

Ready or Not

There is much disagreement about the manner and time of Christ's return and all things related to it...there was then when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and there still is today.

¹Thes 4:16 ***For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive on earth, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to greet the Lord in the air and then we will be with the Lord forever.***

¹⁸ ***So scare people with these words.....*** NO it says

¹⁸ ***So comfort and encourage each other with these words.***

It seems that ever since Paul told the Thessalonian church to comfort and encourage each other with news of Christ's return, Christians have used these very words – words meant to encourage and comfort each other – used them to argue and fight with each other or to scare unbelievers.

A movie released on 13th September, 2013 focuses on the days and events following the “Rapture” and follows four different stories taking place over the world.

"I wanted to make a very clinical, realistic film on the coming Rapture," said director Tim Chey. "There's no cartoon anti-Christ, cartoon anything. It's a very sobering look at what will happen in the next great event of mankind: Christ returning for His church.....It's most definitely not for children under 13. There's no profanity, sex, or anything like that. But I made this film to scare the living daylight out of adult non-believers."

The Second Coming of Christ is actually the real hope of all believers – a hope and trust that God is going to be faithful in fulfilling the promises of the prophecies found in His word.

At His first coming Jesus came as a baby in the manger of Bethlehem. Through His birth, life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection, many of the O.T. prophecies concerning the coming Saviour of the world were fulfilled. However there appear to be prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled – those to be fulfilled at Christ's return. In His first coming He came as a “Suffering Servant,” in His second coming He comes as a “Conquering King.” At His first coming He arrived in the most humble and ordinary of circumstances. In His second coming He will come in magnificent splendour with the armies of heaven at His side.

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, but to build character. People who set dates and times for Christ's return are usually setting to control and upset people, and that is exactly what happened in the church in Thessalonica.

What we can say with certainty is that Christ WILL return, everyone WILL stand before God and there IS an eternal destiny for each person that is determined by whether or not they chose to receive God's free gift of salvation that He offers to everyone through Christ.

I believe that most modern Western Evangelical Christians who have a view on this subject, have not based their view on a good Biblical theology or study or instruction, but rather by sensationalist material – books and films – such as those by Hal Lindsay, Tim LaHaye, Barry Smith etc.

Sadly, that goes for a lot of Pastors as well – especially in what is known as the non-conformist churches – such as Brethren, Baptist, Church of Christ, ACC and other Pentecostal groups. Many of these people are well intentioned but have been careless and, in many cases, quite untrained in critical theology, who simply regurgitate the views that have been taught to them by these books and movies with such compelling story lines or perhaps taught to them by others who are as ill informed as themselves. At Bible school, I was only taught one model – the model adopted by most evangelicals – and there were some bits of it that never added up for me.

The Scripture is clear. Regardless of what the scoffers say, Jesus **is** coming. World history is racing toward the conclusion that God has ordained. It isn't an end that will come as a result of nuclear war, environmental irresponsibility, or an alien invasion; it is the one that comes by the purpose and plan of God, foretold in Scripture. So yes – Christ **will** return!

So the question that people ask is this, where do you stand, what is your perspective on the return of Christ. Are you “post-mill,” “pre-mill,” “amill,” “pre-trib,” “mid-trib,” “post-trib,” or just plain “confused?” I think that if we're going to be honest many of us find ourselves in that last category.

THE FACTS OF HIS COMING

There are some things that are not disputed by most Bible scholars:

- “Jesus is coming back and everyone will see it!” It's a **VISIBLE EVENT!**
- God's perspective on time differs greatly from our own (2nd Peter 3:8)

In spite of the fact that scripture clearly states that we can't know and won't know the timing of the second coming, people down through the ages have tried to figure it out

- The great scientist Sir Isaac Newton (who actually wrote more about theology than science – a fact that we don't often hear!) calculated it not to be before 2060
- William Shakespeare set the date at 1792
- William Miller, the father of the Adventist movement calculated it to occur in 1843, and when that failed he recalculated it to be 1844 that also failed and so he quit setting dates
- Mark 13:32 tells us that the angels don't know the time and that Jesus Himself doesn't know the time (He's still under submission to the father) so what makes us think we're smart enough to figure it out?

People were warned that the flood was coming... for generations they were warned and yet they still disregarded the doom that was on the horizon. So it will be with many when Christ returns

There will be resurrection of both the “Righteous” and the “Wicked” (John 5:28-29)

All the dead of every age and nation will rise from the grave – even though many have been dead for a long time, God sees all and will re-gather them and raise them up!

The dead in Christ and those now living will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air (1st Thessalonians 4:17) – In the KJV, it says in 1Cor 15, of those who are alive at the time of Christ's return, that they will not “prevent” those who have died from meeting God. “Prevent” here is use with the old definition in mind – from the Latin, “*pre*” meaning before and “*vente*” meaning to go, so it is simply saying that we all go together, not the living first.

There is much dispute in Christian groups about the details of this great event.

With the exception of Pre-Millennialism (see below), most models or theological views around eschatology, have some link to the oldest eschatological model – that of Amillennialism, sometimes referred to as “Realized Eschatology”.

Amillennialists believe that the millennium is **not** an actual physical realm on Earth. They do not believe that it will last 1,000 years, rather it is a figurative period simply meaning a long time (a thousand years is as a day to The Lord). They claim, the millennium, so called, or the Kingdom of God, was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection, at which point He gained victory over both Satan and the Curse and is currently active in the world today through the presence of the heavenly reign of Christ, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the activities of Christian faith groups – the church. Christ is now reigning at the right hand of the Father over His church. If Christ reigns in the church and we (the church) are on the earth, then Christ reigns on the earth (NB Roman 5:17 – “*those who receive the great grace and the gift of righteousness reign IN LIFE by the one man, Jesus Christ*”).

Both good and evil will continue in the world during this time. Lawlessness, a falling away from the Church, and persecution of Christians will increase in magnitude. Finally, the current *Church Age* will end suddenly at Christ's second coming. The “Rapture” will happen when Christ returns: believers, living and dead, will rise to meet Jesus in the sky and He will immediately proceed to earth to judge the nations and then the church will follow Him into their eternal state.

This model of “the rapture” is essentially common to all models except premillennialist pre-tribulation futurism. The rapture is seen as a one stage event in which the church rises to meet/greet The Lord in the air as He returns, and then the risen (“raptured”) church escorts Him in His triumph to the earth.

According to amillennialists, upon Christ's return to Earth, the Day of Judgment will occur.

Events described in The **Olivet Discourse** (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) and in most of the book of Revelation are seen as occurrences which have already happened, or which are symbolic in nature and not to be taken literally. The Antichrist is looked upon figuratively and not as a specific individual person.

This belief was held by many of the early Christian fathers during the first and second centuries (interestingly, those closest to the time when Jesus spoke and taught about these things). Augustine (354 - 430 CE), often called the "Father of Amillennialism", was largely responsible for the establishment of Amillennialism as the formal church belief. It remained the generally accepted system throughout Christianity until after the Reformation in the 16th century. There was a form of Historicist Premillennialism in the first couple of centuries, but it was uncommon and did not continue into common belief system of the church.

Many Christian denominations today, primarily those subscribing to what is known as Reformed theology – including groups such as the Anglican Communion, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox groups, Reformed and some American Baptist groups (reformed Baptist – not that they have been reformed but they subscribe to reformed theology), continue to teach Amillennialism.

While other views focus on the final days of humankind on earth, Amillennialism sees "the last things" as having been initiated at Christ's resurrection and so being applicable from the earliest days of the Christian church (so the "last days" have continued since the time of Christ). The Amillennialist perspective sees the whole of God's redemptive revelation as twofold – promise and fulfilment.

Please note that this is VERY truncated summary of Amillennialism.

