

NONE WILL BE "LEFT BEHIND!"

By David Lee Burris

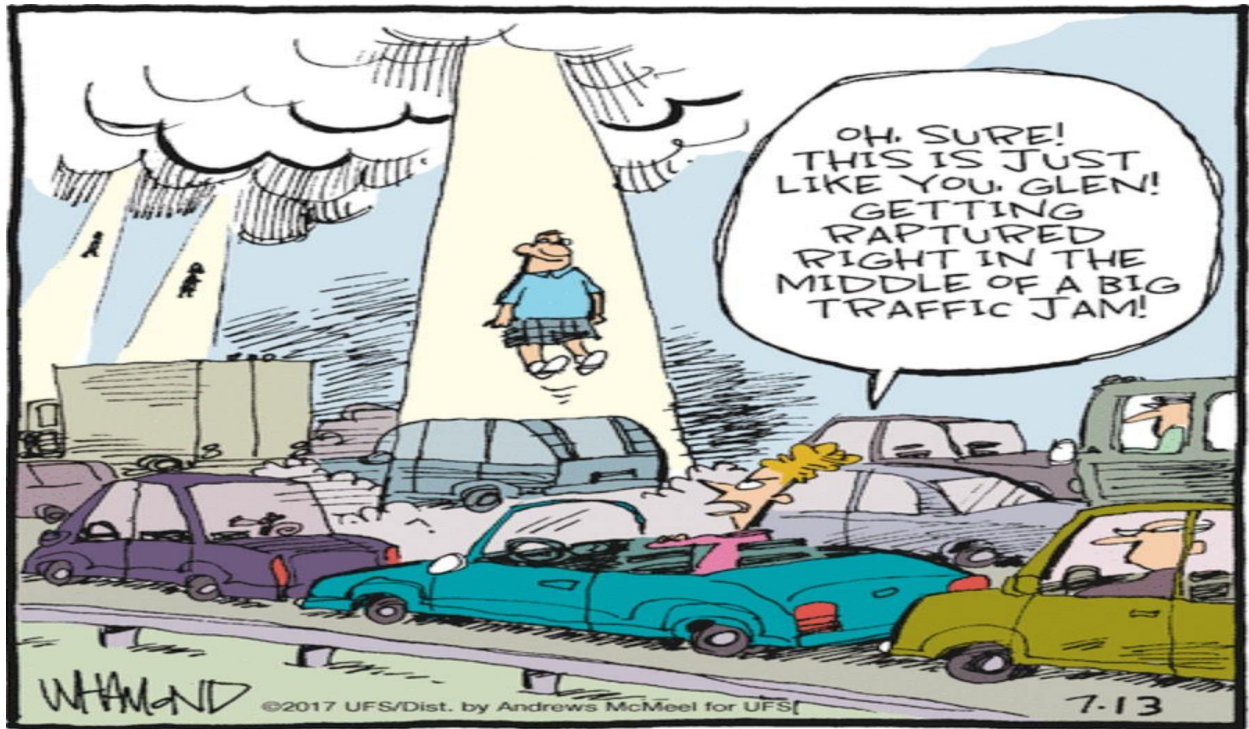


the leftovers



WARNING!

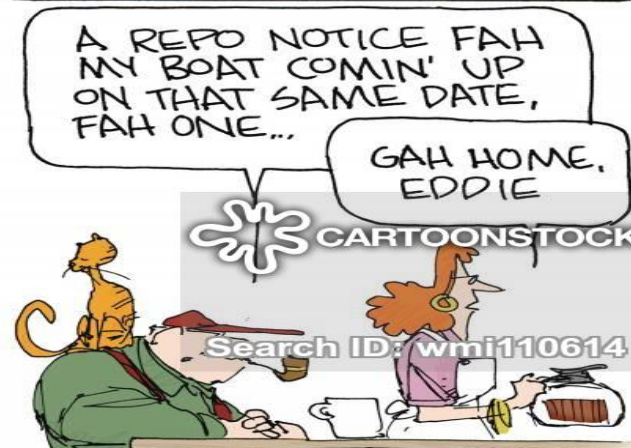
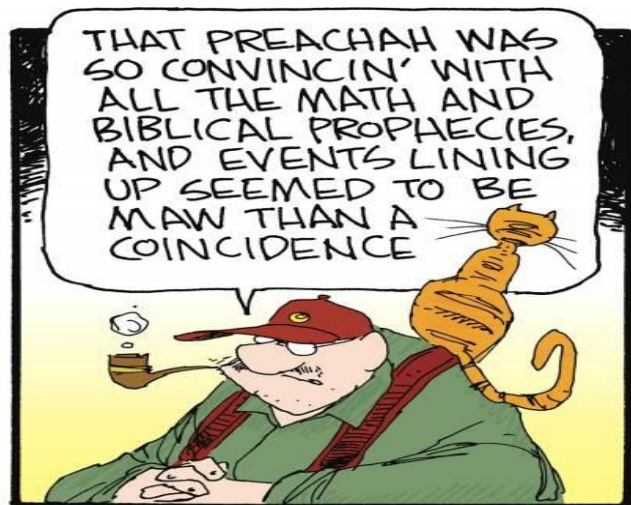
IN CASE OF RAPTURE, THIS VEHICLE WILL BE UNMANNED



Calvinist Cartoons by **EDDIE EDDINGS**

LOOK HONEY!
WE CAN TAKE OUR
CARS WITH US AFTER ALL!





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'So, I guess you can mow the lawn now.'

©nakedpastor



"I'm afraid I have received rather unsettling news. The Rapture took place this morning, 8 o'clock Eastern."



Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

In a moment,.... Or point of time, which is very short indeed; what a moment is, according to the Jewish doctors, See Gill on [Matthew 4:8](#).

In the twinkling of an eye; these two the Jews not only put together as here, but make one to be as the other; so they say (k), , "a moment is as the twinkling of an eye". This phrase, as the twinkling of an eye, is frequently used in Jewish writings (l), to signify how speedily and suddenly anything is done, and which is the design of it here; and the apostle's meaning is, that the change upon the bodies of living saints will be so quick, that it will be done in a trice, before a man can shut his eyes and open them again; so that it will be as it were imperceptible, and without the least sensation of pain; this may also be referred to the resurrection, which will be quick, and done at once; though it seems rather, and chiefly, to respect the change of the living; what follows, indeed, favors the other sense also; **for all will be quick and sudden, the coming of Christ, the raising of the dead, and the change of the living:**

at the last trumpet, for the trumpet shall sound; or "by the last trumpet", as the Syriac and Arabic versions render it; that is, by means of it, through the sounding of that:

and the dead shall be raised incorruptible; free from all frailty, mortality, and corruption, when the trumpet shall sound:

and at the same time also,

we shall be changed; the saints that will be found alive; the apostle speaks in the first person, because of the uncertainty of Christ's coming, and of the blowing of the last trumpet, he not knowing but it might be in his time; what this last trumpet will be, is not easy to say; it can hardly be thought to be a material one: the Jews (m) have a notion, that a trumpet will be blown at the time of the resurrection of the dead, as at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; which will quicken the dead, as they say it then did; and that this will be blown by Michael the archangel (n): it seems very likely to be the same with the shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) all which may be no other than the voice of Christ; at the hearing of which, the dead will rise; but whether this will be an articulate one, as at the raising of Lazarus, or is only expressive of his power, which will then be put forth, is not material, nor a point to be determined: and what if by all this should be meant some violent claps of thunder, as at Mount Sinai, which will shake the whole earth; and when almighty power will be put forth to raise the dead: since such are by the Jews (o) called the voices of the son of David, and are expected by them, a little before his coming? **This is called the "last" trumpet**, not so much with respect to those that go before, much less to the seven trumpets in the Revelations, of which as yet there was no revelation made, but because there will be none after it; see:

"And the trumpet shall give a sound, which when every man heareth, they shall be suddenly afraid." (2 Esdras 6:23)

The 'rapture question'

Grant R Osborne

Three eschatological schools are generally distinguished with regard to their views of the millennium, a thousand-year period prophesied in Revelation 20:4–10. *Amillennialists* believe there will be no millennium in a literal sense; rather, the prophetic passages are general, symbolic pictures of this present age and its spiritual state. *Postmillennialists* view the millennium as a period of peace which will precede the parousia and will result from the evangelization of the world. Both of these positions employ a figurative interpretation of the Apocalypse and related passages. *Pre-millennialists*, however, argue for a literal hermeneutic regarding prophecy. Of course, the 'literal' aspect is relative; not even the most ardent dispensationalist would argue for a literal seven-headed dragon in the end times (Rev. 12). Rather, they assert that biblical apocalyptic foreshadows literal, future events.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism differs not only in espousing a literal thousand-year reign of Christ following the parousia (hence the title 'premillennial'; Christ will return *before* the millennium) but also in teaching a seven-year 'tribulation' period leading up to the millennium (taken from the seventieth week of Daniel, Dn. 9:24–27; cf. Mt. 24:15ff., Rev. 4–18). Advocates of this view believe that there will be a literal seven-year period at the end of the Church Age involving the rise of the 'Antichrist' (Dn. 7:25; 2 Thes. 2:3ff.; Rev. 13:5ff.) coming to power over the entire world; the 'abomination of desolation' (Dn. 9:27; Mt. 24:15) in the middle of the period, when he demands universal worship of himself; and the 'Great Tribulation' (Mt. 24:16ff.) in the last half of the period, when he persecutes the saints.

This movement was called 'chiliasm' in the early church, and disappeared after the work of Augustine and the rise of the historical interpretation of prophecy. It did not reappear until the early 1800's in England, with the prophetic conference movement. Two main forms developed: (1) the classical chiliasm of the early church, associated with the return of Christ after the tribulation period; (2) the dispensational school, expounding the return of the Lord before the tribulation period. The latter view developed within the Plymouth Brethren movement in England and became connected with the writings of J. N. Darby (it was called 'Darbyism' for many years). It was Darby who popularized the position in North America; he made six trips there between 1859 and 1874. There it became extremely popular and carried the day in 'grass-roots' evangelicalism.

We might distinguish three reasons why it became so strong in North America, even while it failed to generate strong support in England or the continent: (1) the prophetic conferences in North America became the major bastion of teaching in the increasingly bitter fundamentalist—liberal debates of 1880–1930. In these dispensationalism more and more carried the day. (2) The popularity of the Scofield Bible (1909) made it the Bible of the common man. It contained dispensational interpretations of passages in footnotes, and these came to be viewed as almost biblical in their authority in the eyes of many Christians. (3) The Bible institute movement of the mid-twentieth century was led almost entirely by men who considered dispensationalism to be essential to any true evangelical faith. As a result, hundreds of churches and small denominations were dominated by this view.

In the last twenty-five years, however, there has developed an increasing debate within premillennialism regarding the temporal connection between the return of Christ and the tribulation period. Three views have emerged: (1) the pretribulation view, teaching that there will be two returns, one before the tribulation to ‘rapture’ the saints and the other after the tribulation to defeat the forces of Antichrist and establish the millennial reign; (2) the mid-tribulation position, which states that the ‘rapture’ will occur in the middle of the tribulation, in connection with the ‘abomination of desolation’; and (3) the post-tribulation position, which asserts that there is only one return of Christ and that the two aspects will occur simultaneously. It will be helpful to set out the biblical evidence that each position marshalls to support its view.

The pretribulation view

At the outset, it is crucial to understand the ‘dispensational principle’ (which ‘is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology’) which declares that Israel must be kept distinct from the church in God’s redemptive plan. Supporters of this position argue that the church is the ‘mystery’ revealed only at Pentecost⁷ and that the Old Testament prophecies refer only to Israel and not to the Church. Therefore, Daniel 9:24–27 and Jeremiah 30:7, the two major prophecies connected with the tribulation, are said to show that the tribulation period is Jewish in character. Therefore, the first sixty-nine weeks in Daniel’s vision are Jewish, and the seventieth week must also be seen in this way.

The Church Age, which comes between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, was not revealed to Israel. This is supported by the Jeremiah verse, which speaks of ‘the day of Jacob’s trouble’. The rapture of the saints before the tribulation is said to be prophesied in John 14:3, where Christ promises to take the Church to his Father’s house. It is revealed as a further ‘mystery’ in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 and is fully explicated in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. There the saints meet Christ in the air and Christ is not seen as coming to earth. Therefore, this could not be the return of Christ after the tribulation period.

Another major argument is taken from passages teaching the imminence of the parousia. Here passages are noted exhorting the believer to ‘watch’ (Lk. 21:36, *et al.*) or ‘await eagerly’ (Lk. 12:36; Tit. 2:13; Rom. 8:23, 25, *etc.*) Jesus’ return. Of special importance are those describing the return as ‘at hand’ (Phil. 4:5; Jas. 5:8, 9; 1 Pet. 4:7). Scholars of this persuasion argue that these passages demand an ‘any-moment’ return which means there are no signs to be fulfilled. Therefore there could not be a seven-year tribulation period which must occur before the parousia.

Finally, we might note passages indicating an escape from God's wrath (Lk. 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:8; Rev. 3:10) which advocates of this school apply to the outpouring of God's wrath in the tribulation period (Rev. 6:8, 17 *et al.*). They argue that the promise to keep the saints from the hour of testing (Rev. 3:10) means that they will be taken out of this world before God's wrath 'tries' the world. Therefore the church cannot be on earth during this period.

The mid-tribulation view

This view has not had a great deal of literature written on its behalf. It is, however, gaining adherents and influence in the debate today. The key to this position is found in the Apocalypse and in the argument that the seals, trumpets and bowls must be interpreted according to successive sequence rather than repetitive cycles. That is, the future events pictured in those images are three separate occurrences; and so the images of the seals, trumpets and bowls do not refer to a single out-pouring of wrath but to three successive outpourings.

These scholars believe that the 'rapture' occurs in Revelation 11:15–19, at the seventh trumpet. The events of chapter 11 revolve around the two witnesses who for a time confound the forces of Antichrist, are finally killed and lie in state in Jerusalem, then are caught up to heaven. Mid-tribulationists identify this with the events of chapters 12 and 13 and with the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 (Dn. 9:27). The great tribulation of Matthew 24:21, 22 is equated with the three and one half days of Revelation 11:10, 11; the orgy of rejoicing over the witnesses' bodies will also involve an orgy of persecution against the church and will be 'shortened for the elect's sake' (Mt. 24:22). Therefore the coming of Christ in Matthew 24:29–31 is equated with the events of Revelation 11 and the seventh trumpet is identified with the 'last trumpet' of 1 Corinthians 15:52. Eschatological symbols common to Revelation 11 and the other major passages on the parousia include the cloud, the great voice, the ascension, the trumpet, the kingdom received, the reward, the time of wrath and the temple in heaven.

Further evidence is taken from Daniel. Buswell states regarding the seventieth week of 9:24–27, that the first half is a time of truce, not of tribulation. Only the second half involves the outpouring of wrath. Then in 12:1–2, when Michael stands up and delivers the people (a prophecy of the rapture), 'at that time' refers to the abomination of desolation in 11:31 and 12:11. Therefore the rapture will take place in the middle of the tribulation period.

