth once again becomes a peaceful and enjoyable place to live. The Messiah and his community will rule for a thousand years during which time all the inhabitants of the Earth will submit to his rule. They will acknowledge his deity and sovereignty over all. He will at last be King of kings and Lord of lords.

Amillennialists, by definition, deny the earthly thousand-year Messianic reign and the clear teaching that the Church will reign over the Earth with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 5:9-10, 20:4-6). They deny the literal interpretation of hundreds of Messianic prophecies in the OT that concentrate on the nation of Israel and this end-of-age era. By contrast, amillennialists concentrate on heaven, of which the Bible says little. They prefer to follow the teaching of Plato and his disciple Augustine, who regarded the Earth as an unworthy place for the glorified Christ and his Church to reign.

Typical of this teaching is Charles Hodge. His Systematic Theology, Vol 111, p. 837, says the events which, according to the common doctrine of the Church, are to attend the second coming of Christ are:

1. the general resurrection of the dead
2. the final judgment

3. the end of the world
4. the consummation of the kingdom of Christ.

Sadly, these amillennial and reformed beliefs miss the mark and cause much confusion among Christians. They deliberately omit the vital teaching of Revelation 20 because it doesn't conform with their erroneous ideas of their tradition.

The events that attend the second coming are rather the following:

1. the resurrection and rapture of the *righteous*
2. the judgment of the *nations* at Armageddon
3. the end of the *Church age*
4. the *establishment* of the Messianic kingdom on Earth when the saints rule with Christ
5. the descent of New Jerusalem from heaven to rest in the sky during the Millennium
6. The Last Judgment and the dissolution of the universe

An unbiased reading of Revelation 20 clearly teaches that:

1. Satan is restrained during the thousand years and then released from his prison at the end of it. He foments a final rebellion by again gathering the nations for battle against Israel and Jerusalem. Fire comes down from heaven and consumes them and Satan is captured and thrown into hell where the Beast and the False Prophet were thrown a thousand years earlier.
2. The resurrection of the righteous occurs at Jesus' coming so that the redeemed can receive their rewards and reign with the Messiah (Mt 25:34). After Satan's defeat, the last judgment takes place. The graves, the sea, and the underworld give up their dead to be judged by the Messiah on God's behalf for what they have done (Jn 5:27-30). The physical universe then disappears without leaving a trace. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (hell) as these concepts will no longer exist. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, the unbelievers, are thrown into the lake of fire, which is described as the second death, a place of eternal torment. The phrase, 'They will be tormented day and night forever and ever', has only one interpretation. There is a grave warning for the last generation of this age:

Anyone who bows down to the Beast and its image and receives his mark on their forehead or hand will drink the wine of God's fury which has been poured undiluted into the cup of his wrath. They'll be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of God's angels and the Lamb and the smoke of their punishment will rise forever and ever. There'll be no rest day or night for those who worship the Beast and his image and receive the mark of his name. This calls for endurance by the saints, those who keep God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev 14:9-12).

The sign of the Son of Man

The sign that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24:30 is something specific. We should not just pass it off as if the visible event of his coming is the sign, as in the ISV translation: The sign that *is* the Son of Man. It is a sign by which we can know that it is the Jewish Messiah who is coming and that he is none other than Jesus. The Jews especially will need confirmation that the Messiah is Jesus whom their ancestors crucified. Christians will know that it is Jesus, but Muslims and Jews are waiting for different messiahs to come. How will atheists and Hindus and Buddhists and others know who it is if there is no sign? According to Islamic tradition, Jesus will descend to earth shortly before Judgement Day, during wars fought against al-Masih ad-Dajjal (their Antichrist), to come to the aid of the Mahdi and his Muslim followers.

The emperor Constantine saw an image of the Christian cross in the sky in AD 312 which changed the course of history. The cross, like nothing else, will be a clear sign to everyone on Earth that this supernatural and glorious event in the sky is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they see him, “all the tribes of the land” (πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς = the Jews) will mourn, realizing that it was their ancestors who nailed him to a cross (Rev 1:7, Zech 12:10). The two witnesses who preached in Jerusalem during the previous 3 1/2 years (Rev 11:1-13) were there to prepare their hearts for this occasion. Seeing a visible cross in the sky will be a great confirmation for them.

