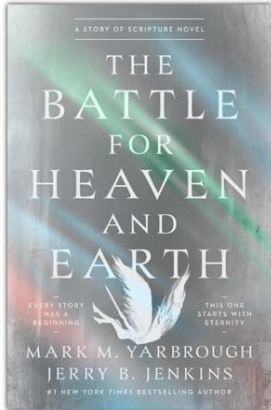


EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Before the Beginning: Jerry B. Jenkins and Dr. Mark Yarbrough Imagine the Battle for Heaven and Earth

The Left Behind author and Dallas Theological Seminary president team up on a novel that dares to picture eternity past, the rebellion in heaven, and the story before Genesis—without rewriting Scripture.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



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Bible sales are climbing. Faith-based streaming is expanding. Audiences who once treated Scripture as background noise are suddenly curious about the people, places, and unseen conflicts inside it. Into that moment step Jerry B. Jenkins, the novelist whose *Left Behind* series sold more than 73 million copies and who later wrote the official novelizations of *The Chosen*, and Dr. Mark M. Yarbrough, president of Dallas Theological Seminary. Their new collaboration, *The Battle for Heaven and Earth*, does not retell a familiar Bible story. It imagines the one before the story begins.

Salfen opens the conversation by noting how rare it is for a pitch to stop him cold. Jenkins and Yarbrough, he says, have something people are already talking about even before the November 3 release. The book, published by Thomas Nelson, moves through eternity past, the rebellion of Lucifer, the creation of the world, and the fall in Genesis 3. Characters and dialogue are invented. The biblical spine is not.

A CONSULTANT WHO CAUGHT THE BUG

The project began as Yarbrough's idea. He approached Jenkins as a consultant, the man who had already written so much fiction. Jenkins tried to talk him out of it. The marketplace is crowded. Expectations needed to be realistic. "But eventually, I really caught the bug for this story and agreed to help him write it," Jenkins says. "It's been great fun."

They cover pre-creation in heaven, the rebellion, creation, and the fall. "We've invented some characters, we've invented some dialogue," Jenkins explains. "We basically have said, we know what Scripture says about it, and we believe the Bible is the Word of God, and it's true, and doesn't need any help. But every Sunday in churches, pastors say, imagine yourself here, and what would have been like, and what might somebody have said or done. And so we've just done that in spades."

"Our fiction that we're writing here should illuminate Scripture, not rewrite it."

— Dr. Mark Yarbrough



Jerry B. Jenkins (left) and Dr. Mark M. Yarbrough. Photos courtesy of the authors / Dallas Theological Seminary.

Yarbrough, who has spent his career teaching Scripture at Dallas Theological Seminary, describes the guardrails. “The first thing is that we wanted to make sure that we stick with the biblical storyline,” he says. They distinguish what Scripture states clearly from what it alludes to, then imagine only within those bounds. “Many times, as we would write characters and storylines, we’d ask ourselves the question, is that consistent to what the Bible does say?” When God appears as a character, the portrayal has to match what the rest of Scripture reveals about Him.

PRAYER, PROCESS, AND THE GRUELING WORK

Salfen asks whether the project changed their prayer lives. Yarbrough notes that no previous interviewer has posed the question. Jenkins answers that there is an author arc as well as a character arc. “I feel personally, I feel challenged by this,” he says. “I resonated with certain characters, even the angels, when they were asking God, ‘You knew this was gonna happen, you allowed this to happen, why would you do that?’ That’s what people are asking all the time.”

Yarbrough speaks of committed prayer time asking the Lord to help them honor the text and present the story in a way that is palatable for both committed believers and readers who may not share their convictions. “It’ll get them asking questions, and we hope it’ll drive them to the text.”

On craft, Jenkins is characteristically candid. He teaches writers online and often hears the assumption that he loves the act of writing. “I love being a writer, I love having written, I love being successful at it,” he says. “But the actual writing is so grueling. I sort of compare it to a marathon runner. Ask a marathon runner at the 20-mile mark, don’t you just love running? You might get a response or a gesture you didn’t expect.” His advice to students is blunt: “If you’re loving it while you’re doing it, you’re probably not doing it right.”

