

Biblical Prophecy

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Biblical Prophecy Magazine

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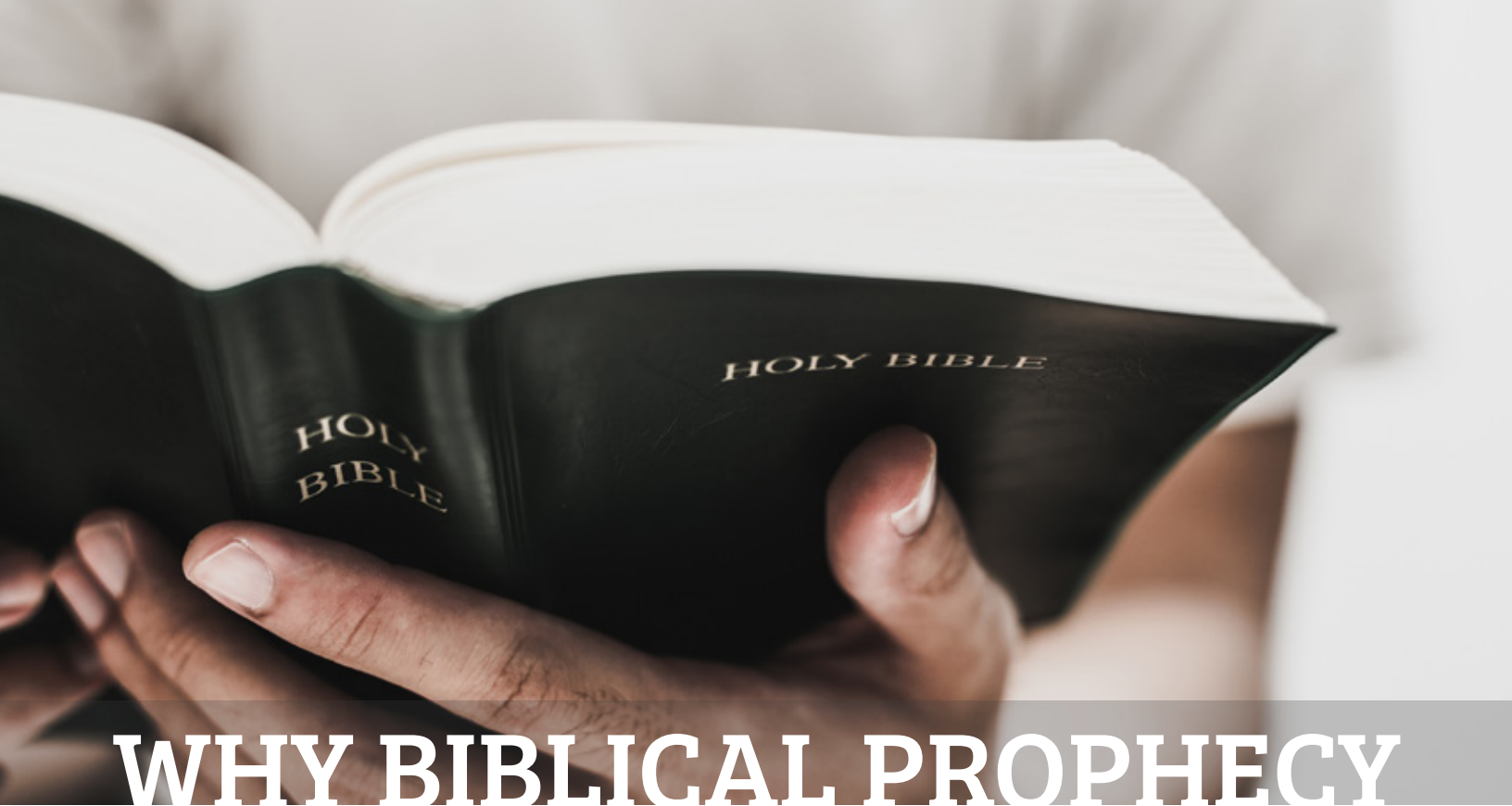
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WHY BIBLICAL PROPHECY MATTERS

By Dr. Alan E. Kurschner

This article examines two types of platitudes commonly shared in Christian circles that deflate our enthusiasm for studying biblical prophecy.

An astonishing, and growing, number of Christians do not think biblical prophecy matters. Specifically, many do not think we should even be concerned with biblical prophecy. By *biblical prophecy*, I am referring to topics mainly related to events surrounding the second coming of Christ and the millennium. Most, of course, would admit that God's future plans for the world are important by virtue of being decreed by God, but many Christians do not think these plans have significant value for Christian living "in the here and now." There are platitudes that reinforce this growing posture among Christians that biblical prophecy does not matter. This is why I thought it fitting to write this feature article for the debut issue of the *Biblical Prophecy Magazine*.

You may have heard at least one of these platitudes—or expressed one yourself! These platitudes, or slogans, are intended—intentionally or not—to discourage “your focus” on biblical prophecy. The vast majority of those who express these platitudes mean well. But I do not think they understand that they lack biblical substance.

I have recognized that most platitudes fall under two major types. The first is *agnostic*, which expresses skepticism that it is possible to have a right understanding of future events in biblical prophecy. The second type of platitude is *pietistic*, which are pious-sounding statements intended to minimize the importance of biblical prophecy study. To be sure, the platitudes of agnosticism and pietism can overlap with each other.

The Agnostic Platitude

- ‘Who are you to think you have the right answer?’

- ‘There are so many views out there’
- ‘Theologians have debated this for centuries’

The agnostic platitude is expressed through several slogans. The person expressing this *sentiment of uncertainty* wants you to know they are certain that you cannot know the truth concerning the events surrounding the second coming. It effectively results in deflating one’s enthusiasm for studying biblical prophecy, or worse, shutting down discussion about the particulars of the Lord’s coming. When someone uses these slogans, they are signaling to you that they do not believe it is possible to have the correct view *and neither should you*. Let’s examine three platitudes.

‘Who are you to think you have the right answer?’

The person expressing this first platitude believes that no one can have the right view on the second coming and the millennium. It is intended to make you feel guilty for believing that you understand correctly. But this sentiment does not agree with Scripture, because of the following self-evident principle: since the Bible *warns* Christians to understand the events surrounding the second coming, it necessarily follows that God *expects*, and makes sure it is possible, for us to understand his teachings. Many passages could be cited, but here are a few key biblical statements exhorting believers to understand and take heed of the particulars of biblical prophecy:

Jesus answered them, “**Watch out** that no one misleads you.” (Matt 24:4)¹

But **when you see** the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be . . . (Mark 13:14)

Remember, I have told **you ahead of time**. (Matt 24:25)

So also **you, when you see all these things, know** that he is near, right at the door. (Matt 24:33)

But be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day close

down upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will overtake all who live on the face of the whole earth. **But stay alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that must happen**, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:34–36)

Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. **Let no one deceive you in any way**. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God. Surely you recall that I used to tell you these things while I was still with you. (2 Thess 2:1–5)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must happen very soon**. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John . . . **Blessed is the one who reads** the words of this prophecy aloud, and **blessed are those who hear and obey** the things written in it, because the time is near! (Rev 1:1, 3)

These are not warnings about the *fact* that Jesus is coming, but warnings to understand the *conditions* for his coming. The Bible’s teachings concerning the events of the end times cannot be disconnected from their spiritual applications. God grounded biblical prophecy in the truth that Christians would face the Antichrist through *warnings not to capitulate to slothfulness, persecution, and false teaching*. These warnings make no sense if we are not supposed to have the right answer.

So, who am I to think that I have the right answer? Someone who has it on good word from Jesus himself and the inspired authors of the New Testament that I can understand, and thereby discern, biblical prophecy.

‘There are so many views out there’

This platitude also expresses uncertainty about understanding biblical prophecy, but for a different

¹ All Scriptures cited throughout are from the New English Translation unless otherwise indicated.



reason. It implies that since there are “so many views,” then it is not possible to know which one is the correct one.

This reasoning is fallacious. For example, there are more religions than there are rapture views, so, according to this logic, we cannot be sure that Christianity is the correct religion. It is a *non sequitur* to assert that because a multiplicity of views exists, therefore we cannot know which one is correct. This epistemic relativism is unbecoming of Christians. It implicitly conveys that God has failed to clearly communicate how his Son’s second coming will occur, and assumes the Holy Spirit is inactive in guiding us into all truth. I would suggest the fault is not with God, but with the interpreter’s presuppositions.

In addition, there are not “many views” on biblical prophecy. There are only four or five main viewpoints: pretribulationism, prewrath, posttribulationism, preterism, and historicism (midtribulationism for all practical purposes is a defunct view). Even if there were “many views,” that should not inhibit us from practicing truth-seeking.

The rabbinic literature reveals an ancient Jewish tradition where Rabbis disagreed among themselves

on various issues surrounding the coming of the Messiah. But this did not prevent Jesus from rebuking the two on the road to Emmaus; he still expected *that they should have possessed the right understanding of how Messiah would arrive*:

Then some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him. So he said to them, “You foolish people—how slow of heart *to believe all that the prophets have spoken!* Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures. (Luke 24:24–27)

Jesus explained that they were responsible for *discerning and understanding* the sign of the times for his first coming based on biblical prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. Similarly, Jesus admonishes Christians to understand the events of biblical prophecy associated with his second coming: “*Remember, I have told you ahead of time*” (Matt 24:24–25).

