

Two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken and...

One Left Behind



One Left Behind

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1. An Impressive Dream

Amanda looked up at the television screen hanging on the wall in the student union where she had just arrived. “We are here in downtown Boston where all chaos has broken loose. A report has just come in of another airliner going down about twenty miles north of here. Unmanned cars are running out of control, and people seem to be somehow vanishing into thin air. Clothes sit in little piles all over the city sidewalks where people have vanished. We are not certain yet just what is taking place, but the President has called for a national emergency and has ordered all people to stay inside.”

Everything had turned to chaos in an instant. Students were calling out for friends. Others stood in corners crying uncontrollably, unable to fathom what had just taken place before their eyes. Out the window, from where Amanda stood, she could see piles of clothes scattered sporadically across the oval of the Ohio State campus from where people had simply disappeared into nothing. Some still wandered about in a daze, like zombies, while others ran frantically, crying. Off to the side, she could see a car was smashed into the building where she took her Biology class.

Mustering up her courage, she decided to head back out into the strange new world, which had just transformed itself before her eyes into a tale of horror. Stepping out, she heard a rumbling noise growing louder and louder. Making her way across the oval, her eye suddenly caught the horrific sight of a passenger airliner hurling towards the oval where she stood. She felt like someone had just reached into her chest and

begun to grip her heart tighter and tighter, as its cry pounded rapidly against her eardrums, trying to drown out the sound of the approaching plane.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

She tried to run, but there was no escape. She stopped and looked up as the plane barreled towards her. Closer. Closer. As it approached, she just watched helplessly and, to her dismay, noticed that no pilot was inside. The passenger plane hit the ground just before her, hurling towards her in a heap of fire and noise. The explosion startled her, and she jumped up, only to find herself in a more peaceful world. Silence. She sat there for a moment, looking about her, shaking. She saw the bedsheets before her, then looked to the window in her bedroom, where the morning light was just starting to drift through the curtains, as she muttered to herself, “a dream... it was a dream.”

The morning passed quickly, but Amanda remained rattled throughout the afternoon as she carried the scenes from her dream into the day.

“Hey.” Amanda jumped as Elizabeth came up from behind, placing her hand on her shoulder. “Wow. Why are you so jumpy?” She looked at Amanda. Amanda just smiled and shook her head. “It’s nothing. Just some dream I had last night.”

“Must have been bad.”

“It was weird.” Amanda was silent for a moment, not offering any details. She stopped and looked at Elizabeth. “Have you ever thought about the rapture?”

“The what?”

“The rapture. You know. Where Christians are taken to heaven. People suddenly vanish. Cars smash into buildings. Planes crash. All that stuff.”

Elizabeth was taken by surprise by the sudden introduction of religion into the conversation, and she feared Amanda was going to start preaching to her. She knew Amanda was a Christian, and while she herself also had a little history of religion in her past, it just wasn't the thing to talk about, at least not on campus.

Elizabeth looked at her quizzically. "What makes you bring that up?"

"The dream I had last night was about the rapture."

"I see." She paused before inquiring, "So... do you really believe that stuff?"

"I guess so." Amanda shrugged. "Don't you?"

"I don't know. I never really thought about it."

"So, what if it's true?"

"So, what if it is?"

"If it's true and we aren't ready, we'll be left behind on earth to endure the tribulation. You know, the antichrist. The mark of the beast. All that stuff."

"Come on. It's not like we're killers or anything. If it's true, we're bound to make it. Besides, even if we don't, we may have to live during the tribulation, but at least we'll have a second chance to get ready."

The thought gave little comfort to Amanda's troubled mind. She needed to know the truth. What did the Bible say about it? While she had seen movies about the rapture, she wanted to know where to find it in the Bible, and she determined to go on a quest in search of the rapture, a journey that would take her to a new level of faith and understanding. Turning to Elizabeth, she said, "Come on. Let's look into it." Elizabeth looked at her curiously and then followed as the two made their way back to the dorm.

2. The Rapture in the Bible

“Wow. You are messier than I am.” Elizabeth said in surprise as they entered Amanda’s dorm room. Clothes were draped across the desk, and the bed was covered with crumpled blankets and crooked pillows. Out the window, she could see students making their way across the yard as the sun hung low in the sky.

Amanda brushed off the comment with a smirk. “My roommate.” Then flipping up the dress that was draped over the desk, she opened the drawer and pulled out a Bible. “Now, we’ll get to the bottom of this.”

“Do you even know where it talks about the rapture in the Bible?”

“Well, there’s only one verse that I can think of. I think it’s somewhere in 1 Thessalonians.” Amanda began to peruse her Bible, flipping through the pages. Finally, she stopped on a page with the announcement, “This is it. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17.”