Some historians have considered the events that took place on this day in 312 AD as the most important in ancient history in terms of defining and shaping the modern world. On the morning of the Battle

of Milvian Bridge, the Roman emperor Constantine was preparing his troops for an assault against an enemy, when he saw an image of a cross in the sky, pointing him to the Christian faith and a favorable outcome in the conflict. The vision of the cross resulted in the Roman Empire's adoption of the Christian faith. Fortified by his heavenly vision, Constantine devised a cunning strategy to win the battle, march triumphantly into Rome, and proclaim himself as emperor of the Western empire. He allowed Christians to follow their faith without fear of persecution. Subsequently, properties confiscated from the Church were returned, funding was made for building new Churches and seminaries, and Constantine began installing Christians in positions of high office and responsibility.

The Day of the Lord – the Messiah's return

(Rev 11:15-19, 14:14-16, 19:11-14)

Four great events occur on the day Jesus returns to Earth from heaven with power and glory, much noise, and brilliant light.

1. **Resurrection** Jesus' destination is Jerusalem, but while still in the air, he sends out his angels to resurrect the righteous dead, the saints of all ages. The living saints are transformed at the same moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and they all rise to meet the Lord in the air in their resurrection bodies.
2. **Touchdown and Earthquake** The Lord touches down on the Mount of Olives, one kilometer East of Jerusalem, and immediately the whole world quakes. The Mount of Olives splits into two from East to West, every mountain and island is displaced, the world's cities collapse, the sun and moon turn black, and the heavens recede like a scroll. No earthquake like it has occurred since mankind has been on Earth. Huge hailstones fall and the Earth's high and mighty hide in caves and among the rocks.
3. **Armageddon** The armies of the world surrounding Jerusalem are thrown into confusion by the earthquakes and by the Lord Jesus as he overthrows them with the breath of his mouth. God's chosen people, Israel, are delivered. The Antichrist and his False Prophet are captured and thrown directly into hell, and the armies from all nations who are attacking Jerusalem are destroyed.

4. **The descent of New Jerusalem** The return of Christ from heaven to Earth is also the descent of God, his angels, and the holy city to a place in the sky above Israel. The Lord will enter through the East gate of the old wall of Jerusalem that is presently blocked up and enter the recently built third temple from where he told Ezekiel in a vision: This is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. During the millennium, New Jerusalem will be the home of God, the Lamb, angels, and the resurrected Church (Rev 22:1-5).

The Resurrection of the Saints and the Glorification of the Church

Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will darken, the moon will not give shine, the stars will disappear from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be disturbed. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. ... And he'll send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from all directions, from one end of the heavens to the other (Mt 24:29-31).

In the parallel passage (Lk 21:25-28), Jesus told his disciples: When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. This is a posture of confidence expected of Christians who have faith and the assurance of salvation at the time of Jesus' coming. It is evidence that Christians will remain in the world during the tribulation until Jesus' return. Some commentators want us to believe that these words are spoken to Jews, but the relevant fact is that they were spoken to Jewish *believers: Christians*. The Bible doesn't teach us that Jews will be gathered by angels.

The Messiah will arrive in power and glory with his angels. The saints will be resurrected and raptured and meet him in *the air*, and he will descend with them to the Mount of Olives. As a result of this great theophany, the Mount of Olives will split in two from East to West, forming a very large valley, with half of the mountain moving toward the North and half toward the South (Zech 14:4). A plain will extend from Geba, just north of Jerusalem to Rimmon 60 km south (Zech 14:10). The apostles were on the Mount of Olives at the

ascension when the angels told them that Jesus would return in the same way they saw him go up into heaven (Acts 1:11–12). The Mount of Olives is about one kilometre east of Jerusalem just across the Kidron valley. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones/saints with him (Zech 14:5, 1 Thess 4:14).

Revelation 19:11-16 I saw the sky opened up and a white horse came out, whose rider is named Faithful and True, he judges and wages war justly. His eyes were like blazing fire, and many crowns were on his head. A name was written on him that no one knows but himself. He was wearing a robe that had been dipped in blood, and his name was God's Word. Heaven's armies followed him, riding on white horses and wearing bright white linen. A sharp sword was coming out of his mouth to strike down the nations. He'll rule them with an iron rod and he'll trample the grapes in the winepress of God Almighty's fierce anger. This name was written on his robe and thigh:

King of kings, Lord of lords.

