

**Don't Be**  
***“Left Behind”!***

**Steven Davis**

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my daughters, Amanda and Alyssa, and my “daughter”, Beth Hammock, so that they may know what I believe and why I believe it.



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## Foreword

This is a compilation of the articles originally published as an attachment to the Midway Baptist Church Adult I Sunday School Class newsletter, *CrossWalk*. The articles have been reformatted slightly, but the content has not been changed.

*CrossWalk* is not an official publication of Midway Baptist Church. Except as otherwise indicated, all views expressed herein are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of any other member of Midway Baptist Church.

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## **Introduction**

(from the October 2004 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

You may assume that the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is what Southern Baptists believe. Not so! Read on, and prepare to be surprised!

### **Know What You Believe and Why You Believe It**

(from the October 2004 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

In Acts 17:10-11, we read:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

The motto for our class is, “Know what you believe and why you believe it.” We should follow the example of the Bereans, who “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

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**Part I: Don't Be "Left Behind"!**  
(from the October 2004 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

If you read the lesson for September 26, based on Revelation 1, you may have been surprised that there was no mention of a future tribulation or a pretribulation rapture. Rather, it states:

The early believers were facing intense suffering and persecution. They needed to know God was with them and understood their present circumstances in light of their future with the Lord. The Book of Revelation was sent to early believers to help give them this perspective. Many scholars believe the book was written about 95 A.D. during the reign of Domitian, the Roman emperor who launched an empire-wide persecution of Christians and Jews for refusing to participate in emperor worship....<sup>1</sup>

That isn't the common teaching about Revelation – that it primarily deals with a future tribulation. Why? The “fine print” after the table of contents gives us a clue: it states, “The 2000 statement of *The Baptist Faith and Message* is our doctrinal guideline.”<sup>2</sup> What does *The Baptist Faith and Message* say about *eschatology* (the doctrine of last things) and what does it mean?

**Eschatology and  
The Baptist Faith and Message**

[The following article is from the September 2004 edition of *Biblical Perspectives*, a newsletter published by Rev. John L. Bray. Used by permission. For an excellent *free* book, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled* – a verse-by-verse commentary on Matthew 24, write to Rev. Bray at P.O. Box 90129, Lakeland FL 33804.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Family Bible Study: Adult Learner, KJV*, Fall 2004. Nashville: LifeWay Christian Resources, p. 34. However, I believe that Revelation was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, unnumbered page.

I have had some thoughts on my mind lately. They relate to our Southern Baptist Faith and Message Statement. At the annual Convention meeting of Southern Baptists in 1963, they adopted what has been called **The Baptist Faith and Message Statement**. The purpose of this document was to “set forth certain teachings” which Southern Baptists believe. The section on eschatology reads like this:

#### X. Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Article X was part of the Statement of Faith when it was adopted in 1963, after being recommended by Dr. Herschel Hobbs and his committee appointed for that purpose. This article has never been changed. **This article is strictly Amillennial** as I understand Dr. Hobbs and the committee’s wording, and it is absolutely opposed to what **Premillennialists**<sup>3</sup> believe and teach about events to occur at the Second Coming of Christ. There is nothing said about a millennium, nor a pre-tribulation rapture, nor a 7-year tribulation period, nor an antichrist and his 666 mark, etc., and it states that the world will be brought to an end at the Second Coming of Christ. This is not to suggest that any change ought to be made in this Statement to accommodate the Premillennialists or any else, for it is possible that even today the majority of Southern Baptists adhere to an Amillennial position.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that all Pretribulationists are Premillennialists, but not all Premillennialists are Pretribulationists.

But here is a thought that comes to me: Suppose that **Premillennial** teachers, evangelists, missionaries and other leaders were to be required to sign this Statement before being allowed to teach in our colleges or seminaries, or to preach in our churches, or to serve on the mission fields, or to be denominational workers, etc. Could they honestly and conscientiously do this, when they do not believe what it says, or without writing in a disclaimer at that portion with which they cannot agree?

But it is true, as Dr Herschel Hobbs, the chairman of the committee that formulated **The Baptist Faith and Message Statement**, said, in a book he later wrote for use as a Study Course in Southern Baptist churches and going into detail about the Statement of Faith, that “Since the New Testament speaks in broad terms about last things, it is to be expected that problems would arise as to the interpretation of details. For instance, interpreters differ as to the number of comings, resurrections, judgments, and the millennium, along with certain other details as to the end of the age. It is not the province of this work to deal with these differences. It is sufficient to say that one’s position as to details has never been a test of orthodoxy among Baptists.” (p. 105, **The Baptist Faith and Message**, Convention Press, Nashville, Tennessee, c. 1971).

Just thinking out loud about this!

[While Article X of *The Baptist Faith and Message* is amillennial, it doesn’t explicitly exclude other positions. However, the last sentence of Article VI, The Church, reads, “The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”<sup>4</sup> This refutes one of the pillars upon which pretribulationism is based: that the Church is not Israel.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, pretribulationism is incompatible with *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Steven]

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<sup>4</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 Edition.*

<sup>5</sup> Tim LaHaye. *Rapture Under Attack*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1998, pp. 229-234.

## Commentary on Revelation 1:1

The key to unlock the meaning of Revelation is found in its first verse.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: (Revelation 1:1)

The word translated *revelation* means *an uncovering*.<sup>6</sup> This book was given to *his servants* (Christians) to *show* (or *reveal*, not to hide) ... *things which must shortly come to pass*.

The phrase translated *shortly* literally means *with quickness, swiftness, speed*.<sup>7</sup> It means these things will *soon* come to pass – not soon to us, but soon to those to whom the book was addressed, the seven churches in Asia (v. 4). Thus, the heart of the book, chapters 4-19, is not a description of a tribulation in the future, but one that occurred in the first century A.D. Since the tribulation is in the past, there can be no pretribulation rapture in the future. See also Rev. 1:3, 2:16, 3:11, 11:14; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, and 20.<sup>8</sup>

Another pillar upon which pretribulationism is based is literal interpretation of prophesy. For example, Tim LaHaye, coauthor of the *Left Behind* series, has his “Golden Rule of Biblical Interpretation”: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> While this may be appealing, it is not scriptural. Further, note that Jesus never corrected or criticized His disciples or the Jewish religious

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<sup>6</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs. *The Cosmic Drama*. Waco: Word Books, 1971, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Gary DeMar. *End Times Fiction*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> LaHaye, op. cit., p. 228.

leaders for interpreting a teaching symbolically rather than literally. However, He was constantly correcting or chastising them for interpreting a passage literally rather than symbolically. Thus, we cannot conclude that literal interpretation is preferable to symbolic interpretation.

Further, note that this verse tells us how the book should be interpreted: it says *he sent and signified it*, that is, *it was shown in signs or symbols*. Therefore, it essentially says we are to interpret the book symbolically, not literally.

## Part II: The Olivet Discourse

(from the November 2004 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Matthew 24:6-8)

Those of you who read the first part of this series will recall that the commentary on Revelation 1:1 showed that the tribulation in Revelation 4-19 occurred in the first century A.D. However, it is dangerous to base a doctrine on a single passage of scripture. What about the great tribulation described in the Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21?

First, let's look at what prompted the discourse.

