

Parousia

16

THE SIGN MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER / FALL 2000

THE PROPHETIC PILLARS OF THE PREWRATH POSITION

Part 5: The Battle of Armageddon Occurs Thirty Days after the Conclusion of Daniel's Seventieth Week

THE PROPHETIC PILLARS OF THE PREWRATH POSITION

The Fifth Prophetic Pillar:

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON OCCURS THIRTY DAYS AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK



by Charles Cooper

The Problem

The timing of the battle of Armageddon in relation to the Seventieth Week of Daniel is very much a debated issue. The prewrath position places the timing of Armageddon thirty days after the completion of Daniel's Seventieth Week. Pretribulationists place the timing of Armageddon at the very end of Daniel's Seventieth Week. C.I. Scofield, who popularized the pretrib Rapture in America, states, "Armageddon is the last event in the great tribulation."¹ Hoyt's statement that, "the Battle of Armageddon with which the tribulation period will come to a close," echoes Scofield's position.² As one would expect, John F. Walvoord is consonant with Scofield. Walvoord states "the Battle of Armageddon will occur during the final days of the Great Tribulation."³ Posttribulationist Bob Gundry's posi-

tion is that "the battle will take place right at Jesus' coming after the tribulation."⁴ Meredith G. Kline states that "the Har Magedon crisis of Rev 16:14-16... is to be identified with the millennium-ending Gog-Magog event of [Revelation] 20:7-10."⁵

One can see that the opinions concerning the timing of the Battle of Armageddon range over a wide spectrum. An essential question about the timing concerns the issue of interpretation. How literally should we take the end-times as recorded in the books of Daniel and Revelation? The book of Revelation gives very precise numbers for the duration of Antichrist's rule—one thousand two hundred and sixty days (Rev. 12:6) or forty-two months (Rev. 13:5). Without explicit scriptural command to do otherwise, these numbers must be

THE FIFTH PROPHETIC PILLAR

taken literally. This, by definition, places the destruction of Antichrist outside the Seventieth Week of Daniel.

A failure to place the timing of the battle of Armageddon in its proper sequence results in scriptural contradictions. This is a conclusion that is unacceptable and unnecessary to those who hold to the inerrancy and infallibility of God's Word. The battle of Armageddon must stand outside the Seventieth Week of Daniel, but before the beginning of the millennial kingdom. This is the only logical conclusion, which has explicit scriptural support and removes all scriptural contradictions.

THE TIMING OF THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

The First Proof: Antichrist's Allotment of Time to Rule

The first proof that the timing of the Battle of Armageddon must stand outside the Seventieth Week of Daniel concerns Antichrist's allotment of time to rule. Revelation 13:5 states, "There was given to him (the beast, who is Antichrist) a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him."⁶ Forty-two months is exactly three and a half prophetic years.⁷ Because Revelation 19:20 places the destruction of Antichrist in the context of the Armageddon campaign and there is no biblical justification for cutting Antichrist's authority to rule short,⁸ the destruction of Antichrist can be effectively placed outside the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week. This harmonizes with Daniel 9:27, which indicates that "the prince" (Antichrist) will make a covenant for one week (seven years) which he will break in the middle of the week (three-and-a-half years). A literal face value hermeneutic would demand that Antichrist can be destroyed no earlier than the first day after the three and an half years of his allotted authority to rule and persecute God's elect.

The Second Proof: Antichrist's Destruction Determined

The second proof that the timing of the Battle of Armageddon must stand outside the Seventieth Week of Daniel concerns Daniel 12:11. Daniel states, "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1, 290 days." Daniel 9:27 indicates that the abolition of regular sacrifices and the setting up of a desolating abomination will begin at

the mid-point of Daniel's final week. Daniel 9:27 also records that this desolation will continue from the mid-point of the Seventieth Week "until a complete destruction...is poured out on the one who makes desolate (Dan 9:27b)." It is immediately clear that Daniel 12:11 extends the length of time between the beginning desolation and the end of the one who makes desolate an additional 30 days. Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 indicate that the termination of the desolation coincides with the destruction of the one who makes desolate. Revelation 19:20 declares that the beast (Antichrist, the one who makes desolate) is thrown "alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone" at Armageddon. The church fathers support this conclusion.

Hippolytus, the first church father to write a complete commentary on the book of Daniel, states, "the duration of the time of the Antichrist is three years and seven months."⁹ David G. Dunbar, an expert on the writings of Hippolytus from Trinity International University, writes,

There is, therefore, not a great deal of new material in Hippolytus. He does develop a few original themes; but by and large he is not an innovator but a preserver and collector of what has gone before. This suggests that in Hippolytus we find a kind of "mainline" eschatology which may have been quite widespread during the closing decades of the second century.¹⁰

As a disciple of Irenaeus, Hippolytus can trace his beliefs back to John the apostle. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John.¹¹ Irenaeus, himself, wrote, "he [Antichrist] will reign for three years and six months."¹² The only logical conclusion is that the destruction of Antichrist occurs after Daniel's final week concludes.

The Third Proof: The Sequencing of the Book of Revelation

The third and final reason Armageddon must stand outside the Seventieth Week of Daniel concerns the proper sequencing of the book of Revelation. Any

A failure to place the battle of Armageddon in its proper sequence results in scriptural contradictions.

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON OCCURS THIRTY DAYS

attempt to place the Battle of Armageddon within the Seventieth Week of Daniel will require a “forced” outline of the book of Revelation. This forcing occurs by an overlapping of the seals, trumpets and bowls. Notice the following chart of the structure of the Revelation by Dr. Douglas J. Moo:¹³

A “Forced” Outline of the Book of Revelation

Seals	Trumpets	12-14	Bowls	17-19:10
1				
2				
	1			
3	2			
		(12-13)		
4	3			
			1	
	4		2	
5	5		3	
			4	
	6		5	
6	6		6	
Vision of Redeemed (7:9-17)	Resurrection (11:11-12)	14:1-5—Redeemed 14:14-20—Rapture Resurrection, Judgment		Proclamation of Judgment and Salvation
		PAROUSIA (19:11-21)	7	
7	7	Binding of Satan First Resurrection Millennium Eternal State		

Dr. Moo espouses a posttribulational Rapture. His outline of the book of Revelation is a defense of that position. Moo indicates that the Rapture of the church will occur following the first six seals, trumpets, and bowls. Moo’s chart indicates that the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl are the same. However, seals one through five, trumpets one through five, and bowls one through five are not equal. Each series begins at different times, but culminates at the same time. Immediately following the Rapture, which follows the sixth seal, sixth trumpet and sixth bowl, the *parousia* of Christ occurs, this includes the battle of Armageddon.

In this author’s opinion, Moo’s outline of the Revelation renders the book unintelligible. The in-

terpretation of the book of Revelation becomes subjectively arbitrary and explicit textual details must be ignored, generalized or spiritualized. We offer two arguments in support of this conclusion.

First, the question of the fifth seal martyrs defies any attempt by those who would argue that the first five seals are the wrath of God in any shape, form or fashion. God clearly states that His judgment and vengeance on the living earth-dwellers responsible for the death of the martyrs will be delayed “until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed... would be completed also” (Rev. 6:11). To suggest that the first four seals are the wrath of God offers a clear contradiction to the Lord’s response to the fifth seal martyrs. Equally, to suggest that any of the trumpets or bowls occur before the fifth seal is a clear contradiction to the Lord’s response to the fifth seal martyrs. The only logical conclusion one can draw from the exchange between the martyrs and God is this: *God’s judgment and vengeance on the earth-dwellers has not begun.*

Second, the final three trumpet judgments are distinctively identified as more disastrous in nature than the first four trumpets. The angelic announcement in Revelation 8:13 is that the nature of the final three trumpets can be summarized in the word woe. *Ὀὐαὶ (ouai, woe or alas)* is an exclamation of pain and pity for the misfortune that awaits someone in a certain condition.¹⁴ The woes establish the impossibility that the seals, trumpets, and bowls overlap or run concurrently.¹⁵ The bowls have a totally different purpose from the trumpets. While the trumpets, using a formula of thirds, persecute mankind in general, the bowls primarily focus the wrath of God against Antichrist, his kingdom, and those who take his mark.¹⁶ Only by ignoring the textual differences and taking Scripture at less than face value can anyone insist that the seals, trumpets, and bowls overlap or run concurrently.

AN OVERVIEW OF REVELATION 12-19

As with Daniel 7:1-14 and Matthew 24:4-14, Revelation 4-11 presents an overview of the end of Gentile dominance over Israel and Jerusalem. Similarly, immediately following the broad overview, the author of the book of Revelation focuses on a detailed look at the persecution of Antichrist. Just as Daniel 7 and Matthew 24, Revelation 12-19 focuses specifically on the Great Tribulation.¹⁷ Unlike Daniel 7 that begins with the rise of the beast from the sea, Revelation 12 begins

AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK

with the dragon's (Satan) hatred of the women (a remnant of National Israel). This forms the basis of the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 12:1-6 states,

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Like Daniel 7, John begins his description of the persecution of Antichrist with highly symbolical language.¹⁸ John indicates that "a great sign appeared in heaven." The Greek word σημεῖον¹⁹ (sign) indicates "a symbol that has deeper significance."²⁰ Unlike Daniel 7, John does not identify the significance of the symbols with the exception of the dragon who is Satan. Revelation 12:1-6 can be summarized as follows: the woman (a remnant of National Israel) gives birth to a son (the Messiah) whom the dragon (Satan/beast empires) desires to kill. The son (the Messiah born to rule the nations) is caught up to the throne of God and the woman (a remnant of National Israel) flees to protective custody in the wilderness for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Closer examination of Revelation 12:1-6 reveals that the Son of the woman is caught up to heaven. He must remain there until it is time for Him to rule the nations. John then skips forward in history to the beginning of Antichrist's tribulation against God's elect. He concludes Revelation 12:1-6 with the woman fleeing to the wilderness. Revelation 12:1-6 fosters two important questions. First, why does the dragon desire to kill the Son? The second question concerns the woman. Why does the woman flee to protective custody in the wilderness

for one thousand two hundred and sixty days? These two questions provide the framework for the rest of the book of Revelation. These two questions are answered in reverse order beginning at Revelation 12:7 through Revelation 20:15.

Revelation 12:7-12 indicates that Michael and his angels wage war with Satan and his angels, which results in Satan and his angels being cast down to the earth. This event initiates the Great Tribulation and the subsequent events that follow it. This culminates with the battle of Armageddon and the Son's reign over the nations. The casting down of Satan to earth leads to his persecution of the woman who gave birth to the male child and her offspring (Rev. 12:13-17). Satan enlists the help of a beast from the sea to persecute the elect of God for forty-two months (Rev. 13:1-12). The beast from the sea enlists the help of a beast from the earth to persecute those who refuse to worship the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:11-18).

Revelation 14 opens with a description of the 144,000 Jews who were sealed just after the Rapture of the church, but immediately before the wrath of God fell in the trumpet judgments. The 144,000 Jews are now standing on Mt. Zion with the Lamb of God. This signals that the end of the Seventieth Week has come and that the salvation of National Israel has occurred. Three angelic announcements of coming wrath follow in Revelation 14:6-12. Revelation 14:13 offers a promise to those who die in the Lord. Revelation 14:14-17 narrates the wrath of God against the wicked depicted in the bowl judgments to follow.

Revelation 15 depicts the third and final sign seen by John in Revelation 12-20. The seven angels with the seven last plagues of wrath against the wicked are presented. Revelation 16 depicts the seven bowls of God's final wrath against Antichrist, his kingdom, and those who took his mark. What is only highlighted in bowls six and seven is detailed in Revelation 17-19. Bowl 7 highlighted the destruction of Babylon, but Revelation 17-18 detailed her

Only by ignoring the textual differences and taking Scripture at less than face value can anyone insist that the seals, trumpets, and bowls overlap or run concurrently.

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON OCCURS THIRTY DAYS

destruction. Bowl 6 highlighted the preparation of the nations for the Battle of Armageddon, but the details of the battle are given in Revelation 19.

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

Revelation 19 opens with a fourfold hallelujah in praise to God for his wrath against the wicked. Revelation 19:7-10 presents the marriage of the Lamb in heaven. The remainder of chapter 19 depicts the return of the Lamb in judgment against Satan, Antichrist, and the nations.

Armageddon Previewed: Revelation 16:12-16

Revelation 16:12 opens with the announcement that “the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates. The purpose of the sixth bowl is to dry up the river “so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.” The singular emphasis on “the kings from the east” has caused some scholars to question their role in the “war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” Why does God grant “the kings from the east” special help to reach the land of Israel while to the rest of “the kings of the whole world” He does not? Are “the kings of the east” coming to fight the Beast or are they coming to fight in “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty?” One cannot be dogmatic at this point, however, by the time of the bowl judgments the hostility of mankind seems to be focused against God alone. Antichrist and the kings of the

earth unite against God “for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.”

Given a literal interpretation of the trumpet and bowl judgments, it is beyond comprehension that any man on earth would continue to resist God’s rule and authority. Revelation 16:14 indicates Satan/Antichrist/False Prophet will utilize demonic deception to gather “the kings of the whole world” “for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” It is in this context that the Lord Jesus offers one of His clearest warnings. He states, “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame” (Rev. 16:15). Incorrectly some have taken

the reference, “Behold, I am coming like a thief” to refer to the Rapture. However, this conclusion fails to appreciate not only the context, but also the historical usage of this phrase.

Jesus states in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...” This is the purpose of a thief. However, there is another issue related to the coming of a thief. This concerns his *modus operandi* (how he operates). That is, a thief comes suddenly or unexpectedly. The apostle Paul indicates “that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2).” Paul indicates that the point of the figure of speech is “suddenness.” Therefore, the question concerning Revelation 16:15 is this: is the point that the Lord makes in Revelation 16:15 one of purpose or *modus operandi*? On the other hand, it could be both. A closer examination will reveal the correct answer.

The image of a man awakened by surprise and forced to parade about naked is clear. The question concerns its meaning. Alfred Edersheim is helpful at this point. In his book *The Temple, Its Ministries and Service*, he writes,

Perhaps one of the most striking instances of this kind is afforded by the words quoted at the head of this chapter—‘Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments.’ They literally describe, as we learn from the Rabbis, the punishment awarded to the Temple-guards if found asleep at their posts; and the Rabbinical account of it is curiously confirmed by the somewhat naive confession of one of their number, that on a certain occasion his own maternal uncle had actually undergone the punishment of having his clothes set on fire by the captain of the Temple as he went his rounds at night... During the night the ‘captain of the Temple’ made his rounds. On his approach the guards had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten, or his garments were set on fire—a punishment, as we know, actually awarded.²¹

The point is obvious: the Lord will suddenly appear and the unprepared will suffer a great disaster. In the context of the sixth bowl, which gathers “the kings of the whole world” “for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” this is clearly a warning—stay away. This is the only way to prevent a disaster at Armageddon for “the kings of the whole

The point is obvious: the Lord will suddenly appear and the unprepared will suffer a great disaster.

AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK

world." If they come to the battle, they will be embarrassed. This will be the least of their problems.

The place of "the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" is called in Hebrew *Har-Magedon*. This is the only place in the Bible where the word occurs. John's indication that the place bears a Hebrew name immediately sends us to the Old Testament. The first step in arriving at the correct meaning is to recognize that a literal geographical location is intended. There is nothing in the grammar or context to prove one word. The second step in arriving at the correct meaning is to recognize that John's audience was familiar with the term. John instructs the reader that Har-Magedon is a Hebrew name. As such, it is composed of two words. The Hebrew word *הר* (pronounced "har") can be translated either a hill or mountain. *מגידון* (pronounced "me-gid-don") "was an ancient city located on a plain in the southwest portion of the Valley of Jezreel (Jewish name) or Esdraelon (Greek name)."²²

Two great mountains stand to the northeast and southeast of the hill of Megiddo: Mt. Tabor and Mt. Gilboa. Between these two mountains run the valley of Jezreel, which is fifteen miles wide at its widest point. It will be the place of God's great slaughter of the nations depicted in Revelation 19:11-21.

Armageddon Pictured: Revelation 19:11-21

What is summarized in Revelation 16:12-16 is fully detailed in Revelation 19:11-21. Revelation 19:11-16 depicts the glorious return of Christ with "the armies which are in heaven." There is no debate that it is the Lord who returns to earth. Who constitutes "the armies that are in heaven" is another issue altogether. The description: "clothed in fine linen, white and clean" can refer to angelic beings (Rev. 15:6) or the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 19:8). Matthew 25:31 indicates that angels will accompany the Lord's return to judge the nations. However, there is not one explicit statement in Scripture that states that the bride of the Lamb will return at Armageddon.²³ Additionally, it appears strange to use the metaphor of a bride at her wedding in Revelation 19:7 and seven verses later use a metaphor of an army to describe the same group. However, one simply cannot be dogmatic about the composition of "the armies which are in heaven" that accompany the Lord to the battle of Armageddon.

Revelation 19:17-18 describe the angelic call to the birds to "assemble for the great supper of God."

The purpose of the gathering of the birds is to eat the flesh of man and beast that gather to fight against the Lord. Commentators recognize a similarity between Revelation 19:17-18, and 21b and Ezekiel 39:17-20. The exact nature of the relationship between Revelation 19 and Ezekiel 38-39 is not at all clear. The problem is compounded by the reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8, which follows the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. No position enjoys the absence of contradictions. Ezekiel's inclusion of a seven-month period to bury the dead and a seven-year period to burn the weapons of warfare make any solution connected with the Seventieth Week of Daniel extremely difficult to sustain.²⁴

Some have incorrectly surmised that "the flesh of all men" mentioned in Revelation 19:18 refers to every single man, woman, boy, and girl on planet earth. However, Revelation 19:19 qualifies the meaning of John's phrase. "And I saw the beast (Antichrist) and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war..." This limits the combatants to military personnel only. There is no indication that non-military personnel are involved. Revelation 19:20 indicates that the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet are seized and "thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone." Revelation 19 concludes by describing the fate of "the rest" (the kings and their armies). They are "killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse." As previously warned, "all the birds were filled with their flesh."

CONCLUSION

It defies logic that anyone familiar with the history of the nation of Israel over the past 50 years could insist that God has not played a prophetic role in the recent history of that nation. Chaim Herzog writes in his book, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*,

The morning of 5 June 1967 found Israel's armed forces facing the massed Arab armies around her frontiers... At 07.45 hours on Monday 5 June, and for the ensuing three hours, the Israeli Air Force commanded by Major-General Mordechai Hod, undertook a

There is not one explicit statement in Scripture that the bride of the Lamb will return at Armageddon.

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON OCCURS THIRTY DAYS

pre-emptive attack designed to destroy the Egyptian Air Force and its airfields... In the main attack, nineteen Egyptian air bases in the Sinai, in the Nile delta, the Nile valley and Cairo area were attacked in some 500 sorties, destroying 309 out of 340 serviceable combat aircraft including all 30 long-range Tu-16 bombers, 27 medium-range Ilyushin Il-28 bombers, 12 Sukhoi Su-7 fighter bombers, some 90 MiG-21 fighters, 20 MiG-19 fighters, 25 MiG-17 fighters, and a further 32 transport aircraft and helicopters. The Six Day War was won virtually in the first few hours.²⁵

An expression of appreciation to God is conspicuously absent from Herzog's book. Indeed, God is not mentioned. But, one will look in vain for a similar expression in the book of Esther. No one doubts the prophetic hand of God in the book of Esther. The same can be said of the Six Day War in Israel's recent history.

An examination of Old Testament military science reveals amazing similarities between Israel's Six Day War and the battles depicted in Genesis, Joshua and Judges. Surprise pre-emptive strikes, swift miraculous defeats of the enemy, extraordinarily low casualties in Israel, unparalleled death tolls among the enemy, and gross inequities in military

personnel are trademark characteristics of God's handy work. Armageddon will be no exception!

ENDNOTES

1. C.I. Scofield, "The Last World Empire and Armageddon," *BSac* 108 (Jul-Sept. 1951), 358.
2. H. A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 163.
3. Edward Hindson quotes John F. Walvoord in the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 57.
4. Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 28.
5. M.G. Kline, "Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium," *JETS* 39 (June 1996), 214.
6. That this refers to the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week is without debate.
7. A prophetic year consists of 360 days. See for a defense of this position: "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Part VI: Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," H.W. Hoehner, *BSac* 132 (Jan., 1975), 63. Also, see Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, 10th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), pp. 67-75.
8. Matthew 24:22 indicates that God will cut Antichrist's persecution of God's elect short. However, there is a difference between Antichrist's authority to rule and his persecution of God's elect. The removal of God's elect from the earth does not alter Antichrist's time to rule.
9. Matthew 24:6 (GCS 1/2.201)
10. D.G. Dunbar, "Hippolytus of Rome and the Eschatological Exegesis of the Early Church," *WTJ* 45, (Fall, 1983), 323.

GRAND OPENING
CELEBRATION!