The post-tribulation view

This position argues that Scripture nowhere teaches two separate aspects to the return of Christ. In every passage there is only one return, and it includes both aspects, the return for the church (1 Thes. 4:13–18) and Jesus' coming to defeat the forces of the Antichrist (1 Thes. 5:1–10). They point to the three terms used for the return—*parousia* or 'coming', *epiphaneia* or 'manifestation' and *apocalypsis* or 'revelation'. Each is used of both aspects, so there is no terminological basis for separating the two.

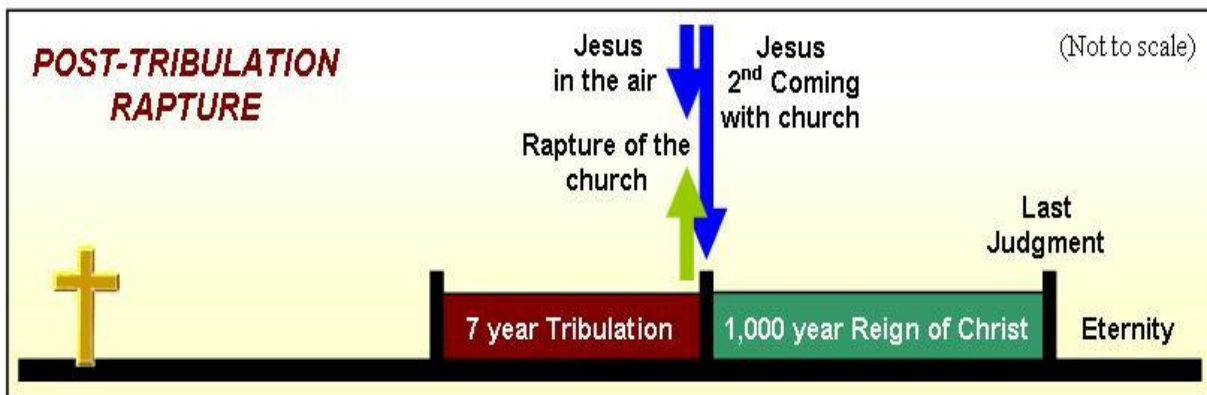
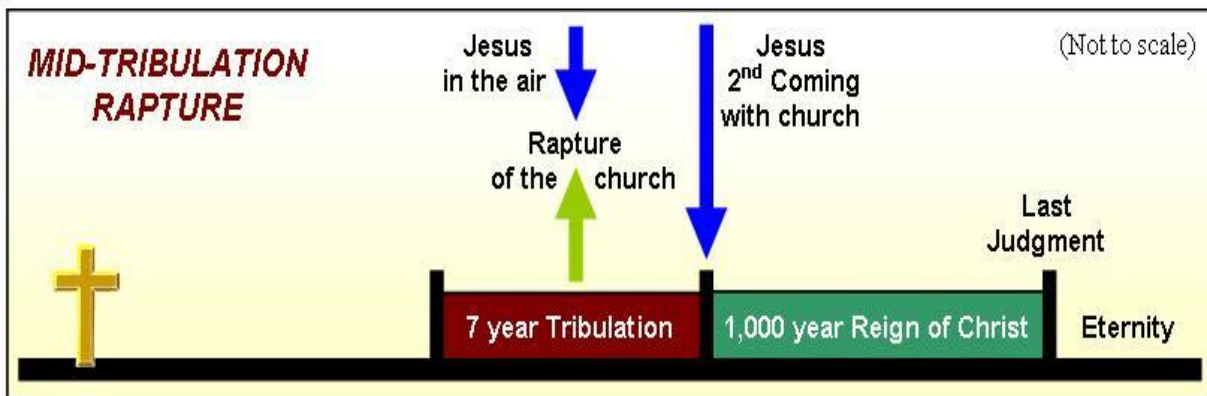
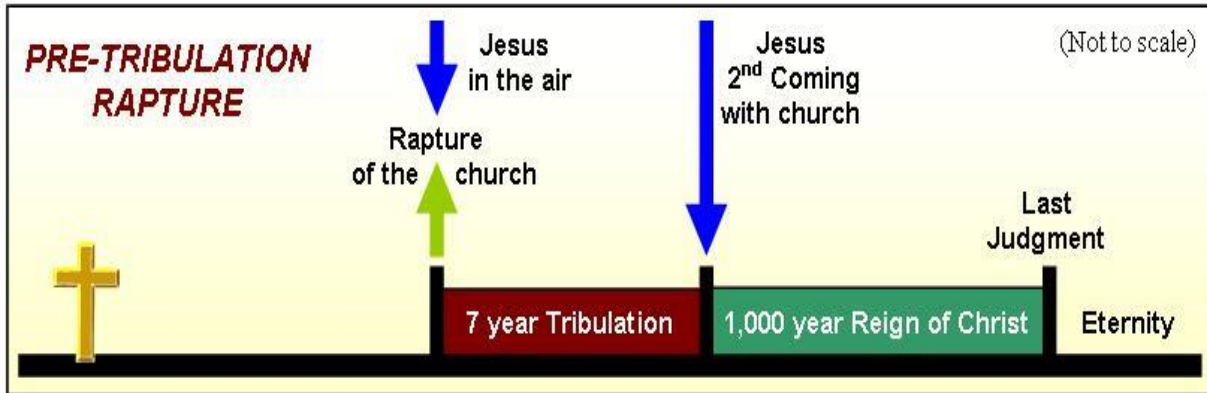
These people argue that imminence does not mean 'any moment' in Scripture. In an extensive discussion of the passages relating to imminence, R. H. Gundry asserts that they teach an expectation which includes a necessary delay before the parousia. During this time such signs as the evangelization of the whole world (Mt. 24:14), the great apostasy and the appearance of Antichrist (2 Thes. 2:3) must occur. This delay is pictured in many of the kingdom parables like the parables of the talents (Lk. 19:11–27) and the virgins (Mt. 25:1–13).

The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 is the major passage for this position. In verses 21, 22, 'elect' is said to refer to the church as well as Israel, since Jesus uses it in this way in Matthew 22:14. Moreover, throughout the New Testament the term is used for the church, so it is the church which will pass through the tribulation period. Then, in verses 29–31, the 'elect' are gathered together 'after the tribulation'. The symbolism of the entire passage fits that of 1 Thessalonians 4 and must therefore speak of the rapture of the church.

Finally, the first Thessalonian Epistle is used to prove a single, undivided return of the Lord. This school argues that the temporal element missing in 4:13–18 is found in 5:1–4. In the original, without chapter and verse distinctions, 5:1 follows directly after 4:18; and the conjunction 'but' in 5:1 indicates the transition from the persons included in the parousia to the time when it will come. Therefore 4:13–18 concerns the relation of the dead to the living at the parousia, while 5:1–4 tells when it will come.

Two passages in 2 Thessalonians are also used. First, 1:7–10 indicates that the 'rest' of the believers will not occur until Christ's return in vengeance and flaming fire. Second, 2:1–10 states that the Antichrist must be in power before the parousia can occur. Ladd asserts that the rapture and the revelation in judgment must have been considered as simultaneous or else Paul would have distinguished them between verses 1 and 3. Since they are not, the church must be meant to pass through the tribulation.¹

¹ Osborne, G. R. (1977). [The "Rapture Question."](#) *Themelios*, 2(3), 77–80.



[Exposing The Rapture Myth You've Been Taught All Your Life](#)

I suppose that this assertion might shock you, but the doctrine of the "rapture" was never taught prior to 1830. Even if it's a little uncomfortable to consider, I would ask you to stay with me on this.

This relatively modern theological notion of the "*evacuation of the saints*" is completely absent from the [Nicene Creed](#) (325), the [Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed](#) (381), the [Chalcedonian Creed](#) (451), the [Athanasian Creed](#) (500), the [Augsburg Confession](#) (1530), The [Canons of Dordt](#) (1618-1619), the [Baptist Confession of Faith](#) (1644), the [Westminster Confession](#) (1646), and the [Methodist Articles of Religion](#) (1784).

While the "rapture" was actually first publicly espoused by the followers of [Edward Irving](#) (1792-1834) and [John Nelson Darby](#) (1800-1882), some are convinced that its roots go back to a sickly teenager named Margaret MacDonald (1815-1840) from Port Glasgow in Western Scotland.

MacDonald and her family later became loosely connected to Irving's Catholic Apostolic movement, which was beginning to emphasize charismatic and eschatological expressions.

Sometime in the spring of 1830, Margaret MacDonald, who was confined to a bed, claimed to experience the "gift of prophecy." There was fervor and excitement in some of the church meetings and MacDonald was caught up in it.

She claimed to experience a vision of the Church being caught away to heaven before the "tribulation." One evening Margaret is reported to have exclaimed the following:
"this is the light to be kept burning - the light of God - that we may discern that which cometh not with observation to the natural eye. Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance. No need to follow them who say, see here, or see there, for his day shall be as the lightning to those in whom the living Christ is. 'Tis Christ in us that will lift us up - he is the light - 'tis only those that are alive in him that will be caught up to meet him in the air."^[1]

Robert Norton, M.D., an observer of these "stirrings," recounted what happened to Margaret and how it impacted so many influential leaders.

"The power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her [MacDonald] for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and vision... here we see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord's coming, when every eye shall see Him, and His prior appearing in glory to them that look for Him."^[2]

Along with the controversial Edward Irving, John Nelson Darby, the originator of Dispensational Premillennialism was also deeply influenced by the supposed "prophetic" utterance of this young woman. Historian Timothy Weber notes the following,

"The Plymouth Brethren commissioned Darby to go to Scotland and investigate. He arrived in the middle of 1830 and according to his own testimony twenty-three years later, actually met MacDonald and heard her prophesy...Darby returned home... convinced that Margaret McDonald's view of the rapture was true. He subsequently fit it into his [Dispensational] system, but never acknowledged his debt to her."^[3]

This wasn't just an association that Timothy Weber observed in his research. Scholars Carl Armerding and W. Ward Gasque became convinced of this same reality. They write, "It is likely... [MacDonald's prophecy] was grist for Darby's mill. As he left Scotland, he carried with him impressions which, after some years of reflection, would play their part in the formation of the teaching of the secret pretribulation rapture."^[4]

However its origin is ultimately framed up, virtually everyone agrees that John Nelson Darby was the first major proponent of this teaching. He readily affirmed the rapture in his public addresses and made it a central component of his Dispensational Premillennialism in the early 1830s.

In the following decades Darby visited America a number of times to share his novel apocalyptic teachings, but it is suggested that

“his reception was cautious at best...Most people dismissed Premillennialism as silly and discredited. Others considered it a novelty and therefore unworthy of their consideration. The educational and ecclesiastical elite tended to reject Dispensationalism.”[\[5\]](#)

Weber notes “*It was not easy to stand against Christian consensus and still claim to be orthodox, but that is precisely what Dispensationalists were forced to do.*”[\[6\]](#) Darby follower, C.H. Mackintosh, once exclaimed, “*It looks presumptuous to contradict, on so many subjects, all the great standards and creeds of Christendom. But what is one to do?*”[\[7\]](#)

By the 1880s, D.L. Moody[\[8\]](#) and a few prominent Fundamentalists began to accept aspects of Darby’s Dispensational theological system. The rapture and its related apocalyptic story-line began to gain traction in some of the camp meetings and Bible Institutes.

Nevertheless, what finally made the doctrine of the rapture an enduring presence in America was the wide dissemination of the Scofield Reference Bible.

Cyrus I. Scofield (1843 – 1921) had become acquainted with Dispensational Premillennialism and came up with the idea of printing an annotated Bible to help individuals master the complexities of this Darbyite system.[\[9\]](#) It seems that the Scofield Reference Bible “*brought the apocalyptic into the heart of evangelicalism.*”[\[10\]](#)

Shortly after it was published in 1909, this Bible became the textbook of choice for Evangelical and Pentecostal Bible institutes. The detailed notes were studied with great diligence & widely accepted - even though they articulated “*a decidedly different interpretation to actually what is being read in the Bible text.*”[\[11\]](#)

Reflecting on all of this, Charles Lippy writes,

“*One did not need to be a convinced premillennial dispensationalist to be influenced by the Scofield Reference Bible since for generations of American Protestants it was the only edition of scripture to use for reading and study of the sacred text of Christianity, etching deeply into the popular religious consciousness.*”[\[12\]](#)

While the rapture was never taught prior to 1830, Michael Williams acknowledges that, “*Virtually every revivalist preacher and populist religious leader of any fame since D.L. Moody has been a Dispensationalist.*”[\[13\]](#)

Over one hundred seventy years later, the rapture and its cataclysmic worldview continues to define theology for many Americans. Multitudes hold to it passionately, never considering it only emerged as a doctrine in the 19th Century. I know first-hand that many are eager to break fellowship and renounce anyone who questions their apocalyptic timeline. They are ready to die for an idea that is completely absent from all historic creeds of the Church.

It's time for us to have a better conversation about what our forefathers actually believed. What was the worldview that defined the faith of [Jonathan Edwards](#) and [John Wesley](#)? Would they have been comfortable defining Christianity as an [evacuation](#) effort?

- [1] Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-up*. (Omega Publishers, 1975): 151. MacPherson cites Robert Norton, *Memoirs of James and George MacDonald of Port-Glasgow* (1840): 171-176.
- [2] Robert M. Norton. *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets: In the Catholic Apostolic Church*. (London: 1861) 15.
- [3] Timothy P. Weber. *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2004) 24.
- [4] Carl E.Armerding and W. Ward Gasque. *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy: A Balanced and Biblical Assessment of the Nature of Prophecy in the Bible*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989) 52.
- [5] Timothy P. Weber. *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2004) 26.
- [6] Timothy P. Weber. *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2004) 28, 31.
- [7] C.H. Mackintosh. *Papers On The Lord's Coming*. (London: 1907) 56.
- [8] Dr. Peter Prosser writes, "While Moody never really endorsed the Dispensational view of Premillennialism, he did not try to prevent its teachings from spreading either. He was attracted to it because of its pessimistic view of culture gave a strong impetus to evangelism." Peter Prosser. *Dispensationalist Eschatology and Its Influence on American and British Religious Movements*. (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) 143-144.
- [9] Michael Williams writes that "Scofield's failure to acknowledge his indebtedness to the Plymouth Brethren does not disguise the fact that Darbyite Dispensationalism provided the structure and content of the Scofield Bible." Michael Williams. *This World is Not My Home: The Origin And Development Of Dispensationalism*. Mentor, 2011, 31.
- [10] Michael Williams. *This World is Not My Home: The Origin And Development Of Dispensationalism*. (Fern, Scotland: Mentor, 2011) 21.
- [11] Peter Prosser. *Dispensational Eschatology and Its Influence on American and British Religious Movements*. (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) 74.
- [12] Charles H. Lippy. *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994) 134.
- [13] Michael Williams. *This World is Not My Home: The Origin And Development Of Dispensationalism*. (Fern, Scotland: Mentor, 2011) 19. Timothy Weber also affirms that, "Every major American revivalist since D. L. Moody has been a Premillennialist of some kind." Timothy P. Weber. "How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend." *Christianity Today*. (October 5, 1998).
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THE WORD

RAPTURE

IS NOT

FOUND IN

THE BIBLE!

RAPTURE-TRIBULATION SPECULATION

The Rapture of the Church

Local television stations from around the world reported bizarre occurrences.... CNN showed via satellite the video of a groom disappearing while slipping the ring onto his bride's finger. A funeral home in Australia reported that nearly every mourner disappeared from one memorial service, including the corpse.