“What’s it say?”

Amanda read. ““For 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. Then 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.”

“Strange.” Elizabeth’s eyebrows furrowed.

“What’s strange?”

“It just doesn’t sound like the rapture, that’s all.”

“What do you mean?”

“It just sounds like it is a picture of Jesus’ return. Ya know, where He comes back and raises the dead

from the grave and takes the living up to heaven at the second coming.”

Amanda concurred. “Yeah, I don’t get it. I see where the people are taken up to heaven, but it’s no different from the second coming of Jesus. There’s no chaos like I saw in the rapture movies. I don’t understand it.”

“Are you sure this is the verse?”

“Yes. I mean... I think so.”

Elizabeth looked at Amanda, but she had nothing else to say. She was sure that it was the verse she had heard people talking about in reference to the rapture, but it wasn’t clear. She could not see how they could get the rapture out of this verse. Still, she took comfort in the fact that her roommate would be able to clear up the issue and said confidently, “Julia will know.”

“Who?”

“My roommate. She is a really strong Christian. She’s always reading her Bible and telling me about her campus Bible study. If anyone will know, she will.”

Elizabeth shrugged. “If it’s that important...”

But it was. Something about the dream burned deep inside Amanda, into her very soul. The idea of being left behind during the rapture stirred a sense of terror within her. If it were to take place today, would she be ready? More than fear of the tribulation, the dream had stirred up questions about her own salvation, and she wondered if the dream was sent from God as some kind of warning. If the rapture was coming soon, shouldn’t she get ready? She didn’t want to be left behind. Still, she took a little comfort in the thought that if she were left behind, she would have a second chance during the tribulation to repent.

3. Digging Deeper

As the two returned from dinner, they found Julia sitting on the crumpled pink sheets of her bed, studying her algebra. The pink Ohio State Buckeye shirt she was wearing clashed with the bedsheets she was sitting on, making a strange concoction of colors that were almost disturbing to look at, but Amanda ignored it.

Julia was tall and beautiful with pretty brown hair that twisted about in curls, and although she was the envy of many of the girls in the girl's dorm, she never thought of herself as more beautiful in any way. Instead, she was really down to earth, which was one of the reasons Amanda got along so well with her.

As the two entered the room, Amanda announced, "Hey, Jules. This is my friend Elizabeth. She's in my Chemistry class."

"It's nice to meet you."

Elizabeth smiled shyly, awkwardly waving her hand before Amanda blurted out, "We have a question for you."

Julia squinted, then returned with a bit of suspicion, "What is it?"

"Well, I was hoping you could help me figure something out from the Bible since you seem to know your Bible so well."

"Ah." Julia's suspicious look eased into a smile. She had been raised a devout Christian and carried her faith confidently into her transition to young adulthood. While many young people lost their faith on campus, Julia had not. In fact, she looked at campus life as an opportunity to strengthen her faith and took every advantage to share it with as many people as possible.

“It’s about the rapture.”

“The rapture?” Julia looked at her with a bit of surprise. “It’s kind of a heavy topic.”

“Yeah, but I need to understand it. You see, I had this dream about the rapture last night. You know. Cars and planes crashing. People disappearing. I can’t stop thinking about it. I just want to know what the Bible says about the subject, but the only verses I know are 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17. Check this out.” Grabbing her Bible from the counter where she set it earlier, she read. “For 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. Then 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.”

Elizabeth now spoke up. “We looked at this verse earlier, and we can’t figure out how this is talking about the rapture.”

“Well, first, it’s important to know that while the word ‘rapture’ itself is not in the Bible, the original Greek translation for the words ‘caught up’ means to be caught up with rapt. This is where people get the word ‘rapture.’”

“I see,” Elizabeth replied.

Amanda still looked confused. “But even if the words mean to be caught up with rapt, or raptured, or whatever, the scene still doesn’t look like what they make it out to be in the movies.”

“Another thing that’s important to understand is that Christians today are actually divided by several different views about the rapture. Some Christians believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. Some believe in a

mid-tribulation rapture. And others believe in a post-tribulation rapture.”

Julia could see Amanda was puzzled and went on to clarify what she said. “You see, the tribulation time is when the antichrist appears, and the mark of the beast is set up. Everyone believes there is going to be a tribulation in the end times, but Christians do not agree about when the rapture is going to take place. Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture think that Christians will be raptured before the antichrist comes.”

“That’s what all the rapture movies today teach, right? A pre-tribulation rapture.”

“That’s right,” Julia affirmed. “But in spite of all the hype made by the rapture movies, not all Christians agree with this. Some believe in a mid-tribulation rapture, which means the rapture takes place in the middle of the tribulation. Some believe in a post-tribulation rapture, which comes after the tribulation. And some do not believe in the rapture at all, but think the rapture and the second coming are speaking of the same event, both taking place after the tribulation, the rise of the antichrist, and the mark of the beast.”

“But does it really matter if Jesus comes before or after the tribulation? I mean, is this really important to understand?”

“Actually, it is. Think of it this way. When Jesus came the first time, God’s people were so focused on the prophecies that spoke of Him coming as a King that they missed the parts that spoke of Him coming in humility and poverty. Because they misinterpreted the prophecies, they were not ready for His first coming.”

Amanda looked at Julia curiously. “Sure, but how can you relate that to the end times?”

“Simple. If the rapture does not come before the tribulation, those who are waiting on the rapture, thinking that Jesus will come and take them before the tribulation, could overlook the rise of the antichrist and the mark of the beast because they insist that these things can’t come until after the rapture.”

Amanda looked at Elizabeth, who appeared deep in thought, pondering her words, as Julia continued, “Besides that, many take comfort in the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture, because if the rapture comes first and they aren’t ready, then they will have a second chance during the seven-year tribulation to accept Jesus.”

“But if the rapture doesn’t come first...” Amanda looked up.

“Right. No second chance.” Julia looked at the girls, who appeared somber, contemplating the thought.

After a moment of silence, Amanda asked Julia, “So I guess you believe the rapture will be after the tribulation?”

Julia smiled. “I can’t just tell you.”

“Why not?” Amanda inquired.

“Because it doesn’t matter what I think. I would rather show you what the Bible says so you can see for yourself, but I don’t have time now. I’ve got to finish my algebra homework. Why don’t we get together tomorrow afternoon for lunch and talk about it?”

Amanda hated the idea of waiting. Her interest in the topic had peaked, and she wanted to know everything now. The topic seemed to buzz about in her mind like a swarm of restless bees, but realizing that Julia was too busy, she consented to wait, more out of a sense of constraint than of her own will.

4. In the Blink of an Eye

The three had agreed to meet at a picnic table just off the side of the campus oval the next day. The afternoon was sunny and warm as Amanda arrived at the table. Taking a seat, Amanda waited for the others, watching the scene developing around her. On the campus lawn nearby, a young man was throwing a Frisbee to his dog. Amanda smiled as the big black Labrador Retriever bounded after the Frisbee as playful as a little puppy, its ears flopping up and down, and tongue flapping out of its mouth randomly in every direction. As she looked upon the scene before her, a voice appeared from behind. "I always loved dogs, but I guess I could never own one."

Amanda smiled, turning to see Elizabeth setting her book bag on the picnic table. "Too much work. I have a friend who has a dog, but it's more like the dog owns her. It's like a baby. 'I've got to go home to check on my dog.' 'I can't go because I don't have anyone to watch my dog,'" Elizabeth mocked.

Just then, Julia came running up. "So sorry, I'm late. My class ran a little over." Even if her class had been on time, Amanda imagined that Julia would have been late. She was typically running about two steps behind the rest of the world. As the three settled at the table, they opened with a little pleasant small talk, but the topic of interest soon surfaced, and the girls pulled out their Bibles to investigate.

"Do you mind if I say a short prayer first?" Julia asked. With the other girls' consent, Julia opened with a simple prayer, asking for God to send His Holy Spirit as they read, to help them understand the Bible better.

“Okay, to start, let’s look at 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17 again.” Julia looked at Amanda.

Taking her cue, Amanda began. “For 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. Then 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.”

“Okay, so this is the verse that they say is talking about the pre-tribulation rapture, which they make all the movies about, but I want you to notice three things here. The Lord returns with the sound of a trumpet. The Lord returns on the clouds. The followers of Christ are raised up and taken to heaven.”

Amanda reiterated the three points. “Trumpet. Clouds. Taken to heaven. Got it.”

“Okay, now Elizabeth, could you read Matthew 24:30-31.”

“Sure,” Elizabeth replied in her usual perky way. “Then 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. And 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.”

“Now, do you remember the three points that I told you to remember?”

Amanda blurted out as if it were a game show. “Trumpet. Clouds. Taken to heaven.”

“Good. Now look and see if you can find any of those points,” Julia prompted, looking up at Amanda.

“I see all of them. First, we are told that Jesus will return on the clouds. Second, we see the sound of a trumpet. Third, we see the dead taken to heaven.”

“Good. Now that’s very interesting, because right before these verses that speak of Jesus coming, verse 29 gives us the context of the scene, telling us that this event takes place immediately ‘after the tribulation.’ These verses leave no question. Even those who believe that the rapture is going to come before the tribulation admit that this verse is not talking about the rapture, but the literal second coming of Jesus.”

Elizabeth tried to get it clear in her mind. “So some people say that the first verse we read was talking about the rapture, but this second verse is talking about a different event?”

“Right,” Julia affirmed. “Some claim that these two verses are talking about two different events.”

“I don’t get it. They are clearly talking about the same event,” Amanda said.

Julia added, “It seems pretty clear to me, but this one says it takes place after the tribulation, which means if both are talking about the same event, then both take place after the tribulation.”

Julia paused to see if the girls understood. Amanda looked at Elizabeth. “Makes sense.”

“Good. Let’s check out another verse. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52. Amanda, could you read?”

Amanda took her cue and read. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

“This verse is the basis of the pre-tribulation rapture movie called *In the Blink of An Eye*, but notice that we see two of the three elements that we just discussed. We see the sound of a trumpet, and we see the dead raised, and yet those who claim the rapture will be before the tribulation use this verse to support their theory. They say that this verse, and the one we read about the second coming, are speaking about different events. But I want you to notice what this verse calls the trumpet.”

“It calls it the last trumpet.”

“If it is the last trumpet, would this be before the tribulation or after? Think about it. There is a reason why this calls it the last trumpet. The last trumpet comes at the end. This isn’t a picture of the rapture. It’s the second coming of Jesus. We not only know this because it calls it the last trumpet, but it’s also clear from the context. Just read 1 Corinthians 15:54 to 55.”

Amanda read. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”

“This isn’t talking about the rapture, where people will be left on earth to suffer and die. This verse is talking about the end, when death will be no more.”

As Julia spoke, a light began to dawn in Amanda’s mind, as it was starting to make sense. “Let’s check one more verse for now. Turn to Revelation 1:7.”

Turning to the verse, Elizabeth took the initiative to read. “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all

the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

“Now notice. Here we again see Jesus coming on the clouds, but can we tell if this is talking about a pre-tribulation rapture, where people vanish from the earth and are taken to heaven before the tribulation?”

“Sure,” Amanda interjected. “We know this is not talking about the rapture because everyone sees Jesus coming here, and they say that the rapture will be silent and secret, like a thief.”

Julia affirmed, “Right. Even those who propose a pre-tribulation rapture as we see in the movies admit that this is talking about the literal second coming of Jesus because it says that every eye sees Him, and yet we see Jesus coming on clouds as He did in all of the other verses. My only contention is this: Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture as we see in the movies have created two different events from these Bible verses, while it seems evident to me that they are speaking of one event. The same event. The second coming of Jesus.”

It began to dawn on Amanda that maybe Julia was right. Maybe these verses were talking about the same thing. She began to consider the implications. What if it was true? Could so many Christian leaders be wrong on this subject? Could most of the Christian world be deceived by a Christianized Hollywood theology created by certain evangelical pastors who made some movies supporting their theory? And what would be the consequences of following a false theory? Amanda shuddered at the thought of all those Christians being deceived and unprepared, waiting for a pre-tribulation rapture that would never come.

5. Like a Thief in the Night

“I’m not sure about all of this. I mean, she just showed us a few verses. There’s got to be other verses that she wasn’t showing us.”

“But that’s the thing,” Amanda retorted. “She didn’t only show us verses that supported her theory. She showed us Bible verses on both sides of the issue. It seemed to me that she was being very transparent about the whole thing.”

“True, but I guess what I can’t get past is how so many Christians could be wrong on this subject. I mean, it seems a bit strange to me that a college girl at the Ohio State University could be right when so many great Christian leaders could be wrong.” Then she shrugged, adding, “but I’m still willing to look into it a little more. She said she would show us some more verses on the subject, so I’ll hear her out.”

The three had agreed to meet on the oval again a few days later. In the meantime, school classes intervened, distracting them from the issue of the ensuing Bible study. Overwhelmed with readings, quizzes, and tests, Amanda was actually able to get her mind off of the issue just a little bit. Distracted by school and life in general, the subject rested in the back of her mind where it lingered like a sleeping bear, periodically stirring like a restless sleeper ready to be awakened. When she saw some tragic event on the news, or when she saw the gasoline prices fluctuate echoing the cry of a dangerously fluctuating economy, or when she saw the immorality all around her, these things would temporarily stir up thoughts of the impending rapture, drawing her mind to Thursday

afternoon. Finally, the day came, and the three again met at the same table, spending the opening moments of their time together in small talk, catching up on each other's lives, before getting into the topic of the rapture.

"So check this out," Julia began enthusiastically. "There was an old Christian movie called *A Thief in the Night*, referring to a pre-tribulation rapture, based on 1 Thessalonians 5:2. I want to look at this concept of Jesus' coming as a thief in the context of the rapture."

"I'll read," Amanda volunteered. "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."

"Notice, this verse comes right after the verses we talked about last week in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17, which say the Lord descends from heaven with the sound of a trumpet and the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This verse is strongly supported by those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture but look at the context in verses 3 and 4. Elizabeth, would you read those?"

Elizabeth nodded with a smile, then began. "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief."

"Many people claim that this is talking about Jesus quietly snatching Christians away in the rapture because it says He will come like a thief, but in the context, we see that it is actually the opposite. Jesus is not coming like a thief to the Christians, but to the non-

Christians. To the Christians, Jesus says that day will not come like a thief.”

“That’s interesting,” Elizabeth admitted. Still, it wasn’t enough to convince her.

“But there’s more. Look at 2 Peter 3:10.”

This time Amanda took a turn to read. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

“So both verses talk about Jesus coming as a thief in the night, but is Jesus coming like a thief to quietly snatch away the Christians?”

“Apparently not, since it says there is going to be a great noise, and the earth is going to burn up.”

“Right, so is this talking about a rapture or the second coming of Jesus?”

Both of the girls were constrained to admit that it was referring to “the second coming of Jesus.”

“You see, both of these verses say the exact same thing. Word for word. They both say that Jesus will come ‘as a thief in the night.’ Both are talking about the same event, but it can’t be talking about the rapture. The context makes it clear. 2 Peter 3:4 and 7 prelude this verse by referring to ‘His coming’ and ‘the day of judgment,’ then it goes on to say that the Lord returns with a great noise and the earth burns up.”

It suddenly became clear to both of the girls that Julia was right. There was no question that these verses were talking about the same event, and this event was clearly not the rapture.

“You see, while many believe that the rapture is coming like a thief, this thief imagery was not used to

show us that Jesus is going to quietly snatch His people away in the rapture. On the contrary! Look at Matthew 24:43 and 44.”

This time Amanda took the liberty to read. “But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”

“Notice that this verse comes almost right after Matthew 24:30-31, which we determined is talking about the literal second coming of Jesus, so we already see that the context of this verse is the second coming.”

“But why is Jesus comparing His coming to a thief? Doesn’t it imply that there will be a quiet coming before the literal second coming?” Elizabeth asked.

Amanda asserted, “No, He’s telling us that His coming will be a surprise to those who are not ready.”

“Right. The context is to get ready for Jesus’ second coming because it could come at any time.”

Still, one nagging question lingered in Elizabeth’s mind. “What about the verse that says they will be left behind?”

“I’m glad you asked about that. I don’t have time to keep studying right now, but I was going to mention to you that my Bible study group is going to go over that verse this weekend. Why don’t you both come out?”

Elizabeth felt funny about going to a Bible study. She had never been to one, and Amanda had not been to a Bible study since she was little, but both of them had become so intrigued by the subject that they were compelled to go and give it a try.

6. Left Behind

The next few days eventually passed, and finally, Saturday night arrived. While most of the college world was out at parties and dancing and involved in strange and ungodly forms of entertainment, Amanda and Elizabeth were making their way to a Bible study.

“Who could have imagined even one month ago that I would be walking to a Bible study on Saturday evening,” Elizabeth said with a smirk.

It felt strange. And being a little embarrassed, the two hid their Bibles in their purses so no one would see them. On the way, they talked casually about school and other things, periodically slipping in and out of the topic of religion as Amanda asked, “So what do you think about all this? You know, this religion stuff.”

Elizabeth continued walking, looking straight ahead. “I don’t know. I mean, I’ve never really looked into it much, but it’s not as strange as I thought it would be. It’s actually kind of fun in a way. I feel like a reporter uncovering some secret. I mean, if your roommate is right, think about the implications. I still have a hard time believing the entire Christian world is wrong, but she sure does make a compelling argument. I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but I’m actually looking forward to learning about what they have to study tonight.”

The two finally arrived at the Bible study and were greeted by the small group. Everyone was very pleasant and cordial and ran them through the usual round of small talk before the Bible study finally began. Leading it out was a young man named Craig. He was a handsome young man, fairly tall with dirty

blond hair, nothing at all like they would expect a Bible study group leader to look like. As Julia had, he too opened with prayer and then began.

“A popular book series was written a number of years ago, which eventually turned into multiple movies under the title, *Left Behind*. These movies portray a pre-tribulation rapture scenario in which people vanish into thin air as they are taken to heaven. Tonight, I wanted to look at the actual verses in the Bible that these books and movies are named after to see if they give an accurate description of the events, as presented in the Bible. So why don’t we look at one of the main verses? It’s found in Matthew 24:40.”

Amanda recognized this chapter. It was the same chapter that the girls had looked at in previous studies together in reference to the second coming of Jesus.

Craig looked at Amanda. “I hate to put you on the spot, but I want to see if one of our new friends would help us by reading that verse for us. Amanda, would you be willing to read that out loud?”

Amanda nodded shyly, then began, “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.”

“Left behind,” Craig said, then paused for dramatic effect. “That verse is the foundation for the entire *Left Behind* book series and movies. The books and movies tell us that those who are taken go up to heaven, while those who are left behind are left on earth to endure the hardships of the final tribulation, the rise of the antichrist, and the mark of the beast. But let’s look at the context and see what really happens to those who are left behind. Let’s back up and have someone else read for me in Matthew 24:37-40.”

A young man in the corner volunteered. “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. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.”

At once, Amanda noticed that the verse started out by talking about the coming of the Son of Man, a term she typically related to the literal second coming of Jesus, and not the rapture. Still, she remained silent and listened to hear Craig’s explanation.

“First, let’s look at the one who is taken. Where is he taken?” No one answered. “Look at the context. The clue is found in the reference to Noah. Check this out. It says that just as the flood came and took them away, one will be taken, and one left. So, where did the flood take them?”

Someone blurted out. “The flood took them to their death.”

“Right. So where are the ones who are taken, taken to?”

The same voice added, “to their death.”

“Right. We see the exact same dialogue in Luke 17:27, where Luke tells us that ‘the flood came and destroyed them all.’ The ones taken are not raptured into heaven as they teach in the movies. In the context, we see that the ones taken away are taken to their death. Jesus Himself tells us this a little further in the text. Elizabeth, would you be willing to read Luke 17:36 and 37?”

“Sure,” Elizabeth agreed, then began, “‘Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.’ And they answered and said to Him, ‘Where Lord?’ So He said to them, ‘Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.’”

“Since the verse tells us that both men are in the field, the question of ‘where’ has to be, ‘where was the one taken’? And where does Jesus say he is taken?”

“Well, since eagles are birds of prey, Jesus seems to be saying that they die,” Elizabeth confirmed.

“Right. Jesus’ point is that those who are not ready when He returns will be destroyed ‘with the brightness of His coming,’ as we are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. That’s why Jesus concludes this section of His speech by saying in Matthew 24:43 and 44, ‘But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.’”

The girls recognized this as the verse they had studied just the week before, and both Amanda and Elizabeth were constrained to admit, at least in their own minds, that everything made sense. They were fascinated that it was so clear, in spite of the Christian worldview, and began to be convinced that the Christian world at large had to be wrong. They had seen the very verse that the rapture movies were built on, and it was saying just the opposite of what the movies projected. This verse was not about people disappearing and planes crashing. It was about the second coming of Jesus. Now, there was only one issue still unresolved.

7. *The Seven-Year Tribulation*

Even though Julia and Amanda were roommates, they did not see each other frequently. With their busy schedules, they often only saw each other in passing. When their paths finally did cross, Julia asked, “So what did you think?”

“It makes sense. I still can’t believe that most of the Christian world could be wrong about this, but it was so clear. Right from the Bible. I mean, I’ve read the *Left Behind* books before, and I don’t remember seeing many Bible references explaining the rapture, but what we went over last night was clear, except...” Amanda hesitated.

Julia looked at her curiously. “Except what?”

“Except I don’t understand where the people who believe in the rapture get the idea of a seven-year tribulation.”

“I’ll show you. You got a minute?”

“Yeah,” Amanda agreed. As the two grabbed their Bibles, Julia warned Amanda, “This study is a little bit heavy, so let me start by giving you the background setting of the story we are about to look at. While the Jewish nation was still in captivity under the Persian empire, the prophet Daniel was given a vision where he was told when Jerusalem would be restored, and how much longer it would be before the Messiah would come. Now let’s look at the story, starting in Daniel 9:24. I’ll try to go slow and break it down one step at a time to help you understand it.”

Amanda began. “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make

reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”

“Okay, so two things I need to point out. First, let’s look at the seventy weeks, which is equal to 490 days. Most Bible scholars recognize that a day in Bible prophecy represents a year. According to the ‘day for each year’ principle, found in Ezekiel 4:6, this period of seventy weeks, or 490 days, represents 490 years.”

“Interesting.” Amanda listened intently.

“I know this may sound a little confusing at first, but hang in there. In a moment, it will all piece together like a beautiful puzzle,” Julia assured her.

