

CHAPTER V

THE MILLENNIAL RESURRECTIONS, JUDGMENTS AND COMINGS OF CHRIST

Scripture presents some rather clear-cut statements in regard to the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment in their relationship to the coming of Christ. Summarily at this point, the Word of God describes Christ's second coming as visible (Ac 1:11) and in great glory (Mt 25:31; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27). His appearing will be sudden (Lk 17:24; 1 Th 5:2) and instantaneous (Mt 24:30). The very purpose of his coming will be to raise all of the dead (Jn 5:28 f.; 1 Th 4:16 f.) and to judge mankind (Mt 25:32 f.; Ro 14:10). This is reiterated in the three ecumenical creeds as well as in the Lutheran Confessions (cf., e.g., AC XVII) and in the doctrinal statements of our own Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (cf. This We Believe, IX, 4). The Scriptures speak of a general resurrection of all the dead at Christ's next and final coming, which will be for the purpose of carrying out the judgment. Millennialists, however, often speak of two resurrections, four judgments and two comings of Christ. With some, three comings of Christ are in fact discernible, although they are reluctant to speak in terms of three eschatological comings.

Two Resurrections

The Millennial Position on the Two Resurrections

John T. Sharrit, in response to the question: "How many resur-

rections are mentioned in the Bible?" answers: "The Bible gives us a description of only TWO resurrections; one for the righteous, and one for the wicked."¹

John L. Benson, speaking only of the first of these two resurrections, says: "At the end of the tribulation and before the inauguration of the millennial kingdom the Lord will raise from the dead the Old Testament saints and the tribulation martyrs."²

The views expressed above are characteristic of modern millennialists. A divided resurrection is one of the marks by which to recognize millenarians. C. H. Little states in regard to millennial doctrine:

Previous to the day of judgment, Christ will personally return to the earth, and after having raised up the departed saints, or the martyrs, or a definite number of the elect, will set up a theocratic kingdom and reign on earth for a thousand years.³

In the following paragraph, however, Little says:

Some (Millenarians) place the Millennium after the Second Coming of Christ. According to this view, Christ will at His coming raise up all believers. Then will follow the thousand years' reign, which they will share with Christ. After this will occur the general resurrection, which will embrace unbelievers only.⁴

A divided resurrection, however, raises a number of perplexing questions which are hurriedly passed over or simply ignored by the vast majority of millennialists. Such questions as these arise: If

¹John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Mission Society, 1978), p 210.

²John L. Benson, The Future Reign of Christ on Planet Earth (Denver, Colo.: B/P Publications, 1974), p 25.

³C. H. Little, D. D., S. T. D., Disputed Doctrines (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1933), p 31.

⁴Ibid., p 31.

the initial resurrection is limited to "the departed saints, or the martyrs, or a definite number of the elect," when does the resurrection of the rest of the believers in Christ take place? Even assuming that all of the saints are raised in the "first" resurrection, what happens to those who are brought to faith and die during the millennium? This writer senses an inadequacy with even two resurrections in the framework of the millennial doctrine when one goes beyond the single, general resurrection of all men at Christ's coming.

Apparently Blackstone also felt the need for more than two resurrections as a result of millennial views. He partially solves the problem by dividing the first resurrection into two phases. He writes:

It seems plain that the resurrection of those 'who are Christ's at His coming,' include both those who constitute the Bride, who are raised at the Rapture, when Christ comes into the air, and the Old Testament saints, the friends of the bridegroom, who doubtless are raised in a different band from the Church, see Rev. 6:9-11, and also those who believe and suffer during the tribulation, who will be raised at the Revelation (when Christ comes to the earth), to take part with Him in the Millennial Kingdom.⁵

Thus the resurrection of the church and the Old Testament saints he has occurring at the rapture and refers to this as "the ingathering."⁶ Phase two of the first resurrection occurs at the revelation and involves the tribulation saints, which he calls "the gleanings."⁷ He goes on to add: "The second Resurrection, or Resurrection of Judgment, occurs after the Millennium, and includes the remaining dead."⁸

On what do millennialists base their multiple resurrections?

⁵Wm. E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming (London & Edinburg, Chicago, New York, Toronto: The Moody Institute of Chicago, Institute Place, 1908), pp 99 f.

⁶Ibid., p 101.

⁷Ibid., p 101.

⁸Ibid., p 101.

Sharrit, quoted above, uses 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 20:4-5 to prove his point. These passages read as follows:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - 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 all be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Cor 15:51-53).

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 with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Th 4:16-17).

Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for speaking the truth told by Jesus and God's Word. They had not worshiped the animal and its statue and were not branded on their foreheads and hands. They lived and ruled with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection (Re 20:4-5, Beck).

Benson, also quoted above, uses as his proof texts John 5:25, 29 and Revelation 20:4, 6. In regard to John's Gospel, verse twenty-eight is needed to complete the thought. These passages, including this verse, read as follows:

I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. . . . Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (Jn 5:25, 28, 29).

Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for speaking the truth told by Jesus and God's Word. They had not worshiped the animal and its statue and were not branded on their foreheads and hands. They lived and ruled with Christ a thousand years. . . . Happy and holy are those who share in the first resurrection; the second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will rule with Him during the thousand years (Re 20:4, 6, Beck).

Blackstone, as mentioned, uses 1 Corinthians 15:23 and Revelation 6:9-11 as his basis for a divided resurrection. These passages read:

But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:23).

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were killed as they had been was completed (Re 6:9-11).

The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on a Divided Resurrection

In regard to the above references to the writings of St. Paul, the context is very clear that he is addressing himself to only one phase of the general resurrection, viz. to that part of the resurrection in which the believers are involved. In neither passage is he discussing the resurrection of the unbelieving dead, except by implication and then only in passing. At the same time it must be borne in mind that this does not necessarily mean that there will not be a second or additional phase of a general resurrection of all the dead with the raising up of believers and unbelievers simultaneously.

In 1 Corinthians fifteen, the great resurrection chapter of Scripture, St. Paul is dealing with Christians who are having doubts and misgivings and even denials about the doctrine of the resurrection. Paul had preached to them the pure gospel, which involved the proclamation of Christ's resurrection from the dead (v. 4). Paul then asks the Corinthian Christians: "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resur-

rection of the dead?" (v. 12). He then proceeds to point out the consequences of a denial of the resurrection: 1) then Christ himself did not rise (v. 13); 2) gospel preaching, and even faith in Christ, is useless (v. 14); 3) gospel preachers are false witnesses (v. 15); 4) those who assumed they had forgiveness are still languishing in their sin (v. 17); and 5) those who have died in Christ are eternally lost (v. 18). There can be no doubt that Paul is speaking of Christians - and only Christians - when he asserts: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (v. 19). Subsequently, Paul proceeds to show us the joy, the peace, the comfort and especially the hope which Christians are to find in their resurrection from the dead.

The immediate context of verses fifty-one to fifty-three also stresses the fact that Paul is addressing himself to this specific phase of the resurrection. In the verse preceding (v. 50) Paul states: "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." When he declares: "We will all be changed" (v. 52), he is speaking only of Christians, whose bodies will be fit for heaven because they will have taken on that which is imperishable and immortal (v. 53). Paul then continues: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'" (v. 54). That victory centers in the victory of Christ himself by his resurrection, seen in the dramatic climax of the chapter when Paul exults: "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 57).

Also in regard to the 1 Thessalonians reference we agree that Paul is speaking specifically of the resurrection of believers. Mil-

lennialists would have us believe, however, that when Paul says, "The dead in Christ will rise first" (v. 16), he is pointing to a divided resurrection. The millennialist associates this with Revelation twenty and the statement: "This is the first resurrection" (v. 5). But the two are not parallel passages. In fact, they are speaking of two entirely different things. Paul is not saying in the 1 Thessalonians passage that the dead in Christ shall rise first in relationship to the unbelieving dead. Paul is dealing here with the question: Will the Christians who are living at the time of Christ's second coming be received into glory by the Lord before those Christians who have passed through physical death and are to be resurrected? Paul answers: "No!" In the passage in point Paul is saying that the dead in Christ will rise first in point of time - prior to the living saints being received by Christ. Thus Paul is setting this sequence of events: 1) the dead in Christ will be raised; 2) the living believers will be caught up with them, the resurrected believers, to meet the Lord in the air.

Once again it needs to be stressed in this connection that the absence of a reference in the text to the resurrection of the ungodly does not per se require that there be a second resurrection - at another time - for the unbelieving mass of humanity. Paul really does not address himself to the matter of the resurrection of the unjust in either one of these passages. When he says in 1 Corinthians fifteen, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive" (v. 22), Paul is presenting, in perfect harmony with the rest of Scripture, but one resurrection from physical death, and that, a resurrection which involves all mankind. Paul, however, does not dwell on it nor develop the thought further since, as has been noted, his primary concern is the re-

surrection of the saints in this given passage.

