

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 5a
The Incredible Journey
Of The
Church Age Believer
Jan. 4, 2004

INTRO We began phase 1 with the title The Believer's Initial Earthly Journey. I expected that at least one person would be alert enough to ask me, "What do you mean by initial earthly journey?" I expected you to say, "It sounds like you are inferring that the believer is going to heaven and then coming back to earth or something like that." Then I gave the second phase the title of the Believer's Interim Heavenly experience. The thought given by the word interim is that it is a temporary experience. Our life on earth now is our initial earthly experience. We will be back after a short time in heaven. Our experience in heaven is only interim. During this time believers will be judged at the judgement seat of Christ and they are going to be united to Christ in marriage. All of this takes place while the tribulation time period called the time of Jacob's trouble takes place on earth.

Phase I covers our time on earth from the moment we are saved until we die or until we are taken to heaven by Christ. Phase II deals with our time in heaven with the Lord until He is ready to return to earth. Phase III is what we will begin to examine this morning. Now, while the Church was in heaven, the tribulation took place on earth. You can read a summarized account of what happens in those 7 years in Revelation 4-19. This morning we will look at that briefly as the prelude to phase 3 of our journey.

III. PHASE 3: THE BELIEVER'S RESUMED EARTHLY JOURNEY

A. Commenced by a Heavenly Horse Ride (Rev. 19:11-16)

1. The prelude to this event of the horse ride

We saw that phase II of the Pilgrim's progress ends by the Christians who have gone to heaven preparing themselves for the marriage supper. We will see more of this marriage supper later. In Revelation 19 we saw that the Church had already become the wife of Christ. She is arrayed in fine linen representing the righteous acts of Christians. When the wife has made herself ready we find in Revelation 19:11-14 how phase III of the Church age believer's journey begins.

You will recall that Elijah was caught up by a heavenly

horseride. Now the saints come down on white horses. I wonder if you can imagine for a moment a group of people numbering into the millions all mounted on white horses? Try to see them in your mind. Then try to picture a rider at the head of this large group. His eyes are as a flame of fire. On His head are many crowns. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood. His name is called the Word of God. Out of His mouth goes a sharp two edged sword. And on His robe is a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

If you can visualize this picture as given in Scripture allow me to paint another picture for you. The Church has been raptured to heaven and has been gone from earth for seven years, if the pretrib view is correct. But what happens on earth during those seven years? That is what I call the prelude to phase 3, of the church age believer's journey. Well, we might look at it under the caption: Meanwhile back at the ranch. The catching up of the Church to meet Christ in the air has left the world with the disappearance of possibly millions of people. They have disappeared without scientific explanation. It will be the biggest news of all time. Let me read it for you again from Scripture: *Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left (Matt. 24:40-41). For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).*

This event will leave the world stunned. It is most likely that science and religion will explain this event to the satisfaction of most people, but many will be brought to consider the claims of the Bible. Right at this time or shortly thereafter there will appear a man whom we refer to as the antichrist. He will be the greatest, most ungodly, most charming,

charismatic figure this world has ever known. This man will be able to do what nobody up to his time has been able to do. He will make peace in the Middle East (Dan. 9:27). One of the amazing things that will happen is the rebuilding of the Jewish temple on Mount Moriah. For those who understand the significance of such an event, will understand what a powerful figure this man, the antichrist, will be.

Now right at the beginning of that time period a very significant event will occur. Write down Revelation 11:1-14 and study it for yourself. Two witnesses are going to miraculously appear on earth. Many speculate that they will be Moses and Elijah. Some think they will be Enoch and Elijah because those two never experienced death on earth. One of the very interesting events in the life of Christ is when He was transfigured before three of His disciples. And there appeared with Him Moses and Elijah. And the interesting thing to me is that the disciples seemed to immediately recognize them.

Now if Moses and Elijah appear in Jerusalem right at the beginning of the tribulation, what do you think will happen to the Jews? Well, I will tell you what will happen. You can read it for yourself in Revelation 7:1-8. Hundreds of thousands of Jews are saved. And of those hundreds of thousands, 144,000, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel are chosen for special evangelistic service.

Now there is a question I have wrestled with for years. How will they know from which tribe each of these Jews is? This past year a new possibility suggested itself to me. The Mormons have claimed for years that the Indians of North America are from one of the tribes of Israel. No one could disprove the claim but there was no evidence for it either. And now, lo and behold, the Mormons have run into evidence that has shaken their view. What is it? DNA testing. Now, with DNA testing, it can be proved who is a Jew and who is not. Should it seem to incredible then, that man himself might be able to determine which of the 12 tribes every Jew is from?

And so we ask, what happens when these 144,000 perform their evangelistic ministry? I want you to read it

with me in Revelation 7:9-14 (read). What happens? During this time of the tribulation, literally millions of people are saved. I will not go into greater detail here, other than to say that these verses reveal that the majority of these believers are martyred before the tribulation ends.

Well, let's move to the middle of the tribulation. During this time many significant things take place. The Devil is cast down (Rev. 12:9-10). It appears that he enters the antichrist who then breaks his 7 year agreement with Israel (Dan. 9:27). Antichrist then goes to the Jewish temple and sets Himself up as god in the temple (2 Thess. 2:3-4). This is called the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15). At this time the believing Jews are instructed to flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:15-21). This flight is picked up in Rev. 12:6, 13-17). Here many thousands of Jews are holed up and remain alive until the end of the tribulation.