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:1-3)

The discourse was prompted by Jesus' prophesy that the temple would be destroyed. This was fulfilled by the Romans in A.D. 70, about 40 years, or one generation<sup>10</sup>, after the prediction. This is a key point. All

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<sup>10</sup> And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness **forty years**, until all the **generation**, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed. (Numbers 32:13)

too often, we see the Olivet Discourse interpreted as if its primary focus is the end of the world, and the destruction of the temple is either relegated to secondary importance or ignored altogether.

There are several difficulties in interpreting the Olivet Discourse. First, there is the question of which verses describe the destruction of Jerusalem and which describe the end of the world. Second, Jesus said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days ... they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (v. 29-30). This appears to be a description of His Second Coming. But later, He said, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” (v. 34). How can we reconcile these verses with the fact that His Second Coming did not occur immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem during that generation?

There are several approaches to resolving these apparent inconsistencies. One is to assume that the verses are simply out of order. This is the approach of Barclay<sup>11</sup> and Hobbs<sup>12</sup>. However, this is unacceptable, as it denies the inerrancy of the Bible.

Another approach is to assume that this passage will be fulfilled twice, initially in the destruction of Jerusalem and again at the end of the world. However, this doesn't address how the Second Coming of Jesus could occur twice. Further, Jesus said, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (v. 21). This verse explicitly rules out the double fulfillment theory; there was only one “great tribulation” and there will never be another.

A third approach is to assume that the passage contains a transition, the first portion addressing the destruction of Jerusalem and second portion addressing the end of the world. However, there is no clear transition verse. Further, this approach requires the word “generation”

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<sup>11</sup> William Barclay. *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p. 300-316.

<sup>12</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs. *Fundamentals of Our Faith*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1960, p. 152.

in v. 34 to be interpreted as “race” (i.e., the Jews). This is the interpretation of Wesley, who believed the transition occurred in v. 29.<sup>13</sup> However, the Greek word translated “generation” means “the sum total of those living at the same time”, and is never used elsewhere in the Bible to mean “race.”<sup>14</sup>

The key to understanding the Olivet Discourse is a proper understanding of Matthew 24:29-31:

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: 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.

As we have previously stated, this appears to be a description of His Second Coming. However, note the similarities to Peter’s sermon at Pentecost:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;  
And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, ...  
And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:  
The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: (Acts 2:16-17(a), 19-20).

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<sup>13</sup> *John Wesley’s Notes on the Bible. The Sword Project, CrossWire Bible Society*, available for free download at <http://www.crosswire.org>.

<sup>14</sup> David Chilton. *The Great Tribulation.*, p. 3, quoted by John Bray in *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*: John Bray, Lakeland FL, 1996, p. 205.

Of course, Peter intended this quote, from Joel 2:28-31, figuratively; he did not mean that the sun would literally turn dark, or the moon would literally turn into blood. Consider also the similarities to Isaiah's prediction of the destruction of Babylon:

The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. . . . For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. (Isaiah 13:4, 10)

Similar imagery is used by Ezekiel in his prophesy against Egypt.

And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God. (Ezekiel 32:7-8)

In neither the destruction of the Babylonians nor the destruction of the Egyptians did the sun, moon, and stars literally become dark or cease to give their light. Matthew 24:29-31 is not a description of Jesus' Second Coming; rather, it is a description of His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem, just as the Lord came in judgment upon both the Babylonians and the Egyptians.

Note that the word translated "angels" in v. 31 literally means "messengers"; whether these are angelic beings or human messengers is determined from the context.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the translators of the King James Version chose the word "angels"; however, they should have chosen "messengers". This passage means that, after the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus sent forth His missionaries throughout the world to "gather together His elect."

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<sup>15</sup> Bray, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

But, what of Matthew 24:14? “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Surely this couldn't have been fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem. But what saith the scriptures?<sup>16</sup>

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that ***your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*** (Romans 1:8)

But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, ***their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*** (Romans 10:18)

But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, ***made known to all nations*** for the obedience of faith: (Romans 16:26)

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of ***the gospel***, which ye have heard, and ***which was preached to every creature which is under heaven***; whereof I Paul am made a minister; (Colossians 1:23)

Of course, Paul also intended these passages to be interpreted figuratively, not literally; he didn't mean that he had literally “preached to every creature which is under heaven”.

While pretribulationists would attack this commentary for its figurative rather than literal interpretation, we have seen that Jesus used the same figurative language as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Peter, and Paul, who all obviously intended their language to be interpreted figuratively. Is it not reasonable that Jesus intended His language figuratively, also? Therefore, we must conclude that the great tribulation described in the Olivet Discourse did indeed occur in the

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<sup>16</sup> Bray, op. cit., p. 23.

first century A.D. and will never be occur again, so there can be no future great tribulation and no pretribulation rapture.

**Part III: The Millennium**  
(from the December 2004 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

One of the most controversial chapters in the Bible is Revelation 20, which describes the millennium. How do we deal with Revelation 20? We can't ignore it; it's certainly in the Bible. Nor can we “spiritualize” it away, as those who don't understand amillennialism would charge. Rather, we have to look at what Revelation 20 actually says, as opposed to what premillennialists assume that it says.

The amillennial interpretation of the millennium is that it began with Christ's first advent and ends at His Second Coming, and that the “thousand years” is not literally a period of 1,000 years, but a long period of unspecified duration. Let's look at the first three verses:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (Revelation 20:1-3)

How could any Christian possibly believe that Satan was bound and cast into the bottomless pit at the first advent? We read,

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. (Matthew 12:28-29)

So we see that Jesus Himself taught that He had bound the “strong man” – Satan – during His first advent. Further,

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. (Luke 10:17-18)

Of course, Satan hasn't been rendered totally powerless by being bound and cast into the bottomless pit, but Revelation 20 never states that he has. We see, therefore, that the amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3 is in perfect agreement with the teachings of Jesus Himself.

Let's look at the next three verses:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)

First, let's note that even if there is a literal millennial kingdom after the Second Coming, this passage disproves the theory of a pretribulation rapture. John clearly says, "This is the first resurrection." However, this would occur at the wrong time for a pretribulation rapture, as it is at the beginning of the millennium, after the tribulation.

But what of the amillennial interpretation of this passage? Note that John says, "I saw the souls of them...." This passage never mentions a bodily resurrection. As we know, the souls of the dead believers are now with Him and He will bring them back with them to be reunited with their resurrection bodies (for example, I Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.) It is the *souls* of the dead

believers that have been raised to life and are now reigning in Heaven with Him who represent the first resurrection.

Is this a new, liberal interpretation of this passage? Certainly not; it was the original Southern Baptist interpretation. According to *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, “John Leadley Dagg (1794-1884) was the first Southern Baptist systematic theologian to be read widely by Southern Baptists.”<sup>17</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention was organized in 1845.<sup>18</sup> Dagg was the president of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, from 1844-54 and professor of theology there from 1844-55.<sup>19</sup> In his *Manual of Theology*, published in 1857, he wrote:

Some suppose that the coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the righteous dead, will precede the millennium, and that the resurrection of the wicked will be at the end of the thousand years. This opinion, according to which the reign of Christ will be personal, is founded chiefly on Rev. xx. 4, 5: ... In carefully examining this passage, we may observe that the first resurrection here mentioned does not include all the righteous dead, but only the martyrs; and that it is not a resurrection of their bodies, but of their souls .... [W]e may interpret the passage before us; which, so understood, teaches a spiritual, and not a personal reign of Christ. ... [W]e may infer that one voice, one trumpet will call forth all the dead, and that one hour (John v. 25) will suffice for the resurrection of all. In one and the same day, (Acts xvii. 31) the great day of the Lord, he will be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God; and will come, to be glorified in his saints, and admired of all them that believe. (2 Thess. i. 8-10)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy George and David S. Dockery, Editors. *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> John L. Dagg, D.D. *Manual of Theology*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Gano Books, 1990, p. 354.