We previously noted Blackstone's reference to 1 Corinthians 15:23. This passage he chooses to translate: "But each in his own band."⁹ The Greek phrase is ἑκκτος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι. Under the Greek noun τάγματι, The Analytical Greek Lexicon translates the word in New Testament usage as "order of succession."¹⁰ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, however, after giving the basic translation of "that which is ordered," continues:

1. of a number of persons who belong together and are therefore arranged together division, group. . . . b. without any special military application class, group. . . . - Acc. to 1 Cor 15:23f the gift of life is given to various ones in turn . . . and at various times. One view is that in this connection Paul distinguishes three groups: Christ, who already possesses life, the Christians, who will receive it at his second coming, and the rest of humanity (s. τέλος 2), who will receive it when death, as the last of God's enemies, is destroyed.¹¹

Under the word τέλος, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament states: "2. rest, remainder . . ., if τὸ τέλος 1 Cor 15:24 is to be taken, w. JWeiss and Ltzm (H Lietzmann), of a third and last group."¹²

In checking over a half dozen English Bible translations, only one leaned in the direction of Blackstone's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:23. This was Beck, who translates this portion of the verse: "But everyone in his own group." All of the others used the abstract concept of "turn" or "order," which is the basic meaning of τάγματι, a

⁹Ibid., p 99.

¹⁰The Analytical Greek Lexicon (New York: Harper & Brothers), p 398.

¹¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p 810.

¹²Ibid., p 819.

word derived from the verb τάσσω, to "1. place or station a person or thing in a fixed spot - . . . 2. Order, fix, determine, appoint."¹³

Good hermeneutical practice requires that we begin with the primary meaning of a word and forsake that for a secondary or derived meaning only when the text or context require it in order to grasp the sensus literalis of the writer.

One can concede the legitimacy of Blackstone's translation of the verse only in the light of the fact that "band" is a secondary and derived meaning of τάγμα. However, there is overwhelming support among Bible translators that the primary meaning of the word can and should be retained in the light of the text and context. Three things, particularly noteworthy, need to be mentioned:

1) At the risk of being redundant it must again be pointed out that Paul is speaking only of one phase of the general resurrection - the resurrection of the saints of God. There is no denial on Paul's part of a general resurrection. In fact in verse twenty-two he declares: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." The emphasis, however, is on the resurrection of "those who belong to him"; the general resurrection is important for Paul at this point only because the believers are a part of it.

2) Paul himself, immediately upon the statement in question, proceeds to present the "order" of which he is speaking, namely, Christ as the firstfruits and then "in their turn" the believers on the last day. To translate τάγμα as "band" or "group," then, does not fit the text, since one person (Christ) can hardly be construed as a group or

¹³Ibid., p 813.

band. Blackstone obviously is endeavoring with his translation of τάγμα to fragment "those who belong to him."

3) The use of τέλος in the secondary or derived sense of rest or remainder is likewise unwarranted by the text. Retaining the primary use of τέλος in the sense of end, one is able to understand the passage in a way that is completely congruous with all that Scripture has to say regarding the resurrection. Looking at the resurrection from the standpoint of Christians - as Paul is doing here - Paul is saying: Christ rose from the dead; on the last day Christians, too, will rise; then the end of all things will have arrived.

It is interesting to note the reference to John's Gospel, used by Benson to support the concept of a divided resurrection. Obviously Jesus is speaking of two different situations when he says, on the one hand, "A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25); and, on the other, when he declares: "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out" (Jn 5:28-29). Similarly, Jesus spoke to Martha: "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

Man is born into this world spiritually dead (Eph 2:1). That act whereby God raises man from spiritual death to spiritual life is generally referred to with such terms as conversion (Mt 13:15; 18:3; Ac 3:19), regeneration or rebirth (Tit 3:5; Jn 3:3, 5, 7; 1 Pe 1:23) or quickening (Eph 2:5, KJV). It is precisely this act of creating spiritual life where there was previously spiritual death that Jesus is referring to in John 5:25. Thus it has no direct bearing per se on the

resurrection on the last day. It, of course, has the indirect involvement with the individual's status before God at the time of the general resurrection, for without this spiritual resurrection the physical resurrection at Christ's second coming can result only in eternal death.

It is also worthy of note in this connection that Jesus says that only those who hear the voice of the Son of God will live. Man has the awful power to reject the call of God's grace, as Jesus here (Jn 5:25) implies. However, his call on the last day to all who are in the grave will be irresistible, no matter how reluctant the unbeliever may be to step forth from his grave (Jn 5:28, 29). Further, in the former case Jesus says: "A time is coming and has now come" (Jn 5:25); in the latter case, simply: "A time is coming" (Jn 5:28), leaving this call from the grave a totally future event.

In regard to this reference in John's Gospel it is well to observe that Christ is speaking of a general resurrection of all men at one and the same time, a position repeated again and again in Scripture. By like token there is no hint or suggestion of a divided resurrection.

A word needs to be said yet in regard to Blackstone's application of Revelation 6:9-11. From his statement, quoted above, he identifies "the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained" in whole or in part with that group of believers being raised at the rapture. These are instructed to "wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been to be completed." This second group Blackstone would call "the tribulation saints," who are to be raised at the revelation of Christ. John, however, is not referring to a group of resurrected saints in verse nine.

The textual reference is to their souls. They must await the time when body and soul are reunited until the number of the elect of God is complete and all of his saints experience the bodily resurrection at one and the same time. Christians, however, are to draw the comfort that between physical death and the resurrection on the last day our souls are safely in the hands of God, where we remain secure.

Further, dividing the resurrection of the saints into two separate events, "the ingathering" and "the gleaning," as Blackstone identifies them,¹⁴ is contradictory to the statement of the Savior himself when he declares:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn 6:39-40).

The primary reference for millennialists on the divided resurrection is Revelation 20:4-6 with their special reference to verse five and the words, "This is the first resurrection." When Sharrit quotes these words, for example, he places the statement, "This is the first resurrection," both in capital letters and in bold type. With this they generally underscore the parenthetical statement of John, "The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were over" (Re 20:5, Beck).

As is often the case with millennialists, the context is overlooked. In response to the millennial position on this portion of Revelation twenty it will suffice to quote Dr. C. H. Little:

In considering the meaning of the expression, "the first resurrection," it is to be observed that no mention of the body has been made in the preceding portion of the context. In v. 4 St.

¹⁴See page 46.

John says: "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God," etc. These were the souls of those who had suffered martyrdom for the sake of Jesus and His Gospel. Of them he says: "And they lived with Christ a thousand years." This is manifestly not a visible reign with Christ on earth, but a living of the souls of the martyred saints with Christ in heaven. These suffered on earth and died as to their bodies; but, as to their souls, they are living and reigning with Christ in heaven and sharing in eternal joys.

Of the rest of the dead St. John says: "But the rest of the dead lived not (not, "lived not again") until the thousand years were finished," i.e., to say, that souls of those who died in their sins do not enter into the realms of bliss, but are doomed to everlasting death.

But of the heavenly life of the martyrs according to their souls, St. John says: "This is the first resurrection," and "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." And just as it was not said above of "the rest of the dead" that they ever lived afterwards, so here it is not said that the reign of the martyrs with Christ will cease at the end of the thousand years. The implication is that they shall serve God and Christ world without end, and that for them the thousand years are but preliminary to the time when they in glorified bodies shall live and reign with their Lord forever and ever. Surely this happy state of the soul is well worthy of being called "the first resurrection," and the benediction pronounced upon them is fully justified! The first resurrection pertains to the soul and furnishes no support to Millenarian views.¹⁵

Four Judgments

The Millennial Position on Multiple Judgments

Following a similar line of thought and a similar brand of exegesis as has been noted in regard to a divided resurrection, premillennialists also insist upon multiple judgments. Blackstone, for example, identifies four judgments, three of them eschatological. He expresses his views on the various judgments as follows:

¹⁵C. H. Little, op. cit., pp 38 f.

We often hear Post-Millennialists use the expression "General Judgment", thereby conveying the idea of some future day in which all mankind will simultaneously appear before God to be judged.

The expression is not in the Scriptures. Pre-Millennialists believe that the Judgment is general, only in the sense that all are judged - but not all at the same time.

The Judgment of believers, as sinners, is passed, being accomplished in Christ on the cross.

"He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (Greek, judgment); but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24. See also John 3:17-19 (R.V.). Judged instead of condemned.

