



THE END

A Seminar on the End Times and Dispensationalist Millennialism
For the Youth of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Their Parents
And Anyone Else Who's Interested

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho • Pastor Tim Pauls
November 18, 2001

Cover Illustration: "Christ Among the Seven Candlesticks," Albrecht Dürer



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Scripture texts from the New King James Version of the Bible

In pursuit of pure teaching, the author welcomes comment and especially doctrinal correction.



A Seminar on the "End Times" for the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Youth Group, Their Parents, and Anyone Else Who's Interested

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I. Introduction

The topic for this seminar may seem to be one of little consequence, and indeed has often been dismissed as having little importance for the Christian's daily life. Indeed, with all the challenges that Christian youth face in our world today, this may seem a bit too esoteric and academic. Voices within Lutheran circles have relegated this discussion to an optional doctrine about which we purportedly have no clear position.

I would have to disagree. This is a doctrine gaining more and more attention as people observe the many signs that this world is in deep trouble and only getting worse. It has especially gained attention for two reasons: The end of a millennium usually leads to discussion of the end of the world, and the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins have sold millions of copies. Long before this, however, when I was thirteen years old, this very topic led me to doubts about my faith and salvation, months of insomnia, and—believe it or not—the fervent prayer that my parents would snore.

Yes, all three are connected.

The goals for this seminar are three in number:

1. That the participants understand the basics of a teaching called "dispensational millennialism."
2. That the participants be able to articulate a Lutheran understanding of the "end times."
3. That the participants have confidence in the truth of the "end times" and the certainty of salvation as taught in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

II. The Issue

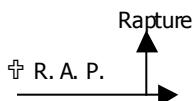
A. The Chart

What would lead a normally happy and healthy seventh grader (well, as normal, happy and healthy as seventh grade boys are) to doubt his salvation and lose sleep for months on end? And what, pray tell, would ever cause him to pray that his parents would snore? It was a presentation in seventh grade religion class, at the Christian school that I attended. A student requested that the teacher explain what the Bible said about the end of the world; the teacher picked up a piece of chalk and obliged. He started a timeline that began with Jesus' crucifixion (†), the Resurrection (R), the Ascension (A), and Pentecost (P), with a line from there symbolizing the present time:



1. The Rapture

Next up on the diagram was this:



Prior to the end of the world, the last days would begin with a phenomenon called "the Rapture." At this time, all Christians would simply disappear from the earth and be taken to heaven. For instance, in the novel *Left Behind*, LaHaye and Jenkins begin the book with the pilot on an airplane in which many of the passengers suddenly disappear. All clothes and other articles remain, but the bodies are gone. This is happening throughout the world at the same instant; indeed, where airliners are flown by an all-Christian crew, there is no one left to fly and the planes crash into the ground.¹

This is the doctrine of the Rapture, the teaching that Christ will return and deliver believers from earth before He afflicts the world with a series of final judgments. It is normally supported by a variety of passages, most notably the following:

⁴⁰"Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two *women* will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." (Matt. 24:40-42)

¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (I Thess 4:16-17)

¹ If you've ever wondered, this has also led to the ubiquitous bumper sticker, "In case of Rapture, this car will be unmanned."

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Rev. 3:10)

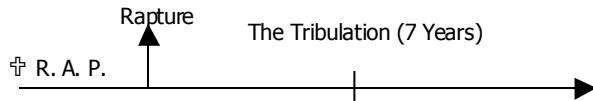
After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." (Rev. 4:1)

And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:14)

The Rapture would signal the beginning of the Tribulation.

2. The Tribulation

The teacher drew a bit more:



The Rapture would signal the start of a seven-year period called the Tribulation, divided into two 3½ year segments. At this time, a world leader would rise to prominence and assume rule over the nations of the world. During the first half of the Tribulation, this ruler would bring peace to the world and show special sympathy toward the nation of Israel. Also, the temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the Jews would reinstitute sacrifices there. During this time, there would be trouble in the form of war, famine, pestilence and death. Many unbelievers, shocked by the Rapture and ensuing judgments, would convert to Christianity. In Israel, two witnesses (likely two of the trio of Moses, Enoch, Elijah returned to earth) would begin to declare the Gospel with power in Jerusalem. 144,000 Jews would convert to Christianity and begin to witness around the world.

At the end of the first half of the Tribulation, the two witnesses would be killed, their bodies left in the streets for 3½ days. God would then raise the witnesses from the dead and gather them to heaven, then pour out more punishment upon the world. War would take place against Israel, likely with Russia as the aggressor. The world leader would reveal himself to be Antichrist, would desecrate the temple and declare persecution on all who refused to worship him—most notably Christians. Followers of Antichrist would be forced to wear the “mark of the Beast” on either their forehead or wrist, and those who refused the mark would not be allowed to engage in commerce. (The “mark” might be the number 666 or a UPC code that served as a credit card.) For the next three and a half years of the Tribulation, Christians would be mercilessly tracked down and slaughtered, usually beheaded.

To display His displeasure, the Lord would afflict the earth with several punishments. Hail, fire and blood would destroy a third of all trees and grass. A great fiery mountain would be cast from heaven into the sea, turning a third of it to blood and destroying 1/3 of all sea animals and ships. A falling star would poison 1/3 of the world's water supply, while 1/3 of the sun, moon and stars would be snuffed out. Locusts would attack the wicked, and 200 million demon horsemen would kill 1/3 of the world's population.

The events of the Tribulation were based upon the following passages:²

The Tribulation

And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:14)

The Division into Two Halves

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be

² After some thought, I elected to put the proof texts for the punishments during the Tribulation in a footnote. Apart from them, there are plenty of proof texts to cover regarding the Tribulation, and a listing of these as well can start to overwhelm seminar participants. Besides, by the time we finish examining the Tribulation, the sequence of the punishments loses its significance found in DM (see footnote 16 and page 27 for more). In any event, proof texts for the punishments from God during the Tribulation are:

Hail, Fire and Blood

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. (Rev. 8:7)

Fiery Mountain Cast into the Sea

⁸Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. (Rev. 8:8-9)

Star Poisons Waters

¹⁰Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water,

Sun, Moon and Stars Darkened

Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. (Rev. 8:12)

Attacking Locusts

³Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. ⁴They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. ⁶In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. ⁷The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces *were* like the faces of men. ⁸They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth*. ⁹And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings *was* like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. ¹⁰They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months. (Rev. 9:3-10)

1/3 of Population Killed

¹³Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, ¹⁴saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. (Rev. 9:13-15)

one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate." (Dan. 9:27)

The 3½ Years of Relative Peace and Evangelism by the Two Witnesses

³"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. ⁵And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. ⁶These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. (Rev. 11:3-6)

The Conversion of the 144,000 Jews

⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: ⁵of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; ⁶of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; ⁷of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; ⁸of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed. (Rev. 7:4-8)

The 3½ Years of Persecution by Antichrist

He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time. (Dan. 7:25)

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (Dan. 12:7)

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rev. 12:6)

But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. (Rev. 12:14)

Initial Support of Israel: See Dan. 9:27 above

Identities of the Witnesses

⁵So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. ⁶And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. (Deut. 34:5-6)

Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. (II Kings 2:11)

And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him. (Gen. 5:24)

²⁹As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became* white *and* glistening. ³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:29-31)

Desecration of the Temple at Midpoint: See Dan. 9:27 above

Invasion by Russia

²"Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him... ¹⁰Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day it shall come to pass *that* thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: ¹¹You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates'—¹²to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places *that are again* inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land. (Ezek. 38:2, 10-12)

Mark of the Beast

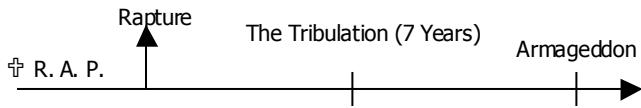
¹³He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (Revelation 13:13-17)

Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Two Witnesses

⁷When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. ⁹Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹²And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. (Rev. 11:7-12)

Clearly, one did not want to miss the Rapture. And if one survived the Tribulation, next to arrive was the battle of Armageddon.

3. Armageddon



Following plagues of sores, bodies of water turned to blood, the scorching of the sun and then darkness, the world would gather against the Lord for one last battle at Armageddon. The Lord would conquer His enemies in this battle, signaling His visible return in judgment.

Proof texts for the end of the Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon include:

Plagues Preceding Armageddon

Sores

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. (Rev. 16:2)

Bodies of Water to Blood

³Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. ⁴Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. ⁶For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." ⁷And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." (Rev. 16:3-7)

Scorching Sun

⁸Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. (Rev. 16:8-9)

Darkness

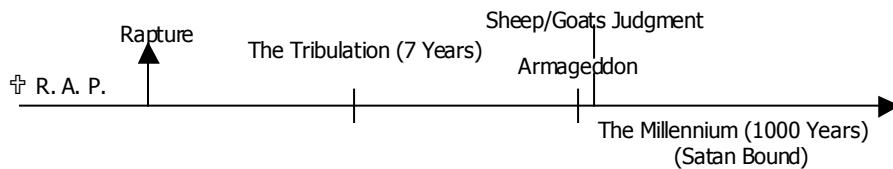
¹⁰Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. (Rev. 16:10-11)

Armageddon

¹²Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. ¹³And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ¹⁵"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." ¹⁶And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. (Rev. 16:12-16)

¹¹Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. ¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. ²⁰Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. ²¹And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Rev. 19:11-21)

4. The "Sheep-Goats" Judgment and the Millennium



Following His victory at Armageddon, Jesus would conduct a judgment of the world, separating believers and unbelievers. Believers who had died would be raised from the dead, though dead unbelievers would remain dead until a later judgment. Satan would be bound—not yet condemned for eternity, but prevented from any sort of evil work. For the next 1000 years (the Millennium), Jesus would rule on earth with His believers in a visible kingdom; there will still be sin and death, but the Church will have control of all matters, spiritual and secular.

Proof texts for the "Sheep-Goats" Judgment and the Millennium include:

The Sheep-Goats Judgment

³²"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of

the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' ⁴¹Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matt. 25:32-46)

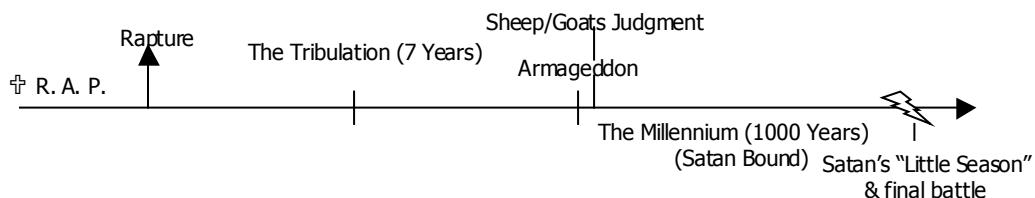
The Binding of Satan

²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (Rev. 20:2-3)

The Millennial Reign of Christ

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4-6)

5. Satan's Little Season



At the end of the Millennium, Satan would be released from his bondage and allowed a "little season" in which he would be permitted one last destructive rebellion against the Lord. However, he would be swiftly defeated for the final time in one last great battle.

Proof texts for "Satan's Little Season" include:

Satan's Release

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. *But after these things he must be released for a little while.* (Rev. 20:1-3)

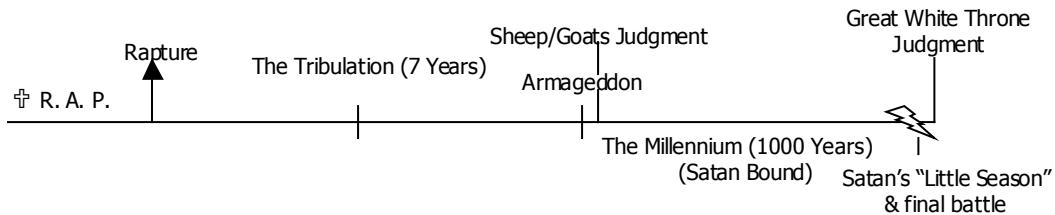
⁷Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and

Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea.
(Rev. 20:7-8)

The Final Defeat of Satan

⁹They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
(Rev. 20:9-10)

6. The Great White Throne Judgment

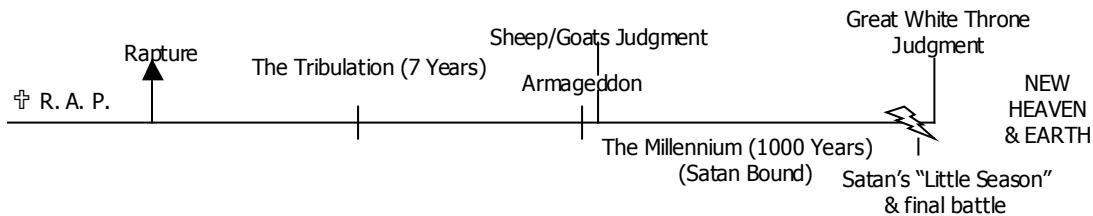


Following the final defeat of Satan would come the final, "White Throne" judgment. Finally, the dead unbelievers would be raised from the dead and sentenced to eternal punishment, along with those who allied with Satan during his little season. Believers who had died during the Millennium would be raised from the dead for eternal life.

Proof texts for the "White Throne Judgment" include:

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11-15)

7. The New Heaven and the New Earth



The White Throne Judgment would signal the end of time and the beginning of eternity. God would then reveal His new heaven and earth.

Proof texts for the new heaven and the new earth include:

¹Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ²Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)

B. 7th Grade Conclusions

The diagram and description fascinated me because I had never heard any of this before, and I'd been going to church all my life. And with this new material, the teacher conveyed this message: The end of the world is going to be terrible, but you can escape all of it in the Rapture.

Therefore, make sure you have enough faith. Make sure that you really believe in Jesus.

I took this message to heart and pondered it with great seriousness. I'd never heard it before, and apparently my pastor had fallen down on the job; after all, there were all sorts of Bible passages to back it up. And, as I mentioned before, I doubted my salvation for the first time, suffered terribly from insomnia and fervently prayed that my parents would snore. The three are connected:

a. I wasn't sure if I was saved because I wasn't sure that I believed in Jesus enough. I knew I was supposed to believe in Him and follow Him, but I kept on doing all sorts of stupid things and sins. So, my life seemed to contradict me calling myself a Christian. Did I really, really, sincerely believe that Jesus was my Savior, or did my sins prove that my faith wasn't really genuine. How could I be sure I believed enough?³

b. For thirteen-year-olds, any crisis is bad enough. The specter of missing the Rapture kept me awake for months on end, with fear that I was indeed hell-bound because I couldn't stop sinning; thus the insomnia.

c. As for praying for the snores of my parents, the answer is simple: I knew that they were true Christians who going to heaven, who weren't near as sinful as I was. Therefore, if the Rapture came along, they'd vanish. But if I could hear them snoring, that meant that they were still there, that the Rapture hadn't happened, that there was still time for me....⁴

³ This is a heavy theme of the currently popular *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye. Among those not raptured is a pastor who explains that he was "left behind" because, while he believed he was forgiven, he wasn't sincere enough about it. (*Left Behind*, p. 195-6) This quantifies faith, saying that one can have some faith, but not enough. Suddenly, sincerity is more important than belief, and one can never be sure of salvation. From the pastor's description, his problem was not insincerity, but reliance on his works as the hope of his salvation.

⁴ Filial piety compels me to add a quick disclaimer that there is no blame on my parents regarding this crisis of faith. While they knew I was short on sleep, they had no idea as the cause for the simple reason that I never told them. If one surmises that my parents were no help to me, that is hardly the case; their presence and help with the adolescent crises they did know about were invaluable. The fault for their unawareness on this matter lies solely with me. Furthermore, the prior years of faithful church attendance, repetition of the liturgy (and its glorious proclamation of hope in the end times), family devotions, and Christian discussion in our *Footnote continued on next page*

III. The Examination

What you have heard and seen on the chart is a teaching known as "dispensationalist millennialism".⁵ There's a reason why my pastor didn't spend time teaching all this when I was growing up: It isn't true. However, we're exploring it today so that you can see the errors and be more confident in the truth that you already know.

Dispensationalist Millennialism (henceforth DM) has some attractions going for it:

- It's based upon Bible verses. Lots of Bible verses.
- It's promoted by many Christians, and has been for centuries in one form or another.⁶ However, it is especially receiving attention now because of the LaHaye/Jenkins novels.⁷
- It's flashy. Lutheran doctrine of the end times is pretty well summed up in the Apostles' Creed, "...from thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead." This is hardly as sensational as disappearing Christians, poisonous meteors and killer-locust attacks.

The second two attractions are dealt with easily enough. Many Christians promote many teachings that are contrary to the Word of God; therefore, the fact that others believe it has little weight. Likewise, the sensational nature of a teaching doesn't make it true; if anything, a doctrine should be more suspect when it portrays the world in a way so different from how God has ordered it.⁸

household planted seeds of the Word that eventually delivered me from my doubts. I remain in their debt to this day, and always will.

⁵ One should note that, while this chart faithfully reproduces one version of Dispensationalist Millennialism, the teachings vary somewhat in sequence and number of events. For instance, some millennialists teach that the Rapture is to take place at the midpoint of the Tribulation or at the end (the "mid-trib" and "post-trib" theories); others propose at least three separate raptures. Still others teach that the two witnesses are at work during the second half of the Tribulation, not the first half.

⁶ DM appears only in the nineteenth century; however, its predecessor, chiliasm, has existed for a long time. See Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, reprinted on page 25 of this essay.

⁷ Although their story and characters are unique, the themes are hardly original. Back in the early 1980's in high school on retreats, we'd watch movies like "Image of the Beast," depicting the dangers of the post-rapture end times. (Among the vivid images were new believers being led to a stainless-steel guillotine because they refused the mark of the beast. This, too, does not make for good sleeping when one is concerned about his salvation.) In the 1970's, Hal Lindsey sold millions of copies of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, in which he pointed to signs of the times to indicate the progress of dispensational millennialism.

⁸ One of many examples in Scripture are events in the life of the prophet Elijah. In I Kings 18, Elijah joins in a contest to the death with 400 prophets of Baal. If one judges the correctness of doctrine on the basis of numbers, it appears that Elijah must be wrong by 400 to 1. Furthermore, Baal worship was far more sensational: It was a fertility cult in which worship could include sexual intercourse. In I Kings 18, the prophets of Baal put on quite a show as they dance and even cut themselves (v. 28) to attract their god's attention; this too is far more exciting than Elijah's quiet prayer (v. 36-37). Up to that point, Elijah is outnumbered and out-sensationalized; however, God clearly demonstrates that Elijah's doctrine is His truth.

In the following chapter, we find a dejected Elijah hiding in a cave, asking the Lord for death because he fears he is the only believer left (I Kgs. 19:9-18). The Lord responds that He is still very present, and that there remain 7,000 faithful men in Israel.

Footnote continued on next page

Doctrine comes from the Word of God; therefore, we must examine the Scriptural basis for DM. We will do this in three parts: First, we'll examine the texts for the three big events of DM⁹—the Rapture, the Tribulation and the Millennium—to see if they really are supported by Scripture. After those three, we'll look at the proof texts for events within the big three. Then, we'll point out some attendant doctrines that accompany DM.

A. The Big Three: The Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Millennium

Before looking at the big three events of DM, we have to take a side trip and talk about how we interpret the Bible. When examining the Scriptures used to support a doctrine, we must take care to be sure of what the Scriptures actually say. There is always a danger in basing doctrine on an individual phrase, verse or sentence in the Bible; taken out of context, a Scripture passage can be used to justify anything. Consider this story that a friend told me back when we were going to the seminary together:

A man wanted to know what to do with his life, so he thought he would find out from the Bible. After a fervent prayer, he opened the Bible, closed his eyes and stuck his finger on a verse. The verse was Matthew 27:5: *Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.* "Hang myself?!" thought the man. "That can't be right. I'll try again." He closed his eyes, opened the Bible and pointed blindly, this time to Romans 9:1: *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit.* "This is the truth that I am to hang myself? I will try one more time," thought the man. He repeated his actions the third time, to find his finger pointing to the verse, John 13:27: *Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."*

Did the Bible really tell the man to hang himself? Not at all, even though he had three Bible verses telling him to do so. We must be careful to make sure that doctrines are really supported by the Word of God. Therefore, we always ask the following questions about verses used to support doctrines:

1. Is the passage clear? If we don't know what a Bible verse means, we don't pretend that we do and base our doctrine upon it.
2. Does the interpretation agree with the verse and its context with the verses around it?
3. Does the interpretation agree with all of the Bible, or is it contradicted elsewhere in Scripture? The Bible does not contradict itself; therefore, true doctrine will be in agreement with all of Scripture.

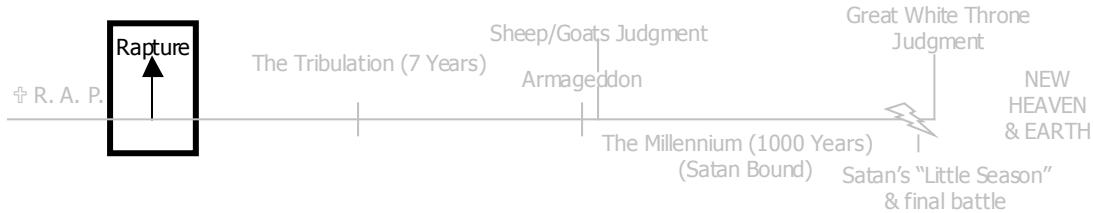
We'll apply these as we look at verses for DM doctrines.

One might also remember Martin Luther standing before the Diet of Worms, one monk against the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. However, Luther's proclamation of the Gospel was correct and pure, and this Gospel will never pass away.

Numbers and sensationalism do not make a doctrine correct. One might appeal to the bumper sticker which reads, "God +1 = A Majority." This is not quite true: God *is* the majority.

⁹ These three events are unique to DM and not found in amillennialism. If these three events are not Scriptural, DM fails. Other events mentioned above still take place, but with different meaning and significance, as we will see.

1. The Rapture



Whether or not the Rapture is the foundational doctrine of DM, it certainly receives the most attention. The validity of the entire theory seems to rest upon the veracity of this teaching: In other words, one often gets the message, "The Rapture is a clear Scriptural teaching; and if that's true, all the rest of DM must be true, too." But is the Rapture a clear Scriptural teaching?

a. Matthew 24:40-42

The first and primary text for the Rapture is Matthew 24:40-42. It is from this text the term "left behind" is derived.

"Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two *women* will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

Is this proof of the Rapture? Let's examine the context of this passage.

In Matthew 24, Jesus teaches His disciples about events leading up to the end. He warns of false teachers (4-5); wars, rumors of wars, troubles and earthquakes (6-7), persecution (8-13) and the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. He further prophesies the "abomination of desolation" and great tribulation to come, including false prophets and darkness (15-29). Further signs include:

³⁰Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt. 24:29-31)

(This text should sound a big warning before we go further: The "tribes of the earth" will see the Son of Man in glory, and He will send His angels with "a great sound of a trumpet." The return of Christ, as foretold in Matthew 24, is obviously visible and audible to all. It is not a secret return in which Christians are furtively raptured.)

Continuing, Jesus uses the parable of the fig tree to instruct the disciples to watch for the signs leading to the end (32-35), though He also declares that only the Father knows the time of the end (36). Verses 37-39 provide the context leading to the "proof text" for the Rapture. They read:

"But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24:37-39)

Jesus compares the end times to the times leading to the Flood, when the wicked had no comprehension that judgment was near, while only a few righteous (Noah and his family)

believed and entered the ark. Note what happened to the wicked in verse 39: They "did not know until the flood came and **took them all away**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

The wicked were taken away, while Noah and his family were left. In this section, immediately preceding verses 40-42, it was a good thing to be left behind! Therefore, in verses 40-42, of the two men who are in the field, the one who is taken is taken in judgment and the one who is left is left in the kingdom of God. Of the two women grinding in the field, the one who is taken is taken in judgment and the one who is left remains in the kingdom of God and under His care.

The rest of the chapter continues this theme. In the concluding verses, Jesus commends the master of the house who watches for the thief and prevents the stealing of his superior's goods. He praises the watchful man who makes sure that the things entrusted to his care are still *left*; indeed, because they are left behind—not taken in judgment, the master is able to care for the servants entrusted to his care.

Furthermore, the word translated "left" from the Greek is *ἀφίεται*. It can mean "abandoned" or "left." However, this word is also used in the New Testament for "let be" or "forgiven." In the context of Matthew 24, the one who is "left" is the one who is not condemned for sin; he is forgiven and allowed to live.¹⁰

The context of Matthew 24 should warn us of the tenuous nature of the Rapture doctrine. Rapture proponents use this text to warn of the danger of being left behind; Jesus gives us this Scripture to teach just the opposite—to remain faithfully on guard so that we remain in the household of faith. According to the Lord, we are to strive to be left behind, rather than be stolen away by false teachers, tribulation, etc., unto eternal judgment.

b. I Thessalonians 4:16-17

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 is also promoted as an unequivocal proof-text for the Rapture:

¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Rapture proponents declare that, prior to the judgment of the world, Christians will rise up and join Christ in the heavens—they will quietly vanish from the face of the earth. The basis for this in I Thessalonians 4:17 is "caught up." Once Christians have vanished, Christ does not return until the battle of Armageddon seven years later. However, consider the following from these two verses:

•Verse 16 announces that the Lord will descend with "a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." This makes His return very noticeable to all. Consider I Corinthians 15:52: "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The point of the trumpet at the Last Day is that all will know that Christ has returned; it will be no secret reserved for the people of God.

¹⁰ While most Bible translations translate *ἀφίεται* as "left", one interesting alternative is from The Bible in Basic English translation, which reads "let go." The one who is not taken is *released*.

- There is nothing in this verse, or any other, that teaches that Jesus will begin His return, then withdraw to heaven for seven years before completing His Second Coming. Rather than indicate the Rapture, I Thessalonians 4 declares that we will be delivered into heaven and the presence of God on the Last Day.

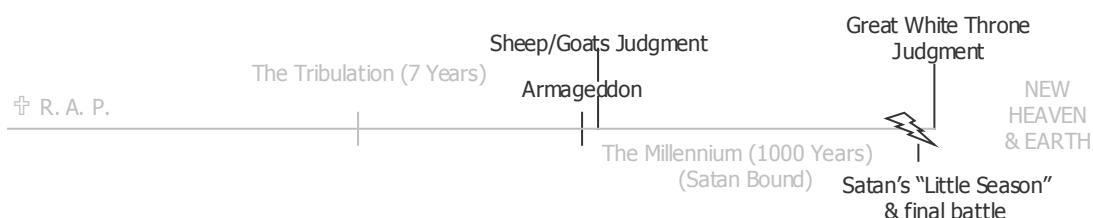
c. Other Proof Texts for the Rapture

Without Matthew 24:40-42 and I Thessalonians 4:16-17 as support, the Rapture has no foundation in the Bible. Other proof texts cited for the Rapture have nothing to do with the Rapture:

- Revelation 3:10 reads, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." Jesus' promise to keep the church of Philadelphia from the hour of trial is seen as proof. However, this could just as easily mean that the Philadelphian Christians will remain on earth, but be shielded from trouble happening around them.
- Revelation 4:1 declares, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'" "Come up here" is used as evidence of the Rapture. In context, however, John is invited in a vision to view the events taking place in heaven; he is not raptured.
- Revelation 7:14 says, "And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' So he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" That the saints have "come out" of the tribulation does not mean they've been raptured, but that they have endured the tribulation and emerged from it.

Since the Rapture is not found in the Bible, we'll erase it from the diagram.

2. Revelation: Straight Storyline or the Same Story, Several Times?



Before moving on to look at the Tribulation and Millennium, we need to discuss how we should interpret the book of Revelation. A glance at the highlights on the diagram above shows an interesting peculiarity: Two final battles and two final judgments. This is because DM supporters advocate a sequential reading of Revelation: The visions from chapters 4-22 detail one continuous history of the end of the world.¹¹ Therefore, there must be separate final battles (Rev. 9:13-21, 16:12-16, 19:11-21, 20:7-10) and separate judgments (Matt. 24, when the Son of Man comes at the start of the Millennium, and Rev. 20). However, several final battles and final judgments should raise a red flag: Shouldn't there be one "final" anything?

¹¹ Some DM scholars consider the seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3 to be part of the historical sequence.

Conservative Lutheran commentators approach Revelation in a different way. Rather than sequential, the visions are repetitive: To comfort persecuted Christians, John tells them the happy ending over and over. So, rather than follow the vision of the seven seals (Rev. 4:1-7:17) in history, the vision of the seven trumpets (Rev. 8:1-11:19) repeats the same history, but with different details and emphases; likewise the other visions of Revelation.¹² Each vision, with some overlap, has common components:

	Vision of Heaven	Condition of World from Christ to End	Victory for the Saints of God
The 7 Seals ¹³ (4:1-7:17)	4:1-5:14	6:1-17	7:1-17
The 7 Trumpets (8:1-11:19)	7:1-17	8:1-11:14	11:15-19
The 7 Visions (12:1-15:8)	11:15-19	12:1-14:20	15:1-8
The 7 Last Plagues (16:1-21)	15:1-8	16:1-21	--
Christ and Antichrist (17:1-19:21)	--	17:1-18:24	19:1-21
The Church's Final Victory (20:1-22:5)	19:1-21	20:1-15	21:1-22:5

Clearly, John is repeatedly reassuring his hearers that, though they must endure suffering, Christ will return. There is only one final battle and one final judgment, not several. We will therefore move the "Sheep/Goats Judgment" and "Armageddon" from where they are found on the diagram and include them with the "Great White Throne Judgment" and Satan's "final battle," respectively, since they are the same events.¹⁴

¹² Brighton offers another scheme, in which only three visions reiterate the same material: The 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, and the 7 last plagues. He holds that the 7 Visions (12:1-15:8) is a cosmic war between God and Satan, while 17:1-22:5 form a lengthy conclusion about the end and judgment. This is not necessarily different: The 7 visions do emphasize the battle between God and Satan, but over the same time period as the other visions. Likewise, 17:1-22:5 puts emphasis on the end, but covers the condition of the world prior to the end and final judgment.

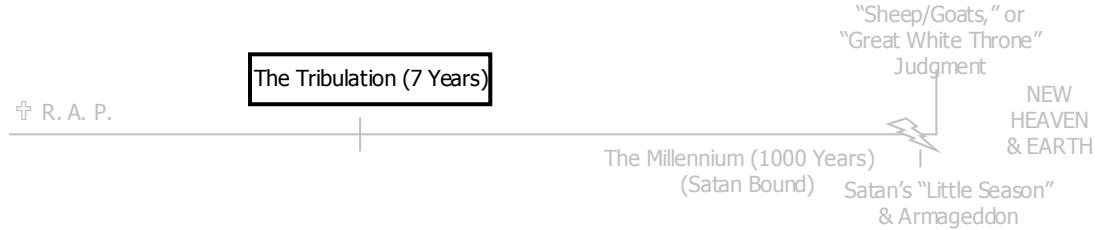
¹³ Outline taken from Becker, pp. v-ix.

¹⁴ DM supporters steadfastly maintain that these are different events, and it is worth a lengthy footnote (really!) to demonstrate the weakness of their argumentation. For instance, study notes found in *The Open Bible* (p. 942) list seven reasons why the "Sheep/Goats Judgment" of Matthew 25 cannot be the same as the "Great White Throne Judgment" of Revelation 20:

1. The throne in Matthew 25:31 is called "glorious," while the throne in Revelation 20:11 is called "a great white throne."
2. Matthew 25 records a judgment of the living, while Revelation 20 speaks of a judgment of the dead.
3. Matthew 25 records a judgment without a resurrection of the dead, while Revelation 20 speaks of a resurrection of the dead before the judgment.
4. The judge in Matthew 25 is "the King" who judges both the righteous and unrighteous. In Revelation 20, the judge is God, judging only the wicked dead.
5. In Matthew 25, there are no books opened at the judgment. In Revelation 20, books are opened.
6. In Matthew 25, there are three classes judged: The righteous "sheep," the unrighteous "goats," and the "tribes," the elect of Israel. In Revelation 20, only the dead are judged.

Footnote continued on next page

3. The Tribulation



a. The Seven Years

No reputable Bible scholar will disagree that the Church will undergo tribulation and persecution before the end of the world; however, the notion of a seven-year period called "The Tribulation" bears scrutiny. Proof texts for the seven-year Tribulation included the following:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate." (Dan. 9:27)

"And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (Rev. 11:3)

He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time. (Dan. 7:25)

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who *was* above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half a *time*; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished. (Dan. 12:7)

7. In Matthew 25, the King gives the kingdom to the righteous who inherit eternal life. In Revelation 20, no one is saved and all are thrown into the lake of fire.

It is unfortunate that such a spurious interpretation has received such a wide showing, and a few comments are in order.

a. The details in these two passages do not distinguish them as separate judgments. Rather they are complementary portrayals of the same judgment. The fact that the throne of Revelation 20 is "great" and "white" does not mean it is not also "glorious." The fact that Matthew 25 records the presence living people does not mean that the dead have not been raised anymore than the presence of the "dead" in Revelation means that the "living" aren't there, too. As the Son of Man is one of the persons of the Trinity, there is no conflict that He, the King, is God who sits on the throne in judgment in both passages. The fact that no books are mentioned in Matthew 25 does not mean that no books are opened. In this line of argument, DM proponents come dangerously close to arguments of historical critics.

b. DM interpretations above of Revelation 20 are based on their own presuppositions, not the Bible. Arguments 4, 6 and 7 all maintain that only the wicked dead are judged in Revelation 20, but there is no proof of this in that passage. Rather, the foundation for the argument is the DM assumption that the righteous and the wicked who are alive have already been judged: But there is no proof that this has taken place in Matthew 25 or Revelation 20. In fact, nowhere in Scripture is there any indication that there will be more than one day of judgment in which the righteous and unrighteous will stand before the throne (cf. 2 Peter 3:7; I John 4:17).

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rev. 12:6)

But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. (Rev. 12:14)

A bit of math and interpretation is needed to explain. 1260 days is roughly three and a half years. If "a time" = "a year", then "a time, times and half a time" = three and a half years. DM proposes that the Tribulation is composed of two $3\frac{1}{2}$ year periods, and $3\frac{1}{2} + 3\frac{1}{2} = 7$. In this case:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} 1260 \text{ days of the two witnesses} & & \\ (\text{Rev. } 11:3) \Rightarrow & \mathbf{3\frac{1}{2}} & \\ 1260 \text{ days of the woman's flight} & & \\ (\text{Rev. } 12:6, 14) \text{ and Antichrist's shattering} & & \\ \text{of the Church (Dan. } 12:7) \Rightarrow & \underline{\mathbf{+3\frac{1}{2}}} & \\ \mathbf{7} & & \leftarrow \text{The "week" of Dan. } 9:27, \text{ in which} \\ & & \text{Antichrist begins persecution halfway} \\ & & \text{through.} \end{array}$$

The "week" of Daniel 9:27 is interpreted as seven years. Therefore, Dispensational Millennialism (DM) teaches a seven-year tribulation. Different passages which mention a $3\frac{1}{2}$ year period are assigned either to the first half with Antichrist's peaceful reign (Rev. 11:3) or the second half when Antichrist persecutes the Church openly (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:6, 14).¹⁵

However, one must approach such an interpretation with caution. The books of Daniel and Revelation are both considered "apocalyptic literature." This genre not only speaks of apocalypse, but does so using symbolic language; this includes the use of symbolic numbers. Within the book of Revelation, several numbers take on symbolic significance:

- 3:** The number three is symbolic of the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
- 4:** The number four is symbolic of the world, as in the four corners of the earth or the four points of the compass.
- 7:** $7=3+4$, and the number seven is symbolic for God's gracious interaction/covenant with the world. He creates the world in seven days, and the sevenfold Holy Spirit delivers grace to mankind (Is. 11:2-3; Rev. 1:4). The number seven often symbolizes that the Creator of the world is still actively involved in the world for the sake of Jesus who has died for the world.
- 10:** The number ten symbolizes completeness.
- 12:** The number twelve symbolizes the people of God, the Church, as in the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 apostles.

¹⁵ Note that the only passage which mentions a $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year time period that is assigned to the first half of the seven years makes no mention of a peaceful reign by Antichrist. It is usually assigned there because a time of peace would give the two witnesses freedom to preach publicly. However, there is no proof in Rev. 11:3 that it refers to a different time period than the other verses which mention a $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year period. In reality, it refers to the same time as the others, as we will soon demonstrate.

So seven symbolizes God's covenant with the world, His ongoing grace and providence. The devil does his best to break this covenant: Seven broken in half, or $7 \div 2$, equals $3\frac{1}{2}$. Therefore, in apocalyptic literature, $3\frac{1}{2}$ is symbolic for the work of evil forces attempting to destroy God's covenant and His people.

To what time, then, does the number $3\frac{1}{2}$ refer? It refers to any time, from Jesus' Ascension to His return in glory, that the devil is at work to thwart God's covenant. It refers to any time that the Church is enduring tribulation for her faithfulness to Jesus. In other words, the number $3\frac{1}{2}$ symbolizes all of the time between Jesus' Ascension until His return in glory, because the devil is at work all of that time to thwart God's covenant. As Paul and Barnabas declared, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

You and I are in "the Tribulation" right now—even as Paul and Barnabas were. Even as Luther was. Even as those who come after us will be, should the Lord not return first.¹⁶

While DM proponents interpret a literal seven-year Tribulation, this is hardly in keeping with the symbolic use of numbers in apocalyptic literature.

b. Important Side Trip!

DM advocates will often respond to this argument with the reply that those who interpret these numbers symbolically are no longer taking the Bible literally. This is a serious accusation that bears a response.

Failure to interpret the Bible literally is normally seen as a hallmark of liberal theology and higher criticism. Blatant examples abound in higher critical literature: Liberal scholars hold that Jesus didn't feed a literal 5000 men with five literal loaves and two literal fish, but a much smaller number that was later inflated to look miraculous. Jesus wasn't really born to a literal virgin, but merely to a young, promiscuous girl. There really isn't a literal, bodily resurrection from the dead, it is held; we will simply be raised up in spirit or memory. So go various interpretations when the literal truth of the Bible is denied. This is not our intent in interpreting these numbers symbolically.

In interpreting the Bible literally, we recognize that the Lord Himself uses symbolic language in His Word. For instance, when He declares, "I am the Door" (John 10:9), the Lord does not mean that He is literally a rectangular plank of wood with three hinges and a handle. Using a symbol, He is literally declaring Himself to be the entry to heaven because of His death on the cross.¹⁷ Furthermore, Jesus often uses parables in which He makes heavy use of symbols to convey the truth, sometimes identifying the meaning of each symbol in the text (cf. Matt. 13:2-23). Therefore, we must examine the Scriptures with the understanding that *the Lord uses symbolic language at times to declare His literal truth*; the context of the verse will usually tell us whether or not the language is symbolic. The context of these texts in Daniel and Revelation is

¹⁶ Therefore, the "punishments" that take place during the Tribulation (see footnote 2) are not specific, one-time plagues that happen near the end of the world. Rather, they are ongoing consequences of sin throughout the history of the world, portrayed in symbolic language.

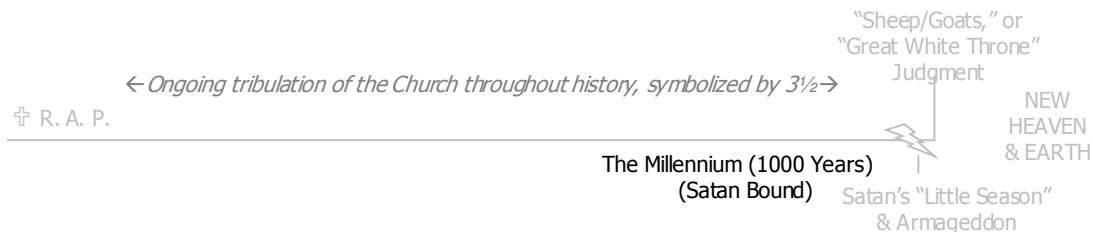
¹⁷ On a slight tangent, this argument can be carried a step further in refinement. The word which is symbolical is neither "I" nor "am;" "I" refers to Jesus, and the verb literally means "am" not "am symbolized by." When Jesus declares, "I am the Door," He does not claim that He symbolizes a door: Rather, He is the Door, and rectangular planks of wood, with hinges and handles, then symbolize Him.

that they are written in the genre of “apocalyptic literature,” writings about the end of the world that make heavy use of symbolism.

Furthermore, one must ask if DM advocates are consistent in their literal interpretation. In the proof of the Tribulation above, the seven-year period is supported by Daniel 9:27, which speaks of Antichrist breaking the covenant and persecuting God’s people midway through a week; therefore, DM supporters hold that the “week” of Daniel 9:27 is symbolic for a seven-year period. This is a crucial proof text for DM, for it is the text which adds the 3½ half-year periods into a seven-year stretch; without Daniel 9:27, the 3½ year segments in Revelation could refer to the same time repeatedly—the time before the Last Day when evil works to destroy the Church.¹⁸

The Tribulation, therefore, does not refer to a seven-year period before the end of the world; rather, those verses teach that there will be ongoing tribulation until the end of the world. We’ll change the diagram to reflect that.

4. The Millennium



Since there is no first final battle and judgment, the Millennium is not a specific thousand year period which follows them. To understand the Millennium, we need to go back to the list of symbolic numbers on page 16. Ten is a number symbolic of completeness. $1000 = 10 \times 10 \times 10$, making it a number of comprehensive completeness. Therefore, the 1000-year period of Revelation 20 is the entire time period between the Resurrection of Jesus and the Last Day. During this time, Jesus indeed reigns over all, though His Kingdom remains unseen until He returns in glory. Satan is “bound” in that he has been defeated at the cross.¹⁹

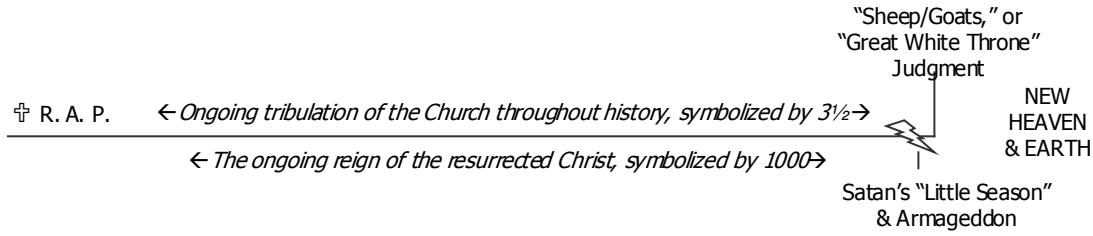
Note: Even as the Lord reigns unseen over creation, the devil is still at work to destroy the Church. *Therefore, the Millennium and the Tribulation are contemporaneous*, for at this very moment Christ reigns and the devil schemes. ($1000 = 3\frac{1}{2}!$)

We’ll make this adjustment to our diagram.

¹⁸ Research for this seminar included, in part, a survey of DM websites in early October of 2001. One of these websites held that Isaiah 30:25, which speaks of a great slaughter as towers fall, was fulfilled at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Another indicated that the two “meteors” of judgment in Revelation (8:8,10) were fulfilled by the collision of the two airliners with the towers. While recognizing that such interpretations are the private opinions of website operators, one wonders how these examples are consistent with a DM insistence that the Scriptures be taken literally.

¹⁹ This leads to the question: “If Satan is bound, how come he can still lead people astray?” One should liken Satan’s bonds more to a leash than a straitjacket. Imagine a ferocious dog on a twenty-foot leash: As long as one stays 25 feet away, there is no danger. However, if one is foolish enough to step within reach of the dog, he will be bitten. Likewise, with the victory of Christ on the cross, Satan is defeated and bound. He can only destroy those who are foolish enough to remain in the radius of his chain.

5. Hey—Look at This!



Once we dispense with the Rapture and interpret the Tribulation and Millennium in accordance with Scripture, we've arrived at the Lutheran and Scriptural account of the "end times." This is extremely consistent with Scripture:

³Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" ⁴And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. ⁸"All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. ⁹"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. ¹⁰"And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹²"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³"But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 24:3-13)

This tribulation is not confined to a seven-year period before the end; rather, it is present from the time of Christ's first coming (born to Mary) until His second coming in glory:

³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of *your* souls. (I Peter 3:3-9)

These are signs that precede the end, and suffering will increase (See "Satan's Little Season," p. 21). However, the Lord also declares:

³⁶"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷"But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸"For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹"and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:36-39)

Therefore, the end will come as a surprise, for life will seem quite normal despite the added tribulation. The world will be so blinded by sin that it will not notice the signs of its impending doom.

Reflecting the Scriptures, the Nicene Creed confesses that Jesus "sitteth on the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom will have no end."²⁰ The lack of reference to DM in the ecumenical creeds is not for the sake of brevity, but because Scripture rejects DM as false.

Furthermore, the Lutheran Confessions say:

It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devils and condemned human beings will not suffer eternal torture and torment.

Likewise, rejected are some Jewish teachings, which have also appeared in the present, that before the resurrection of the dead saints and righteous people alone will possess a secular kingdom and will annihilate the ungodly. (Augsburg Confession, Article XVII)

Note that, while the Augsburg Confession declares that Christ will return in glory without the intervening events taught by DM, it also condemns "chiliasm," the teaching that the righteous will rule with God on earth for a thousand years before the end. DM teaches a modified version of chiliasm in its doctrine of the Millennium. Therefore, it is no great stretch to say that the Lutheran Confessions do not leave DM as an optional doctrine, but rejects it as doctrinal error.

This version of the "end times" doesn't make for very good novels or movies, because it's far too much like real life and the order which God has given in the world. (That should probably tell us something, too.) But it certainly is in keeping with the Bible.

And now that we've got the basics of the end of the world down, we can go back and address some of those other doctrines that we mentioned in describing DM before.

B. A Scriptural Interpretation Other Doctrines Taught by DM

1. The Two Witnesses

The Lord declares in Revelation 11:3, "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." That there are two witnesses is not up for discussion; however, we do need to look at the identity and nature of the witnesses, as well as the timeframe in which they evangelize.

As mentioned above, DM proponents usually identify these witnesses as two of the trio of Moses, Elijah and Enoch. Elijah and Enoch are chosen because they entered heaven without death; therefore, it is speculated that they must return and be the witnesses so that they can be killed. This is speculation and a rationalistic conclusion. Others, such as Tim LaHaye,²¹ identify the two witnesses as Moses and Elijah, the two witnesses who were present with the Lord at the Transfiguration. Not only did they speak with Jesus of His "exodus" (Luke 9:31) at that time, but

²⁰ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 22.

²¹ LaHaye, Tim and Jerry Jenkins. *Nicolae*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997. For instance, see page 157.

the description of the witnesses matches miracles that these prophets performed: "These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire" (Rev. 11:6). Drought was a sign wrought by Elijah (I Kings 17), while Moses turned water to blood and prophesied plagues for Egypt (Exodus 7ff).

Are the two witnesses Moses and Elijah, or are other options? Given the symbolic language of Revelation, and the deliverance of these prophets to heaven long ago, there are other options. These two witnesses will have power from God and will testify boldly like these two great witnesses of the Old Testament. They will do so for the "3½ years" that the devil seeks to destroy the Church; in other words, they will testify for the entire time until the Lord's return. Near the end, for a shorter time of "3½ days," they will be rejected and killed—not just by the world, but by much of what calls itself "the Church." In the end, however, God will raise them, showing His approval.

If the two witnesses testify for the entire time of the devil's activity from the time of John to Christ's return, the identity of the two witnesses with human beings cannot be correct. Therefore, we look for two enduring things that serve as witnesses, that proclaim and work miracles. We also have the following clues:

- Revelation 11:4 describes them as olive trees and lampstands that stand before God. Olive trees produced oil suitable for lamps, and oil denotes the Holy Spirit (I Sam. 10:1-10; Acts 10:38).
- Two olive trees appear in Zechariah 4:1-14, which feed oil into a lampstand at the temple; they are described as "the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth" (4:14). They are doing the work of the Holy Spirit (4:6) bringing grace (4:7).
- In Revelation 1:20, seven lampstands are used to symbolize seven churches. Therefore, the two witnesses are the means by which the Holy Spirit brings grace to the Church.

Conservative Lutheran commentators have therefore identified these witnesses with the Word and the Sacraments, the means of grace. They remain always, are rejected more and more by those within Christendom, but continue to work the miracles of faith, life and salvation. *These miracles are wrought with water* (the external element of Holy Baptism) *and blood* (along with the body of our Lord, given in, with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion).²² We should note, too, that in Revelation 11:7-9, the two witnesses are killed but kept on display before they are vindicated by God. It is notable that in our present day, many church bodies

²² One other OT connection is found in Exodus 4, where Moses stands before the Lord at the burning bush. (With descriptions of plagues, Revelation often calls up imagery of Egypt in Exodus.) When the Lord directs him to Egypt, Moses demurs, fearing that Pharaoh will not listen. The Lord then gives Moses several miracles: Power over a serpent (4:3-4) and power over leprosy, a terminal disease (4:6-7). If those two signs fail, Moses is given a third sign: He is able to turn water into blood. When Moses cites his poor speech as a reason not to go, the Lord sends Aaron with him as spokesman (4:14-16). Therefore, two witnesses go to Egypt to rescue Israel from Pharaoh, with power over serpents, disease and death. One goes to speak the Word of the Lord, while the other goes with a miracle of water and blood. Could this be a foreshadowing of the two witnesses of Word and Sacrament, with power over sin, death and the devil?

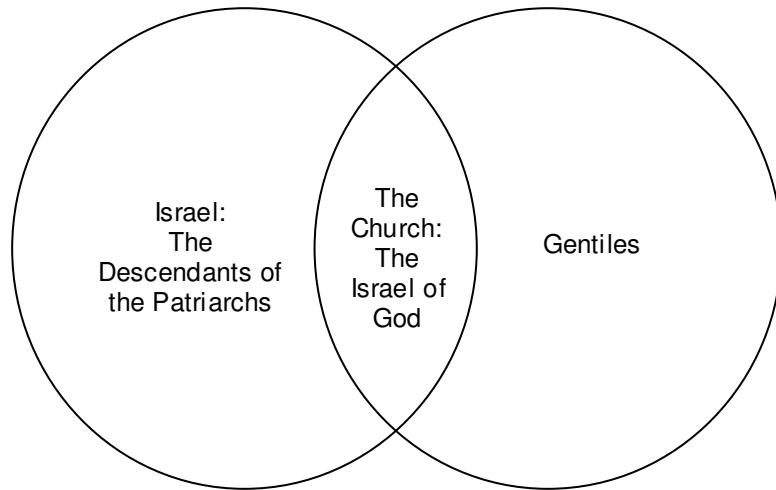
reject the authority of the Word and the efficacy of the Sacraments; but rather than disposed of, these means of grace are still preserved as empty symbols with different meanings.

2. The 144,000 Israelites

To unravel the identity of the 144,000 Jews who are sealed in Revelation, we must determine who they are as the 144,000 and who they are as the Jews.

The number chart on page 19 will help us decode the 144,000. The number 12 is a symbol of the people of God; the number 10 is symbolic of completeness, while three symbolizes God Himself. Furthermore Revelation 4 records 24 elders around the throne of God, symbolizing the people of God from the Old Testament and from the New Testament (12×2). $144,000 = 1000 \times 144 = 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 12 \times 12 = 10^3 \times 12^2$. It is a number of ultimate completeness: *The Lord saves all of His people from all time, and that vast host is symbolized by 144,000.*

The term "Jews" or "Israel" takes on a double meaning in the New Testament: It can mean either the genetic descendants of the twelve patriarchs, or it can mean the People of God—those who trust in Jesus as their Savior, be they Jew or Gentile. A Venn diagram might help here:



The identity of "Israel" with the descendants of the Abraham is a given in Scripture. The identity of the Church as the "New Israel" is affirmed many times in the New Testament. Christians are identified as the true descendants of Abraham:

- Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. (Gal. 3:7)
- They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." (John 8:39)
- Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.²³ (Luke 3:8)

²³ "Stones" was rabbinic code for "Gentiles:" When a rabbi told a parable in which stones were mentioned, he was usually referring to non-Jews. Here, John the Baptist does not propose that God will make believers out of literal rocks, but that Christ has come to save Jews and Gentiles both.

Twice in Revelation, the Lord makes clear that the synagogue is not the home of the true Israel; rather, the Church is:

- I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (Rev. 2:9)
- "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. (Rev. 3:9)

Given these passages, it is apparent that the reference to the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7 is to the Church, not to the Jews as genetic descendants of Abraham. Therefore, Paul pronounces this blessing upon the Christians at Galatia:

- And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Gal. 6:16)

Ephesians 2:11-22 also treats this doctrine with substance.

Just as the number "144,000" symbolized the totality of God's people, so does the term "children of Israel." The Lord Jesus uses this to announce that He will save all those who trust in Him, be they ethnic Jew or Gentile.

3. Invasion of Israel by Russia

It was especially popular during the Cold War of the 20th century to view the Soviet Union as the instigator of Armageddon, and its inclusion involves some rather creative translation. Revelation 20:8 mention the presence of Gog and Magog at the last battle; God and Magog appear one other time in Scripture, Ezekiel 38:2: "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him...." Some DM proponents have suggested that Meshech and Tubal are forms of Moscow and Tobolsk, two Russian cities;²⁴ thus Russia appears as the aggressor in Revelation.

This is, however, a wild speculation. Meshech and Tubal were two Old Testament cities located in present-day Turkey, and the etymology of both names have nothing to do with the Russian city names. However, the Russian invasion of Israel still receives some support today.²⁵

4. The Mark of the Beast

DM supporters hold that the beast of Revelation 13 will compel all to wear a visible mark on the forehead or hand, based upon Revelation 13:16, "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads...." Some have speculated that, since this would be necessary for commercial transaction, that the mark

²⁴ Becker, Siegbert. *Revelation: A Distant Triumph Song*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985. Dr. Becker was by no means a proponent of this theory; on page 316 of this excellent commentary, he exposes it for the flight of fancy that it is. Indeed, the identification of Meshech and Tobolsk once again calls into question the claim of those individuals that they follow a literal interpretation of Scripture.

²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins reference a Russian attack on Israel that is foiled by divine means (*Left Behind*, p. 9ff). To be fair, this is not proof that they base this on Ezekiel 38:2; Russia could simply be a convenient enemy for the plot of their book.

will take on the form of a UPC symbol and serve as the bearer's credit card. Others, based upon verse 18, believe it will simply be a tattoo of the number 666.

Based upon the symbolic style of Revelation, it is appropriate to approach such ideas with caution. In New Testament times, slaves were marked or branded by their masters, and worshipers of false gods often adorned themselves with religious tattoos.²⁶ Rather than a visible mark, Revelation 13 may well teach that those who are not believers are enslaved to false gods, and Christians will be persecuted for their faith. This would be in keeping with Revelation 7:3 (cf. 9:4), which records that believers bear the seal of God on their foreheads. Some early Christians believed this seal to be Baptism, others the Word of God; all were agreed that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. In any event, the meaning is that Christians are the Lord's servants and people, and the Master knows them: "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19). This seal is not visible to man, but to God alone.²⁷

As for the number 666, the numbers on page 16 provide a clue. 6 = 7-1; or, six falls short of being a perfect 7. Meanwhile, 3 is symbolic of God. The beast of Revelation 13 will attempt to replace God and rule (thus the *three* sixes), but will fall short and be defeated (thus the *sixes*).

5. The Punishments of the Tribulation

For the purposes of this study, a careful examination of each judgment lies outside the scope. However, a few general remarks are in order. The plagues of Revelation 8 are very similar to the plagues of Egypt in Exodus 7-12. These plagues fell upon Egypt because the Egyptians persecuted the people of God and rejected God's Word when Moses called for Pharaoh to let the people go. The plagues of Revelation 8, while sometimes difficult to interpret, indicate that God promises judgment upon the world for persecution of His Church and the rejection of His Word. Rejection of the Gospel will result in widespread loss of life—temporal and eternal. Such consequences of sin are evident now, and will be so until the Last Day.

6. Armageddon: Location and Time

The closest reference to Armageddon in the Old Testament is *Har Megiddo*, or Mt. Megiddo. DM supporters suggest that a final military showdown between Israel and the world will take place on the plains of Megiddo near the mountain.

However, there is a more likely, Scriptural explanation. Because of readily-available water on the plains of Megiddo, it was a popular encampment for armies and many battles were fought between Israel and its enemies (Judges 4:14-24; 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Kings 9:23-29). Nearby is Mt. Carmel, where Elijah faced down the 400 prophets of Baal in a battle to the death (I Kings 18). This region of OT Israel was well-known to John's hearers as a place where God's people were attacked by enemies of God. Mt. Megiddo then becomes symbolic for the worldwide assault on God's people, the Church, in the final days.

The Battle of Armageddon is the same battle in Revelation 16, 19 and 20. John repeats the battle to assure the hearer that the Lord is victorious every time.

²⁶ Brighton, Louis. *Revelation*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1999. Page 361.