What of the next passage?

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:8-10)

At first glance, this appears to be a capsule summary of the tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon, and the intervention of Christ at His Second Coming; because of the similarities between this passage and Revelation 19:20:

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

But note that, in chapter 19, at the end of the tribulation, the beast and the false prophet were cast into hell. In 20:10, at the end of the millennium, the devil is cast into hell where the beast and the false prophet already were. Thus, these are clearly two separate occasions, separated by the duration of the millennium.

The final passage is a clear description of The Judgment.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is

the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Thus, we conclude that Revelation 20 does not actually teach a millennial kingdom on earth beginning with the Second Coming; rather, it describes the entire Church Age, beginning with the First Advent of Christ and ending with the Judgment, on the last day, the day of His Second Coming. This is incompatible with the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture, which requires a literal millennial kingdom after the Second Coming. Therefore, we conclude that the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is false.

## **Part IV: Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week**

(from the January 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

The doctrine of a pretribulation rapture states that Christians will be raptured immediately before a seven year tribulation, followed by Christ's Second Coming ("Glorious Appearance" in pretribulationist lingo). Have you ever wondered where the Bible teaches *seven years* of tribulation? Not in the Olivet Discourse; Jesus discussed the Great Tribulation (which, as we have seen, was fulfilled in A.D. 70 during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem), but He did not mention the duration of the tribulation. Nor in the book of Revelation, which mentions periods of 3-½ years five times, but never mentions a seven year period.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the teaching of a seven year tribulation is based on the pretribulationist interpretation of Daniel 9:27, which describes what is commonly known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week of years.

Let's look at Daniel 9:24-27 to see what we can learn about Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people

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<sup>21</sup> Gentile, Ernest B. *The Final Triumph*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, a division of Baker Book House Company, 2001, pp. 236-237. Please note that, although I primarily reference *The Final Triumph* in this article, I could have referenced a large number of commentaries and books on eschatology, as there are many works that state essentially these same points.

of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

There are essentially two interpretations of this passage – the traditional interpretation and the pretribulationist interpretation. Both agree on one point: each day represents a year, so the seventy weeks represent 490 years ( $7 \times 70 = 490$ ).<sup>22</sup> This is based on Genesis 29:27-28; Leviticus 25:8; Numbers 14:34; and Ezekiel 4:6.<sup>23</sup> The major difference is the interpretation of verse 27, Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week.

In the traditional interpretation, Messiah is “he” who “shall confirm the covenant with many for one week” and who “shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”<sup>24</sup> Gentile states:

Only Jesus Messiah could “confirm a covenant” (Isaiah 42:6; Romans 15:8; Hebrews 13:20). This was done when He “[brought] an end to sacrifice and offering” (verse 27) through the shedding of His own precious blood.

In the pretribulationist interpretation, Antichrist is “he” who “shall confirm the covenant with many for one week” and who “shall cause

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”<sup>25</sup> As Steve Wohlberg describes the pretribulationist interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

“He” is the antichrist.

“The covenant” is a peace treaty the antichrist makes with the Jews after the rapture.

...

“He shall cause the sacrifice ... to cease” means the antichrist will stop the sacrifices of the rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem during the tribulation.

According to verse 25, Messiah will come after 69 weeks (7 weeks plus 62 weeks), or 483 years (7 x 69 = 483) after “the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” Verse 26 states that Messiah will be cut off “after” 69 weeks. Verse 27 says that “in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”

The traditional interpretation of verse 25 is that Messiah will begin His ministry with His baptism after 69 weeks and, according to verse 27, will be “cut off” – crucified – in the midst of the [seventieth] week, that is, 3-½ years after the beginning of the seventieth week. The pretribulationist interpretation, however, states that all of verse 27 refers to the Antichrist; therefore, verse 26 means that the Messiah will be crucified at the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week.

Which interpretation is correct? Which interpretation was actually fulfilled? What happened at the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week: did Christ begin His ministry or was He crucified?

There are three potential dates for the beginning of the 70 weeks: 536 B.C.<sup>27</sup>, 458 B.C.<sup>28</sup>, or 445 B.C.<sup>29</sup> Adding 483 to each (and recalling

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<sup>25</sup> Wohlberg, Steve. *End Time Delusions*. Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, Destiny Image, Publishers, Inc., 2004, p. 215. Wohlberg is not a pretribulationist!

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Gentile, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985, p. 684.

that there was no year 0), we find the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week to be 53 B.C., A.D. 26, or A.D. 39, respectively. Obviously, 53 B.C. is too early for either the beginning or end of Christ's ministry, and A.D. 39 is too late.

When was Jesus baptized? In John 2:20, we read, "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" According to A.T. Robertson, who cites Josephus, Herod began building the temple in 20 B.C.; 46 years later would be A.D. 27.<sup>30</sup> Robertson states, "It was at the first Passover in his ministry that this expression is used. It has been probably six months since his baptism."<sup>31</sup> Six months prior to the Passover in the spring of A.D. 27 would be the fall of A.D. 26 – as predicted by the traditional interpretation of Daniel's 70 weeks.

Note also that most commentators think that Jesus was crucified after a ministry of 3-½ years<sup>32</sup> – half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week – again in accordance with the traditional interpretation. This would place the crucifixion at Passover in the spring of A.D. 30, not A.D. 26 as required by the pretribulationist interpretation.

Since the traditional interpretation of Daniel's 70 weeks accurately predicted the years of Christ's baptism and His crucifixion, while the pretribulationist interpretation missed the date of the crucifixion by approximately four years, we must accept the traditional interpretation and reject the pretribulationist interpretation. Since pretribulationism is based on the pretribulationist interpretation of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, we must reject the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture as false.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Robertson, A.T. *A Harmony of the Gospels*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1922, p. 265.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Gentile, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

## Part V: As a Thief in the Night<sup>33</sup>

(from the February 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

Those of you who read the first two parts of this series will recall that both the commentary on Revelation 1:1 and the commentary on the Olivet Discourse (found in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21) showed that the tribulations they describe occurred in the first century A.D. and will never occur again. Therefore, there will be no future “Great Tribulation” and no pretribulation rapture. Those of you who read the third part of this series will recall that the commentary on Revelation 20 showed that there will be no millennial kingdom on earth after the Second Coming of Christ; rather, the millennial kingdom is the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Heaven, established here on earth during Christ’s earthly ministry, and it will last until the Second Coming. Once again, this shows that the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is false.

There are a number of passages that describe the return of Christ “as a thief in the night”:

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. (Matthew 24:43)

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 that day should overtake you as a thief. (I Thessalonians 5:2-4)

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<sup>33</sup> This month’s study is based on Dr. D. James Kennedy’s tape series, *An Historical Perspective on the End Times*. Coral Ridge Ministries: Ft.Lauderdale FL.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. (Revelation 3:3)

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. (Revelation 16:15)

These passages are popular with pretribulationists, who claim that they teach a secret, silent rapture of the Church. An especially interesting “thief in the night” passage is found in II Peter:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (II Peter 3:10-13)

Note that this cannot be a description of a pretribulation rapture, as verse 10 clearly says that, on that day, the heavens will pass away and the earth will be destroyed. Further, the destruction of the earth on the day that Christ returns is in obvious conflict with premillennialism. This passage, however, is in perfect harmony with amillennialism.