There is a Judgment Day coming, not a day of twenty-four hours, but a long series of years. Day is used to designate such a period in 2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 6:13; and Heb. 3:8. The "Hour" in John 5:25, has been over eighteen centuries long. So the "Hour" in John 5:28 may be centuries of years.

This "Day of Judgment" is also called "The Day of the Lord," and "The Great Day."

It is ushered in with plagues and closes with fire, between which lies a long season of the "sure mercies of David," or the Millennium. In it there will be four visible judgments, in the following order:

Four Judgments

I. The Judgment of the Saints for their works.

This is not on earth. Compare 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with 2 Thess. 1:6-10 and Rev. 19:11-16. . . .

These glorified Saints receive their judgment undeniably before that of the ungodly. See Matt. 25:14-30. The judgment of the servants occurs before the judgment of the nations. Matt. 25:31-46; see also 1 Pet. 4:17-18.

II. The Judgment of the living nations, who are upon the earth at the Revelation. Jesus is judge of the quick (or living) and dead.

The Church or Saints, having been before caught up in the Rapture, come with Christ to execute judgment upon the world or living nations. This is the judgment of the quick, or those who are living upon the earth, when Christ comes at the Revelation. He separates the sheep from the goats, gathering out all things that doth offend (Matt. 13:41-42), and sets up His kingdom (verse 43). The third party, His brethren, are the Israelites, who are never to be reckoned among the nations.

Then follows the Millennium, which is one continuous day of Judgment (Acts 17:31), when the righteous Judge will be upon earth (2 Tim. 4:8), and when judgment shall be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Isa. 28:17.

III. The Judgment of the dead at the Great White Throne.

IV. The Judgment of angels, into fire "prepared for the devil and his angels." The ungodly go there first. Compare Rev. 19:20 with Rev. 20:7-10; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6.

Such events, requiring intervals of time, preclude the idea expressed in the term, "general judgment."

The "Day of the Lord" has two aspects, to wit: Judgment on God's enemies, and deliverance and blessing for God's people.

So we have the Judgment:

Of believers, as to their character, on the cross.
Of believers, as to their works, at the Judgment seat of Christ.

Of the living nations at the Revelation.

Of the ungodly at the Great White Throne.¹⁶

The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on Multiple Judgments

Blackstone uses over sixty passages as proof texts for his position on a four-fold judgment. Our objection to Blackstone's statements do not lie in the area of who will be judged. The Scriptures make it very clear that all men, believers and unbelievers, the quick and the dead, all must stand in the judgment. With St. Paul we say: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10). The author of the letter to the Hebrews clearly states: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (He 9:27).

Our disagreement rather focuses on the multiplicity of judgments which millennialists seemingly require to fill out their millen-

¹⁶Wm. E. Blackstone, op. cit., pp 101 ff.

nial dream. To reject a general judgment on the basis of the fact that the term is not used in Scripture, as Blackstone does, is a begging of the issue. Although that specific term is not used in the Word, the concept is one which is more than adequately supported. Incidentally it might be hastily noted in passing that the word "rapture" is not to be found in the Scriptures either. There are judgments of God that are apparent in Scripture. One thinks of the flood, of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., to mention but a few. All of these, however, are judgments of God which have taken place in time. Nowhere do the Scriptures use the plural, judgments, when it speaks of the judgment that will occur on the last day, except in an incident like Revelation 19:2, where the general judgment is individualized. "True and righteous are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries" (Re 19:2).

One passage in particular which Blackstone uses to support his view of multiple judgments, however, does need special consideration. Peter writes: "It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pe 4:17). But is Peter talking about the judgment on the last day, or is he referring to a judgment which takes place already in time? To use this passage to show a multiplicity of final judgments is to show a total lack of sensitivity for context. Both before and after the passage in point Peter is speaking of the sufferings of Christians in time, before Christ comes to judge the quick and the dead. He is speaking of the refining of Christians and the purging out of hypocrisy. The Pulpit Commentary rightly explains

in connection with this verse:

The beginning of judgment is the persecution of the Christians, as our Lord had taught (Matt. xxiv. 8,9, and following verses); but that judgment is not unto condemnation: "When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi. 32); it is the fiery trial, "which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth," the refining fire of affliction.¹⁷

Characteristic of the tenor of all of Scripture are the words of the Savior himself as he describes for us his coming in glory for judgment, a judgment that embraces believer and unbeliever alike, that is portrayed by him and elsewhere in Scripture as a single act and, therefore, a general judgment, and that allows no room for the millennialist's fantasies. Jesus says in Matthew 25:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left (vv. 31-33).

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' (v. 34). . . .

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (v. 41). . . .

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (v. 46).

Three Comings

The Millennial Position on the Three Comings of Christ

Normally millennialists will speak of two eschatological com-

¹⁷The Pulpit Commentary, H. D. M. Spence, M. A., D. D. and Joseph S. Exell, M.A., editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), Vol. 22, p 176.

ings of Christ. Yet when one analyzes the millennial doctrine and compares the doctrine of individual millennialists, it becomes rather obvious that there is disagreement as to when the next (but not the last) coming of Christ will occur. In chapter VII the subject of the tribulation and the wrath of God will be treated in some detail. However, it is necessary for our present discussion to touch upon some matters that will be dealt with in detail in the later chapter.

Some millennialists, known as pretribulationists, speak of a secret coming of Christ immediately prior to the tribulation. They use as the basis for their position such passages as Matthew 24:37-41 and Revelation 3:10. These passages read as follows:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left (Mt 24:37-41).

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Re 3:10).

To illustrate this pretribulation, secret coming of Christ, Hal Lindsey speaks of "the ultimate trip." He writes:

Astounding as man's trip to the moon is, there is another trip which many men, women, and children will take some day which will leave the rest of the world gasping. Those who remain on earth at that time will use every invention of the human mind to explain the sudden disappearance of millions of people.

Reporters who wrote the historic story of Apollo 11 told how the astronauts collected rocks which may reveal the oldest secrets of the solar system. Those who are alive to tell the story of "Project Disappearance" will try in vain to describe the happening which will verify the oldest secrets of God's

words.¹⁸

Lindsey then presents five fictitious quotations, showing the reaction to the rapture or translation of believers. The first of these will suffice to illustrate the picture that he is painting:

"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!"¹⁹

Subsequently, Lindsey explains:

Someday, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. . . .
It will be the living end. The ultimate trip.²⁰

Although pretribulationists indeed refer to the rapture as a coming of Christ, even as Lindsey does in the previous quotation, they are hesitant about identifying this as the "second coming" of Christ, the first, of course, being his coming in the flesh. The following quotation from Lindsey makes this clear. He continues later on in the same chapter:

Christians sometimes have a theological debate about whether the Rapture occurs at the same time as the second coming of Christ or whether it takes place before the second coming, even before the Tribulation.²¹

Lindsey's doctrinal position is clearly expressed with statements like:

"We believe the Bible distinguishes between the Rapture and the second coming of Christ"²² and "they do not occur simultaneously."²³

To millennialists in general the purpose of Christ's second com-

¹⁸Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p 135.

¹⁹Ibid., p 136. ²⁰Ibid., p 137. ²¹Ibid., p 142. ²²Ibid., p 142

²³Ibid., p 142.

ing will be to establish his millennial kingdom. But invariably they hold to at least two and often three eschatological comings of Christ.

We have already seen how Lindsey, for example, speaks of a pre-millennial coming of Christ and yet is not prepared to refer to Christ's millennial coming as his third coming. Others, however, do refer to yet another, a third, eschatological coming of Christ. At the same time they are extremely careful not to identify three such comings of Christ. Sharrit, whom we might identify as a midtribulationist, denounces the pretribulation theory. He avoids three future advents of Christ by insisting that Christ's next return will take place after the three and one-half years of the tribulation and before the three and one-half years of the wrath of God. He nevertheless does see another advent of Christ following this return. After quoting Matthew 24:29-31 he writes:

These Scriptures do not apply to His Third Coming, at the end of the seven-year period, for the Battle of Armageddon! At that time He will come "on a white horse, with the armies of Heaven" also on white horses! . . .

Now, JESUS says that His next coming will be "immediately after the tribulation of those days." He says that He is not coming back until "immediately after the Tribulation"! But, the author was taught in Bible School, and heard it preached, and believed it for about 40 years, that Jesus would come BEFORE the Tribulation, and that His coming would be a "SECRET COMING," - and that the whole world would suddenly awake to the fact that Christians and children under the age of accountability, had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, they knew not how! - and that then the 144,000 Jews would be World Evangelists, and that many would be saved after the Rapture of the Church, and that they would be the "Tribulation Saints" of Rev. Chapter 7, etc.

