

Prophecy of the Great Tribulation — Matthew 24:16-28

Prophecies in the Old and New Testament urged wicked people to repent of their rebellion against God. At the same time, they warned the people that God would pour out His wrath upon them if they failed to repent of their sins. God lovingly warned them even when He knew they would not respond. Yet, some people think our God enjoys causing people to suffer and die, but that is not true. The correct perspective is that God hates evil. The only way to remove evil, rebellious, hateful, and obstinate people is to remove them in time from this life. Unfortunately, evil people fail to understand how truly wicked they are. As humans we are very accustomed to sin. Adam and Eve sinned by being rebellious. As a result, they caused sin to spread to all of their offspring. Later, Genesis 6:11-12 reveals that the earth was corrupt and full of violence. We know from our own experience that humans lie, deceive, hate, kill, are proud, seek revenge, seduce and lust after men and women. The book of Ezekiel reveals Israel's rebellion against God. Israel murdered the prophets and faithful believers. Repeatedly God urged the nation to repent, but the people refused. He warned them that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed and two-thirds of the people would be killed by the Babylonian army, but they did not believe Him. God says that He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked in Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11. As a result, God pleaded with Israel to repent and explained that He did not take pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezekiel 18:30-32). This portion of Scripture reveals that the character of God demands He must punish evil people who continue to sin. That same principle applies in our present time. Our wicked world is now rushing toward a great time of suffering. When it arrives, God will pour out His wrath on the people who refuse to repent and stop being wicked. Our study is about Jesus' prophecy of the great tribulation in Matthew 24 when God will destroy all of the wicked upon the earth (Matthew 24:16-28; Mark 13:15-23; and Luke 21:21-24).

Overview of the Signs. In the last two studies, “would His second coming occur?” He will answer that Christ has been with Peter, Andrew, James, and John on the Mount of Olives. He was answering the second of two questions that they had asked. The question was, “What are the signs of His second coming?” (Matthew 24:4). Verses 29-31 will provide the answer to their first question which was, “When



Great Tribulation Will Be God's Wrath Upon this Evil World

question in verse 32. Jesus began to respond by describing some of the signs of His second coming in verses 4-7. In verse 8, He called these signs birth pangs. Since He referred to birth pangs, it is obvious that Jesus knew about the pains a woman would suffer during pregnancy and delivery. It is obvious from verses 4-14 that

Jesus knew some birth pangs came very early because the signs He mentioned are very common experiences. Medical doctors refer to three types of birth pangs. The first birth pangs that a mother will experience are called Braxton Hicks birth pangs. They can occur as early as 4.5 months into pregnancy. The birth pangs that occur next are called latent birth pangs and occur just before delivery. These are the pains that help a mother know it is time to go to the hospital or call for the midwife. The third set of birth pangs are called active birth pangs. These are the pains she will feel when she is the process of delivering the child. So, the signs of Jesus' return in verses 4-8 are illustrated by Braxton Hicks birth pangs. These are the very early signs. So, the signs in verses 4-7 have been occurring for over two thousand years, and we are waiting for the "latent birth pangs."

The next signs that Jesus gave us, in verses in Matthew 24:9-14, correspond to latent birth pangs. They will occur during the first half or the first 3.5 years of the seven-year tribulation.

We discovered in our previous study that the tribulation will be a seven-year period. It will begin with a peace agreement between the antichrist and Israel. The length of the tribulation is described in the book of Daniel as time, times, and half a time (Daniel 7:25; 12:7). The signs in Matthew 24:9-14 will occur before an event called the abomination of desolation occurs. This event is described in Matthew 24:15 as happening in the middle of the tribulation. Why does verse 15 correspond to the middle of the tribulation? The answer is that Jesus said the sign of the abomination of desolation, which the prophet Daniel mentioned in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11, will occur next. He validated both prophecies in Daniel. The abomination of desolation will occur when the antichrist stands in the temple as an object of worship (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). He will very likely place an image or statue of himself in the temple. Here are the words of Jesus in verse 15,

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to

the mountains. Matthew 24:15-16 (NASB)

During the first half of the tribulation, Israelites will be severely mistreated, betrayed, and killed, even though the nation of Israel will be experiencing relative peace due to the peace treaty established by the antichrist (Matthew 24:9-14). That is, Israel and Christians will not experience total peace. Ironically at the same time, the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread throughout the world. Imagine the gospel spreading everywhere and the hatred for Christians intensifying!

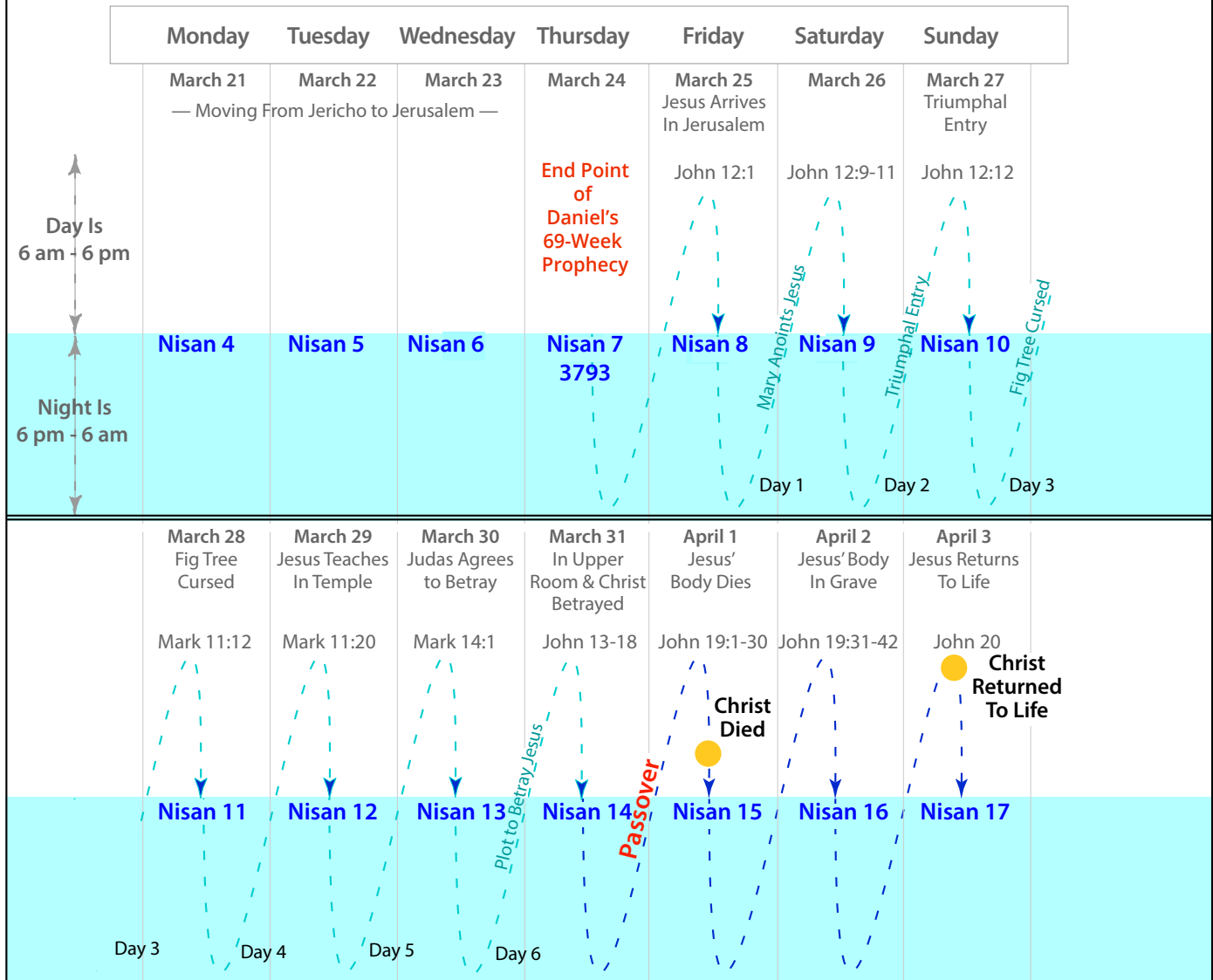
The signs of the last half of the tribulation are given to us by Christ in Matthew 24:16-28; Mark 13:15-23; and Luke 21:21-24. These signs correspond to the active labor pangs that result in the delivery of a baby. Chapters 7-16 of the book of Revelation describe the horrors that will occur in the last half of the tribulation. God uses the symbols of trumpets and bowls to describe and illustrate the various judgments upon the earth. An overview of these judgments will be provided as we explain the meaning of Matthew 24:16-28. The second coming of Christ will occur in verses 29-31. So, let us begin.