### **The Last Day**

John 6 contains a number of verses in which Jesus discusses the Resurrection.

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but

should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39-40, 44, 54)

In this passage, Jesus said four times that believers will be raised “at the last day”. After the death of Lazarus, Martha stated her belief concerning the resurrection of believers: “Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” (John 11:24).

In John 12, Jesus discussed the timing of the judgment of non-believers:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. (John 12:48)

To be judged on the last day, the unbelieving dead must be resurrected on the last day. Therefore, we conclude that the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers will be on the last day, the day of Christ’s Second Coming, as described I Corinthians 15:51-52, I Thessalonians 4:16-17, II Peter 3:10-13, and a plethora of additional passages. This disproves the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture, which has no less than three resurrections spread over 1,007 year. It also disproves the doctrine of a premillennial post-tribulation rapture, which has the resurrection of the believers at the Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the unbelievers 1,000 years later at the end of the millennium. Note that it agrees perfectly, however, with amillennialism.

**Part VI: The “Rapture Passage”**  
(from the March 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

My older daughter, Amanda, is in the third grade at Gilead Christian Academy. For the last several weeks, her class has been memorizing I Thessalonians 4:13-18 – the “Rapture Passage”, one verse per week.

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 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. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

First, let’s note that three times in this passage, in verses 13, 14, and 15, Paul uses the Christian metaphor of “sleep” or “asleep” meaning “death” or “dead.” Recall from the first part of this series that pretribulationists claim that their doctrine is based on a literal interpretation of prophesy. Yet even the most hard-core literalist recognizes that the words “sleep” or “asleep” cannot be taken literally; they must be taken figuratively.

Second, note that the purpose for Paul writing this passage is to assure the Christians in Thessalonica that the dead believers will be resurrected, and not “sleep” forever.

Third, note that verse 14 says that “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” Paul is speaking of the souls of dead believers that are now reigning with Him in Heaven (see the commentary on Revelation 20:4-6 in the third part of this series). The Lord will bring

the souls of dead believers with Him when He returns, so that their souls can be reunited with their resurrection bodies.

Finally, note that this passage says nothing about a tribulation, either immediately after the rapture (pretribulationism) or immediately before the rapture (posttribulationism). The claim that this passage teaches a pretribulation rapture, because Paul would have mentioned the tribulation if it occurred before the rapture, is an *argument of silence*, based on speculation as to what Paul would have written if pretribulationism were not true. However, we can turn this logic around: if pretribulationism is true, why didn't Paul clearly state that the rapture will occur immediately prior to a tribulation for non-believers?

### **The Last Trump<sup>34</sup>**

Paul wrote another passage that is also frequently used by pretribulationists:

Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (I Corinthians 15:51-52)

Note that this passage is essentially a parallel to that found in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. In particular, verse 52 is a parallel to I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

The passage in I Corinthians does not actually mention that the living believers will be caught up in the clouds. However, it does provide an additional detail: it states that “the trumpet” that “shall sound” is “the last trump.”

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<sup>34</sup> *The Last Trump* is based on Dr. D. James Kennedy's tape series, *An Historical Perspective on the End Times*. Coral Ridge Ministries: Ft.Lauderdale FL.

There is only one passage in the Bible which discusses both the tribulation and a “coming” of Christ – the Olivet Discourse:

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: 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 24:29-31)

As we have seen in the second part of this series, this passage refers to Jesus coming in judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. But pretribulationists insist that the passages in I Thessalonians and I Corinthians both describe a pretribulation rapture, while the passage from the Olivet Discourse describes the Second Coming at the end of the tribulation, since verse 29 places this “coming” of Christ “immediately after the tribulation of those days.”<sup>35</sup>

However, there is basic problem with the pretribulationist logic. Recall that I Corinthians 15:52 states that those events will occur “at the last trump”. Recall also that, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus says that, “he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet”. If the *last trump* has sounded at a pretribulation rapture, there can't be another trumpet to be sounded at the Second Coming at the end of the tribulation if the tribulation occurs after the rapture. We must conclude, therefore, that the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is false.

It is interesting to note how two popular pretribulationists deal with this inconsistency in their logic: Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *Are We Living in the End Times?* By Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999, pp. 101-103.

state that “the last trump” is “His last trumpet for the church.”<sup>36</sup> However, there is nothing either implicit or explicit in the passage to justify adding this qualification. They claim that their interpretation of prophecy is superior to that of amillennialists, because they interpret prophecy literally whenever possible. Yet they essentially change the text of the Bible so as to eliminate the obvious inconsistencies in their doctrine, a practice that is totally unacceptable. Thus, their “literalism” is revealed to be nothing more than a cover for their unscrupulous rewriting of the Bible.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

**Part VII: The Judgment**  
(from the April 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

There are a number of passages that deal with the judgment. Premillennialism teaches at least two judgments, one for believers at the beginning of the millennium, and one for non-believers at the end of the millennium. Pretribulationists teach at least three judgments, one for believers after the Rapture, one for the “tribulation saints” at the “Glorious Appearing” of Christ, and one for non-believers at the end of the millennium. Amillennialists teach one general judgment for both believers and non-believers on the last day, immediately after the Second Coming of Christ. We examined John 12:48 in Part V of this series; it states that unbelievers will be judged on the last day. Let’s examine some of the other passages concerning the judgment.

**The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats**

Jesus described the judgment at the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse in the passage known as The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall

answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:31-46)

This is a description of one general judgment of both believers and non-believers, as taught by amillennialists.

Matthew 13 contains two parables in which Jesus teaches His eschatology, the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares and the Parable of the Net.

### **The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares**

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time

of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. (Matthew 13:24-30)

Jesus provided His own explanation of this parable. Note His interpretation of the various symbols and figures of speech. Jesus *constantly* talked in symbols and figures of speech, and cannot be properly understood if His teachings are interpreted literally. Jesus showed by example that the “consistent literal interpretation” method of the pretribulationists (see Part I of this series) is an improper technique for understanding the Bible.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 13:36-43)

### **The Parable of the Net**

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of

fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.  
(Matthew 13:47-50)

In both of these parables, believers and unbelievers are separated from each other – that is, judged -- at the Second Coming. Again, these parables describe one general judgment as taught by amillennialists, not the two or more judgments required by premillennialism and pretribulationism.

### **Conclusion**

This month, we have examined three parables concerning the judgment, and all three describe the same thing – one general judgment of both believers and non-believers at the Second Coming of Christ. This is in accordance with amillennialism. We must conclude that premillennialism and pretribulationism are both inconsistent with the Bible; therefore, we must reject both of these doctrines as false.

**Part VIII: Premillennialism**  
(from the May 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

I recently heard a sermon by a preacher<sup>37</sup> in which he stated that we know that Christians will not face the Great White Throne Judgment. However, he did he offer any scripture to support his claim. Why not? *Because there is no scripture to support it.* He was essentially stating that he is a premillennialist, since one of the distinguishing features of premillennialism is separate judgments for the righteous<sup>38</sup> and unrighteous<sup>39</sup>. Amillennialists and postmillennialists, on the other hand, believe in one general judgment on the last day for both the righteous and unrighteous.