Amanda smiled.

“Second—‘determined.’ The prophecy says that seventy weeks are determined. The word determined here literally means to ‘cut off.’ That means these 490 years are cut off and set aside for the Jewish nation.”

Amanda looked up at Julia curiously. “Set aside for what purpose? Why?”

“The prophecy says to make an end of sins and to anoint the Most Holy. That just means that this time is given for the Jews to repent and turn back to God because the Messiah is about to come and be anointed. We are given more specific details about the prophecy in Daniel 9:25.”

Again, Amanda read. “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.”

“The prophecy says that from the time the Jewish nation returns to Jerusalem to restore the city until the Messiah comes and is anointed will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, for a total of sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years of the 490-year prophecy. Historically, we know that the Jewish nation was released from captivity and allowed to return back to Jerusalem in 457 B.C., as seen in Ezra 6 and 7. Adding 483 to 457 B.C. should take us to what year?”

Amanda was quiet for a moment as she did the math. “Since there was no year zero, crossing from B.C. to A.D., that would bring us to the year 27 A.D.”

“Right. Since the prophecy said it was to anoint the Most Holy, we conclude that Jesus would be anointed and begin His ministry in 27 A.D., fulfilling the time prophecy of Daniel.”

“So was Jesus anointed in that year?”

Julia smiled, then continued. “Ironically, when Jesus was baptized, He said that at that moment, the Spirit ‘anointed Me to preach the gospel’ (Luke 4:18). At this time, in Mark 1:15, Jesus Himself declared, ‘The time is fulfilled.’ The year He was baptized was determined to be around the year 27 A.D. by the clues given in Luke 3:1.”

Amanda looked entirely confused, so Julia summarized her point. “In essence, all that means is that the prophecy of Daniel pointed forward to Jesus’ ministry starting in 27 A.D., laying the foundation of this prophecy.”

Clarifying, Amanda said, “So the 483 years came to an end in 27 A.D. when Jesus was baptized, which started the last seven years of the prophecy.”

“Right. Now let’s read Daniel 9:26 and 27.”

Again, Amanda read, “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week...” then she inserted, “Or, for seven days.”

“Yes, except it’s talking about prophetic days. When you apply the day for a year principle, this refers to seven years, which is where they get the seven-year tribulation.”

“I see,” Amanda said, then continued, “...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.”

“Okay, so again, here’s where we get the seven-year tribulation theory. The prophecy says that after the sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years, the Messiah will make a covenant with the Jews for one week, or seven years. According to the pre-tribulation rapture theory, this seven-year period is cut off and raptured down until the end of time,” Julia said, making a play on words. “But was the seven-year covenant with the Jews coming in the future, or was it already made? Let’s find out. Turn to Matthew 26:28 and read that if you would.”

“Sure.” Amanda smiled as she flipped to the page and read. “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

“Here Jesus is just about to die on the cross, and He again confirms the covenant that He made with the

Jews, but notice that exactly three and a half years into His ministry, Jesus dies.”

Suddenly a light began to dawn in Amanda’s mind. “The prophecy said that the Messiah would make a covenant with many for seven years, but in the middle of the seven years, which is exactly three and a half years later, the Messiah would be cut off.”

“Right. According to Bible scholars, Jesus’ ministry began in the autumn of 27 A.D., and Jesus died in the spring of 31 A.D.”

Amanda was still confused. “But the prophecy said that in the middle of the week, when He was cut off, He would bring an end to sacrifice and offering.”

“When Jesus died, there was no longer a need to sacrifice lambs. That’s why Mark 15:38 says the veil of the sanctuary temple was ‘torn in two’ the instant Jesus died on the cross. According to Hebrews 9:16-18, Jesus’ death ended the Old Testament, or covenant, and started the new covenant era. When the new covenant began, the sanctuary service ended, bringing an end to the sanctuary sacrifices and offerings.”

Suddenly it began to make perfect sense—everything except the end. “But the prophecy said Jesus would make a covenant for seven years. That only covers the first three and a half years. What about the last three and a half years?”

As Julia explained the end of the prophecy, Amanda stood amazed. Everything seemed to fit so perfectly together that she couldn’t understand how anyone could misinterpret this prophecy to suggest that it pointed to the pre-tribulation rapture. Amanda only wished Elizabeth was around to hear the prophecy and was anxious to share it with her as soon as she saw her.

8. Explaining the Prophecy

“So, how did she explain the last three and a half years?” Elizabeth’s eyebrows crumpled together.