“We have Gary DeMar and Dave Hunt on the phone. They have agreed to debate the topic of Bible prophecy. Dave and Gary have debated a number of times over the years, so they are familiar with the issues. Dave, why don't you go first? From your perspective, what is the single doctrine that sets you and Gary apart?”

“I would have to say that it's the pre-trib Rapture.”

“Could you briefly explain it?”

“The Rapture and the Second Coming are two distinct events. One occurs at the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period when Jesus comes for His church, and the other at the end when Jesus returns with His church to rescue Israel.”

“Gary, is the pre-trib Rapture a sticking point for you?”

“Yes, and a whole lot more. But I have one question for Dave. Can he show me one verse that teaches a *pre-tribulational* Rapture?”

“Dave?”

“Certainly. First Thessalonians 4:16–17 [KJV] is a good starting point: ‘For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.’ ”

“Gary, your response?”

“It's no surprise that Dave turns to this passage, since 1 Thessalonians 4 is considered the key Rapture passage. If the Rapture's not taught here, it's not taught anywhere. The issue in this debate is not whether those in Christ are being caught up; it's *when* they are being caught up and what follows this event. There is no mention of a Tribulation period following being caught up. A careful reader will note that there is no mention of the reign of Anti-christ, a rebuilt temple, or Armageddon, all the elements that assume a pre-trib Rapture. There is no single verse in the entire Bible that supports a pre-trib Rapture.”

The story line of *Left Behind* is based upon a doctrine called the Rapture. To be more precise, it is based upon a particular view of the Rapture, a *pre-tribulational* as opposed to a post-tribulational, mid-tribulational, partial, or pre-wrath Rapture. The Rapture, a word that is not found in English translations of the Bible, supposedly is an event where all Christians, both living and dead, will be “caught up” to meet Jesus in the sky and then be taken to heaven. Jesus' return to “rapture” His church is invisible and secret. No one will know the event has taken place until after the fact. Advocates of a Rapture do not agree when the event occurs. All agree that the timing of the Rapture is tied to the seven-year Tribulation period. The pre-tribulationist believes that the Rapture takes place *before* (pre) the Tribulation; the post-tribulationist believes the Rapture takes place *after* (post) the Tribulation; the mid-tribulationist believes the Rapture takes place in the *middle* of the Tribulation, and advocates of the newest rapture position, the pre-

wrath Rapture, teach that Christians are raptured just before God pours out His wrath on an unbelieving world near the end of the Tribulation period. The partial rapture view, a minority position, claims that only those Christians who are watching and waiting for Christ's return will be raptured.

There is no single verse or group of verses that specifically describes any of these five Rapture positions. In terms of pre-tribulationism, since that's the Rapture position advocated by LaHaye, we should expect to find at least *one* verse that describes Jesus coming for His *church* to take Christians to heaven *prior* to a seven-year period of Tribulation, and then Jesus returning with His church seven years after the Rapture to defeat Antichrist and set up a kingdom in Jerusalem that will last for a thousand years. Of course, there is no such verse or group of connected verses that mentions these very necessary doctrinal elements. There is no such phrase as "the rapture of the church" or "the catching away of the church" found anywhere in the Bible. Even LaHaye admits that no one passage teaches a pre-trib Rapture:

One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that not one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second Coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true. But then, no one passage teaches a post-trib or mid-trib Rapture, either.

No single verse specifically states, "Christ will come before the Tribulation." On the other hand, no single passage teaches He will *not* come before the Tribulation, or that He will come in the middle or at the end of the Tribulation. Any such explicit declaration would end the debate immediately.

Arguing that the other Rapture positions don't have a verse to support them does not make LaHaye's position right. It's possible that the entire end-time scenario in which all the Rapture positions have a stake is without biblical foundation. We will consider this possibility in later chapters. At this point, readers of *Left Behind* should be aware that the pre-trib Rapture is the keystone to the entire multi-volume series. If there is no pre-trib Rapture, then no one is left behind. One would think that this necessary doctrine would have at least one or two very closely associated verses that, when harmonized, would describe the elements necessary for the pre-trib Rapture hypothesis to make sense to the "casual reader."

At the same time LaHaye gives the impression that the pre-trib Rapture doctrine is self-evident to anyone who reads the New Testament, he has to admit that the doctrine was not discovered until the nineteenth century. All attempts to find a pre-trib Rapture any earlier than around 1830 do not stand up to historical scrutiny. It was only in the nineteenth century, LaHaye tells us, when "the Bible was available and being read by millions in the English-speaking world" and "prophecy was in the air," that the discovery took place. If it took nearly nineteen hundred years to discover the pre-trib Rapture, why didn't it take that long to discover the many other doctrines that Christians believed and confessed without the aid of an English translation of the Bible? There was no English translation of the Bible until the late fourteenth century. How did the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, to name only a few doctrinal standards, ever get written without the aid of an English translation of the Bible? There have been countless commentaries published on the Bible throughout the centuries by men who were intimately familiar with all the biblical languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—and they were never able to find the doctrine.⁶ Even pre-trib advocate H. A. Ironside, for whom LaHaye has the highest regard, admitted the novelty of the position:

[U]ntil brought to the fore through the writings and the preaching and teaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr. J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century [i.e., the

nineteenth century], it is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through the period of sixteen hundred years! If any doubt this statement, let them search, as the writer has in measure done, the remarks of the so-called Fathers, both pre- and post-Nicene; the theological treatises of the scholastic divines; Roman Catholic writers of all shades of thought; the literature of the Reformation; the sermons and expositions of the Puritans; and the general theological works of the day. He will find the “mystery” conspicuous by its absence.

Thomas Ice, cofounder with LaHaye of the Pre-Trib Research Center and an editor of LaHaye’s *Prophecy Study Bible*, claims that a “certain theological climate needed to be created before premillennialism would restore the Biblical doctrine of the pre-trib Rapture. Sufficient development did not take place until after the French Revolution.” But like LaHaye and John Walvoord, Ice has to admit that “neither pre nor post-tribs have a proof text for the time of the Rapture.” The doctrine, therefore, “is the product of a deduction from one’s overall system of theology, both for pre and posttribbers.”¹⁰

This is a remarkable admission for a doctrine that is so crucial to a theological position said to be fundamental for a proper understanding of the Bible. How is it possible that:

- so many well-meaning Christians believe in a pre-trib Rapture when even pre-trib advocates tell us that not one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of Jesus’ second coming separated by the Tribulation;
- the Old Testament doesn’t teach a pre-trib Rapture;
- no one up until around 1830 taught a pre-trib Rapture; and
- the doctrine, supposedly “so clearly revealed in the Scriptures,” became “utterly lost” immediately after the close of the New Testament canon?

Marvin Rosenthal, a prominent and respected evangelist to the Jewish people, states that he could no longer hold to a belief in a pre-trib Rapture because he determined, after his personal study, that the Bible did not teach it. Rosenthal turned to John Walvoord, whom LaHaye describes as the “dean of all living prophecy experts,” hoping to find clear *biblical* support for the position. Walvoord’s *The Rapture Question* includes a list of fifty arguments in support of a pretrib Rapture. Rosenthal was shocked to discover that no biblical text explicitly supported the doctrine:

Not once, among fifty arguments, does this godly Christian leader cite one biblical text that explicitly teaches pretribulation rapturism—not once. This was not an oversight. **The reason for the omission of any pretribulation Rapture texts is clear. There are none.** Walvoord’s own comment helps substantiate that fact. He wrote, “It is therefore not too much to say the Rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology [the doctrine of the church] than eschatology [the doctrine of the last things]” ... **There simply is no explicit exegetical evidence for pretribulation rapturism.**

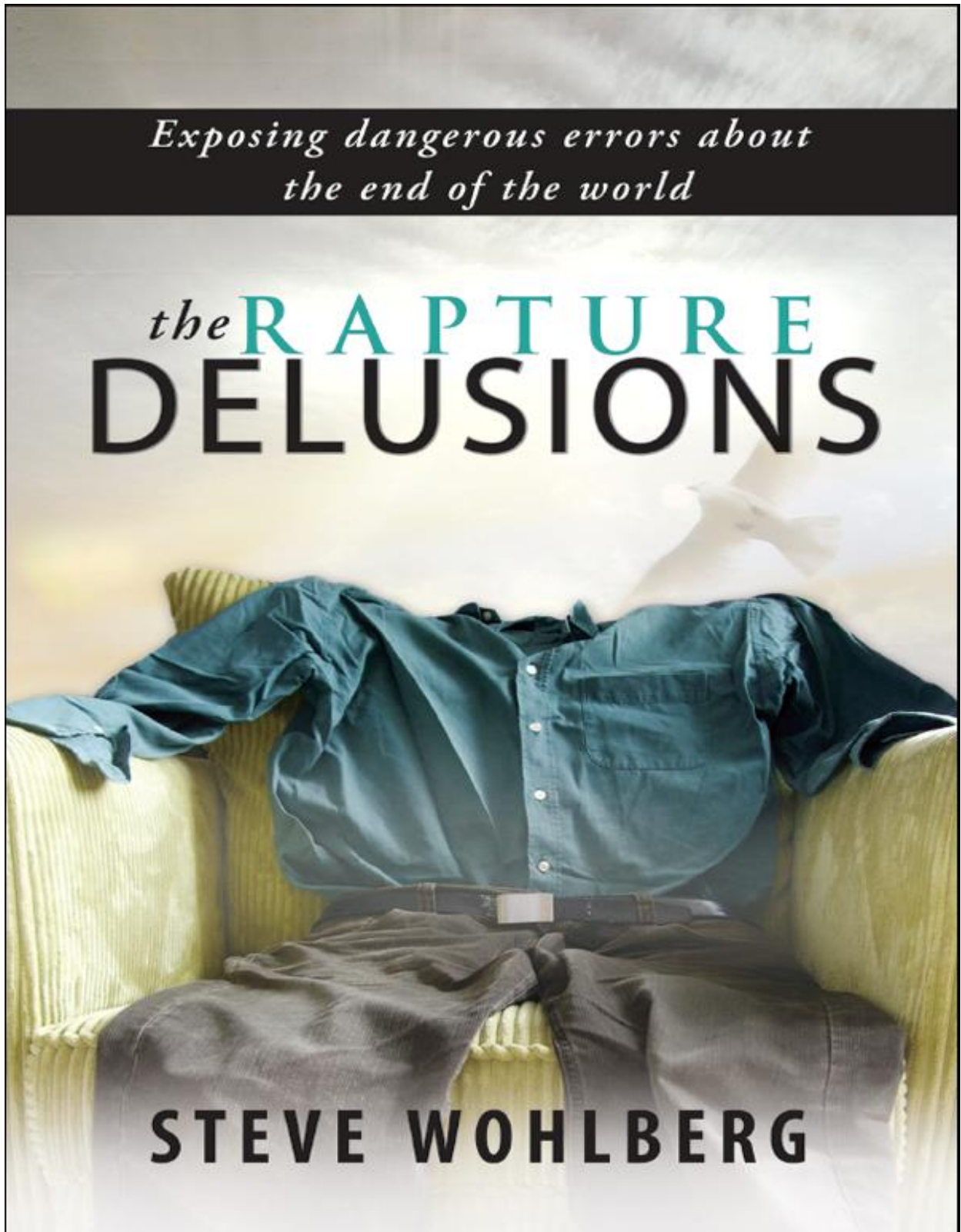
By all accounts, there is not one explicit verse to support a position that millions of Bible-believing Christians hold with unbending devotion. In the first edition of *The Rapture Question*, Walvoord, like LaHaye, had to confess that evidence for either a pre-tribulation or a post-tribulation Rapture was not explicitly taught in the Bible. “[Walvoord] deleted this statement in later editions of the book.”²

² DeMar, G. (2009). [Left Behind: Separating Fact from Fiction](#) (pp. 17–23). Powder Springs, GA: American Vision.

*Exposing dangerous errors about
the end of the world*

the **RAPTURE**
DELUSIONS

STEVE WOHLBERG



I remember the event as if it happened yesterday. There it sat, inside an airport newsstand in Atlanta. I didn't have much time to catch my connection to Canada, but the magazine cover grabbed my attention immediately. *Time* magazine, July 1, 2002. Flames surrounded a large cross with these words emblazoned: "*The Bible and the Apocalypse: Why more Americans are reading and talking about the end of the world.*"

I paid the \$3.95.

On the plane I read the cover story titled "Apocalypse Now," highlighting the surge of American interest in deciphering biblical prophecies after the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Raptureready.com was featured, an incredibly popular Website whose Webmaster has invented a "Rapture Index," calling it a "Dow Jones Industrial Average of End Time activity." On September 24, 2001, 13 days after 9-11, the site's "bandwidth nearly melted under the weight of 8 million visitors."

The article's center spread showed full-color pictures of the entire *Left Behind* series, with the words "Copies Sold" written under each book: "*Left Behind—7,000,000; Tribulation Force—4,100,000; Desecration—3,100,000*" and so on. Below was a box labeled "Glossary of Terms" defining apocalyptic phraseology for the average Joe. I was especially interested to see how "The Tribulation" was defined: "A period of seven years of disaster that will end with Christ's defeat of evil at Armageddon."

"Meet the Prophet" was the title of another four-page story a few pages in. Dead center was a large photograph of Tim LaHaye preaching, with "Taking his message to the masses," as the subheading. The next page showed Jerry B. Jenkins standing next to a sidebar picturing "*Left Behind* Wares" including comic books, a kids series, and a Monopoly-style *Left Behind* board game. All of these *Time* articles described a heightened interest in prophecy—especially among evangelical Christians—and spelled out the popular views being critiqued in this book: rapture first, seven-year tribulation next, during which Mr. Wicked appears and attacks the Jews.

Except for one article. Page 46. Its intriguing title was *The End: How It Got That Way* by journalist David Van Biema. My heart started pounding. *Could it be?* Below the headline was a little picture (maybe 1 by 1.5 inches, smaller than those of LaHaye, Jenkins, and each *Left Behind* book) of a curious-looking man by the name of John Nelson Darby, who lived in England during the 1800s. An obvious student of history, Van Biema referred to Mr. Darby as "the man with the plan" to introduce into nineteenth-century British and American Christianity "a radical new eschatology," which included believing in "a seven-year, hell-like Tribulation."

I could scarce believe my eyes. *Has some of the hidden history behind the historical development of the rapture doctrine actually surfaced in the mainstream press?* indeed it had.

Darby's contribution to the development of evangelical theology has been so great that he is even universally credited as being "The Father of Modern Dispensationalism."

Before quoting one key paragraph from Van Biema's insightful pen, I should clarify that John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) is no small fry in church history. Pastor, evangelist, lawyer, theologian, and the leader of group called The Plymouth Brethren, Darby wrote at least 53 books on Bible subjects. His ideas were so influential that in the early 1900s they were injected by Cyrus Scofield into his legendary Scofield Reference Bible, which brought them into mainstream American Protestant Bible schools and beyond. Darby's contribution to the development of evangelical theology has been so great that he is even universally credited as being "The Father of Modern Dispensationalism."