[Note that pretribulationism is a subset of premillennialism: all pretribulationists are premillennialists, but many premillennialists reject pretribulationism. If premillennialism is false, pretribulationism must be false.]

The Great White Throne Judgment passage reads:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which

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<sup>37</sup> Note that I might have heard him on TV or the radio; I will not identify him.

<sup>38</sup> The Judgment Seat of Christ: II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

<sup>39</sup> The Great White Throne Judgment, found in Revelation 20:11-15, quoted in this article.

were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Note that verses 12 and 13 state, "... I saw the dead ... and the dead were judged.... And the sea gave up the dead ... and death and hell delivered up the dead ... and they were judged every man according to their works." "The dead" includes all of the dead, not just the unsaved dead. Verse 13 states that "every man" – all – both saved and unsaved – were judged "according to their works." Contrary to what premillennialists claim, this passage clearly discusses one general judgment of both believers and unbelievers.

As we saw in Part VII of this series, the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46), the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43), and the Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50) all describe one general judgment in which believers and unbelievers are separated from each other – that is, judged – at the Second Coming of Christ. [Note that it is my usual practice to fully quote all scripture, both for the readers' convenience and to show that I am not misinterpreting the scripture. However, since this is essentially a summary of previous articles, where the referenced scripture was fully quoted, and due to a lack of space, I will not quote all of the scripture in this article.]

In Part V of this series, we saw that II Peter 3:10-13 states not once but twice that, at the return of Christ, the heavens will pass away and the earth will be burned up or melt:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the

elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (II Peter 3:10-13)

Therefore, there will be no earth for a millennial kingdom after the Second Coming of Christ, as required by premillennialism.

Further, we saw that in John 6:39-54, Jesus said four times that believers will be raised “at the last day”.

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39-40, 44, 54)

In John 12:48, Jesus discussed the timing of the judgment of non-believers: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” To be judged on the last day, the unbelieving dead must be resurrected on the last day. Therefore, we conclude that the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers will be on the last day, the day of Christ’s Second Coming. Again, this is in direct conflict with the teachings of premillennialism.

The matter is quite simple: we can believe what Jesus and Peter taught, or we can believe what premillennialists teach. We cannot believe both, as they are in direct conflict with each other.

## **An Opportunity for My Premillennialist Friends**

I am under no illusion that I have convinced all of my premillennialist friends that the doctrine of premillennialism is false. Therefore, I offer you the opportunity to write a guest article to be published in a future issue of *CrossWalk*. Using scripture, the article must reconcile premillennialism with Jesus' teachings of the judgment and the last day, as well as Peter's teaching that the world will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ. The article should be no more than two pages, single spaced. You must identify yourself, but I will withhold your name upon request. I need your article by May 21 for the June issue or by June 18 for the July issue. Electronic format is preferred, but not required. Start writing!

**Part IX: Pretribulationism**  
(from the June 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

In the May 2005 issue of *CrossWalk*, I offered the opportunity for a premillennialist to write a guest article that could reconcile premillennialism with Jesus' teachings of the judgment and the last day, as well as Peter's teaching that the world will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ. The response I received did not address these subjects; it is essentially a defense of pretribulationism. I decided to publish it in any case.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17) This article should be viewed in light of this verse, not as an argument between two men but as a discussion between two friends, so that it may “sharpeneth the countenance” of both of us.

**Guest Article in Defense of Pretribulationism**

In comment on your study on the May 2005 Crosswalk – I whole heartedly agree with your column on Mrs. Lillie Mae Causey. I also remember fondly the teachings of her class. These teachings gave many of us the fundamentals of our Christian faith, and have much greater value now as I study the Word of God. Praise God for such a dedicated teacher.

Regarding your study “Don't Be Left Behind Part VIII” – I oppose! You stated that you heard a sermon preached in which the preacher said, “We know that Christians will not face the White Throne of Judgment”. Perhaps you should have listened to this sermon. In your report you stated there is no scripture to support his belief. In the scripture that you use to confirm your belief, Rev. 20:11-15, you have apparently missed the word repeated so often; “The dead small and great ... the dead were judged ... the sea gave up the dead ... death and hell delivered up the dead....” You are right, the dead will be judged by their works, and the Book of Life will be searched for their name. But, the name of the dead will not be found in the Book of Life.

The Book of Life contains the names of those who have been made alive by the Blood of the Lamb. “And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” 1 Cor. 15:45. According to Webster’s Dictionary, “Quick” means: 1. Prompt, 2. Intelligent, 3. Speedy, 4. Living Persons, 5. Vital part. And in like manner, “quicken” means: 1. Hasten, 2. Become alive or sensitive, All these definitions seem to describe Jesus. And the fact He was made a “quickenning spirit” means that He is able to “quicken”. To put it simply, because we have to understand it simply, Jesus came to make us alive. To include all the scripture that talks of the “quick” (saved by the Blood), I would need extra paper – and will provide them for you, if you request. Jesus said, “He is the way, the truth, and the life”. John 11:25. I could go on, but maybe this is enough to convince you that we as Christians inherit by the finished work of Jesus, through His perfect sacrifice, eternal life. Those who have inherited eternal life are listed in the Book of Life. The dead are not! Therefore, the judgment spoken of in Rev. 20:11-15 will not include the saints.

Next, you refer to Part VII of this series, “the judgment of the sheep and the goats.” I ask you to read the whole of the Scriptures again and let the words speak for themselves. Matt. 25:1-13 ... the virgins 5 with oil for their lamps, 5 without. Those with oil went with the bridegroom, those without did not. This is a story of separation. Matt. 25:14-30, the story of the servants given the talents. The two that used the talents to make other talents were accepted, the one who did not was cast out. Again, a story of separation. Matt. [13:24-30 and 36-43] (which you target), Good seed was sown, then the enemy came and sowed the seed of tares. The end of the parable is gather the tares first for the fire, put the wheat into the barn. Again, separation. Not judgment!

How can we be sure that the judgment has not been passed at the time of separation? Jesus used parables that could be understood by the farmers and common people of His day. Today some of the same standards of harvest apply. The fruit is gathered first, brought into the packing house, graded and sorted. This also applies to livestock. You never mix turkeys and chickens when you take them to market, nor mix sheep and goats. Once you separate them, they are graded by age, weight, and even breed within their species.

We can also tell these stories are not judgment because they were not cast into the “lake of fire”. God knows the heart of man. His Word is for the learned and the unlearned. He has to keep it simple or plain. To read or interpret His Word any other way leads to false doctrine.

There is a coming judgment for those that are in Christ, this is true. We will be judged for those things that are done in the flesh. II Cor. 5:10 tells of the judgment seat of Christ to which we all must appear. If you read the scripture in its entirety, you will discover that Paul is talking about the believer and the believers in the church of Corinth. He even uses the words “we all” putting himself in the same judgment. In Romans 14:10, we are also warned of the judgment seat of Christ. Paul again is talking to the believers. These believers are those made alive by the Blood of the Lamb, the grace of God, and their faith is His finished work.

I fully believe that the day of the Lord will come as “a thief in the night”. Read I Thes. 4:13-17. In verse 16 ... “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: 17 ... Then we which are alive and remain (not yet tasted physical death) shall (will) be caught up together with them in the clouds, (He is not touching the earth at this time) to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we (the believer) ever (for all time) be with the Lord (the one who quickens us)”.