**BUT, ACCORDING TO GOD'S HOLY WORD, THESE TEACHINGS ARE NOT TRUE!
THEY ARE NOT BIBLICAL!**

They are only traditions of our fathers, our elders, our Church organizations, and none of them are based and grounded upon the Word of God! There is no Scripture in the Word of God that teaches that the Rapture of the Church will take place before the

"Great Tribulation"!²⁴

Later Sharrit asserts:

The eighth Chapter of Revelation shows the beginning of the 3½ year period of the "Wrath of God" - continuing on through the 11th Chapter, bringing a chronological happening of events up until the time of Christ's 3rd Coming, as is described beginning with Rev. 19:11²⁵

To summarize, then, the three eschatological advents of Christ which are discernible in millennial theology are 1) his coming for the rapture, 2) his coming to establish his millennial kingdom and 3) his coming for the battle of Armageddon, or the final judgment. Since the beginning of the millennium supposedly takes place immediately after the wrath of God, which is to last for three and a half years after the end of the tribulation, there is an unavoidable distinction which logically must be made between Christ's coming (secret or not) at the rapture and his coming for his millennial reign at the revelation of the church. The two advents which millennialists hold as a rule are 1) Christ's coming for the church and 2) his coming for the battle of Armageddon.

The Scriptural Evaluation of Their Position on the Three Comings

Three passages need special consideration in our evaluation of the millennial position on Christ's eschatological comings. They are Matthew 24:37-41, Revelation 3:10 and Revelation 19:11-16.

The words of Matthew twenty-four especially important for our present concerns are verses forty and forty-one. Once again, it is necessary to observe the context, something which millennialists frequently fail to do. In verse thirty-one Jesus had said that he "will send his

²⁴John T. Sharrit, op. cit., pp 186 f.

²⁵Ibid., p 191.

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." In verses forty and forty-one Jesus is describing this activity of his angels. A parallel situation is described by Christ in this same discourse as he relates the parable of the ten virgins. In verse ten of chapter twenty-five Jesus says: "While they" (the five foolish virgins) "were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut." Millennialists would have us believe that, when one of the men in the field and one of the women grinding with a hand mill are taken (Mt 24:40-41), Jesus is describing the rapture and that those who are left continue to be involved in their activity in the field or at the mill. However, the context teaches us that the proper understanding of these words of the Savior is that those who are taken are the elect of God and those who are left are rejected. They will not enter into Christ's heavenly kingdom. There is no support in this passage - nor for that matter in any passage of Scripture - for a rapture of the saints of God prior to the final judgment of all men on the last day.

Similarly, Revelation 3:10 does not teach a pretribulation rapture of the church. That the trial spoken of here is specific and refers to the severe tribulations of the last days seems obvious, since παραρροῦ here has the article, which is usually omitted in New Testament usage. The saints, however, are not to be exempt from "the hour of (the) trial," but are to be kept so that their faith remains intact in spite of it. A similar thought is expressed in John seventeen, as the Savior prays for his disciples. He prays: "My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world but that you protect them from the

evil one" (v. 15).

In Revelation nineteen, which Sharrit and others of the millennialists picture as the coming of Christ for the battle of Armageddon,²⁶ several things are to be noted. First of all, chapter nineteen from verses one to eighteen presents a heavenly interlude, following on the heels of the announcement of the fall of Babylon, the destruction of the Antichrist. A careful reading of these verses points out that what John sees occurs in heaven, not on earth. Its purpose is to comfort the people of God by assuring them that the King of kings and Lord of lords reigns and that with him are all of his saints, "dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (v. 14), safe and secure from the final judgment of the unbelieving world. The vision of the King of kings and Lord of lords provides us with the comforting assurance of Christ's final victory, assured in advance, over the forces which have been amassed for the battle of Armageddon (Re 16:12-16).

What follows in chapter nineteen, verses nineteen to twenty-one, is the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon, the preparations for which were mentioned in chapter sixteen, verse sixteen. This is that phase of the final judgment which will be meted out upon the beast and the false prophet. There is no textual support whatever in the passage to assume that this is a premillennial coming or judgment of Christ.

In conclusion it needs to be stated that there are simply no passages of Scripture that speak of more than one eschatological coming of Christ. All of the passages dealing with the final advent harmoni-

²⁶The battle of Armageddon will be treated at greater length in chapter VIII.

ously concur that Christ will come but once more, that his next coming will bring an end to this world as we know it, and that the purpose of his coming will be to gather together his saints and to pronounce eternal judgments on all who have despised the grace of God and rejected him as the Savior from sin, death and the power of the devil. "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (He 9:27) writes the author of the letter to the Hebrews. The generic use of the term "man" must include also the redeemed. There is absolutely no room in this passage for the string of millennial activities which chiliasts suppose.

Matthew twenty-four and twenty-five, one of the longer and more detailed sections of Scripture dealing with the last things, speaks of Christ's coming, the resurrection of all the dead, the judgment and the assignment of men to their eternal abode. Many of the parables of Jesus, referring to the last day, likewise stress this same sequence in rapid succession without even a hint of a millennium, multiple resurrections, multiple judgments or multiple comings of Christ. Within the framework of Matthew twenty-four and twenty-five two such parables are presented, namely the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13) and the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30). In the former the bridegroom arrives, enters with the wise virgins into the wedding banquet and the door is shut - all in such rapid succession that the foolish virgins had no time to replenish their oil. How appropriate, then, the admonition is: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Mt 25:13)! In the latter parable, the parable of the talents, the master returns and immediately settles accounts with his servants (Mt 25:19). And there is complete concurrence throughout the Scriptures on these eschatological

truths. Multiple resurrections, multiple judgments and multiple comings of Christ can occur only by superimposing these preconceived notions on texts which do not support these millennial views. The millennialists are forcing Scripture to say something which it never intended to say.

CHAPTER VI

ANTISEMITIC FORCES, THE ANTICHRIST AND DATE SETTING

The Millennial Picture of the Antisemitic Forces and the Antichrist

It may seem rather strange to tie antisemitic forces, the Antichrist and date setting together into a single chapter unit. However, it is here that the date setting of millennialism becomes most apparent. It is as though this were the door in millennial theology which opens onto a chronological sequence of events, dated in terms of duration and order. This writer's first inclination was to identify this chapter as Antichristian forces, the Antichrist and Date Setting. When scrutinizing millennial literature, however, it is clear that many millennialists, particularly the pretribulationists, see these "anti-forces" not as being opposed to Christ so much as they are opposed to Israel. From the viewpoint of these millennialists they would be regarded as antichristian forces and opposed to Christ because of the heavy emphasis which these millennialists place on Israel as the chosen people of God and the misinterpretation of which they are guilty in connection with those passages of scriptural prophecy on which they base their doctrinal position on the restoration of Israel as a nation appointed by God to be his own, a subject which will be discussed at length in chapter X. To some, such as Hal Lindsey, even the term Antichrist seems to be a misnomer because they view him as an individual who is not so much opposed to Christ (for Lindsey, for example, the rapture has already

taken place) as he is opposed to Israel.

Israel Restored as a Nation

Hal Lindsey's portrayal of these antisemitic forces is characteristic of this brand of millennial thought. When he says: "We are approaching the most electrifying decade in human history,"¹ he is in essence saying that Israel's restoration as a nation is a sure sign that marks the beginning of the end times.

Of this restoration of Israel as a nation Hal Lindsey says that it shows the fulfilment of prophecy. He writes:

Moses . . . said that because of continued misbelief and rejection of their God, Israel would be destroyed as a nation a second time.

. . . Many other prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos to name a few, all predicted the great world-wide exile of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Jewish nation.²

The same prophets who predicted the world-wide exile and persecution of the Jews also predicted their restoration as a nation. . . . This restoration was to come about in the general time of the climactic seven-year countdown and its finale - the personal appearance of the Messiah to deliver the new state from destruction.

Right here a careful distinction must be made between "the physical restoration" to the land of Palestine as a nation, which clearly occurs shortly before the Messiah's coming, and the "spiritual restoration" of all Jews who have believed in the Messiah just after His return to earth.³

Lindsey places a great deal of emphasis on this matter of the restoration of Israel as a nation, especially because, to him, it signifies the imminence of those events leading up to the revelation of the

¹Hal Lindsey, The World's Final Hour: Evacuation or Extinction (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p 11.

²Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), pp 46 f.