With these facts in mind, notice carefully these shocking sentences from reporter Van Biema in that July 1, 2002 issue of *Time* magazine:

His [J.N. Darby's] most striking innovation was the timing of a concept called the Rapture, drawn from the Apostle Paul's prediction that believers would fly up to meet Christ in Heaven. Most theologians understood it as part of the Resurrection at time's very end, Darby repositioned it at the Apocalypse's very beginning, a small shift with large implications. It spared true believers the Tribulation, leaving the horror to nonbelievers and the doctrinally misled...Darby's scheme became a pillar of the new Fundamentalism.

**...the Rapture doctrine was really only John Nelson Darby's
"most striking innovation."**

There it is! I thought to myself. *Even though Time magazine is a liberal publication, the truth has finally been told.* Van Biema is absolutely correct. Based on solid historical research, he accurately reported to millions of *Time* readers that the Rapture doctrine was really only John Nelson Darby's "most striking innovation." As Van Biema stated, Darby took Paul's "caught up" phrase in First Thessalonians 4:17 and then creatively "repositioned it at the Apocalypse's very beginning, a small shift with large implications." Significantly, Van Biema also noted that in the early 1800s, "most theologians" didn't see it that way, which is 100 percent correct. In fact, they had never heard of it. Yet as the decades wore on—like a theological terrorist destined to hijack popular Christian ideas about the end times—"Darby's scheme became a pillar of the new Fundamentalism."

No matter what pro-Rapture teachers adamantly claim, the biggest problem is that "Darby's scheme" and "most striking innovation" isn't truly biblical.³

³ Wohlberg, S. (2011). [*The rapture delusions*](#). Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

Now You See Them, Now You Don't

*If in the last few years you haven't discarded a major opinion or acquired a new one,
check your pulse, you may be dead.*

—Frank Gelett Burgess (1866-1951)

Although the exact word *rapture* isn't in the Bible, millions of prophecy-minded Christians have nevertheless been taught that soon God's Church will disappear from planet Earth without a trace. Headlines are predicted to read: "Multitudes Missing, Chaos Sweeps Globe!" "All Children Have Disappeared!" "Massive Traffic Snarls Due to Evaporated Drivers!" "Planes Crash, Trains Wreck, as Pilots and Engineers Vanish!" Perhaps you've seen bumper stickers reading: "In case of Rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned."

In the last few years, the number-one promoter of the rapture idea has been the *New York Times* bestselling *Left Behind* series, coauthored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. A high-speed, 16-book sequence of novels about the end times, *Left Behind* teaches that the return of Jesus Christ takes place in two distinct phases. First, Jesus comes *invisibly* to remove His Church before a seven-year tribulation, during which the rest of humanity must face the antichrist. This is the rapture. At the end of those seven years, Jesus will again return *visibly* to deliver those who became Christians during the tribulation—after being given a "second chance" to be saved—and to pulverize the invading enemies of Israel at Armageddon. This is the second coming. Thus, it's rapture first, then seven years with the antichrist, then the visible second coming of Jesus Christ.

...a rumor has circulated that some higher-ups at a large airline want at least one non-Christian pilot aboard each flight—just in case!

These popular concepts—rapture, seven years of horror, future antichrist—have also been taught in many apocalyptic Christian films, such as *A Thief in the Night*, *Image of the Beast*, *Tribulation Force*, *The Omega Code*, *Left Behind: The Movie*, and *Megiddo*. Because the rapture teaching has been promoted so heavily in our society, even among those outside the Church, a rumor has circulated that some higher-ups at a large airline want at least one non-Christian pilot aboard each flight—just in case!

The real question is: Although "rapture" isn't a biblical word, is the doctrine there? If not, could it be an *end-time delusion*? Let's find out.

First of all, the Bible certainly does teach the exciting truth that Jesus Christ will return for His people. Our Lord Himself said, *"I will come again and receive you to Myself"* (John 14:3). All Christians should believe Christ's promise and long to meet Him on that great day.

But will He come invisibly? Will the Church disappear? Does the Bible really teach vanishing Christians? Without a doubt, the most quoted passage used to support the rapture concept is First Thessalonians 4:17. Lots of Christians know this verse by heart, and it is cited in *Left Behind: The Movie*. There Paul wrote that true believers will someday be *"caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"* (1 Thess. 4:17). **But does "caught up" mean disappear?** Is Paul describing a silent return of Jesus Christ before an apocalyptic seven-year tribulation? We don't need to guess. The answer is in the context, and you don't need to have a four-year degree to grasp the truth.

Will the Church disappear? Does the Bible teach Christians vanish?

Have you ever driven down a highway without realizing how fast you were going, and then, when you finally looked down at your speedometer, you thought to yourself, *I'm going too fast and must slow down*? This is what we need to do with First Thessalonians 4. We must slow down and take a full look.

Here is what Paul actually wrote:

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 we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Rapture promoters interpret "caught up" to mean *disappear* because this view fits their tightly meshed prophetic system, yet it must be admitted that the text doesn't say this.

Rapture teachers interpret this event as silent and secret, yet doesn't it seem rather loud and visible? There is a shout, a voice, a trumpet. Have you ever heard of a silent trumpet? The truth is, First Thessalonians 4:16 is one of the noisiest verses in the Bible! Look carefully: Jesus Christ comes down from Heaven shouting and blowing a trumpet. The dead rise. Then true believers are "caught up." Honestly, do you see anything here about vanishing Christians prior to the tribulation? Rapture promoters interpret "caught up" to mean *disappear* because this view fits their tightly meshed prophetic system, yet it must be admitted that the text doesn't say this.

Two thousand years ago, at the end of His earthly life, Jesus Christ was also “taken up,” (see Acts 1:9). This doesn’t mean He disappeared, leaving His clothes on earth. Instead, in full view of His wondering disciples, “*while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (Acts 1:9). This event was highly visible. Luke said Jesus Christ was “taken up,” and then clouds are mentioned, just like Paul wrote about believers being “caught up...in the clouds.”

Notice carefully the full context of this verse:

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward Heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into Heaven, **will so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into Heaven**” (Acts 1:9-11).*

Everything will be highly visible, just like the ascension of Jesus.

Here we have holy angels—in the form of men in white robes—explaining the simple truth about Jesus Christ’s return. They told the disciples that just as Jesus was literally and visibly “taken up” into the clouds, even so would He “come in like manner as [they had] seen Him go into Heaven.” Although these angels never attended a seminary, there’s no doubt they had their theology straight. They taught no secret coming or vanishing Christians. Everything will be highly visible, just like the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Let’s return to First Thessalonians and take a look at the thief-in-the-night idea:

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 we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:3).

Here Paul compares the coming of Jesus Christ to the arrival of a midnight thief. Rapture promoters interpret this to mean Jesus will come like a *silent* thief to snatch believers off this earth before seven years of chaos—then driverless cars will crash, pilotless planes will collide, and babies will be found missing from their cribs. The Christian film *A Thief in the Night*, which is similar to *Left Behind: The Movie*, portrays this dramatically. Yet is this really what Paul is saying?

Again, let's slow down and take a closer look at our biblical speedometers. First of all, the day when Jesus comes as a thief is clearly *the very same day* in which He descends with a shout and a trumpet blast. Second, it comes as "a thief in the night" only upon the unprepared. When it hits, "sudden destruction comes upon them [the lost], as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."

...it is not a secret coming, but only a sudden one.

Do you see what Paul is really saying? Jesus' coming as a "thief in the night" does not mean He will come quietly and invisibly to steal believers out of this world, as is taught in rapture movies and *New York Times* bestselling books. Rather, it means He will come unexpectedly, bringing "sudden destruction" upon the unsaved. *Thus, it is not a secret coming, but only a sudden one.* Will the unprepared get a "second chance" to be saved during a subsequent seven-year tribulation? Paul answered this question when he wrote, "*They shall not escape*" (1 Thess. 5:3).

Here's a simple summary of what First Thessalonians 4:16-5:3 really says:

1. Jesus Christ will literally descend from Heaven with a shout and a trumpet blast.
2. The dead in Christ will rise first and true believers will be "caught up," just like Jesus Christ Himself was visibly "taken up" into the sky almost 2,000 years ago.
3. This cataclysmic "day of the Lord" will burst upon the unprepared like the unexpected arrival of a midnight thief.
4. "Sudden destruction" will overwhelm the lost, "and they shall not escape."

When taken literally, these words describe the visible second coming of Jesus Christ, not a secret rapture.

Immediately after his solemn prediction of Christ's return as a midnight thief, Paul wrote to true believers:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).⁴

⁴ Wohlberg, S. (2011). [*The rapture delusions*](#). Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow.

—Aesop (620-560 B.C.)

Immediately after warning about tricky false prophets and deception, Jesus said:

*Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the **secret** chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be* (Matthew 24:26-27 KJV).

Here Jesus draws a razor-sharp contrast between false views of His return and the truth.

How should we respond to the idea of a secret return?

Concerning false views, don't miss that little word— *secret* (see Matt. 24:26). Jesus plainly warned that some will mistakenly promote a “secret” coming. Based on the context, we discover that this will be one of those powerful delusions that only God's faithful elect will avoid. How should we respond to the idea of a secret return? Christ's answer is stunning. *“Believe it not.”* Why? Because *“as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Matt. 24:27).

When it comes to the parousia, Jesus clarified it would be *anything but secret.*

Far from being a secret event, Jesus Himself compares His return to the brilliant flashing of electric bolts of lightning hurtling across the sky. Now here's an important point. Guess what exact Greek word Matthew used for “coming” in verse 27? The same one he used in verse 3— *parousia*. This is clear evidence that the parousia definitely applies to the highly visible second coming of Jesus Christ. In Hollywood action movies, hidden files are sometimes labeled, “Top Secret.” When it comes to the parousia, Jesus clarified it would be *anything but secret*.

Christ's bewildered disciples had inquired, *“...what will be the sign of Your coming [the parousia], and of the end of the age?”* After warning about secretive delusions, Jesus finally

answered their exact question by lifting the curtain of history and fully unveiling what His cataclysmic return would be like:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31 KJV).

This description of Jesus Christ's return contains more punch than the highly speculative, evolutionary big bang theory. There's no question about it. His "coming," or parousia, will be unmistakably *visible* to "all the tribes of the earth." The dazed masses of humanity will literally "see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory." Certainly no one will miss it, and no one will wake up the next day wondering, *Which way did the Christians go?* On that awesome day, the unsaved will "mourn." Why? Because their loved ones have vanished? No! But because Jesus Christ has *suddenly come* and their last chance for preparation is behind them. Now it's too late. They're lost forever.

There's no question about it. His "coming," or parousia, will be unmistakably *visible* to "all the tribes of the earth."

This entire passage also parallels Paul's words in First Thessalonians 4:16-17. Just like in Paul's description of what will happen when true believers are "caught up," Jesus Christ also said His coming would be a very noisy event that will include loud reverberations from "a great sound of a trumpet" throughout the sky. When that booming blast is heard, multitudes of shining angels will descend into Earth's polluted atmosphere, circle the globe, and "*gather together* His elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other." Thus true believers will be "caught up" into the air. Now don't miss it. These are the very same elements Paul wrote about in First Thessalonians 4:17!

Jesus Christ also said His coming would be a very noisy event...

In *both* Matthew 24:30-31 and in First Thessalonians 4:16-17, we read about clouds, noise, a loud trumpet, a gathering together, and true believers being transported into the sky. When we place these sections side by side—without prejudice or preconceived ideas—the message is

unavoidable, inescapable, and irrefutable. Both passages refer to the loud, climactic, highly visible, and glorious second coming of Jesus Christ!

Back to Matthew 24; the Truthteller continued:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 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. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:36-44).

Here Jesus Christ compared His return to the sudden descent of billions of tons of water upon lost sinners in Noah's day. Those ancient people thought Noah was a crazy old man, until *"the flood came and took them all away, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be"* (Matt. 24:39). Guess what Greek word is used here again for "coming"? Don't take my word for it; look in your own concordance. It's *parousia*, which, as we have already proven, unmistakably applies to the highly visible second coming of Jesus Christ.

Here Jesus Christ compared His return to the sudden descent of billions of tons of water upon lost sinners in Noah's day.

Now notice, *immediately* after Jesus described His parousia in verse 39, He continued without skipping a beat: **"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left"** (Matt. 24:40). Remember, this is the second most widely quoted verse used to buttress the secret rapture doctrine. Supposedly, when verse 40 is fulfilled, those who are "taken" will vanish without a trace, leaving only their clothes, shoes, false teeth, and wedding rings, while those who are "left" will have to endure a horrific seven-year tribulation and face the antichrist. But is this really what Jesus Christ is saying?

We all should open our own Bibles, pick up our own concordances, and find out for ourselves what truth is.

We don't need to depend on scholars to find the answer. We all should open our own Bibles, pick up our own concordances, and find out for ourselves what truth is. If you are willing to do it, here is what you will surely find: Believers will be "taken" at the "coming," or *parousia*, which the Bible clearly applies to the loud, visible, and glorious appearance of Jesus Christ at the very end of the world (see Matt. 24:3,27,30-31,39-40).

Jesus basically said, "It will be just like Noah's day" (see Matt. 24:37-39). Now think about it. Did Noah and his family vanish before the flood? No, they walked visibly into the ark. And what about those who were *left behind* after the door of the ark was shut? Did they have a second chance? No again. How were they left? *They were left dead; they did not escape.* After saying, "the flood came, and took them all away," Jesus made His power-packed point, "*so also will the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man be*" (Matt. 24:39). And then, without a break, Christ said, "***Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left***" (Matt. 24:40). Upon careful analysis, these words leave no room for *Left Behind's* tantalizing saga about "tribulation believers" resisting the antichrist during a post-rapture seven-year period. Why not? Because those who are "taken" are transported up at the "coming," or *parousia*, which applies to the *final* second coming of Jesus Christ!

...what about those who were *left behind* after the door of the ark was shut? Did they have a second chance?

Immediately after saying, "*One will be taken and the other left,*" the King of kings then compared His second coming to the sudden arrival of a midnight thief, just like Paul did in First Thessalonians 5:2-3. Jesus Christ said:

But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:43-44).

...watch out for satanic temptations and end-time delusions.

True believers are urged to watch, be ready, and to avoid all subtle, secretive, devilish tricks.

Both declare this day will come with thief-like suddenness upon all sleeping sinners. In Noah's day, when billions of tons of water came crashing down, there were no second chances for those who refused to enter the ark. Similarly, Paul said the lost "shall not escape." And both Paul and Matthew use the same Greek word to describe this great and awesomely powerful "day of the Lord." Look in your own concordance. It's *parousia*, which clearly refers to Christ's second coming. True believers are urged to watch, be ready, and to avoid all subtle, secretive, devilish tricks. Let's look at one more passage describing an event predicted to occur "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*" (see 1 Cor. 15:52). This is probably the third most quoted pro-rapture verse used to support the idea of vanishing Christians prior to a nightmarish seven-year tribulation. We have previously slowed down to look at our biblical speedometers, yet this time we must come to a screeching halt. Context, context, context—that's the safety zone. Notice carefully what Paul really wrote:

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

Is Paul saying believers will someday vanish while their loved ones blink? Not at all! He is simply saying that the dead will be raised and our sinful bodies will be changed "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.*" When will this "moment" take place? Paul's answer is clear. It will occur "at the *last trumpet,*" when "the trumpet will sound," that is, at the very end of the world. This is the very same "great sound of a trumpet" Jesus Christ said would be heard when He finally commissions His shiny angelic friends to gather His people at His second coming (see Matt. 24:31).

