

When Will Christ Return

A defense of Reformed A-millennialism

by

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Introduction

When will Christ return? Will He return before or after the Great Tribulation? This is a question that has baffled many, and has been the source of much debate among Christian groups. Historically, there were as many, or more who believed in a post-tribulation return of Christ as believed in a pre-tribulation return of Christ. Today, with the tele-popularization of dispensational pre-millennialism by tele-evangelistic groups, including those of Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, Jack Van Impe and John MacArthur, by the growth of the charismatic movement, by the popularity of the Scofield, and the Ryrie reference Bibles, and of late with the popularity of the Left Behind series of novels, little more is heard of the historic teaching of a-millennialism. Many would give a strange look to a Christian who would say that he does not believe in a Pre-tribulation rapture, nor in the future re-establishment of Israel as the people of God. Yet such was the doctrine of most of the great reformers, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, and William Tyndale, is presented in the Westminster Confession, and is the position held by most Reformed, Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, and Lutheran churches.

Very few people today question the teachings of their churches or of their educators. People on the most part have a blind-faith in what they have been taught. Yet the Bible forbids that we should trust in what we are taught, especially when it comes to the Bible. Rather we're to be as the Bereans and search the scriptures to see if the doctrines are true (Acts 17:11). "Study to show thyself approved unto God"(2 Timothy 2:15).

Certainly the author would not suggest that all who adhere to the Pre-Tribulation, pre-millennial return of Christ fail to diligently search the scriptures. Certainly there are also those among the reformed groups that have accepted a-millennialism because their church teaches it. Yet pre-tribulation, pre-millennialism is gaining much ground among those who do not search the scriptures because of the tele-popularization of this teaching.

What are the differences between Pre-tribulation-Pre-millennialism and A-millennialism?

The main difference between Pre-millennialist (whether Pre-trib, Mid-trib, or Post-trib) and a-millennialist is their interpretation of Revelation chapter twenty.

In Revelation 20, there is a period of 1000 years (a millennium) in which Satan is bound, and in which the believers reign with Christ. The pre-millennialist believe that this era follows the return of Christ. Hence they believe Christ will return *pre-millennially*. The a-millennialist believe that the millennium is symbolic of the whole New Testament era. Hence they believe that Christ will return *a-millennially*, that is, there will be no future millennium era.

Which view does the Bible teach? Both of these groups will say that the Bible clearly teaches its view. How can both of these groups be totally convinced that they are correct? Certainly we cannot say that one of these groups is not composed of diligent Bible students. Certainly both of these groups have those among them that do diligently study the scriptures. The main difference between these groups is how they go about interpreting the scriptures.

The one group primarily interprets prophesy by looking at the New Testament as a parenthesis within the Old Testament prophecies, (hence the Old Testament prophecies are complete in themselves, and the New Testament is a separate plan of God that was not revealed in the Old Testament. [This is what they call the "mystery" of Ephesians 3:3-6 and Revelation 10:7]). While the other group uses the New Testament in its interpretation of the Old Testament. This group believes that the key to interpreting Old Testament Prophecy is found in the New Testament. The first group is the Pre-tribulation Pre-millennialist, the second is the A-millennialist.

In this essay the author will show why he believes that the second group is preferable to the first. This will require a diligent survey of the scriptures. For this, one must put aside what he has been taught and search the scriptures for himself and see what the Bible teaches.

Certainly the author of this essay is not infallible. Hence one should not put trust in what is written herein, but should diligently check to see if this is

supported by the scriptures. If it is not faithful to the scriptures, then it, along with anything that one has been taught which may not be faithful to the scriptures must be disregarded.

Here are reasons why the author believes in a Post-tribulation, a-millennial return of Christ:

The Last Day Resurrection of all believers

Proof # 1 The last trump.

In the first part of this essay, it is important to clearly see that there is no Biblical reasoning to believe that the "rapture" (i.e. "calling up" of the believers) will occur prior to the Great Tribulation. Rather we will see that the Bible teaches that the rapture will occur at the end of time.

In the pre-tribulation view, Christ will return twice. The first time, prior to the Great Tribulation, Christ will return "secretly" to rapture the church. At this point only the church will see Him. This will be a "thief in the night" coming of Christ. The second time that Christ will return will be after the Great Tribulation, when "every eye shall see him". This time He will return to the earth, with His Church to judge the world, and establish the "millennial kingdom."

Will there be a pre-tribulation rapture of the church?

First Corinthians 15:51-53 clearly teach concerning the rapture. Verse 52 teaches that this will occur "at the last trump." The dead in Christ will all be raised. If this is the Last Trumpet, then it must follow that there are other trumpets sounded before it, and that there are no more trumpets sounded after it. Here Paul is teaching that, prior to the rapture, there must be the sounding of multiple trumpets. Then at the sounding of the last of these multiple trumpets, the rapture will occur.

We must interpret scripture with scripture. Here we have the sounding of multiple trumpets, after which will be the resurrection of the believers. Where else does the Bible speak of the sounding of multiple trumpets? Perhaps we can gain more insight of what the Bible is teaching here.

The Bible speaks of the sounding of multiple trumpets prior to Israel's battle with Jericho in Joshua 6. The nation was to circle the city daily for seven days. On each of these days they were to circle the camp, and the priest were to blow with the trumpets. Then on the seventh day, after circling the camp

seven times in that day, the trumpets were blown (this the seventh blowing of the trumpets) and "the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city". Here is a multiple blowing of trumpets. At the last blowing of the trumpets, the people took the city. This event occurred in the past, yet it can be seen as a picture of a future event. Jericho (the city of palm trees - Deuteronomy 34:3) is the first city that Israel overtook in the promised land, after crossing the Jordan River. Hence, it was the first city of their inheritance. The earthly inheritance of the Israelites of the land of Canaan, during Joshua's day, is a picture of the eternal inheritance of the people of God of the New Jerusalem for all eternity. Upon the seventh (i.e., the last) daily sounding of the trumpets, the people "went up into the city" (Joshua 6:20) Here is the picture of the rapture. They "went up into" the city of their inheritance. At the rapture, which will occur at the sound of the last trumpet, we, the believers, will go "up into" the city of our inheritance.

Consider the following:

Israel waited seven days to receive this inheritance. - The Believers must wait the completeness of time (7 is a number of completeness) to receive their inheritance.

Israel awaited the last sounding of the trumpets to receive their inheritance. - The believers must await the sounding of the last trumpet to receive their inheritance.

Upon the last sounding of the trumpets, Israel went "up into the city." - Upon the sounding of the last trumpet the believers will go up into their inheritance.

Israel did not build this city. - God prepared it for them. The believers inheritance is being prepared for them.

Jericho was the city of Palm trees. - The New Jerusalem is the city of the righteous (Psalm 92:12).

There is another event in the Bible where there will be multiple sounding of trumpets. This event occurs in Revelation chapters 8 through 11. The seventh and last of these trumpets is sounded in Revelation 11:15-19. Notice that this trumpet ushers in the following events in verse 18:

1. The time of God's wrath is come.
2. The time that the dead are judged.

3. The servants of God are rewarded.

4. The destroyers are destroyed.

We first note that this is the time at which God's wrath has come. What is God's wrath?

According to pre-trib theology, the tribulation is God's wrath. They believe that First Thessalonians 5:9 teaches that because "God hath not appointed us to wrath" means that the believers would not have to go through the Great Tribulation. Does this definition match what the Bible says is the wrath of God?

Jesus warned the pharisees to flee from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7). How could Christ possibly mean for them to flee from the Great Tribulation? Romans 2:5 (speaking to man) says, "*after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasureth up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath.*" If this were speaking of the Great Tribulation, then every man would need to be resurrected to experience the Tribulation. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "*And to wait for his Son Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*" The "us" in this verse included Paul, yet he lived at least 1950 years prior to the Great Tribulation. Clearly the Great Tribulation cannot be the definition of the wrath of God.

The wrath of God is not the Great Tribulation. Rather the wrath of God is eternal punishment in the lake of fire. This is the wrath that the pharisees were to flee. This is the wrath that mankind treasures up to himself. This is the wrath from which Paul was delivered. First Thessalonians 5:9 does not teach that the church would not have to go through the Great Tribulation, but that they would not have to go to hell: "*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation*" The salvation in view in this verse is not salvation from the Tribulation, rather it is salvation from the penalty of sin.

The time of God's wrath has come, i. e. mankind will now be judged, and will be sentenced to suffer the wrath of God forever. Hence the next phrase, "*The time of the dead that they should be judged.*"

When are the dead to be judged? If we listen to the pre-millennial theologian, we would have to come up with two different instances. They believe that the nations that remain after the second coming of Christ will be judged at end of the tribulation. Then the rest of those who are without Christ will be judged

1000 years later.

Yet there is a major problem with this interpretation. This passage of scripture does not say that only the nations alive at this point will be judged at this point. It says that this is the time that the dead are to be judged. It does not say that only part of the dead are to be judged. Let us not make the scripture say something that it does not say.

Revelation 20:11-15 also speaks concerning the judgment of the dead. This passage appears immediately after the 1000 years in which Satan is bound, and the martyrs reign with Christ. Is this not the same judgment? Notice how 20:12 parallels with 11:18. This is the time that the dead are to be judged. This is the same event. The Bible does not give any reason to separate these passages into two different judgments. Certainly Revelation 20:11-15 teach that the judgment of the dead will occur after the 1000 year reign of the martyrs with Christ.

"But wait.." one may say, "do you mean that the seventh trumpet will not sound until the end of the millennium?" To this the answer must be "Yes."

Immediately after the judgment of the dead in Revelation 20:11-15, heaven and earth pass away, and are replaced with a new heaven and a new earth, and the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed . Is this not the reward for the servants of God? It most certainly is the reward that Jesus promised (Luke 18:29-30). Does not Revelation 11:18 say that the servants of God would be rewarded after the sounding of the last trumpet? Could it be that this New Earth is the reward of Revelation 11:18?

These two passages are most certainly parallel in time. The judgment of the seventh trumpet is concurrent with the white throne judgment. But when is the millennium? That we will cover later in this study. First we are still showing that the Rapture will occur on the Last Day.

The rapture will occur at the sounding of the last trumpet, which we have now seen is parallel to the Seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, which is parallel to the timing of the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20.

Is there any other Biblical references to a trumpet rapture, and if so, do they also agree with the same timetable as the seventh and last trump?

Proof # 2, Matthew 24.

In Matthew 24, the disciples of Christ asked Him, "*what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?*" To this Jesus gives an answer of what was to happen in the Church Age, and in the Great Tribulation. Verses 4 through 14 are in reference to the entire Church Age. Verses 15 through 26 refer to the Great Tribulation. Verses 27 and following refer to the second coming of Christ.

Verse 29 makes it clear that the return of Christ will be immediately after the Tribulation. Verse 31 says that "*with a great sound of a trumpet,*" He shall send his angels to "*gather the elect from the four winds.*" - Another reference to a trumpet rapture!! Verse 29 makes it clear that this "gathering together", which occur with the sounding of a trumpet, will occur after the Tribulation. Can this be the "last trumpet" of First Corinthians 15:52? It most certainly cannot be after the "Last Trumpet."

Some theologians have thought that the "elect" of verse 31 refers to National Israel, and not the church. What is a Biblical interpretation of this word elect?

The Greek word that is here translated elect is *eklektos*, which is also used in the following scriptures:

Matthew 20:16 - *So the last shall be first, and the first last: For many are called, but few chosen (eklektos)*

Colossians 3:12 - *Put on therefore, as the elect (eklektos) of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy ...*

Titus 1:1 - *Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect (eklektos)*

1 Peter 2:9 - *But ye are a chosen (eklektos) generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation ...*

Certainly this word is used in reference to the Church, and not just to Israel. We cannot say that the use of this word in Matthew 24:31 must refer to National Israel. Rather, by the scriptural use of the word, we would be led to believe that its use is connected to the church, Jew and Gentile alike.

Also, note to whom Jesus is speaking in this passage. He is speaking to His disciples (verse 4) ... i.e., his church. Verses 15 through 26 clearly refer to the Great Tribulation, yet Jesus uses the second person "you/ye/your" (i.e., his

disciples, the church) six times!! He gives second person commands three times. Certainly Jesus believed that His church would live through this Great Tribulation.

In verse 42, after describing how His return will be, Jesus uses a second person command, "*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*" Then again in verse 44, He says "*Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.*" Jesus, here, is saying that His Disciples, i.e., the church, need to be ready for His coming. That is, His church will be present for his second coming. Lest we think that these verses are referring to a secret rapture prior to the tribulation, the context of these verses describe for us how the second coming will be, verse 30, "*all the tribes of the earth ... shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds.*" If the church is present for the second coming, then they could not have been raptured seven years previous.

Matthew 24:29-31 clearly speak concerning the second coming of Christ.

Compare these verses with the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17:

Matthew 24:29-31 "*the sun shall be darkened*" Revelation 6:12-17 "*The sun became black as sackcloth of hair*"

Matthew 24:29-31 "*The moon shall not give its light*" Revelation 6:12-17 "*The moon became like blood*"

Matthew 24:29-31 "*The stars shall fall from heaven*" Revelation 6:12-17 "*The stars of heaven fell unto the earth.*"

Matthew 24:29-31 "*The powers of heaven shall be shaken*" Revelation 6:12-17 "... *even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.*"

Matthew 24:29-31 "*Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.*" Revelation 6:12-17, All men say "*hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne,*"

Matthew 24:29-31 "*Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn*" Revelation 6:12-17 Men "*said unto the mountains and rocks, Fall on us*"

Certainly by comparing these passages, we must see that they refer to the same event. We cannot conclude anything else. (How can the stars fall from heaven twice?) Matthew 24:29 says that this event will immediately follow

the Tribulation. Hence the opening of the Sixth seal must be immediately after the tribulation. Not only that, but the rapture must occur at the opening of the sixth seal, because, while all of this is happening, the angels shall gather the elect with the sounding of a trumpet (Matthew 24:31).

We are seeing that the Bible does not allow us to interpret the Book of Revelation chronologically. To do so, would cause problems when comparing scripture with scripture. Just because John saw all of the events in the order he did, does not mean that those events must fall in that order chronologically.

The sixth seal must be concurrent with Judgment Day, because verse 17 says, "*the great day of his wrath is come.*" (Notice the word *day* is singular). We have already discerned what the wrath of God is, and what it is not earlier in this study. This is Judgment Day. Mankind will have to stand before God and give and account for sin, and be sentenced to spend eternity in Hell (the wrath of God). That "*great day of His wrath is come.*"

Proof # 3, Noah, and Lot.

In Matthew 24, verses 29-51 all speak of the return of Christ. We have learned above that his return will be after the tribulation. Verse 36 teaches that the timing of his return is unknown to all of mankind. (Note that He did not say that his return could be at ANY time, but that when He will return would be unknown to man...Hence, He was NOT teaching that His return would always be imminent. [more about this later]). Verses 37 and following further develop what He states in verse 36. Verses 37 through 39 use the days of Noah as an illustration of verse 36.

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be ... they were eating and drinking, marrying ... until the day Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came." The emphasis of Christ in these verses is to show that the people of Noah's day were not expecting the flood. Rather, they lived in unbelief, and made no preparation for the coming disaster. So shall it be when Christ returns: people will be living in unbelief, not preparing to meet God. It will be life as usual. Then Christ will come, and find them unprepared.

But also note the parallel between Noah (God's witness to the antediluvian) and the church (God's witness to today's world). Notice Christ said "*until the day that Noe entered into the ark.*" Noah in this illustration is parallel with

the church. God makes it clear in Genesis 7:13 that the flood came on the "*selfsame day*" that Noah entered the ark. Hence also, the church will be present up until the return of Christ, "*as the days of Noe.*"

To further develop this point, Christ continues in verse 40, "*then shall two be in the field; one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.*"

Certainly, we can come to no other conclusion here than that both the saved and the lost shall dwell together up until the return of Christ. The one shall be taken (i.e., as the antediluvian, taken away into condemnation) and the other left (i.e. the redeemed shall not come into condemnation.).

Then he continues in verse 42 and says, "*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*" Paraphrasing, "Because of what I have just told you, be watchful, because you do not know when my coming will be." We know that this coming in view here is *not* a secret return, because the context will not allow for it. (Verse 30). Why would Jesus command his disciples (the church) to watch for His second coming, if they were to be raptured seven years prior to that coming? Certainly Jesus was telling his disciples to watch because some of his disciples would be present when he returned.

In Luke 17, Jesus compares his return not only with the days of Noah, but also with the days of Lot. Verses 28-30: "*Likewise 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. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*"

The same is true here as it was in the days of Noah. The people of Sodom conducted business as usual, giving no thought to what was about to happen. Then on the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, the city was destroyed. Just as was Noah, Lot is a parallel to the church. He dwelt among the Sodomites up until the same day that Sodom was destroyed.

Notice the picture:

Noah gets on the ark - The earth is destroyed - the "*selfsame day*"

Lot leaves Sodom. - Sodom was destroyed - the same day.

The Son of man returns (and we are raptured). - the earth is destroyed - the same day

This is all but conclusive. But just in case one is not yet convinced, the Bible has a lot more to say about the timing of the rapture.

Proof # 4 The Last Day.

The phrase "Last Day" (singular) is only used eight times in the Bible. They are: John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; John 7:37; John 11:24; Nehemiah 8:18

Nehemiah 8:18 and John 7:37 both refer to the last day of the feast of tabernacles. The other six occasions are as follows:

John 6:39: "*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**.*" - This includes all of God's elect, both New and Old Testament believers.

John 6:40: "*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**.*" - New Testament believers.

John 6:44: "*No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the **last day**.*" - Both Old and New Testament believers, yet more clearly realized by the New Testament believer.

John 6:54: "*whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the **last day**.*" - Both Old and New Testament believers.

John 11:24: "*Martha saith unto him, I know that he [Lazarus] shall rise again in the resurrection at the **last day**.*" - Old Testament Believers.

John 12:48: "*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**.*" - The non-believers.

Notice what is to happen in the last day (singular):

The believers are raised (both Old and New Testament believers.)

The unbelievers are raised.

Judgement to the unbelievers.

The last day is the last day. There are no more days to follow.

Proof # 5, This Age and the Age to come.

The Greek word *aion* (Strong's number 165), which is commonly translated "world" in the King James Version, according to the *Strong's Concordance, Dictionary of the Greek Testament*, means "an age" - This is agreed among both the pre- and a-millennial theologians. This is definitely not disputed by Pre-millennialist in passages like Matthew 24:3 ... there they are quick to say that the disciples meant, "the end of the age", rather than the "end of the world", as the King James translators said. Most other versions of the Bible do translate this word as "age".

The New Testament only speaks of two ages, or *aion*-s. This Age, and the Age to come:

Matthew 12:32: *but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world (aion), neither in the world (italicized*) to come.*

* Italicized words in the KJV are words that do not appear in the Greek, rather these are implied by the Greek. This verse would be better translated "neither in this age, nor in the one to come."

Luke 18:30: ... *who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world (aion) to come, life everlasting.*

Ephesians 1:21: ... *not only in this world (aion), but also in that which is to come.*

Luke 20:34: *The children of this world (aion) marry, and are given in marriage.*

Luke 20:35: *But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world (aion) ... neither marry nor are given in marriage.*

In this age people marry, in the age to come people will not marry (Luke 20:34-35). In this age faithfulness is greatly rewarded; the faithful from this age are rewarded eternal life in the age to come. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age, nor in the age to come.

There are but two ages, this age, and the age to come. The question, then is, when will this age end?

Matthew 24:3: ... *what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the*

world (aion)?

To this Jesus answers with the remainder of the chapter, revealing signs of the end of the age, all culminating with his second coming in verses 29 and following. Hence the end of the age will be marked by the return of Christ. Matthew 13:39-43 reveals the great harvest which is to take place at the end of the age, in which the tares are thrown into a furnace of fire (i.e. the Lake of Fire).

This Age The wheat and tares dwell together. **The End of the Age** The tares are taken from among the wheat and burned (Matt 13:30). **The Age to come.** The tares are burnt in the Lake of fire. (Matthew 13:42)

This Age The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations **The End of the Age** Christ shall return and the elect shall be gathered. (Matthew 24:31) **The Age to come** The evil servant shall have his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:51)

This Age Those who leave all to follow Christ shall receive manifold blessings (Luke 18:30) **The Age to come** Those who leave all to follow Christ receive life everlasting (Luke 18:30)

This Age People marry in this age (Luke 20:34) **The Age to come** People do not marry in this age (Luke 20:35).

This Age This age is temporal, ending with the return of Christ. **The Age to come** This age is eternal.

Certainly the age to come cannot be referring to a coming millennium. If this were true, people would have to procreate to sustain life on the earth. Marriage is the only Biblical form of procreation. In the age to come, there is no marriage. If the age to come were the millennium, then there would have to be two ages to come. Yet this is not what the Bible says.

There is this present age; there is the age to come (eternity); there are no other ages.

Proof #6 The resurrection of Daniel 12.

Daniel 12:2: *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Daniel 12:13: *But go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in*

thy lot at the end of the days.

The prophecy of Daniel 12 has to do with the end times. Even though many scholars disagree about the nature of the Great Tribulation, not many would disagree that Daniel 12:1, and Daniel 12:11 both speak concerning the Great Tribulation, especially since Jesus referred to these verses in Matthew 24, verses 15 and 21.

Verse 2 of chapter 12 speaks of resurrection that will occur in this time. Then verse 13 also speaks of when the prophet, Daniel will be raised. Pre-tribulation scholars are right to believe that this resurrection will occur after the Great Tribulation, after all, verse 13 says that Daniel will be raised to stand in his lot (i.e., receive his inheritance) at the end of the days (the days of verses 11 and 12, i.e., after the tribulation of verse 11, when the Lord shall return in verse 12, on the 1335th day, Daniel shall be resurrected.)

Hence, it is, that the pre-tribulation scholar teaches that there will be three separate resurrection occurrences. The first is that of the church, prior to the Tribulation; the second is that of Old Testament Israel at the end of the tribulation; the third is of all of the lost after the 1000 year kingdom age. The first resurrection is eminent, the second will not occur until, at minimum, seven years later, then the third will not occur until 1000 years after the second.

There are two major problems with this interpretation of Daniel 12. The first is the 1000 years separating the resurrection of life from the resurrection to death. How can we look at verse 2 and say that this one event encompasses 1000 years?

The second, and most major problem is with separating the resurrection of the Old Testament saints from the New Testament saints.

Since, by definition, (pre-tribulation rapture) they must believe that the church is raptured before the tribulation, and since Daniel 12 does not allow for a pre-tribulation rapture of the prophet Daniel, then they must conclude that there are two resurrections of life, one before the tribulation, and one after.

The problem arises with the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Those verses teach that we, who are alive and remain till the coming of our Lord, shall not precede those who sleep. Rather, the dead in Christ will rise first,

then we who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. This coming of Christ they teach is before the tribulation.

Yet, all who are in Christ, that are dead, must be raised before those who are alive will be raptured. The problem: Is Daniel not "dead in Christ"? Are the Old Testament believers not among the "dead in Christ"? To say that the Old Testament believers will not be raised prior to those who are alive and remain, is to say that they are not in Christ.

Hence the real problem, if they are not in Christ, then they cannot be saved!! (unless, per chance, there were some other means of salvation apart from Christ).

If the Old Testament believers are in Christ, then they must be raised before those who are alive and remain are caught up with them. Since Daniel 12 teaches that the prophet Daniel, who is certainly in Christ, is not to be raised until after the tribulation, (and hence his people Israel also), then we who are alive and remain cannot be caught up together with them until they are raised after the tribulation.

Proof # 7 Sudden Destruction.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 are verses that the Pre-tribulation rapture proponents try to use to prove their doctrine. However, these verse teach the exact opposite.

First notice the context in chapter 4. In the previous section we saw that the dead in Christ must rise first. Daniel, and his people, (Daniel 12:13), who qualify as among the "dead in Christ", will not be resurrected until after the tribulation. Also, notice that this resurrection of chapter 4 occurs with the "trump of God." We discussed before the trumpet rapture in proof #1.

Chapter 5 starts in the same context, "*Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.*" This is the times and seasons of the resurrection in chapter 4. Verse 2 teaches that the return of Christ will be as a thief in the night.

This is a passage from which the Pre-tribulation proponents get their secret return of Christ doctrine. First, let us understand that this verse does not say anything about a secret return of Christ. The "*thief in the night*" does not mean that his return would be unseen, rather it means it would be unexpected. Verse four further explains this. "*But ye, brethren, are not in*

darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief." That is, you will not be surprised, for you will be expecting it. You are not in darkness (unaware) of his expected return, as are they.

Just in case we have any more doubt as to when this return will be, verse 3 makes it very clear! "*For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them.*"

"*Sudden destruction.*" How can we interpret sudden destruction to be anything other than sudden? Yet that is what our pre-trib friends believe. They look for seven years of progressive destruction. This is not sudden. Rather the people in this passage, will be consumed in the wrath of God!! It will be sudden. They will stand before the white throne, and be cast into the lake of fire. This is the sudden destruction in view. Verse 9 further explains this. "*For God has not appointed us unto wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The wrath of God is the sudden destruction. Zephaniah 1:18 - "*Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.*"

Proof # 8 The Last Days.

If we look at the history of the world as a whole, we see that the earth is thousands of years old. We cannot know when the earth was created.

Of this, however we can be certain, the cross is nearer to the end of the time line. The apostle made it clear that the church was living in the last days. If, according to the apostles, these are the last days, what more can follow this present age?

Hebrews 1:1-2: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things ...*

1 Peter 1:20: *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, must was manifest in these last times for you.*

1 John 2:18: *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that anti-christ shall come, even now are there many anti-christs; whereby we know that this is the last time.*

1 Corinthians 10:11: *Now all these things happened unto them for*

ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Acts 2:17: *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ...*

The apostles understood this present age as being the last. Why do we not?

Let us now review what has been learned:

1. No where does the Bible say that there will be a pre-tribulation resurrection of the church.
2. The rapture occurs at the sounding of the last trumpet.
3. This last trumpet is the same as is sounded in Revelation 11:15, i.e. the seventh trumpet.
4. When this seventh trumpet is sounded it is the time for the dead should be judged, and that they should experience the Wrath of God.
5. The judgment of the dead after the seventh trumpet and the white throne judgment of Revelation 20 are the same event.
6. The wrath of God is not the Great Tribulation, rather it is the penalty of sin.
7. This last trumpet is the same trumpet sounded in Matthew 24:29, immediately after the tribulation, in the which the angels will gather the elect for the four winds.
8. Jesus taught that his disciples (i.e., the church) would be present during the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:15-28.
9. The events of Matthew 24:29-31, which occur after the Tribulation, are the same events that occur at the opening of the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17. Hence the sixth seal is a prophecy fulfilled after the Tribulation.
10. The sounding of the last trump in 1 Corinthians, the opening of the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17, the return of Christ in Matthew 24:29-31, the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15-19, and the time of the white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, all occur at the end.
11. On the "*selfsame day*" that Noah entered the ark, the flood came, "as the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be." Genesis 7:13; Matthew 24:38-39.

12. "But the **same day** Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day the Son of man is revealed." Luke 17:29-30.

13. The resurrection of the believers, both Old and New Testament, will be the **Last Day**. The resurrection and judgment of the unbelievers will also be the **Last Day**.

14. There are only two ages discussed in the New Testament, this age and the age to come. The end of this age is marked by the return of Christ.

15. The resurrection of Daniel and his people is after the Great Tribulation. Since they are among the "dead in Christ", they will be raised before the church is raptured.

16. The "thief in the night" return of Christ does not imply a secret return. Rather, "thief in the night" signals an unexpected return.

17. The return of Christ is accompanied with the sudden destruction of the world.

18. The apostles taught that the church was living in the last days. How can there be another coming age before the end?

Answering Questions

Certainly by comparing scripture with scripture, we must conclude that the rapture will not occur until after the Great Tribulation, when Christ returns to receive his own, and to destroy the earth and judge the wicked.

However, certainly for the reader who has been indoctrinated in pre-millennial theology, there are still other questions that need to be answered.:

1. Where does the author get the idea that the book of Revelation cannot be interpreted chronologically?

2. How does the author explain the 1000 years of Revelation chapter 20? When will these things be?

3. When will God fulfill the covenant promise made to Abraham, that both he and his seed would inherit the land of Canaan for an eternal possession? Does not God still owe Israel a glorious future? Is not the millennial kingdom the fulfillment of the promises?

4. Does not the author believe in the imminent return of Christ?

These are all very good questions, and the author hopes to answer these questions and any others that might be of concern to the reader. Certainly there is no wrong question. After making such a bold statement as the one above, the author needs to be prepared to answer any questionable doubts. So this section is devoted to clear up any questions that may have arisen in the mind of the reader.

Concerning the Chronology of the book of Revelation

It is commonly believe among pre-millennial theology that the book of Revelation must be viewed Chronologically.

Certainly one would not debate that the book is written in the order that John saw the visions. But no where does the Bible teach that the visions must be fulfilled in the order that they appear. This idea is strictly from the minds of men.

Although these theologians do not completely believe that these visions are chronological. Look at chapter twelve for example: Not many would disagree that the woman clothed with the Sun is a picture of national Israel. She gives birth to the Christ child. The great dragon is the devil, who waits to devour the Child as soon as He be born. None would disagree that this part of the vision was fulfilled in the past, even before John saw it. Yet if we must look at the book of Revelation chronologically, we must conclude that the opening of the seven seals and the sounding of the seven trumpets occurred before the first coming of Christ, during the Old Testament era. Of course, such an idea would be ridiculous, yet if every event in Revelation were chronological, then this must be true.

Rather this event is just one example of how the fulfillment of the visions are not chronological. "But," these theologians would say, "this is merely a parenthesis in the vision." In saying that this is a parenthesis, and that the majority of the book must be seen chronologically, they are setting up their own rules of interpretation. The Bible does not say that this book will be fulfilled chronologically, rather such ideas are the ideas of men.

We have already seen through comparing scripture with scripture, how that opening of the sixth seal and the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the Great White Throne Judgment are all fulfilled at about the same time. Hence, these events cannot be part of a chronological unfolding of the book.

The Bible does not say that the visions of Revelation must be fulfilled chronologically, then neither must we approach it with this pre-conceived idea.

Concerning the future of Israel

Before looking at Revelation 20, and discerning when the events of the 1000 years take place, let us first ask the question: Is there a still to come glorious future for national Israel? Has God fulfilled his promises to this nation, or must He still fulfill them?

Answering these questions is important to understanding prophesy, because how we view God's promises to Israel will determine whether we believe that there is more to come for this nation. The dispensational/pre-millennialist believe that God is still to fulfill the promises made to this nation. These promises, they believe will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom age (i.e., millennium).

First, let us look at the promises made to Abraham. Are the promises to Abraham fulfilled, or are they yet to be fulfilled?

When looking at the promises to Abraham, it is important to note that there are two different types of promises made to Abraham. Those that included Abraham in the promise, and those that did not include Abraham in the promise.

One of the covenant promises mentioned to Abraham in scripture (Genesis 12:6-7) did not include Abraham! The promise made to Abraham here is that God would give his seed the land. It does not include Abraham, nor does it say how long his seed would have the land. (This I will refer to as *the Fulfilled Covenant*) This promise is repeated in Genesis 15:18-21. Again in these verses Abraham is not the recipient of this promise, nor is there mentioned how long his seed would have the land. This promise is repeated again in Genesis 24:7. Just as before, the promise is not for Abraham, nor do we see how long his seed would have possession of the land.

A second covenant promise mentioned to Abraham in the scripture, however, did include Abraham in the promise. (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:15-17). (This I will refer to as *The Abrahamic- Covenant*) This covenant promise is made to both Abraham and to his seed. The continuity of the possession of the land of promise is eternal. This covenant is further developed in Genesis 17. (See

also 26:1-5; 28:12-15, confirm with Isaac, and Jacob)

Notice the following differences between the two covenant promises:

The Fulfilled Covenant	The Abrahamic Covenant
To Abram's seed	To Abram and his seed
Did not include Abram in promise	Included Abram in promise
No guarantee of continuity	Eternal possession
Conditional in its continued blessing By sin they lost their possession (Deuteronomy 8:18-20)	Unconditional in its eternal blessing
Completely fulfilled. (Joshua 21:43-45; Nehemiah 9:7-8.)	Yet to be fulfilled, Abraham must be resurrected for this promise to be fulfilled
This promise was for national Israel.	This promise includes all who believe on Christ. (Galatians 3:7, 29)

The promises that God made to Abraham concerning national Israel, have all been completely fulfilled (Joshua 21:43-45; Nehemiah 9:7-8). God owes them no more from any promise that He gave to Abraham.

The promises that God gave to Abraham concerning both Abraham and his seed (which include all who have trusted in Christ, Galatians 3:7, 29) have not yet been fulfilled. These promises will be fulfilled in the New Earth. The city that Abraham was looking for was one whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10), i.e., his inheritance would be the New Jerusalem, not the earthly Jerusalem, which was built by man.

What about other promises which seem to show a glorious future for national Israel? Doesn't Ezekiel speak of a coming restoration for Israel, in Ezekiel 37:21-28?

Let's look quickly at this promise to Israel. Note the following:

1. God will gather the children of Israel from among the heathen, and bring them into their own land, verse 21.
2. God will make them one nation, verse 22.

3. There will be but one king over them, one shepherd, i.e., David, verses 22, 24.
4. God will cleanse them from their transgressions, verse 23.
5. They will be the people of God, and God will be their God, verse 23.
6. They shall dwell in the land given unto Jacob forever, verse 25.
7. God shall dwell in the midst of them forever.

Certainly these promises are yet to be fulfilled! God will gather the children of Israel from among the nations, and will dwell in the midst of them forever!!!

Before we jump to any conclusions about how these verses must be fulfilled, we must let the Bible define its own terms.

According to the scriptures, who is Israel? The word **Israel** can have one or more of three Biblical definitions. Certainly the word **Israel** can refer to the nation of Israel. The word also can be used in reference to Jesus Christ: (Isaiah 49:3; Hosea 11:1, ref. Matt 2:15). 3. Israel could also refer to all who believe on Christ. We are the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29; Romans 2:28-29). "*Thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them [i.e. Israel], and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree.*" Romans 11:17-24 (Grafted into the same tree!!!).

Since we can have up to three different definitions of Israel, we must ask ourselves, who is the Israel in view here? Is national Israel in view here? Before we answer that, we must ask, can national Israel be in view?

The answer to this must be: No. National Israel cannot be in view for the following reasons:

1. Matthew 8:5-12: (verse 11-12): "*And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" - Jesus said this!! He said this about national Israel, the physical seed of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. There is no message of restoration here. Rather, the Gentiles, (i.e., those from the east and the west) shall inherit the kingdom in their stead!!

2. Matthew 21:18-19. Jesus came up to a fig tree which was in leaf, but did not have any figs. He curses the fig tree. "*Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward, forever*" The fig tree is none other than national Israel (Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7). Never again would the nation of Israel bear fruit! As a whole they have become apostate, and will remain that way. They will again be in leaf (Matthew 24:32-33), but will never bear fruit. This is the word of Christ.

3. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35) "*but in every nation he that feareth Him ... is accepted with Him.*" In other words, God will not show favor unto someone because of his national origin, but solely on the basis of who will fear Him. Israel is not a holy nation, for they have rejected their Messiah, rather the believers in Christ are the holy nation (1 Peter 2:9-10). God has said in Acts 10:34, that he will not show favor to any particular nation. Why should He change his mind?

Could these verses be referring to the Lord Jesus Christ? Christ was never scattered among the heathen, and these verses have a plural fulfillment. "*My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forever.*" So the likelihood is that Christ is not the Israel in view here.

What about all who believe on Christ, can these verses have all who believe on Christ in view? They most certainly can!! Following the above seven point outline of this passage, let us see how this prophesy is fulfilled in all who believe on Christ:

1. God will gather the Children of Israel from among the heathen, wherever to they have been scattered. Hence, Jesus gave us the Great Commission: "*Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations.*"(Matthew 28:18). His elect are scattered throughout the world, and they must be reached with the gospel! They will be reached.

2. God will make one nation of them. The elect, who are scattered throughout the world are become *one* nation (1 Peter 2:9-10), the one body who are the heirs of the promise (Ephesians 4:4; and 3:6)

3. There will be one King over them, David. David is a picture of Christ, who sits on the throne of David. Certainly David, himself, is not the king over them. Rather Christ is the one king over them. David will also be the one shepherd over them; again, not David but Christ is the one shepherd (Isaiah 40:11). He is the Good Shepherd, and we are the sheep of his flock.

4. God will cleanse them from their transgressions. God has cleansed his people by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, we have been declared righteous through Him.

5. *"So shall they be My people, and I will be their God."* Romans 9:24-26: *"I will call them My people, who were not My people."* See also 1 Peter 2:10.

6. They shall dwell in the land given unto Jacob, forever. Matthew 8:11, *"And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven"* See also Galatians 3:29

7. God will dwell in the midst of them forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Certainly these verses can be fulfilled in all who have trusted in Christ. No future golden age is needed for the fulfillment of these verses. They will be eternally fulfilled.

There are many other references quoted by the pre-millennialist theologians, which they use to try to prove a future restoration of national Israel, all of which are fulfilled in all of the believers of Christ. Hence we will not exhaust those in this study. Just remember, when looking at such passages, that the Israel of God is all who believe on Christ.

Remember, as stated in the introduction to this essay, the main difference between the interpretation of prophesy between pre-millennialist and a-millennialist is how they view the New Testament in relation to Old Testament prophesy. Pre-millennialist tend to interpret the New Testament Age as a parenthesis (i.e. unseen) in Old Testament prophesy; while a-millennialist see the New Testament as fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy.

Pre-millennial Theology:

Israel, Israel, Israel, Israel, Israel, (the church), Israel, Israel

(The church is a parenthesis, i.e., unseen in Old Testament prophesy)

A-millennial Theology:

Israel (a picture of God's people), ----- the New Testament church

-----There is but one people of God-----

(Christ and the church are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy)

Concerning the 1000 years of Revelation 20

What about the 1000 years of Revelation 20? Where do they fit in? The first thing to keep in mind, as discussed earlier, is that the prophecies of Revelation will not be fulfilled chronologically. Chapter 20 does not have to follow after chapter 19. The chronology of the fulfillment of the visions does not have to replicate the chronology of the giving of the visions.

When does chapter 20 begin? It begins when an angel comes down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit, and binds Satan.

Who is the angel with the key to the bottomless pit? Revelation 1:18, Jesus Christ has the keys of hell and death. It is He who has the power to bind Satan.

When was, or, when will Satan be bound? Matthew 12:29: "*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.*" The strong man of this verse is Satan, the prince of this world. He must first be bound so that his goods may be spoiled (i.e., so that his slaves, unregenerate mankind might be taken from him).

What does it mean that Satan is bound? It does not mean that he is powerless. It means that he is limited to what is under his authority. Imagine a pit bull on a chain, if you come too close to it, you find out that he is definitely not powerless, rather his power is limited to the length of his chain. The same is true about Satan, his powers have been greatly limited.

This is also taught in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Verse 3 teaches that a falling away is to come and the man of sin is to be revealed. This man of sin is empowered by Satan, verse 9. Before this falling away, the man of sin is restrained, but a time will come when He who restrains will no longer restrain, that the man of sin may be revealed. The first thing to note about the man of sin, is that he existed, and worked in Paul's time, yet under restraint. (verses 6 and 7). He has been restrained throughout the Church Age. (Hence, this cannot be a single individual who has been restrained for close to 2000 years, rather it is a power that has been restrained). For most of the church age, the powers of Satan are restrained. The point in time will come when the powers of Satan will no longer be restrained and the man of sin, whom Satan will empower, will then be revealed. In this manner Satan is bound.

When was Satan bound? During the Old Testament era Satan had access to heaven. This is seen in Job 1:6. Then in Luke, Jesus said to his disciples that "*I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven.*" (Luke 10:18) This He said to them after they reported to Him, how that the devils were subject unto them through the Name of Christ. I.e., because Satan is cast down, the disciples have power above him. Satan's power has been greatly limited.

Revelation 12:7-12 speaks of a great battle between Michael and his angels, and the dragon, the devil. Once Satan is cast down, a loud voice says that salvation is come, for the accuser is cast down. Then verse 11 shows by what means the dragon was overcome: through the blood of the Lamb. The devil was defeated by the blood of Christ. The death of Christ provided the means through which the powers of Satan would be defeated.

Satan was bound at the cross. The blood of the Lamb has brought his defeat. Here we have a picture of Satan being bound for a thousand years to illustrate the power of the New Testament church. The strong man was bound (Matthew 12:29) so that his house could be plundered.

How long is Satan bound? The use of numbers in the Bible have great spiritual significance. For example, the number 7 is well known to be a perfect (i.e., full) number. There are seven days in a week, God sanctified the seventh day. There are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls of wrath, seven churches, 70 weeks of years, or 70 sevens of years, seven weeks of years per Jubilee. There were 7000 in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal., that is 7 x 1000. God warned Noah seven days before the flood. We are to forgive 70 times 7 times, etc...

The number 12 is also an important number. It represents a multitude, or vast number. There were 12 children of Israel, 12 tribes, 12 disciples, 12 basket of leftovers, 12 gates with 12 angels upon the 12 foundations in the New Jerusalem. 144,000 who have the Father's name in their forehead, that is 12 x 12 x 1000.

The number 10 is also a significant number. It represents completeness. There were 10 virgins, 10 lepers, 100 sheep. The number 1000 is made up of 10 x 10 x 10. Hence it is a number of completeness.

Satan is bound for the completeness of time, until he must be loosed. He was bound at the cross, he must be loosed for a short season. God is showing that Satan will be bound for the complete amount of time that God has planned.

Then he will be loosed. The restraining hand will be removed.

Then John sees the souls of them that were beheaded for witness of Jesus, and they lived and reigned with Christ 1000 years. Notice that John is seeing souls. If he saw resurrected bodies, he would not say that he "saw the souls them that were beheaded", rather he would say he "*saw them who were beheaded.*" The point is that the souls of people are in view here, not bodies. He saw the souls of them who have part in the first resurrection (verse 5).

"This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power." What is the first resurrection? It is not the rapture of the church (unlike what many pre-millennialist teach). The first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection! In Eden, Adam died. At that point he did not physically die; rather, he died spiritually. Later he died physically. The unregenerate man is spiritually dead. He must be resurrected spiritually to have eternal life. Jesus said to Nicodemus that he must be born again. i.e., he must experience a spiritual resurrection, i.e, the resurrection of the soul. The first resurrection occurs when one is born again. John sees the souls of them who live and reign with Christ. These souls begin to live and reign with Christ once they have experienced the first resurrection. Those who are saved are living and reigning with Christ

What is the first resurrection? The context tells us what the first resurrection is:

"And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years ... this is the first resurrection." The first resurrection is the resurrected soul living and reigning with Christ for 1000 years. How long is the one thousand years that a believer lives and reigns with Christ? The completeness of their reign is forevermore!!

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were completed." How long will the rest of the dead not live? For the completeness of time. How long is the completeness of time for them? Forevermore!!! The rest of the dead will never live again! True, they will be raised on the last day to be judged, but they will not live, rather they will experience eternal death.

"And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." That is, in the completeness of time, Satan shall be loosed.. Then he will go forth to deceive the nations for a short season. This short season right before the end is the Great Tribulation. This will be a most dreadful time. He

will bring about the abomination of desolation in the temple. We will discuss more thoroughly the nature of this Great Tribulation later in this study. After this short season, after Satan is ultimately defeated at the return of Christ, is the Great white throne judgment.

The 1000 years is the entire church age. The short season is the Tribulation. In essence, Revelation 20 is a summary God's plan to evangelize the world throughout the entire New Testament era. Satan is bound so that the gospel is able to penetrate to the ends of the earth. Those who are converted reign with Christ in his kingdom even while they are still living in this sin-cursed earth. Those who are not converted will have no hope of life. This interpretation fits completely with what we have learned from scripture earlier in this essay concerning the Last Day return of Christ.

Concerning looking for His coming

Is the return of Christ imminent? The imminency of the return of Christ is a doctrine that is vastly held among Pre-tribulation rapture proponents. They believe that Christ could return at any moment to rapture His church, regardless of whether it is a time of spiritual darkness, or a time of great revival. It could be at any moment. Is this a Biblical interpretation of watching for the return of Christ. Has the return of Christ always been imminent? When is the return of Christ imminent?

Has the return of Christ always been imminent? The answer must be no. The return of Christ was not imminent in the following periods of time:

- 1.** As long as the apostle Peter lived, the return of Christ was not imminent. Jesus prophesied about how Peter would die in John 21:18-19 (i.e., he would die before the return of Christ). Hence, as long as the apostle lived, the return of Christ was not imminent.
- 2.** Paul was told by God that he would testify of Him in Rome (Acts 23:11). During the period of time between receiving this message and Paul testifying in Rome, the return of Christ was not imminent. (The reason the author points out these two examples is to counter the idea that many pre-tribulation rapture proponents have that the apostles believed that the return of Christ could have been in their life times; certainly Peter did not believe that).
- 3.** In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-9, Paul tells the people to not be shaken by any teaching that the day of Christ was at hand. Rather, he taught that the day of

Christ would not come until first there came a falling away, and the man of sin is revealed. Since, at the time that Paul wrote this to them, these things had not yet happened, then Christ would not yet return. In other words, for as long as there had not been a great falling away, and as long as the man of sin had not been revealed, the return of Christ would not be imminent. Times of great revival in history are all evidence that the return of Christ is not at such times imminent. The Bible is clear in this passage that there will be a great falling away prior to the return of Christ.

Jesus also taught that before His return there would be a great falling away. In Matthew 24, the disciples ask Jesus what would be the sign of his coming. In answer to this question, Jesus first outlines tribulations that will occur throughout the church age (verses 4- 14). Then, starting in verse 15, He tells them of a time of great tribulation, worse than ever has been (verse 21), the worst time of tribulation in the history of the world! Then he tells them, that immediately after that great tribulation, He shall return (verses 29-30). Hence, He will not return until after that time of great tribulation! The return of Christ is not imminent unless it is a time of great tribulation.

Certainly, among the darkest hours in the history of the church, is the time right before the Protestant Reformation. In this time the masses were blinded by the Catholic Church. Most did not have the Bible in their own languages. They relied on their priests to show them the gospel. However, what most church leaders were teaching the people was far from the gospel of the scriptures; rather, it was a gospel of works. It was not the gospel! Masses were being led to the slaughter. Surely this was a great tribulation! At times like these, Jesus taught His disciples to look up (Matthew 24:33). Yet, revival broke out. People openly opposed the teachings of the Roman church. Many were converted. This time in history turned out to not be the great tribulation that Jesus told his disciples about.

The dark time before the Reformation was probably one of the darkest hours for the church, yet the Great Tribulation will be an even darker hour!! This dark time must come prior to the return of Christ.

Jesus taught his disciples to "*watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*" (Matthew 24:42). Pre-tribulation rapture proponents try to use such verses as this one to prove their doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. Yet Jesus does not teach in this verse that His coming could

be at any time. He had just told them what would proceed his coming! He had just told them what to watch for, i.e., the Great Tribulation he just described. Most people in this world, and most people in the churches will not be watching. Yet the true disciples will know what to watch for, because Jesus outlined it for them in this chapter (Matthew 24:33).

Will we be watching? He will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:22, i.e., unexpectedly). Will he not come unto us as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:24)? Will we be expecting Him? Woe unto us if we, like the evil servant, are not prepared when He returns (Matthew 24:48-51).

The Nature of the Great Tribulation

What will be the nature of the Great Tribulation? Will it be a period of time marked by extreme chaos?

If the nature of the Great Tribulation were chaotic, people would recognize that it was the Great Tribulation, and would expect the return of Christ. Yet the Bible says that people will not be looking for the return of Christ (Matthew 24:42-51) Because of this the author believes that the nature of the Great Tribulation will not be so much physical, as it is spiritual.

Rather than being a time of chaos, the Great Tribulation will be a time of business as usual. Matthew 24:38 - 42, and Luke 17:26 - 31 show what life in the world will be like at the time Christ returns (which is immediately after the Great Tribulation):

1. They did eat and drink.
2. They were married and given in marriage.
3. They bought and sold.
4. They knew not (they were unaware of anything being wrong) until the flood came and destroyed them all.

In the days of Lot and Noah, life went on as usual for the population. They bought and sold (the stock market was open), they married. They did not know anything was different. Then judgment came. As such it will be when Christ returns. The world will expect business as usual. They will not notice anything is different.

For the reader who has previously been indoctrinated in pre-trib, pre-millennial theology, this might seem like a strange idea. One might ask, is

there not supposed to be great disasters such as great hail storms and fire storms which will destroy a third of the vegetation, and are not rivers to be poisoned with wormwood? What about the locusts and scorpions that torment men? Are the seven seals and trumpet judgments not to be taken literally? To this the author answers that the Bible does not allow for a literal interpretation of these events; therefore the terms used in these events must be symbolic in nature.

One might ask why the author prefers a symbolic interpretation of these events above a literal interpretation. Is it wrong to look for a spiritual fulfillment rather than a literal fulfillment of these events?

Pre-millennialist like to fault a-millennialist for spiritualizing. They say that they prefer a literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. Yet this is not totally true. They are quick to say that the woman of Revelation 12 is Israel, and that the great dragon is Satan. They like to believe that the beast with seven heads and ten horns is the European Union. Is this not making such passages symbolic in nature, rather than literal? Is the pot calling the kettle black? Is that not what they fault a-millennialist for? Yet in their defense, they say that they take a literal interpretation unless *the passage* does not allow for a literal interpretation. In defense of a-millennialism, may it be known that a-millennialist agree, and go an important step further, that is, we should take a literal interpretation of a passage of scripture unless *the rest of the Bible* does not allow for such an interpretation.

So, does the Bible allow for a literal interpretation of the visions of the book of Revelation? Firstly, some of the visions will definitely be literally fulfilled. We can definitely say this because such says the remainder of the Bible about such events. For example, the vision of the Great White Throne will have a very literal fulfillment. We know this because the Bible says in several other places that all of mankind will stand before God and be judged. Death and hell being cast into the Lake of Fire has a very literal fulfillment for the same reason. The opening of the sixth seal has a very literal fulfillment (Revelation 6:12 -17). It will literally be fulfilled on the last day. For one to not believe that this will happen on the last day, would require a less than literal fulfillment (hence, the pre-millennialist take a less literal interpretation of the sixth seal than do the a-millennialist.) The heavens will literally depart as a scroll once this seal is opened. (Compare with 2 Peter 3:10, and see if there

can be another 1000 plus years for this earth after this event). [If we are to take a literal, chronological interpretation as the pre-millennialist teach, how can the stars fall from heaven, and the heavens be rolled back as a scroll at this time if there are still stars in the sky later for a third of them to be darkened (Revelation 8:12)?] The pre-millennialist also teach that the opening of the sixth seal is a full three and a half years or more prior to the end of the Great Tribulation, yet in these verses it is clear that the kings of the earth are very much aware of the return of Christ, verse 16. Compare this with Matthew 24:38 - 42, where for this world it will be business as usual right up until Christ returns. Is there a contradiction? No, rather there is a faulty interpretation by the pre-millennialist.

Many of the events of the book of Revelation cannot have a literal interpretation because such an interpretation would not harmonize with the Bible as a whole. Great disasters will not be the mark of the tribulation, firstly because Jesus said that such disasters would not be the mark of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:6-7). Rather the primary sign of the Great Tribulation according to Christ is the abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15) and an arising of many false Christs that would deceive the masses, the elect would even be deceived if that were possible (though they will not be deceived because of the Grace of God). Jesus pointed to a time of great spiritual unrest. Secondly, many of the events cannot be taken as literal because if they did literally happen, then the world would be in disarray, and it would not conduct business as usual..

What is the mark of the Great Tribulation? It is the abomination of desolation "*When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation stand in the holy place ... then let them who are in Judea flee unto the mountains.*"(Matt 24:15)

What is the abomination of desolation? The abomination of desolation is a time in which the sanctuary is polluted. Daniel 11:31 says "*they shall pollute the the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.*"

The word *abomination* in the Bible is used often in relation to times when Israel served false gods: "*And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the Prophet, he took courage, and put away the Abominable idols out of the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the Lord, that was*

before the porch of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 15:8). "For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites" (1 Kings 11:5). "For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight, saith the Lord: they have set their Abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places to Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hunnon, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into My heart." (Jeremiah 7:30-31).

For such abominations, God promised desolation to Israel, "*And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it*" Leviticus 26:30-32.

Thus we can know that the abomination of desolation has to do with the people of God forsaking God to serve a false god. This great abomination will take place, according to Matthew 24:15, in the "holy place."

In the Old Testament the Temple served as the Holy Place, in which was the Holy of Holies. It was veiled off to separate it as a place that is sanctified unto God. When Christ died on the cross, in the instant he died, the veil in the temple which hid the holy of holies was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). This signified that the holy of holies was no longer at that place in Jerusalem, which was merely a shadow, but was now in the body of Christ, the fulfilment of the shadow. The temple of the Old Testament was a symbol which pointed to the body of Christ. (Hebrews 9:11, 24). In the New Testament we have access to the holy of holies through the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:19-20). In the New Testament, the believers (the body of Christ, 2 Corinthians 6:16) are the temple of God. The church is the Holy Place.

A time will come in which the church (not the eternal church, over which the gates of hell shall not prevail, but the external church) will be defiled. "*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 worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing*

himself that he is God." 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Remember, in the New Testament, the temple of God is the body of believers, i.e., the church. During this time of Great Tribulation, the man of sin will set himself up in the church, and will be worshiped as God. This is "*the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand[ing] in the Holy Place.*" (Matthew 24:15). This agrees with what Daniel, the prophet said concerning the abomination of desolation. Daniel 8:13: "*Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give **both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?***" The sanctuary is the church, it shall at this time be trodden under foot. "*And arms shall stand on His part, and **they shall pollute the sanctuary of His strength, and shall take away the daily, and they shall place the Abomination that maketh desolate.***" Daniel 11:31.

A time will come when the church will no longer be a place where the gospel is heard, 2 Timothy 4:3-4: "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*" "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*" 1st Timothy 4:1-2.

The man of sin (1 Thessalonians 2:3), who is empowered by Satan, who for the most part of the church age has been restrained (KJV -"letteth" is an archaic word that means "restrain"), will be no longer be restrained. (Since, according to the passage, he has been restrained for most of the church age, at least 1950 years, we must conclude that the man of sin is not just one individual, confer with 1 John 2:18). He will be allowed to infiltrate the established churches on a much greater scale than he has ever before throughout the church age. Certainly the man of sin has been at work for the entire church age, leading churches away from the true gospel, yet he has been restrained from taking full control in the external church. But a time will come when he will no longer be restrained. In this time of Great Tribulation, there will be a Great falling away, in which very few churches will hold to the true gospel. Salvation by grace alone will be a teaching that is not heard among churches. Rather for the most part churches will have a watered down

gospel, which is not the gospel.

This is a most dreadful time. Jesus said that this time of great tribulation will be worse than any other time of tribulation. Ezekiel 14:12-23 is a passage that speaks about the Great Tribulation. This passage is parallel to Revelation 6:7-8, the fourth seal (compare verse 21 with Revelation 6:8). Jerusalem, upon whom this judgment is prophesied (verse 22) is a picture of the church (Hebrews 12:22-23). This passage teaches, that in this time of great tribulation, if Noah, Daniel, and Job were to be alive, they would only deliver themselves, i.e., they would be unable to lead any to Christ. The people of this time will have turned their ears so far from the truth, that these great men of old would not be able to persuade them.

"Let them which are in Judea flee into the mountains." This is the command that Christ gives to His people who will live in this coming time of Great Tribulation.

Judea is the province in which the temple was located, hence, it is a picture of the external church, the corporate body in which the eternal church is located. When the abomination of desolation takes place; i.e., when the church becomes apostate, then those who are within the apostate church (Judea) are commanded to flee to the mountains. That is, they are not to remain in the apostate church.

When ones church has rejected the true gospel for a false gospel, he needs to leave his church. At the time of the end, when there are very few doctrinally sound churches, it may not even be possible for the believers to find a church which is faithful to the gospel. In that case it is better for them not to even attend church if all the churches he finds are apostate.

A similar phrase to the phrase, "flee into the mountains" is also used in Genesis 19:17, where Lot is commanded by the angels who had rescued him from Sodom to "Escape to the mountain." The city of Sodom, which pictures the world in that passage, is also used in reference to the apostate church in Revelation 11:8.

The two witnesses are slain, and their bodies lie in the street of Jerusalem, which is spiritually called Sodom. Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem.

Jerusalem typifies the church. Jerusalem was the capital city of Judah, the city of David. Jerusalem was the location of the Temple. The church is the

location of the Temple of God (the believer, 1 Corinthians 6:19). The saints in the New Heaven and the New Earth are called the "New Jerusalem, the Holy City", Rev 21:2. (The New Jerusalem represents a people. It appears as a "bride adorned for her Husband").

Jerusalem is in this passage referred to as Sodom. Instead of being a "holy city" (Rev 21:2) as it should be, it is a city of reprobates. The church in this time of Great Tribulation has become apostate. It is no longer the city of God. Rather, it is, at this time, comparable with Sodom.

Had Lot remained in Sodom, he would have been destroyed with the city. God brought him out of the city and commanded him to "escape to the mountain." So, also, the believers, when they find that their churches are no longer the church of God are to leave them and "flee into the mountains."

The Great Tribulation will be marked by great apostasy, in which churches who afore time were faithful to the gospel, have rejected it for the doctrines of men. It would be hard for a believer to find a good church. If the believer is unable to find a good church, then he must remain outside the church, lest he take part in the church's apostasy.

Will any be saved during this great tribulation? Certainly during this time, many people will be turned to strong delusions (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) so that they will believe a lie. Yet, people will be saved during this time. In Ezekiel 14:22, after this dreadful prophesy about how harden people will become, verse 22 says, "*Yet, behold, in it shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth ...*" i.e., souls will be saved, "*brought forth*", even in this time of great tribulation. It will still be the day of Salvation. People will be saved all the way up to the return of Christ, according to 2 Peter 3:9. The context of 2 Peter 3:9 speaks about the return of Christ. Verses 3 and 4 teach that in the last days, there shall be scoffers who will say, "*where is the promise of His coming?*" To this Peter answers in verse 9, that the Lord is not slack, but is longsuffering towards us. Hence, the seeming delay before the coming of the Lord is for our benefit. Why? Because God is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" (The *any* and *all* in this verse refer to their antecedent, *us*. *Us* refers to it's antecedent, *beloved*. The *beloved* are the ones to whom Peter is writing, 2 Peter 1:1. Hence, the *any* and *all* in this verse refer to the elect, those who will "obtain like faith" as the apostle.) That is, Christ will not return until all of the elect have been converted,

because God is not willing that any of His chosen people should remain unconverted and under the wrath of God. But once all have come to repentance, verse 10, the Day of the Lord will come, in the which the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

In Conclusion

It is interesting to note that during the time of the first advent of Christ, the Jews of that day were looking for a Messiah that would deliver them from the Romans. They looked for a Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom in Israel. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) They were not looking for one who would die to save them from their sins. Their eyes were on the political situation around them, and not on their spiritual condition. They missed their Messiah. Today, the church following in the same steps as did Israel; looking for the Messiah to return to establish a political kingdom in Israel. All eyes are on the political situations of Israel and Europe, trying to match such political conditions with Bible prophecy. Just as Israel, the church today is focusing on things around them rather than their own spiritual conditions. Just as Israel for the first advent, the church will be unprepared for the second advent. May we stop focusing on the political conditions around us, and focus on the spiritual condition of the church.

This study is in no wise exhaustive. Yet it should give one a much clearer understanding of what the historical doctrine of a-millennialism teaches.

Of this one thing we can be certain, Judgment Day is coming. Every single day, for approximately 200,000 people around the world, today is the Last Day. They will take their last breath, and their destiny will be finally sealed. We do not know when our last day will be. It could be today. "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Are you ready to meet God?

The Bible teaches that we can know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). We cannot attain eternal life by our own merits. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not of works, lest any man should boast.*" Ephesians 2:9-10. Salvation is through grace **alone**. There is nothing that we can do to inherit eternal life. Salvation is by grace, **plus nothing**. Whether or not we are baptized, or if we go to church, read our Bible, live morally - none of these things can assure salvation. We cannot trust in our baptism, church membership, or even in some prayer

which we may have recited for salvation. We can only throw ourselves on the mercies of God, because our salvation is totally dependent upon God alone. If we, like the publican (Luke 18:13), out of a broken heart, in true repentance, will throw ourselves before God and ask mercy of Him, he will hear our prayer. If we, like the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-10), who covered themselves with sackcloth and sat in the ashes (i.e., out of a truly repentant heart, totally broken before God) will "*cry mightily unto God*", He will hear our cry.

Are you ready to meet God? "*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*" (Amos 4:12.)

Sola Deo Gloria!

Questions, or comments about this article? Feel free to contact the author at harriswebpage@yahoo.com

Amen!

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