

The End: The Return

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This morning, we're continuing our message series on the end times.

So far, we learned of the first event that will occur at the end times; the rapture of believers. Our focus then becomes split as events simultaneously occur in heaven and on earth.

We learned of the bema seat judgment where believers receive their rewards for the good deeds done with good attitudes and right hearts from God Himself.

We also learned of the great wedding that occurs between Christ and the church and the great feast that occurs at that time.

We then switched our focus to the events which occur during that same seven year period on earth.

We learned of an evil triad that raises to world power and deceives many into believing the lie that they are God. Last week, we learned of the great tribulation when God's judgment and wrath are no longer withheld from creation.

The evil triad gathered together the kings of the world in preparation for the great battle of Armageddon. Before we continue forward into the events at Armageddon, we're first going to have a bit of a flashback. We're first taken back to Zechariah 9 where these events were prophesied so very long ago.

Sometimes, when an individual is shown a prophetic vision or given a prophetic word, it appears to be a single event, but is actually several separate ones shown together. This is called mountain range prophecy. Think of a man standing on a hill looking at a mountain range in the distance. The mountain peaks all appear to rise up from the same mountain base. However, when you move closer to the mountain range, you find that there are actually several mountains all miles away that are making up that single mountain range view seen by the man. This occurs with prophecy as well and Zechariah 9 is an example of this.

Zechariah 9:9-10;14-16

9 Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

14 Then the Lord will appear over them;
his arrow will flash like lightning.
The Sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet;
he will march in the storms of the south,
15a and the Lord Almighty will shield them.

16 The Lord their God will save his people on that day
as a shepherd saves his flock.

We find here a prophetic word about the coming king. From other prophetic words, we know that a king would rise up from the tribe of Judah in the lineage of David whose kingdom would not end. From this prophecy, Israel was waiting for a great king that would rise in great, worldwide power and authority and bring world peace and their salvation. They believed, correctly, that Jesus was that king.

Let's now move ahead in time when one of the mountain peaks of this prophecy came to pass.

Matthew 21:1-11

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Hosanna means 'Save us' and when a king rode into a town riding a colt, it signified that he was coming in peace. The people of Jerusalem were filled with rejoicing believing wholeheartedly that Jesus was their coming king. They laid before Him palm branches symbolizing the triumphal victory that Jesus would bring. They believed that at this time, He would overthrow all governments and be the worldwide ruler of peace who would save Israel. They had this completely right, but didn't realize that the second part of that prophecy, that second mountain peak, would not occur at this same time. Indeed, Jesus is the king of Israel and provided for their salvation to become their shepherd. However, when Jesus didn't look and act like the king that they were waiting for, the cries of the people changed from the great rejoicing of 'Hosanna' to the great condemnation of 'Crucify.' When asked by Pilate if Jesus was the king of the Jews, Jesus did not deny the fact. In fact, even when being lead to His crucifixion, He was mocked and ridiculed by the guards for claiming to be this coming king. The sign that hung above the head of Jesus on the cross declared the charge against Him, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews".

Jesus died, being held to that cross by the sins of you and me and then rose again to life three days later.

We now turn ahead to a time which has not yet come and view this second mountain peak of Zechariah's prophecy and resume our study on the end times.

We recall that those praising Jesus for being the coming king laid on the ground before Him palm branches. Last week, we learned that those waiting for their innocent blood to be avenged were also given by God palm branches along with white robes and were asked to wait. These palm branches are truly the symbol for the coming triumphal victory of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords!

Let the battle of Armageddon commence!

Revelation 19:11-21

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 20

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

God isn't looking for a people who blindly worship Him and serve Him. God gives us free will and a choice to make. His desire is for a people who choose to worship Him despite the trials and temptations of life. The people who live during the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth will have never faced the temptation of Satan and only have experienced life within the context of this bliss. Although the false prophet and the antichrist have already been thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur for all eternity, Satan is spared during this 1,000 years and allowed to be released upon the earth one last time. Unfortunately, many of those who experienced the rule of Christ on earth are deceived by Satan and wage war against God's people. Satan and those following him are put to a final end for all eternity.

Then comes that final great white throne judgment.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

This is it. In the end what really matters? In the end, we stand before God. If we have not accepted God's free gift of salvation, our name is not written in the book of life, and we spend eternity in Hell, a giant lake of fire. If our name is in the book of life, we spend eternity in Heaven. It seems like such a simple and easy decision; and it is! Satan, however, is determined for all to share his destiny and makes it seem so difficult to decide and impossible to stick with the decision to follow Christ; his deceit is brilliant. The truth is that it is an easy decision to make and that God will give us everything that we need to live our lives for Him.

What is your decision today? What do the books containing the story of your life contain? Today can be the first day of a new beginning in your life! It's not too late to begin a new chapter and write a story that brings praise and glory to God; one that will be richly rewarded and praised by God Himself on that final, glorious day! Let's pray together this morning and do just this.