The Warning to Flee. In verse 16, Jesus started giving the four disciples the sign of the 3.5 years of the tribulation.

Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. Matthew 24:16-20 (NASB)

Immediately, we should notice that Jesus warns the Jewish people in Israel to flee from their homes, abandon the fields, and ignore all of their clothes and belongings as they hurry to the mountains. They must quickly rush in order to save their lives. Jesus expressed sorrow for pregnant mothers and those nursing babies because that would make their escape more difficult. Luke 21:21 informs us that Jesus had also

Last Week of Jesus' Life



encouraged those living in cities and in the country to flee. That is, they are to hurriedly leave wherever they are living and find protection if they can. Luke 21:22 gives us the reason for the encouragement to flee. Jesus said that these days will be days of vengeance.

Because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Luke 21:22 (NASB)

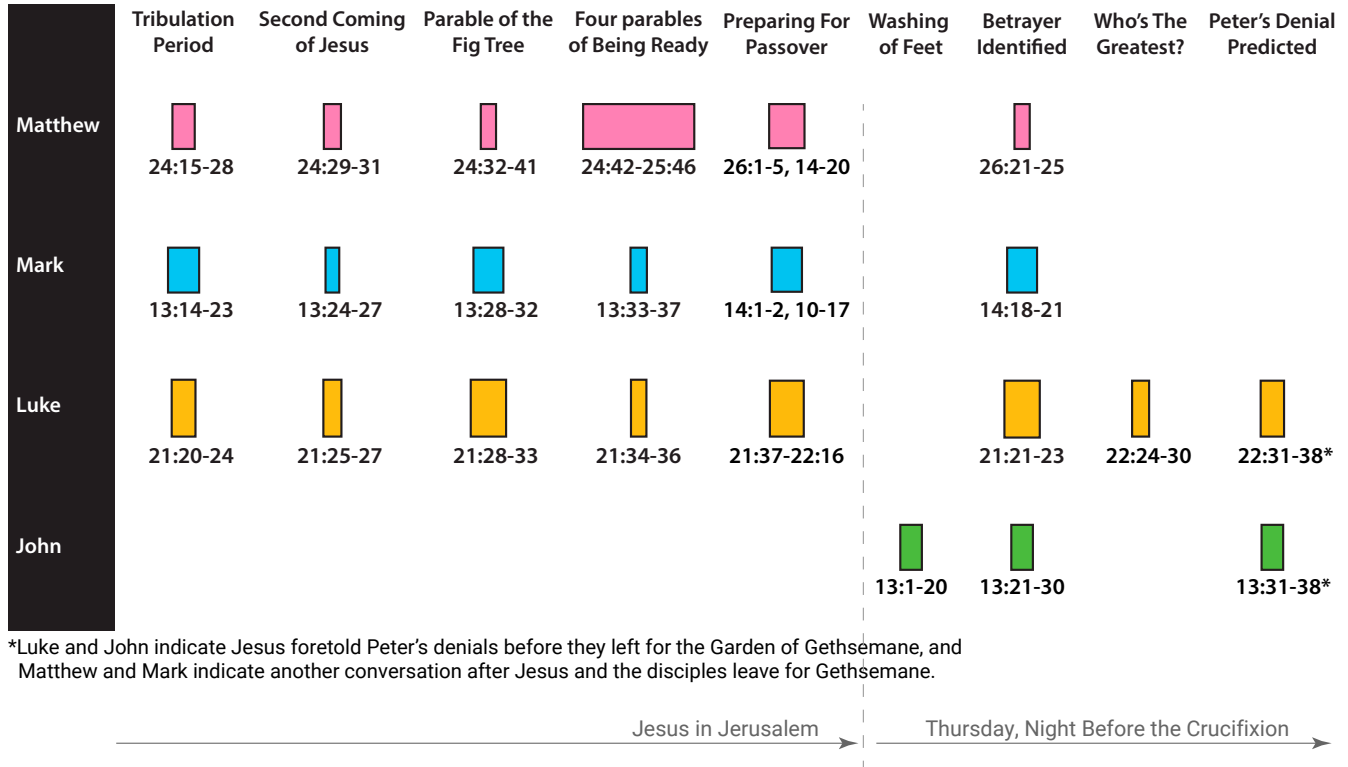
The Greek word for vengeance is *ekdikesis*. The word is a compound word composed of “out” and “justice.” That is,

