

Today there is much talk about the conflict in the Middle East as signs that set the stage for the battle of Armageddon that is to occur 3 ½ years into the tribulation. There was much said about the end of the world being near, the rapture and the 1000 year reign. Those that hold to this view are called “premillennialist.” Millennium means a thousand years, so this belief embraces events that will happen before (pre) the millennium.

To begin, let me present a general overview of the premillennialist doctrine. This position held by many states that Jesus came to earth to establish his prophesied kingdom that would restore a physical kingdom to Israel. But since the Jews rejected Jesus, he had to postpone the starting of this kingdom until he comes a second time. As an interim program, the church was established as a substitute until the kingdom is established. Prior to the kingdom being established there will be the rapture. During the rapture, all the saints will be changed and Jesus will come in secret and take up into heaven as a rescue from seven years of tribulation on earth. During the first 3 ½ years of this seven, all the Jews will return to Jerusalem and two antichrists will rebuild the temple. During the second 3-½ years, war over Israel erupts and is climaxed in the battle of Armageddon where 200 million soldiers fight over Israel. Jesus now returns, defeats evil thus ending the battle of Armageddon, and establishes his earthly kingdom and begins to reign on his Jerusalem throne for a thousand years. During this reign, peace on earth will prevail. The Mosaical sacrificial system will be reinstated along with temple worship. At the end of the thousand years, final judgement will take place.

I suppose such teaching has been around for a long time, but it wasn't until Hal Lindsey wrote the book Late Great Planet Earth in 1975 that this movement escalated. This book was the number one best seller in the decade of the seventies.

More recently, the premillennial sensation to hit the religious scene is the Left Behind series of best selling books written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Over 20 million copies have been sold. The initial volume *Left Behind* has spawned other premillennial themes, such as *Tribulation Force*, *Nicolae*, *Soul Harvest*, *Apollyon*, *Assassins*, *The Indwelling* and *The Mark*. Each new book has avid readers anxiously awaiting the next one in the series. There is also *Left Behind: The Kids* so that children ages 10-14 might be thoroughly indoctrinated in premillennial sensationalism. The *Left Behind* movie came out in October 1999. More recently a series of video games have hit the market.

The *Left Behind* book and movie cover the basic Rapture doctrine. It is the fictional story of Rayford Steele, his daughter Chloe, Buck Williams and Bruce Barnes as they try to make sense of the strange disappearance of thousands of people around the world. The rest of the Rapture story is that while these select souls are taken to be with the Lord during the Rapture period, there will be a seven-year tribulation on earth unlike anything ever seen before. The seven-year tribulation is to be consummated by the horrific battle of Armageddon. Then, Jesus Christ is to set up his kingdom on earth for one thousand years. The entire Rapture scenario is as fictional as anything you will read in novels, but those who believe it claim that it is taught in the Bible. As we shall see, such is far from being the case. This book has sold over ten million copies.

Another book by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins entitled *Are We Living in the End Times* promotes modern day prophecies and the premillennialism views. Notice some quotes from page 25.

This is about to change as we enter "the time of the end." As soon as the church is raptured (see chapter 9), God will again begin to visibly intervene in the affairs of mankind. Russia and her allies will go down to destroy the nation of Israel but will themselves be destroyed supernaturally by God (Ezekiel 38-39, see chapter 8);

One thing is apparent: Russia's attack and the Rapture are the number one and two end-time events. They are followed by the rise of Antichrist (see chapter 21), the day of God's wrath (see chapters 12-14), the two witnesses (see chapter 23), the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see chapter 24), and many other acts of divine intervention during the Tribulation.

The Tribulation will be followed by the majestic intervention of God in the glorious return of Christ to the earth (see chapter 15) to setup His thousand-year kingdom (see chapter 16), followed by heaven or eternity (see chapter 19).

So there is to be a sequence of events centered on the coming millennium.