FEBRUARY 5 - 28, 2001



AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK

11. Eusebius *Church History* 5.20.5-7.
12. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.4
13. R.R. Reiter, P.D. Feinberg, G.L. Archer and D.J. Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 204.
14. D.L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 583.
15. See the previous edition of this newsletter for a defense of this position.
16. The first bowl strikes "the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image" with loathsome and malignant sores. The second bowl strikes the sea turning it into blood, which kills all its content. The third bowl strikes all fresh water sources turning them into blood. The angel of the waters (Rev. 16:5-7) tells us that the reason God strikes all water sources (both salt and fresh) and turns them into blood is to punish "they [who] poured out the blood of saints and prophets." The "they" must refer to wicked humans. The nearest antecedent is the marked worshippers of the beast in Revelation 16:2. The fourth bowl causes the sun to scorch men, [Literally, *the men*]. The Greek is very specific here, not men in general, but in context, specific men, which refers back to Revelation 16:2. The fifth bowl is specifically indicated to afflict "the throne of the beast; and his kingdom." Bowl 6 calls the nations to the great battle of Armageddon. The seventh and final bowl destroys the cities of the world, Babylon the great, mountains and islands. *The men* (the Greek is specific) are pounded on earth with hundred pound hailstones. This again refers back to Revelation 16:2.
17. The time designation of "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" in Revelation 12:6 connects us directly to Daniel 7:25, 9:27 and 12:11.
18. However, this should not cause the reader to assume that John's meaning is beyond discovery. While John does not offer the correct interpretation of every aspect of his prophecy, Daniel does. Daniel establishes that highly symbolical language has a specific and concrete reality. Daniel's hermeneutic is an excellent model for interpreting Revelation 12-19.
19. Pronounced "say me on."
20. D.E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 52b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 681.
21. A. Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministries and Service*, (Bucks: Candle Books, 1997), 99.
22. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, page 898.
23. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is argued by some to be a reference to the bride's return with the Lord at Armageddon. However, this is highly unlikely. The Greek says literally, "the holy ones." This designation can refer to angels or humans. Daniel characteristically designates celestial beings as holy ones prior to the kingdom, but humans are holy ones after the kingdom comes. See "The Provenance of the Term 'Saints': A Religionsgeschichte Study," *JETS* 24 (June 1981), 112. The context of 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is the *parousia* of Christ at which time the Thessalonians will be presented before God the Father. The Thessalonians will be presented and rewarded before Armageddon.
24. In a subsequent article, we will deal with the identity, meaning, and significance of the Gog/Magog conflict detailed in Ezekiel 38-39.
25. Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 151-153, 160d.

VERY SOON THE GATES WILL OPEN TO A DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT DESTINATION!

Step through the Jerusalem city gate, and journey back to the time of Christ when the Romans ruled the Holy Land. Experience the Jerusalem Street Market in all its bustling excitement. Marvel at the splendor of a six-story-high replica of Herod's Temple. Feel the emotion and reverence of Calvary's Garden Tomb plus much, much more. With all this awaiting you in Orlando, why not start planning your visit today! Call to request our free visitor's guide – *Passport to The Holy Land Experience!*



Simply call us toll free at (1-866-872-4659)

1-866-USA- *HolyLand*

A MINISTRY OF
Zion's Hope
ORLANDO, FL

Examining the Twenty-four Elders

by Gary Vaterlaus

In Revelation 4:4 we are introduced to twenty-four elders who are in heaven—“And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.” Some teach that these elders represent the Church. Since this heavenly vision of John takes place before the opening of the first seal, they conclude that this proves that the Church has been raptured and is in heaven before the events of Daniel’s 70th week begin.

Their arguments identifying the twenty-four elders as the Church go something like this:

1. The twenty-four elders are wearing *crowns*—these must be the victor’s crowns that believers are promised in Scripture.
2. The twenty-four elders are wearing *white garments*—these must be the same white garments that the Church is wearing in Revelation 19:8.
3. The twenty-four elders are distinct from the angels and the four living creatures, and, unlike angelic beings, they age (after all, they are called “elders”), so they must be *human* (i.e. the Church).

Let’s look at these arguments and several passages that mention the twenty-four elders. Our study will show that this view has no biblical support, and is actually contradicted by Scripture. When we study Scripture we must remember to be careful how we interpret passages. We must let them speak for themselves and not be too quick to reinterpret them to fit into our own preconceived theological systems.

Crowns

The Greek word for ‘crown’ in Revelation 4:4 is *stefanos*. While this word can mean a victor’s crown or wreath earned in the games, according to W.E. Vine it can also mean a token of public honor for distinguished service, or an emblem of joy and glory (Vine, W.E., *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). Thus, the fact that the elders have crowns does not automatically mean they were given to them as a victory reward. These could equally be crowns of joy and glory that are bestowed upon the elders in their service of worshipping God.

White Garments

The saints are not the only one’s wearing white garments in Revelation. Angels are also described as wearing white garments in Revelation 15:6—“...and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles.” So, just the fact that the el-

ders are dressed in white linen does not require them to be the Church. We must be careful to not take one identifying statement in Scripture and then apply it universally every time it is used.

Humans

The fact that the elders are distinct from the angels and the four living creatures does not necessitate them being human. Nor does the fact that they are called “elders” mean that they have gotten older. There are 175 references to “elders” in the Bible. One hundred and sixteen of those references are in the Old Testament, leaving fifty-nine in the New Testament. The vast majority of the references in the Old and New Testament refer to the leaders of a city, the leaders of a tribe (the elders of the congregation of Israel), or in the case of the New Testament, the leader of a local church. This term does not refer to age. The elders were the rulers and decision-makers. Instead of making the elders something that the Bible does not state them to be, let’s just let them be twenty-four elders, seated around the throne of God, who were created to worship Him and have a leadership role in heaven.

The Passages

I want us now to look at three passages in the book of Revelation which mention the twenty-four elders. As we read these passages we will see that the twenty-four elders are *not* equivalent to the Church.

Revelation 5:1-5

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it; *and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”* (italics added)

Here we see one of the elders explaining to John that he should not weep, because Christ, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, is worthy to open the book with its seven seals. It is interesting to note that it is not all the twenty-four elders referred to here, but just one of the elders. The fact that one elder is singled out as speaking shows us that this is not a representative group for the Church (supposedly representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Christ), but actually individual elders, having distinct identities from one another (as also seen in Rev. 7:13). If in John’s visions the twenty-four elders are the Church, then we would expect them to only appear as a group.

Revelation 5:8-10

And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for

Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. *And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.*” (italics added)

In this passage the elders are worshipping the Lamb, singing a new song to Him. They state that Christ purchased “men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Notice the words used to describe those who had been purchased by Christ: “them” and “they,” that is, someone other than the twenty-four elders. If they were speaking of themselves they would have used words like “us” and “we.” The fact is that the elders see themselves as distinct from those whom Christ purchased with His blood—the Church.

Revelation 19:4-6

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.” And I heard, as it were, the voice

of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns...” (italics added)

In this passage the twenty-four elders and four living creatures are worshipping God. Then a voice comes from the throne commanding God’s bond-servants, small and great, to give praise to God as well. Next, John hears a “great multitude” praising God. As in the above passage, here we see that the twenty-four elders are a distinct group from the bond-servants of God—the Church, which is the same “great multitude” we encounter in Revelation 7:9-17. And by the way, the passage in Revelation 7 shows again that the twenty-four elders are separate beings from the great multitude which is from “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues”—that is, the Church.

Nowhere in Scripture are the twenty-four elders called the Church. This is an assumption based on reasoning in order to support a pre-conceived idea—that the Church is already in heaven before the events of Daniel’s 70th week begin.

As Scripture is studied carefully and compared with other Scripture, it becomes clear that the twenty-four elders do not represent the Church in heaven, but are creatures, leaders in heaven, who reside around the throne of God, worshipping and serving Him.

His Plans for the Ministry

The Lord continues to open doors for The Sign Ministries while also closing others. Through these days of transition, we appreciate your thoughts and prayers and notes of encouragement.

Within the past two months **Bill Lee-Warner**, seminar Bible teacher and author of several articles and FAQs on our website, was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor. He has begun treatment and remains a tremendous rock of faith to all of us here in the office. Bill writes, “In all things, let us run the race before us—to win! Let us not just be in the race, but to win with our Lord in the end.” As we have strived

to minister to Bill, we have often found ourselves incredibly ministered to by his words. Please pray for Bill and his family.

In light of this, **Gary Vaterlaus** has taken some of Bill’s scheduled meetings and semi-

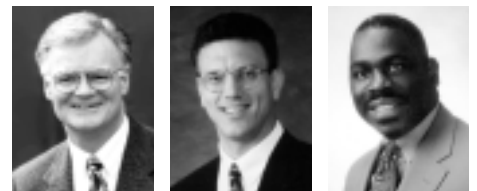
nars. Recently, Gary has met with pastors in Oregon and spoken in churches in Idaho, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Alberta. Gary will also be writing for our website and this newsletter while traveling across the country.

Charles Cooper is planning on upcoming trips to Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Florida, and New York, as well as preparing for a Seattle-area conference with Gary in April. He is working on developing a seminar on the Book of Revelation that will incorporate a dramatic reading of the text by Marquis Laughlin, who will be appearing regularly at The Holy Land Experience, a living,

biblical museum opening in 2001 in Orlando, Florida. Charles is also busy at work on the next issue of *Parousia* which will take a closer look at Pseudo-Ephraem, an ancient sermon that supposedly includes an explicit statement

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11



Bill Lee-Warner Gary Vaterlaus Charles Cooper

that would refer to a pretribulational Rapture.

Other future ministry projects include the publication of the “Pillars” newsletter articles into a book, the development of a video series focusing on the Olivet Discourse, and a redesign of our multimedia presentation that our speakers use when conducting conferences and seminars.

As we look forward to the new year, we are excited about the possibilities the Lord has for The Sign Ministries, but we also are reminded of the preciousness of the lives of our staff and friends of the ministry. Our ministry is to you, students of the Bible. And your ministry to us is in encouragement and prayer. Thank you for your part in our lives.

Letters & Email of Encouragement

I am anxious to finish *The Fourth Reich* and I want to start an in-depth study of *The Sign*. I am about halfway through the *Rapture Question Answered*. I just want to thank you for this wonderful ministry. I think it is great how you offer your books to Pastors and Missionary for free to help get the message out. I have shared my books with all my friends and fellow missionaries and I tell them where they can get a copies of their own. Thanks for all your hard work and may God bless each of you.

— Missionary C.H. in Paraguay

If it were not for your 1-800 number there is no way... that I could have spent the time on the telephone discussing *The Sign*. I must especially thank Dean for... his smile that comes across the phone. And Bill and Roger whom I had the pleasure, along with my daughter, to meet on one of their missions.

My prayer is that God will give you the strength to continue. You will never be forgotten here. The staff that is at the ministry, though you are not seen as others, without you we would all be in trouble. The Lord give you the grace to continue. Last but not least, but equal, Charles. I don't know how I could possibly say, "Thank you" for the many times you spent on the phone with me explaining and expounding on the truths pertaining to the Second Coming of our Lord. My prayer is that our Lord will richly bless you and your endeavors...

— R.W. in South Carolina

It has been a blessing to my spiritual life to study God's Word concerning the end times. I have been praying for your ministry and want to encourage you to keep spreading the Word. Also, tell Bill that there have been powerful testimonies occurring in peoples'

lives in the church he was teaching at, beginning that weekend. Thanks again, it has been very beneficial to God's people to have His Word taught in a way that gives Him credit for being harmonious and not confusing or meaningless. Praise God!

— T.G. in North Carolina

I just want to say thank you for the ministry of Bill Lee-Warner during the Prophecy Seminar last week. We were not only blessed, challenged, and encouraged by his teaching; we were enriched by the fellowship we enjoyed with him. I can honestly say that the conference was a complete success in every way. I only hope and pray that we will continue to be "Bereans" and apply what we are learning to our lives during these pivotal days. May God continue to bless all of you, is our prayer.

— Pastor D.O. in New Mexico

Parousia is produced and published four times a year by The Sign Ministries, P.O. Box 113, West Olive, MI 49460; (800) 627-5134; info@signministries.org; Editor: Rev. Bill Lee-Warner; Associate Editors: Dean Tisch, Sandy Ksycki, Dirk Eichhorst; Creative Director & Designer: Scott Holmgren; ©2000 The Sign Ministries. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted without publisher's written permission. Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible, ©1977, 1987, 1988, The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. The Sign Ministries is a ministry of Sola Scriptura. Visit our website at: www.signministries.org

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Grand Haven, MI
Permit No. 383

THE SIGN Ministries
P.O. Box 113
West Olive, MI 49460
A Ministry of Sola Scriptura