Studying God’s Word, therefore, requires assiduousness, diligence, and concentration. But you cannot look for truth if you do not believe it is there in the first place. And truth is not determined by how many views are out there. The fact that there exists a variety of interpretations should be more of a reason to concentrate our attention on biblical prophecy—not to ignore it.

‘Theologians have debated this for centuries’

This agnostic-implying platitude assumes that if theologians cannot agree among themselves, then who could possibly have the correct understanding? It appeals to the tacit claim that laypeople cannot come to the right, biblical answer. After all, if theologians cannot come to the right answer, then certainly *you* cannot.

It is supposed that truth can only be disseminated from the interpreter-priests. If a theologian says we “cannot be sure,” then that settles it, and who are you to think that you know better? It is the height of arrogance to think only popes, cardinals, theologians,

and pastors can possess the right answers. This is elitism. Jesus had quite a bit to say about this type of arrogance concerning the religious leaders of his day (see Matt 23).

Just because theologians have had different interpretations on the topic of the second coming for centuries, does not mean that *all* theologians must be equally wrong. Nor does it mean that you cannot disagree with theologians, as this platitude implies. Theologians do not have a corner on the truth. It is also not true that theologians have been debating the topic of the rapture and second coming for centuries. To be sure, they have debated the topic of the millennium, but as far as the question of the rapture as it relates to the Antichrist and the second coming, this question has been mostly a topic of debate among theologians only in the last two centuries, especially this past century.

Even if it were true that they were debating this topic for two thousand years, so what? Theologians have been debating many doctrines for millennia, for example, the doctrine of the nature of Christ, the gospel, and the nature of God. Does this mean that we should no longer continue to engage in these important theological questions? Does it mean we cannot know what Scripture teaches on the nature of Christ or of God?

It is not a bad thing for theologians and laypeople to debate doctrine. It is a good thing to reflect and study God's Word. "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Truth is typically discovered through disagreement and debate—not avoidance of it.

In summary of the agnostic platitude, it does not work because it is logically flawed, scripturally naive, and historically myopic. We are admonished to seek truth on the particulars of biblical prophecy, and based on this mandate God intends for us *to possess the right understanding*.

Don't let anyone make you feel guilty for believing that biblical prophecy matters and expressing what you think is the correct understanding of Scripture. We can be confident that it is there for us to discover it.

The Pietistic Platitude

- 'It will all pan out in the end'
- 'The only thing that matters is the fact that Jesus is returning'
- 'I'm looking for Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist'
- 'This doctrine divides the Church'
- 'You should be concerned with evangelism, not biblical prophecy'

This second type of platitude is expressed with several slogans that possess a veneer of piety. They may sound reasonable and godly but at the end of the day they are shallow and meaningless utterances. Those who quote them may be motivated by good intentions or they may be using them as a copout for not studying biblical prophecy. Whatever the motivation, these statements fall far from representing biblical reality. While piety is a good thing, if there is no biblical substance behind a platitude, then it is just that, pious sounding.

'It will all pan out in the end'

This first platitude under the pietistic rubric is one of the most common. It is a trope intended to place oneself above the fray. It implies that engaging this topic is not worth the time or effort. The platitude sounds pious, but it does not reflect biblical teaching for the single reason that it will *not* "pan out" in the end. Indeed, Jesus is ultimately victorious, but God ordains the *means* as well as the end. And these means include real, consequential, concrete warnings.

I already noted that Jesus warned against ignoring his teachings on this topic (Matt 24:25). The most graphic passage in the Bible on hell is found in the context of God's warning not to take the mark of the beast (Rev 14:9–12). If it all pans out in the end, then Jesus's warnings to Christians are disingenuous. Why give these warnings if he did not think there were consequences to disregarding them? Why warn us in the first place if it will all pan out in the end no matter our ignorance of the danger? This slogan is at best ignorant, and worse, it makes Jesus out to be a disingenuous prophet.

Let's examine this platitude closer. Pan-millennialism (sometimes referred to as *pan-tribulationism*) believes

“In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus places more emphasis on how to live during the great tribulation than on his return itself.”

it is of little value to study the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. Those who hold this position believe we cannot understand future events in any coherent, meaningful framework. Pan-millennialism, however, is more than just a belief; it is a posture and behavior. It minimizes catalysts for holy living. Ignoring these events easily leads to complacency and indifference.

There can be different motivations for believing in pan-millennialism.

Tradition: If someone is told over and over that it will all pan out in the end, they will begin to believe it, and their belief will become a tradition.

Anti-Sensationalism: Some prophecy teachers have abused the doctrine of the second coming through their sensational teachings by date-setting and speculations. Consequently, many Christians have avoided the topic of biblical prophecy all together, regulating biblical prophecy to “panning out in the end.”

Passivity: This type of person is ignorant in all doctrines—and intends to keep it that way. It is laziness.

Pride: Conversely, some individuals have studied many theological subjects, except biblical prophecy, but to avoid displaying their ignorance on this topic they dismiss it.

Jesus clearly taught we should know the nature and sequence of events leading up to his return. At the end of Jesus’s ministry his disciples asked him when he would return: “what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3). If there were any opportune time for Jesus to explain to his disciples that it would all pan out in the end, this would have been the time. But Jesus proceeds to give a discourse for his disciples on *how* the events will unfold (see Matt 24–25). The deception will be so great just before his return that Jesus says “if possible, even the elect” could be deceived

(v. 24). Jesus instructs believers that they can—and should—know the season of his return: “Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door” (vv. 32–33). After Jesus lays the foundation for the events that will precede his return, he moves into the second half of his discourse, where he exhorts believers to be spiritually watchful lest they become apathetic and in danger of judgment (Matt 24:36—25:30).

Based on this point alone, vigilant Christians should concern themselves with the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. Jesus warns against any dismissive sentiment because it does not heed his teaching nor foster a biblical expectancy for his return.

Similarly, the apostle Paul was not a pan-millennialist. In his letters to the Thessalonians, he is adamant that believers would face an Antichrist figure before the end. The apostle gives a sequence to key events leading up to the Lord’s coming (2 Thess 2:1–5). In v. 5, Paul urges them, “Surely you recall that I used to tell you these things while I was still with you.” If Paul were a pan-millennialist, this admonition would be unintelligible.

In addition, the book of Revelation opens up with, “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near!” (Rev 1:3). Revelation does not begin with pan-millennialism; it begins with conviction. If a reader is to be blessed by their obedience they must *understand* what will happen before Jesus returns. The book concludes with the same conviction, “These words are reliable and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants *what must happen soon*” (Rev 22:6).

These biblical truths do not express a pan-millennial outlook. Rather, it is clear that God intends to alert

his church to key events *leading up to* Jesus's return. Pan-millennialism reflects a flippant, dangerous—even sinful—attitude, dismissing the severe warnings from Christ on this important subject. It dismisses Jesus's illustration of the five foolish virgins who discovered, to their horror, that it did not all “pan out” in the end. They were shut out of the kingdom for not being prepared.

‘The only thing that matters is the fact that Jesus is returning’

This platitude shares a similar sentiment with the previous slogan. It implies that biblical prophecy is pure speculation. Another version says, “All that matters is that you are right with God.” These sound pious, but underneath there is a flaw. The biblical writers, including Jesus himself, focused, not on the “fact” that Jesus was coming back, but on the *conditions* at the time he comes back. And he taught that a means by which we become right with God is understanding and obeying his end-time instruction. Some of these biblical end-time conditions have already been covered, but I want to make a few additional comments.

Jesus is coming back, and there is no question that knowing this truth should propel us to holy living. But for the biblical writers, such events as the great tribulation, the rapture, the day of the Lord's wrath, and the coming earthly kingdom were significant concerns, and therefore should be concerns for us.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus places more emphasis on *how to live during the great tribulation* than on his return itself. Therefore, we too, must model Jesus's example by emphasizing the ramifications of Antichrist's great tribulation upon the saints. The task of the student of prophecy is not just to affirm *that* Jesus is returning but to understand and obey the instructions concerning the events *surrounding* his return. In this way, we will be refined in faith for his arrival. Jesus implied in an ominous statement that many will lose faith before he returns: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8). No wonder Jesus warned, “See, I have told you *beforehand*” (Matt 24:25). And in the context of the mark and image of the beast, the book of Revelation warns, “This requires the steadfast endurance of the



saints—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

It is true that being right with God matters when Jesus returns. But it does not happen in a vacuum. God designed biblical prophecy *as a means of becoming right with God*. Jesus and the biblical authors did not give us prophecy to tantalize us or to give us mere head knowledge. Rather, biblical prophecy matters because God is preparing us for difficult times and drawing us closer to him. It is then imperative that every believer study biblical prophecy and take its commands seriously. This will foster a love for the Lord’s return and vigilance for what will happen before his return.

It is incumbent upon the student of biblical prophecy to understand more than the “fact” that Jesus is returning. The stakes are high to understand biblical prophecy accurately. The major event that the Bible warns God’s saints to look for before Jesus’s return is the revelation of the Antichrist and his killing program—the period when God’s Bride will have her faith tested before Jesus returns.

‘I’m looking for Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist’

This next slogan also implies that all “side issues” such as the timing of the rapture, great tribulation, the Antichrist, and the coming earthly kingdom were not important concerns for the biblical writers. But Jesus himself warned each of us to be on the alert for the Antichrist before his return: “So when you see the abomination of desolation [Antichrist]—spoken about by Daniel the prophet—standing in the holy place . . .” (Matt 24:15).

The apostle Paul makes the same point: “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness [Antichrist] is revealed, the son of destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God” (2 Thess 2:3–4).

And the book of Revelation, after explaining the persecution that will happen at the revelation of the Antichrist, warns Christians: “This requires steadfast endurance and faith from the saints” (Rev 13:10; cf. Rev 14:9–12).

All three end-time teachings by Jesus (Matt 24–25), Paul (1 and 2 Thessalonians), and the book of Revelation give prominence to the event of the Antichrist’s great tribulation that will happen before Jesus returns for his church. Watching for Antichrist *and* Jesus is therefore not either/or.

I do not like the thought that my family may have to face the regime of the Antichrist, but it is God’s will that ultimately matters. Would you not count it an honor to stand up on the day of your death and give glory to the true God of this universe by being a witness against Antichrist as he is blaspheming God? Or are you going to stand up boldly to the Wicked Desolator and confess Jesus Christ as Lord of the universe?

The Antichrist can only kill you once! Do not forget that Jesus promised: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).

‘This doctrine divides the Church’

Our next platitude implies that disagreement means division. To be sure, divisive people can use this doctrine to divide the church. But biblical prophecy is intended to have the opposite effect: for Christians to be able to disagree in love and truth. *It is not an excuse to ignore biblical prophecy out of fear for division*. What promotes division and disunity is conformity and silence.

Churches should not enforce *conformity*, requiring new members to hold to a particular view on the rapture or millennium: “It’s our way or the highway.” To be sure, churches *should* take a position on these matters, preaching and teaching their flock on these truths. But there should not be a requisite belief on these matters in order to become local church members. Belief in cardinal truths, however, should be required, such as justification by faith alone, Christ’s deity and resurrection from the dead, and Jesus’s future physical return. While one’s view on the rapture or the millennium should not be considered a cardinal article of the Christian faith, this should not minimize a church’s passion and zeal to explicate important end-time truths.



Churches also should not enforce *silence* on their members on the topic of biblical prophecy out of fear of division. “You can have your own personal view, but don’t share it with others in the church; if you do, you are a divider.” Avoiding discussion on biblical prophecy—and other biblical issues—sets up a church for disunity.

There is a difference between division and disagreement. Christians should have the maturity to disagree in love and truth. We should not blame biblical prophecy for divisiveness but blame divisive people. Using “unity” as a cover to avoid potentially divisive people will inevitably result in *disunity*.

A third option, anticipated above, is the biblical and pastoral approach which promotes unity and proclaims the whole council of God’s Word. And this happens by promoting *meaningful interaction*. We can have spirited debates, and even if everyone does not agree, at the end of the day there can still be a spirit of unity when God’s people seek the truth together.

May pastors and their church members be more concerned with grappling with God’s truth than worried about potential disagreement. Meaningful interaction within the church is a good thing—conformity and silence are not.

‘You should be concerned with evangelism, not biblical prophecy’

This final pious platitude is usually framed by invoking Acts 1:6–8 for support:

So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you

are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.”

This is a common proof text that deflates one’s enthusiasm for studying biblical prophecy. But it is misguided—a false dichotomy and a contradiction to many biblical exhortations and commands to understand the events surrounding our Lord’s return.

What does Acts 1:6–8 actually instruct? Try to put yourself in the situation of the disciples. They had given up their lives the past few years to follow Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believed was the Messiah predicted by their Hebrew prophets. They had just experienced the crucifixion drama, only to witness his glorious resurrection and be reunited with him. Then for almost forty days the disciples were taught about the kingdom and other matters. So their natural response makes perfect sense: “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” In other words, they are asking, “Will this happen *now*?”

To be sure, they should have known better because a few days before the crucifixion Jesus taught them the sign and conditions that must happen before he returns to establish the kingdom (Matt 24–25). But his disciples—as the Gospels often reveal—needed to be reminded of what they had forgotten. Jesus replies to the disciples by reiterating two points he taught



them a month earlier on the Mount of Olives. On the first point, Jesus reminds them that the timing is the Father's domain, not theirs:

You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. (Acts 1:7) Cf. "But as for that day and hour no one knows it—not even the angels in heaven—except the Father alone." (Matt 24:36)

On the second point, Jesus reminds them that it is necessary for them to be witnesses to the world before his return:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Cf. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matt 24:14)

In addition, in the Olivet Discourse the disciples ask what is the "sign" of his return (Matt 24:3), while in Acts they are more impatient, asking "is this the time?" (Acts 1:6). Accordingly, Acts does not reiterate Jesus's entire Olivet Discourse but outlines a few aspects from it. Therefore, we should not use the evangelistic call in Acts 1:6–8 to eclipse Jesus's other biblical prophecy teaching from his Olivet Discourse. Evangelism and biblical prophecy are not either/or; they complement each other.

Another example that links evangelism with biblical prophecy is found in Matt 28:19–20:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

In this passage, Jesus exhorts his disciples to evangelize with the result of making more disciples and "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Clearly, Jesus does not intend for his commands within biblical prophecy to be excluded, because he emphasizes "*everything* I have commanded you" (cf. Matt 24:14!).

In addition, in Acts 17:31, Paul uses the biblical prophecy of the day of the Lord's judgment *as the basis for his evangelism* when he witnesses to the Athenians:

Because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.

Finally, Rev 14:6–12 links evangelism to the biblical prophecy of Babylon the Great and the warning of hell by taking the mark of the beast:

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, and he had an **eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth**—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He declared in a loud voice: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!" A second angel followed the first, declaring: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great city! She made all the nations drink of the wine of her immoral passion." A third angel followed the first two, declaring in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and takes the mark on his forehead or his hand, that person will also drink of the wine of God's anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb. And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night, along with anyone who receives the mark of his name." This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints—those who obey


God's commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus.

The warning of hell and the gospel proclamation are *embedded* directly within biblical prophecy—the admonition to saints not to take the beast's mark. In short, evangelism and biblical prophecy complement each other, exactly how God intended.

In summary of the pietistic platitude, it is facile as it does not reflect biblical reality. Its superficial treatment of the subject minimizes, or worse, nullifies God's revelation of biblical prophecy events surrounding his return taught in the Olivet Discourse, the Thessalonian epistles, and the book of Revelation. If we would possess true piety, it should be grounded in biblical reality.

Conclusion

Many platitudes and slogans attempt to minimize the relevance of biblical prophecy. I have outlined the most common so you can be alerted to them and be able to respond to them. They have become so entrenched in Christian parlance that most people do not give them a second thought. This article critiqued them head-on with biblical substance. Words—or in our case, platitudes—have consequences. It is imperative for the informed Christian who loves biblical prophecy to give pushback to these platitudes, and the best pushback is to lovingly direct them to what God's Word has to say about why biblical prophecy matters.

Studying biblical prophecy is not a religious hobby or an academic exercise. It is intended to sanctify and sober us. Christians are in a real battle against the forces of evil. May God's Word prepare our hearts and minds for the difficult times coming. 



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Many of us have been told that we will be “raptured out of here before the Antichrist arrives.”

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The Vindication of the Saints in Revelation 20:4

— Ryan Habbena

This article explores the narrative “connective tissue” in Revelation pertaining to the raised martyrs of 20:4 and how tracing these Scriptures helps illuminate the focus and function of this verse in the Apocalypse.

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers, and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives (Luke 21:16–19).¹

When the Messiah arrived and announced his coming kingdom, he included a development many did not expect. Instead of immediate relief from persecution and oppression Jesus predicted an increase in the suffering of God’s people. Yet, the good news in the midst of such conditions was that those who suffer for their testimony also receive the unassailable promise that they will share in the Messiah’s glory.

The book of Revelation foretells the coming time of transition—when those who have suffered for the king will be raised and receive a kingdom. Revelation 20:4 is one of the passages that describe the coming vindication of those who suffer for the sake of the Name.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

This verse has been a nexus for eschatological debate. Because of the clear description of both a resurrection and millennium, it is a watershed in the millennial debate. But beyond the millennial question, this verse presents interpretive questions for those that hold to the premillennial position.

- Does this describe a posttribulational rapture and resurrection?

¹ All Scriptures cited throughout are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise indicated.

- Is this a “special resurrection” that occurs in the wake of Armageddon for a select group of saints?
- Or is something else being stressed by the divinely inspired author?

In this article, my aim is to present a narrative reading of Rev 20:4. By “narrative reading,” I mean looking at the terms, themes, and developments that have led up to this point in John’s end-times chronicling of the divine vision. As we explore the connections that lead up to this point, we will see that this verse presents the coming vindication of those that endure in their testimony as contrasted with the demise of those that persecute and put to death God’s people. Furthermore, tracing the flow of these terms and concepts will help pinpoint the timing of the resurrection of the subjects of Rev 20:4.

The Elements of Revelation 20:4

Much can be said about the significance of this verse. For our purposes, I want to center on the *focus* of this passage and then highlight several of the *terms* and *concepts* that will be traced throughout our exploration of pertinent texts that lead up to this point.

First, the overall focus of this passage is on the vindication of the martyrs of the great tribulation. Furthermore, its place in the flow of Revelation serves to contrast their vindication with the destruction of the beast and false prophet. This conflict between God’s people and the ultimate expression of the Serpent’s seed has been the primary conflict chronicled in John’s vision. At this point in Revelation, we have just read that judgment and justice have been accomplished in that Babylon has fallen and the beast and the false prophet have been assigned to their eternal “unresting place” in the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20). And while this is the reality for the Antichrist and false prophet, the martyrs highlighted in 20:4, who have been beheaded for their faithfulness, are now alive and granted authority to reign. Thus, *both* justice and vindication are primary focal points of this passage.

Secondly, there are pertinent terms and concepts in 20:4 that prove to be of central importance to discover the identification of these raised martyrs, the timing of their resurrection, and the overall function of this passage for the believing reader.

That these ones were put to death for “the word of the God and the testimony of Jesus” is of great importance. This terminology will form a connection to other passages in Revelation. And though they were put to death, they “came to life.”² Thus, resurrection is a crucial step in the progress that leads to their vindication. This resurrection leads to the inheriting of authority—they *reign* with Christ for 1,000 years. This presents a resounding reversal: From the world’s perspective, those beheaded appeared to have experienced a decisive and final defeat. Yet, their association with the One who holds the keys of death and hades proves that his power is unstoppable. He can and will raise his people unto vindication before the eyes of all.

With these terms and concepts highlighted, let us trace four pertinent passages that cast light on the meaning and function of Rev 20:4, paying close attention to their context within the progression of Revelation’s narrative.

Revelation 6:9–11 The Cry of the Martyrs

In Rev 5, John writes of the Lamb taking the scroll from the hand of the Father. This scroll is best understood as containing the wrath of God culminating with the coming of the kingdom of God.³ The Lamb is the only one worthy to open it. Lined upon this scroll are seven seals that must be broken before the scroll can be opened, the contents read, and the inheritance of the kingdom received. As the breaking of the seals progresses we come to the fifth seal—a seal of great significance in discovering both timing indicators as well as thematic flow related to Rev 20:4. John records:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the

² The aorist Greek verb *ezēsan* translated “came to life” could also be contextually translated as “lived and reigned” rather than the rendering of the ESV. These differing translations of this verb ultimately does not affect the conclusions of this article.

³ In my estimation the best understanding of the scroll is that it holds the inheritance of the Kingdom. The trumpets are the contents of the scroll which culminate in the coming of the Kingdom at announced in Rev 11:15. The immediate context as well as the numerous parallels to Dan 7 support this conclusion.

earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been (Rev 6:9–11).

In relation to the timing, this text indicates that the Lord’s judgment upon the wicked world is yet to commence. After crying out for judgment, these martyrs are told to “rest a little longer.” Of note is that this event in the vision takes place immediately before the sixth seal. The opening of the sixth seal unveils the signs in the sun, moon, and stars that herald the immediate coming of the Day of the Lord. The Lord’s teaching in the Olivet Discourse places this event at an unknown day and hour after the midpoint of Daniel’s seventieth week (see Matt 24:15, 29–30, 35).

Notice the subjects of this portion of the vision are “souls,” or “lives,”⁴ that were “slain for the word of God and the witness they had borne.” This forms a crucial connection to Rev 20:4 as the subjects of that text are those who were beheaded for the word of God and the testimony “of Jesus.” Why add this phrase? By not including “of Jesus” it widens the scope of the souls under the altar to those who were martyred before his incarnation—all the way back to Abel.

With the fifth seal martyrs, a subtle allusion is presented. The crying out of “souls” or “lives” from the base of the altar is a picture of blood crying out. The base of the altar is where the blood would flow from the sacrifice. And the “crying out” terminology takes the reader back to the first martyr: Abel. This subtle but powerful allusion back to Gen 4:10 then spans to the appointed time when “the rest of their fellow servants and brothers would be complete.” Thus, the *scope* of the fifth seal vision speaks of the martyrs of all time and the *function* of this text is for the reader to know the Lord is in control and will avenge all once his sovereign plans reach their fulfillment. But while these distinctions are noted, a bit of deductive reasoning leads us to expect that

⁴ The underlying Greek term *psychas* speaks of both breath and life and is the same word used in 20:4 to speak of the beheaded martyrs. In this context, an allusion to “blood” is likely at work as well. Leviticus 17:11 proves to be a helpful backdrop: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”

the martyrs of Rev 20:4 would be included here as these are “waiting” for others to complete their testimony.

This leads us to the introduction of a significant link between the two passages: the white robes. Note that these martyrs are not clothed in white robes at this point. So, what do these white robes represent and how can they give us insight into the overall message of Revelation? In the very next chapter we see the donning of these heavenly garments.

Revelation 7:9–14 Clothed with White Robes

After the events of the fifth seal, we read of the all-important breaking of the sixth. When the Lamb breaks the sixth seal the prophetic cosmic signs and disturbances make their appearance (or disappearance). There are key connections here to other prophetic texts that describe the events following these “signs in the sun, moon, and stars,” including the inception of the *parousia*, the impending arrival of the wrath of the Lord, and indeed the resurrection and rapture of Christ’s people (Matt 24, Luke 21, 1 Thess 4–5).

Revelation 7 forms an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. With the breaking of the seventh seal the eschatological wrath of the God is going to be unleashed. Thus, the purpose of this interlude is to highlight the preservation of God’s people and the fulfillment of his promises. First, 144,000 are sealed from the 12 tribes. These are the firstfruits of the end-times harvest of Israel (see Rev 14:1). The sealing is an act that identifies ownership as well as implying preservation from the coming wrath that is about to unfold (see Rev 7:3).

After this, John sees a “great multitude.” And this blessed group is described as donning “white robes.”

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:9–10).

This group is the resurrected church of the King. They have come out of the midst of “the Great Tribulation.” They are raised to life and placed under the protective care of the Great Shepherd. That they are wearing white

robes forms a link back to the fifth seal. The martyrs who cried out for justice and vindication are now raised and with the King forever.

What, though, is the significance of the imagery of the “white robes”? A careful reading of Revelation presents three emblematic purposes of “white robes” regarding the salvific realities for the redeemed. First, as the context in ch. 7 clarifies, these robes are related to resurrection. The parallels with the Olivet Discourse and the classic rapture passage confirm this being the gathered resurrected of 1 Thess 4:13–17.⁵ Second, Rev 7 speaks of the purification that caused these robes to be “made white.” Thus, the cleansing sacrifice of Christ connects to these robes.⁶

Third, a related passage in ch. 19 gives further insight to the emblematic signification:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:7–8).⁷

This highlights the glorious gospel truth that, not only are the sins of the redeemed removed by the blood of the Lamb, but they are clothed in his righteousness which has and will be demonstrated in the lives of his chosen ones.⁸

⁵ See Ryan Habben, *The Parable of the Fig Tree* (Bellefonte: Strong Tower Publishing, 2009) 113–130, and Alan E. Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2013) 59–101 for more expositional reasoning on this portion describing the recently raptured church.

⁶ The Old Testament roots of this imagery are found in Zechariah’s vision of Malak YHWH clothing Joshua the high priest in clean, fine garments (Zech 3:1–5). This profound vision anticipates and foresees the New Covenant blessings that will come from the Lord.

⁷ The Greek term *byssinon* (fine linen) is different here than *stolē* (robes) in Rev 6:11 and 7:9. Certainly the concept connects back to these texts. Yet, the change in terms may be to stress the true priestly and royal nature as contrasted to Babylon as the usage of *byssinon* in chs. 18–19 lends to such.

⁸ Though the thematic element of being “clothed in white” is key to recognizing the resurrection motif connected to 20:4, we must be cautioned against applying it to every instance in Revelation. For instance, in Rev 4:4 the heavenly 24 elders are described as being “clothed in white.” While the identity of the 24 elders is beyond the scope of the article, the context of Rev 4–7 and the narrative flow of Revelation preclude these 24 elders from being the subject.

Returning to the narrative flow of Revelation, now that God’s people are raised and his firstfruits are sealed, the time of judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth has come—the very time for which the fifth seal martyrs were told to wait. Thus, vindication and judgment are



both at hand. As the seventh seal is broken, the trumpets unfold. The furious wrath of God descends upon the created order. The land, the skies, the seas, and the inhabitants of the earth are pummeled by the successive blasts of divine war. These trumpets culminate in the announcement: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15b).

Revelation 13:7–10 Conquered By the Beast

A careful reading of Revelation reveals that it is not a strictly chronological book. There is a general progression of seals, trumpets, and bowls, but within these there are several times where the inspired author interjects an interlude. These interludes are strategically placed for thematic reasons. After the seventh trumpet sounds at the end of ch. 11 there is another extended interlude in chs. 12–14.

Since the kingdom of this world is now being transferred to the Lord and his Anointed, this interlude describes and traces the epic conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. This conflict harkens back to the beginning: to Gen 3:15. While all of history is dominated by this massive conflict, the interlude in chs. 12–14 is focused on the events that occur in the wake of the midpoint of Daniel’s seventieth week. As the dragon is thwarted in his pursuit of the woman, he goes off “to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17).

It is through the beasts of Rev 13 that the dragon launches his war against the saints. We read of their campaign against the Lord and his people:

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation (Rev 13:7).

And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain (Rev 13:15).

The great tribulation is the moniker given to this era (Matt 24:15; Rev 7:14). This unparalleled time is described in detail by the Lord: “Then

they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another” (Matt 24:9–10).

Thus, the beheaded martyrs of Rev 20:4 are certainly part of this group who is persecuted and put to death. They are also included in the group described in the wake of the breaking of the fifth seal. The manner in which they are “conquered” is physical death. But there is a divine irony in this statement. Though they may have been put to physical death, it is through their endurance that they defeat the Serpent. For it is witnessed in Rev 12:11: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

Because of their unification with Jesus of Nazareth, these martyrs have conquered the Serpent. And though they may physically die, their demise is not final. Having one’s head taken off usually is a decisive end to one’s life. But those who hold to the testimony of Jesus even unto death will indeed rise again. And they will rise to further conquer.

Revelation 17:14 Conquering the Beast

After the interlude of Rev 12–14, we are taken to the final wrath of God upon the earth and its inhabitants. Revelation 15–19 describes the seven bowls of God’s wrath that follow the trumpets, the fall of Babylon, and the battle of Armageddon.

Within the timeframe of these events, those who have been killed for the testimony of Jesus have already been raised, as the resurrection is described between the sixth and seventh seals. The bowls that are poured out after the trumpets tell of the furious wrath from the Lord upon the beast and his kingdom. As we approach the culmination of this time, we read of the assembling of a massive army to wage war against the Lamb. And we see that the people who were ironically “conquered” through being put to death, are going to be with the Lamb in his conquest of the beast and his armies:

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful (Rev 17:14).

When the appointed time for battle arrives, the Lamb goes forth in unstoppable power to destroy the beast, the false prophet, and his armies. Regarding those who accompany him in his conquest, we read that the “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses” (Rev 19:14).

Returning to Revelation 20:4 The Vindication of the Martyrs

With these selected Scriptures surveyed, let us return to our primary text and revisit the narrative function and focus of Rev 20:4. Looking at the passage again:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

The presentation of these beheaded martyrs who have been brought to life is placed here for both thematic and functional reasons. It is not placed here to describe a posttribulational, special resurrection that occurs in the aftermath of the battle of Armageddon and binding of Satan. Rather, it is here to contrast the vindication and victory of these ones who seemed to be decisively conquered with the demise of the Beast and his followers. The connective tissue of Revelation relates this group to the fifth seal martyrs. In light of this, we understand their resurrection and gathering is with the rest of the saints, not apart from them, as described in Rev 7:9–17.

Furthermore, all who are raised by Christ will reign with him. The focus on beheading is not teaching that these will exclusively reign with Christ, but rather prompts the reader aligned with the Lord to stand in solidarity with these ones, knowing the King’s power will surely raise those who were beheaded for their testimony. And indeed, all who endure will share such vindication and authority. He has purchased a people from every, tribe, nation and tongue. All in him have their robes washed white by the blood of the Lamb.

And all who are raised to life when he appears in the clouds will join him in reigning over the nations as he grants authority and honor to those that are his.

Conclusion: The Coming Reign

The preceding is only a cursory exploration of these profound and important themes in the inspired revelation given to us by the King. Though further searches will uncover more insight into these matters, the function of Rev 20:4 for the believing reader is established and clear:

Those who endure in their testimony and faith will be vindicated by their King.

As the body of Christ, we are encouraged to stand with our brothers and sisters who shed their blood for the sake of the Name in solidarity.

We ourselves do not know what we will be called to endure in the future. But we do know we are each called to “love not our lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11) when considering the value of our confession of Jesus as Lord. And as we read the Lord’s promises concerning those who will be beheaded because they refuse to bow before the beast, we take great encouragement in knowing the One who will raise them from the dead and grant them the privilege of reigning with him has extended the same promises to all who believe in his name. For the heavens sing of such comforting and motivating truths:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10). BP



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Passover, the End Times, and the Return of Jesus

— *Travis M. Snow*

This article explores the relationship between Passover, biblical eschatology, and the second coming of the Messiah, particularly in four key prophetic texts: Luke 22, Num 24, Isa 11, and Ezek 38.

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus and his disciples reclined at the Passover meal (Seder) in Jerusalem and celebrated the miraculous deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian bondage. As the sun set, the smoke and smell of flame-broiled lamb rose from hundreds of community ovens set up throughout the city. In households across Jerusalem, the hustle and bustle finally subsided as the Passover meals began, and the story of the exodus was retold with vivid imagery through the various elements of the Seder.

At the end of the meal, it was customary for the participants to ascend to the rooftops of their houses to sing the final psalm of the Egyptian Hallel, which includes the famous line that both anticipates and calls for the arrival of the Messiah: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Ps 118:26).¹

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture translations throughout are from the NASB. The author has presented some verses in bold for emphasis.

Passover and Messianic Expectation in the First Century

Just days before, Jesus had entered Jerusalem amidst tumultuous fanfare and unrestrained shouts from the Jewish crowd as they too proclaimed, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt 21:9).

While we might be inclined to interpret these shouts of praise towards Jesus as nothing more than a simple recognition of his messianic credentials, for these first century Jews, there was a lot more to it than that.

In the first century, Passover always created a bit of a charged and dangerous atmosphere in Israel. On the one hand, the Jewish people were happy to celebrate the miraculous work God had performed in Egypt in the past. But on the other hand, the existing reality of Roman oppression and occupation cast a dark shadow over the festivities and inspired a spirit of revolution in the hearts of the people.

It was during the Passover season, at the dawn of spring, that the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to come and redeem them, just as God had done for their ancestors thousands of years before. Thus, when Jesus entered the city right before the start

of Passover, riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zech 9:9, the Jewish crowd naturally expressed their belief that their time of redemption had come. From their vantage point, it would only be a few days before Jesus would finally vanquish the Romans and set up God's kingdom on Passover.

Jewish scholar Hayyim Schauss perfectly describes the atmosphere of tension and messianic expectation that permeated Israel at that moment:

The highest point in the evolution of Pesach [Passover] came in the last century of the second Temple, when the Jews suffered from the heavy oppression of the Romans. It was during this period that the Messianic hope flamed up, and in the minds of the Jews the deliverance of the future became bound up with the first redemption in Jewish history: the deliverance of Egypt. Jews had long believed that in the deliverance to come, God would show the same sort of miracles that He had performed in redeeming the Jews from Egypt. This belief gained added strength in the period of Roman occupation and oppression. *Jews began to believe that the Messiah would be a second Moses who would free the Jews the self-same eve, the eve of Pesach. So Pesach became the festival of the second as well as the first redemption*; in every part of the world where Jews lived, especially in [Israel], Jewish hearts beat faster on the eve of Pesach, beat with the hope that this night the Jews would be freed from the bondage of Rome, just as their ancestors were released from Egyptian slavery.² (emphasis added)

Jesus Hasn't Fulfilled Passover Yet

Rather than fulfilling first century Jewish hopes for messianic *political* deliverance, Jesus defied the expectations of his people and flipped the script to a significant degree. Instead of acting as Israel's Passover Deliverer and Judge, Jesus went to the cross and died as the Lamb of God, the perfect Passover sacrifice, offered on behalf of Israel and the nations. Though few Jews were expecting this to happen, it was precisely the Messiah's sacrifice as the Lamb of God that allowed

us to experience not simply freedom from political oppression, but a deeper and more important type of freedom: freedom from *spiritual* bondage and freedom from our sins.

For the past 2,000 years, in both Christian and Messianic Jewish circles, this explanation of how Jesus fulfilled the Passover has mostly focused on his sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Clearly the sacrifice of Jesus on Passover is a central part of the gospel—a central part of the good news we boldly proclaim to the world. In no way should we ever downplay the essential importance of the Messiah's atoning sacrifice on our behalf, including its relationship to Passover.

That said, it is also vitally important to understand that the traditional Christian and Messianic Jewish explanation of how Passover relates to the ministry of the Messiah is incomplete. Passover has not yet been completely fulfilled by Jesus, and it has just as much to do with his second coming as it does with his first coming.

It is only by understanding the still-future significance of Passover that believers will be able to grasp some of the most important lessons related to biblical eschatology and the Messiah's return. Put simply, the end-times significance of Passover is one of the most widely overlooked yet central eschatological themes of the Bible. We cannot truly comprehend who Jesus is or what he is coming back to do until we first gain a fuller understanding of the deeper prophetic meaning of Passover.

Jesus and the End-Times Fulfillment of Passover

The key text in the New Testament where Jesus unambiguously tells us that Passover will not be completely fulfilled until the time of his second coming can be found in Luke 22:15–16. At his last Seder meal before his death, Jesus said this to his disciples:

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it *until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God* (Luke 22:15–16).

In Luke 22 Jesus mentions two things that are almost universally ignored when Passover is discussed today.

² Hayyim Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days: History and Observance* New York: Schocken Books, 1970, 46–47.

First, believers will actually celebrate Passover with Jesus when he returns. Second, the reason we will do this is because Passover will not be completely fulfilled until his messianic kingdom is established on the earth. In other words, Jesus recognized that the feast of Passover is in some way directly connected to his second coming.

Based on Luke 22:15–16 we can conclude that the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah only represents a *partial* fulfillment of Passover. According to Jesus there are still other elements of the Passover that will not reach their deepest fulfillment until the kingdom of God is established in the future.

Though this often comes as a surprise, Jesus connected his second coming and other eschatological events more to Passover than to any other biblical feast. Understood from a first century Jewish perspective this makes perfect sense.

As we have already seen, a large portion, if not a majority, of Jewish people in the first century was expecting the Messiah to arrive and set up his kingdom on Passover. This means the eschatology of Jesus, including his eschatological understanding of Passover (Luke 22:15–16), was in perfect harmony with the broader Jewish eschatology of his day.

Jesus never delegitimized traditional Jewish hopes of Messianic deliverance associated with Passover, as many scholars have concluded. He simply said that first he would die as the Lamb of God on Passover and then he would return as Israel's Passover Deliverer, so that Passover can be "fulfilled in the kingdom of God" at a later time, just as his disciples were already expecting.

The End-Times Passover in Biblical Perspective

For many years I wondered what Jesus meant when he said Passover will only be "fulfilled in the kingdom of God" after he returns. At first I thought maybe Jesus was referring to deliverance in a general sense, saying that when the kingdom of God is established believers will truly be set free from sin and death.

While this might be true at some level, meditating on the idea of general deliverance only uncovers the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the deeper meaning of Passover. As I continued to study, I came to the realization that Jesus's understanding of Passover was

deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. In effect, the Hebrew Bible itself speaks of an end-times Passover, which will include a second exodus that will literally take place during the last days, right before Jesus establishes his kingdom. This end-times Passover is such a central part of the teaching of the biblical prophets that when I discovered it I wondered how I could have missed it for so many years.

For the rest of this article, I want to cover a few key prophecies connected to the end-times Passover and look at how they informed the eschatology of Jesus in Luke 22:15–16. In my recently published book, *The Passover King*, I cover these prophecies and many others in more detail, so what follows will only be an overview of some key points and arguments from the book.

Numbers 24:7–9

The third Balaam Oracle in Num 24 is arguably the most important and foundational text related to the second exodus that will take place when Jesus returns. The last half of this prophecy, in Num 24:7–9, reads:

Water will flow from Israel's buckets, and *his Seed (zera) will be by many waters, and his King shall be higher than Gog; and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with His arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.* (Author's translation)

Historically, most, though not all, interpreters of Num 24:7–9 have assumed this passage is about ancient Israel, and describes their historic exodus out of Egypt c. 3,500 years ago. A much stronger case can be made that it is about the Messiah, the "Seed" and "King" of Israel (v. 7), and that it describes the time of his second coming when he will wage war against the powers of darkness, which will include the armies of the Antichrist, who in Num 24:7 is named "Gog."

Gog in Numbers 24:7

Unfortunately, all English translations of Num 24:7 rely on the Masoretic Text that substitutes

“Passover has not yet been completely fulfilled by Jesus, and it has just as much to do with his second coming as it does with his first coming.”

the Amalekite king “Agag” for “Gog” in verse 7. Reading Agag into this verse is problematic, primarily because most early manuscripts, including the Greek Septuagint (c. 200 BC) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (c. 100s BC) read verse 7 as a reference to Gog, not Agag. Gog can also be found in some early versions of Greek Aquila (140 AD), Greek Theodotion (150 AD), and Greek Symmachus (c. 100s AD), as well as in some early Latin versions (c. 100–300 AD). As we shall see, reading the Amalekite king Agag (1 Sam 15; c. 1000 BC) into a prophecy about the second coming of the Messiah does not suit the context of the oracle as a whole.³

In his magisterial treatise on Num 24 and Ezek 38–39, Old Testament scholar William Tooman summarizes why we should accept that Gog, not Agag, appears in Num 24:7:

Some scholars have tried to explain away the reference to Gog in Num 24:7. In most cases, they assume that Num 24 must be a prediction of the coming Davidic monarchy. . . . The main problem with the reading “Agag” is that it does not suit the circumstances portrayed in the oracles. . . . Inasmuch as the coming king is said to “devour” and rule over “many nations,” the oracles do not correspond with any pre-exilic hope or reality regarding the monarchy. Of the two readings, only Gog makes sense in the context. . . . [In addition the] Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch, Theodotion, and Old Latin reveal an ancient understanding of the Balaam Oracles in which a

foe named Gog is defeated by the king of Israel in the [latter days].⁴

The Warrior Messiah in Numbers 24:7–9

Another indication that Num 24:7–9 is future, messianic, and eschatological, is that Balaam used the same Hebrew term for “seed” (zera) that was first used in the original messianic prophecy in Gen 3:15, which speaks of the seed of Eve crushing the seed of the serpent. In addition, the notion that Israel will have a future king who will conquer his eschatological foes is an idea rooted in the messianic prophecy of Gen 49:10, which speaks of the messianic king from Judah who will possess the “scepter” and judge the nations.

Given these links to the messianic theology of Genesis, what Balaam is doing in Num 24:7–9 is drawing on these earlier prophecies about Israel’s Seed and King. He is describing the time when the Messiah will vanquish and crush his enemies in the future, just as the book of Genesis had previously said he will.

It is worth noting that in verse 8 there is a clear emphasis in the Hebrew text on third person *singular* pronouns and verb forms. This grammatical detail confirms that Balaam was speaking primarily about the singular Messiah, not merely corporate Israel in verses 7–9. Unfortunately, this grammatical detail is not easily recognized in English translations. However, it is quite obvious in the Hebrew, and extremely important.

In essence, Num 24:7–9 represents a development of the warrior Messiah motif that is a prominent feature throughout the Torah (Gen 3:15; 49:10; Deut 32:39–43). This passage is about future events that

³ See full discussion on Gog in Num. 24 in Travis M. Snow, *The Passover King: Exploring the Prophetic Connection Between Passover, the End Times, and the Return of Jesus* Dallas: Voice of Messiah, 2020, 66–82.

⁴ William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38–39* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011, 140–143.

will take place in the life of the Messiah, not past events that took place when Israel left Egypt. After all, nothing described in Num 24:7–9 has actually happened yet. Jesus has not yet established his exalted kingdom, nor has he come out of Egypt with Israel and devoured, crushed, and shattered his enemies. In addition, Num 24:7–8 contains numerous Hebrew imperfect verbs, which denote incomplete future action. Balaam would not have used this form if he were talking about an event that had already occurred, but it suits the structure of a prophecy well.⁵

Jesus Will Come ‘Out of Egypt’ Again

One of the key events highlighted in Num 24:8 is the second exodus. This verse states that when Jesus returns he will lead Israel “out of Egypt” a second time. Thus, we read:

God brings him *out of Egypt*, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, And *will crush their bones in pieces* [cf. Gen 3:15], And shatter them with his arrows (Num 24:8 cf. Deut 32:41–42).

This is the first passage in the Bible that describes a semi-detailed sequence of events that will take place when Jesus returns, and we can be sure it was this prophecy that became the foundation of the other eschatological Passover and second exodus prophecies that feature prominently in the writing of the later prophets. As we read in the text, Jesus will come “out of Egypt” with Israel when he returns, and he will wage war against the powers of darkness throughout the Middle East as he makes his way up to Jerusalem to defeat the Antichrist. Then, after he comes “out of Egypt,” Jesus, the Seed and King of Israel, will be

⁵ I mention this point because unfortunately the few Christians scholars who have recognized Num 24:7–8 is messianic have tended to read this prophecy as though it is only about Jesus leading the church through a “spiritual exodus,” or as though it only predicts that Jesus would come “out of Egypt” when he was a child (Matt 2:15). The problem with both of these readings (i.e. the allegorical and preterist readings) is that they force us to ignore the eschatological language in the prophecy, including the reference to Gog, and the description of how Jesus will shatter and crush his enemies. Solid and consistent exegesis requires that we read all of Num 24:7–8 as a future prophecy about events that will only take place when Jesus establishes his exalted kingdom. Because the entire sequence of events in Num 24:7–8 has not actually happened yet.

“higher than Gog, and his kingdom shall be exalted.”

Based on Num 24:7–8 we can make a number of important practical points related to biblical eschatology. First, Israel will have to be exiled again into Egypt and the surrounding nations of the Middle East in order for Num 24:7–8 to be fulfilled. As we see in other passages in the Hebrew Bible, this final exile will in fact happen during “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Isa 11:11–12; 27:12–13; Jer 30:4–11).

Second, Jesus will not descend from heaven and land immediately in Jerusalem when he returns. Instead, he will first go down into North Africa and lead a second exodus “out of Egypt.” This second exodus will be a literal replay of the first exodus that took place 3,500 years ago under Moses. In other words, the second exodus is not a concept we can merely spiritualize without reference to real geography and the specific God-ordained sequence of events outlined here. Num 24:7–8 is telling us that Israel’s original exodus was a type, or prophetic foreshadow, of what will one day happen again when the Messiah establishes his kingdom.