out of justice or because of justice, this action will occur. The word is usually used to refer to God’s action. God is pictured as avenging wrong. Repeatedly, we are told in Scripture that God has declared He will avenge all persecuted believers and punish the wicked upon this wicked world (Romans 12:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8; Hebrews 10:30; 1 Peter 4:4-5). Here is Romans 12:19.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Romans 12:19 (NASB)

Life and Heart of Jesus

The Last Week - March A.D. 33



In reality the full seven-year tribulation will be a time of divine judgment. The last half of the tribulation will be the time when the God of vengeance will pour out His wrath on this unbelieving, Christ-rejecting, and Christian-persecuting world. It will be a time of extreme punishment. Every human will be at risk of losing their lives and then their judgment will come.

God Pours Out His Wrath. Matthew 24:21 explains how God will implement His vengeance or wrath.

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Matthew 24:21 (NASB)

We are told that the last 3.5 years of the tribulation will be a time of great tribulation. The Greek word for tribulation is *thlipsis*. It means suffering, persecution, or oppression. That is, God the Father will cause the wicked world to suffer

the worst horrors that have ever occurred. Luke 21:22 adds another reason for the tribulation. It will also be a time when all the prophecies about Israel's suffering will be fulfilled. We should notice that Jeremiah 30:7 refers to the great tribulation as "Jacob's trouble." That is, the tribulation will be a time for Israel to suffer due to the people's wickedness over the centuries and their crucifixion of Christ.

That is why Jesus called the period of time following the abomination of desolation the great tribulation (Matthew 24:16-28). The great tribulation will occur in the last half of the seven-year tribulation. That means the length of the great tribulation will be 3.5 years. In Revelation the great tribulation is described as 42 months, 1,260 days, and time, times, and half a time (Revelation 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

Revelation 6-16 provides an overview and some details of the great tribulation. Chapter 6:1-8 describes the four horses of the apocalypse. Chapter 6:1-4 indicates that the tribulation starts with relative peace. That is, the first half is

a time of peace due to the peace agreement. Then verses 3-8 reveal that the world will experience war, famine, and death at an unprecedented level. Verses 9-11 reveal that believers will be slaughtered. Verses 12-17 then reveal that during this time, God the Father will be pouring out His wrath upon the earth—humans, animals, plants, the sun, and stars. They tell us how God will punish the wicked upon the earth.

Chapters 7-16 provide many details of how God’s wrath will be poured out upon the earth. The seven trumpets will destroy one-third of the trees, grass, sea animals, and naval vessels, dim the stars and sun, and pollute the rivers and fresh water (Revelation 8:1-13). That will be the first woe. The fifth trumpet will result in demons being released from the bottomless pit and hurting the people of the world. The bottomless pit is the place where the angels who sinned in Genesis 6 are being imprisoned (Revelation 9:1-12). The sixth trumpet will result in an army of 200 million demons being unleashed upon the earth, killing one-third of all humans (Revelation 9:13-21). The seventh trumpet will cause the seven bowl judgments to occur. Then the third woe will occur.

The first three bowl judgments of God’s wrath will cause people to suffer “loathsome and malignant sores,” and turn the sea and fresh water into blood (Revelation 16:1-4). Revelation 16:5 states that the reason these judgments will occur is that the wicked upon the earth persecuted the saints (Christians), and the prophets (Revelation 16:5-6). The fourth bowl judgment will cause the sun to be so extremely hot that it will scorch men so badly that they will blaspheme God (Revelation 16:8-9). The fifth bowl judgment will cause the kingdom of the Antichrist to be so dark that men will gnaw their tongues and blaspheme God due to pain (Revelation 16:10-11). The sixth bowl judgment will result in the Euphrates River becoming dry so that nations from the east will be able to invade Israel, enabling the nations of the world to come to the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16). The last bowl judgment will be the final outpouring of God’s wrath on the wicked earth (Revelation 16:17-21). Here is the seventh bowl judgment,

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe. Revelation 16:17-21 (NASB)

The message is that God’s wrath upon the wicked will reach a climax at the end of the battle of Armageddon. Israel will almost be defeated. Zechariah 13:8 reveals that two-thirds of Israelites will be killed. The total death toll upon the earth will be incredibly great at the end of the seven years of tribulation.