Second Coming of Jesus & the Rapture

Rebuilding of the temple

The Antichrist. The Kingdom. The number 666
Armageddon

So for the next few minutes let us consider what the Bible says about the second coming of Jesus and then we will look at the rapture. As we consider the matter of the second coming, let us turn to Matt 24. The premillennialist references Matt 24 as signs (like wars, earthquakes, pestilence's, and rumor of wars) as signs that point to the time when Jesus will return. The chapter begins by Jesus talking to his disciples about the temple and tells them that ***there shall not be left here one stone upon another (2)***. As the disciples had opportunity to talk to Jesus, they had questions about he said regarding the temple. In verse 3 they ask ***when shall these things be?*** (question 1) Note also that there was a second question asks. ***And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?*** It is crucial to remember these two questions. Jesus starting with verse 4 answers both questions. In verses 4-34 Jesus answers the first question-when will the temple be destroyed? It's noteworthy that vs 4, 5, 11, 24 warn against being deceived regarding this matter. Apparently the Lord recognized the danger of deception. He lists a number of signs of the impending destruction. There will be false Christ (5) wars and rumors of wars (6), kingdom against kingdom, pestilence, famines, earthquakes (7), and persecutions (9). Premillennialists claim these signs mark the second coming of Jesus (i.e. question number two). When you think about it, these are events that have occurred in every generation. How many, let's say of earthquakes, would it take to be a sign of Jesus' return. Truth of the matter is that these signs have nothing to do with Jesus' return. They are related to the temple being destroyed.

Look at Mat 24:15. ***When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, flee to the mountains.*** If we knew what the abomination of desolation that would help us understand this passage. Luke tells us that the abomination of desolation is an army that encompasses the city (Lk 21:20). It reads ***when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.*** When you see this sign, flee to the mountains. If this referenced the second coming of Jesus, what would they benefit by going to the mountains? The Roman army, led by Titus, about 70AD destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including this temple. This besieged started in 66AD under the Cestius Gallus, but for some unknown reason he surrounded the city and then withdrew. The city was then besiege by Vespasian about 68AD; the devastation continued until the final overthrow and destruction came by the hand of Titus in 70AD. This invasion and destruction was so

devastating that the nation of Israel did not exist again until the May 14, 1948. Yet, I've been told that in such destruction, not one Christian died. Why? It was because when the armies surrounded the city and then retreated, they headed for the hills thus were spared.

Well, Matt 24:3 had a second question-what shall be the sign of thy coming? To that Jesus said I don't know. (*Mat 24:36 KJV*) ***But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*** Mark 13:32 says not even the Son (Jesus) knows.

(Mat 24:42 KJV) Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

(Mat 24:44 KJV) Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Regarding the Second Coming, Jesus says we don't know when, so be ready. When you think about it, if Jesus doesn't know when his return is going to be, how could he set forth signs predicting such? The message is "readiness." Get ready; stay ready; be ready when He comes!

RAPTURE

Page 103-104 of *Are We Living in the End Times* we read: The coming of Christ must occur in two installments because they are for two different groups of people and fulfill two different purposes. The first is the Rapture, when all living and dead Christians will be snatched up to be with Christ in the Father's house. The second is for all the people of the world, who will be judged for rejecting Christ. The first is secret, for a special group; the second is public, for everyone left on the earth. They are entirely distinct events.

They believed that this doctrine is taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. Yet, a reading of the passage will show, first, that there is no mention of a "Rapture" either in word or thought. The claim is made that the idea of the Rapture is found in the expression "caught up" (Vs. 17). If you look at the context, this passage is answering the question early Christians had about the state of dead saints that had died before the return of Jesus. It has nothing to do with the unrighteous or ungodly. The premillennialist conclude that this will be a secret occasion based on several passages that speak of the second coming being like a thief in

the night – quietly slipping in and slipping out. But those thief in the night passages refers to the Lord's coming unannounced, suddenly, unexpectedly.

From this passage in 1 Thes 4, we learn in v16 that the glorious return of Christ will not be a quiet occasion witnessed only by a few, but that it will be heralded by the shout of angels and the sound of trumpets and every eye shall see Him! 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, **"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. It will not be a secret.**

Revelation 1:7 tells us, *"Behold, he' cometh with clouds; and every eye' shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.* It will not be a secret.

We can know from the Scriptures that when our Lord returns, that will be the end and God will be "all in all." 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 says: *As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power....* If the righteous is the kingdom, the church, i.e Christians, then when they are delivered up to God is the end. They will not be snatched away to return again seven years later with Jesus for a third return. The books of 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians were referring to the righteous, not all mankind.

Notice what the Bible says about the coming of Christ regarding all mankind (John 5:26-28.) The dead will be raised, both the righteous and the wicked will be raised-at the same time. Jesus promised it. He said: *For as the Father hath life in himself so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

Turn with me to John 6. Notice verse 40, 44, 54. These verses speak of the righteous being raised up **at the last day**. When is this resurrection to occur - in the last day? Now look at John 12:48. Here we learn that the lost will be judged **in the last day**. Conclusion,

both the righteous and the unrighteous will receive their rewards at the same time, in the last day.

As stated earlier, premillennialism is prevalent. This teaching is against the teaching of the Bible, but one thing we both agree with is that Jesus is coming again. He has not told us when that will be or given us any signs, so we must get ready, be ready, and stay ready. Are you ready for the return of Jesus?

Invitation: