

THE RAPTURE – IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Chapter 1 of the book *The Left Behind Deception*

by Steve Wohlberg

[The Left Behind Deception. Author, Teacher, Pastor, Steve Wohlberg is committed to bring clarity to Biblical truth. He carries this concern into television on ACN, 3ABN, Safe TV and CBS Texas. You will be fascinated as you rivet your attention on this very hot issue. *Ed.*]

An official *Left Behind* site on the Internet declares: In one chaotic moment, millions of people around the world suddenly disappear leaving their clothes, wedding rings, eye glasses and shoes in crumpled piles. Mass confusion hits while vehicles suddenly unmanned veer out of control, fires erupt and hysteria breaks out as the living stare in disbelief and fear at the empty places where their loved ones were just seconds before. This is the rapture that God has planned as the first sign to begin the unraveling of the end of time.

Newspaper headlines are predicted to read: Millions Mysteriously Vanish! All Children Have Disappeared! Massive Traffic Snarls Due to Missing Drivers! Planes Crash, Trains Wreck As Pilots and Engineers Disappear! It has been reported that some at American Airlines are worried about this, so they want a least one non-Christian pilot aboard each flight just in case!

The Bible certainly does teach the exciting truth that Jesus Christ will return for His people. Jesus Himself said, I will come again, and receive you to myself (John 14:3). I fully believe these words, and long to be ready for that great day. Without a doubt, the most quoted passage in the Bible now being used to support the idea of a Rapture is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Countless Christians know it by heart, and it is cited in *Left Behind: The Movie*. Paul wrote that believers in Jesus Christ will someday be caught up "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). How wonderful! This will be no imaginary, Beam me up, Scotty, event as in *Star Trek*. On the contrary, it will be very real, and no space suits or oxygen masks will be needed. While I do believe in the return of Jesus, and that believers will someday be caught up, there are still some major issues of interpretation I want to examine. The first concerns *the timing* of our being caught up, and the second has to do with *the nature* of the event itself.

Let me explain. According to *Left Behind*, the return of Jesus Christ actually takes place in two distinct phases. First, Jesus returns silently and secretly, unnoticed by the world. At that moment Christians will be caught up, or raptured, which is interpreted as the *sudden vanishing* of millions of people all over the globe. The rest of mankind, having been left behind, are then forced into a seven-year period called the Tribulation (*The Tribulation Force*, inside cover, second book in the *Left Behind* series). During the Tribulation, the Antichrist rises to enforce his deadly mark. At the end of the seven years, Jesus returns visibly before the eyes of all, an event referred to as Christ's Second Coming or Glorious Appearing. Thus, according to *Left Behind*, Jesus first comes silently to rapture away true believers, and then, seven years later, He comes visibly at the very end of the world. With minor variations, this sequence is now accepted by millions of Bible-believing Christians as an accurate picture of end-time events.

There are three primary pillars that stand out in this teaching, and it is safe to say that the entire *Left Behind* project rests firmly on top of each of them.

Pillar 1 – The Rapture, when the Church is caught up (1 Thessalonians 4:17), does *not* take place at the visible Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but seven years before it.

Pillar 2 – Those who miss the Rapture will have a *second chance* during the seven years of Tribulation to be saved.

Pillar 3 – The true Church of today will *escape the Tribulation* and will *not* have to face the Antichrist and the Mark.

Before we go any further, allow me to list three logical alternatives, thus clarifying the issues.

Alternative 1 – The Rapture, when the Church is caught up (1 Thessalonians 4:17), *does* take place at the visible Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of world.

Alternative 2 – Those who are not ready for the catching up of true believers at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will have *no second chances* to be saved.

Alternative 3 – The Church of today will *go through* Earth's final period of Tribulation and therefore must overcome the Antichrist and the Mark in order to be ready for Christ's Second Coming.

Can you see how serious these issues are? Which view is right The three pillars of *Left Behind*, or these three logical alternatives? *What does the Bible really say?*

Let's start with Pillar 1 The Rapture does *not* take place at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. As I have already mentioned, the most widely quoted passage about the Rapture is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There, Paul wrote, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up." Although the word rapture doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible, the idea comes from those two words "caught up." A simple comparison of verse 17 with verse 15, which says, "We which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord," makes it very clear that believers will be caught up at the coming of the Lord. Here is the key issue *At which coming of the Lord?* Will believers be caught up at a silent and invisible coming of the Lord, before the Tribulation, as taught in *Left Behind*; or will believers be caught up at the highly visible Glorious Appearing of Jesus Christ at the end of the world? Before we read the entire context, it is important to realize that Paul uses a very specific Greek word for coming in verse 15. The word is *parousia*, which you can find in any concordance. You may find this a little hard to believe, but a whole lot rides on that one word. If you are a high-tech person, click Save, and store that word in your mental computer, for we will come back to it.

Have you ever driven down a highway without realizing how fast you were going, and then, when you finally looked down at your speedometer, you said to yourself, I'm going too fast and must slow down!? This is what we need to do when it comes to our study of 1 Thessalonians 4. We must slow down and take a full look. As we do, we will discover truth that is not only clear, but also shocking. In fact, the implications are nothing short of cataclysmic. Right in

between verses 15 and 17, Paul wrote, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump [or trumpet] of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). *Left Behind* describes this event as silent and secret, yet doesn't it seem rather loud and visible? There is a shout, a voice, and a trumpet. Have you ever heard of a silent trumpet? Some people have even called 1 Thessalonians 4:16 the noisiest verse in the Bible!

Now let's put verses 16 and 17 together: The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Honestly, do you see anything in these words about *vanishing Christians* prior to the Tribulation? Does "caught up" necessarily mean disappear without a trace? At the end of His earthly life, Jesus Christ was also taken up, (Acts 1:9), but this doesn't mean He disappeared, leaving His clothes on earth. Instead, in full view of His wondering disciples, *while they beheld*, he was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9). Just as Christ's ascension was highly visible, even so do Paul's words about a shout, a voice, a trumpet, a resurrection, and believers being caught up into the clouds seem quite visible. That is, if we take them literally.

Let's return to 1 Thessalonians and take a look at the entire context: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come like *a thief in the night*. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape" (4:16-18, emphasis added).

Paul said that this tremendous day of the Lord will finally arrive like a thief in the night. The producers of *Left Behind* interpret this to mean that Jesus will come like a *silent* thief to steal believers out of this world before the seven years of Tribulation – then driverless cars will crash, pilotless planes will collide, and babies will be found missing from their cribs. After this the Antichrist will rise, the Mark of the Beast will come, and people will yet have a second chance to be saved. The popular Christian film, *A Thief in the Night*, which is similar to *Left Behind: The Movie*, also presents this perspective. Yet, is this really what Paul is saying?

Again, let's slow down and take a closer look at our Biblical speedometers. Paul wrote, "You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3). *Do you see what Paul is really saying?* Jesus coming as a thief in the night does not mean He will come quietly and invisibly to steal believers out of this world, as is taught in *Left Behind*. Rather, it means He will come unexpectedly, bringing sudden destruction upon the unsaved. *Thus it is not a secret coming, but only a sudden one.* And what about the unprepared being given a second chance to be saved? Paul clearly answered this question when he wrote, "*They shall not escape*" (5:3).

Therefore, upon the closest examination, the most widely quoted passage in the Bible used to support the *Left Behind* idea of a silent return of Jesus Christ, of vanishing Christians, and of people being given a second chance during a subsequent period of Tribulation, *doesn't really say this at all!* Paul said that Jesus will literally *come down from heaven* with a noisy shout, a loud voice, and with the blast of a trumpet. This awesome and tremendous day of the Lord will come unexpectedly upon all the lost like a thief in the night, resulting in their *sudden* destruction. The apostle Peter also wrote about this same return of Jesus Christ as a thief: "The day of the Lord will come as *a thief in the night, in which* the heavens shall pass away with *a great noise*, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10, emphasis added). According to Peter, the return of Jesus as a thief is definitely not a silent and secret event before any seven-year period of Tribulation. Rather, this day arrives suddenly, with a great noise, and is clearly associated with the end of the world! A major crack is starting to form in Pillar 1.

Now let's go back to that mysterious Greek word, *parousia*. There is absolutely no doubt that Paul used this word to describe the coming of Jesus at which believers will be caught up (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). This same Greek word is also used in a sizzling apocalyptic message given by Jesus Christ Himself in Matthew 24, so we need to take a look at it. On a certain momentous day, "As [Jesus] sat upon the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of *your coming*, and of *the end of the world*" (Matthew 24:3, emphasis added). The Greek word there in verse 3 for coming is *parousia*. The disciples associated this coming, or *parousia*, with the end of the world, and they were anxious to know more about it.

The immediate response of Jesus was: "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4). The forcefulness of this thought should hit us like a hurricane! Why? Because it clearly implies that when it comes to this exact topic of the coming or *parousia* of Jesus Christ and the end of the world, there is going to be a great deal of deception whirling around. And what is even more dramatic is that Jesus raised His "Don't Be Deceived" warning flag *four times* in this single sermon (Matthew 24: 4, 5, 11, 24). One gets the idea that last-day delusions would someday sweep over planet Earth like a massive tidal wave. The only way to avoid being swept away in this swirling sea of falsehood is to pay close attention to the words of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord continued: "For there shall arise false Christ's and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). Here Jesus said Satan's delusions will eventually become so subtle and powerful that only the elect will come through unscathed. But who are the elect? Based on the context, they must be a group of people who know Jesus Christ and the Bible so well that the devil can't mislead them. Verse 31 also tells us that the elect are people who are ready for the return of Jesus Christ.

Immediately after warning about tricky false prophets and deception, Jesus Christ said: "Wherefore if they say to you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the *secret* chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:26, 27, emphasis added). Here, Jesus draws a razor-sharp contrast between false views of His return and the

truth. When it comes to false views, don't miss that little word secret. Jesus plainly warned that people will mistakenly say His coming will be in secret. In fact, based on the context, we discover that this will be one of those powerful delusions which only God's faithful elect will avoid. So how should we respond when people say Jesus' coming will be in secret? Christ's answer is stunning. Jesus said, "*Believe it not!*" Why? Because "as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west; so shall also the coming of the son of man be."

Far from being a secret event, the return of Jesus Christ will be like the brilliant flashing of millions of lightning bolts blazing across the sky. Can you guess what awesome Greek word Matthew used for coming in verse 27? It is *parousia*, and this mega-important word is the exact same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 in his description of that coming of Jesus at which believers will be raptured or caught up! In many Hollywood action films, certain files are labeled Top Secret, yet when it comes to Bible truth about the coming, or *parousia* of Jesus Christ, this return will be *anything but secret*. The crack in Pillar 1 is getting bigger.

Paul plainly said that the Rapture will take place at the coming or *parousia* of Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Jesus Himself said His coming or *parousia* will be like the brilliant flashing of electrically-charged bolts of lightning hurtling across the sky. The disciples associated this very same awesome coming or *parousia* with the end of the world, and they asked Jesus what the major sign of this coming would be (Matthew 24:3). After warning about secret coming ideas and deception, Jesus finally answered this exact question by lifting the curtain of history and fully unveiling what His high-powered and super-cataclysmic coming or *parousia* will really be like: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30, 31).

This high-impact description of Christ's return contains an even Bigger Bang than the highly-speculative evolutionary Big Bang theory. The coming or *parousia* of Jesus Christ, *at which believers will be caught up*, will be unmistakably *visible* to all the tribes of the earth. The amazed masses of mankind will literally *see* the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Certainly no one will miss it, and no one will wake up the next day wondering where all the Christians went. On that great day, all the unsaved will mourn. Why? Not because their loved ones have vanished into thin air, but because Jesus Christ has *suddenly come*, and now their life of sinning and partying is over. And once again, this will be a very noisy and loud event which will include the echoing of a great sound of a trumpet throughout the sky. When that booming blast is heard, billions of shining angels will descend and circle the globe to *gather together* his elect from the four winds. Thus true believers will be caught up into the air. Now don't miss it. These are the very same elements Paul wrote about in 1 Thessalonians 4:17!

In *both* Matthew 24:30, 31, and in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, we read about clouds, noise, a trumpet, a gathering together, and believers being transported up into the air. Any concordance will show you that *both* passages refer to the coming or *parousia* of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 24:27, 30, 31, this coming or *parousia* *unmistakably* applies to Christ's Glorious Appearing. As we are to be caught up together, let's put these shocking pieces together. The

conclusion is inescapable, unalterable, and irrefutable. True believers will be caught up or raptured at the loud, climactic, highly-visible, and ultra-glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

This article is like a race car whose engine is just beginning to rev up. We have a lot more to cover, so let's keep going. In Matthew 24, after describing His Glorious Appearing, Jesus continued: "But of *that day* and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. *Then* shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord will come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore you be also ready: for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man will come" (Matthew 24:36-44, emphasis added).

Here, Jesus Christ paralleled His return with the sudden descent of billions of tons of water upon the lost in Noah's day. Those ancient people thought Noah was a crazy old man, "until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also *the coming* of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:39, emphasis added). Can you guess what Greek word is used here again for coming? Don't take my word for it, but look it up yourself in your own concordance. It is *parousia*, which, as we have already proven, clearly applies to the visible Glorious Appearing of Jesus Christ. Now notice, *immediately* after the word *parousia* is used in verse 39, Jesus continued: "THEN shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left." This is probably the second most quoted passage in the Bible now being used to support the *Left Behind* idea of a silent Rapture prior to the Tribulation. Supposedly, when this verse is fulfilled, those who are taken will vanish without a trace, leaving only their clothes, shoes, false teeth and wedding rings, while those who are left will have to endure the Tribulation, facing the Antichrist and the Mark. But is this really what Jesus Christ is saying?

The correct answer to this question will not come by depending on the interpretations of others. Actually, it is never safe to lean wholly on any man. Christians should never be taught to rely completely on Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins, or any other popular teacher, including Steve Wohlberg. We should all open our own Bibles, pick up our own concordances, and find out for ourselves what is truth. If you are willing to do this, then this is what you will most definitely find Believers will be taken (verse 40) at the coming or *parousia* (verse 39), which the Bible clearly applies to the loud, highly-visible and ultra-glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the world (Matthew 24:3, 27, 30, 31, 39)!

Jesus basically said, It will be just like Noah's day (verses 37-39). Now think about it. Did Noah and his family vanish before the flood? No, they walked visibly into the ark. And what about those who were *left behind* after the door of the ark was shut? Did they have a second chance? No again. How were they left? *They were left dead, they did not escape.* After saying, the flood came, and took them all away, Jesus made His power-packed point, "so shall also the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of man be" (verse 39). And then, without a break, Christ said,

"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left" (verse 40). Upon careful analysis, these words leave no room for the continuing lives of *Left Behind's* Rayford Steele and Buck Williams during the Tribulation after the Rapture. Why not? Because those who are taken are taken up at the coming or *parousia*, which applies to the final Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

Immediately after saying, One shall be taken and the other left, the King of the Universe then compared His Second Coming to the sudden arrival of a midnight thief, just like Paul did in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3. Jesus said, "If the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore you also be ready: for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man will come" (Matthew 24:43, 44). To watch doesn't mean spending endless hours in front of the television set, nor does it mean watching popular movies about the end times that may take detours away from the straight truth. Rather, it means to *watch out for deception!*

Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 fit together just as perfectly as Adam and Eve before they sinned. Both describe a noisy, loud, highly visible, trumpet-blasting and ultra-glorious return of Jesus Christ in the clouds. Both describe believers being caught up and transported into the air. Both declare this day will come with thief-like suddenness upon all sleeping sinners. In Noah's day, when billions of tons of water came crashing down, there were no second chances for those outside the ark. Paul said the lost shall not escape. And both Paul and Matthew use the exact same Greek word to describe this great, tremendous, and awesomely powerful day of the Lord. Simply look in your concordance. That word is *parousia*, which clearly refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. True believers are urged to watch, be ready, and to avoid all subtle, satanic deceptions.

What about the Rapture taking place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? This is probably the third most quoted passage in the Bible now being used to support the idea of vanishing Christians prior to the Tribulation. We have previously slowed down to look at our Biblical speedometers, yet this time we must come to a screeching halt. Paul wrote, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound*, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52, emphasis added). Is Paul saying that believers will mysteriously vanish from the earth prior to the Tribulation, while their loved ones blink? Not at all! He is saying that the dead will be raised and our bodies will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. But *when* will this moment take place? Paul's answer is clear. It will occur *at the last trump*, when the trumpet shall sound, that is, at the end of the world. This is that very same great sound of a trumpet Jesus said would be heard at His Second Coming (Matthew 24:31)! Pillar 1 is cracking and crumbling.

As we have previously noted, Pillar 2 supporting the *Left Behind* project is the theory that those who miss the Rapture will have a *second chance* to be saved during the Tribulation. If you think about it, this idea can be dangerous. Some might rationalize, If the Rapture really takes place, then I'll know for sure God is real. It may be tough, but I can still join the Tribulation Force during the seven years. Even if that Antichrist guy tries to kill me, I will still resist the Mark! While the fostering of this foolish attitude is not the intent of *Left Behind*, people can easily adopt this "let's wait and see" position, *putting off their decision to follow Jesus Christ*.

But Paul wrote that all who are not fully on the Lord's side when believers are caught up, shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:3), and there were no second chances in Noah's day. After the door of the ark closed, all desperate attempts to get inside were useless. Therefore Pillar 2 is becoming like a man diagnosed with cancer; it has very serious problems.

If Pillars 1 and 2 supporting the *Left Behind* project are wrong, and if the logical alternative about the Church being caught up at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is right, then this means that the Church of today is destined to go through the Tribulation, rather than disappearing before it arrives. Yet Christians often resist this conclusion with the argument, God wouldn't allow us to go through the Tribulation because He loves us too much! But think about it. Does He love us any more than He would love the Tribulation Force after the Rapture? Obviously not. Then why would He allow them to go through such a period? Could it be that the doctrine of *escaping tribulation* is really only catering to our middle-class American tendencies? We like comfort and hate to go through trials, and we can hardly bear it when our TV-dinner life-style is threatened. Yet historically, God's people have gone through intense suffering. All of the disciples of Jesus, except for John, were cruelly murdered. Thousands of the early Christians were literally torn to shreds by wild dogs and lions inside the Coliseum. Millions of others were horribly tortured by the Inquisition and burned to ashes during the Dark Ages. Believers in Russia and China have suffered terribly under Communism, and yet American Christians say, God wouldn't allow us to go through the Tribulation!

Some Christians might respond by saying, Yes, but those verses are talking about tribulation, not *the* Tribulation. But think about it. If the majority of the Bible's tribulation texts refer to what believers *go through*, why would God's Word suddenly shift gears by teaching that *the* Tribulation is something believers will *not* go through? Even in *Left Behind*, there are Christians who do go through *the* Tribulation (the Tribulation Force), therefore the thought of Christians going through this period is really not so strange.

Many Christians also argue, If the Church is going through the Tribulation, then why isn't the Church mentioned after Revelation 4? Let's take a closer look. In Revelation 4:1, John was told to come up here. People conclude this represents the Rapture and they think the Church isn't mentioned anymore. First of all, John did not actually go to heaven in Revelation 4:1, he was simply taken up *in a vision*, while his toes were still on Patmos. Secondly, the Church *is* on earth after Revelation 4. How do we know this? Because the Bible says the Antichrist will make war with *the saints* (13:7), then we read about *the faith of the saints* (13:10), and then, during the Mark of the Beast crisis, Revelation refers to *the saints* who keep *the faith of Jesus* (14:12). Some might respond by saying, Yes, but those are the Tribulation saints after the Rapture, not the Church. But consider this. Paul wrote his New Testament letters to the churches of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:33). What does this tell us? It tells us that wherever there are saints, *there is the Church!* Even if the saints mentioned in Revelation 13 and 14 are only the Tribulation saints after the Rapture, wouldn't they, as sincere believers in Jesus Christ, *still be the Church?*

Left Behind teaches that the Church will not be here for Armageddon. Is this true? The word Armageddon occurs in Revelation 16:16, which is the great chapter about the falling of the seven last plagues. Right before verse 16, *during* the time of the seven last plagues, Jesus Christ thunders, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches and keeps his

garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:15, 16). Did you catch that? Who is Jesus talking to? To the Church! At the time of verse 15, *while* the seven plagues are falling, which is definitely *during* the Tribulation, and right before the battle of Armageddon, Jesus Christ has not yet come as a thief! Therefore He must come like a thief *at Armageddon, after* the Tribulation, and this must be the time when He comes to gather His Church.

Like a good Commanding Officer, Paul urged the soldiers of the cross to, "Put on the whole armor of God – that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). How can we stand in the evil day if we have previously disappeared? Jesus Christ also said, He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24:13). So how long must we endure? *To the end*. Yet Christ will be with us, that's why He promised: "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). We can trust Him in this.

If everything in this book is true, then what about the seven years? The concept of a seven-year period of Tribulation is actually *the underlying foundation* of the entire *Left Behind* scenario. Remember, the theory is that first the Rapture takes place, and then comes the seven years of Tribulation. One of the *Left Behind* novels declares, "The disappearances have ushered in the seven year period of Tribulation" (*The Tribulation Force*, inside cover). In another we read: "It's the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation" (*The Indwelling*, inside cover). Thus, this *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* best-selling series of Christian books, now being endorsed by well-respected Church leaders nationwide, is built completely around this seven-year framework.

The Great Granddaddy Bible Text for the entire seven-year Tribulation theory is Daniel 9:27. This passage is the very first verse quoted in *Left Behind: The Movie*. Here is what it says: "He shall confirm the covenant with many for *one week*, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice to cease." A day in prophecy represents a year (Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:6), thus this famous period of one week actually represents seven years. Millions are now applying this to a future seven-year period of Tribulation. He is interpreted to be the Antichrist who will make a covenant with the Jews during the Tribulation. Book 6 of the *Left Behind* novels is called *Assassins*. The subtitle reads: "Assignment: Jerusalem, Target: Antichrist." Its focus is the halfway point of the Global Community's seven-year protection agreement with Israel (p. 302).

According to *Left Behind*, immediately after the Rapture, the Antichrist will make this seven-year protection agreement with Israel. Yet I wonder how he could accomplish this so quickly right after the Rapture, for wouldn't he need some time to rise to power? An intrinsic part of this story is the theory that, during the Tribulation, the Jewish temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices will be resumed (more on this later). Supposedly, halfway into the Tribulation, the Antichrist will break his protection agreement with the Jews and stop the sacrifices, thereby causing them to cease. This is how millions of Christians today are now interpreting Daniel 9:27.

What many don't realize is that there is another reasonable interpretation that is quite different. Not only does this alternate view have a great deal of Biblical support, but it has also been taught in the past by many credible Bible scholars who have written respected commentaries

which are now in the libraries of pastors across America. One example is the world-famous *Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary*. Shockingly, this commentary doesn't apply Daniel 9:27 to the Antichrist at all, nor does it apply the one week to a seven-year period of Tribulation after the Rapture. Rather, it applies it to *Jesus Christ*, who, after three and one-half years of loving ministry, died in the midst of the week, which ultimately caused all animal sacrifices to cease!

Here's the quotation from Matthew Henry's famous commentary: "By offering himself a sacrifice once and for all he [Jesus] shall put an end to all Levitical sacrifices" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. IV – Isaiah to Malachi, Complete Edition. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1712, Notes on Daniel 9:27, p. 1095). Another excellent Bible commentary written by the famous British Methodist Adam Clarke says, This confirmation of the covenant must take in the ministry of John the Baptist with that of our Lord, comprehending the term of seven years, during the whole of which he might well be said to confirm or ratify the new covenant with mankind (*The Holy Bible with a commentary and critical notes* by Adam Clarke, Vol. IV – Isaiah to Malachi. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, Notes on Daniel 9:27, p. 602). Here's one more from the much-respected *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*: He shall confirm the covenant Christ. The confirmation of the covenant is assigned to Him (Rev. Robert Jamieson, Rev. A. R. Fausset and Rev. David Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Complete Edition. Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., Notes on Daniel 9:27, p. 641). All of these commentaries are now available electronically on the World Wide Web, so you can easily check these references yourself.