³Ibid., p 48.

church, or the millennium. He states this clearly when he writes:

"Some time in the future there will be a seven-year period climaxed by the visible return of Christ,"⁴ and then two paragraphs later comments: "The general time of this seven-year period couldn't begin until the Jewish people re-established their nation in the ancient homeland of Palestine."⁵

Subsequently Lindsey adds considerable detail to the above statement. To capsulize, the following summary statement of Lindsey is quoted:

To be specific about Israel's great significance as a sign of the time, there are three things that were to happen. First, the Jewish nation would be reborn in the land of Palestine. Secondly, the Jews would repossess old Jerusalem and the sacred sites. Thirdly, they would rebuild their ancient temple of worship upon its historic site.⁶

For each of these Lindsey quotes Scripture. "Ezekiel," he says, using chapter thirty-eight, verse eight, "showed that the Jewish nation would be reborn after a long world-wide dispersion."⁷ To prove his second and third points, namely the repossession of old Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple by the Jews, Lindsey uses Zechariah, chapters twelve to fourteen, and Matthew 24:15.

The sequence of events which Lindsey portrays as immediately following the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the Old Testament Mosaic worship culminates in the "abomination of desolation," referred to by Daniel (9:27). This sequence of events portrays the arising of the antisemitic forces and the antichrist.

The Antisemitic Forces

⁴Ibid., p 42.

⁵Ibid., p 42.

⁶Ibid., pp 50 f.

⁷Ibid., p 51.

"The new State of Israel will be plagued by a certain pattern of events which has been clearly forecasted,"⁸ writes Lindsey. He then continues:

Shortly after the restoration of the Jews in the land of Israel, an incredible enemy will arise to its "uttermost north." This enemy will be composed of one great nation which will gather around it a number of allies. It is this "Northern Confederacy" that is destined to plunge the world into its final great war which Christ will return to end.⁹

Lindsey bases his position in this matter on Ezekiel thirty-eight and thirty-nine, Daniel 11:40-45 and Joel 2:20. He, along with the others who are cast from the same millennial mold, identify God and Magog along with Rosh (see the variant reading on Ezekiel 38:3) as Russia, Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk, a Russian province.

On the basis of Ezekiel 38:5-6, the Russian allies are Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Togarmah. These Lindsey identifies with Iran,¹⁰ Ethiopia,¹¹ Libya,¹² Iron Curtain countries,¹³ and southern Russia¹⁴ respectively.

Turning to Daniel 11:40-45 Lindsey speaks of an Arab confederacy, spearheaded by Egypt, "the king of the south," which will include Libya and Ethiopia.

Lindsey also speaks of the rise of the oriental nations, particularly Communist China. He sees yet another alliance which will take place between this group and the already existing coalition of the Russian and Arab confederacies. Revelation 16:12 and 16 with its references to the kings of the east and Armageddon is used as his basis for

⁸Ibid., p 59.

⁹Ibid., p 59.

¹⁰Ibid., pp 67 f.

¹¹Ibid., p 68.

¹²Ibid., p 69.

¹³Ibid., pp 69 f.

¹⁴Ibid., p 70.

this assumption.

Meanwhile, in the west the Roman Empire is supposedly in the process of revival. Lindsey points to Daniel two and seven. From these two chapters he sees a succession of empires "which would come on the stage of history and have authority over the whole world."¹⁵ These four empires he identifies as the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian and the Roman Empires. The form of what he calls phase two of this fourth kingdom (Dn 2:20) Lindsey claims will be that of a ten-nation confederacy.¹⁶ Lindsey goes on to explain:

We are not speaking of a revived Roman Empire in the physical, geographical sense, although some of these countries were part of the Ancient Roman Empire, but we are speaking of those countries which are the depository of the people, the culture, and the tradition of Rome.¹⁷

Lindsey then hastens on to the identification of this revived Roman Empire in the European Common Market and subsequently adds:

Heading the revived Roman Empire will be a man of such magnetism, such power, and such influence, that he will for a time be the greatest dictator the world has ever known. He will be the completely godless, diabolically evil "future fuehrer."¹⁸

He will not only be a political leader, but a religious leader.¹⁹

The Antichrist

The one Lindsey is identifying above is, of course, the Antichrist. To most millennialists the person who will be the Antichrist is not yet known. He may indeed already have been born, in fact may already be a prominent figure in current history, particularly to those

¹⁵ Ibid., p 89.

¹⁶ Ibid., p 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., p 94.

¹⁸ Ibid., p 98.

¹⁹ Ibid., p 93.

millennialists who see the world on the very brink of the tribulation period of three and a half years. To them it is during the tribulation that the Antichrist will become identifiable, coming on a wave of anarchy with an extremely rapid acquisition of power to the point where he becomes a dictator. Holding out a convincing prospect of "peace and safety" (1 Th 5:3) to a world riddled with "wars and rumors of wars" (Mt 24:6), he will even demand divine homage for himself and even set himself up in the very temple of God (2 Th 2:4). In regard to the location of the temple of God Lindsey comments:

There is only one place where this temple of God can be and that is on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, on the site where the Dome of the Rock and other Moslem shrines now stand.²⁰

Thus Lindsey explains the reason for the need of the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, namely because the Antichrist will set himself up as God in the temple of God.

Few millennialists are as committal as Lindsey in regard to the supposed details of the Antichrist. And, as we might expect from millennial evidence we have seen earlier, few millennialists totally agree on the person of the Antichrist, when he will be revealed, his precise scope, and so on. Sharrit, for example, agrees that the Antichrist must be a Roman, but asserts on the basis of the symbolic (Sharrit's own admission here) number 666, that he will be Nero Caesar, who will "come up out of the abyss" (Re 17:8).²¹ The adventist, Ellen G. White, in her book entitled Final War, identifies the Roman papacy in its historical

²⁰ Ibid., p 109.

²¹ John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Mission Society, 1978), pp 112 f.

form as the Antichrist,²² a position incidentally which is not typical of millennial theology.

How all of these pieces fit together will be discussed in connection with the tribulation and the wrath of God in chapter VIII. At this point, however, the comment should be made that in the millennial jigsaw puzzle each of these individual items which has been noted holds an important place and all of it centers around the nation of Israel. Succinctly, Dr. J. W. White verifies this with his statement, short and to the point: "The sine qua non of Scriptural prophecy is the people of Israel."²³

An Evaluation of the Millennial Antisemitic Forces and the Antichrist

Picking up the thought expressed in the latter portion of the preceding paragraph, the millennialists of this brand place an undue emphasis on the role of the Jewish nation in the plans of God for the future. Their emphasis is termed "undue" because it is unwarranted in the light of scriptural teaching. During the Old Testament period a distinct demarcation between Jew and Gentile is apparent. In order to fulfill his promises of the Savior, God insisted on this cleavage, by which Israel remained throughout the Old Testament era his chosen people. In the New Testament period, however, the line of demarcation is drawn between believer and unbeliever rather than Jew and Gentile. To the Christians Peter writes: "You are a chosen people, . . . a people

²²E. G. White, Final War (Phoenix, Arizona: Inspiration Books, 1979), pp 106 ff.

²³John Wesley White, Ph. D., Re-entry (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1971), p 133.

belonging to God" (1 Pe 2:9). Paul, in Ephesians, chapter two, points out that the uncircumcised Gentiles have been made one with the circumcised Jews (Eph 2:11-13). Once they were "separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus" they "who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:12, 13). Paul is expressing much the same thing in Galatians three, when he writes:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Ga 3:26-29).

In the days of Christ the Jews prided themselves on the fact that they were Abraham's seed (Jn 8:32, 37), his natural descendants. Scripture, however, identifies the true descendants of Abraham as those who believe in Christ. In Romans nine Paul asserts:

Not all who descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring are reckoned." In other words it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Ro 9:6-8).

Richardson properly observes:

The true seed of A(braham) now includes both circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles who believe in Christ; circumcised Jews who reject Christ are no longer the seed of A(braham).²⁴

Recognition of this point is important at this juncture because it is precisely this which millennialists do not recognize; and, as a result, they misconstrue those passages of Scripture which refer to Is-

²⁴A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson, D. D. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p 13.

rael as God's people in the New Testament period. They insist that even in this context of the New Testament the term "Israel" always refers to Israel as a nation, not as the body of believers. Bearing this in mind, let us retrace our steps and view those passages which millennialists use to support Israel's restoration as a nation, the antisemitic forces and the Antichrist.

