

After Jesus made clear that He would be leaving this earth until Israel was ready to say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" then Jesus' disciples asked "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" It is notable that they included asking for a sign in addition to the normative parts of their question. Their thinking is quite biblical in a historical sense because Jesus' first coming was presaged by signs. Namely, the star that appeared to the wise men of Babylon and the forecast that Jesus' coming would be announced by one in the spirit of Elijah. And as the "Jews require a sign", so their question is right on track. Recall that the wise men recognized the import of the sign of the star without biblical explanation for it. The explanation seems to be tied to their eastern ancestry, possibly in or near Babylon, which was visited, by God's permission and direction, by none other than Daniel who was more wise than all the astrologers and sorcerers of Babylon. The scriptures do not say so but there is a high probability that during Daniel's lifelong exile in Babylon that lengthy questions and discussions were put to Daniel and recorded in their history by the local astrologers. Also, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego and Ezekiel were there. Obviously, God orchestrated the foretelling of the sign for the coming Messiah of Israel and the world. And so in time (and on time) out of the east came worshipers fully convinced of the meaning of this star and, as I have speculated, a tribute to the excellency of the Hebrews that had lived long ago in their midst. Jesus did not dodge the apostles' question but named events that would occur in their future history, some that did **not** portend the end of the age; and signs that **would portend** the end. He emphasized that when **all** the signs were seen in the world that then the end of things would be "at the very doors" This, if anything, is imminency if anyone is curious as to when imminency starts. Included in the signs are the coming of Elijah, the revealing of antichrist, and the darkening of the sun, moon and stars.

Why is this significant? Bible scholars from the 19th century and onward have proposed the concept of the imminent return of Christ and many insist that no prophesized events are currently yet to be fulfilled thus making Jesus' return imminent. They do not pinpoint a historical time or event that initiated this era of imminency. This single dogma causes many obstacles to other biblical passages. It is claimed that the rapture of the elect cannot be found in Jesus' Olivet preaching found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The revealing of the antichrist before the rapture in II Thessalonians chapter 2 eludes them. Jesus, however, **did** describe the events necessary to proclaim the onset of His imminent return and is clearly there for everyone to read. More importantly, Jesus said "see, I have told you all things beforehand." If not in the gospels, where and when does he allude to the rapture?

The most significant and unmistakable sign of all, given in Mark 13:26, is "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." The return of Jesus to catch away the believers, both dead and alive, will be witnessed on earth by every eye. The brightness will break thru the previous darkening of the sun and fill the sky "as the lightning shines from the east even unto the west". I am fascinated with this verse from Matthew 24:27. When looking at the words in the early texts the word for lightning could have been translated as brightness. Either word gives the sense that it will shine in the east and be seen also in the west, i.e.; over the whole earth. Brightness,

however, is consistent with the magnificent and unequalled glory that is pronounced for this time. Also, it does not seem that a bright flash only will appear but a sustained illumination that conceivably might appear for a period of time, which, along with the prior darkening of the sun, will get the world's attention like no other. Together these would end the tribulation of persecution, make everyone evaluate the proclamations of bowing to the antichrist, and set "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" as whether to serve antichrist or face martyrdom. To the Jews and the nation of Israel and in concert with the revelation to Daniel regarding the making of an end to sin (9:24) and that "Many shall be purified, and made white, and refined..."(12:10a) this period of the glorious appearing of Jesus in the end times would have enormous effect. Mark records Jesus best with "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (13:37). Watch as the world incoherently tries to eradicate the Jews; watch events unfold in the aftermath of WWI to move Jews into Israel; watch and see Israel become a nation again; watch as the world doubles down to surround Israel with their armies; watch as lawlessness increases especially in governments; watch as Israel is pressured into political compromise for national safety. "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

The tipping point (no turning back) of man's day seems to be when antichrist is revealed and begins the persecutions in the great tribulation that follows and are foretold in Daniel's prophecy: "But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." Jesus amplifies that text with "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." Then God's Day of Wrath begins on the "self same day"¹ as the rapture of the believers, both dead and alive. But just prior to the beginning of the fall of wrath is the sealing of the servants of God, namely 144,000 of the 12 tribes of Israel and silence in heaven for the space of about half an hour followed by the seven trumpets of judgment from God on the earth. Meanwhile, in heaven, John is shown a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, **standing before the throne and before the Lamb** clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. This revelation is reminiscent of Luke's quote from Jesus to "keep watch at all times, and pray that you may be deemed worthy to escape all that is about to happen **and to stand before the Son of Man.**"

From my perspective, at least, few would choose to await the time of the great tribulation, making an alternative explanation for the timing of the rapture seem more preferable. It may be that the full realization of end time chronology was not apparent in the 19th and early 20th centuries and it is equally possible that other priorities for the preaching of the gospel, from God's perspective, were more important for those living then to hear and heed the fundamentals. As time moved on toward the end of the age, and

¹ Twice Jesus illustrates times of rescue and then judgment from the old testament to the time of rapture and then God's wrath in the church age as occurring on the same day.: "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."; "And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark.

the good news being carried to the ends of the earth, it would be consistent that God would put an urgency in the hearts of those who would be living or whose children would be living in that generation to begin understanding the events coming. Recall that Daniel, in his day, was told "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." It is evident that Daniel did not understand although he penned these words; primarily because additional revelation must later be revealed by Jesus Himself through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul.²

² Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." Dan.12:8-10