Now back to Matthew 24. In verse 22, we are told Jesus said,

Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Matthew 24:22 (NASB)

The Greek word for “cut short” is *koloboo*. It literally means cut off. So, Jesus told us that God the Father will cut off or stop the great tribulation in order to prevent all of the elect from being killed. Since Israel is in focus in Matthew 24, the elect may primarily refer to Israel (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 41:8-9; 45:4). Also, He may have spoken of the elect in order to include every believer, Jew and Gentile (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 17:14). This is important because only the elect will be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom (see Matthew 25:31-46). Isaiah 65:17-25 teaches that mortals must be living in the kingdom so that children can be born

and populate the kingdom. For a full explanation read “The Judgment of the Nations—Sheep and Goat judgment.”

The Evilness of Evil. In verses 23-26 Jesus reveals how utterly wicked men can be. He stated that during the great tribulation, false Christs and false prophets will appear. That is, they will seek to impersonate Christ, who is God Himself.

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. “Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.” Matthew 24:23-26 (NASB)

Jesus says they will claim to be Him. They will perform not a few small signs like a magician. Instead, Jesus said they will perform great signs and wonders for the purpose of deceiving people. Satan will help them perform great signs and wonders. Jesus warns believers to not believe these impostors, to not follow them, and do not search for them. We can imagine that these liars will appeal to many people who will hope that they can stop the suffering. These signs will be so powerful that the world will be deceived, but not the elect. The elect will know that the horrors will be the vengeance of God.

The Second Coming. Then Jesus tells us that the next chronological event will be His second coming.

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. Matthew 24:27-28 (NASB)

In these two verses, Christ uses lightening and vultures to describe the nature of His coming. His message is clear in verse 27 that His illustration of the lightening flashing from the east to the west means that His coming will be seen by everyone around the world. Zechariah 14:6-7 indicates that

God will cause the world to become totally dark so that the radiance of Christ will be seen everywhere. In other words, we illustrate this truth by saying the light of the sun and stars will be turned just as we turn off a light switch and then turn it back on in the evening as the day is darkening. So, when Jesus said that the lightening will occur in different directions, He could have added north and south. In reality, lightening can flash in any direction including vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. But His major point is that lightning is visible to everyone when it flashes. So, His coming will be just as visible. It will be seen for over one hundred miles under the right circumstances.

Then He uses another illustration to reinforce the same point. He spoke of vultures circling over corpses. This is a common occurrence for anyone who lives in the desert, countryside, or near forests. It is God’s way of removing dead animals from the earth. But Jesus uses the illustration to repeat His point that when His second coming occurs, everyone around the world will see Him. He will not be hiding somewhere in the wilderness or in an inner room in a house. The people will not have to search for Him. This is a promise that Jesus will not be like the false Christs. Everyone will see His second coming!

Now we should notice two important verses in Daniel. The first verse is Daniel 12:7 where we are told that after a time, times, and half a time, the power of Israel will be shattered. That is a reference to the last half of the tribulation. The message is that tribulation will end with Israel’s military power being shattered. We will discover in the next study that this will happen when the second coming of Christ occurs and He rescues Israel from the armies of the world. We will learn more about the second coming of Christ in the next study.

Conclusion. So, Mathew 24:16-26 provides an overview of the great tribulation. It will be a time when God the Father will pour out His wrath upon the world. During this time, He will avenge all of the persecuted believers and punish the wicked upon this wicked world. He will fulfill all the prophecies that state Israel will suffer for its rebellion and rejection of Christ (Zechariah 11:1-17). His judgments will also occur because the wicked on the earth

have persecuted all Christians, those who are Gentiles and those who are Jews. The wicked will also suffer because they rejected Christ and did not repent of their sins.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. Revelation 9:20-21 (NASB)

The tribulation will be a time when God calls men and women to repent and believe in Christ so they can have forgiveness for their sins. Romans 10:9-13.

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13 (NASB)

Repent and believe in Christ so that you are ready for Him when He returns. He is coming again!