Ezekiel thirty-eight, which many millennialists use to establish the restoration of Israel in Palestine, is, in fact, a comforting word of God that shows the Israel of God, the true believers in Christ, to be safe and secure in the hands of God, in spite of the fact that turmoil and danger surround them. The enemies of the church surround her on every side. "Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (v. 3) and "Gomer . . . and Beth Togarmah" (v. 6) lie to the north; "Persia, Cush and Put" (v. 5) lie to the east and south respectively. On the west lies the Mediterranean Sea from the vantage point of Israel. Here we have represented in a symbolical array of formidable nations, the foes besetting the church. They are called to arms and stand in battle array against a "people . . . gathered from many nations," but "now all of them live in safety" (v. 8). Obviously the thought is eschatological. A fitting application would be the final battle of Revelation twenty, for subsequently the Sovereign Lord says through the prophet: "When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused" (v. 18). In Revelation twenty John describes Gog and Magog as they are assembled for the final battle of Satan against Christ and his church, a battle in which the outcome is never in doubt, for it ends in the final judgment!

Lindsey uses Matthew 24:15, which refers to Daniel's prophecy

of the abomination of desolation, and on this basis asserts that the Jews will reinhabit Jerusalem and will rebuild the temple on Mount Moriah. Matthew 24:15-16 reads:

So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes destruction', spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains.

The immediate frame of reference of these words, however, is not the final judgment! It is true that in the broader context Jesus does refer to the final judgment. However, he is responding to a request from the disciples. They had asked of him: "Tell us . . . when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age" (v. 3). Verses one and two tell us what triggered this request.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

In these opening verses of chapter twenty-four Jesus is obviously talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, which included the temple, that occurred in 70 A.D. In verses fifteen and following Jesus reverts back to the very thing that prompted the request and, in fact, was a part of the request. "When will this happen?" the disciples had asked Jesus. At the same time the destruction of Jerusalem would be a picture in miniature of the devastation that would occur and accompany the final judgment. Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 280-399), who is often called "the Father of Church History,"²⁵ adds the historical comment at this point in Matthew twenty-four that these words of Jesus led the Christians in

²⁵Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin L. Luecker, editor in chief (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p 349.

Jerusalem to flee from the city before its destruction in 70 A.D. Thus we are able to see how this warning of Jesus served its purpose for those Christians in that first Christian century. Matthew twenty-four simply has nothing to say about the nation of Israel retaking old Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. By Jesus' own words the "abomination that causes destruction" to which he refers here was the desecrating of the temple by the Romans under Titus. This view is amply supported by the words of Christ recorded in Luke 21:20, where, speaking in the same context, Jesus said: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near."

The reference of Lindsey to Zechariah twelve to fourteen also shows a lack of recognition of Israel as church as opposed to Israel as nation. When one recognizes the fact that faithful Israel of the Old Testament has flowed into and become the church of the New Testament, the interpretation of passages like this one from Zechariah take on a meaning that is not in conflict with the clear passages of Scripture, is, in fact, the writer's intended meaning, and simply speaks of the tribulations of the saints of God in the last days of the world, while they rest securely in the hands of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 presents to us the clearest portrayal of and the most detail on the Antichrist. For our present purposes it will suffice to state our objections to the misunderstanding of the majority of the millennialists on this matter. The marks of the Antichrist are vividly portrayed here by Paul. The common faith of the Protestant world at the time of the Reformation was that the Roman papal system was (and continues to be) the Antichrist of which Scripture speaks.

Millennialists have a problem primarily because they interpret

Paul's words to refer to a single individual rather than a continuing sequence of individuals. But Paul asserts that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (v. 7) - in his day - and that "he" (namely, this sequence of individuals but all of the same spirit) will continue until "the Lord Jesus will overthrow" him "with the breath of his mouth" by the restoration of the pure gospel through the reformation "and destroy" him "by the splendor of his coming" (v. 8) on the last day. Thus, revealed in time, he will continue to be a phenomenon within the church, "the temple of God" (v. 4), until the Lord comes in judgment. It goes beyond the scope of this present writing to illustrate how all of the marks of the Antichrist portrayed in Scripture fit the Roman papacy. Sufficient for our present purpose are the words of the Smalcald Articles: "The Pope is the very Antichrist" (Part II, Art. IV). When viewed as a single individual, however, it is necessary to assume that when he is revealed, the Lord's coming must follow within a lifetime.

Also many millennialists assume God's temple to be a physical building rather than the church and this necessitates finding such a building - and what would be more appropriate, then, than the temple in Jerusalem!

Date Setting

For the most part modern millennialists avoid setting specific dates for the beginning of the seven-year period of the tribulation and the wrath of God and the thousand-year reign of Christ. In fact, many of them decry the kind of date setting that has taken place in the past.

John Wesley White, for example, says:

Overzealous soothsayers from time to time deliberately disobey Jesus Christ and predict dates for a forthcoming divine appearance, often bringing into disrepute one of the most precious and potent doctrines of the Christian Church.²⁶

Similarly, Hal Lindsey writes:

Many Bible students in recent years tried to fit the events of World War I and World War II to the prophetic signs which would herald the imminent return of Christ. Their failure discredited prophecy.

The people who have fled to the mountains to await the end of the world haven't had the faintest idea about the truths of Bible prophecy.

It is because of these unscriptural attempts at calculating dates that some eyebrows rise when we speak of Bible prophecy today.²⁷

On the other hand, these same millennialists become guilty of the very thing they deplore by the kind of imminence of the Lord's coming which they portray. Ten pages later, Hal Lindsey, for example, asserts:

When the signs just given begin to multiply and increase in scope it's similar to the certainty of leaves coming on the fig tree. But the most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel. Even the figure of speech "fig tree" has been a historic symbol of national Israel. When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the "fig tree" put forth its first leaves.

Jesus said that this would indicate that He was "at the door," ready to return. Then He said, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place (Matthew 24:34 NASB).

What generation? Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs - chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so.²⁸

²⁶John Wesley White, op. cit., p 15.

²⁷Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p 43.

²⁸Ibid., pp 53 ff.

Likewise, Sharrit, using the same reference to "this generation" in Matthew twenty-four, writes:

It seems as if God has chosen to wait until these "last days" to reveal to His servants the time of the Second Coming of Christ. If the Christians down through the centuries had known that it would not have happened during their lifetime, perhaps they might have been less zealous for the Evangelization of the world - but now, in these "last days" we ought to know just what to expect! This is the generation that Jesus was talking about.²⁹

Subsequently, the same author says:

We can know the "times" and the "seasons"; we can know the "signs of the times" - we can know of things that must happen before He returns - we can know of what Jesus said would happen "immediately" before He comes - so that leads us to the fact that we will probably know the "year" and perhaps the "month," in which He will come - when that "year" and that "month" actually arrives. Jesus never said that we would never know the year or the month, but He said that we would not know the "day" or the "hour."³⁰

Thus modern millennialists are still guilty of date setting. To be sure, it is a more subtle form. As Christians we indeed ought to feel, probably more strongly than we do at times, the imminence of Christ's second coming. What is disturbing is the inference in much of modern millennialism that prior to this point in history - in fact with some such as Lindsey, until that future point in history when the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt - the Lord could not have come, because all of prophecy had not yet been fulfilled. And this is simply incompatible with the whole tenor of the New Testament. Since Christ's ascension we have been living in the eschatological age. The author of the letter to the Hebrews points this out when he says that God "in these last days . . . has spoken to us by his Son" (He 1:2). The thrust of New Testament theology emphasizes a need for God's children in every age to be

²⁹ John T. Sharrit, op. cit., p 176.

³⁰ Ibid., p 179.

prepared for Christ's second coming. The assertion, made by many in the millennial camp, that the apostles were not looking for the immediate return of Christ simply is not compatible with what these men wrote. To provide just one illustration, Peter speaks of the Lord's second coming and the destruction of the world and then says, not only to us of the twentieth century, but to the people of his own day as well: "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Pe 3:11-12). It is the Lord of the church who says to his people of every age: "Yes, I am coming soon!" and with John his people have responded ever since: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Re 22: 20).

CHAPTER VII

THE RAPTURE

The millennial concept of the rapture has already been touched upon briefly, particularly in connection with the millennial resurrections and the comings of Christ in chapter V. In this chapter an attempt will be made to bring all of the various facets of the rapture together into a millennial focus and then evaluate the position of the millennialists on the rapture in the light of Scripture.

When Will the Rapture Occur?

Because there is a division within the ranks of millennialism as to when the rapture will occur, it is necessary that this matter be discussed even before a description of the rapture can be given. One finds that the millennial description of the rapture is colored by the time when, in their individual opinions, Christ will come for his saints.

There are basically three divergent views among millennialists as to when the rapture will occur. The three millennial camps on this issue are identifiable by the names pre-tribulationists, mid-tribulationists and post-tribulationists. These names identify when they individually assume the rapture will take place in relationship to the seven-year period which for most millennialists is described as the tribulation and the wrath of God, which will be considered in detail in the following chapter. For our purposes at the present time, however, the

seven-year period as a whole, which for convenience and for our present purposes will be designated as the tribulation period, is the period with which the rapture is invariably associated.