Why did Paul want us to know these things? I Thes. 4:18 ... “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” There is not much comfort in the dread of the type of wrath that God has proposed for those who go through His appointed tribulation. I Thes. 5:8-11 ... we are told ... “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not appointed us to wrath; but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep (alive or dead in Christ – alive by His sacrifice) we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do”.

If these thoughts are of the premillennialist, it appears as though Paul himself must have been a premillennialist! Jesus ascended into the clouds and the angels said that in like manner He shall come again (into the clouds/ caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air). Hey, I'm really liking the "premillennialist" witness that I've seen in the Word of God!!!!

There is a final day, a day of judgment, a day of putting away all evil, and a day of a cleansing fire. It will come as Peter foretold. It has to be, or Peter is a false prophet. If he were a false prophet, God would not have used him so mightily. God will cleanse the heavens and the earth with fire. Heaven because of satan's rebellion, earth because of the fall of man and the rule of satan. As gold is refined, all of heaven and earth will be purged. Then we will see the "New Heaven" and the "New Earth". I won't begin to tell you I completely understand God's time table in Revelation. I don't believe any man can. We see John witnessing an overview of all history all the way back to Genesis. It is confusing, but I think we will be better served of the truth if we take the book as it is written and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what He would have us to know.

[Personal comments to me omitted.]

Sincerely,

/signed/

[Name Withheld, Identified as Pre-Tribulationist, or PT for short, in my response below.]

### **Response**

Thank you for your kind words regarding my column on Mrs. Lillie Mae Causey. As you said, "Praise God for such a dedicated teacher." Amen, Brother!

While I am disappointed to learn that I haven't persuaded you to reject pretribulationism, it is refreshing to find a pretribulationist who can actually defend his belief with scripture. Since the heart of your

defense is the “Rapture Passage”, let’s begin there, and save the discussion of the judgment or “separations” until later.

Before we begin, though, let me clarify one point: I do not believe that there is a future tribulation; I believe that the tribulation as prophesied in both the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and will not occur again. This is in accordance with the traditional beliefs and teachings of Southern Baptist theologians, including Dr. Herschel Hobbs, for whom our Adult Sunday School Commentaries are named. I more fully addressed this subject in Parts I and II of this series.

The “Rapture Passage” reads as follows:

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 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. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Verse 13 states the purpose for Paul writing this passage: to assure the Christians in Thessalonica that the dead believers will be resurrected, and not “sleep” forever.

Verse 14 says that “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” Paul is speaking of the souls of (physically) dead believers that are now reigning with Him in Heaven (see the commentary on Revelation 20:4-6 in Part III of this series). The Lord will bring the souls of dead believers with Him when He returns, so that their souls can be reunited with their resurrection bodies.

In your commentary on verse 17, you state, “He is not touching the earth at this time”, implying that He then reverses directions and immediately takes us to heaven. However, there is nothing in this passage to justify that interpretation. The passage itself states “so shall we ever be with the Lord”, but it does not say whether we will be taken to heaven immediately or whether He will take us back to earth first.

However, in the original Greek, the word Paul used, *parousia*, paints a richer picture. Brent Kinman describes in this way:

... Paul spoke of Jesus’ return as a “parousia” (v. 15). While the term *parousia* might simply be translated as “arrival” or “presence”, it often has richer connotations. ... In the Hellenistic world a *parousia* often signaled the coming of a ruler or royal figure. ... At the approach of the dignitary, a band of municipal officials and other citizens ... would proceed some distance from the city in order to meet the celebrity well in advance of the city walls. ... After this, the guest was escorted back into the city by those who had gone out to meet him.<sup>40</sup>

By using the word *parousia*, Paul is essentially telling his original readers that we will meet Christ in the air so that we can escort Him to the earth – in marked contrast to pretribulationism.

[In a second letter, PT responded to this as follows:

Concerning I Thessalonians 4:17, maybe you should study the tradition of the Jewish wedding ceremony. The groom stands in the street to call the bride from her father’s house. He then takes her to his father’s house. I believe the clouds could be compared to a street in Christ’s case. Jesus certainly used them to leave, and we’re told [H]e will come in like manner. I think that fits well with the word *parousia*.

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<sup>40</sup> Kinman, Brent. *History, Design, and the End of Time*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 133.

My response:

Considering that the church in Thessalonica was in Greece and was composed primarily of gentiles, it would be more logical for Paul to use *parousia* to invoke the Greek imagery associated with the word rather than the imagery of a Jewish wedding ceremony, which would be foreign to the Thessalonians. Further, if Paul intended this passage as an image of a Jewish wedding ceremony, why didn't he use any other wedding terminology, such as referring to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride? In any case, though, the passage itself does not say whether Christ immediately returns to heaven or continues on to earth; the pretribulationist insistence that this passage teaches that He immediately returns to heaven is a case of reading into the passage what is simply not there.]

In your commentary on verse 18, you state, "There is not much comfort in the dread of the type of wrath that God has proposed for those who go through His appointed tribulation." However, the "Rapture Passage" neither says nor implies anything about a tribulation, either before or after the rapture. Verse 18 refers back to verse 13, which states Paul's purpose for writing this passage: to assure the Christians in Thessalonica that the dead believers will be resurrected.

Paul himself further explained his eschatology in II Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Verse 3 states, "... that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;". Here, Paul states that the "man of sin", or Antichrist, must be revealed before Christ returns for the Church. If the tribulation is in the future, as required by pretribulationism, this passage requires that the tribulation begin prior to the rapture, which contradicts the teachings of pretribulationism. Thus, we must conclude that not only was Paul not a pretribulationist, but also that his writings teach that pretribulationism cannot be true.

[In his second letter, PT responded:

II Thessalonians 2:1-12 once again tells of Jesus gathering His believers. If you leave out Revelation 19 and 20, there is no point to discuss it further. I still maintain my stand on the Word of God as presented in the Bible!

My response:

I do not understand your reference to leaving out Revelation 19 and 20; I certainly believe the entire Book of Revelation, although my interpretation of the book differs greatly from yours. Please reread Part I of this series, which discusses my basic belief about Revelation, and Part III of this series, which discusses my interpretation of Revelation

Note, however, that you did not address my point about this passage: Paul states that the “man of sin”, or Antichrist, must be revealed before Christ returns for the Church. If the tribulation is in the future, as required by pretribulationism, this passage requires that the tribulation begin prior to the rapture – this directly contradicts the pretribulationist teaching that the rapture will occur prior to the beginning of a future tribulation.]

In regards to your comments on the Great White Throne Judgment, you believe that the “dead” described in this passage are only the spiritually dead, while I believe that they are the physically dead, including both the spiritually living and the spiritually dead. While this passage itself doesn’t explicitly clarify the issue, other scripture does. In John 12:48, Jesus discussed the timing of the judgment of non-believers: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” I assume that you would agree with me that this is a reference to the Great White Throne Judgment. Note that the verse says that this judgment will occur “in the last day”. When is the resurrection of the righteous?

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. ... Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39-40, 44, 54)

In this passage, Jesus said four times that believers will be raised “at the last day” – the same last day as the resurrection of the unrighteous, not at the beginning of a future millennial kingdom, as required by premillennialism, or at a rapture before the tribulation seven years

before the beginning of a future millennial kingdom, as required by pretribulationism.

[In his second letter, PT responded:

Could the scriptures John 6:39, 40, 44, and 54 tell about the last day of grace, the day the church is caught up to join Jesus in the clouds, to be taken to the Father's house to be married to Jesus as in Revelation 19?