Ezekiel saw the Lord's coming in a vision. From the Mount of Olives, the Messiah enters Jerusalem via the east gate (Ezek 43:1–5) and then into the temple. Ezekiel heard the sound of the Lord's coming like the roar of rushing water, and the Earth was radiant with his glory. It is a noisy event accompanied by brilliant light. When the glory of the Lord entered the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord told Ezekiel that this was the place of his throne and the place for the soles of his feet. He would live there among Israel forever (Ezek 43:7). ('Forever' often means as long as the world exists.) Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the God of Israel is nothing else but the return of the Messiah. The place for the soles of his feet is his point of contact with the Earth, there in the temple where he will be worshiped by Israel and the nations. However, his visible presence will be in the glorious New Jerusalem with God the Father and the saints who will rule the Earth from there. There is no biblical teaching that the Messiah will be seen on Earth during his reign.

Paul had a lot to say about the second coming in his epistles to the Thessalonians who had turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who will rescue us from the coming wrath. He said:

They should live lives worthy of God who calls them into his own kingdom (kingship) (1 Thess 2:12).

Christians are not in darkness that this day should surprise them like a thief. (1 Thess 5:4).

That day will not come unless the rebellion occurs and the Antichrist is revealed (2 Thess 2:3). This man of lawlessness will exalt himself above everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4).

The most graphic descriptions of Jesus' return for the saints are found in the following NT passages:

1 Thess 4:14-17 “For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that *God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him*. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, *who are left until the coming of the Lord*, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” These verses allow no possibility of a secret pretribulation rapture.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

In summary, the following events will occur during this time:

1. The Messiah will return with power and great glory.
2. The spirits of all the righteous dead, from both OT and NT times, will accompany Jesus from heaven when he returns. Their bodies will rise from their graves and the living saints will be raptured, and they will all meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:15-17, Rev 14:15-16, 20:4).
3. The Lord will then descend to the Mount of Olives with his angels and saints (Zech 14:4-5b). He will enter through the eastern gate of Jerusalem (Ezek 43:1-4) and “suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1), where he will be worshipped by people on Earth during the millennium.

4. The New Jerusalem, the eternal home of angels and saints which is now in heaven (Heb 12:22-24) comes down out of heaven from God and rests above Jerusalem (Rev 21:2-4, 9-11). God, his Messiah, and the saints will live and reign from there from that moment on. The light and glory of the New Jerusalem will be seen from afar in the sky above the earthly Jerusalem (Isa 60:1-3).

The Messiah's Descent to the Mount of Olives

At the end of the Great Tribulation, when the nations have surrounded and captured most of Jerusalem, the Lord will come down from heaven to fight against them (Rev 19:11-16). The Messiah will descend physically from heaven in the same way that he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11) and to the same place from where he ascended, near Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4, Luke 24:50-51). The prophet Job prophesied, saying, he knew his Redeemer was alive, and *in the end, he would stand on the Earth* (Job 19:25). When Jesus' feet touch the Earth as he comes in judgment, the greatest earthquake ever felt will shake Israel and the whole Earth (Ezek 38:19-20, Rev 16:17-21). The Mount of Olives will split in two with half the mountain moving North and the other half moving South (Zech 14:4).

The kings of the Earth and their armies will be gathered to make war against the Messiah (Rev 19:19), but the Messiah will defeat these kings and their armies by fire (Isa 66:15-16) and the word of his mouth (Isa 11:4, Rev 19:21). Others will die by attacking each other in panic (Ezek 38:21, Hag 2:22, Zech 14:13) and by rotting flesh (Zech 14:12), resulting from chemical or biological weapons. There will be massive slaughter, graphically portrayed in Revelation as blood flowing as high as horses' bridles (Rev 14:20). The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be killed and cast into hell (2 Thess 2:8, Rev 19:20).

The day that Jesus the Messiah returns to Earth is a great and glorious visible event when the Messiah comes on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory, and with his angels whom he will send out to gather the elect (Matt 16:27, 24:30-31, 1 Thess 3:13, Jude 14, Rev 19:11-14). The saints will meet the Lord in the air (Matt 24:31, 1 Cor 15:50-53, 1 Thess 4:15-17) and then descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:5). All the righteous dead will be

resurrected, and living saints will be transformed, and the Lord will establish his millennial reign over the whole Earth.