²⁷ In 2 Timothy 2, Paul laments the destructive doctrines of false teachers in the Church, and Scripture teaches that unbelievers cannot be discerned by appearance until the Last Day (Matt. 13:24-30; 23:2; 25:31-46; cf. CA VIII); therefore, the seal of God is not visible to man. The invisibility of this seal is not accepted by all DM supporters: LaHaye and Jenkins portray it as a 3-D image visible only to Christians so that they can identify each other during the Tribulation. (*Soul Harvest*, p. 172)

7. Satan's Little Season

It is Scriptural that tribulation will increase as the end of the world draws near. The Old Testament predicts persecution of God's people (Dan. 12:1; Ezekiel 38-39; Zech. 14:1-2), as does the Lord (Matt. 24:21-31). This is Satan's "little season" (Rev. 9:13-19; 11:7-10; 16:12-16; 19:19; 20:7-9), his last-ditch effort to destroy the Church. He will fail.

8. New Heaven and Earth

The new heaven and earth are certainly Scriptural, the new creation of God for eternity.

C. Attendant Theology

Along with erroneous doctrines about the end of the world, DM is attended by several other doctrines which are cause for concern. We examine four of them here.

1. Decision Theology

DM is steeped in "decision theology," the teaching that man is saved by *his decision* to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. Faith is not a gift of God that enables man to believe; rather, faith is a conscious act of man that leads him to accept Jesus as His Savior. This manifests itself in different ways.

Take for instance, the LaHaye/Jenkins novel, *Left Behind*. When the Rapture takes place, all infants and young children in the world disappear. This is because DM proponents hold that, since faith is a work of man, small children are unable to believe; and because God is a merciful God, He would therefore rapture all children. Questions arise immediately: At what age are children able to believe, and does this "age of accountability" vary from child to child? What does the rapture of all babies and young children say about original sin? Do babies have a sinful nature or not? What about developmentally-disabled children, who may function at the level of a three-year-old throughout their lives?

With such questions in mind, what sort of comfort can a pastor offer to parents at the funeral of their seven-year-old—can we be sure of a child's salvation or not? More importantly, however, Scripture shows that infants can have faith: The unborn John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb because the unborn Jesus is present in the room (Lk. 1:41-44). All of this stems from the idea that faith is man's work of believing in God. Faith, however, is a gift of God—not of works (Eph. 2:8,9); and God can give that gift even to the unborn.

If faith is regarded as man's work, then man's work is the means of grace: Because man believes, God forgives him. Therefore, there is no need for the Sacraments as means of grace; in fact, DM theology regards Holy Baptism and Holy Communion as man's acts of devotion toward God, not God's work upon man. It is therefore impossible for DM proponents to accept that the two witnesses of Revelation are the means of grace, for they teach that the Sacraments have no power to save.

DM theology is quick to deny the Roman Catholic doctrine that man is saved by good works before God, and rightly so; yet it also teaches that man is saved by his work of deciding for Christ. As I related back on page 11, this means that a Christian can never be sure of salvation: If I'm saved by my believing, can I ever be sure that I believe enough?²⁸

²⁸ For the answer, see the conclusion of this seminar, "A Seventh-Grader's Salvation."

2. The Law Saves?

Scripture clearly teaches the distinction of Law and Gospel. The Law shows our sin and our need for a Savior, but it is powerless to save us. However, the Gospel gives forgiveness and life—it is the power of salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

While I know of no explicit claim that the Law can save on the part of DM, it is sometimes implicit in style. In viewing DM movies on school retreats in my high school years, there was no memorable Gospel in the films; rather, the goal of the filmmaker appeared to be to try to make hell look so terrifying that one was driven by fright to heaven. (One man noted, with no vulgar intent, that this genre intends literally to “scare the hell out of you.”)

The Law is necessary to show sin and the malevolence of evil. However, terror cannot make anyone believe—only the Gospel can. Conversion by the Law is Scripturally impossible; if the Gospel is absent, there is no hope.

3. Second Chance

Just as dangerous is an attendant teaching to the doctrine of the Rapture: Because the world will continue after Christians are raptured, DM theology offers a second chance to those who do not believe. If they are willing to endure great pain and loss, persecution and suffering, those who did not believe before the Rapture can still be saved. Some have likened this to a “Protestant purgatory;” if one doesn’t get to heaven initially, he can still be saved by further suffering for his sins—by resisting Antichrist and enduring subsequent persecution. However, this second chance is in no way Scriptural, and it offers a false hope that is not there.

4. Where’s the Gospel?

It’s a natural law of communication: When you’re talking about one subject, you’re not talking about others. One of the greatest problems with DM is what it doesn’t talk about: namely, the Gospel.

The Gospel is assumed in DM theology, but what is assumed is not proclaimed.²⁹ In all of the speculation about the Rapture and Tribulation, the focus is on the Christian’s individual commitment. Whenever anyone spends time emphasizing man’s commitment, he is de-emphasizing Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. While this is merely anecdotal evidence, the author’s conversations with DM proponents have shown that their concern for the “End Times” leads them to speak of their commitment and ignore speaking of the Gospel—the only thing that can save us from Satan’s destructive power.

²⁹ A popular—and accurate—proverb in theology is “The Gospel assumed is the Gospel denied.”

Conclusion: A Seventh-Grader's Salvation

At the beginning of this seminar, we listed three goals:

1. That the participants understand the basics of a teaching called "dispensational millennialism."
2. That the participants be able to articulate a Lutheran understanding of the "end times."
3. That the participants have confidence in the truth of the "end times" and the certainty of salvation as taught in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Hopefully by now, participants can see that DM, while an entertaining theory, is biblically unsound. Instead, it is a patchwork of proof texts knit together by inconsistent rules of interpretation. A Lutheran doctrine of the "end times" is far more simple and sound: The world will continue, oblivious of the impending return of Christ. As in the days of Noah, the times and majority of the population will be wicked. Christ will then return, in glory, to judge the living and the dead. This, the confession of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, is clearly stated in biblical passages noted above.

There's one more string to tie up, then: Back in junior high school, how was I ever delivered from doubt of my salvation and those horrid, sleepless nights? While it took a few years to understand, I later realized that the comfort came from the Lord's promises regarding Holy Baptism.

Remember, I was afraid of missing the Rapture because I'd been led to believe that salvation depended on my dedication to God. Therefore, how could I be sure that I believed enough that Jesus was my Savior? How could I be sure I was committed enough to the Lord to be saved? The confusion grew worse before it got better: I asked a trusted teacher how I could be sure I was committed enough to Jesus. He responded that, if I wasn't sure, I should just accept Him as my Savior and Lord again.

So, I did. Several times. And each time, after a few days, I began to wonder once again if my commitment was enough. Could I ever be sure I was saved?

The answer is simple: If salvation is up to you and the quality of your trust, you can never be sure of salvation. Furthermore, if anyone believes that he is saved by his commitment, he believes that he is saved by works—his work of believing in Jesus.

Baptism to the rescue! As the *Small Catechism* declares, "[Baptism] works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."³⁰ Working up enough faith to believe in God does not save us. God saves us by His work, for the sake of Jesus. Faith is a gift that He gives, not a work that we must summon (Eph. 2:8,9). In Baptism, the Lord gives forgiveness and gives faith to believe that Jesus' death on the cross is enough for salvation.

Such blessed rest and peace! You see, salvation didn't matter on how well I believed or behaved; it was based upon what Christ had done for me. Whether I did one of those stupid things that seventh-grade boys do or not, Jesus still loved me. He had still died on the cross for me. He had still made me His own in Holy Baptism.

³⁰ *Small Catechism*, Baptism, II

Sin still leads me to doubt my commitment to Him to this very day. That doubt *in myself* is a great blessing, for it continually sends me back to the Lord who has died for me. His commitment is never in doubt, because He always keeps His promises. His forgiveness for me, personally, is not in question, either. I have a certificate of Holy Baptism which testifies that He gave *me* that forgiveness on April 30, 1967. When I make confession privately or publicly, the pastor says, "In the stead and by the command of Christ, I forgive *you* all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." When I receive the Lord's Supper, I have just heard the pastor declare the Words of Institution, where Jesus proclaimed, "Take and eat, this is My body, which is given for *you*.... Drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for *you* for the forgiveness of sins."

Now, *that's* certain hope! Jesus died to take away my sins; in the means of grace, He gives that forgiveness to me—and to you! There's no need for that haunting uncertainty of whether we are committed enough to Him. Your salvation lies in this incredible news: He is committed to you, and He gives you forgiveness and eternal life...to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith (through all temptation and end-time tribulation) unto life everlasting. Depart in peace.

P.S. Mom and Dad: When you come to visit, you don't have to snore. It's okay.

Which brings us, of course, to...

...THE END

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