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THE DAY OF THE LORD

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It is the purpose of this paper to present what appears to be a new argument in favor of the doctrine of the premillennial posttribulation return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This argument is based upon a new consideration of the conflicts in the pretribulation rapture theory's views of the Day of the Lord.

The phrase "Day of the Lord" appears in Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14 (twice); Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5; Acts 2:20; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:2; and II Peter 3:10, a total of 23 times. An examination of these passages yields no clear and unique definition for the phrase, "The Day of the Lord."

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In the field of eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, the views of the Day of the Lord generally vary with one's position concerning the Millenium and the Great Tribulation. There are basically three views of the Millenium: premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial. The premillennial view says that Christ will return to earth a second time and will literally reign on earth for a thousand years before ushering in the eternal state. The postmillennial view says that Christ will return to earth a second time at the end of the millenium and immediately

usher in the eternal state. (i.e. the reign of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is the millenial reign of Christ on earth and it began at Pentecost.) The amillenial view says there will be no literal reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years.

The postmillenial and amillenial views of the Day of the Lord are somewhat similar and are together adequately expressed by Keil (1). On page 474 of Volume X, he states, "The day of the Lord ... commenced with the appearance on earth of Christ This judgment burst upon the Jewish nation not long after the ascension of Christ. Israel rejected its Savior, and was smitten with the ban at the destruction of Jerusalem in the Roman war; and both people and land lie under this ban to the present day."

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Within premillenialism, there are two major views of the Great Tribulation: pretribulationism and posttribulationism. Pretribulationism says that Christ will secretly come back to rapture the church (take it out of the world) just before the last 7 years before ~~he~~ returns to take up his millenial reign. This last seven years is known as the tribulation period, or as the Great Tribulation, because of the rise of Antichrist and his persecution of Israel at that time. Posttribulationism says that Christ will visibly come back and rapture the church (to meet him in the air) at the end

of the Great Tribulation and will immediately bring the church back with him to the earth to set up his millenial reign.

Gundry (2) clearly indicates posttribulationism's view of the Day of the Lord: it will not begin until the end of the Great Tribulation. On pages 94 and 95 he states, "The prophecy of Malachi, the reiteration of that prophecy by Jesus, the appearance of Elijah with Christ at the Transfiguration, and the likeness of Elijah's miracles in the OT to the miracles in Revelation 11:1-13 all unite to identify Elijah as one of the two witnesses. The early Church almost universally accepted the identification. John writes that the two witnesses will prophesy 1,260 days, apparently the latter half of Daniel's seventieth week, for 'the nations' will surely not 'tread under foot the holy city' until the Antichrist breaks his covenant with the Jews (Rev. 11:2,3). The day of the Lord, then, cannot begin until the expiration of Elijah's ministry, which occupies the final half of the tribulation Certain celestial portents will both precede the day of the Lord (Joel 2:30, 31) and follow immediately upon the tribulation (Matt. 24:29). Clearly, the day of the Lord will not begin with the tribulation or any part of it, for otherwise the heavenly portents after the tribulation could not be said to precede that day."

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Pretribulationism's view of the Day of the Lord is not so clear cut. Some pretribulationists follow posttribulationism's view that the Day of the Lord begins at the end of the tribulation. Others believe it begins at the beginning of the tribulation. And still others believe that it begins in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period.

Hoyt (3) states both the first and second views. On page 76, referring to II Thessalonians 2:1-4 he says, "In the Authorized Version 'day of Christ' should read 'day of the Lord' as corrected in the American Standard Version. And 'the day of the Lord' in this context refers to the coming of Christ in glory at the end of the tribulation." This would indicate that the Day of the Lord begins at the end of the Great Tribulation.

But, on page 141, regarding the nature of the period of tribulation, he says, "This period is characterized as the day of the Lord." This would indicate that the Day of the Lord begins at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Walvoord (4) echoes this confusion. On pages 108 and 109, he states, "Generally speaking, pretribulationists have identified the day of the Lord as the millenial kingdom, including the judgments that introduce the kingdom. This view was popularized by the 1917 edition of the Scofield

Reference Bible. In this interpretation, for all practical purposes, the day of the Lord begins at the end of or after the great tribulation."

But then, on page 118, he says, "Although the events of the day of the Lord do not begin immediately after the rapture, the time period as such - following the symbolism of a day beginning at midnight - could easily be understood to begin with the rapture itself."

Pentecost (5) indicates that this controversy between Scofield's position of 1917 and Harry Ironside's position of 1947 has serious ramifications for pretribulationism in general. On pages 230 and 231, he says, "Thus it is concluded that the Day of the Lord will include the time of the tribulation. Zechariah 14:1-4 makes it clear that the events of the second advent are included in the program of the Day of the Lord. 2 Peter 3:10 gives authority for including the entire millennial age within this period. If the Day of the Lord did not begin until the second advent, since that event is preceded by signs, the Day of the Lord could not come as a 'thief in the night,' unexpected, and unheralded, as it is said it will come in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. The only way this day could break unexpectedly upon the world is to have it begin immediately after the rapture of the church. It is thus concluded that the Day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God's

dealing with Israel after the rapture at the beginning of the tribulation period and extending through the second advent and the millenial age unto the creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millenium."

Goldberg (6) presents the third viewpoint (that the Day of the Lord begins in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period) using the same Jewish concept of the 24 hour day as Walvoord does, but with a different result. He also bases his position upon God's promise to send Elijah in Malachi 4:5.

On page 32, Goldberg says, "In the Biblical backgrounds of Israel, and in the Jewish religious culture today, the day begins at about 6:00 p.m. sundown." The concept is that the first part of the day is darkness and the second part of the day is brightness. In relationship to the Day of the Lord, the night corresponds to the last 3-1/2 years of the seven-year tribulation period during which Israel undergoes severe pressure as indicated in Isaiah 60:2a and Zechariah 14:1-2a. On the other hand, the brightness corresponds to the millenial reign of our Messiah, Jesus Christ, as outlined in Isaiah 60:2b-3 and Zechariah 14:8a,9,16a. Thus, the Day of the Lord consists of the last half of the tribulation period and the entire Millenium.

Chapter 11 of Revelation speaks of the two witnesses who "shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days,

clothed in sackcloth." (11:3) Goldberg maintains that this will occur during the first 3-1/2 years of the tribulation period and that this first 3-1/2 years is not actually part of the Day of the Lord because Malachi 4:5 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." If Elijah is to come before the Day of the Lord, then the Day of the Lord cannot begin until after Elijah has come.

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So we find a most serious conflict in the pretribulation views of the Day of the Lord. On the one hand, as Pentecost notes, the Day of the Lord must include the entire seven-year tribulation period; otherwise, imminency cannot be maintained. But, on the other hand, as indicated by Goldberg, the Day of the Lord cannot begin until the middle of the seven-year tribulation period; Elijah must come before the Day of the Lord, and he cannot come before the rapture because then the rapture would not be imminent.

Given the circular nature of this argument, it seems reasonable to conclude that pretribulationism cannot be maintained. Since chapter 20 of Revelation clearly describes a literal future earthly reign of Jesus Christ, premillennialism must hold against postmillennialism and amillennialism. Thus premillennial posttribulationism appears to be the only viable choice for the timing of our Lord's

second coming.

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END NOTES

1. Keil, C. F. Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986
2. Gundry, Robert H. The Church and the Tribulation, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.
3. Hoyt, Herman A. The End Times, Chicago: Moody Press, 1969.
4. Walvoord, John F., The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
5. Pentecost, J. Dwight. Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964.
6. Goldberg, Louis. Turbulence Over the Middle East, Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1982.

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