The names themselves will now identify the relationship between the rapture and the tribulation period, established by the various millennial groups. Pre-tribulationists view the rapture as taking place immediately prior to the onset of the tribulation period. Mid-tribulationists hold that the rapture will take place at the exact mid-point of the tribulation period. That is, they believe the church will be raptured immediately after the three and a half years of tribulation itself and immediately prior to the subsequent three and a half years of the wrath of God, the latter part of the tribulation period. Post-tribulationists say that the rapture will occur immediately after the tribulation period, that is, after the full seven years have transpired. This view has the rapture of the church coincide with millennial thinking on the battle of Armageddon.

A "Reconciliation" of the Three Theories

Sharrit provides the following outline, apparently in an attempt to overcome the obvious discrepancies which exist between these three divergent millennial camps. Sharrit's outline, together with his heading for this "reconciliation," is as follows:

A RECONCILIATION OF THE THREE THEORIES
CONCERNING "WHEN IS JESUS COMING FOR THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH?"
BETWEEN "PRE-TRIBULATIONISTS"- "MID-TRIBULATIONISTS" -
"POST-TRIBULATIONISTS"

1. The "Pre-Tribulationists" have been Absolutely correct in saying:
 - (a) Christians will never suffer the "Wrath of God"! Absolutely true!

- (b) Christians will never be on Earth, during the "Wrath of God"! Absolutely true!
 - (c) There will be a "Rapture" of the Church before the Battle of Armageddon! Absolutely true!
 - (d) The "Marriage of the Lamb" will be in Heaven, before the Battle of Armageddon! Absolutely true!
 - (e) There will be two distinct "Comings of Christ"! - One for the Church, then again, at the Battle of Armageddon! Absolutely true!
2. The "Mid-Tribulationists" have been Absolutely correct in saying:
- (a) Jesus will come for the Rapture of the Church in the "middle" of the 70th Week of Daniel! Absolutely true!
3. The "Post-Tribulationists" have been Absolutely correct in saying:
- (a) Jesus will not come until, as He said, "Immediately after the Tribulation of those days"! Absolutely true!
 - (b) Christians are going to have to face the Antichrist! Absolutely true!
 - (c) Jesus will not come for the Rapture of the Church until, as the Apostle Paul said:
 - (1) After a great falling away! Absolutely true!
 - (2) After the "man of sin" is revealed! Absolutely true!
 - (d) Jesus will not come until, just as He said, after the sun is darkened, and after the moon shall not give its light, and after the stars of heaven will fall, and after the powers of heaven are shaken! Then Jesus shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory! Absolutely true!
 - (e) The Antichrist will make war on Christians and overcome them! Absolutely true!

YOU WILL PROBABLY ASK! -
HOW CAN ALL THESE STATEMENTS BE RECONCILED?

READ THIS BOOK AND YOU WILL SEE!¹

Sharrit himself anticipates the question with his "tongue in cheek" "reconciliation" of these three totally different opinions when he asks, even after he has provided his "reconciliation," "How can all these statements be reconciled?"² The truth of the matter is that the three millennial positions of the time of the rapture are irreconcilable. There just is no way they can be fitted together to cover this

¹John T. Sharrit, Soon-Coming World-Shaking Events (Phoenix, Arizona: Christian Missionary Society, 1978), pp 8 f.

²Ibid., p 9.

particular breach of consistency in millennial theology. What Sharrit has done is simply to list the common denominators of the three theories. The specific issues that separate these three camps are ignored, at this point at least in his writings. A subsequent chapter of Sharrit's book is entitled "Rebuttal of Pre-Tribulation Doctrine" (chapter twenty).³

The Rapture - Secret or Seen?

This breach on the church's involvement in the tribulation period is reflected further in the confusion that is apparent among millennialists as to the manner in which the church will be translated from earth to be with Christ. As a rule pre-tribulationists view the rapture as something which occurs secretly. The problem which pre-tribulationists have with making this in fact a third millennial coming of Christ has already been discussed in chapter V. There, quoting from Hal Lindsey, it was pointed out how this necessitates a distinction between the church and the tribulation saints as well as an additional coming of Christ for this segment of the believers. Further, it was also noted how according to Lindsey the rapture would be apparent on earth only by the sudden and unexplainable disappearance of the true believers in Christ at the point of time of the rapture.

On the other hand, mid-tribulationists and post-tribulationists view the rapture as an event that will be apparent for all to see. They insist that Scripture does not portray a situation whereby the church will be excluded prior to the tribulation period. In fact, they usually

³Ibid., pp 229 ff.

point to the tribulation as being centered around the church. Sharrit expresses this point of view when he says:

We see, therefore, that the Bible says the "Great Tribulation" will be against the "saints" - the Christians! - All over the world! PLEASE do not let any man deceive you! The "Great Tribulation" is NOT for Israel! It is NOT for the world of sinners! The Anti-Christ will ONLY make⁴ war on the "saints" - the Christians! for the first 3½ years.

His statement a number of paragraphs later further explains:

The "Great Tribulation" is ONLY for the Church! The "Wrath of God" is ONLY for the world of⁵ sinners and unbelievers! They are TWO SEPARATE PERIODS OF TIME.

A Description of the Rapture

"What a display it is going to be! Far greater than any 4th of July celebration!"⁶ Thus Sharrit, a mid-tribulationist, describes the rapture. What Sharrit, of course, is describing is the glory and splendor of Christ's coming for his church and the amazement and awe that his coming will generate here on earth. This description of the rapture from the standpoint of mankind as it is constituted at the time of the rapture is, as we might expect, totally lacking from the picture portrayed by pre-tribulationists, who of necessity view Christ's coming for the rapture as secret.

Our point of emphasis here, however, is not so much a description of the externals accompanying the millennial rapture as it is a description of the rapture from the viewpoint of those who are involved in it - the faithful church. This Hal Lindsey describes in the following way:

⁴Ibid., p 243.

⁵Ibid., p 244.

⁶Ibid., p 271.

Someday, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend. Earth and all its thrills, excitement, and pleasures will be nothing in contrast to this great event.

It will be the living end. The ultimate trip.⁷

An Evaluation of the Millennial Rapture

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 St. Paul writes these words of comfort and encouragement to the Thessalonian Christians of his day and through them to us:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's own 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 with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

These words constitute the primary reference of Scripture for the rapture. When the term rapture is applied specifically and only to what Paul is describing here, there is no real problem nor any kind of quarrel with millennialists on this score. Because God himself has through the apostle revealed this to us, as believing Christians we accept this as true. And the term rapture, which signifies extreme joy, ecstasy and elation, indeed seems to be an appropriate and fitting term.

To use the term, however, one runs into the danger of being mis-

⁷Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p 137.

understood because of the many unscriptural circumstances surrounding the rapture which millennialists associate with it. Among these unscriptural circumstances surrounding the rapture are: 1) a distinct division between the rapture of the church and the "rapture" of the tribulation saints; 2) a "secret" coming of Christ as an initial part of a prolonged coming of Christ for his church; 3) the separation of the rapture from Christ's coming on the last day to raise the dead and judge the world; and 4) the ongoing activity and history of the world, even after the church has been raptured.

As with millennialists in general, so with the various brands of tribulationists, one need but allow them to refute each other. Sharrit does an excellent job of refuting the position of post-tribulationists and especially of pre-tribulationists. He writes:

Having himself believed in the pre-tribulation Coming for about 40 years, the author believes he is qualified to present the doctrines and supporting scriptures, of those who believe that Jesus will come before the Tribulation. Let us study their fallacies:

1. Rev. 3:10 "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

THIS IS THEIR STRONGEST SCRIPTURE! Let us examine it carefully. Jesus told the Apostle John, the Revelator, to write it "to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia." This was one of the Churches at that time (A.D. 96) in Asia Minor.

We have no Biblical authority to claim that this Scripture is meant for any other Church, except for that particular Church in Asia Minor. This Scripture was literally fulfilled, to the Church in Philadelphia in the 7th Century, when the Mohammedans destroyed every Church in Asia Minor, except the Church in Philadelphia!

Now, listen to this documentation; - to throw it completely out, as a scripture on which to build your hopes of being raptured away before the Tribulation. A foot-note, in the "Living Prophecies" by Kenneth N. Taylor, says this, referring to Rev. 3:10 -

"The inference is not clear in the Greek, as to whether this means

"kept from" or "kept through." (the tribulation) (sic)

Now, if the Greek scholars throughout the world, can say that the Scripture "is not clear in the Greek, as to whether this means "kept from" or "kept through" the tribulation," (sic) THEN AM I, OR ANYONE, ABLE TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH IS NOT GOING THROUGH THE TRIBULATION? GOD FORBID! Especially so, when Jesus, Paul and St. John say that Jesus will not come until "immediately after the tribulation."