Is Paul saying believers will someday vanish while their loved ones blink? Not at all!

In summary, the parousia principle (supported by the context of Matthew 24) proves the "one will be taken" event occurs at the final second coming of Jesus Christ. And based on the full context of First Corinthians 15:52, "*the twinkling of an eye*" moment similarly occurs at the very end of the age⁵

⁵ Wohlberg, S. (2011). [The rapture delusions](#). Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

What Does the Bible Say About the Rapture?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)



Occasionally you may see slogans such as: “In case of the Rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned” or “The Rapture: the only way to fly,” circulated by folks who believe in the so-called Rapture theory on bumper stickers, T-shirts or Twitter and Facebook.

These expressions herald the alleged event that Hal Lindsey, author of the multimillion best-seller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, calls “the ultimate trip.” Following in Lindsey’s footsteps are the more current, *Left Behind* series of books and movies, as well as various other sensational publications.

What Is the Rapture?

Those who advocate the heresy of dispensationalism, contend that soon (always within the next few years), Christ will return to the earth in a silent and invisible way to “rapture” the living saints and to resurrect the righteous dead.

According to the dispensational scheme, this will trigger a **seven-year tribulation period** that will be consummated by “the battle of Armageddon.” Following this horrible conflict, it is claimed that Christ will begin his reign of 1,000 years on David’s throne in the city of Jerusalem.

According to Lindsey, when the mysterious Rapture occurs, society will be virtually panic-stricken. He describes the scene as follows:

“There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!” (1970, 125).

Lindsey’s explanation for this wild scene, which has been drawn from his fertile imagination, is that these automobiles were manned by Christians, who were suddenly and mysteriously swept up to be with the invisible Christ.

The Rapture Doctrine Defined

The word “rapture” is derived from the Latin **rapio**, which means “to seize, to snatch.”

Though this word is not used in the Bible, dispensationalists claim the idea is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There Paul speaks of the second coming of Christ. He declares that those living saints who witness the Lord’s return will be “caught up” (**harpagesometha**) in the clouds to meet Him.

To use 1 Thessalonians 4, though, in an effort to prove a silent, secret return of Christ is, as Alexander Reese put it, one of the sorriest attempts “in the whole history of freak exegesis” (1975, 146).

Problems With the Rapture Doctrine

The foregoing rapture theory is plainly contradicted by the following Biblical facts:

Christ's return will be visible.

The return of Christ will be visible universally, not invisible or secretive, known only by a few.

In Matthew 24:15-22 Jesus described the conditions to be associated with the destruction of Jerusalem. In connection therewith, he warns that if anyone claims, "Lo, here is the Christ," it was not to be believed:

"For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen [from *phaino*, "to shine"] even unto the west; so *houtos@*, "in this manner"] shall be the coming [*@parousia* of the Son of Man" (27).

As those early disciples "beheld" (*theaomai*, "see, look at") Christ's departure (Acts 1:11), so in like manner (*tropos*, "in the same way") would He come again.

The coming of the Lord will involve a revelation" (*apokalupsis*, "to uncover") of His being (2 Thes. 1:7).

At his coming, Christ will be "manifested" (*phaneroo*). When this term is used in the passive voice, as in 1 John 2:28, it means to "show or reveal oneself, be revealed, appear to someone" (Arndt & Gingrich 1967, p. 860).

As Jesus was visible during his first "appearing" (*epiphaneia*) on earth (2 Tim. 1:10), so will He be visible when He appears at His second coming (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim.4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13).

At his coming, it is said that Christ "shall appear (*horao*, "become visible") a SECOND time" (Heb. 9:28).

If Lindsey and his dispensational kin are correct, Christ will not **appear** until his **THIRD** coming!

A sound will accompany Jesus' second coming.

Further, the Scripture indicates that the advent of Christ will be accompanied by considerable audible phenomena.

The Lord will descend from heaven “with a **SHOUT**, with the **VOICE** of the archangel, and with the **TRUMP** of God” (1 Thes. 4: 16). Someone has called this the “noisiest” verse in the Bible!

Too, when Jesus comes again “the heavens shall pass away with a **GREAT NOISE**” (2 Pet. 3:10), and that hardly accords with the notion that the second advent will be a silent, secret event!

Both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected when Christ returns.

The idea that only the righteous dead will be resurrected at the time of the rapture is totally false.

First of all, the New Testament teaches that there will be a single resurrection consisting of both just and unjust (Acts 24:15), who will come forth in the same hour (Jn. 5:28, 29).

Secondly, this resurrection will occur at “the last day” (Jn. 6:54), which does not leave **time** for a seven-year tribulation period, much less a millennium!

Clearly, both the good and bad are rewarded at the time of Christ’s coming (Matt. 25:31ff; 2 Thes. 1:7ff).

Truly, the rapture theory is a ruptured theory!

The History of the Rapture Theory

The rapture doctrine has its roots in history, not in Scripture. The idea appears to be traceable to the old Irvine Pentecostal movement of the early 1800s.

One writer says:

“The idea of a two-stage coming of Christ first came to a Scottish lass, Miss Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow, Scotland, while she was in a ‘prophetic’ trance” (Brinsmead 1974, 28).

The author quotes from a book written by one Dr. Robert Norton, a member of the Irvinite group, and published in 1861. It reads:

“Marvellous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially on the doctrine of the second Advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss M. M. =, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and vision, we have an instance; for here we first see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord’s coming, when every eye shall see Him, and His prior appearing in glory to them that look for Him” (1861, 15).

The rapture theory thus rests upon the same sort of basis as Shakerism (founder Ann Lee had visions and claimed to communicate with the dead in seventy-two languages!), Seventh Day Adventism (Ellen White thought she took a trip to heaven), and Christian Science (Mary Baker Eddy’s revelations told her there is no death!).

Conclusion

The dispensational dogma, with all its peculiar elements (including the rapture notion), is clearly at variance with much Bible teaching, and honest students of Holy Writ will reject it.

“I’ll See You In The Rapture”

Perhaps you saw the bumper sticker a few years ago which said, “In case of the Rapture, this car will be without a driver.” Regardless, you are at least passingly familiar with the expression, “the Rapture.” The rapture theory is part and parcel of premillennial speculation. It states that before a seven year period called, “the great tribulation,” the saints will be snatched, or the righteous will be raptured from the earth to be with Christ. After this time, Christ will come to the earth with His church and commence His 1,000 year reign in Jerusalem. If you have been content to read your Bible, this is all news to you. Like infant baptism, Christmas, Groundhog Day, and the Pope, the rapture doctrine is not in the word of God.

The Chief Text

The central text used to support and sustain the rapture doctrine is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent /precede/ them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul shows that the dead in Christ are not to be sorrowed after like those who have no hope. Some believed that one who died before Christ came would miss the blessings and benefits of His coming. Paul lays that fear to rest. As a matter of fact, the righteous dead will rise first, before the righteous living, to meet the Lord. Paul was not contrasting the righteous dead and the wicked dead.

The chief text to refute the rapture doctrine is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. See above.

First: The Quiet Coming. Rapturists teach that they will be quietly, mysteriously taken away. Presto, they will become invisible! Actually, the second coming will be quite a noisy affair. Paul says the Lord will “descend... with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” Peter says “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise” (2 Peter 3:10/. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” There is no room for a hushed up rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Second: The Two Comings. Those pregnant with visions of rapture expect their deliverance in the first stage of a two-part coming or the first of two comings. Well, whatever. Their idea is that stage number two occurs after the seven years of tribulation when the Lord shall return to set up His kingdom on earth. (Compare that with 1 Cor. 15:24-28/. But the context of 1 Thessalonians 4 is a stubborn thing. Men divided the Bible into chapters and verses, so we often separate areas that are kin to one another. Continue reading 1 Thessalonians 5.

But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief.

Obviously, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:4 is at least contextually related. Compare the comforting conclusions of 1 Thessalonians 4:18, “Wherefore, comfort one another with these words,” and 1 Thes 5:11, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” So, when the Lord comes and the righteous are “caught up,” at the same time the wicked will be overtaken and destroyed. This is also the teaching of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10:

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe because our testimony among you was believed in that day.

God is going to repay tribulation to the troublers. He is going to repay rest (a noun, not verb) to the troubled. But when? (1) “When the Lord shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them (the sinners)” and (2) “when he shall be glorified in his saints. . . in that day.” (3) “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). But what about the wicked? They are not in Colossians 3:4. Yes, but they are in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10. (4) Both the righteous and the wicked are in Matt. 16:27. “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” So, when the Lord comes with the angels, then (not later) He shall reward every man not part, not some/, but “then,” “every man.” There is no sequential, sectional coming; hence, no rapture. Truly, “there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15).

Are you amazed, all ye that await your rapture? Well, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, into the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Observe that the “shout” of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is the “voice” of John 5:28. Do you see the implications of that conclusion?

Now, place all these cited and related passages together. If you come up with (1) a separate coming of the Lord for the saints only, (2) seven years of tribulation on earth; (3) another coming of the Lord and beginning of a 1,000 year reign on earth, then you are reading ideas for - which there are no words of the Lord.

Third: The Duration. The third rapture imagination is seen in its duration. Rapturists say the saints will soar to meet the Lord in the air for seven heavenly years before being hauled back to earth for 1,000 earthly years. That is not what 1 Thessalonians 4 teaches. It says that after the righteous are raised “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” To suit their dream, it should say, “so shall we be for seven years with the Lord.”

As the righteous shall “ever be with the Lord,” so the destruction of the wicked will be unending. The wicked “shall not escape,” and they “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” The “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9) is equivalent to the “ever be” with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17). The destruction, like the deliverance, is final, total, eternal. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:41).

Fourth: The Visible Coming. The wicked will not see the Lord when He comes to rapture the righteous, or so say the premillennialists. How do we account for this blatant blindness? We are told the Lord is coming for His saints (the rapture) & then He will come with His saints (the second coming. The first time He will not be seen or manifested, but He will be seen the second time. No such distinction can be found taught in the New Testament. Both the “alive and the dead” will be judged “at his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:1). Both the wicked and the righteous will see Jesus when He comes. “When he shall appear,” the righteous will see Him (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,” the wicked will see Him, or else the word “revealed” means concealed.

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye (not just the righteous) shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him” (Rev. 1:7). All will see the Lord when He comes “with clouds.” The righteous will meet Him “in the clouds” (1 Thess. 4:17). He shall come back as He went, i.e., visibly with clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7), and “every eye shall see him.”

Conclusion

The rapture doctrine is a delusion. It is a large part of the fabric of premillennial sewing, but there is not even a stitch of it in the testimony of the Lord. If the hope of the rapture is so prevalent and prominent in the Present premillennial preaching, why is it not frequently and fervently advocated and demonstrated in the word of God?

Questions

1. What is the chief text used to support the rapture doctrine?
2. What was Paul's point in 1 Thess. 4:13-18?
3. According to the rapture doctrine, how long are the saints to be with the Lord?
4. How long are the saints to be with the Lord according to 1 Thess. 4?
5. What is the significance of the "voice" of Jn. 5:28 and the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:16 as it pertains to the rapture theory?
6. When the righteous are glorified, what will happen to the wicked? Will they: (1) Be given a second chance? (2) Be left in their graves? (3) Be raised, judged and condemned? (4) None of the above.
7. Will there be any noise when the Lord comes for His saints? Cite passages.
8. Will Christ's kingdom be set up when He returns? See 1 Cor. 15:24-28.
9. How many people will see the Lord when He comes again?
10. What is the significance of "clouds" with respect to the rapture doctrine in such passages as Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7? - *Guardian of Truth* XXVI: 3, pp. 35-37

Will There be a "Rapture"?

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The average American is aware of the periodic claim that “the end is near.” When Y2K was approaching, outcries of doom, global disruption, and Armageddon were widespread. Hal Lindsey achieved nationwide attention over thirty years ago with his national bestseller *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). A more recent repackaging of the dispensational brand of premillennialism is the popular *Left Behind* book series (see “The Official...”). Every so often, a religious figure captures national attention, announcing the impending return of Jesus—even to the point of setting a date—only to fade into the anonymity from which he arose when his claim falls flat, but having achieved his “fifteen minutes of fame” (see Whisenant and Brewer, 1989). The sensationalism sells well and tweaks the curiosity of large numbers of people. Incredibly, this pattern has been repeating itself literally for **centuries!**

Such is the case with the alleged “Rapture.” It comes from the Latin word “*rapere*,” which means “to seize, snatch out, take away.” Dispensationalists apply this word to the idea that Christ will come suddenly and secretly in the air to snatch away from the Earth the living saints and the resurrected bodies of those saints already deceased. This rapture is supposed to occur just prior to the seven-year Tribulation period, which, in turn, will be followed by the Millennium.

Proponents claim that the Rapture will be secretive. We are told that families will be shocked by the strange disappearance of a mother, father, or child. Driverless cars will collide in the streets (thus the bumper sticker: “In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned”). A man and wife will be in bed; she hears a noise, turns her head, and finds him gone. Planes will crash with no pilots found. These sensational and dramatic examples illustrate the view that the Rapture will be an **invisible** coming of the Lord **for** His saints, leaving **visible results** of chaos and confusion among the remaining unbelievers.

In reality, the word “rapture” is not found in the Bible, though it is claimed to be the Latin equivalent of *harpadzo* translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV). Lindsey admitted, “[i]t is not found in the Bible” (1970, p. 126), and noted that the word “translation” is just as suitable. Yet the word “translation” does occur in the New Testament. Paul referred to the fact that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and **translated** us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13, emp. added). So when an unbeliever obeys the Gospel, receives forgiveness of sins, and is added to the church of Christ, he is taken out of the world and transferred to Christ’s kingdom. This use of the term is certainly a far cry from the idea that it refers to Christians being **raptured** from the physical Earth to meet Jesus in the air.

The New Testament uses three terms to refer to Christ's return. First, *parousia* is translated "coming, presence, or advent." Second, *epiphaneia* is translated "appearing, manifestation, or brightness." Third, *apokalupsis* is translated "revelation." Dispensationalism holds that *parousia* ("coming") refers to the "Rapture" that occurs seven years before the *epiphaneia* ("appearing") or *apokalupsis* ("revelation)." Accordingly, at the "Rapture," it is claimed that Jesus will come **for** the church only, while at the "Revelation," Jesus will return **with** the church, and put an end to the "Tribulation" and "Armageddon."

The primary passage used to support the idea of a "rapture" is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. But this passage was not actually given to deal with the return of Christ. Its purpose was twofold. First, it was designed to reassure Christians that their deceased loved ones would be able to share in the Lord's return. Second, it informed Christians that those who are still living when Christ returns will have no precedence or advantage over those who have already died. This dual function of the text constitutes a very different emphasis from the one imposed upon it by dispensationalists.

The dispensational distinctions made between the three New Testament terms that refer to Christ's return are simply untenable (Boettner, 1957, p.163). For example, dispensationalists assert that the "coming" (*parousia*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refers to the "Rapture." Yet the same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 to speak of Jesus coming **"with"** His saints, thereby coinciding with the dispensational concept of the "Appearing" or "Revelation" seven years **after** the "Rapture." Dispensationalists apply 2 Thessalonians 2:8 to the "Antichrist," and therefore must understand this as a reference to the "Appearing" seven years **after** the "Rapture." Yet the verse uses the expression "**manifestation** ("brightness"—*epiphaneia*) of His **coming** (*parousia*)." Thus the term "coming" is used in the New Testament to refer to **both** dispensational concepts of the "Rapture" and the "Appearing," and the two expressions are, in fact, **combined** in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 to refer to **one and the same event**.