The Great Earthquake - God's wrath poured out

(Rev 16:1-21, 18:1-24, 19:1-21)

The Day of the Lord is the day when God, in the person of Jesus, descends to earth in judgment to punish a rebellious world. A great earthquake follows the pouring out of the seventh bowl of wrath the Lord's descent (Rev 16:17-21). The death and destruction that occur at this time are graphically described by the OT prophets.

Isaiah 13:9-13 See, the Day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land (or Earth) desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make people scarcer than pure gold, rarer than the gold of Ophir. Therefore, I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

Isaiah 24:18b-23 The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the Earth shake. The Earth is broken up, the Earth is split asunder, the Earth is violently shaken. The Earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls—never to rise again. In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the Earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished *after many days*. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders—with great glory.

The Lord will punish the evil powers in heaven above as well as the kings on earth below. The Antichrist and his false prophet are thrown directly into hell, but Satan and his followers will be confined to a dungeon until the millennium is over. The Messiah will reign, and his glory will shine from the New Jerusalem and eclipse the light of

the sun and the moon. The following verses describe the destruction and terror caused by worldwide earthquakes.

Jeremiah 4:23-26 I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

The following verses describe the battle of Armageddon. The Messiah will empower the remnant of Israel to defeat the armies of the world gathered against Jerusalem. The birds are called to feed on the carcasses after this great slaughter (Rev 19:17-18). It is at this time that Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26, Rev 1: 7, Zech 12: 6, 9-10).

Ezekiel 38:18-23 “This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign LORD. In my zeal and fiery wrath, I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur on him and his troops and the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Apart from the environmental disasters that occur on the day of the Lord, there is a vast army of two hundred million troops called Gog who come from the North and East and descend on Israel for the battle of Armageddon. This is the great rebellion against God, his Messiah, and Zion spoken about in Psalm 2. But the Lord will vindicate himself.

Joel 2:10-11, 30-32, 3:15-16 “Before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD thunders at the head of his army (God’s instrument - Ezek 39:2); his forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? ... I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. ... Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the Earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”

On the day of the Lord, Israel, still in unbelief, will be besieged by the whole world, but the Lord will bring about their deliverance. He will roar forth from Zion and save them. This is how the nation of Israel will enter the millennium as God’s redeemed nation.

Zephaniah 1:2-3, 14-18 “I will sweep away everything from the face of the Earth, *declares the LORD*. I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea - and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble ... The great Day of the LORD is near - near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness - a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the corner towers. I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole Earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the Earth.”

“I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth” (Rev 13:10). “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

The Philadelphians had kept his word and did not deny his name, they had kept his command to endure patiently, so Jesus keeps them from the hour of trial that is to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth. What does the hour of trial refer to?

The last 3 ½ years will be a time of patient endurance for the saints during which time many will be martyred. “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patient endurance on the part of God’s people” (Rev 13:10).

It is not the Great Tribulation from which the Lord will keep Christians. The distress that God’s people will endure during that time is caused by a world in rebellion against God and his people, and more specifically, by the Antichrist and his desire to rid the world of all religion and worship apart from his own. Their presence in the world at that time is evidenced by the martyrdoms. However, they will be removed from the earth at the Lord’s return *before* the seventh bowl of wrath is poured out.

1. The Lord descends from heaven
2. The righteous saints are resurrected and raptured and meet the Lord in the air
3. The Lord descends to the Mount of Olives
4. The world quakes as never before as God’s wrath is poured out, resulting in volcanoes, tsunamis, fire, smoke, and darkness.
5. New Jerusalem descends from heaven; the home of God, angels, and the redeemed

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty,

and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! *For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?*” (Rev 6:12-17).

“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible” (Rev 16:17-21).

Bowls of God’s wrath are poured out in quick succession and may reflect the natural consequences of earlier events described under the seals and trumpets but are here described as God’s wrath being poured out on Antichrist and his followers. The painful sores that afflict the unbelievers, the pollution of the seas and rivers, and the fierce scorching heat of the sun may all result from nuclear warfare.