Which view is right, the one put forth in *Left Behind*, or the one described in those old dusty commentaries? Does Daniel 9:27 apply to a future seven-year period of Tribulation, or was it fulfilled by Jesus Christ 2000 years ago? The only way to find out is by taking a careful look at Daniel 9:27 itself. God's Word says: "He shall confirm the *covenant* with *many*." Now take a look at this. Jesus Christ Himself said, "This is my blood of the new *covenant* shed for *many*" (Matthew 26:28). Behold a perfect fit! Both use the words covenant and many. Popular teaching says the Antichrist will make a covenant or protection agreement with the Jews and then break it after three and one-half years, yet the Bible actually says: "He shall *confirm* the covenant with many *for one week*." Thus He is to *confirm* the covenant for the full seven years, not break it! And it is not simply a covenant, as is commonly understood. No! It is *the covenant* which applies to the New Covenant. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one who *confirmed the covenant* (Galatians 3:17; Romans 15:8). In the midst of the week, after three and one-half years, Jesus gave His life for us, causing the sacrifice to cease. He was the final sacrifice. No more sacrifices are to be offered. Period (Hebrews 10:12).

In my other book, *Exploding the Israel Deception*, Chapter 5 is called, The 70th Week of Daniel Delusion. There, I give many more solid reasons why Daniel 9:27 doesn't apply to the Antichrist at all, but to Jesus Christ alone. The fact is, the entire *Left Behind* idea of a seven-year period of Tribulation after the Rapture is a grand illusion, a massive mega-myth. It may even go down in history as the Greatest Evangelical Misinterpretation of All Time! The whole concept is like a gigantic bubble. Once Daniel 9:27 is correctly understood, and the sharply-pointed pin of truth is inserted, Pop! goes the seven years!

I want to conclude by talking about Pillar 3 which now supports the *Left Behind* house. The Church of today will *escape the Tribulation* and will *not* have to face the Antichrist and the

Mark of the Beast. This is the Big One, and it is right here that emotions fly and reason vanishes just as quickly as those disappearing people in *Left Behind: The Movie*. Why? The answer is simple. If Pillar 3 is false, and if the Church will not be caught up until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, then this obviously means that the Church must *first* pass through Earth's final period of Tribulation, and will have to face the Antichrist and the Mark. Many Christians fear such a conclusion, and this is why, many times, underneath the attempt to maintain the doctrine of a Pre-Tribulation *Secret* Rapture, there often lurks a *secret* fear of having to face the Mark of the Beast.

This reminds me of the tragic deaths of 118 crewmen inside the giant Russian nuclear submarine, Kursk. On Saturday, August 12, 2000, way out in the icy waters of the Barents Sea, east-northeast of Moscow, something went terribly wrong. An explosion took place, which was followed by another. The catastrophe developed at lightning speed, (*Newsweek*, Nov. 6, 2000, p. 43) and the doomed sub quickly sank to the bottom of the ocean. *Newsweek* ran a story on this called, A Cry From the Deep. Twenty-three Russians survived the initial blasts and flooding. A letter that was later found by deep-sea divers inside a pocket of the one of the corpses. The note said: "There are 23 people here. None of us can get to the surface (*Newsweek*, Nov. 6, 2000. p. 43). Because help didn't come quickly enough, they all drowned. As I have thought about this, I can imagine the *feeling of fear* in the hearts of those Russian sailors deep down below the calm surface of the water.

Fear also lurks below the doctrine of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Deep down underneath the surface of many arguments, lies a hidden fear of having to face the Mark of the Beast. This fear may be unconscious, yet often it is there, though it need not be. True Christians can learn a lesson from popular bumper stickers which say, Fear No Evil. We don't need to be afraid. We can trust in Jesus Christ, for hasn't He promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"? If the fictitious Tribulation Force in the *Left Behind* novels can overcome the Antichrist and the Mark of the Beast, *then so can we!* Yet Christians *do* fear the Mark, and this fear often prevents them from even reasonably examining the clear Scriptural evidence in favor of a Post-Tribulation gathering of the Church to Christ. And thus, sadly, the Pre-Tribulation Rapture idea has become "The Great Evangelical Escape Clause" for the Avoidance of the Mark of the Beast! And for those who must have it that way, no amount of Biblical evidence will convince them. Like a triple-bolted door in downtown New York, they are simply closed to the facts.

The result? *Truth is left behind.*

TO OBTAIN THE WHOLE BOOK [*The Left Behind Deception*]:

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ALSO ask about his other books:

The 1888 Message for the Year 2000, and Exploding the Israel Deception