Third, based on the way the messianic warrior motif of Num 24 is linked to the conquering Messiah motif of Rev 19, a strong case can be made that the raptured and resurrected saints will be with Jesus and Israel throughout the duration of this second exodus. It is true that this second exodus has primary relevance to Israel since it is connected to what the Jewish nation will go through both during the 70th week of Daniel (Dan 9:27) and when Jesus returns. However, this second exodus/end-times Passover is also relevant to the church. The end-times Passover is about the destiny of all of the people of God. It reveals how we will participate with Jesus in the establishment of his kingdom.

We will see these next two prophecies are firmly rooted in the second exodus theology of Num 24:7–9.

Isaiah 11

Isaiah 11:11 speaks of the time when the Lord will “again recover *the second time with His hand*, the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”

Many evangelicals have concluded this verse refers to the restoration of the modern State of Israel in the 1900s. The problem with reading modern Israel's history into Isa 11, however, is that the wider context of this prophecy refers to events that will only take place when the Messiah returns (see Isa 11:1–10).

Also, when Isa 11:11 mentions the Lord will rescue Israel “*with His hand*,” he is drawing on the original account in Exodus where God said he would “stretch out” his “hand” to save Israel (Exod 3:20). The idea communicated here is that when the Messiah appears God will again do for Israel what he originally did for their ancestors in the book of Exodus. As important as modern Israel certainly is, God did not literally establish it with his own hand through miraculous signs and wonders.

Therefore, we must understand that Isa 11:11 is about the second exodus, just like Num 24:7–8. In addition, Isa 11 expands on the picture of the second exodus first revealed in Num. It does this by mentioning other nations besides Egypt, including Assyria (Iraq/Syria), Elam (Iran), and Shinar (Iraq) that the Messiah will travel into to rescue the scattered Jewish remnant when he returns.

Jesus Will Part the Sea

And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; And He will wave His hand over the River with His scorching wind; and He will strike it into seven streams and make men walk over dry shod. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt (Isa 11:15–16).

At the end of the prophecy, Isaiah tells us the Messiah will part the Red Sea again and perform supernatural signs and wonders over the Euphrates River. This will allow Israel to return to their promised land from all the nations of the Middle East after their final exile during the great tribulation.

As we can see, God's “hand” is again mentioned in Isa 11:15 and the final line of the prophecy indicates that Isaiah has the original exodus in view. What God originally did for Israel “in the day that they came up



out of the land of Egypt” he will do again when the Messiah returns to establish his kingdom.

- Jesus will part the Red Sea.
- He will turn the Euphrates River into seven streams,
- and then he will lead his people through the desert and into the land of Israel, right before the messianic age begins.

The entire Passover and exodus story is going to repeat again, but in a much more dramatic way when Jesus returns.

Ezekiel 38–39

Just like in Num 24, Ezek 38 uses Passover and exodus symbolism to describe how the Messiah will defeat Gog (the Antichrist). Whereas Num 24:8 mentions Jesus coming “out of Egypt,” Ezek 38:22–23 says that Jesus will defeat Gog with the Passover plagues from the book of Exodus:

With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him [Gog]; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone. I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD (Ezek 38:22–23).

Unfortunately, there is a longstanding Christian tradition that denies Gog is the Antichrist, and that the Antichrist's defeat at the hands of the Messiah is in view in Ezek 38:22–23. One primary reason for this confusion is because it is not widely understood Gog



had already appeared as the quintessential enemy of the returning Messiah (i.e. Antichrist) in Num 24:7.⁶

The Traditional Jewish View of Ezekiel 38–39

In contrast to what we find in Christian commentaries, many Jewish sages across the span of time have understood that: Gog (i.e. Antichrist) will be the chief rival of the Davidic Messiah, that Gog will be defeated right before the messianic age begins, and that Ezek 38 uses Passover symbolism to describe the victory of the Messiah over his enemies.

For example, in his commentary on Ezekiel, Rabbi Moshe Eisemann writes:

There is a wealth of Midrashic literature [i.e. traditional Jewish commentary] that relates the plague, blood, hailstones, etc. mentioned in [Ezek 38] to similar disasters which befell the Egyptians. . . . Apparently, the Sages wish to draw our attention to the thread which, spanning the centuries, ties Gog to Egypt.⁷

⁶ For full discussion on why Ezek 38–39 should be interpreted as a prophecy about the Antichrist and the second coming, see Snow, *The Passover King*, 206–92.

⁷ Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkiel: Ezekiel: A New Translation with Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2003, 590–91.

Rabbi Naftali Silberberg writes on Chabad.org that the “defeat of Gog and Magog will precipitate the Messianic Redemption.”⁸ In other words, it is a common Jewish view that Gog will be defeated by the Messiah just as Num 24:7 says he will.

Besides these Jewish traditions, we also know that it will be Jesus who will carry out the plagues in verses 22–23 because verse 20 says at this time Gog and the nations will encounter God’s “presence.” The Hebrew word for “presence” here is *panim*, which most commonly means “face.” Many other Scriptures teach that it is the Messiah who embodies the presence and face of the Lord in human form (Gen 32:24–32; Heb 1:3). Consequently, when Ezek 38:20 says the nations will encounter God’s presence/face, this is a shorthand way of saying they will meet the incarnate Messiah, God in the flesh.

The Final Pharaoh and the Miracle-Working New Moses

In summary, Gog is presented by Ezekiel as a kind of end-times pharaoh figure, as the chief rival of Israel who will be vanquished by Jesus—acting as the New Moses on behalf of his people—at the dawn of the age to come. Ezekiel 38–39 give us one of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring pictures in the entire

⁸ Naftali Silberberg, “The Battle of Gog of Magog,” Chabad.org, online.

Bible of how Jesus will defeat the Antichrist and fulfill Passover “in the kingdom of God.” Jesus will defeat the Antichrist and his armies by using the same plagues Moses used against Pharaoh in the book of Exodus!

Furthermore, when we read Ezek 38–39 in light of Num 24 and Isa 11, we can paint an even more detailed picture of how the prophetic sequence of events will unfold when Jesus returns.

- Jesus will return to the Middle East.
- He will go down into Egypt to liberate the Jewish remnant from captivity and slavery.
- He will lead a second exodus through the Middle Eastern desert, parting the Red Sea and turning the Euphrates River into seven streams along the way.
- Finally, he will lead his people into the Promised Land, after which point he will confront Gog and his armies, destroying them as the miracle-working New Moses with a cataclysmic outpouring of plagues, hail, fire, brimstone, and extremely severe weather.

When these events are completed, at long last Jesus and his disciples will eat the Passover again, just as he said in Luke 22:15–16, because at that time, the Passover will finally be “fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

I have no doubt that when Jesus spoke of the future fulfillment of Passover in Luke, he had texts like these on his mind. Jesus knew he is coming back to fulfill the Passover, literally, miraculously, gloriously, and in a way that is going to leave the nations and his people in complete and utter awe and trembling before him.

If we think the first exodus was something special, we haven’t seen anything yet. **BP**



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Letters of Encouragement



From 2009–2013, I attended The Master's College (now The Master's University) as a biblical languages student. I still remember a lecture on the rapture by a professor who I still respect deeply and who greatly impacted my growth as a Christian and student of the word of God. He presented an argument for the rapture from 1 and 2 Thessalonians that left me confused. Since he taught me to be a Berean and search scripture for myself, I did. After graduation and further study, several things became crystal clear to me.

First of all, I was taught that “the word of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 meant that Paul had received a new revelation from God, something Jesus never revealed. In other words, Paul as an apostle had something new and exciting to share. I actually agree that “the word of the Lord” signifies a new revelation in its NT usage. But Paul’s revelation is not a revelation of a new event, but rather the revelation concerns the order of transformation at Christ’s coming: *the dead*

will have precedence over the living (1 Thess 4:15). This is new, something that Jesus is not recorded to have taught, and this new revelation would comfort the believers who were uninformed about the dead in Christ. This of course was Paul’s main point in writing this section of the letter (1 Thess 4:18).

Second, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–2, Paul links the gathering of the saints with the day of the Lord, which throughout the scriptures is the eschatological wrath of God. They occur back-to-back. Even at TMC I was taught this.

Third, 2 Thessalonians, like 1 Thessalonians 4–5, links “the gathering of the saints” (1 Thess 4) with the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:1–2). Fourth, the second coming of Christ can’t happen until the antichrist is revealed in God’s temple (2 Thess 2:1–12). This is the basic argument, which I realize requires a lot more proof than I can present here, and which others have done like Alan Kurschner in his book, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*.

The result of these discoveries was that I still held to a futurist interpretation, but was 100% convinced the pretribulational rapture argument was incorrect.

There was no way that Paul was trying to throw the Thessalonians such a large curveball in such a small paragraph (1 Thess 4:13–18), such that there would be two 2nd comings of Christ. This particular group of believers were easily rattled (2 Thess 2:2) and needed to be reminded of things Paul taught them when he was with them (2 Thess 2:5). He would have taken a lot more ink to outline a 2 ½ coming of Christ.

So my previous stance on the pretribulational rapture, which I never clung to that dearly, was deconstructed, but I didn't exactly know what to replace it with. Then came along Alan Kurschner's *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*. How glad I was to find another person who was also raising their eyebrows at the entrenched pretribulational rapture position, and who laid out a compelling exegetical defense of an alternative position.