The term "Revelation" (*apokalupsis*) in 1 Corinthians 1:7 is descriptive of what the dispensationalists call the "Rapture," since Christians await it. But in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, it clearly refers to the "Appearing." The term "Appearing" (*epiphaneia*) is used in 1 Timothy 6:14 as the event that terminates Christian activity on Earth, and thus fits the "Rapture" concept. But in 2 Timothy 4:1,8, the references to judgment fit the "Appearing." In view of these considerations, the sincere Bible student is forced to conclude the three words relating to Christ's return in the New Testament are used **synonymously and interchangeably**. The New Testament simply makes no distinction between the coming of the Lord **for** His saints ("Rapture") and the coming of the Lord **with** His saints ("Appearing" or "Revelation"). The dispensational dichotomy is in direct conflict with New Testament terminology.

If Christians are to be removed seven years **before** the "Revelation" or "Coming" of Christ, then no passage should speak of Christians remaining on Earth **until** the "Revelation." However, many passages do just that (see Boettner, pp. 165-166). For example, in Titus 2:13, Paul referred to the "blessed hope" and the "appearing" as one and the same event, i.e., Christ's coming. In the original language, the two substantives, "hope" and "appearing" (*epiphaneia*) are closely linked by the common article. They are not two separate events, as if to be read: "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing." Rather, the text is saying, "looking for the blessed hope and appearing." The one explains the other. The "blessed hope" of Christians is "the glorious appearing" of Christ. Other examples would be 1 Peter 1:13 and 4:13, where the grace on which the Christian is to set his hope is to be received at the "revelation" (*apokalypsei*) of Christ, at which time the Christian may rejoice. But, according to dispensationalism, the Christian should rejoice seven years **earlier** at the rapture.

Further, the use of the word “end” comes from a word that refers to “full end” and, in the New Testament, always refers to the end of the world, i.e., the Judgment day (see Boettner, p. 168-169). In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promised to be with the disseminators of the Gospel message to the very “end.” This means the church will remain on the Earth, preaching the Gospel, until the Judgment Day. But if the church is “raptured away” seven years **before** the end, she cannot fulfill what Christ **commanded** her to do! In Matthew 13:39-40, there is no removal of the saints before the “full end.” The righteous and the wicked grow **together** until the very end. The separation of the two comes at **the end** (not seven years **before** the end). The dispensationalist claims that the righteous will be taken out from among the wicked. But the Bible says **just the opposite**: the wicked will be taken out from among the righteous (Matthew 13:39-40).

The doctrine of the “Rapture” asserts that believers will be raised seven years before the “Revelation,” and 1,007 years before the end of the “Millennium.” But in four separate verses, Jesus Himself said believers will be raised “at the last day” (John 6:39,40,44,54). There can be no other days **after** the **last** day. So the believers cannot be raised at an alleged “Rapture” **before** the last day.

Finally, the Second Coming of Christ is nowhere depicted as **secret**, as the “Rapture” advocates affirm. In fact, just the opposite is true. Christ’s coming will be accompanied by “blazing fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7), the sound of a trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52), a “shout,” the “voice of the archangel,” and the “trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). In fact, “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7). These passages show that **all persons everywhere** will see and hear this event. In fact, the very passage upon which the doctrine of the “Rapture” is founded (i.e., 1 Thessalonians 4:16), far from describing a quiet and secretive event, is about the noisiest verse in the Bible!

When one is willing to remove from the mind all preconceived, complex, and sensational theological concoctions, and simply let the Bible present its own portrait of the end of time and the Second Coming of Christ, the dispensational viewpoint of a postulated “Rapture” is seen to be totally unfounded.

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The Left Behind Series

By **Wayne Jackson**

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On a flight from Chicago to London, several passengers aboard Capt. Rayford Steele's plane suddenly and mysteriously disappear. When Steele radios to London to report the situation, he discovers that the incident on his plane is not an isolated phenomenon but a worldwide occurrence. As Steele begins his search for answers, he learns that the Christ has come to take the faithful with Him in preparation for the coming apocalyptic battle between good and evil.

The foregoing is the promotional blurb for the first volume in the so-called *Left-Behind* series, co-authored by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye.

The series of seven books is creating a sensation among religious readers and apparently becoming an effective medium for the advocacy of the eschatological (end of time) dogma known as dispensational premillennialism. The various titles in the Jenkins-LaHaye sequence are *Left Behind*, *Tribulation Force*, *Nicolae*, *Soul Harvest*, *Apollyon*, *Assassins*, and *The Indwelling*.

One of the leading elements of dispensationalism is the doctrine of the "rapture," i.e., the supposed snatching away of the saints at the time of Christ's return (reputedly in the not-distant future). The proponents of this doctrine claim that when the rapture occurs, the unrighteous will be left behind, hence the background for this *Left Behind* series of religious dramas.

The tragic fact of the matter is, the doctrinal premises upon which the books are based are no less fabricated than the fictional story lines with which they are presented. Let us focus upon the so-called rapture theory, since it is central to this controversy.

The rapture notion asserts that some seven years before he begins his earthly, millennial reign, Christ will secretly and silently come to earth. At that time, he will snatch away his saints to heaven.

Advocates of this dogma contend that it is biblically based in 1st Thes. 4:14. There Paul speaks of believers being “caught up” to be with the Lord in the air (v. 17). The truth is, however, the Thessalonian reference is an allusion to the visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world, and not to some mythical, secret arrival prior to that to effect a rapture.

In Revelation 4:1 a heavenly voice beckons to John: “Come up hither.” Supposedly, this is a reference to the rapture of the church.

In the footnote of his *Reference Bible*, C. I. Scofield commented on this passage: “This call seems clearly to indicate the fulfillment of 1 Thes. 4:14-17. The word ‘church’ does not again occur in the Revelation till all is fulfilled.”

So what? The word “church” does not occur in 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, or Jude. But what would such omissions indicate about an alleged rapture? The mere absence of a word within a given context provides no evidence at all.

Moreover, the final mention of the church in Revelation does not refer to some heavenly, raptured organism; rather the term is plural, “churches” (22:16), and it is employed of congregations in their individual, earthly capacity.

Professor Alan Johnson, a premillennialist associated with Wheaton College, confesses: “There is no good reason for seeing the invitation for John to come up into the opened heaven as a symbol of the rapture of the church” (1981, 461).

Robert Mounce agrees: “There is no basis for discovering a rapture of the church at this point” (1977, 134).

The doctrine of the rapture became popular a few years ago when Hal Lindsey published his little book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey described the event as follows:

There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we've got an invasion from outer space! (1970, 124-25).

Lindsey's explanation for this frantic scene, as drawn from his imagination, is that these automobiles were being driven by Christians who were suddenly and mysteriously caught up to be with the invisible Christ.

The word "rapture" is derived from the Latin *rapio*, which means to seize, to snatch. Though this word is not in the Bible, dispensationalists claim the idea is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There Paul speaks of the second coming of Christ; he declares that those living saints who witness the Lord's return will be "caught up" (*harpagesometha*) in the clouds to meet him.

To use this context, though, as proof of a silent, secret return of Christ is, as Alexander Reese, a premillennialist, acknowledged, one of the sorriest attempts "in the whole history of freak exegesis" (quoted by Murray 1948, 137).

The rapture theory is contradicted by the following biblical facts:

(1) Christ's return will not be **invisible**; rather, it will be universally manifest.

For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen [from phaino, to shine] even unto the west; so [houtos, in this manner] shall be the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:27).

As those early disciples "beheld" (*theaomai*, to see, look at) Christ's departure to heaven, so "in like manner" (*tropos*, in the same way) will he come again (Acts 1:11).

The Lord's coming will involve a "revelation" (*apokalupsis*, to uncover) of his being (2 Thessalonians 1:7), because at that time Christ will be "manifested" (*phaneroo*)—a term which, when employed in the passive voice (as in 1 John 2:28), means "to show or reveal oneself, be revealed, appear to someone" (Arndt and Gingrich 1967, 860).

Moreover, as Jesus was visible during his first “appearing” (epiphaneia) on earth (2 Timothy 1:10), so will he be **visible** when he appears at his second coming (1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13).

Finally, of his coming it is said that Jesus shall “appear” (horao, become visible) a **second** time (Hebrews 9:28). If the advocates of the rapture theory are correct, the Lord will not **appear** until his **third** coming!

(2) Christ’s coming will not be inaudible; rather, Scripture indicates that the second advent will be accompanied by considerable sound phenomena.

The Lord will descend from heaven with a “a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). This has been called the noisiest verse in the Bible.

Too, when Jesus comes again, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise” (2 Peter 3:10). That hardly accords with the notion that the return of the Lord will be a silent, secret event.

The truth of the matter is, the rapture theory is relatively recent. The idea appears to be traceable to a Pentecostal movement of the early 1800s—founded by Edward Irving (1792-1834). A recent writer says:

The idea of a two-stage coming of Christ first came to a Scottish lass, Miss Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow, Scotland, while she was in a “prophetic” trance (Brinsmead 1974, 28).

Brinsmead quotes from a book, published in 1861, by Dr. Robert Norton, a member of the Irvingite group. This volume, titled *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets: In the Catholic Apostolic Church*, as quoted by Brinsmead, reads as follows:

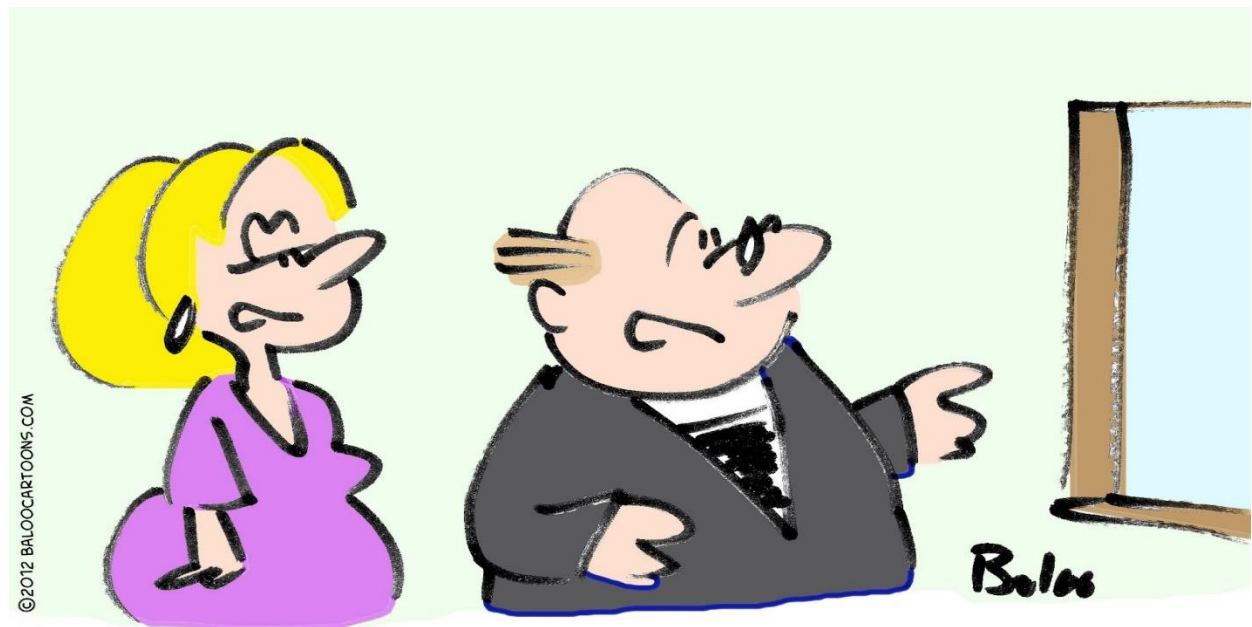
Marvelous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially on the doctrine of the second Advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss M. M. —, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and vision, we have an instance; for here we first see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord’s coming, when every eye shall see Him, and His prior appearing in glory to them that look for Him (15).

George Murray, in his excellent volume, *Millennial Studies*, has also quoted the renown Greek scholar, S. P. Tregelles, who in 1864 wrote:

I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there should be a Secret Rapture of the Church at a secret coming until this was given forth as an “utterance” in Mr. Irving’s church from what was then received as being the voice of the Spirit (138).

Rapture theory thus rests upon the same sort of bogus “revelations” as Shakerism (founder Ann Lee had visions and claimed to speak in seventy-two languages), Seventh-Day Adventism (Ellen White thought she took a trip to heaven), and Christian Science (Mary Baker Eddy’s revelations told her there is no death).

The dispensational dogma, with all its peculiar elements (including the notion of a secret rapture), is at variance with the teaching of the Bible, and careful students of Holy Writ will reject it.



"No, it's not the Rapture — The kids next door got a trampoline."

Left Behind—or Left Bedazzled?

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.



The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines bedazzled: “To dazzle so completely as to make blind” (2000, p. 159). A significant portion of Christendom has been bedazzled by the sensationalism of Dispensational Premillennialism. Events in the Middle East continually evoke a steady stream of fundamentalist outcries that the end of time is near, the Rapture is about to occur, the Antichrist, Armageddon, and the Tribulation are all imminent. Does the Bible really teach these doctrines? Does the Bible really speak about Iraq, Russia, China, the modern state of Israel, and the Middle East?

The claim that “the end is near” is certainly not new. Indeed, such claims have been incessant since Jesus left the Earth. Periodically, a religious figure will capture national attention, announcing the impending return of Jesus, even to the point of setting a date, only to fade into the anonymity from which he arose when his claim falls flat—but having achieved his “15 minutes of fame” (see Whisenant and Brewer, 1989). The sensationalism sells well and tweaks the curiosity of large numbers of people. Incredibly, this pattern has been repeating itself literally **for centuries**. Hal Lindsey achieved nationwide attention over 40 years ago with his national best-seller *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). With the approach of Y2K, outcries of doom, global disruption, and Armageddon were widespread. More recently, a prominent repackaging of the dispensational brand of premillennialism is the popular 12 volume *Left Behind* book series first published from 1995 to 2007 by Tyndale House (*Left Behind*, 2008). The book series spawned three movies starring Kirk Cameron between 2000 and 2005, and the newly released (October, 2014) remake starring Nicolas Gage (“Left Behind: The End...,” 2014).

INTRODUCTION

Unlike postmillennialism (the view Jesus will return **after** the world is Christianized following a long period of peace and righteousness), and amillennialism (the view that the Bible predicts no worldwide period of peace and righteousness, with good and evil continuing until the end), premillennialism is the view that Jesus will return **before** a 1,000 year period of peace and righteousness and reign in person as king on Earth. The dispensational brand of premillennialism is a system of Bible interpretation that was advocated in the early 19th century through the writings of John Darby (Stokes, 1885, p. 537), which were popularized in the early 20th century in the *Scofield Reference Bible* (Gaebelien, 1943; Mangum and Sweetnam, 2009). According to this view, history is divided into seven dispensations with the “church age” preceding the arrival of the kingdom. The basic planks of dispensationalism are as follows:

1. At some point in the near future, Jesus will secretly “Rapture” the saved, both living & deceased, from Earth, taking them to heaven to receive their reward.
2. A seven year period of intense “Tribulation” will then ensue on Earth.
3. During the seven year period of “Tribulation,” the “Antichrist” will appear.
4. Worldwide turmoil will escalate, culminating in the battle of “Armageddon.”
5. Jesus will return with His saints in order to end “Armageddon” and usher in His 1,000 year reign (the “Millennium”) on a literal throne in Jerusalem, at the end of which, eternity will commence with some going to heaven and the rest to hell.