My response:

Yes, we agree on this point. But this is the same last day that Jesus spoke of in John 12:48, the last day in which the non-believers will be judged. Study the passages, and you will see that there is no justification for inserting a 1,007-year gap between two different last days, other than the desire of pretribulationists to defend their doctrine.]

As for you comments describing the various parables as separations and not judgments, well, that's certainly a novel interpretation. I've read quite a few commentaries and "Study Bible" notes written by people ranging from die-hard pretribulationist to postmillennialist, and all seem to agree that each of these parables is a descriptions of a judgment, the difference in interpretation being whether they describe the same judgment and, if not, which judgment any particular parable describes. Of course, a parable may only mention the separation, but the commentators generally agree that the separation is the result of an implied judgment.

However, even if we consider these parables to describe separations, it really doesn't help your case in defending pretribulationism. Pretribulationism *requires* two or more *judgments*. While the traditional amillennial view is that there is only one general judgment of both believers and unbelievers, amillennialism can certainly allow for two judgments after the believers are separated from the unbelievers.

Steven Davis

**Part X: The Illustrations of Jesus**  
(from the July 2005 Edition of *CrossWalk*)

The pretribulation rapture version of the future is as follows (based on Scofield's note on Revelation 19:19, entitled "The Day of the Lord").

1. The rapture of the Church just preceding the beginning of the Day of the LORD (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17);
2. the fulfillment of Daniel's seventieth "seven" (week) (Daniel 9:27), the latter half of which is the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21);
3. the return of the Lord in glory to establish the millennial kingdom (Matthew 24:29-30);
4. the destruction of the beast, the false prophet, and their armies, which is the "great and terrible" aspect of the day (Revelation 19:11-21);
5. the judgment of individual Gentiles according to their treatment of Christ's brethren, the Jewish people (Zechariah 14:1-9; Matthew 25:31-46) and the judgment of Israel (Ezekiel 20:34-38);
6. the millennial reign of Christ on earth (Revelation 20:4-6);
7. the satanic revolt and its judgment (Revelation 20:7-10);
8. the resurrection and final judgment of the wicked (Revelation 20:11-15);
9. the destruction of the present earth and heaven by fire preparatory for the future "day of God" (2 Peter 3:10-12); and
10. the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (Isaiah 65:17-19; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).<sup>41</sup>

The preterist amillennial version of the future is considerably simpler, in part because the tribulation is understood to have been fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The 2000 Edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message*, X. Last Things, sentences two through four (reformatted in outline style, but with no change in wording), read:

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<sup>41</sup> 1917 Scofield Reference Bible Notes. *The Sword Project*, CrossWire Bible Society, available for free download at <http://www.crosswire.org>.

1. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth;
2. the dead will be raised;
3. Christ will judge all men in righteousness.
  - a. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment.
  - b. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.<sup>42</sup>

Which of these two versions of the future is consistent with the various illustrations Jesus used to describe the subject?

Both versions begin with the return of Christ. In the pretribulationist version, the saved dead are resurrected and all of the saved are carried to heaven, where they are judged. In the amillennial version, all the dead, saved and unsaved, are resurrected, judged, and the saved carried to heaven. Note that the difference for the saved is whether the judgment occurs before or after they are carried to heaven – essentially insignificant.

The real difference lies in what will happen to the unsaved when Christ returns. The pretribulationist version says that they will enter into a seven-year tribulation, while the amillennial version says that they will be judged and cast into hell. So let's look at what the various illustrations say will happen to the unsaved at the return of Christ.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43) says “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them” (verse 30) and

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire;  
so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall  
send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his  
kingdom all things that offend, and them which do

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<sup>42</sup> 2000 Edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, available for free download at <http://www.sbc.net>.

iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:40-42)

The unsaved are cast into hell.

The Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50) says:

... but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:48(b)-50)

The unsaved are cast into hell.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) says: “Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” (Matthew 25:11-12)

While not as graphic as the previous parables, this parable shows the unsaved as being shut out of heaven with no hope of being allowed in later – in other words, the unsaved are cast into hell.

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) says: “(30) And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The unsaved are cast into hell.

In Luke 17:26-27, Jesus compared His Second Coming to the days of Noah:

And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

Verse 27 says of the unsaved "... the flood came, and destroyed them all" – they were destroyed, that is, cast into hell.

In Luke 17:28-29, Jesus compared His Second Coming to the days of Lot: "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

Verse 29 says of the unsaved "... it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" – again, they were destroyed, that is, cast into hell.

We have examined six illustrations that Jesus used to describe what will happen at His Second Coming, and found that all show that the unsaved will be cast into hell, not enter a seven-year tribulation. This is in accordance with amillennialism and is in marked contrast with pretribulationism. Therefore, we conclude that Jesus Christ is an amillennialist.

## Part XI: The Origin of Pretribulationism

“Why”, may you ask, “are there two Don’t Be “*Left Behind*”! articles in the July issue of *CrossWalk*?” Good question. Since I began the series with the second issue, and there are a total of twelve articles, I decided to include two articles with this issue of *CrossWalk* so that we can conclude the series next month with the last issue of this church year.

### The Sun of Righteousness

It was a great pleasure to have Brother Alan Wheeler and his family visit Midway on Memorial Day Weekend. I especially enjoyed his sermon on “The Sun of Righteousness”. I’ve been criticized for being obsessed with eschatology – it made me feel good to know that Brother Alan thinks the subject so important that he preached on the Second Coming in his first sermon at Midway in over two years.

The scripture he used was Malachi 4:1-2:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Note that this is essentially an Old Testament parallel of the six illustrations of the Second Coming that we examined in the previous article.

And, of the unsaved, verse 1 says, “... all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” – in other words, at the return of Christ, the unsaved are cast into hell. As Brother Alan said, the unsaved will have no second chance – that is, they will not have a chance to be saved during a

future tribulation – rather, at the return of Christ, they will be cast into hell. Although he did not use the term, Brother Alan’s message was pure amillennialism. Amen! And Amen!

### The Origin of Pretribulationism

Since I am obsessed with eschatology, I have discussed the subject with quite a few people over the past 30 years. When I have asked them what they believe about eschatology, I generally get one of the following answers:

1. “I haven’t studied the topic sufficiently; therefore, I don’t know.”, or
2. “I believe in a pretribulation rapture.”

If I then ask the person who believes in a pretribulation rapture *why* he or she believes in it, he or she will almost invariably say, “Because that is what I was taught.” Very few have done any real study on the subject; a pastor or a Sunday School teacher taught pretribulationism, and nobody ever presented any dissenting opinion, so it was assumed that Evangelical Christians believe in pretribulationism like we believe in the Virgin Birth. Besides, practically all the books and movies about the End of Time begin with the rapture, quickly followed by the horrors of the tribulation. Haven’t Christians *always* believed in the pretribulationism?