A very similar view of eschatology is held by those subscribing to Postmillennialism. This model claims that chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation sees Christ's second coming as occurring *after (post)* the "**Millennium**", a Golden Age in which Christian ethics prosper. Postmillennialist believes that the millennium is an era (not necessarily a literal thousand years) during which Christ will reign over the earth, not from a literal and earthly throne, but through the gradual increase of the Gospel and its power to change lives.

Postmillennialism holds that Jesus Christ established His kingdom on earth through His preaching and redemptive work in the first century and that He equips His church with the gospel, empowers her by the Spirit, and charges her with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) to disciple all nations.

Postmillennialism expects that eventually the vast majority of men living will be saved, thus Christ will virtually rule over the whole earth through the unprecedented spread of the Gospel.

Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of men and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions Jesus Christ will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously, to end history with the general resurrection and the final judgment after which the eternal order follows. The postmillennialist sees the millennial kingdom as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that he would become "a great nation" and that "all peoples on earth would be blessed" through him ([Genesis 12:2-3](#)). This holy reign coming about via gradual conversion through the spread of the Gospel — this incremental progress is drawn from many pictures found throughout Scripture (e.g., [Deuteronomy 7:22](#) and [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#)).

The establishment of the millennial period includes two phases. The first phase is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. The second phase is believers preaching the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Some postmillennialist believe that the conversion of the world will be a very slow and gradual process, taking perhaps thousands of years more. On the other hand, others believe that conversion could happen within a short period of time (about 10 years) as the result of a great revival.

Postmillennialism was a dominant theological belief among American Protestants who promoted reform movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, but it was the last of the three major eschatologies to develop. It was first taught within the church in the seventeenth century.

Postmillennialism was articulated by men like John Owen in the 17th century, Jonathan Edwards in the 18th century, and Charles Hodge in the 19th century. It was the dominant view in the nineteenth century in the evangelical church, but was eclipsed by the pre-millennial position by the end of World War I due to what has been called the "*pessimism and disillusionment engendered by wartime conditions*."

The historical rise and development of postmillennialism has been the object of some dispute, partly because of the many similarities between it and Amillennialism.

It is generally thought that Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) – a controversial English theologian and biblical commentator, a priest in the Church of England, known for his strongly anti-Calvinistic views – developed systematic postmillennialism, as a clearly distinct form of millenarianism.

The model to which I subscribe (see below) is likewise very similar to Amillennialism.

Then there is Premillennialism – a view that has given rise to what I sometimes refer to as “Christian horror movies” and books such as the Left Behind series. Obviously, as its name implies, Pre-millennialism believes that there will be a literal 1,000 year period in which Christ will personally physically reign on and over all the earth and thus will return to the earth before this millennial reign commences. However, this particular view is, in itself, quite divided in the way it depicts the events leading up to the commencement of the millennium.

The primary division is centred around that which is called the great tribulation and the rapture.

Let's touch on Pre-millennialism. This model is quite divided. Firstly, there are those who believe that most of the events in the Book of Revelation have been fulfilled in history (in a similar way to Amillennialism). This is called Historicist Pre-millennialism. The remaining (and predominant) group of pre-millennialists believe that most of the events in the Book of Revelation will be fulfilled in the future. This is called Futurist pre-millennialism (most of these would be called dispensationalist pre-millennialists). This group is further divided into 3, with some placing the rapture of the church BEFORE the great tribulation, some midway through it and some as the event that brings the great tribulation to an end.

First, a brief look at historicist pre-millennialism.

As noted, this view accepts the notion that there will be a time of great apostasy and persecution of God's people preceding Christ's return and that He will return to the earth to establish a literal 1,000 year period during which Christ will reign on the earth. After the millennium, Satan will be loosed and Gog and Magog will rise against the kingdom of God; this will be immediately followed by the final judgment.

The historical premillennialist's view interprets some prophecy in Scripture as having literal fulfilment while others demand a semi-symbolic fulfilment. As an example, the seal judgments of Revelation 6, are viewed as having fulfilment in the forces in history (rather than in future powers) by which God works out his redemptive and judicial purposes leading up to the end.

Rather than the belief of an imminent return of Christ, it is held that a number of historical events (e.g., the rise of the Beast and the False Prophet) must take place before Christ's Second Coming.

Historicists refer to the fact that the “**Revelation of Jesus Christ**” was given, “**To show to His servants things which must shortly come to pass.**” Thus, they claim, the prophecies of Revelation are not about some distant, future even, but things that “came to pass” shortly after they were written i.e. they were historically fulfilled. This is the standard whereby they base their beliefs on biblical prophecy. When they do, they claim to find the Bible’s prophetic word is simple in its interpretation, powerful in its fulfilment, and accurate in its detail. So, for example, the people of the prince which is to come (Dan 9:26), who would destroy the city and the sanctuary, are the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 under the leadership of Titus, Prince of Rome, son of Vespasian.

“The Romans surrounded a Jerusalem besieged by civil war, and a holy temple occupied by a generation of villains so mad, that had the Romans made a longer delay the city would have been swallowed up by the earth, or destroyed as Sodom”(Josephus. Wars of the Jews 5:13:566). This was a time when *false prophets abounded*, (Wars 6:5:285) *the daily sacrifice failed* (Wars 6:2:94) *when famine* affected the estimated 3,000,000 people in the city, (Wars 5:12) *a measure of wheat was sold for a talent of money* (Wars 5:13:571), *when men sought by death [by sword over death by starvation], but found it not*, (Wars 5:12:517) a context when *fire and blood mingled together, the blood in the lanes in such quantities that the whole city ran with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men’s blood* (Wars 6:8:406ff) *earthquakes* (Wars 1:19:370) and *signs in the heavens*: (Antiquities 17:6:167 Eclipse, comet) a time when *the sounds of trumpets* (Wars 6:1:68) and the *noise of horses* (Wars 3:2:33) were sounds to inspire dread and torment, when the *great plain* in front of Jerusalem (Wars 5:2:67, 5:3:106ff) was levelled even wider by the four legions of the Roman army as *numerous as locusts* to make a greater plain for battle. Such an historical view clearly is rooted solidly in Amillennialism.

Likewise, the concept of the Tribulation being confined to a 7 year period makes no sense in the light of world history – is it even possible to suggest that North Korean Christians are not facing tribulation? What about the inquisition? According to those accepting this model, “the great tribulation” began with the stoning of Steven and continues to the end of the age (again very similar to Amillennialism).

So to Futurist Pre-Millennialism. As noted earlier, futurists come in 2 main types – pre-trib and mid-trib. Some add post-trib here, but most “post-trib” pre-millennialists are historicists or some sort of mix (accepting the Historicist’s prophetic interpretations, but then having the prophecies fulfilled again at the end of the age as per futurist teaching).

I noted earlier, that in the modern evangelical world, futurist pre-millennialism seems to dominate the prophetic landscape. I’ll suggest why in a moment, but first I’ll define what a futurist believes – or at least what Futurist Pre-millennialism theology teaches – because my

guess is that most evangelicals who would identify as futurists, don't know what the doctrine really is AND have no real Biblical base for it, except for a few vague Scriptures that they quote, often out of context. But nonetheless it's what they have been taught to believe so they simply believe it, but often when exposed to the doctrinal basis of this model, they shy away from its claims.

So, here is a brief overview of Futurist pre-millennialism's core beliefs.

Futurism is so called primarily because it regards Revelation 4 onwards as prophecy to be fulfilled in the future. Its basic tenets of belief go like this:

The world is currently living in a period or dispensation of grace – a gap of unknown length between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. At a time known only to God The Father, Christ will return to a place in the heavens and all post Pentecost Christians who constitute the Bride of Christ (this model does NOT regard the O T saints as part of that bride) will be caught up to meet the Lord and will remain with Him there and will celebrate the Marriage Supper of The Lamb. The Holy Spirit will also leave the world (with the Church), and the world will descend into an ungodly chaos led by the Anti-Christ (incorrectly defined as one opposed to Christ – see definition below) and this will culminate in the nations rising together to destroy Israel. During this time the Beast will rise to rule, and without his mark, you will not be able to buy or sell. There will be a false prophet who will lead a false religion during this time also. A great battle will be fought in the Armageddon valley and just as Israel is about to be destroyed, Christ, accompanied by the raptured church, will return. He will stand on the Mount of Olives which will divide in two, allowing water to rush in and make Jerusalem a sea port. Satan will be bound and the victorious Christ will then establish a perfect reign of peace on the earth for 1,000 years after which Satan will be loosed, lead an attempted coup (which will include people who have been witnesses of Christ's rule in the millennium), be defeated and cast into the bottomless pit. Christ will then judge the world – those who rejected Christ will stand before the Great White Throne and be cast into hell “where the Beast and the False Prophet are”. Believers will stand before the Bema seat to be judged according to their works and will receive rewards for their deeds.

Then there will be a new heaven, in which the Triune God along with all post Pentecost believers will dwell and there will be a new earth on which Israel will live eternally.

So, a literal 7 year tribulation and a literal millennium. The primary division between futurists is around the timing of the rapture. Does it take place BEFORE the tribulation starts, do believers experience the first 3^{1/2} years and then experience the rapture, or do they live all the way through (a basic problem with this is, and one that causes quite a bit of consternation, is the timing of the “marriage supper of The Lamb”).

This is one of the more recent views of eschatology and it has an “interesting” history.

The eschatological doctrines of the reformers (Luther et al), nominated the Pope (or more specifically, the Papacy as a system) as the Anti-Christ. This was not something that Rome appreciated, as you could guess.

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was established fundamentally, to counter the reformation. Francisco Ribera was a Jesuit priest and scholar born in Spain in 1537, who began writing a lengthy commentary in 1585 on the book of Revelation titled *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis*

Apostoli, & Evangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentarij (“Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist”). The book was written in Latin and never translated into any other language. In order to remove the Catholic Church from consideration as the antichrist power, Ribera proposed that the first few chapters of the Apocalypse applied to ancient pagan Rome, and the rest he limited to a yet future period of two 3½ year periods (the last “week” of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:25), and applied it to a future Antichrist to avoid any application to the papal system. This period would be immediately prior to the second coming, sometime in the future.

He proposed that *the* antichrist would be a *single* individual (not a papal system as proposed by the Reformers), who would persecute and blaspheme the saints of God, rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, abolish the Christian religion, deny Jesus Christ, kill the two witnesses of God and conquer the world. So, according to Ribera, the final 7 years of earth’s history were when the anti Christ would appear, so *none* of the book of Revelation had any application to the middle ages or the papacy, but to the future, to a period immediately prior to the second coming. Ribera died in 1591.

Ribera’s views would probably have fallen away quickly if not for Cardinal Roberto Bellarmine (1542 - 1621), who promoted Ribera’s ideas. His lectures were published as *Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of the Christian Belief Against Heretics of This Time*. Theologian Leroy Froom describes these lectures as “the most detailed apology of the Catholic faith ever produced.” He claims that they “became the arsenal for all future defenders and expositors.”

This forerunner to futurist doctrine went off the theological radar for a couple of centuries post reformation, then in early 1830, Margaret McDonald, a 15 year old Scottish member of Edward Irving’s congregation claimed to have had “visions” that included a Secret Rapture of believers before the appearance of the Antichrist. She informed Irving of her visions and Irving swallowed them completely. He then attended a prophecy conference that began in Dublin Ireland in 1830 at Powerscourt Castle, where he promoted Margaret McDonald’s ideas of a Secret Rapture and Bellarmine/Ribera’s model of Futurism.

The conference was attended by John Nelson Darby, a Church of Ireland clergyman, who later started the Plymouth Brethren movement. Darby first heard of the secret rapture at this conference and he went to visit Margaret MacDonald at her home in Port Glasgow, Scotland. Darby synthesized the various points of the Pre-tribulation doctrine over a period of years to bring it to its final form. This did not happen overnight, but it took a period of many years to finalize the doctrine. The doctrine did not find easy acceptance, caused divisions and bred confusion during the years he worked on it.

Years later (1859-1874), Darby would take his model to America where it was accepted by some. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921), was greatly influenced by Darby and his writing, and incorporated Darby’s Futurism model in the notes of his *Scofield Reference Bible*.

Darby had fallen out with the hierarchy of the Church of Ireland, primarily over his dispensationalist developing ideas and opinions about the church and ministry. Darby had quite a few “followers” and when he left the Church of Ireland, they went with him and began to meet together for worship, communion and teaching. It was these meetings that grew and developed into the Brethren movement.

Schofield was, like J N Darby, a lawyer. He became a member of the US Congress, but was forced to resign "under a cloud of scandal" due to a series of because of suspect financial dealings, which included accepting bribes, stealing political contributions intended and forgery. It is suggested that Scofield was possibly jailed on forgery charges.

Schofield was a heavy drinker and was divorced by his wife on grounds of desertion in 1883. Schofield was converted in a Presbyterian church and quickly became a Presbyterian minister. During the 1890s, Scofield began to call himself "Rev. C. I. Scofield, D.D."; but there are no records of any academic institution having granted him either an earned or honorary Doctor of Divinity or any other theological degree. Schofield wrote a set of notes that covered the whole Bible and published them in 1909. Scofield's notes teach futurist doctrine and dispensationalism. It was largely through the influence of Scofield's notes that dispensational premillennialism became influential among fundamentalist Christians with one million copies having been printed by 1930. The *Scofield Bible* became THE Bible of the evangelicals throughout the Western World and was instrumental in firmly establishing the Futurist interpretation in the Protestant Bible schools of the United States in the 20th century. Its establishment in evangelical schools and its earlier spread by the missionary great movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, largely spearheaded by Brethren and others similarly influenced by Futurist doctrine (mainly via Schofield's notes and Darby's writings), saw the doctrine spread and become accepted as truth across the world. Today it is the "popular" view, although most people don't understand its implications.

Schofield's notes on eschatology were totally Premillennial /futurist. His notes presented only one view, so it was accepted as truth – because "Mr Schofield said". Schofield's Bible was popular because the average Christian could not only read the Bible, but they could read what the Bible actually meant (at least according to Mr Schofield).

The world was full of turmoil and war, famine was a global issue, it was easy to see that this could be a time for a one world leader to rise (the antichrist etc). The early 1900's saw the loss of millions of lives in wars – especially the war to end all wars, as it was known. Then came the depression and if that didn't sound enough like the end of the end times, along comes Hitler with his anti-Jewish rhetoric and murderous dictatorship (Hitler was seen by many as the antichrist, especially as his bombers rained down fire from heaven on most of Europe as per Rev 13:13 – add in atom bomb at the apocalypse has arrived. When all of that ended, in 1948 Israel was "reborn" – futurists claimed this to be the budding of the fig tree (Mat 24), so this generation would see it all out. One generation = 40 years = 1988.

Wisement wrote a best-selling book called "88 Reasons Why Jesus Must Return in 1988" in which he claimed that Jesus would return at the feast of Rosh Hashanah in 1988. People watched wars continue in Korea and Vietnam, the Middle East crisis, the Cuban crisis - 1988 came and went. There are still some who refer to 1948 and claim that a generation is "three score years and ten" which would make the return of Christ 2018 – they were wrong. Others have tried for 1995 then 2000, 2012 but so far, no-one has picked it. I guess if people keep saying it will be this year, eventually someone will get it right!

In the 1970's, Hal Lindsay's book "The Late Great Planet Earth" captured the attention and interest of the evangelical world and became the best non-fiction seller of the decade, with over 28million sales, it was translated into 28 languages across the globe. In the 1990s Tim LaHaye had similar success with his "Left Behind" series – they sold 65 million copies, were made into movies and into video games. They were imaginative, captivating, a toeing the line of futurist doctrine and helping to "spread the word".

