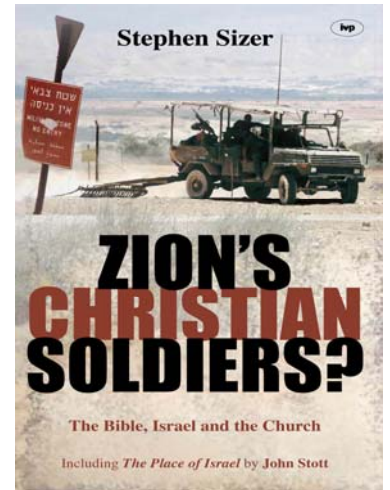


## Seminar 6

### Overture to Armageddon: Want to be Left Behind?

The video game taking Christian America by storm, aptly titled '*Left Behind: Eternal Forces*', encourages its players to kill anyone who resists conversion to Christianity. As Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft battle it out for domination of the electronic game world, the games' creator anticipates a ready market among those who have already bought 63 million copies of the '*Left Behind*' novels.



The game is set in New York City, a rather unusual venue for Armageddon you might think since New York doesn't actually get a mention in the Bible. It is, however, the location of the United Nations headquarters and that is the clue. Never popular among conservative evangelicals, in *Left Behind: Eternal Forces*, the bad guys are the Global Community Peacekeepers, who are on a search and destroy mission in Manhattan. Their target is the remnant of newly converted Bible-believers, left behind when Christians were apparently raptured secretly to heaven. These new believers, left on earth, form a Christian army called the Tribulation Force.

Under the heading 'Turn or Burn?' a review by Focus on the Family suggests the game could well be an evangelistic tool for teenagers – “the kind of game that Mom and Dad can actually play with Junior—and use to raise some interesting questions along the way.” Perhaps anticipating a degree of incredulity on the part of some readers, the review asks,

How do peace and prayer go hand in hand with tanks, attack choppers and street battles? ... Yes, you're offered sniper rifles, gun turrets, even tanks and helicopters. And there are points at which a gun battle is necessary to avoid a massacre. (When this happens, there's no gore. Units fall to the ground and fade away.) But if you go in guns blazing, nine times out of 10 you fail. It quickly becomes clear that the strongest weapons in your arsenal are your top-level missionaries and worship leaders. It's easier to convert a group of enemies than it is to shoot them. Still, post-Rapture warfare *is* integral to the game, as it is in the *Left Behind* books and movies.

In an interview with Tim LaHaye, the author of the *Left Behind* books on which the video game is based, Focus on the Family asked whether Christians will really be expected to militarize in the future?

He told *Plugged In Online* that this fictionalized depiction in the books, movies and now video games is a representation "of the self preservation instinct of the much-persecuted saints during the Tribulation."<sup>1</sup>

What a relief. It's all right then apparently as long as it is "faith-based" killing. Players pray for their adversaries "and try to do good spiritual things for them" But at a certain point, it becomes acceptable to kill them. So killing is OK as long as it is done in the name of Jesus. A rather more sceptical review by *Jews on First* observes that,

The goals of the game are simple: Spread the gospel, and stay alive. But staying alive may sometimes lead to the taking of life -- "fighting hellfire with hellfire". And that raises a knotty moral conundrum for any game designer who worships Jesus, the Prince of Peace.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, the mistaken idea of a secret rapture on which the *Left Behind* empire is based, and the belief that some will come to faith after Jesus returns, has generated a lot of bad theology and galvanised a belligerent US foreign policy in the Middle East.

Confident that Christians will escape and witness the events from the grandstands of heaven, exponents detach themselves from the Christian responsibility to work for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. Instead they describe in graphic detail the suffering that will soon take place there. Charles Ryrie, for example predicts this will be, 'the time of Israel's greatest bloodbath.'<sup>3</sup> John Walvoord similarly predicts a holocaust in which at least 750 million people will perish.<sup>4</sup> Tim LaHaye warns that 'Jacob's trouble', prophesied by Jeremiah 30:7, will certainly be far worse than the Spanish Inquisition ... or even the Holocaust of Adolf Hitler.'<sup>5</sup> Not to be outdone, in *The Final Battle*, Hal Lindsey claims, 'Israel is in for a very rough time. The Jewish State will be brought to the brink of destruction.'<sup>6</sup> In a later chapter he clarifies what this will mean for the Jews:

The land of Israel and the surrounding area will certainly be targeted for nuclear attack. Iran and all the Muslim nations around Israel have already

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<sup>1</sup> Focus on the Family. *Left Behind* now an 'End Times' game.  
<http://www.pluggedinonline.com/thisweekonly/a0002989.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ryrie, *The Living End*, (Old Tappan, Revell, 1976), p81. The title of chapter 8 is entitled 'A Bloodbath for Israel.'

<sup>4</sup> John Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1962), p108.

<sup>5</sup> Tim LaHaye, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, Tyndale House, 1999), p146.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle*, (Palos Verdes, Western Front, 1995), p184.

been targeted with Israeli nukes ... All of Europe, the seat of power of the Antichrist, would surely be a nuclear battlefield, as would the United States ... Zechariah gives an unusual, detailed account of how hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the Israel battle zone will die. Their flesh will be consumed from their bones, their eyes from their sockets, and their tongues from their mouths while they stand on their feet (Zechariah 14:12). This is exactly the sort of thing that happens from the intense radiation of a neutron type bomb.<sup>7</sup>

John Hagee takes an even more aggressive approach toward Iran. At the July 19th, 2006 Washington DC inaugural event for Christians United for Israel, after recorded greeting from George W. Bush, and in the presence of four US Senators as well as the Israeli ambassador to the US, John Hagee stated :

The United States must join Israel in a pre-emptive military strike against Iran to fulfill God's plan for both Israel and the West... a biblically prophesied end-time confrontation with Iran, which will lead to the Rapture, Tribulation, and Second Coming of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

The highly speculative and imaginative interpretation of ancient prophecies that under girds the *Left Behind* books, films and now computer game has a fatalistic view of the future. With its prewritten script, it is inherently suspicious of anything international, anything ecumenical, anything involving the European Community or the United Nations.

### **What is the idea behind the “Rapture”?**

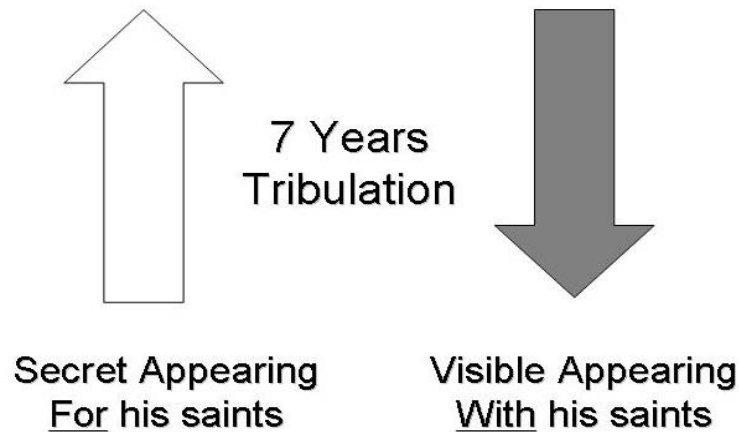
The Rapture is the novel idea that Jesus will actually return twice. First of all secretly to rescue true believers out of the world before, or mid-way through a seven year period of intense suffering known as the Tribulation, then visibly with his saints to judge the world. So advocates claim Jesus will return secretly *for* his saints, then visibly *with* his saints.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 255-7.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Posner, “Pastor Strangelove” The American Prospect Online, <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=11541> <Accessed March 2007>

## The Two-Stage Rapture

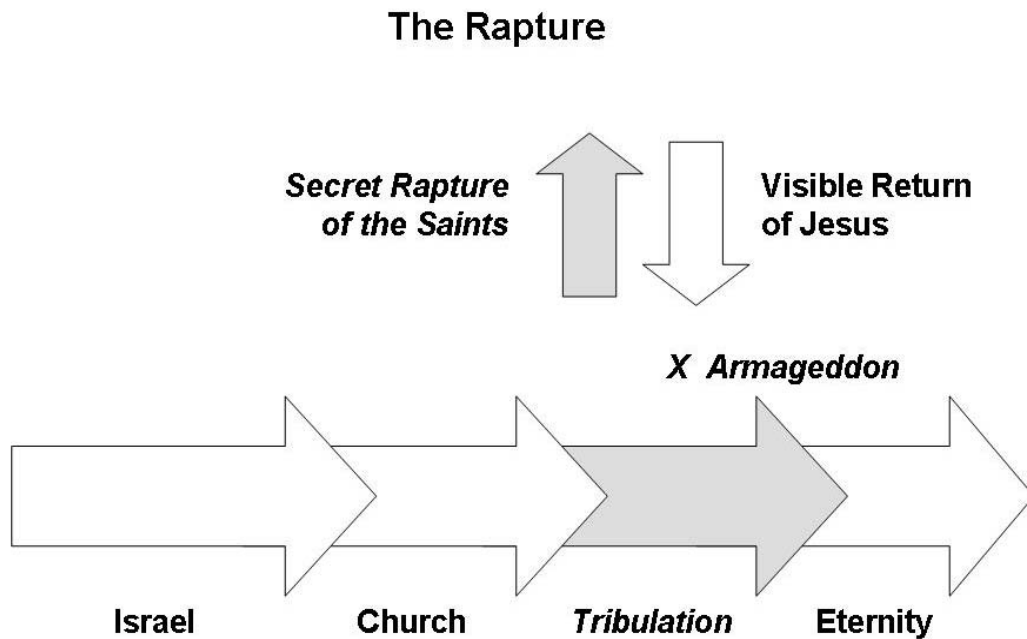


Although now a dominant view in America, largely as a result of Tim LaHaye's immensely popular *Left Behind*<sup>9</sup> series, the idea of a two-stage Rapture has been traced to the eccentric views of J.N. Darby and Cyrus Scofield.<sup>10</sup> To the traditional hope of the visible return of Jesus they added the notion of a secret return associated with a time of great suffering and persecution for those left behind on earth. Proponents believe that in one cataclysmic moment, millions of believers around the world will suddenly be caught up in the air to be with Jesus. Life will continue on earth for those who have ignored or rejected Jesus for either three and a half years or seven years. Mid-Tribulationists believe Christians will be rescued half way through the Tribulation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the more popular Pre-Tribulationist view doesn't involve any suffering for Christians.

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<sup>9</sup> Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* collection includes 8 volumes in the adult series and 24 volumes in the children's edition as well as videos and the DVD game. Total sales exceed 60 million copies. [www.leftbehind.com](http://www.leftbehind.com) (accessed January 2007)

<sup>10</sup> See Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Leicester, IVP, 2004), pp.191-202. J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,' *Collected Writings*, Prophetic. I, Vol. II, pp. 153-155.



Hal Lindsey speculates on how the Rapture will be perceived from the perspective of the non-Christian left behind,

There I was driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy... cars going in all directions... and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild. I think we've got an invasion from outer space.<sup>11</sup>

According to the website *Rapture Ready* after the Rapture,

The prophecy section in all Christian bookstores will be cleaned out, and you may need reservations to attend Sunday church services. Well, maybe not at all churches. The world will be in a state of supreme chaos, and out of this mess will arise the man who will have an answer to every question. This man, the Antichrist, will be the greatest salesman in history because he will sell the people the biggest lie ever. Satan will be so impressed with him that he will give this man his full power. At the end of this Tribulation there will be a great war known as Armageddon and Jesus will return visibly, defeat the Anti-Christ and reign on earth for a thousand years.<sup>12</sup>

In a review of *End Times* written by John Walvoord, *Jews for Jesus'* website promises reassuringly,

The end times can be happy and rewarding for Christians. The key is understanding them. With clarity, logic and conviction, this book dramatically

<sup>11</sup>Lindsey, *Late.*, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup><http://www.raptureready.com/rr-secret-rapture.html> (Accessed January 2007)

explores world events in light of biblical prophecy, outlining the precepts of our faith. Written by one of the field's top experts, it is the definitive work on prophecy.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, they advertise LaHaye's bestselling books *Left Behind* series:

Thrilling end-time adventure looks at life on Earth following the Rapture. In one cataclysmic moment, millions around the globe disappear, vehicles careen out of control, loved ones vanish before your eyes, global chaos ensues.... You'll pick it up - but not put it down!<sup>14</sup>

### **What does the Bible say about the Rapture?**

Cyrus Scofield in the footnotes to his *Reference Bible* has to contradict Jesus in order to perpetuate the notion of a secret Rapture of the saints before his visible return. In Matthew 13, in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus explains that the tares will be removed first and destroyed, then the wheat gathered. When the servants ask, "Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?" the master replies,

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. (Matthew 13:30).

Jesus is using an illustration to describe his return, and therefore we must not read in too much to the detail. Nevertheless, Jesus says that his return will be associated both with destruction and deliverance, condemnation and vindication. In a footnote to this verse, however, Scofield reverses the order and separates what Jesus combines to ensure it fits with his presuppositions.

The gathering of the tares into bundles for burning does not imply immediate judgment. At the end of this Age (v. 40) the tares are set apart for burning, but first the wheat is gathered into the barn.<sup>15</sup>

If there is any significance to the harvesting process in Jesus' parable, it is surely teaching the opposite to Scofield. Likewise in a footnote to Acts 1:11 Scofield ignores the promise made by the Angel that everyone will see Jesus when He

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<sup>13</sup> John Walvoord, *End Times, Understanding Today's World Events in Biblical Prophecy*, (Waco, Texas, Word, 1998); Jews for Jesus, <http://www.store.jewsforjesus.org/books/products/BK232.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Jews for Jesus, <http://www.store.jewsforjesus.org/books/products/sp057.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Cyrus Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1945), fn. 1, p. 1016.

returns. Instead, he claims that after Jesus returns to take believers secretly to heaven, there will then be a 'national regathering' of Israel, the 'destruction of the present political world-system followed by world-wide Gentile conversion.'<sup>16</sup>

The most frequently cited passage to justify a two-stage Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

In commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4:15, in his *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, Darby asserts,

Observe, also, that this revelation gives another direction to the hope of the Thessalonians, because it distinguishes with much precision between our departure hence to join the Lord in the air, and our return to the earth with Him.<sup>17</sup>

Now can you find in these verses a two-stage return of Jesus, first secret then visible? With, as Darby suggests, 'much precision'? No, neither can I. Ironically some proponents claim that only those who do 'see' it in these verses will be raptured. Maybe it's a case of 'seeing is believing'. Darby certainly regarded disinterest in his teaching on the rapture a sign that the church was apostate and his own 'Assembly' elect. Following Darby's rejection of the main line denominations, Hal Lindsey seems to share the same sectarian views.

<b>J. N. Darby</b>	<b>Hal Lindsey</b>
The rapture of the saints before the appearing of Christ, strange as it may appear to some, has nothing to say to the church, directly or exclusively; but as we form part of those caught up, it of course, interests us in the highest degree. <sup>18</sup>	I've said it before and I will no doubt say it again: When the Rapture occurs, many churches will not have to find a new pastor. That's how badly infected the modern church is with deceiving spirits. <sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., fn. 1. p. 1148

<sup>17</sup> J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, Vol. V. (London, G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, Prophetic. IV, Vol. II, p. 118.

The passage from Thessalonians does teach a sequence to the return of Jesus. But it is not the one dispensationalists hold to:

<b>The Sequence to the Return of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 4</b>	
1.	Jesus will return to earth (4:16)
2.	His return will be associated with loud sounds (4:16)
3.	The dead in Christ will be raised first (4:16)
4.	Those believers still alive will be caught up to meet him in the air (4:17)
5.	We will be with the Lord forever (4:17)

Nothing in 1 Thessalonians, or in fact any other New Testament passage, teaches that Jesus will return secretly to take believers to heaven for seven years and then return with them to earth for another thousand years.

The most conclusive repudiation of the notion of a secret rapture, however, comes from Jesus himself in Matthew 24:30-31.

At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31)

Jesus is using vivid imagery from the Old Testament to describe his return. The great trumpet refers to the silver trumpets used to call God's people to worship (Numbers 10:1-10) and the four winds (Jeremiah 49:36; Zechariah 2:6) symbolise the entire world. In this way Jesus will gather his elect "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

The sequence in this passage is equally clear and reinforces that found in 1 Thessalonians.

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<sup>19</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth 2000 AD* (Palos Verdes, Western Front, 1994), p. 29.



<b>The Sequence to the Return of Jesus in Matthew 24</b>	
1.	There will be a sign of Jesus appear in the sky (24:30)
2.	Jesus himself will appear visibly (24:30)
3.	The whole world will see him and mourn (24:30)
4.	The event will be accompanied by loud sounds (24:31)
5.	Then Jesus will send his angels to gather his elect (24:31)

So believers will be caught up to be with Jesus when he returns visibly, not before. The whole world will be watching and mourning. What is certain from this passage is that the rapture will not occur before Jesus returns; and that nothing relating to the return of Jesus will be secret. Perhaps not surprisingly, there are no footnotes or comments to these important verses in either the *Scofield Reference Bible* or the *New Scofield Study Bible*.

Sadly, the mistaken idea of a secret rapture has generated a lot of bad theology. It is probably the reason why many Christians don't seem to care about climate change or with preserving diminishing supplies of natural resources. They are similarly not worried about the national debt, nuclear war, or world poverty because they hope to be raptured to heaven and avoid suffering the consequences of the coming global holocaust. Like a sinking ship, the world is doomed. There is therefore no point in preserving the world or getting involved in charitable or humanitarian work. Every human tragedy, be it earthquake, hurricane or war merely adds to the mounting evidence, proving their contention that the end of the world is nigh.<sup>20</sup>

The hype surrounding the *Left Behind* phenomenon is a tragic example of what happens when people major on minors and dogmatise on obscure verses. We must base our beliefs on the central truths of God's word. I do not believe God has written off this beautiful world. Nor am I desperate to leave it. We have a mission to fulfil (Philippians 1:21-25). I am not the only one who will be happy to be 'left behind', at least until Jesus does return.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For useful critiques of the two-stage Rapture theory – see Crawford Gribben, *Rapture Fiction and the Evangelical Crisis* (Webster, New York, Evangelical Press, 2006); and Dave MacPherson, *The Great Rapture Hoax*, (Fletcher, North Carolina, New Puritan Library, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> See Ted Noel, *I Want to be Left Behind* (Maitland, Florida, BibleOnly Press, 2002).

## The Signs of the Times

In a Newsweek article headed *Are These the End Times?* Tim LaHaye was asked “How do you interpret what’s happening in the Middle East? Are you seeing signs that these are the end of days? By now you should be able to predict what LaHaye had to say:

Biblically speaking, the very nations that are mentioned in prophecy-and have been mentioned for 2,500 years as occupying the focus of the tension of the last days – are the very nations that are involved in the conflict right now. That may be one of the reasons there’s a sudden interest in bible prophecy because all of a sudden they realize end-time events could possibly take place and break forth right now.<sup>22</sup>

While Jesus stated, “about that day or hour no one knows.” (Matthew 24:36), some of his followers today are at least trying, it seems, to predict the month. Visit the website of *Rapture Ready* and you can check out the Rapture Index. Over 40 distinct signs are identified from the Scriptures, grouped under four headings: ‘natural’, ‘social’, ‘religious’ and ‘prophetic’. Each sign is given a score based on its frequency, intensity or significance at any given moment in time. The combined scores are then totaled. Using this method of calculation, apparently anything over 150 means ‘fasten your seatbelts’.<sup>23</sup>

I recently preached a sermon on Daniel 7-8 and speculated on possible ways in which this passage may contain ‘signs’ for our generation. Daniel gives us three clues that help us identify that this passage is talking about the present day.

1. “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.” (Daniel 7:21). We are dealing with a time of great persecution of Christians. More Christians died in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than in the previous 19 centuries combined.
2. “The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom” (Daniel 7:24). We must be dealing with events soon to take place because this configuration of ten nations has not yet happened in history.

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<sup>22</sup> Brian Braiker, *Are These the End Times?* *Newsweek*, July 28, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14083809/site/newsweek> (Accessed January 2007)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.raptureready.com> (Accessed January 2007)

3. 'Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." ... but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future ' (Daniel 8:17, 26). These visions in Daniel 7-8 clearly refer to events close to the end of the world.

Where is this leading then? Think about it: before you can read a map you must first pin-point your present location on it. It is the same with prophecy. Daniel mentions four animals that represent four empires – the lion with eagle wings, the bear, the leopard, and a fourth, too awful to describe. Let's see if we can identify them. If we start with the last - we have already observed that the ten kingdoms have not yet emerged. This may describe a super confederation of the United States of Europe or possibly a new Islamic Confederacy emerging around Iran and Syria. If the fourth beast will rise in the near future we can easily name the other three. First, the lion. Which nation has the lion as its symbol? Dead right - Britain. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain had the largest empire in the world. One quarter of the world's population and one fifth of the world's land mass was part of the British Empire. What about the eagle wings? The USA of course! Since the Second World War, the United States took over the role of Britain and became the world's only English-speaking super power, but is already in decline. So the first beast represents the British and American empire. What of the bear? Which nation is symbolised by a bear? Russia, of course. For nearly 70 years the Soviet communist Empire, aided by China dominated the world. I can see you are getting into this now. So what about the Leopard with four bird's wings and four heads? Did you know that the UN and G8 has divided the world into four sectors - the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa - which will ultimately be ruled by four heads who will answer to the UN Security Council led by the Secretary General? When I preached this sermon, Tony Blair had just announced he was standing down as leader of the Labour Party. I went on to say, 'And you know the leading candidate when the UN's Kofi Annan retires? Tony Blair. . . If Tony Blair does become the new UN Secretary General, (or gets a job behind the scenes) we are assured stronger powers for the UN, the use of pre-emptive force against countries defying UN resolutions, and a more united world. Have you read that some where before in the Book of Revelation?'

OK - I need to make an apology. I have been leading you astray. I may not have actually convinced you but I certainly convinced most of my congregation judging

from the open mouths and wide eyes that day. You see how easy it is to play games with the biblical text? With a vivid imagination and a gullible audience it is not hard to 'prove' selected prophecies are coming true today. Go to the website of Rapture Ready and you will find a list of possible anti-Christ figures. In 2006 the list included Bill Gates, Tony Blair, Prince Charles and Kofi Annan.<sup>24</sup>

How then should we interpret the 'Signs of the Times'?

Jesus said,

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:25-28)

Here are some generic signs to watch out for:

<b>Type of sign</b>	<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>Bible reference</b>
Geological	Great earthquakes	Luke 21:11
Biological	Plagues and famines	Luke 21:11
Political	Jerusalem under Gentile control	Luke 21:20-24
Military	Wars and rumours of wars	Mark 13:7-8
Moral	Lawlessness, violence and immorality	2 Timothy 3:1-5
Religious	Apostasy and false prophets	Matthew 24:10-13
Evangelistic	The gospel proclaimed to the whole world	Matthew 24:14

Now these signs have been evident since Jesus first described them. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Jesus wanted us to understand that the magnitude or frequency of these signs would increase before he returns so that believers would recognise their significance. But the point is – they were never intended to tell us the time of Jesus' return.

Think of them like the hazard warning signs you see on a motorway. They keep you alert and ready for what ever lies ahead. They were never intended to be like mileage signs that tell you how far away you are from your destination. Jesus wants to keep

<sup>24</sup> [www.raptureready.com](http://www.raptureready.com) Accessed November 2006

us awake not guessing. And any way, the troubles and sorrows predicted by Jesus are not the end in themselves but only the 'birth pangs'. Ask your mother what that feels like. These signs merely precede the visible appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody knows when Jesus will return. Two things are certain though. First, we are nearer to that day than ever before in history. And second, these signs certainly appear more evident in our generation than ever before. The whole point of the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) is that we are wise if we live as if Jesus is returning today. If the thought that Jesus were returning today would cause you to change your priorities, then you better change them.

### **Armageddon or 'I'm a geddin out o' here'**

From the number of column inches devoted to the Battle of Armageddon in books by prophecy experts like Tim LaHaye, John Walvoord and Hal Lindsey, you might be forgiven for thinking it must be a pretty important subject in the Bible. It comes as a bit of a surprise therefore to discover that *Har Megiddo* (the hill of Megiddo) gets only one mention in the entire New Testament (Revelation 16:13-20).

The *Scofield Bible* notes inform us that, 'Armageddon is the appointed place for the beginning of the great battle in which the Lord, at his coming in glory, will deliver the Jewish remnant besieged by the Gentile world-powers under the Beast and False Prophet.'<sup>25</sup>

Confident that Christians will escape and witness the events from the grandstands of heaven, exponents describe in graphic detail the suffering that will take place for unbelievers left on earth. Charles Ryrie, for example predicts this will be, 'the time of Israel's greatest bloodbath.'<sup>26</sup> John Walvoord similarly predicts a holocaust in which at least 750 million people will perish.<sup>27</sup> Tim LaHaye warns that 'Jacob's trouble', prophesied by Jeremiah 30:7, will certainly be far worse than the Spanish Inquisition ... or even the Holocaust of Adolf Hitler.'<sup>28</sup> Not to be outdone, in *The Final Battle*, Hal Lindsey claims, 'Israel is in for a very rough time. The Jewish State will be brought to

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<sup>25</sup> Scofield, *Scofield*, op.cit., fn. 4, pp1348-1349.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Ryrie, *The Living End*, (Old Tappan, Revell, 1976), p81. The title of chapter 8 is entitled 'A Bloodbath for Israel.'

<sup>27</sup> Walvoord, *Israel*, op.cit., p108.

<sup>28</sup> LaHaye, *Are*, op.cit., p146.

the brink of destruction.<sup>29</sup> In a later chapter he clarifies what this will mean for the Jews:

The land of Israel and the surrounding area will certainly be targeted for nuclear attack. Iran and all the Muslim nations around Israel have already been targeted with Israeli nukes ... All of Europe, the seat of power of the Antichrist, would surely be a nuclear battlefield, as would the United States ... Zechariah gives an unusual, detailed account of how hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the Israel battle zone will die. Their flesh will be consumed from their bones, their eyes from their sockets, and their tongues from their mouths while they stand on their feet (Zechariah 14:12). This is exactly the sort of thing that happens from the intense radiation of a neutron type bomb.<sup>30</sup>

John Hagee takes a similar line to Hal Lindsey over Iran. At the July 19th, 2006 Washington DC inaugural event for Christians United for Israel, after recorded greeting from George W. Bush, and in the presence of four US Senators and the Israeli ambassador to the US, John Hagee stated :

The United States must join Israel in a pre-emptive military strike against Iran to fulfill God's plan for both Israel and the West... a biblically prophesied end-time confrontation with Iran, which will lead to the Rapture, Tribulation, and Second Coming of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Like Zechariah, the Book of Revelation is fertile ground for ultra-literalists who believe an imminent nuclear holocaust is forecast. For example, in Revelation 14 we read:

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (Revelation 14:17-20)

Lindsey claims this describes the consequence of a nuclear holocaust. For a distance of 200 miles from the Valley of Jezreel near Megiddo across to the Jordan Valley then down to the Dead Sea and on to the Gulf of Aqaba, he claims the entire valley will be filled with the debris of war and the bodies of animals and people, and above all, blood.

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<sup>29</sup> Lindsey, *Final*, op.cit., p184.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255-7.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Posner, "Pastor Strangelove" The American Prospect Online, <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=11541> <Accessed March 2007>

I have travelled the entire length of this valley ... It is almost impossible to imagine the valley covered with blood five feet high! Yet that is exactly what God predicts, and He always fulfils His Word. Some have asked, "Wouldn't the blood coagulate and not flow?" Blood exposed to intense radiation doesn't coagulate ... Because of the intense radiation, blood will not coagulate. It will literally become a sea of blood five feet deep.<sup>32</sup>

While similar speculative interpretations are common among other End-Times commentators, William Hendriksen offers an alternative and rather more rational explanation for the figures contained in this passage.

In the picture that John sees, a lake of blood results. It is so deep that horses can swim in it. It spreads out in all directions to the extent of sixteen hundred stadia. Remember that four is the number of the universe and the earth. This is the judgment of the wicked. Ten is the number of completeness. So, sixteen hundred, which is the product of four time four, times ten times ten, would seem to indicate that this is the thoroughly complete judgment of the wicked. And the winepress of God's wrath was trodden down outside the Holy City!<sup>33</sup>

So, while Revelation 16:14-16 may just possibly be describing a literal battle that will soon take place near Megiddo, it is more likely that John is describing the final cosmic overthrow of evil by Almighty God.

### **The Future Assessed : But which one?**

Christians have historically viewed the future differently depending on how they have interpreted the reference to a thousand years in Revelation 20:1-6.<sup>34</sup> Some take it literally as a period of time on earth while others interpret it metaphorically describing events from a heavenly perspective. It boils down to one of three options and you will find well known Christians associated with each.

#### **1. Amillennialism**

Amillennialists believe Revelation 20 describes the present reign of Jesus Christ in heaven (Matthew 28:18-20). There will be no literal or physical kingdom on earth when Christ returns. The kingdom of God is present in the world now as Christ rules the Church through his Word and the Spirit. When

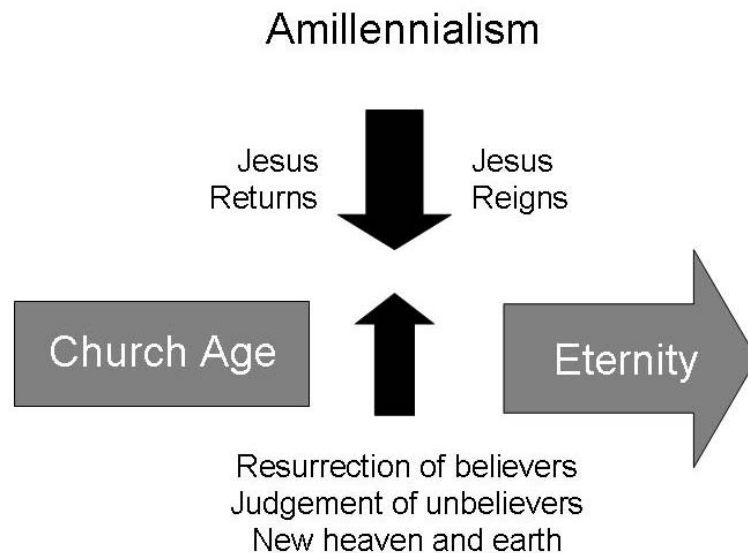
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<sup>32</sup> Lindsey, *Final*, op.cit., pp. 251-252, 284

<sup>33</sup> William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, (London, IVP, 1940), p. 156.

<sup>34</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze, Sorting out Evangelical Options*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1992); Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1977); Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation: Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1997).

Christ returns there will be a general resurrection of the dead followed by the final judgment. He will reign with his saints over a recreated earth in eternity. John Calvin and Louis Berkhof were amillennialists. For amillennialists, Revelation 20 is metaphorical.<sup>35</sup>



## 2. Postmillennialism

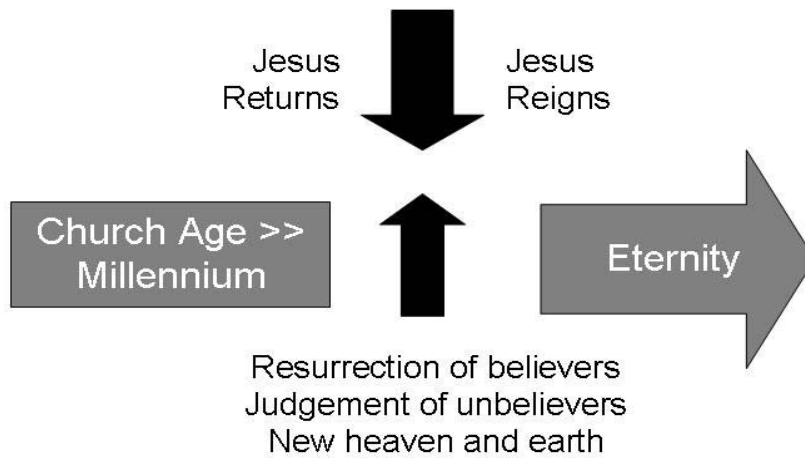
Postmillennialists believe that there will be an extended period of peace and prosperity on earth prior to the return of Christ. This is the millennium during which the gospel will be proclaimed to all nations and Christian values will be universally embraced. When Christ returns there will be a general resurrection of the dead followed by the final judgment. He will reign with his saints over a recreated earth in eternity. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield were postmillennialists. For postmillennialists, Revelation 20 is symbolic.

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<sup>35</sup> The illustrations for the three main views of the Millennium are adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, IVP, 2004), pp. 1109-1111.



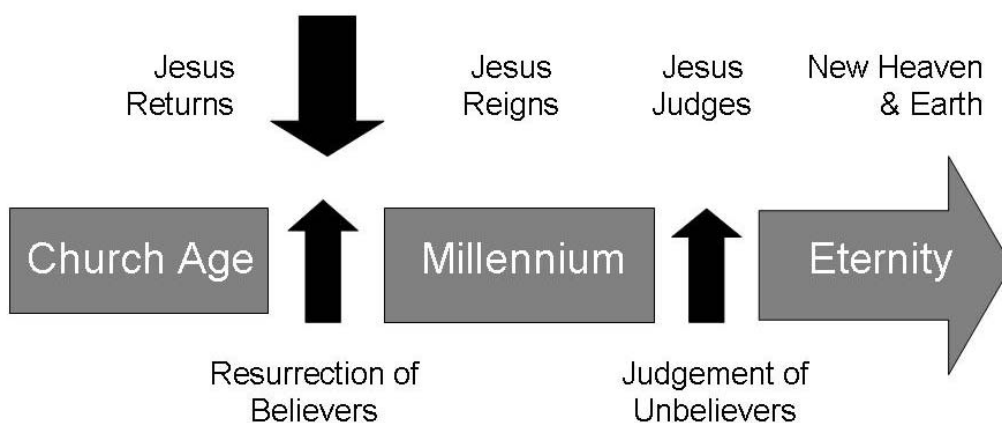
## Postmillennialism



### 3. Premillennialism

Premillennialists believe world events are leading to a climactic war and Christ will return to intervene. The first resurrection will occur and Christ will reign on earth in Jerusalem for a thousand years. At the end of the millennium, the last judgement will occur, Satan will be destroyed and the heavens and earth renewed. Christ's temporal kingdom will merge into his eternal kingdom. There are two variants, Covenantal and Dispensational depending on whether Israel and the Church will share eternity together. Cyrus Scofield and Hal Lindsey are examples. For premillennialists, Revelation 20 is literal.

## Premillennialism



Those who see references to a millennium in Revelation 20:1-6 as metaphorical or symbolic (amillennial and post-millennial) tend to view the future positively. Those who believe Jesus will reign on earth for a thousand years (premillennial) tend to be pessimistic about future events prior to his return. Christian Zionists are invariably premillennialists and among the most pessimistic of all. Their highly speculative and imaginative interpretation of ancient prophecies has led many to believe the restoration of Jews, the founding of the State of Israel and conflict with the Arabs are signs of the imminent return of Jesus. Grace Halsell observes:

Convinced that a nuclear Armageddon is an inevitable event within the divine scheme of things, many evangelical dispensationalists have committed themselves to a course for Israel that, by their own admission, will lead directly to a holocaust indescribably more savage and widespread than any vision of carnage that could have generated in Adolf Hitler's criminal mind.<sup>36</sup>

Such a fatalistic view of the future, with its prewritten script, is inherently suspicious and pessimistic about anything international, ecumenical, or involving the European Community or United Nations. Efforts to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East are spurned as counterfeit and a satanic ploy to beguile Israel. Such paranoia might be deemed a sick joke were it not so pervasive and influential, it seems, in shaping US foreign policy with its perpetual war against the 'Axis of Evil'. Its greatest danger is surely that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **What does the Bible say about the return of Jesus?**

Here are some promises from the New Testament to hold on to.

- 1. It will be a personal return** (John 14:2-3).
- 2. It will be a visible return** (Acts 1:9-11).
- 3. It will be an unmistakable return** (Matthew 24:23-27, 30).

Jesus warns us against being 'taken in' by news that he has returned secretly or invisibly. His description should leave us in no doubt. "Just as the lightening comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:27) Further more, in Revelation 1:7, the Apostle John promises, "He is coming with the clouds and every eye shall see Him."

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<sup>36</sup> Halsell, *Prophecy*, op.cit., p195; See also DeMar & Leithart, *Legacy*, op.cit., p26.

So his return will be personal, visible and unmistakable.

#### **4. It will be a sudden return (Mark 13:32-36)**

Paul also emphasizes how sudden this event will be "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52).

#### **5. It will be an unexpected return (2 Peter 3:4, 10)**

Peter also explains that some people will deny that Jesus is coming again. When Jesus came to earth the first time, he was not expected by the majority of people. It will be the same at his second coming. Jesus warned his disciples, "for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will." (Matthew 24:44). As for the unbelieving world, "While they are saying 'Peace and safety' then destruction will come upon them suddenly." (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

#### **6. It will be a glorious return (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)**

Jesus will return with the clouds (Revelation 1:7); with great power (Mark 13:36) and with his glorious angels (Matthew 16:27). In stark contrast to his first advent when he came as a vulnerable baby, Jesus will return in the full manifestation of His power.

Based on the New Testament there are six things we can be sure about concerning the return of Jesus. It will be personal, visible, unmistakable, sudden, unexpected and glorious.

### **How should we live in the light of Christ's return?**

While there will always remain an element of mystery concerning the timing and precise details of our Lord's coming, he has told us enough to satisfy our faith, keep us watchful and assure us that he will return to take us to be with him where he reigns in glory. This is not our home.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

In Matthew 24, having explained that the hour of his return is unknown, Jesus challenges his followers to do three things.

### **Be Watchful**

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matthew 24:42). This means we must be vigilant, constantly aware that Jesus may return at any moment. We must constantly review our priorities, our choices and our actions in the light of Jesus’ imminent return.

### **Be Faithful**

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant” (Matthew 24:45). Jesus never commands us to be fruitful. He does command faithfulness. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. Faithful to what we already know of God’s will for our lives. Faithful to the one who has called us, who saved us and who gifted us.

### **Be Serving**

“It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.” (Matthew 24:46). We are told to be watchful, faithful and serving. Instead of speculating about the Lord’s return, we have work to do – serving him according to the talents and gifts he has entrusted to us. Why? Because above all, Jesus has entrusted his mission to us. Which is? To make disciples – fully devoted followers of Jesus - of all nations. While we have time, let us use every opportunity God gives us to tell others how much God loves them. Jesus promises, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17). Nearing the end of his life, the apostle Paul looked back over his life, first as an enemy of Christ, then as his servant and expressed his hope for the future. “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8). Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus? Do you long for his appearing? Is there unfinished business in your life? Then finish it quickly. Be ready before it is too late. Is there anything more important than Jesus in your life? Then it is too important. Revise your values before he has to, to your shame. If you knew that the Lord was returning tomorrow would you change your priorities today? Then change them. Live today as if it were your last. Live as if it were yesterday that Christ

died, as if He rose from the dead today, and as if He is coming back tomorrow. Then you will not be ashamed at His appearing and you will not lose your reward. "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have." (Revelation 3:11). Maranatha!

### **Chapter Summary Points**

1. The *Left Behind* phenomenon has created a destructive culture of pessimism and fatalism in Western Christianity.
2. This polarised and apocalyptic world view appears to be shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East and destabilising the peace process.
3. The idea of a secret two-stage Rapture is a recent innovation without biblical foundation.
4. The Signs of the return of Christ are intended to keep us watchful not tell us the time.
5. Armageddon is not necessarily a reference to an apocalyptic nuclear holocaust but the cosmic battle between good and evil.
6. Jesus Christ will return personally, visibly, unmistakably, suddenly, unexpectedly and gloriously.
7. In the light of his imminent return we should be watchful and faithful servants doing his will.

### **Passages to Review**

Matthew 24:23-31; Mark 13:32-36; Luke 21:25-28; John 14:1-6; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; 2 Peter 3:4-10; Revelation 3:11; 7:9-16; 14:17-20; 16:13-20; 20:1-6.

### **Questions for further study**

1. Why has the *Left Behind* craze gained such popularity?
2. How would you refute the idea of a secret Rapture from Scripture?
3. What are the 'Signs of the Times'?
4. How should we interpret them?
5. How should we live in the light of the Lord's return?

## **Conclusions: The Last Word on the Middle East?**

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” ... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-2)

What is your vision of the future? However we understand the detail of God’s working in our world today, these verses describe where the world is heading. This is God’s purpose and therefore our mandate - the healing of the nations. God’s plan is nothing less than paradise restored. We look forward to the beauty, harmony and intimacy of a restored relationship between God and his people, where pain, suffering and death are no more. Is the way we view Israel and the Church assisting or hindering God’s plan? Are we furthering the biblical mandate to proclaim the gospel to Jew and Gentile or have we substituted ‘another’ gospel? Are we ‘doing justice and loving mercy’ in the Middle East or are we exacerbating tensions? Are we walking in the way of peace or we hindering reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis?

### **What have we found so far?**

In Chapter 1, we considered the significance of our presuppositions and their influence on our understanding of the Bible. We introduced the relationship between Israel and the Church by comparing and contrasting two major theological positions, Covenantalism and Dispensationalism, setting the scene by refuting some of the red herrings used to discredit those who challenge Zion’s Christian soldiers (Matthew 22:29).

In Chapter 2, we recognised the importance of reading the Bible literally and contextually. We explored the relationship between the Old and New Covenant and saw how there is not only an organic unity, but also a clear and irreversible transition from the Old to the New. We noted how the prophetic and apocalyptic books like

Daniel and Revelation need careful handling to avoid erroneous interpretations. We saw how important it is that we resist taking contemporary events to be the realisation of biblical prophecy. Instead, as we read the Bible, we must ask how a particular passage fits within God's progressive revelation and points to God's purposes revealed fully and finally in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27).

In Chapter 3, we discovered that God has only ever had one 'chosen' people. Citizenship has always been inclusive and spiritual, never exclusive and physical despite human efforts to make it so. Membership was always on the basis of grace through faith not race or ritual. The Church of Jesus Christ, or the Israel of God, includes both the Old Testament saints as well as the New Testament saints. All who looked forward to the coming of their Saviour, as much as those who recognized Jesus when he came, are the true children of Abraham and Sarah. The promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled in and through the Church. The beautiful imagery used to describe God's people in the Old Testament is repeatedly applied to God's people in the New Testament. When Jesus died on the cross, he broke down the wall of separation between Jewish and Gentile believers making one new humanity reconciling both to God in himself (Ephesians 2:15-16).

In Chapter 4, we surveyed the purpose and extent of the Promised Land. We saw that the Land always belonged to God. His people were only ever aliens and tenants with, at best, temporary residence. Their presence in the Land was always conditional on faithful obedience. Unfaithfulness led to exile in Assyria and Babylon. Repentance led to restoration. God's kingdom on earth was always international. Jesus redefined the concept of the kingdom as a spiritual and heavenly reality that encompasses his faithful servants of all nations. Jesus repudiated the notion of an earthly and nationalistic kingdom. His disciples looked forward to a better and more secure inheritance (Hebrews 11:16).

In Chapter 5, we considered the place of Jerusalem in God's purposes. Far from being an exclusive capital for the Jewish people, we discovered that the Old Testament vision is of a city which is intended to be inclusive and a focus for all nations. In the New Testament, Jerusalem becomes associated increasingly with the death and resurrection of Jesus. We considered the meaning of ending of 'the times

of the Gentiles' and recognized that this best describes the period before the return of Jesus. Thoughts of national sovereignty are eclipsed by images of the heavenly Jerusalem which is the true home of all who trust in Christ (Galatians 4:26).

In Chapter 6 we thought about the temple and considered its role in teaching people about the history of salvation, the seriousness of sin and need for sacrifice. That is why we remained unconvinced by the arguments for a new temple in Jerusalem. The language used to describe the temple of the 'living God' (2 Corinthians 6:16) is now applied to the church; with Jesus as the cornerstone and his followers as the 'living stones' that form it. When Jesus died to atone for our sins, the Temple in Jerusalem became redundant.

In chapter 7, we faced the logical consequences of Christian Zionism which is inherently pessimistic about the future. This is because it is based on assumptions about the Jewish people, the Land, Jerusalem and the Temple which are drawn almost exclusively from the 'shadows' of the Old Testament rather than the 'light' of the New Testament. They do not take account of the way these concepts are fulfilled, replaced, annulled, expanded or given new definition by Jesus and the Apostles. How we should view the future is a matter on which godly Christians are wise not to be dogmatic. We noted that the role of the 'signs' of Jesus' return are to keep us alert not tell the time. References to Armageddon do not necessarily lock us into believing there has to be an apocalyptic war between Islam and Christianity. While the idea of a two stage Rapture is entirely fictional, the return of Jesus is not. It will be personal, visible, unmistakable and sudden. Jesus is coming soon! Our role, as his servants, is to be watchful and faithful (Matthew 24:45).

The simple chart below summarises these findings. It shows that in terms of identifying God's people, in terms of the significance of the Land, the centrality of Jerusalem and the importance of the Temple, Old Testament type and shadow gives way to New Testament reality. In each aspect the hopes and expectations of the Old Covenant have been fulfilled in the New Covenant, fully and finally in the person of Jesus Christ.



	<b>Old Testament Promise</b>	<b>New Testament Fulfilment</b>
God's People	Genesis 12:3 Genesis 22:17 Isaiah 5:1-7 Psalm 80 Deuteronomy 18:19 Amos 9:11-12 Hosea 1:10, 2:23 Genesis 21:10	Galatians 3:16, 29 Revelation 5:9 Matthew 21:33-41 John 15 Acts 3:23 Acts 15:14-19 Romans 9:21-26 Galatians 4:30
God's Land	Psalm 37:11 Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 Deuteronomy 5:16 Genesis 23:4; 1 Chr. 29:15	Matthew 5:5 Acts 3:24-25 Ephesians 6:1-3 1 Peter 1
God's City	Jeremiah 12:7; 22:5 Isaiah 29:3; Ezekiel 4:2 Isaiah 63:3-6 Isaiah 54:1 Isaiah 52:1	Luke 13:34-35 Luke 19:41-44 Luke 21:24 Galatians 4:26-27 Revelation 21:2, 22-26
God's Temple	2 Samuel 7:5-7 Psalm 40:6-8 Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 52:11 Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16	John 2:19-21 Hebrews 10:1-10 2 Corinthians 6:16-17 1 Peter 2:5-7

In his helpful book, *God's Big Picture*, Vaughan Roberts traces the story-line of the Bible.<sup>37</sup> He shows how God's plan of redemption, using the imagery of the King and his kingdom, is revealed progressively from Genesis to Revelation as a "binding theme of the whole Bible".<sup>38</sup> Citing Graeme Goldsworthy, Roberts explains the concept of the kingdom as "God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing".<sup>39</sup> The following chart is adapted from his book and summarises, what we have discovered about the continuity between Israel and the Church. It also shows the progression from Old Testament promise to New Testament fulfilment.

<sup>37</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the story-line of the Bible* (Leicester, IVP, 2003), p. 149.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1981), p. 47.

<b>The Kingdom of God</b>	<b>God's People</b>	<b>God's Place</b>	<b>God's Purposes</b>	<b>God's Son</b>	<b>God's Word</b>
The Pattern of the Kingdom	Adam and Eve	Garden of Eden	Perfect relationship	Creator (John 1:3)	Genesis 1-2
The Perished Kingdom	Pre-Abraham	Banished	Broken relationship	Offspring (John 8:56)	Genesis 3-11
The Promised Kingdom	Abraham and his descendants	Wandering	Covenant relationship	Bronze snake (John 3:14)	Genesis 12-Deuteronomy
The Partial Kingdom	Israel from Joshua to Solomon	Canaan	Obedient relationship	Son of David (John 7:42)	Joshua-2 Chronicles 9
The Prophesied Kingdom	The Exiles	Captivity	Repentant relationship	The Son of God (John 8:31-58)	2 Chronicles 10-Malachi
The Present Kingdom	The Disciples	True Temple	Justified relationship	Passover Lamb of God (John 1:29)	Matthew-John
The Proclaimed Kingdom	The Church	World	Renewed relationship	Saviour of the world (John 4:42)	Acts-Revelation 3
The Perfected Kingdom	Every nation, tribe, people and language	New heaven and earth	Blessed relationship	Lord (John 20:28)	Revelation 4-21

In each phase of God's redemptive plan, notice the unique role which the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled in bringing our redemption to completion.

### **What difference has Jesus made?**

The fundamental question we have considered in this book is this: What difference did the coming of Jesus Christ make to the traditional Jewish hopes and expectations? Was it the fulfillment or merely the postponement of those hopes?

Remember this is not a new controversy. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, Christians debated the relationship between Israel and the Church. The Book of Hebrews is all about the relationship between the Old and New Covenants and how Jesus fulfilled the first in order to inaugurate the second.

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. (Hebrews 3:1-6)

The writer of Hebrews develops this argument in chapter 4. In an overview of Jewish history, the progressive revelation of God's 'rest' points to, and then beyond, Canaan. It begins with God resting on the seventh day of creation (Hebrews 4:3-4). Because of their rebellion in the desert, God denied the adults access to the Land (4:5). Once in the Land, even the 'rest' from their enemies achieved under Joshua was provisional (4:8). Psalm 95 is quoted to indicate a future rest beyond even the zenith of the kingdom achieved under David (4:6-7). Believers are urged to look forward to and enter a more permanent rest than provided in Canaan.

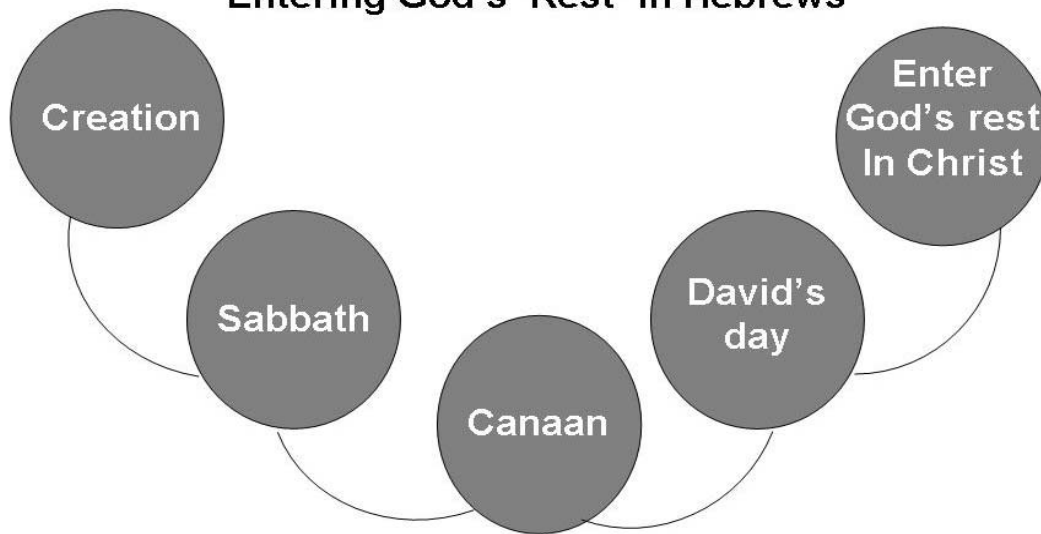
There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also rest from their own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9-11)

Craig Blomberg provides a helpful illustration showing the progression from creation to Christ in these verses.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: Acts to Revelation. An Introduction and Survey* (Nottingham, Apollos, 2006), p. 419

## Entering God's 'Rest' in Hebrews



Clearly, Orthodox Jews who do not yet recognize Jesus as their Messiah, still have their eyes fixed on Moses, adhere to the demands of the Law and cling to the promises of a literal inheritance in the Land. Christians who identify with Zionism and believe the Old Testament promises the Land, Jerusalem and the Temple to the Jewish people in perpetuity, are in danger of doing the same.

Hebrews 6 explains that the progression from the Old to the New Covenant, which was consummated in the death of Jesus - our ransom sacrifice, is irreversible.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

This is because, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:19-20). Faith in Jesus Christ, as the consummation of all the hopes of Israel the highest spiritual mountain top beyond which it is downhill which ever way a person goes. There is nothing greater, nothing higher, and certainly nothing more magnificent than the mountain top of divine revelation found in the Lord Jesus Christ. David Breese describes the alternatives:

To move beyond that mountain top in the pursuit of something better is to lose oneself in the crags and crevices of the slopes that fall away from real Christianity. And beyond the crevices of heresy are the fever swamps of the cults, where the serpents and the scorpions wait. Beyond rationality is insanity, beyond medicine is poison, beyond sex is perversion, beyond fascination is addiction, beyond love is lust, beyond reality is fantasy. Just so, beyond Christianity is death, hopelessness, darkness, and heresy.<sup>41</sup>

As we have already seen, one verse in Hebrews sums up the relationship between the Old and New Covenant. “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” (Hebrews 8:13). The destruction of the Temple with its holy of holies and altar, the death of the High Priest, the dispersion of the Levites and the ending of animal sacrifices in 70 AD, fulfilled that prediction. The choice since then has been between two theologies. One based primarily on the fading shadows of the Old Covenant and one based on the reality of the New Covenant.

### **How then does the Old Testament relate to Jesus?**

Graeme Goldsworthy’s book, *According to Plan*, includes a simple but effective diagram, showing the relationship of the Old Testament to Christ, together with some New Testament assessments.<sup>42</sup> The Bible passages cited in this adaptation show conclusively that the Old Testament imagery and the promises associated with them, cannot be applied to the Jewish people and Judaism today, as if the coming of Jesus merely resulted in their postponement. They were fully and finally accomplished in Jesus Christ (John 5:39).

<b>Old Testament</b>	<b>Jesus Christ</b>	<b>Scripture Reference</b>
Prophetic word	Completed	Hebrews 1:1-2
All prophecy	Fulfilled	Acts 13:32-33
All God’s promises	Yes	2 Corinthians 1:20
David’s line	Ended	Romans 1:3
Promise to David	Answered	Acts 2:30-31
Mystery of Salvation	Revealed	Ephesians 3:3-6
Sacrifices	Finished	Hebrews 10:11-12
Eternal Purposes	Accomplished	Ephesians 3:11
Whole Old Testament	Concerning	Luke 24:27

<sup>41</sup> David Breese, *Know the Marks of the Cults* (Eastbourne, Victor Books, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester, IVP, 1991), p. 63.

The fulfilment in Christ of the Old Testament promises concerning the Land, the Law and Temple is best articulated in Stephen's sermon in Acts 6-7. His 'Old Testament survey' not only refutes the serious charges laid against him concerning the Temple and the Law but points to Jesus as the fulfilment of both (Acts 6:12-14).

**1. The Land (Acts 7:1-18).**

Stephen begins by reminding them that while the Patriarchs were faithful, none received an inheritance in the promised land.

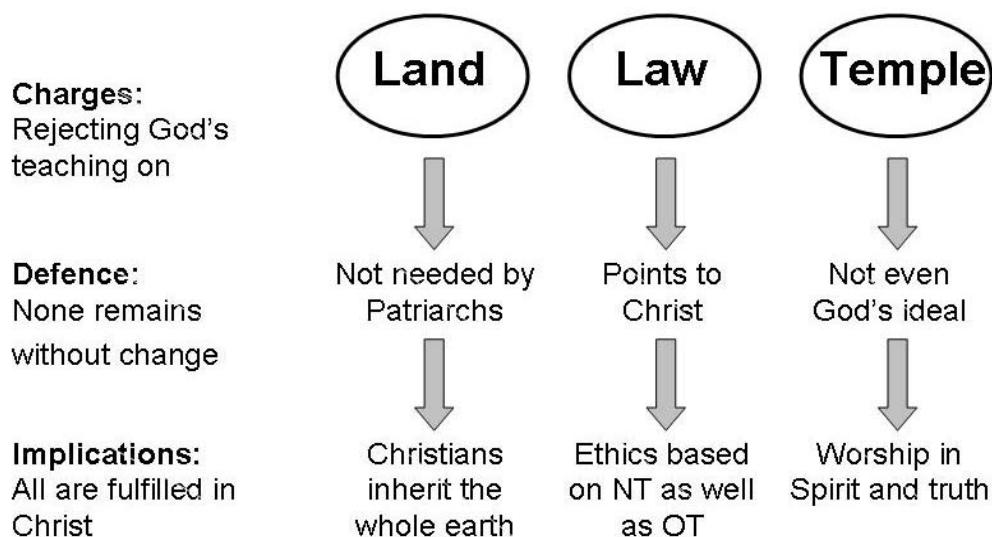
**2. The Law (Acts 7:18-43).**

Stephen reviews the life of Moses and alludes to the coming of another prophet whom the people should follow. Clearly his intent was to show that Jesus was the person Moses promised, and that his message should be heeded.

**3. The Temple (Acts 7:44-50).**

Stephen's sermon moved from the Land and Law to the most sensitive issue – the Temple. He points out that God had originally lived with his people in a portable tabernacle. When they wanted a king and temple like the surrounding nations, God acquiesced. Stephen quotes from Isaiah 66 to show that God anticipated the dangers associated with an immovable temple. (Acts 7:48-50)

### Stephen's Breakthrough (Acts 6-7)



Through his sermon, Stephen turns the tables on them and shows it is they who were lawbreakers not him. Craig Blomberg has produced an illuminating chart that highlights the charges against Stephen, his defence and implications for Christians.<sup>43</sup>

### **Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?**

If you want to delve further into the origins of this controversy, get hold of my book, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (IVP, 2004). It does three things: First, it traces the history of the movement, identifying the various strands of its family tree on both sides of the Atlantic. Second, it explores the theology of the movement and how the Bible is used and abused. Third, it examines the political agenda of Christian Zionism, and that's where it gets really scary. There are literally hundreds of organizations dedicated to realizing the Zionist agenda. Now do you see how what we believe affects how we behave?

If you would like to study this further or receive regular updates, check out [www.christian-zionism.org](http://www.christian-zionism.org) and my own website [www.sizers.org](http://www.sizers.org) for more articles, audio and video material.

### ***The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism***

This historic document was issued by the heads of the mainline denominations in Jerusalem in 2006 as an urgent plea for help from the worldwide Church to counter the destructive effects of Christian Zionism. Living in close proximity to Jews and Muslims, they experience on a daily basis its negative impact. In the eyes of many Muslims, Christianity is increasingly equated with one sided diplomatic support for Israel and aggressive military action in the Middle East. This is fueling tension not only between the West and Islam but endangering the very existence of the Church in Israel and Palestine. The text of the Document may be found on the websites mentioned above.

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<sup>43</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: Acts to Revelation. An Introduction and Survey* (Nottingham, Apollos, 2006), p. 37.

## **The Place of Israel**

I am honoured that we have John Stott's permission to include an unpublished sermon he once delivered at All Soul's, Langham Place, London. Entitled, *The Place of Israel*, it provides an erudite and succinct analysis of the controversy from a biblical perspective.

### **Now that you know these things**

In this series of lectures we have focused on biblical passages that speak about God's people, the Land, Jerusalem, the Temple and the future. By now you will have figured out why I believe Christian Zionism to be a defective, misguided and some times dangerous theology. When you distil it down, what are you left with? An exclusive theology driving a political agenda which elevates one nation over others rather than an inclusive theology centred on Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. In its worst forms, Christian Zionism uses the Bible to justify racial superiority, land expropriation, home demolitions, population transfer, colonial settlements, the denial of international law and the dehumanization of Arabs. It not only fuels islamophobia but also anti-Semitism and Islamist retaliation against Christians. What does Jesus think about all this? On Palm Sunday, Luke tells us, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42). I believe Jesus continues to weep not only over Jerusalem, a city whose very name means 'peace', but also for his children who promote a theology of war and conquest. It all seems a very long way from the simple teaching of Jesus who promised "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). There are three simple ways we can demonstrate our paternity, diffuse tensions between Jews, Christians and Muslims and contribute to justice, peace and reconciliation.

### **1. Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." For the



sake of my friends and of all the people, I will say, "Peace be within you." (Psalm 122:6-8).

## **2. Seek Peace and Pursue it**

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever among you would love life and see good days must keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:9-11; Psalm 34:12-16)

## **3. Proclaim the Prince of Peace**

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,<sup>3</sup> just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:4)

Jesus said, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17).