Consider the following evaluation of each of these five planks.

WILL THERE BE A RAPTURE?

The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word “*rapere*” which means “to seize, snatch out, take away.” Dispensationalists apply this word to the idea that Christ will come suddenly and secretly in the air to snatch away from the Earth the living saints and the resurrected bodies of those saints who have died. This “Rapture” is supposed to occur just prior to the seven-year “Tribulation” period.

Proponents allege that families will be shocked by the strange disappearance of a mother, father, or child. Driverless cars will collide in the streets (cf. bumper sticker: “In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned”). A man and wife will be in bed; she hears a noise and turns her head to find him gone. Planes will crash with no pilots found. The “Rapture” is represented as an invisible coming of the Lord for His saints leaving visible results of chaos and confusion among the remaining unbelievers.

In reality, the word “rapture” is not found in the Bible, though it is claimed to be the Latin equivalent of *harpadzo* translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV). Lindsey admitted, “[i]t is not found in the Bible” (p. 126), and noted that the word “translation” is just as suitable. Yet the word “translation” does occur in the English New Testament.

Paul referred to the fact that God “delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Colossians 1:13, ASV). So when an unbeliever obeys the Gospel, receives forgiveness of sins, and is added to the church of Christ, he is taken out of the world and transferred to Christ’s kingdom. This use of the term conflicts with the idea that it refers to Christians being “raptured” from the physical Earth to meet Jesus in the air.

Actually, the Scriptures use three terms to refer to the return of Christ. First, *parousia* is translated “coming, presence, or advent.” Second, *epiphaneia* is translated “appearing, manifestation, or brightness.” Third, *apokalupsis* is translated “revelation.” Dispensationalism claims that “coming” (*parousia*) refers to the “Rapture” which occurs seven years before the “Appearing” (*epiphaneia*) or “Revelation” (*apokalupsis*). Accordingly, at the “Rapture,” Jesus will come for the church only, while at the “Revelation,” Jesus will return **with** the church and put an end to the “Tribulation” and “Armageddon.”

The primary passage used to support the idea of the “Rapture” is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. But this passage was not given to deal with the return of Christ, but to clarify the status of Christians **before** the return of Christ. Its purpose was twofold. First, it was designed to reassure Christians that their deceased loved ones would be able to share in the Lord’s return, and second, it informed Christians that those who are still living when Christ returns will have no precedence or advantage over those who have already died. This dual function of the text constitutes a very different emphasis from that imposed upon it by dispensationalists.

The dispensational distinctions made between the three terms referring to Christ’s return are simply untenable (see Boettner, 1957, pp. 163-165). Dispensationalists assert that the “coming” (*parousia*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refers to the “Rapture.” Yet the same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 to speak of Jesus coming “**with**” His saints and therefore coincides with the dispensational concept of the “Appearing” or “Revelation” seven years **after** the “Rapture.” Dispensationalists apply 2 Thessalonians 2:8 to the “Antichrist” and therefore must understand this verse as a reference to the “Appearing” (*epiphaneia*). Yet the verse uses the expression “the manifestation (brightness—*epiphaneia*) of His coming (*parousia*).” Thus the term “coming” is used in the New Testament to refer to **both** dispensational concepts of the “Rapture” and the “Appearing,” and the two expressions are even combined in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 to refer to **one and the same event**.

The term “Revelation” (*apokalupsis*) in 1 Corinthians 1:7 is descriptive of what dispensationalists call the “Rapture” since Christians await it. But in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, it clearly refers to the “Appearing” (*epiphaneia*). The term “appearing” (*epiphaneia*) is used in 1 Timothy 6:14 as the event that terminates Christian activity on Earth and thus fits the “Rapture” concept. But in 2 Timothy 4:1, the reference to judgment fits the “Appearing.” Paul stated: “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). Observe that dispensationalists would have Paul translated into heaven at the “Rapture” **before** he receives his crown of righteousness—which he says he will receive at Jesus’ “appearing” (*epiphaneia*).

In view of these observations, it is evident that the three words relating to Christ’s return are used in the New Testament **synonymously & interchangeably**. The New Testament simply makes no distinction between the coming of the Lord **for** His saints (“Rapture”) and the coming of the Lord **with** His saints (“Appearing” or “Revelation”). The dispensational dichotomy is not supported by the language of the New Testament.

Additionally, if Christians are to be removed seven years before the “Revelation,” then no passage should admonish them to live their lives expecting to remain on Earth **until** the “Revelation.” However, many passages do just that. For example, in Titus 2:13, Paul refers to the “blessed hope” and the “appearing” as one and the same event, i.e., Christ’s coming. Boettner observes:

In the original Greek the two substantives *hope* and *appearing* are closely united with the common article. They are not two separate events, as if it read, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing,” but simply, “looking for the blessed hope and appearing.” The one explains the other. “The blessed hope” of Christians is “the glorious appearing” of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (p. 166, italics in orig.).

Another example is 1 Peter 2:14 and 4:13 where the grace that the Christian is to set his hope on is to be received at the revelation (*apokalupsei*) of Christ, at which time the Christian may rejoice. But, according to dispensationalism, the Christian may rejoice seven years earlier at the “Rapture.”

Further, the word “end” (*sunteleia*) means “completion, consummation, close, the full end” (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 799; Thayer, 1901, p. 606; Nicoll, n.d., 1:202; Moulton and Milligan, 1982, p. 613). Used six times in the New Testament, it refers to the end of the world (i.e., the last of life on Earth). Noted Presbyterian commentator Albert Barnes explains that the term as used in Hebrews 9:26 refers to “the last dispensation or economy; that under which the affairs of the world will be wound up” (1971, p. 215). The term parallels the expression “last days” which likewise refers to “the closing period of the world” (Barnes, 2005, p. 31). Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski describes the word as “‘the completion’ when all things shall reach their goal and end” (2001, p. 538).

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promised to be with the disseminators of the Gospel message to the very “end.” Such a promise implies that the church will remain on the Earth, preaching the Gospel, until the Judgment day. But if the church is raptured away seven years **before** the end, she cannot fulfill what Christ commanded her to do. In Matthew 13:39-49, no removal of the saints occurs before the “full end.” The righteous and the wicked grow **together** until the very end. The separation of the two comes at **the end** (not seven years **before** the end). The dispensationalist claims the righteous will be taken out from among the wicked. But the Bible says just the opposite: the wicked will be taken out from among the righteous (Matthew 13:39-40).

The same concept may be seen in the New Testament use of “the last day.” The doctrine of the “Rapture” asserts that believers will be raised seven years before the “Revelation” and 1,007 years before the end of the “Millennium.” But Jesus Himself stated four times that believers will be raised “at the last day” (John 6:39,40,44,54). How can there be additional days after the **last day**? Dispensationalism contradicts Jesus’ own statements that He will raise believers at the **last day**, implying that believers cannot be raised **before** the last day.

A final observation on the “Rapture” is its alleged secretive nature. The second coming of Christ is nowhere depicted as secret. In fact, just the opposite is true. Christ’s coming will be accompanied by “blazing fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7), the sound of a trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52), a “shout,” the “voice of the archangel,” and the “trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). In fact, “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7). Clearly, all persons will witness this incredible occasion. In fact, the very passage upon which the doctrine of the “Rapture” is founded (i.e., 1 Thessalonians 4:16), far from describing a quiet and secretive event, is as Boettner notes, “about the noisiest verse in the Bible!” (p. 171).

WILL THERE BE A TRIBULATION?

Dispensationalists also believe that when Christ comes secretly and snatches away the saved at the “Rapture,” He will take them to heaven where they will receive their reward. They say Revelation chapters four and five describe this heavenly scene. During this period, a seven year Tribulation will rage on Earth, as in Revelation chapters 4-19, that will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. Various passages are sprinkled here & there in this elaborate theory of the end times. But Matthew chapter 24 is perhaps the most prominent passage that is offered in an effort to prove an alleged “Tribulation.” Hence, an exegesis of this central proof-text is necessitated.

Matthew 24

In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced multiple woes upon the Jewish authorities of His day. In verse 38, He declared that the Jews' house would be left to them desolate. He then left the immediate confines of the Temple complex, but paused at a distance with His disciples to continue the same line of thought. He referred their attention to the Temple and said: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be torn down" (Matthew 24:2). Such a declaration would have been shocking, if not horrifying, to these "dyed-in-the-wool" Jews that took great pride in the Temple. Privately, the disciples asked Jesus two questions: (1) "When will these things (the Temple disruption—DM) be? and (2) "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus proceeded to answer these questions in such a way as to distinguish between the destruction of the Temple on the one hand, and the end of the world on the other. He showed that they are completely separate events. Jesus began His response by delineating numerous signs that would take place prior to the toppling of the Temple. First, many would come claiming to be the Christ (vs. 5). As a matter of fact, near the time of Jerusalem's fall in A.D. 70, many false messiahs arose, claiming to be the Christ. Josephus, a Jewish historian, said that such messiahs became more numerous before the siege of the city (*Antiquities*, XX.V.1; XX.VIII.6; *The Wars...*, II.XIII,4). Gamaliel also alluded to such figures during that time period (Acts 5:34-37). And Paul warned of false "apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13).

Second, Jesus said that "wars and rumors of wars" would circulate, "but the end is not yet" (vs. 6). Numerous wars were engaged in by the Romans against various smaller nations as Rome continued her trek toward worldwide domination. At the same time, Rome had to cope constantly with revolt and rebellion among her conquered peoples. Josephus verified this fact (e.g., *Antiquities...*, XX). The "end" referred to in this verse applied to the end of the Temple, not the end of the world.

Third, Jesus predicted that famine, pestilence, and earthquakes would occur (vs. 7). It is documented historical fact that during the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, famines and earthquakes occurred. There was a massive famine during the reign of Claudius Caesar before the destruction of Jerusalem (Acts 11:28; cir. A.D. 47; see Bruce, 1962, 4:309). An unusual number of great earthquakes occurred during the reign of Nero in A.D. 60-70, destroying many cities of Asia Minor (Tacitus, *Annals*, XII.43/58; XIV.27; XV.22). The occurrence of these signs between the time of Jesus' word (A.D. 30) and the destruction (A.D. 70) would be seen as the direct fulfillment of Jesus' statements. But if Jesus' words apply to a yet future event, His words make no sense for there have been earthquakes and famines all over the world for the last 1,900 years, and the occurrence of them today is no sign at all.

Fourth, Jesus further stated that the apostles would be hated, persecuted, and even killed (vs. 9). Peter, Paul, James (Acts 12:2), and James the Less were all put to death before the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus said that false prophets would arise, many Christians would stumble, and evil would abound (vss. 10-13). As the pressure of persecution increased during the early decades of Christianity, so the faith of many decreased. Apostasy became prevalent. It is during such turmoil that false teachers make their mark by capitalizing on spiritual confusion, doubt, and weakness (cf. Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1-2).

Fifth, Jesus said that the Gospel would be preached in all the world (vs. 14). It is also historical fact that the Gospel was preached to all the world prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Paul wrote to Christians in Rome (A.D. 58) and said their faith was spoken of "throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:8). When Paul wrote to the church of Christ at Colossae (A.D. 62), the Gospel was "bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:6) in the entire world, which can only happen if the seed is first sown "in all the world." In fact, Paul flatly stated that the Gospel had been preached "to every creature which is under heaven" (KJV), or "in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1:23). The point is clear: The Gospel was preached to the world prior to A.D. 70 as Jesus predicted.

Once all of these signs (i.e., false Christs, wars/rumors of wars, famines/earthquakes, persecution, death of the apostles, the apostasy of many, the rise of false prophets, and worldwide proclamation of the Gospel) came to pass, Jesus said the “end” would come (:14). That is, the end of Jerusalem, the end of the Temple, the end of formal Judaism, and the end of the Old Testament economy would occur. Jesus said this end would come about with the presence of the “abomination of desolation” in the holy place (vs. 15). He applied Daniel 9:27 to the presence of the Roman army at the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (cf. Luke 21:20).

Consequently, Jesus urged the faithful in Judea to “flee into the mountains” (vs. 16). History records a remarkable factor concerning the fall of Jerusalem. With the approach of A.D. 70, Jewish Christians took the invasion of the Roman armies as the appointed sign which Christ had given. Upon seeing the Roman military machine in full march, Jewish Christians dropped everything and made their escape to Pella, a village east of the Jordan in Perea about 15 miles south of the Sea of Galilee (Boetner, p. 201; Keener, 1993, p. 113; Wilson, 1989, p. 76; Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.5.3; Sheppard, 2013, pp. 10-14; Gichon, 1981, 113:56; Epiphanius, *De pond, et Mens*, 15). Thus, while God was bringing due wrath upon unbelieving Jews, He made provision for those Jews who had become Christians to escape. Jesus pronounced woe on those who, in facing the hardships that would occur, would have the added difficulties associated with protecting and nursing children – especially if it occurred in winter or on the Sabbath (vss. 19-20). Bearing and caring for children is a difficult task in and of itself. But such functions become incredibly difficult when one is “on the run.” Likewise, escape from the onslaught of a ruthless military force would be complicated by the conditions that accompany the wintertime. The cold and hunger would constitute hardship on children and adults alike. The allusion to the Sabbath refers to the fact that Jewish authorities would still be enforcing observance of the Sabbath with closed city gates (Nehemiah 13:19). Thus, these two verses deal with hindrances to flight from the besiegement of Jerusalem. Jesus further stated that “great tribulation” would be associated with these events, comparably worse than at any time and resulting in the loss of many lives (vss. 21-22). We who live subsequent to A.D. 70 have difficulty fathoming the magnitude of the tribulation experienced during the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time, Jews were crowded together from all over the world to observe Passover. The mass misery that resulted from the Roman siege was extensive. Josephus, an eyewitness, alluded to the atrocity in the words, “neither did any other city suffer such miseries...from the beginning of the world” (*The Wars...*, V.10.5). The phrase “nor ever shall be” shows that Jesus had in mind a time near His own day with much time to come after the event. If He was alluding to some period near the end of time (as per dispensationalism), He would not have added such words since there would be no future time left for such an occurrence. God could have easily permitted every single Jew to be wiped from the face of the Earth. But for the sake of His church (which included converted Jews), the period of tribulation was shortened (vs. 22).

Next, Jesus warned that during the period leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, false Christs and false prophets would come forward and display magical tricks to deceive people into thinking they were authentic representatives of God (vss. 23-26). When people face severe and intense disruption to their lives, they tend to become easy prey for those who seek to exploit the hardships of others. Jesus warned of this phenomenon as the time for Jerusalem’s destruction grew nearer. When any individuals, even in our own day, seek to seduce people into believing that the Lord’s final coming is imminent, Jesus says, “Don’t believe it!” (cf. vs. 26). Why? Because when Jesus comes at the end of time, **everyone** will know it. The second coming will be as visible and as evident as a blinding flash of lightening that covers the entire sky (vs. 27). In contrast with the ultimate return of Jesus, the coming of Jesus in judgment on Jerusalem would be discernible on very different grounds: “For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (vs. 28). Typically classified as a type of vulture due to its carrion feeder traits, the eagle was the symbol of Roman power. It was carried by the different units of the Roman army wherever Roman authority was being exerted (Lightfoot, n.d., 24:28; cf. Arndt and Gingrich, p. 19—“eagle symbol of swiftness”). The contemporaries were readily familiar with this fact. Thus, in A.D. 70, the Roman vultures swarmed over Jerusalem and devoured the carcass of apostate Judaism (cf. Wallace, 1960, p. 252).

Next, Jesus resorted to the use of several highly figurative phrases which are based upon Old Testament apocalyptic language: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (vs. 29). The phrase “after the tribulation of those days” means after the horrible events that occurred during the siege of the city, which history records began on August 10, A.D. 70 and lasted some two months. In that short period, 1.1 million died in unspeakable anguish, and 97,000 were taken as slaves (Josephus, *The Wars...*, VI.9.3). After the tribulation of the siege, the final destruction occurred. Jesus described this destruction in symbolic, apocalyptic terminology reminiscent of the description of the destruction of Babylon recorded in Isaiah 13: “The day of the Lord is near” (vs. 6); “For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil” (vss. 10-11); “I will shake the heavens, and the earth will be shaken from its place” (vs. 13). All one need do is read Isaiah 13 to see that these statements referred to the military onslaught of the Medes in the sixth century B.C. that brought about the downfall of the Babylonian empire. Similarly, Isaiah depicted destruction of Edom in terminology that spoke of the cosmos being dissolved and the sky rolling up like a scroll (34:4). Ezekiel portrayed the fate of Egypt in terms of the darkening of the stars, Moon, and Sun (32:7). There is no question that such language is highly figurative, hyperbolic, and designed to make an **impression**, to create an **effect** in the mind of the hearer, and not intended to be taken literally. If God can discuss the overthrow of Babylon, Egypt, and Edom in such extravagant, dramatic terminology, surely He can do the same when discussing the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

At this point would “appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (vs. 30). In other words, the **darkening** of the Jewish temple, the **shaking up** of the Jewish commonwealth, and the **fall** of Jewish authority through the instrumentality of imperial Rome was the sign or signal that Christ had come in judgment on Israel. He was the One responsible for the misery that would shroud the Jewish nation. Jesus had done exactly what He had told Caiaphas he could expect to witness personally: “the Son of man is coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). Jews knew that such language was completely normal when describing God’s execution of wrath in history. When God punished Egypt in the long ago, He “rode on a swift cloud...into Egypt” (Isaiah 19:1) – a graphically appropriate way to envision God’s vengeance. (NOTE: The use of the term “tribes” refers to the Jewish families that mourned the fall of national Judaism—all the Jewish tribes of the Earth.)

Next, angels would go forth with a great trumpet sound and gather together the elect (vs. 31). Historians report that once Jewish opposition to Christianity (reflected thruout the book of Acts) was removed in A.D. 70, the **true nation** of God (i.e., the church of Christ—the “holy nation” [1 Peter 2:9]—the Christian elect) began to experience unparalleled effectiveness. The sound of the Gospel trumpet was heard more clearly than ever before. The word for “angel” is the normal Greek word for “messenger.” In this passage it refers to the emissaries of the Gospel who, by means of the preached Word, gathered individuals into the elect fold from all over the world. Such phraseology is reminiscent of the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) in which every 50th year, the believing community sounded a ram’s horn all through the land, and proclaimed the year as a year of release or liberation.

Jesus next uttered a brief parable about a fig tree (vs. 32-33). Tender branches and new leaves on a fig tree function as **signs**—signals that summer is near. Likewise, the signs that Jesus delineated pinpointed the time when Jerusalem was to be destroyed. Once faithful disciples began to observe the unfolding of these signs, they would realize that the city was about to be besieged by the Roman armies. They could then “look for their redemption” (Luke 21:28), i.e., act upon their providentially prearranged escape plan and receive deliverance from the persecutions of Jewish authority. The repetition of the second person plural pronoun is further proof that Jesus was referring to His own generation, not a generation centuries in the future: “So **you** also, when **you** see...” (vs. 33).

Jesus brought to a close His response to the first question asked by His disciples with the words: “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (vs. 34). The generation to whom He was addressing Himself would still be living when “all these things” would occur. Thus every single sign that Jesus pinpointed would occur during **that** generation. Some, however, suggest that the Greek word for “generation” (*genea*) may also be translated “race,” in which case Jesus was simply saying that the Jewish race would not pass out of existence before all these things happened to them. But if this be true, then Jesus is put in the position of telling the Jews what would happen to their race, and then saying that their race would not pass away until everything that was going to happen to their race happened—an absurdly redundant notion. Why would God declare a group’s fate, and then assure the group that they would still be around to suffer that fate? Obviously, God would never have told them the specifics of their fate if they were not going to be present to experience those specifics. The fact of the matter is that the word “generation” is used repeatedly in the Gospel of Matthew, and it designates those who are living at a particular point in time (cf. Matthew 1:17; 11:16; 12:39-43; 23:36). In fact, in Matthew 23:36-39, where the context is the same as Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of the contemporary population of Jerusalem as the “generation” that He had in mind—the one that He sought to “gather” and whose house would be “left desolate.”

Verse 35 functions as a transition verse. Then Jesus turned His attention to dealing with the disciples’ second question. He emphatically distinguished between the destruction of Jerusalem, that He had been discussing, and the end of the world or second coming. Even if the disciples had not asked about “the end of the world,” it would have been appropriate for Jesus to have dealt with the matter since He would not want the two to be confused. So He alluded to “that day,” i.e., the day heaven and earth will pass away (vs. 35), the world will end, and Christ would come again (vs. 3). Thus, verses 36-51, as well as chapter 25, refer to the end of time. Jesus’ first point was that, whereas those who give proper heed to the signs can pinpoint the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, no one can pinpoint the day of Christ’s return. There will be, in fact, **absolutely no signs** to alert men to the second coming. Verses 37-39 clearly show that life on this Earth will be going on as it always has with “business as usual.” Jesus’ ultimate return will be totally unexpected with no signs to warn of its approach (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

When studied carefully in context and in light of history, verses in Matthew 24 dispensationalists claim refer to the end times are seen to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Without a doubt, there will be tribulation in the world. Christians are, in fact, assured of such (2 Timothy 3:12; John 16:33; Acts 14:22). Christians always have and always will endure tribulation. There will be no future period of tribulation from which saints will be exempt as dispensationalists describe. The world may well experience World War III. Horrible atrocities may well be unleashed upon humanity. But such future events will in no way result as the fulfillment of biblical teaching. The Bible simply does not teach that there will be a future seven year “Tribulation” on Earth that will culminate in a battle of Armageddon.

WILL THERE BE AN ANTICHRIST?

Moving to the next prominent doctrine of dispensationalism, we consider the alleged appearance during the “Tribulation” of the “Antichrist.” The term “antichrist” occurs **only five times** in Scripture, **only** in the writing of John, and **only** in two of his five books: 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2nd John 7. The implications are significant. Dispensationalists do not go to 1 and 2 John when they discuss the Antichrist. They go to Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, or Daniel. They go to passages that do not even use the word “Antichrist.” In stark contrast to current claims, John applied the term “antichrist” to **more than one** individual, and to individuals who were living **then**—in the first century. First John 2:18 states that numerous antichrists had arisen in John’s day, and he therefore contended that “it is the last hour” (i.e., the final period of religious history commonly referred to as “the last days” as in Acts 2:16-17). He then described their behavior as “not of God” (1 John 4:3). “Antichrists” were simply **all those** who denied Christ (1 John 2:22). John, therefore, labeled any such deluded soul as “the deceiver” & “the antichrist” (2 John 7). Notice the use of the article.

John was saying that people living in his own day who denied the incarnation of Jesus were to be regarded as the antichrist! Not just **an** antichrist—but **the** antichrist! The idea that the term “antichrist” is to be applied to some “future fuehrer” (Lindsey, 1970, p. 87) who will draw the world into a global holocaust is totally out of harmony with John’s inspired use of the term.

Daniel 9

The first passage which some say predicts an “Antichrist” is Daniel 9:24-27. Observe carefully the content of this marvelous prophecy. During the prophetic period that Daniel identified in terms of 70 symbolic weeks (vs. 24), transgression, sin, and iniquity would be “finished,” “ended,” and “reconciliation provided for.” This terminology clearly refers to Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross (Hebrews 9:26). The effect of Christ’s atoning work was that “everlasting righteousness” was ushered in. As Paul stated: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6). Because of what Jesus did, individuals may now stand before God completely righteous through obedient faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Likewise, “vision” and “prophecy” would be “sealed up.” This refers to the inevitable termination of Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ’s appearance in human history: “Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24; Hebrews 1:1-2). Finally, the phrase in Daniel 9:24 that speaks of the “anointing” of the “most holy” refers to the public ministry & subsequent official crowning of Jesus as He took His place upon His throne to rule in His kingdom. Isaiah said: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has **anointed Me** to preach good tidings to the poor” (61:1, emp. added). On the day of Pentecost, Peter said: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). Notice that Daniel summarized the entire 70 week period by including all of these factors in the 70 weeks.

Next, Daniel broke the 70 week period into three segments: 7 weeks, 62 weeks, and 1 week. Verse 25 pertains to the first two sections of the 70th week period. During these two periods, that is during 69 of the 70 prophetic weeks, a decree would go forth calling for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Nehemiah 2:7-8; Ezra 1:1-3). Daniel made clear these 69 weeks of the prophetic period, during which the Temple would be rebuilt and national Israel reestablished, would take one up to the appearance of the Messiah.

Verse 26 speaks of the **final** week of the 70 week prophetic period, for he said “**after** the 62 weeks” (which already followed the initial 7 weeks). “After” puts one into the final or 70th week of Daniel’s remarks. Two significant events were to occur during this final week. First, the Messiah would be “cut off.” This definitely refers to Jesus’ death upon the cross: “He was cut off from the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8). Second, a “prince” and his people would come and destroy the city and the sanctuary—an obvious allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple edifice in A.D. 70 by Titus and his Roman army.

Verse 27 alludes to the activation of the new covenant between the Messiah and “many,” that is, between Christ and those who are responsive to the demands of the new covenant. As the Hebrews writer said: “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (8:8; cf. Acts 3:25). The New Testament teaches that the cutting off of the Messiah—the crucifixion—was **the act** that confirmed the covenant (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-29), and brought an immediate end to the validity of the Old Testament practices of sacrifice and oblation (Colossians 2:14; Luke 23:45; Hebrews 10:18-20). Then Daniel alluded to the ruthless invasion of Jerusalem in the phrase “abomination of desolation” (interpreted by dispensationalists to be the “Antichrist”). Jesus quoted this phrase in Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20, and applied it to the Roman desecration and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70.

Thus, the fundamental purpose of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy was to show God's final and complete decree concerning the Israelite commonwealth. All of the events described in the prophecy were literally fulfilled nearly 2,000 years ago. As far as God is concerned, the logical end of the Old Testament and Judaism has occurred. Now He deals only with the spiritual children of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile (Romans 4:11-12,16; 9:8)—the church of Christ which is the actual "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

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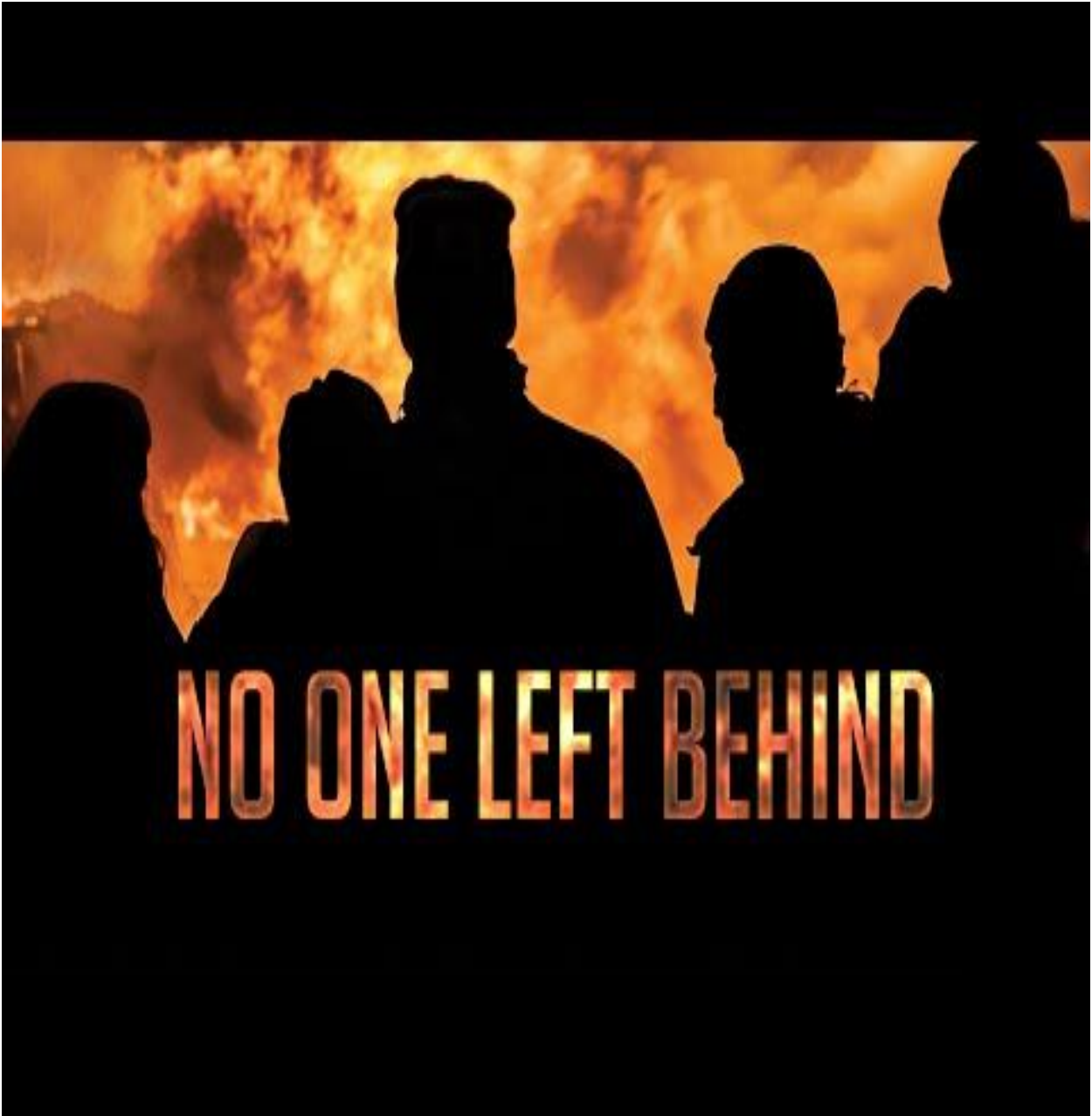
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