So many people have been damaged by promises that have been unfulfilled. People have quit jobs, failed to go to University, sold homes etc. all because Jesus was going to come on a particular date and take them away from a world that was about to end. They expected things to get bad, for many to fall away and only a remnant would remain rapture ready.

It's interesting when you consider how differently the Church fathers saw it. Escapism was not part of their doctrine, Christ would return for a victorious church – and you can't have victory if you're not there for the battle!

This doctrine of escapism is SO Western centric. For some reason, the church in the West is going to be taken out of tribulation, testing and trial – yet the church through the years and even today across the globe, faces such tribulation on a daily basis and has always been strengthened by persecution.

My model.

Most theological views are given names – the model that I have adopted, is sometimes known as inaugurated eschatology. It, like some of the others mentioned above, is closely aligned to the Amillennial model, with a couple of unique characteristics that set it apart.

The term *inauguration* essentially refers to an act in begins or introduces a system, policy, or period or where a given party officially inducts another newly designated party into a special position of authority. This practice typically alludes to a significant transition wherein the subject being inaugurated represents a new phase of leadership or service. Inaugurated eschatology is a view of eschatology that says that the end times (or latter days) were inaugurated at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. With the Kingdom of God being inaugurated by Jesus, it has not only a present component, but also a future one. It is sometimes referred to as “already and not yet,” and basically contends that the last days are already here, but there is still a consummation of these last days that is yet to come. So the Kingdom of God is not only an eschatological gift belonging to the age to come; it is also a gift to be received in the present aeon.

For example, Christians await the final resurrection where they will receive new bodies, yet in a sense, believers are already “raised with Christ”. Likewise, as believers await the final judgment, in a sense they have already passed through it, for “***there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***” because believers are justified by faith in Christ already.

John 5:24 “***whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life***” It is not necessary for the believer to wait until the last day to experience eternal life – we have it now, we have already experienced something of resurrection life. We are already living in the Kingdom NOW, but we will experience it more fully after Christ's return.

What this tension means for Christians is that we faithfully wait for the future day of the Lord, when we will dwell with Him forever in the new heavens and the new earth, but in the meantime, we live in the victory and authority of Christ's Kingdom on earth which was established at the first coming of Jesus and is now here, but it is not yet fully consummated because that completion or consummation does not occur until His second coming.

Scripturally, we see this tension as well. With the coming of Christ, the Kingdom has come, and through the gospel of Christ we now receive the promised blessings. At the same time, the consummation of the Kingdom is still in the future awaiting those who follow Christ into heaven and all its glory. It's only later, in the future, that the ultimate consummation will be fully realized.

For most of the balance of these notes, I will look at some issues with the Premillennial Futurist model that puts much of Daniel and John's prophecies in the future and make some comparisons of it with my "inaugurated eschatology" model. I do note that "inaugurated eschatology" closely resembles the more traditional, more orthodox Amillennial view, but does have a few more positive view of some issues.

The key Biblical passages that I will keep in mind are the passage known as "the Olivet Discourse" (taken from Matthew chapter 24), Daniel chapters 2 and 9 and the book of Revelation – the revelation of Jesus Christ.

My model sees the tragedy and destruction of Mat 24 already completed – at least most if not all; it sees Daniel as applying primarily to events that are now historical and sees the Kingdom of God as being both here and yet to come – a Kingdom that will continue to expand as more people come to Christ rather than one that diminishes because of Christians falling away.

An inescapable fact is that millions have seen tribulation, starting with the stoning of Stephen and continuing to this very day, yet despite this, the gospel is increasing in its effect, with millions coming to Christ TODAY, especially in the non-western world, at a rate of many thousands of new believers each day.

We in the West only see our own nations where the church has become lazy in evangelism and more importantly in disciple making, thus there's an appearance of a falling away. Part of this is due to the social advantage and expectation of a form of Christianity, is no longer extant. The two concepts of the church needs to be understood here. The "invisible church" is made up of all TRUE believers, born again believers in any community or even universally. The "visible" church is made up of people who attend Christian places of worship or tick a census box in order to claim a Christian allegiance.

The reality is that the world at large is experiencing revival. Perhaps even in the West, the invisible church is still expanding despite the "falling away" in church attendance/the VISIBLE church. If we have to have a great falling away before Christ returns, we will have to turn off the revival that is happening globally. But how do you stop God giving visions of Jesus to Moslems that see them turning to Christ in ever increasing numbers?

We must lift our eyes from of Western world and see that the harvest is still white and the labourers are being sent to bring in a great harvest!

This positive eschatological model sees the book of Revelation showing the enemies of Christ progressively coming under Jesus authority – as kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. It sees a future awakening in which the Jewish people will accept Christ as their Messiah and saviour.

The Bible says that, when He returns, He will find faith on the earth and His kingdom operating successfully – it seems that the only hope and faith that many Western Christians have is for spaceship rapture to save the day. But Jesus said “Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

Your Kingdom come.... He is praying for the Kingdom of Heaven to find expression on earth to such an extent, that God’s will will be carried out on the earth as it is in heaven. He is into Kingdom building, not escapism. Jesus introduced the kingdom and it’s still growing. The positive view sees millions being saved, the church rising, the Kingdom rising – God’s will being done, heaven invading earth, touching earth and overcoming the enemy.

It is important to remember that, up until the mid 20th century, the basic foundation of this positive view was pretty much the orthodox, common view for centuries and still is with many Christians, especially those not in the Western Evangelical world.

So according to inaugurated eschatology, what will happen when Jesus returns?

Believers will receive a new eternal incorruptible body; believers will be judged and receive rewards for their faithfulness; the unbelievers will face judgment and eternal punishment; the devil and evil will be destroyed in hell and there will be a renewed earth.

This view is NOT saying that ALL evil will end before Christ’s return – that can’t happen because men have a free will and some will choose to exercise that will against The Kingdom, but despite this, the Kingdom will grow and expand AND that’s exactly what’s happening now.

Another thing to consider before moving on. There are two expressions used in the gospels – the end of the age and the end of the world. In Greek, these terms can be interchangeable, so some see them as having identical meaning, but I contend that this may not be the case. I suggest, for example, that an AGE ended at the cross and a new AGE began. Dispensationalists often say that we are living in the “day of grace” and I think that they are right, however I would change the word “day” to “age” and for the “age” to start (the age of grace) the old had to end. Prior to the cross, people lived in a different age – they lived under the law, under the Old Covenant. But when Christ died, something happened – the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom signifying that the basis of access to God had changed – the old age had finished. The old age and the new lived on together for a while – they repaired the curtain, with some not letting go of the old sacrificial system (how easy it is to hold on to old practices and habits and when God takes them away, we restore them, we repair the curtain because it’s something that we know, we’re familiar with, we’re comfortable with – even though God has moved on, we stay and hold our ground). Others, of course, received the new age’s grace and access to God through one sacrifice for sin forever.

With this in mind, let’s look a little at Matthew 24.

¹Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.²"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."³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.⁵ For many will come in my

name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, ' and will deceive many.⁶ You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.¹⁵ "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains ¹⁷ Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house.¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equalled again.²² If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²³ At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.²⁶ "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather."²⁹ Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."³⁰ At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.³² Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.³⁴ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.³⁶ "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.³⁸ 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;³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.⁴⁵ Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying

away a long time,⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I suggest that here, in Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of the end of the AGE – the end of the old covenant before the cross. He said of the Temple, that not one stone would be left on another and declared that this generation would not pass until this was done. When the Temple was destroyed, the age of sacrifice ended formally (Christ had already ended it in reality, but with the trashing of the Temple, sacrifice could no longer take place). All of this happened within 1 generation – the generation did not pass until all was fulfilled. The Temple was destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked in 70 AD.

Now consider this. How many questions did the disciples ask here in Mat 24? One, two or three? I suggest that it was three questions. Hold that thought. Think of the context here. The Temple that Herod built – and was, in fact, still building – was amazing; grand architecture, rich furnishings, the centre of the Jewish nation and faith – and Jesus said that the whole thing would be destroyed, shattered, turned to rubble within a generation. We shouldn't underestimate the significance of this statement. Imagine in 1970 one of the architects of the Twin Towers in New York looking at these great towers, tallest in the world, being built – imagine one of them saying within a generation these towers will be down, they'll be rubble, not one brick will be left standing on another. We couldn't imagine such a thing. Imagine what these Jewish disciples thought, imagine the things that would start to run around in their mind and totally mess with their heads.

They walked across the road to the Mount of Olives with all sorts of questions begging to be asked: when will it happen, what sign will there be, and what about end of the age?

Wars, famine, earthquakes etc., but He says, when you see these things happening, get out of here, don't hang around, leave! Imagine if you were in the Twin Towers and someone you trusted in God gave you a prophetic word that the building was about to be rammed by a plane and the whole thing would collapse, my guess is that you wouldn't finish your cup of coffee, you'd get out! Jesus was warning them of what was about to happen to Jerusalem. He wasn't answering the question about the sign that the world was ending, He was answering three separate questions – when will these things happen (i.e. the Temple being destroyed), what will be the sign of your coming, your kingdom being established and what about the end of the age?

We must be careful to see Jesus' answers in the context of the questions. Jesus was saying to His disciples, when you see these things happening, get out of Jerusalem, the end of the age is at hand. And it happened, when Titus, Prince of Rome sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD – the Temple was utterly destroyed and the age of Temple sacrifice came to a bitter end.

But, a Futurist may protest, that couldn't be it. What about the tribulation (that one we'll deal with later – but remember what happened during the siege of Jerusalem by Rome), what about the mark of the beast without which you couldn't buy or sell – well, what about the Roman coins used in Jerusalem, each had the mark or image Caesar.

We need to keep our eyes on Christ rather than keep looking for the antichrist.

What's the context of the passage? Jesus had been walking in the Temple with His disciples and they had been noting that it was good that the Temple was being rebuilt – starting in about 20BC. I think that it is important to understand here, that the disciples were NOT thinking of Jesus' second coming – they were still getting their head around the first coming – they still had the picture of a Messiah who would have one coming, lead Israel out of bondage and establish a divine reign over the earth, probably from the Temple in Jerusalem itself – after all, it was the most logical place, it was where God's presence dwelled.

So Jesus tells them that the Temple is going to be destroyed, and their comfort zone and their theology are messed with simultaneously. If that wasn't enough, Jesus adds that THIS GENERATION would be around to see it all happen.

Remember, Jesus had just been in a verbal altercation with the Pharisees and Sadducees telling them that the blood of the prophets who had been put to death in the past would be upon them, they would be the ones held accountable, THIS generation. One of the keys to understanding and interpreting Matthew 24, is understanding what Jesus was talking about when He used the phrase "this generation".

They're sitting on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple and they switch into question mode. When's this going to happen, what is the sign of your kingdom coming, when will the age end? It's a logical progression

The disciples understood from the prophets that Messiah would come; they understood from Daniel that the other kingdoms would be overthrown until the final one would be crushed by a rock that was not made by man – Messiah would come and establish His kingdom and it would be an everlasting kingdom. So all the questions start and Jesus begins to answer them – false prophets, wars, famine, earthquakes, persecution would all come first. Within 40 years, the siege and eventual destruction of Jerusalem occurred in AD70. One of the world's most horrific genocides. It destroyed the city, the Temple, it ended the Temple Sacrificial system and dispersed the Jews throughout the world. The horrors that occurred were huge – if it wasn't that Christ had warned His disciples to know what was coming and respond by leaving when they saw the things starting, who knows how far the gospel may have spread – it may have even been snuffed out in the fall of Jerusalem. But was this tribulation, was it really THAT bad? Jesus had used some pretty descriptive language – it would be so bad, worse than ever before.

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian, but was with the Roman invaders – he is regarded as the greatest authority in terms of the reliable recording of the events of the time and was even sent by the Romans to try to negotiate a settlement. He records that 1.1 million people were killed during the siege. Yet interestingly, he notes that no Christians were killed as they had all fled the city as per the instruction/warning that Jesus had given them.

He wrote: Now of those that perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; for if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did any where appear, a war was commenced presently, and the dearest friends fell a fighting one with another about it, snatching from each other the most miserable supports of life. Nor would men believe that those who were dying had no food, but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest anyone should have concealed food in their bosoms, and counterfeited dying; nay, these robbers gaped for want, and ran about stumbling and staggering along like mad dogs, and reeling against the doors of the houses

like drunken men; they would also, in the great distress they were in, rush into the very same houses two or three times in one and the same day. Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes; and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed: the very wisps of old hay became food to some; and some gathered up fibres, and sold a very small weight of them for four drachmae.

He wrote of cannibalism and unfathomable horror.

NOW as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury, (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done,) Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne; and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison, as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valour had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind

Jesus warned His disciples of what was to come, but only a few minutes earlier had told the religious leaders that they were about to pay a price for the killing of the prophets who had come before. He had wept of Jerusalem as the city that killed its prophets. Why did He weep? He knew what would soon befall the city! They had rejected the prophets, rejected the Messiah, the covenants and even God and would soon pay a huge price.

OK, let's take a look and see if the detail of Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled.

When Jesus spoke of the signs of "these things happening" – the destruction of the Temple, He said that there'd be wars and rumours of wars – but at the time it was the Pax Romana – Roman peace – there were no wars, Rome ruled in peace. But soon that changed. Within 20 years of Jesus' death (well within the "this generation" time span), the Pax Romana began to fail – the Jews began to live in fear of the Romans and there were uprisings (wars) and all sorts of rumours of what Rome might do in retaliation. 50,000 Jews were slain in Seleucia, 20,000 in Caesarea, in AD56, 60,000 were slain in Alexandria, within 2 years prior to the siege of Jerusalem two Caesars were murdered and Rome experienced civil war – it was time of great turmoil and there were constant rumours on new uprisings and rebellion. The disciples would have picked up on some of this.

False Christs and deception – historians tell us that in the period leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, there was a great increase in the number of people who rose up claiming to be Messiah. John Wesley in his notes, wrote that never before had there been so many imposters appear in the world as there were in the few years prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The early church Fathers also record that this was the case.

What about famine and earthquakes. Josephus reports a great famine in about 60AD, but nothing could compare to the famine experienced by those living in Jerusalem between 66 and 70 AD. We read something of it before where men ate sandals and leather shields and committed acts of cannibalism. We also see a rise in earthquakes prior to 70 AD. There was of course, the earthquake at Christ's death, but in the AD60's, there are records of earthquakes in Colossi, Smyrna, Millatus, Laodicea, Crete, Rome and Judea just to name a few. Not to forget AD63 and the destruction of Pompeii.

What about persecution? Think of the early church and the horrendous persecution that they suffered for the sake of Christ. THAT was tribulation in anyone's language. Rome persecuted the Christians. Nero blamed Christians for the fire that destroyed much of Rome and Christians became subject to all sorts of retribution and persecution as a result. Nero took Christians, tied them to stakes, covered them with tar and used them to light the way to some of his parties.

Remember that Jesus said all of this long before it happened, this is what would lead to the destruction of the Temple; these were the signs of these things happening. Note also how many time He said "this generation" needed to be ready and watch.

The Futurists claim these to be the signs of Christ's return, but that is not consistent with history or the context of Matthew 24. But the signs of the Kingdom coming are not negative signs of destruction and ruin, but of positive happenings.

Question 1 was "When will these things happen?"

Question 2 was "What will be the sign of your coming?"

You can't use the answer to the FIRST question as an answer to the second.

A "sign" is not an end in itself – it simply points to something or warns of something. Jesus said (as a sign) that the sun and moon would be blackened and stars would fall out of the sky, so we consider this with our Western mindset, knowing what the sun and moon and stars are (i.e. those lights in the sky!) and when they fall it certainly will be a problem. So the Futurist says that just before Jesus comes, the universe will basically fall out of the sky. The problem is context. Jesus is speaking in the context of an Eastern mindset where much reference is made to sun, moon and stars in representative or picture form of governing authorities. Remember Joseph's vision? The moon and the stars bowed down to him. Have you noticed that in the OT prophets' writings, when judgment was declared against a city like Tyre or Sidon or Babylon the prophets said things like your stars will fall from the sky, your sun and moon will be blocked out. Jesus is answering the first question and saying that leaders will fall and that of course happened with the fall of 2 Caesars just before Jerusalem fell.

OK what about the fig tree. There not much in scripture that equates Israel to the fig tree – an olive tree, yes, but not a fig. Jesus used this to reinforce what He had been saying – when you see the fig tree start to blossom, you know that summer is almost here, IN THE SAME WAY, when you see these things start you will be able to know that the end is near – it's the same as seeing a red sky at night. It's nothing to do with 1948.

Verse 35 to the end He tells us of ONE sign only about His return. The sign is that no one will know, only The Father. To illustrate the suddenness of His coming, he refers to two men in the field and two women grinding grain – one taken, the other left. Check the context, this is NOT the rapture, those taken are taken to judgment.

Historians tell us that Christians fled the city in AD66 when Florus, the Roman procurator, stole vast quantities of silver from the Temple and desecrated the High Priest's vestments and the Temple itself by a number of vile acts that outraged Jewish masses, who rioted and wiped out the small Roman garrison stationed in Jerusalem. Cestius Gallus, the Roman ruler in neighbouring Syria, sent in a larger force of soldiers. But the Jewish insurgents routed them as well. Rome responded with a huge number of troops who massacred many Jews. Those who escaped at this time were spared from the great tribulation that those living in Jerusalem were to experience over the next few years.

Some have a problem in dividing Matthew 24 into three distinct answers, so they're not sure whether He was talking about the 2nd coming or what was happening at the time, but when you read it in context and without a pre-set view, it is simple and clear.

A lot of futurists have problems as well, that's why there's pre-trib, mid-trib and post trib rapture believers, some have more than one rapture (I've heard 5 suggested, certainly one pre for the church, one mid for those save in great tribulation and one just before the end for "the overcomers") and some have 2 classes of Christians – some who are raptured and some who are left behind – all of which is too confusing for me to get my head around – especially when I have difficulty fitting ANY of their ideas into Scripture.

If you believe that Christ is going to return, then you MUST believe in the rapture – and I do... but what I mean by the rapture does not match the Futurist's idea. Of course, the word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible, it's a word that has been invented to describe the 1Thessalonians 4 promise that we will be caught up together to meet Him in the sky. The Latin word *raptus* is where this word originates and that Latin word is a translation of the Greek word *harpadzo* which means "caught up" and that's the word used in 1Thes 4:17.

The Greek word *apantesis* used in 1Thes 4:17 and translated "meet" is the key to the understanding of this idea of the secret rapture, i.e. where Jesus comes somewhere in the sky and secretly (ie no-one see Him), meets all believers and takes them away for a period of up to 7 years.

Apantesis is only used four times in the New Testament.

Matthew 25:1 and 25:6 are the first two occurrences. In this 'Parable of the Ten Virgins,' we are told by the Lord that the virgins **"took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom"** (25:1) and **"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go out to meet him."**

What happened when the virgins went out to meet the bridegroom? Did they run off with the bridegroom for 7 years? Of course not! Did they immediately leave with him and go off to another country? No, they went out to meet him and then escorted him the short remaining distance to his bride.

The third occurrence is found in Acts 28. Here, Paul is heading toward Rome. As he heads toward Rome, some believers came out to meet him and then escorted him the remaining distance to Rome. Here is the text: **"... :and so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the believers heard of us, they came as far as Appii forum and The three taverns to meet us**

and when Paul saw them, he thanked God, and was encouraged. And when we came to Rome, ..." (28:14c - 16a)

Again, we have to state the obvious. Paul, who is a very important Christian, was on his way to Rome. Some believers heard that he was coming, so they went out to meet him. Upon meeting him, they also did NOT stay at the Appii forum with him nor did they run away together for a few years. No, they continued back to Rome...together!

They went out to meet him and escorted him the remaining distance.

The last instance of *apantesis* in the New Testament is found in 1 Thess. 4:17. "***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.***"

The most obvious meaning of the word here is the same as the other places it is used – so the Christians who are alive, who have survived up to the time of the Lord's coming, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air... and then they will immediately continue the remainder of the distance back to earth together. It does not say anything about the Lord returning, then reversing direction and heading back to Heaven.

They will meet the Lord in the air, and then escort him to the earth.

They will NOT meet him in the air and then go off to heaven together, or hang out in the clouds for seven years, or get married, or any such thing.

"When a dignitary paid an official visit or parousia to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escorting him on the final stage of his journey was called the apantesis..." (F. F. Bruce, New Bible Commentary, p. 1159)

Apantēsis (Strong's Greek 529) Is a technical term that refers specifically to the practice of sending a delegation outside the city walls and gates to receive a dignitary who was coming. This was the practice when a king and his army were returning from war. All the people would pour out of the city gates and welcome them with pomp and circumstance. The people would meet them outside and then usher them back into the city with shouts of joy and acclamation.

Vines Dictionary of New Testament Words says *"It is used in the papyri of a newly arriving magistrate. It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary"*

When the dignitary or conquering general approached a city, the people of the city would go out to meet him and escort him back into the city. In no case does the one being met reverse direction and return the way he came. On the contrary, it is the people meeting the dignitary who change direction.

Once again, we note three things:

- 1 - The Lord descends from heaven [toward Earth].
- 2 - After the dead rise, we who are alive go to meet him in the air.
- 3 - We accompany the Lord back to Earth, which he was originally approaching

Some suggest that Jude 14 *And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints*, indicates that they go to heaven then return together – but it simply doesn't say that. The Lord comes, we go to meet Him and He comes to earth WITH His saints who have met Him on the way!

So, when did the “last days” or “end times” start? When was the Kingdom inaugurated ?

Clearly all of this happened in Jesus' generation:

- The kingdom of God is at hand ([Mark 1:15](#)).
- This is... the last days ([Acts 2:16-17](#)).
- The end of the ages has come ([1 Cor. 10:11](#)).
- In later times, the last days, some will depart from the faith and there will come times of difficulty, just as you already see ([1 Tim. 4:1](#); [2 Tim. 3:1](#)).
- In the last days, scoffers will come, and have come ([2 Pet. 3:3-5](#)).
- Treasure something eternal in these last days ([James 5:3](#)).
- In these last days, God spoke to us by Christ ([Heb. 1:2](#)).
- The powers of the future exist in the present ([Heb. 6:5](#)).

So we today are living in the last days and experiencing The Kingdom of God! On Easter morning, God's new creation invaded our present fallen world. And yet, we still await a day when Christ will return and this new age will be consummated. So now we live with the tension between these two ages. We have experienced some of the *age to come*, but we still live in the midst of this *present evil age*. Our salvation is already, but not yet – that is, it has a present and a future part – we have been saved from sin's penalty through the price paid on the cross, we are living in a world in which The Kingdom of God is operating and saving us from the POWER of sin but in the future, when the Kingdom is fully consummated, we will be saved from sin's presence.

OK! So – where can the millennium fit into this model? The Hebrews generally refer to a huge or indefinite figure as a thousand. So is the figure “a thousand” to be taken literally?

Deut 7:9 *“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments”* Does this mean that in the 1001st generation, He breaks His covenant? Of course not!