A broader series of events around the Messiah’s arrival

1. The kingdom of the Antichrist is plunged into darkness as rebellious worldwide armies, symbolically known as Gog and Magog (Ezek 38-39), converge on Jerusalem for the battle of Armageddon (Rev 9:13–19, 16:10–16, Zech 12:2-3, 14:2) resulting in the slaughter of an additional third of humanity.
2. The Messiah returns and his divine feet trigger worldwide seismic activity, the worst ever known to man (Ezek 38:19–20, Rev 6:12, 11:13, 16:18), that causes cities to collapse and the worldwide empire of Babylon to fall (Rev 17–18).
4. The sun and moon are darkened, huge hailstones fall from the sky, and islands and mountains are obliterated. The sky

disappears with a roaring sound, the elements are destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on is laid bare (2 Pet 3:10). Human civilization is almost destroyed by a combination of man's warfare and God's wrath.

5. The Lord roars forth from Zion and empowers Israel to destroy the opposing armies (Zech 12:1-9, 14:3, Rev 14:17-20, 16:16, 19:11-16). An angel calls for the birds of prey to come and eat the carcasses of the slaughtered armies, their kings, and generals who came to make war against the Messiah (Rev 19:17-18).
6. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are captured and thrown into hell (Rev 19:19-20, Isa 52:7-10). Satan is bound for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3) so that he doesn't deceive the nations during the Messianic reign.
7. The Lord pours out his Spirit on Israel and the whole nation is converted (Isa 32:15, Ezek 39:25-29, Joel 2:28-29, Zech 12:10-13:1, Rom 11:26-27, Rev 1:7, 11:13). Their conversion is too late for them to be included in the Messianic kingship, but all Israel are gathered to their promised land where they are recognized as the Lord's nation on earth.
8. The victorious King of kings establishes his reign over all nations (Rev 11:15-17, 20:4-6 cf. Ps 22:27-28, Isa 24:23, Zech 14:9) ruling over Israel as their promised Messiah (Jer 33:14-17). The Church reigns with him as his monarchy.

This massive *earthquake* is a major feature of the distress caused at the end of the Great Tribulation. Its effects are graphically recorded after the sixth seal is broken; the sun will become black, the full moon red, and the stars in the sky fall to Earth. The sky will vanish like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island will move from its place. Then the kings of the Earth, the important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and all the slaves and free people will conceal themselves in caves and among the rocks in the mountains. They want the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Messiah. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can endure it? (Rev 6:12-17). Who can withstand the Lord's indignation (Nah. 1:6) or endure the day of his coming (Mal 3:2)?

The Lord speaks of the *earthquake* that occurs when Gog attacks Israel in a dramatic fashion:

“In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the Earth will tremble *at my presence*. Mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 38:19-23).

This same *earthquake* is described again when the seventh bowl is poured out after the sixth bowl, resulting in the drying up of the Euphrates, and preparing the way for the kings from the East. Demonic spirits perform signs and go out to the kings of the *whole world* to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. There is lightning, thunder, and a powerful *earthquake*, more powerful than any since people have been on the Earth. Compare that statement with Daniel 12:1, “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened *from the beginning of nations* until then” and Matthew 24:21, “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again.” “Since people have been on Earth,” “from the beginning of nations,” and “from the beginning of the world” are synonymous expressions pointing to Genesis 10 where there is an account of the nations after the worldwide flood.

The great city, Jerusalem, will split into three parts, and *the cities of the nations will fall*. Every island will vanish, and the mountains will no longer be recognizable. Huge hailstones, each weighing about 40 kilograms, will fall from the sky on people, and they will curse God because the hail will be so catastrophic.

This great judgment on the Day of the Lord is also described by the prophet Isaiah. He says that every hand will go limp, and every

man's courage will melt. They will be terrified; pain and anguish will seize them; they'll writhe like a woman in labor. They'll look aghast at one another, and their faces will be ablaze with fear. The Day of the Lord will come – cruel, with wrath and fierce anger – *to turn the entire inhabited Earth into a desolation and to annihilate sinners within it*. The stars of the heavens and their constellations won't shine their light. Compare parallel passages, “the stars in the sky fell to Earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind” (Rev 6:13), and “the heavens will disappear with a roar” (2 Pet 3:10). The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon won't shine its light. The Lord will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. He'll put an end to the pomposity of the arrogant and overthrow the insolence of tyrants. *He'll make people scarcer than pure gold* and make the heavens tremble. The Earth *will shake* from its place at the time of the Lord's wrath (Isa 13:7-13).

Jesus himself confirmed the interpretation of these prophecies. He said that immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) will mourn when they see the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt 24:29-30). As the redeemed are receiving a *kingship* that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful and worship God in reverence and awe (Heb 12:28).