There are essentially two versions of the origin of pretribulationism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Actually, some pretribulationists claim that a book by Morgan Edwards, published in 1788, and a work by Pseudo-Ephraem, who may have lived as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, each contain a pretribulationist passage. However, neither work as a whole is pretribulationist, nor did either work influence the development and spread of pretribulationism. Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*. Second Edition. Simsonville, South Carolina: Millenium III Publishers, 2000, pp. 264-273

1. According to *The Rapture Plot*:

During springtime in 1830, an end-time vision sprang into [15 or 16 year old] Margaret MacDonald's mind. Privately she sent hand-written copies of her Scripture-riddled revelation to some leading clergymen including [Edward] Irving.<sup>44</sup>

2. In 1827, John Darby discovered pretribulationism.<sup>45</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the claims of those who support each of these versions to determine which one is correct.<sup>46</sup> Rather, let's consider the point on which both versions agree: pretribulationism originated in either 1827 or 1830, **about 1,800 years after the Crucifixion.**

How could this doctrine – which pretribulationists claim is so clearly taught by the Bible – have been overlooked by all of Christianity for 18 centuries? How had it been overlooked by such spiritual giants as Augustine, Luther, Calvin (for my Calvinist friends), and Wesley (for my Wesleyan-Arminian friends)? Simple – it's not there. Someone – whether Margaret MacDonald or John Darby – invented the idea, then both Irving and his followers (Irvingites, or members of Irving's Catholic Apostolic Church, which he founded after his ouster from the Presbyterian Church) and Darby and his followers (the Plymouth Brethren, although not all of the Plymouth Brethren accepted pretribulationism) began searching for scripture to support the new

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Tim LaHaye. *Rapture Under Attack*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1998, p. 169.

<sup>46</sup> For the record, I believe the first version. *The Rapture Plot* is an excellent account of the origin of pretribulationism and the attempt by pretribulationists to give the credit (or, should I say, blame) to Darby. Why do modern pretribulationists care? They certainly can't credit the origin of their most cherished doctrine to an uneducated teenage girl. And Irving was "deposed on charges of heresy" from the Presbyterian Church (*The Rapture Plot*, p. 2); since pretribulationists certainly can't credit a heretic, they are left to credit Darby.

doctrine, as well as new interpretations of passages that were in conflict with pretribulationism. This search was well-documented, as both the Irvingites and Darby wrote prolifically.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Spread of Pretribulationism**

Despite Darby's efforts to popularize pretribulationism, it remained an obscure teaching until one of his followers, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, wrote *The Scofield Reference Bible*. It was published in 1909 and subsequently revised and published as the *New and Improved Edition* in 1917. This was one of the first "Reference Bibles" or "Study Bibles", with footnotes throughout the text to explain the various passages. The Scofield Bibles were instant best-sellers.<sup>48</sup>

However, Scofield's notes presented pretribulationism in a manner that would lead an unsuspecting reader to believe that they represented the generally accepted beliefs of Evangelical Christian scholars, preachers, and teachers, which was grossly misleading. As a result, an entire generation of Christians was deceived into believing pretribulationism.

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<sup>47</sup> MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-120. Darby's writings show that he did not convert to pretribulationism until 1839. See pp. 114-116 of *The Rapture Plot*.

<sup>48</sup> Glenn R. Goss, Th. D. *Cyrus Ingerson Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible*, available for free download at <http://www.scofield.org/>.

## **Part XII: What Does It Matter, Anyway?**

In Part X of this series, we compared the pretribulationist and amillennial versions of the future and found that, for the saved, the difference is essentially insignificant: in the pretribulationist version, the saved are carried to heaven then judged, while the amillennial version reverses this order. That being the case, you may ask, “As a Christian, what does it matter which I believe?” Let’s look at several issues.

### **No Second Chance**

As we have seen, pretribulationism teaches that, at the return of Christ, the unsaved will be “left behind” to endure a seven-year tribulation. They will have the opportunity to accept Christ and become “tribulation saints”. But, as we have seen in the illustrations that Jesus used and in the “Sun of Righteousness” passage, when Christ returns, the unsaved will be cast into hell and will have no second chance.

When I mention this to a pretribulationist, the response that I usually get is that he or she believes that anyone who had a chance to accept Christ before the rapture will not have a second chance after the rapture. However, I have never seen any pretribulationist book, commentary, or “Study Bible” that stated that position. And the main story line of the *Left Behind* series, coauthored by Tim LaHaye, involves the “Tribulation Force”, a group of people who are saved after the rapture but whom previously had the opportunity to accept Christ. In fact, one of the members was a “visitation pastor” at his church, and two others are a father and daughter whose wife/mother and son/brother were taken in the rapture.

### **“Jesus is Coming Soon”**

Pretribulationists claim that “We are living in the End Times” and that “Jesus is Coming Soon.” As we saw in Parts I and II of this series, these prophecies, in Revelation 1:1, 1:3, 2:16, 3:11, 11:14, 22:6, 22:7, 22:10, 22:12, and 22:20 and in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21), were fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Jesus came in

spirit in judgment of the Jews who had rejected Him. Thus, while Jesus **may** come tomorrow, He **may not** come again for 1,000 years – we simply do not know. We should live as is we do not know whether or not He will return in our lifetime – always ready for His return, always ready to face death first.

### Credibility

In this study, we have seen many examples where scripture either does not support or clearly contradicts pretribulationism. Thus, “The Rapture Passage” (I Thessalonians 4:13-18) does not mention a tribulation. “The **Last Trumpet**” of I Corinthians 15:52 occurs **before** the trumpet of Matthew 24:31, which occurs **after** the **tribulation** of Matthew 24:29. The date of the Crucifixion predicted by the pretribulationist interpretation of Daniel’s “Seventy Weeks of Years” (Daniel 9:24-27) is wrong by at least three years. Revelation 20 clearly teaches there are only two resurrections – a spiritual resurrection and a physical resurrection – while pretribulationism requires three physical resurrections. Jesus taught that the physical resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved would be on **the last day** (John 6:39-54 and 12:48), while pretribulationism requires 1,007 years between the two resurrections. Peter taught that the world would be destroyed at the Second Coming (II Peter 3:10-13), not preserved for a 1,000-year literal rule of Christ as required by pretribulationism. And Paul’s “Man of Sin” and the beginning of the tribulation occur **before** the Return of Christ for His Church (II Thessalonians 2:1-12).

### Paul and the Judgment

Pretribulationists cite Paul’s “Judgment Seat of Christ” passages to support their teaching of separate judgments for the saved and the unsaved. The passages are:

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (Romans 14:10)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in

his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (II Corinthians 5:10)

Note that these passages do not mention the unsaved; they do not say that the unsaved will not be judged in the same judgment as the saved.

Paul also discusses the judgment in another passage:

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: (Romans 2:5-10)

In verse 5, he talks of “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”, in verse 7 and 10 he discusses “eternal life” and “glory, honor, and peace” for the saved, and in verses 8 and 9, “indignation and wrath, [t]ribulation and anguish” for the unsaved. This is a description of one judgment on one day for both the saved and the unsaved. Once again, this is in accordance with amillennialism, and in marked contrast with pretribulationism.

### **In Closing**

This is the final part in the *Don't Be "Left Behind"!* series. I hope that you have enjoyed reading the series as much as I have enjoyed writing it. And, of course, I hope that I have convinced you that preterist amillennialism is the correct interpretation of eschatology.

But, more importantly, I hope that I have inspired you to read and study what the Bible says about the subject. The motto for our class is, “Know what you believe and why you believe it.” And you should believe what you do because of what the Bible says, not because of

what I or any other Sunday School teacher writes or says, or what any preacher writes or says, or what the notes in a “Study Bible” say. After all, these are all just the thoughts of men, not the inspired Word of God.

So we end this series where we begin. In Acts 17:10-11, we read:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

We should follow the example of the Bereans, who “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Yours in Christ,

Steven Davis