Amanda explained as best she could remember. “Well, the prophecy said from the start that 490 years were to be cut off for the Jewish nation, to give them time to repent of their sins and turn back to God. During the last seven years, Jesus would come and call the Jewish nation to return to God, but in the middle of the seven years, three and a half years into His ministry, the Jews would crucify their own Messiah.”

“Leaving them with three and a half years remaining in the prophecy,” Elizabeth concluded.

“Right. In His mercy, God gave the Jewish nation three and a half years after the cross to look back on the horrible event, in retrospect, and repent. The final three and a half years were the last chance for the Jews to repent and remain God’s chosen people, but three and a half years after Jesus’ death on the cross, the Jews confirmed their rejection of Christ by stoning Stephen in Acts 7:58. Right after that, Paul was converted and told to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, in Acts 9:15.”

“So three and a half years after Jesus died on the cross, the Jewish nation was cut off, and the gospel went to the Gentiles,” Elizabeth confirmed.

“Yes. That’s why Peter tells us in Acts 11:18 that ‘God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life,’ and Paul says in Acts 18:6, ‘From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ In essence, that is why we are Christians today, instead of Jews. The prophecy said that seventy weeks, or 490 years, were given to the Jewish people to repent and turn back to God. If they

refused, they would no longer be God's special people, as they were in the past. The gospel would then go to the Gentiles instead. Since the Jewish nation did not repent, but rejected the Messiah, that's exactly what happened."

Well, it certainly made sense. The prophecy seemed clear. "And what does all this have to do with the rapture again?" Elizabeth asked.

"Well, the prophecy said that after sixty-nine weeks, the Messiah would come and make a covenant with the Jewish nation for one week, or seven years. Today, those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture say that the final seven years of this prophecy are cut off and moved down to the end of time. Instead of being a prophecy of the Messiah, they claim this is a prophecy of the coming antichrist, and they say that God is going to raise the Jewish nation back up again during this final seven-year tribulation. At that time, they say that the antichrist is going to commit an abomination when he stands in the Jewish temple, but in order to do this, the temple must be rebuilt. That's why Christians today relate the rebuilding of the Jewish temple with the end times and the rapture."

"But how did Julia explain the part of the prophecy about 'abominations...poured out on the desolate,' if she says it isn't about the antichrist?"

"That part was so simple. In Matthew 24:15 and 16, Jesus Himself referred to the same abomination of desolation that we read about in Daniel. Check it out."

Amanda pulled her Bible out of her purse and handed it to Elizabeth, who read, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place'

(whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

Elizabeth, lifting her head from the Bible, looked at Amanda. “So how do you know this isn’t talking about the antichrist standing in the temple?”

“Because the same scene in Luke 21:20 and 21 explains it a little differently, telling us exactly what the abomination of desolation is.”

Again, turning in the Bible, Elizabeth read in amazement, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.”

“That’s referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D. The Roman armies surrounded the temple and destroyed the city. That’s why Jesus goes on to say in verse 24 that ‘they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.’”

Elizabeth was dumbstruck. It was all very simple. She couldn’t deny it and was ready to accept it as the simple truth until she began to consider what it would cost. As the days passed, Elizabeth realized that this belief would set her apart from most Christians. She had worked so hard to fit in. Among school. Among friends. While the Bible study had been fun for a while, she knew that accepting this truth would cost her more than she was willing to give up. While she could not deny what she had learned, she tried to ignore it. She hoped she could just go back to life before she had ever learned any of these Bible teachings.

Gradually, the convictions in her heart began to fade, and she started hanging out with different friends, slowly losing touch with Amanda, while Amanda's faith became stronger. Amanda began to attend Bible study every week, adopting her new Christian friends as brothers and sisters in Christ. As time passed, she grew closer and closer to Julia and the others in the Bible study group, but more and more distant from Elizabeth. But fate, at last, brought them back into contact with each other as they crossed the campus oval one afternoon.

"Hey, Elizabeth. How have you been? I was just thinking about you."

"I've been fine." Elizabeth seemed a little uncomfortable. Their meeting seemed to bring back old convictions, and she fidgeted nervously.

"You should really come back to the Bible study and visit us."

"I don't know. I'm kind of busy these days."

Amanda could see the unrest in her eyes. "Elizabeth. Please don't turn your back on God. Don't forget all the stuff we learned together. While the rapture may not be true, Jesus is going to come back, and some will be taken to destruction, while others will be left to receive Jesus. The prophecy still stands true. Don't forget about Luke 17:35."

"Listen, I gotta go," Elizabeth said abruptly, trying to avoid conviction. "I'll... see ya."

As Elizabeth rushed off, Amanda stood there watching. Her eyes were full of sorrow as she muttered the words under her breath somberly, "Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left."

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