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Yarbrough loved the creative mornings. “The joke that Jerry and I have amongst ourselves is I would give him junk, and he would make beauty out of that junk,” he says with a laugh. Yarbrough handled much of the storyline and characters; Jenkins, “the consummate writer,” shaped the theology and prose. They share a warped sense of humor, which helped. Jenkins returns to the central discipline: “The key in this story is plausibility. We don’t take away from the gospel, that’s the key. But we just try to do what pastors do, and try to imagine yourself there, but it has to be plausible.”

HAIL MARY MOMENTS

Salfen's co-host, former Dallas Cowboy Drew Pearson, requires every guest to name a Hail Mary moment—the career leap that had to work. Jenkins recalls approaching Walter Payton early in the running back's career. He had already done a book with Hank Aaron. He told Payton's agent and the Bears that if they agreed, he could secure an advance and a publisher. Silence lasted nine months. Then the agent called and said they were ready. "That was my Hail Mary, and it did open a lot of doors."

Yarbrough's Hail Mary was this book itself. He had never written a novel. After years of dreaming about it and circling the idea with Jenkins, he finally said the best path was to write it together. "I think he said, well, I thought you'd never ask," Yarbrough remembers. "I was like, here we go, Lord, we're just gonna toss it up and see what happens."

WHAT KEEPS THEM ON THE PATH

Jenkins rejects the notion that Christian writers receive the words directly from God the way Scripture was given. He does, however, approach the work with a private ritual. He kneels at a prayer bench and surrenders what he has. "As my son would say, that's my five loaves and two fish. The multiplication of that, the miracle of that, is going to have to be something from God."

Yarbrough's prayer is simpler and stricter: "Lord, help us to be consistent to what you have said." He has little patience for invention that drifts from the text. "I'm not creative enough to be a liberal pastor," he says. "I've gotta stick with what has been said." Their shared aim is that the fiction illuminates Scripture rather than rewriting it.

They see the current moment as more than marketing. Jenkins believes a revival is underway. He cautions that success still requires quality work born of genuine surrender, not merely a clever crowdfunding model or outside-Hollywood angle. Yarbrough points to rising Bible sales and the human hunger for more than the world offers. "We're spiritually bankrupt," he says. Projects like *The Chosen* and this novel help people visualize what Scripture describes and imagine the world around it. "I hope that it hits a pulse."

AN ECOSYSTEM AND A SERIES?

They are already thinking ahead, though carefully. "We hope it becomes a series," Jenkins says. "I don't think Mark realizes how old I am. I may have to write some of this series in heaven." Success of the first book will determine the rest. Material is abundant; they have only reached Genesis 3.

Around the novel sits a larger ecosystem. The website thebattleforheavenandearthbook.com will host roughly 21 video teachings on the chapters and theological themes, accessible via QR codes in the book. Ten complete songs written for the story will be released as a soundtrack, recorded by artist friends. Companion Bible studies are planned. "Hopefully it's a whole ecosystem that will lead to more novels as well," Yarbrough says.

WHAT THEY HOPE READERS TAKE AWAY

Jenkins wants readers to resonate with the characters—most of them biblical, a few invented—and then turn back to the text. "Our whole goal is to have people go back to the Scripture and say, where did they get this? And why did they say this?" He is not a theologian and relies on Yarbrough for the fine points. He hopes the novel turns people back to the Bible, to church, or, if the material is new, simply fascinates them with the supernatural.

Yarbrough aims at readers who are “kicking the tires.” He wants them to recognize an unseen realm and a spiritual battle. “This story that we have in Scripture, which we both believe is real and true, is our story. It tells why we are the way we are, and why there are challenges, and why we struggle.” It also shows what God is doing about it. “I always say the story of Scripture is the greatest story ever told. And so we pray that it’ll get people closer to God... and because of that, that people will say, man, life is better when done with Him.”

They ask readers to pre-order. “Just go to Amazon,” Yarbrough says. “The Battle for Heaven and Earth.” The website will track the expanding ecosystem in the weeks before release. Both men express gratitude for the conversation and the chance to get the word out.

FIND THE BATTLE FOR HEAVEN AND EARTH

Pre-order now on Amazon and wherever books are sold. Releases November 3, 2026, from Thomas Nelson in paperback, ebook, and audiobook.

Official site: thebattleforheavenandearthbook.com — videos, soundtrack details, and updates.

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Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.