Ps 50:10 *“For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills.”* Does this mean that someone else owns the cattle on hill 1001? Of course not!

2Peter 3:8 *“one day is with the Lord like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”* Does that mean that 1001 days carries us into a second year? No, that's crazy.

That's just the way that the Hebrew people spoke. Another expression that Jesus used was “70 times 7” in relation to forgiveness. I've always wondered what I'm allowed to do the 491st time that someone offends or hurts me in some way.

I think that it is important to note that the only time the concept of Christ reigning for one thousand years is found, is in the book of Revelation – a book filled with figurative language (and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands – who on earth counted that many and got the right number!!!)

So, is the millennium limited to a literal 1,000 years? No, I don't think so – for He shall reign forever and ever.... that's eternal and we cannot measure time in eternity, the two concepts are totally incompatible.

So, when was or when will His kingdom be established?

First of all, what is a kingdom? Obviously, the answer is that a Kingdom is a place where a King legitimately reigns. The kingdom is not lessened or in any way diminished if a subject fails to fully comply with the King's directions, the kingdom remains the same, the authority and power of the Kingdom is not affected by the conduct of the King's subjects (saints sin, but remain saints and the kingdom is not destroyed by their sin).

When Jesus died and rose again, He established a new Kingdom – the age of God's Kingdom being limited to Israel, with all of its sacrificial and its legal requirements ended (the end of the age), and a new Kingdom was established.

Luke 17:20 The Pharisees demanded to know when the kingdom of God would come and He answered "The kingdom of God is not a visible Kingdom: ²¹people cannot say it's here or it's there! For The Kingdom of God is in you."

In writing to the Roman church, Paul said that *Rom 5:17* ***those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.***

Clearly then, the Kingdom within, was not meant to be something that would happen in the distant future, believers do not have to wait for a future state to reign with Christ, this reigning happens now in life. So, if the Kingdom of God is in you, and you are on the earth participating in that reign, then where is the Kingdom of God? Where are you? On earth – so is God's kingdom on earth? Yes. It has not yet had its absolute fulfilment – there is an "age to come" where the Kingdom of God rules in an age free from sin, sickness and suffering. It will be a time of universal peace on earth and God's absolute sovereign reign over all of creation (that can't be the millennium – there'll be sinners there???), but the fact that the entire kingdom is not subservient to the King does not lessen the presence of the Kingdom on earth as we noted a moment ago.

In other words, Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, but we still suffer from the consequences of living in a fallen world with sin, sickness and disease as the tension between the King and the usurper plays out. So whilst the Kingdom of God is already here (in us) and Christ is already reigning on earth, the full benefits of the Kingdom have not yet been ushered in. Because the Kingdom of God is still "not yet" here in all of its glory and power, Christians still suffer sickness and death. Although we have eternal life, we still live in a world of sin with all the sickness, pain and suffering that sin produces. Until Christ returns, we will not experience the fullness of the kingdom of God in all aspects and areas. BUT, nonetheless, the Kingdom of God IS within you!

For those who put the Kingdom exclusively into some future period of time, the serious consequence of such a view is simple. If Jesus is not now king over His existing kingdom, there is no new birth. Jesus said, “***Unless a man is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God***”, John 3:5. (so if he IS born of water and spirit, he IS able to enter the kingdom). If the kingdom is something waiting for an end of the world millennium, there is no kingdom now, thus no new birth now.

If the kingdom is waiting for the millennium, there is no deliverance from the power of darkness. Paul wrote to the Colossians telling them they had been delivered “***from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son***” Col. 1:13. I ask how can that be, if the kingdom is still waiting to be established in the future?

So is the kingdom something limited to a 1,000 year period at the end of time? That cannot be! I suggest that the 1,000 years is as figurative as the 1,000 hills on which He owns the cattle – it is indicative of an ageless kingdom that is here now, and will have perfect expression in the future. So will He reign for 1,000 years? No, He’ll reign for a lot longer than that!

OK, we can’t talk about eschatology, end times, without a reference to Daniel’s vision and the 70 weeks that he prophesied.

In Daniel chapter 9, Daniel has a supernatural dream and vision. This was the message 70 x 7’s have been decreed for your people divided up like this 7 then 62 then Messiah will come. Now, before going on, there is little argument about these time periods. 69 of the 7’s will pass between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and when Messiah will come.

In 454 BC Artaxerxes issued the decree (in Neh 2) allowing Nehemiah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. If we add 483 years to that we get to 28AD which is the time when Jesus declared His Messiahship in the reading of Isaiah 61 (...He has anointed me...) and declaring that the Scripture was now fulfilled before them. There’s pretty general agreement on this so far. However, that brings us to Daniel’s 70th week – there were 70 weeks and we’ve only used up 69 of them.

Futurists claim that a time gap started at the end of the 69th week and they put the whole of this week (i.e. 7 years) into a future time – the final 7 years, often called “the great tribulation”. They say that the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel, break it after 3^{1/2} years and then Israel and any remaining Christ followers will be persecuted until Jesus returns at the end of the “week” i.e. the end of the 7th year. This is where all the “Left Behind” books happen. So why the gap? Why couldn’t Daniel see a gap, he could see everything else?

On the other hand, the positive view – and the most common view from the early church to the 20th century – sees it differently. There are a few things to note here. First up, the “cutting off” of Messiah occurs after the 69th week, it doesn’t say when at this point (Dan 9:26 ***After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing***). It also says that, at some point after the 69th week “***the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary***”. As we have noted previously, Titus, Prince of Rome (NB the prince that shall come, not a king or emperor) did this in 70AD. Verse 27 commences with the word “he”. There are only two logical, contextual possibilities of who the “he” is. Futurists claim it to be a time distant antichrist (i.e. distant in time from the rest of

the passage) but that is simply not contextually possible. The 2 possibilities are the Messiah or the Prince. Futurists get around context by making the antichrist “the prince” but no-one else claims the “he” to be the prince – the “he” that confirms the covenant is the Messiah.

At the beginning of His ministry, He declares the Kingdom to Israel, re-enforcing the covenant that God has made with them, but His ministry lasted just 3^{1/2} years, at which time “Messiah was cut off” – He was taken and crucified. However, His crucifixion did something important. Look at ^{Heb 10:11} ***Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins*** (that’s the old covenant, a sacrificial system).¹² ***But this priest offered one sacrifice for sins for all time*** (thus fulfilling ^{Dan 9:27} ***he will put an end to sacrifice and offering***) ***then he sat down at the right hand of God***. The gospel was preached to Israel alone for the next 3^{1/2} years, until the stoning of Steven and the conversion of Saul/Paul saw the time appointed to Daniel’s people, Israel end and the gospel taken to the gentiles (Acts 13:46). There is simply no reason for a gap in Daniel’s 70th week, it has all been fulfilled and was done so in the 490 years prophesied by Daniel!

Matthew Henry’s commentary on Daniel 9:27 states, “By offering himself a sacrifice once and for all, he [Jesus], shall put an end to all the Levitical sacrifices.”

British Methodist Adam Clarke’s commentary says that during Daniel 9:27’s “term of seven years,” Jesus Himself would “confirm or ratify the new covenant with mankind.”

The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown commentary also says: “He shall confirm the covenant—Christ. The confirmation of the covenant is assigned to Him.”

The prophecy of “seventy weeks” means seventy straight sequential weeks. There is no example in Scripture (or anywhere else!) of a time period starting, stopping, and then starting again. All biblical references to time are consecutive: 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:4), 400 years in Egypt (Genesis 15:13), etc.

The 70th week follows immediately after the 69th week. If it doesn’t, then it cannot properly be called the 70th week!

It is illogical to insert a 2,000-year gap between the 69th and 70th week. There is no gap between the first seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. Why insert one between the 69th and 70th week?

Daniel 9:27 says nothing about any “tribulation,” “rebuilt” Jewish temple, or “antichrist.”