2. Another scripture from those who say that the Church will be caught away before the Tribulation, is this: "After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice I heard was as it were a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in Heaven, and one set on the throne." (Rev. 4:1-2)

Now, these words were spoken to the Apostle John only, in his being given the Book of Revelation to write; and to say that this is a type, or a picture, also of the Church being raptured to Heaven before the Tribulation, through this door, is a very "sandy" foundation indeed, on which to build the all-important doctrine of the Church being translated through this door, before the Tribulation begins! By the same process of imaginations we might be able to build up other doctrines from other similar scriptures. Do you want to base your hopes on such "sandy" foundations? Especially, after hearing what Jesus Himself, St. Paul and St. John, say on the contrary? Do you want such a foundation?

3. Another scripture that the Pre-Tribulationists use is Luke 21:36. Let us read it: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Jesus, in this scripture, tells His followers, to watch and pray always, that they may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Does this mean to escape the tribulation, which He had already explained in the same Mt. Olivet sermon, that Christians would have to endure, (Matt. 24:21-22) or does it mean the awful "Wrath of God" period of approximately 3½ years "that shall come to pass"? We believe it refers to escaping the "Wrath of God!" Unless we keep "prayed up" and watching, we will be like the foolish "Virgins" of Matt. 25:1-13, that our Lord told us about, who were not ready when the bridegroom came, and they did not get to go in to the wedding.

Also, Greek scholars tell us that the words "to escape all these things" can also be translated "to escape out of all these things."

Christians will "escape out" of the Great Tribulation! Even though we may die, we will "escape out of" the Great Tribulation and enter into the presence of the Lord!

Certainly, in the light of the other scriptures, it is certainly not a verse of scripture on which to build a doctrine that the Church will not have to go through the tribulation, especially, in the light of the other scriptures which tell us that the Church will not be raptured away until "immediately after the Tribulation," and not until the Anti-Christ sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

4. Another verse that is used in trying to prove that the Church will not have to go through the Tribulation is the verse in the King James Version, as follows: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9-10)

This is a picture of the four beasts, the twenty-four elders, around the throne of God in Heaven, falling down before the Lamb (Jesus Christ), and singing a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

This translation (King James) would mean that the four beasts and the twenty-four elders of Heaven had been redeemed out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation - and that they shall reign on the Earth. Some would have us to believe that they are representing the Christians, then in Heaven, but as we have seen, such is not true. There is no scripture to prove that the Christians are in Heaven at this time!

The author has checked many translations of the New Testament on these verses, and most of them read differently. For instance, the Amplified Version reads as follows: "And (now) they sing a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the scroll and to break the seals that are on it, for you were slain (sacrificed) and with your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom (royal race) and priests to our God, and they shall reign (as kings) over the earth!"

As you see, this puts a different light on these scriptures! The saints are not in Heaven, that we have any record of, at this time! Consequently, it is no proof that the Rapture has already taken

place!⁸

A word needs to be said at this point, before proceeding with Sharrit's rebuttal of the post-tribulationist doctrine, regarding his interpretation of Revelation 5:9. It must be conceded that the manuscripts do not speak as one voice on this text and that the specific problem, as Sharrit has rightly noted, is whether the objects of the verbs are in the first person or the third person. However, the only major manuscript support for the position of Sharrit and the Amplified Bible is the Alexandrian codex; the remaining major codices all support the use of the first person in verse nine, rather than the third person, as Sharrit suggests above.

Further, we must disagree with Sharrit's objection with the translation of the King James Version, which, as he admits, necessarily requires the understanding that the beasts and the elders themselves have been redeemed by Christ. Sharrit is correct when he says that some believe that the four beasts, or living creatures, and the twenty-four elders represent the Christians. At least so far as this latter statement is concerned, we are in this group.

Twelve and its multiples express a symbolic relationship to the church (e.g., the twelve tribes of Israel, the Old Testament people of God; the twelve apostles of the New Testament; the 144,000, twelve times twelve, the elect of God, etc.). Thus the twenty-four elders represent or symbolize God's saints. In chapter five verse eight they are described as having harps. In chapter fifteen verse two the ones holding harps are "those who have been victorious over the beast and his image

⁸John T. Sharrit, op. cit., pp 229 ff.

and over the number of his name." They are further described in chapter five verse eight as having "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Thus, since they are not mediators for the saints, they must be a symbolical representation of the saints themselves. In chapter five verses nine and ten the song which they sing proves again that they represent the believers. (Remember, the major codical support is for the use of the first person, as noted above.) Finally, when the twenty-four elders are first introduced in the Book of Revelation (4:4) they are described as being dressed in white. Subsequently, in chapter seven verses thirteen and fourteen, the "multitude which no one could count, wearing white robes" (Re 7:9) are described as "they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Re 7:14).

Whether one sees in the four beasts symbols of God's creation as they serve and glorify him or whether one sees in them symbols of the four evangelists, as some do, the four beasts or living creatures likewise rejoice that salvation has been accomplished (Re 5:8-10). In the former case we might compare Romans 8:18-23, to see how the whole of God's creation awaits the final deliverance of the last day:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Ro 8:18-23-23).

To identify the four beasts or living creatures as representatives of

all creation fits the role which they play in the Book of Revelation more appropriately than to identify them as representatives of the four evangelists. Furthermore, one has difficulty with this latter interpretation when viewing the description of the four living creatures in Revelation 4:7 in the light of Ezekiel's description (Eze 1:10), to which John's vision is comparable.⁹ Because of this relationship, one must also assume a similar relationship in their identification. Thus in the Book of Revelation as representatives of God's creation, they provide the fitting "Amen" to the song of all creation in chapter five verse fourteen. Immediately upon the heels of this "Amen" the four beasts are called upon to serve as the agents in extending the invitation to "Come!" (Re 6:1, 3, 5, 7). Each invitation is followed by one of the four horsemen of Revelation. One thing which these four horsemen have in common is that their respective roles influence the world and the creation of God. One of the beasts or living creatures is also assigned the task of distributing the seven golden vials, filled with the wrath of God, to the seven angels who were to dispense each of the vials (Re 15:7), pouring out the wrath of God on the earth (Re 16:1). And thus we would agree with Sharrit that the rapture has not already taken place, but point out once again that what is presented in Revelation 5:9-10 is a symbol of the sum total of believers - the church in its full and final form.

We pick up the argumentation of Sharrit in his rebuttal of pre-tribulation and post-tribulation doctrine. He writes subsequently:

⁹See also Ezekiel 10:14.

WHEN did Jesus say He was coming?

1. IMMEDIATELY AFTER the Tribulation! (NOT BEFORE)
2. IMMEDIATELY AFTER the
 - (a) Sun is darkened!
 - (b) Moon shall not give her light!
 - (c) Stars shall fall from heaven!

Matt. 24:29 Mark 13:24-25 Luke 21:25

Who are we - to say that Christ will come for His "elect" BEFORE these things happen! - to say that Christ could come at any moment? To do so, you call Christ a liar - You say that Christ did not know - but that YOU do know!

How do we know that these things do not happen at the Battle of Armageddon, as the so-called Post-Tribulationists believe? By comparing it with what the Bible says! Read Rev. 19:11-21 describing the "Battle of Armageddon."

We know that Rev. 19:11-21 is Christ's Coming at the Battle of Armageddon! It is definitely NOT His Coming for His "elect"! When is the Rapture of the Church? Jesus said that it would be "immediately AFTER the tribulation." PLEASE do not let anyone deceive you otherwise!¹⁰

A word needs yet to be said about the doctrine of the mid-tribulationists. Sharrit points out, properly, that pre-tribulationists and post-tribulationists have no scriptural foundation on which to base their views. However, it must also be pointed out that the same is true for the doctrine of the mid-tribulationists. The passages that are used to support their position are those which speak of the final activity of Christ on the last day: - the coming in glory, the raising of the dead, the "rapture" of the church, and the judgment upon the unbelieving world along with Satan and his hosts. But all of this we believe on the basis of Scripture can and will be accomplished in a matter of moments. For millennialists, however, this must be prolonged. Mid-tribulationists see a three-and-a-half year "Great Tribulation" and then the rapture of the church. Following the rapture is another three-and-a-half year pe-

¹⁰Ibid., pp 241 f.

riod of the "Wrath of God." There simply are no passages of Scripture which can justifiably be interpreted to support the tribulationists of any color. The circumstances they insist must accompany the rapture find no valid basis in the Word of God.