At the mid-point of the tribulation we might say, "All hell breaks loose." I do not read of any people being saved after this. I read instead these words, "And they repented not" (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9,11). The horrors and catastrophies that now take place are almost beyond description. And it gets worse and worse as the end of the tribulation gets closer. Matthew 24:22 tells us that if those days were not shortened no flesh would be saved, that is mankind would destroy himself. And as those seven years roll to a close, Luke 21:25-27 says, "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Now I propose to you that that cloud in which Christ comes will be a cloud of white robed saints on white horses! And so we are ready to see now, the beginning of phase three of journey of the Church age believer. It begins with what I have called a heavenly horse ride.

2. The event of this heavenly horseride itself

So let us look now at the heavenly horse ride by which this third phase of the Church age believer begins. For it is at this time that the heavenly horse ride of the believer takes place as he returns to planet earth. Dressed in white and mounted on white horses the believers now come down from heaven back to earth. Listen to Matthew as he writes what this return will be like for those on earth, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (24:29-30).

At the time of the Lord's return many significant things will be happening on earth. First, Jerusalem will be besieged by the nations and will be ravaged by them. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the Arab nations are going to be involved in this terrible battle. There dwells in this very day a Palestinian Arab who cannot wait until he might butcher every Jew alive. His name is Yassar Arrafat. This man has no feeling for fellow human beings not even those of his own nation. A recent prophecy magazine writes in an article titled "How to Win a Peace Prize" says, "Yassar Arafat ordered the murders of the school children in Avivim, Ma'alot, and Antwerp; the murders of the 11 Jewish athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich; of synagogue worshippers in Istanbul; of a child and his pregnant mother in Alfeh Menashe, and of a mother and her children on the bus in Jericho. This is the man who ordered innocent Arabs in Nablus hanged by their chins on butchers' hooks until they died; by whose orders the bellies of pregnant Arab women were split open before the eyes of their husbands and the hands of Arab children were chopped while their parents looked on." This information comes from the Jerusalem Post of Sept. 11, 1993.

What will it be like in Jerusalem when Christ returns to earth with His Church? Men like Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussien and Yassar Arafat will have her in a

death grip. Turn with me to Zechariah 14 for a description of that time by an Old Testament prophet by the name of Zechariah (read 14:1-2). As I see it, when the Lord returns with the Church, now turned into an army, He will first take care of this little matter at Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3-7). Jerusalem will be taken out of the hands of her conquerors.

I believe that next on His agenda will be delivering the Jewish Christians who fled out of Jerusalem in the middle of the tribulation when the antichrist took over the temple (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4). It is believed that they will flee to a city called Petra. This is a city carved out of rock in Bible times. It was the Nabatean capital in the Biblical country of Edom. It is situated between present day Eilat at the Eastern tip of the Red Sea, and the Dead Sea. Just north of Petra is the Biblical city called Bozrah. It seems that somewhere in this area will be troops who keep the Jews holed up in Petra. Petra is a likely place for these Jews to flee to because it is a city carved out of rock and the only entrance is a very narrow canyon with walls 300 feet high and almost a mile long. It is a place now often visited by tourists who travel to the Middle East.

Let us look at the Scriptures that prophecy this event (Jer. 49:22; Is. 34:1-8; Is. 63:1-6).

What I think will happen is that the world will hear of the events taking place. From Revelation 1:7 we gather that every eye will see Him ascending on the clouds. There is little doubt that His return will be televised. The Lord's work at Jerusalem and Bozrah will be worldwide news. Now something very interesting takes place. We pick it up in Revelation 16:12-16. The nations of the world now gather at Armageddon. The purpose? To conquer Jesus Christ and His army. Let us go back to Revelation 19 to pick up the following events.

The second last battle of this world will occur at Armageddon. I have stood on the mound of Megiddo and looked over the vast valley which stretches out for many miles. It is the sight of many historical battles because it is an important cross road to many places. It is some 30 kilometers SSE of modern Haifa in

Israel. This is the most likely place to be chosen for the gathering of the coalition forces of the world mentioned in Revelation 16:12-16 (read). In Revelation 19:17-21 we see the results of this battle (read). According to Revelation 14:20 horses will be in blood up to their bridles for a stretch of 200 miles. This is the final battle before the millennium.

And then, as this battle draws to a close, the sound of warfare will hush. The evil forces of this world will have been silenced. A time period of 1000 years of peace will now envelop the earth. Today, there is a verse of Scripture found on the buildings of the United Nations. It reads like this, "...They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is. 2:4). But it will not be the UN that will usher in this time period. It will be the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be Yeshua, Hamashia.

CONCL: How does phase three of the Pilgrim's Progress begin? It begins by a return to earth on white horses, following Jesus Christ. It begins with a battle on earth between the Son of God and the armies of the world. The outcome is described in Revelation 19 and Ezekiel 39:11-20.

Now I ask you, does all this sound too fantastic? This morning we have seen only a small part of what Scripture reveals of the time I call the prelude to the heavenly horseride. I am sure that what Scripture reveals, is but a small part of what will actually happen as we can learn from past fulfilled events. You may ask, "Why is this not preached more. If the Bible actually gives all these events, why do we hear so little of it?" One of the overriding reasons is the Amillennial view that set in, in the Church not long after Christ went back to heaven.

There are more reasons. I believe the devil does not want this preached. No, if you and I should get to know the hope of our calling, the devil would lose much ground in us. It would carry us victoriously through many a valley of depression. It would grip us and excite us and motivate us. There is yet another reason and that is because we as Christians do not read and believe our Bibles. Read the first three chapters of the Bible and believe them, read the last three in the same way and believe them in the same way, and the hope of your calling will take on an altogether new dimension.