Jesus warned that “this” generation (the generation of Daniel’s 70 week) would see the city surrounded by an army ^{Mat.24:15-16} ***"When you see the abomination of desolation that Daniel spoke about then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains."*** Using the same command for the people in Judea to flee, Christ says, in ^{Luke 21:20} ***"And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its destruction is near."***

Jesus had told the disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15; Mt.28:19; Acts 1:8), YET after Christ ascended, the disciples still at first preached only to Israel! Why? I can think of only one prophecy which would indicate that

this was to be the course followed. It is the prophecy of the 70 weeks which implied that after the death of Messiah there would still be three and a half years that pertained to Israel!

Bearing this in mind, we can now understand at least one reason why the gospel went "to the Jew first" and then later to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). Peter preached shortly after Pentecost: ***"You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant... to you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"*** (Acts 3:25, 26). ***"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you"*** (Acts 13:46).

In person, Christ came to Israel during the first half of the "week" of three and a half years. Through the disciples for the three and a half years that remained His message still went to Israel, ***"the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following"*** (Mk. 16:20). In a very real sense of the word, the ministry of the disciples was a continuation of the ministry of Christ.

Then came the conversion of Cornelius which completely changed the missionary outreach, outlook, and ministry of the church. Though the New Testament does not give an exact date when this happened, apparently the time for special exclusive blessing upon Daniel's people had drawn to a close.

The gospel which had gone first to the Jews was now to take its full mission to be preached to all people of all nations!

This time of changeover was marked by a number of supernatural events. Cornelius received a heavenly visitation. An angel appeared to him and told him to call for Peter ***"who will tell you words whereby you and all of your household will be saved"*** (Acts 11:14). God showed Peter a vision which caused him to know that the gospel was now to go to the Gentiles and not to Israelites only. All of these things were timed perfectly showing that God's hand was accomplishing a definite purpose.

Returning to Jerusalem, Peter explained what had happened. ***"When they heard these things, they... glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"*** (Acts 11:18). From this very point, more and more, there was a turning to the Gentiles with the gospel message. God's measurement of 490 years pertaining in a special way to Israel had obviously been completed.

The antichrist.

In which book of the Bible is the antichrist mentioned? Only in John's epistles AND in these, John refers to antichrist in plural terms (i.e. not an individual) and as a spirit not a person – i.e. the spirit of antichrist. Remember, antichrist is not against Christ, it is a substitute, one who stands in the place of Christ – *ficario christe* (that's the Latin translation of the Greek "anticristos" – it means a substitute Christ, one who acts vicariously). Note also John wrote "This is the last hour...." describing the spirit as being that which denies the deity of Christ.

Hitler and Stalin were suspected. For a long time, everyone was convinced that it would have to be Henry Kissinger. After all, he brokered a settlement of the Middle East crisis, But then

it was *Gorbachev* (a world leader with a mark on his forehead!). Then Ronald Wilson Reagan (666), he was shot and recovered (from a deadly wound).

John wrote that many anti Christs were already in the world in his time.

Stop looking for ANTI Christ and keep your eyes fixed on the REAL one – the author and finisher of our salvation.

OK. The mark of the beast. What is it?

Mark on forehead or hand without which you cannot buy or see (Rev 13).

Is it the bar code on products? Would God send you to hell because you bought a can of coke???

Was it Bankcard (or any other “cashless” card?

Some suggest that it’s an RF ID device that can be implanted in the body.

In Daniel 7, he had a vision of 4 animals representing 4 kingdoms – Babylon, Medo-Perian, Greek and Roman, each represented by an animal – a lion, a bear and a leopard, but the 4th animal, representing the Roman empire, is described only as a beast. There are many who suggest that the “beast” was the Roman Empire and the mark was the face of Caesar on each coin, without which you could neither buy nor sell. Some suggest that the Roman Catholic church is a continuation of the Roman Empire and suggest that baptism and confirmation are its marks. Note here that the Pope gives himself the title *Ficario Filii Dei* (Vicar Son of God).

I suggest that it’s something more simple. I don’t believe that God confines someone to hell for wearing a tattoo, having a credit card, a coin or a piece of technology or for being Catholic – no, it isn’t external, it’s an internal mark. In the OT, the Hebrew people were told to bind the law to their forehead and their hand (some take this literally, but most don’t) as a sign of allegiance to God in their thinking and their actions. I suggest that the “mark of the beast” is simply the same principle, declaring by thought and action, an allegiance to a spiritual power or ruler other than God. It is interesting though that Caesar Nero, the most evil emperor of Rome, who blamed the Christians for the fire of Rome (two-thirds destroyed) to stir up hatred against the Christians etc., his name in Roman number/letter terms = 666

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the great statue. Each stage represented a kingdom through to the feet of iron and clay which represented the Roman Empire. Daniel got all of this right. But, he said, a stone, not made with human hands, came and crushed the feet (Rome), bringing down the statue, and the stone grew and became a mountain that filled the whole earth. This stone represented a kingdom not of this world, not made of gold or silver or bronze or iron and clay. Jesus was the stone (the stone that the builders rejected) that impacted the Roman world and established a new kingdom – a kingdom that lasts forever. He preached the Kingdom and told His people that the Kingdom of God is in you! This stone has grown to be the church – a mountain that covers the whole earth.

Christ’s return is more than an event, more than an end in itself. When Tony Abbot took the Coalition from Opposition to government, he didn’t do so simply because he liked the seats on the government side of the parliament better – he didn’t just move because he wanted the title of Prime Minister, nor was the move an end in itself – he didn’t simply say, the jobs done, we’re no longer in opposition. No, he moved to the government benches to govern. Likewise, when Jesus returns, He’s not simply returning because He said He would, nor is

His return, the actual event of His return, an end in itself. He is not returning just so He can say that He's in charge. He returns to govern, to rule eternally.

OK, a few scattered problems with Futurism.

John saw a bunch of people dressed in white in heaven and the angel asked him who they were – he said that he didn't know, so the angel told him. The answer was given that they were people saved during the great tribulation. This creates two problems – first the tribulation was supposedly happening at the time, so how did they get to be in heaven? Was there another rapture after all? If so, how many “raptures” would be required over a 7 year period? Secondly, how did they get saved if the Holy Spirit had been removed from the earth?

A favourite quote of Futurists is from Matt. 24:40: "***Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.***" However, the question is who was taken and what happens then? Look at the context by reading the two preceding verses: " ³⁷ ***As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be***" (24:37-39). The flood took away the wicked! Righteous Noah and his family were left behind! "So also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

Remember the wheat and the tares – separated at the harvest – who was taken and what happened? Nobody left behind but God's saints, it was the wicked who were taken away to judgment! The principle through Scripture is fairly consistent – when people were taken away, it was not for blessing but for judgment. Separation of the sheep and goats follows the same principle.

The scene of crashing planes and cars (or ships and chariots) or unborn babies evaporating from their mothers' wombs is found nowhere in the Bible. The major unproven premise of the Rapture doctrine is that after Jesus secretly snatches away the believers, life will continue on earth more or less as we know it. This doctrine says that there will be multitudes of people left behind who will be totally ignorant of what caused the disappearances. Can such ideas be found anywhere in the Bible? The answer is no, they can't!

Another question. Jesus prophesied and promised, "***In the world you will have tribulation***" not that you would escape from it (John 16:33). Why do we in the 21st century western church think that we would escape it when for centuries, the church has faced tribulation. Note that when the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, he said, "***I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation***" (1:9)

If the millennium follows the return of Christ but comes before the judgment, will sinners left on earth at the end of the tribulation remain alive? Will they get a “second chance” to receive Christ as Saviour? So is it possible to get saved after the second coming? If not, why not, as the judgment hasn't happened? If they remain, will they sin? Will death occur in the millennium if the final judgment hasn't yet taken place?

These are some of the many problems that pre-millennialists face with the doctrine on which so many books and movies have been based.