His book helped me to realize several things. I realized that the celestial signs mentioned by the prophet Joel and Jesus himself didn't happen until the sixth seal. Therefore Jesus will not come back until after the sixth seal, just as he said in Matthew 24. I was also mind-blown when I considered that the seals don't represent the wrath of God. But it makes perfect sense: the seals of a scroll are not the content of the scroll itself, but rather must be opened in order for the scroll to be read. The scroll itself represents the judgments of God on the unbelieving world. The trumpet and bowl judgments are the theophanic wrath of God.

Seeing the martyrs that come out of the fifth seal, who are described right afterwards in Revelation 7:9–17, also led to a big breakthrough. If such a great number of martyrs from *every tribe* come out of the tribulation (Rev 7:9, 14), then the position that Gentiles wouldn't face the tribulation must be wrong. Furthermore, Revelation 6:10 reveals that the martyrs of the fifth seal believe the wrath of God and the recompense of God are a future reality.

In summary, Alan's book helped me confirm what the Holy Spirit had already shown me, and also helped me to fill in a lot more of the puzzle pieces. He also showed me a conclusive argument from 2 Thessalonians 2:3 that precludes doing any funny

business with the word *first*. That was amazing because my professor had used the very argument that Alan destroyed. You can find it on his website, and as a student of biblical Greek, I really appreciated it.

I still have more questions about prewrath since I'm new to it. If Jesus's 2nd coming is a complex unfolding series of events like Alan describes, I want to learn more about what that looks like; I still have a lot of questions. But for further study to be fruitful, one has to start off on the right foot. False dogma needs to be removed so that further study can be made, and that Christians can be prepared for the Antichrist's tribulation. This study has also just made me fall more in love with studying God's Word. It is exciting and sobering to live in the last of the last of days. Maranatha!

— Timothy Bell, San Dimas, CA

I was not brought up in a Christian home and was converted at the age of 18 by the direct intervention of the Lord much to the astonishment of everyone who knew me. I completed my degree at Cambridge University where I was much involved with Christian activities, including working with missionaries in Zambia in the summer vacations. I developed a passion and hunger for the Bible and used to slip away to the University Library to read books by the renowned British Bible teacher, the late Derek Prince. As well as giving me a good grounding in the foundations of the Christian faith, Prince's teachings cemented in me a love for Israel and the Jews and convinced me of the premillennial view.

For those in the UK, like me, who held a premillennial position, the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible and popular books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay meant that the pretribulational view was dominant. As I began my teaching career, I became involved in a church where I did some Bible teaching and later became an elder. The founder and lead elder of the church was a popular and gifted Bible teacher who firmly held a pretribulational position. Recommended

books on eschatology in this church included those by Lewis Sperry Chafer and John Walvoord from Dallas Theological Seminary.

It was only when I moved away from the area, to posts as a deputy head and then a headteacher, that I questioned some beliefs that I had taken for granted in the pretribulational view. These included the view that the rapture was imminent (in the sense that it could happen at any moment without any preceding signs) and also the teaching that the entire seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy was "the tribulation" and a time of wrath. I found pretribulational interpretations of Matthew 24 were confusing, and even contradictory, with claims that there was no mention of the "rapture of the living saints" in this passage as it was said not to apply to the church. Contrary to pretribulation teaching, it became clear to me, from passages such as 2 Thessalonians 2, that before the return of Jesus, believers would experience persecution from the Antichrist.

The churches in Britain are predominantly amillennial and the fastest growing churches often tend to view eschatology as a distraction and prophetic passages are not often addressed. Replacement theology prevails, with the church being viewed as "spiritual Israel," and many prophetic passages are interpreted allegorically. Reliable teaching on prophetic issues is thus not readily available in the UK.

As I looked for alternative positions within the premillennial view, I initially shifted to the posttribulational view but soon became uncomfortable with how it seemed to concertina so many of the events comprising the second coming into a small window of time—even within one day. However, when I read Alan Kurschner's *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*, I realised that the prewrath position answered so many of my questions. It was a relief to find such clear exposition and exegesis. There were many points in this book that clarified my understanding. These included: distinguishing between the great tribulation and the day of the Lord's wrath, the identification of the wrath as following after the seals, including the trumpet and bowl judgments, and also the explanation of the great tribulation being "cut short" by the rapture. Prewrath's view of the return of Jesus—the parousia—

consisting of a complex series of events, made so much sense. It was good to read Alan's explanation in the book's notes concerning Matthew 24:36–44, that both the specific Greek verbs used and the contextual information clarify that the believers are "taken" into the Lord's presence in the rapture whilst the unbelievers are the ones "left" to face the wrath of the day of the Lord.

The prewrath view is just beginning to gain a small foothold in the UK. I hope it will grow in influence and that some Bible teachers are willing to admit to mistakes in their previous views. For me, this admission was liberating.

— Brian Melia, Brighton, UK

My journey in studying and understanding the book of Revelation vacillated between fascination and frustration. At times, I celebrated my growing understanding of the Scriptures only to hit a road block of confusion. Then I would study or hear an opposing view that opened a new way of thinking that made me question what I had already believed. Confused, I would begin thinking through the book of Revelation with a different paradigm only to see new challenges emerge in the direction I was now considering. Frustrated that I couldn't find a consistent answer to how the book of Revelation should be understood, I resolved to believe in the full bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ and assumed the details would always be debated.

I know I am not alone. Many believers in our generation have simply adopted an eschatological theology based upon a godly teacher who espouses its merit. Many of these believers hold to a pre-trib position, which has dominated the landscape of conservative, evangelical scholarship for the past 150 years and has been propagated even more by several best-selling fictional books that highlight its theology. This theological system has provided security, meaning, and hope for many Christians who believe that prior to the 70th week of Daniel they will be raptured before the Great Tribulation.

In 2002, I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary with a Th.M. degree (I have an incredible love for Dallas Theological Seminary, its faculty, administration, and alumni and am indebted and grateful for the instruction I received as a student from 1998–2002. Being a student at DTS is still one of the best decisions I have ever made!). At DTS I was taught eschatology from a dispensational, pre-trib perspective from godly men. Although the interpretation seemed strained to me and I personally couldn't defend it, I loosely held a pre-trib position because I was led to believe that other positions demonstrated a departure from a clear, literal interpretation of God's Word. I have always wanted my theological views to emerge from the Scriptures, as I believe the Word of God to be inerrant and the final authority for all matters of life.


After graduating in 2002, I served as an itinerant evangelist, preaching the gospel everywhere the Lord would allow me the opportunity throughout the world. Since I was so focused on preaching the gospel I set my eschatological convictions on the back burner. At times I would reference the "imminent" return of Christ only in hopes to persuade more listeners to immediately respond to the gospel but didn't spend much time considering the subject of eschatology.

That all changed in 2010 when God called me to plant and pastor BRAVE Church in Denver, Colorado. Preaching the whole counsel of God's Word and not just the gospel of Jesus Christ forced me to grow my eschatological convictions. My conscience would not allow me to teach a theological system simply because my mentors and other godly men had embraced its veracity. I needed to be personally convinced about what God was saying.

I began to ask the Lord to teach me His Word rather than a theological system. I no longer cared if I was going to be pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib or even an amillennialist, preterist, historicist, idealist or some other theological system no one had even considered (It should be noted that I know and am friends with several godly men and women who hold different eschatological convictions). I simply wanted to be biblical in hopes that I could understand how to live out the message of Revelation and become more effective teaching it to God's people. So, with

no preconceived notions, I started to read and take notes and study the book of Revelation again. During that time, I was introduced to the Pre-Wrath position, specifically taught by Marvin Rosenthal and Dr. Alan Kurschner. The beauty of what I learned through these teachers and the Spirit of God was a theology of eschatology that maintained a literal hermeneutic, didn't allegorize or twist a text and allowed the Bible to be the final authority. I also found that the book of Revelation made complete sense, which only deepened my love for Jesus Christ and a yearning for His return.

This is not to say that I now understand everything there is to know about the book of Revelation nor am I an expert. Rather, I have confidence in the Word of God and know how to teach God's people to live in light of what is coming. Because I firmly believe that a generation of Christians will see a great apostasy and the future antichrist they must be ready to endure for their faith. However, I also believe that God will cut the days short and rapture his church before the day of the Lord's wrath so that He can mete out His judgment on the nations before His victorious return back to the earth with His saints.

My convictions are settled in holding to a prewrath position not because that is the theological system I choose to defend, but because the Word of God clearly reveals it. Unfortunately, I believe the church has been falsely taught that they will be raptured before the Great Tribulation and therefore not prepared for what is soon to happen. This has caused me to teach our church that we must be ready and we must endure to the end. It should be noted that I believe in the eternal security of the believer. However, this doesn't mean that believers will not suffer or experience tribulation, but on the contrary must be ready to faithfully endure. I appreciate others who hold different views than me, but I am firmly settled and convicted that the Word of God teaches a prewrath rapture position. Every believer would benefit from understanding the Word of God from this perspective. 

— *Dr. Jeff Schwarzentraub*
Pastor of BRAVE Church in Englewood, Colorado

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