

THE POST-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

BY

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Foreword

In this work, William Arnold III has accepted the challenge of offering a solid Biblical answer to the pervasive doctrine of pre-tribulationism. He has examined crucial Biblical passages relevant to the ongoing debate of pre-tribulationism vs. post-tribulationism. Through exegesis of Scripture and pertinent historical information, the author has built a strong case for the reality of a post-tribulational rapture of the church.

The time of the rapture is never stated in the Scripture as clearly as prophecy teachers would like it to be, no matter what their personal persuasion regarding the rapture may be. The variety of teachings on this subject by respectable theologians is evidence of this very fact. There is enough evidence to build a case for each of the views. This author has built a very strong case for a post-tribulational rapture of the church; a case in which I am persuaded is the strongest of all. It has been said that the mind is like a parachute, it works best when it is open. I pray you would have an open mind to hear the argument of the author, and let it challenge you to re-examine your own doctrinal position on this sometimes heated topic.

--Jason Dulle

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1. Introduction

A Plain, Literal Approach

First of all, I would like to state that in this discussion I am taking a plain, literal approach to interpretation, which is more literal at times than many pre-tribulationists.¹ I want to look primarily at what the Bible actually has to say about this topic. However, I will use accepted terminology such as the non-biblical words “rapture” and “Millennium,” only because these are the words most people relate to. I will usually follow the common usage of the word “Tribulation” to refer to the entire seven-year period even though I believe biblically it is only used of the latter three and one half years.

Pentecost’s *Things to Come* Eschatology

I realize that not all pre-tribulationists agree on all points. Some of the issues I cover may not apply to some. Although I have heard and read a variety of pre-tribulationists, I was formally taught from Dwight Pentecost’s *Things to Come*, which has been a standard pre-tribulationist textbook for a long time. I will attempt to point out where modern pre-tribulationists have changed their views, but I do apologize if I overlook some.

Pre-Tribulationism Is Based on Inferences and Is Not Specifically Taught in Scripture

The doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture is not specifically taught in the Bible. Instead, it is based upon other doctrines which pre-tribulationists conclude require a pre-tribulation rapture: such as, imminency, exemption from wrath, distinction between the church and Israel, etc. However, nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus will come prior to the Tribulation. On the other hand, Jesus himself said that he would return “*after the tribulation*” (Matt. 24:29-31).

Burden of Proof

Finally, if pre-tribulationism is not specifically taught in Scripture, and we all agree to the post-tribulation second coming, then post- is the default position. It is up to the pre-tribulationist to demonstrate that there are two separate events and that the first of these takes place before the Tribulation. Unless it can be demonstrated otherwise, we are left to assume that the “blessed hope” of the believer is the second coming of Christ after the Tribulation.

¹ This book is primarily a discussion of Pre and Post-tribulationism. For an evaluation of the new “Pre-Wrath” rapture theory, see my web site at: www.TheRapture.org.

2. The Biblical Basis for Post-Tribulationism

One Rapture Passage

If we are going to try to decide when the rapture takes place then we must first go to the rapture passages and see what the Bible actually has to say about this event. Naturally, if we want to know when this event will take place we should look where it is discussed. The problem is that there is only one “rapture passage” in the Bible: 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Only Paul mentions the church being caught up in the air, and he only says it in this one passage. Therefore, this must be foundational to any discussion of the rapture. Since this is the only place in Scripture where the rapture is mentioned, all other passages that are taken to be “rapture passages” must have some connection to this verse. In other words, how would someone claim another passage as a “rapture passage,” without first proving that the same event is being described as is in the one rapture passage in the Bible? This is very significant to the discussion, because the next closest passage to this one is Matthew 24:27-31, which specifically states that it takes place *“after the tribulation.”*

Another passage that is commonly referred to as a “rapture passage” is 1 Corinthians 15:52. Although I would agree that this is describing the same event, the rapture is not specifically mentioned here. The reason we connect the two is because similar events are mentioned. Both passages mention a trumpet and the resurrection of believers. Because of this, we conclude that these are both the same event. However, as I already mentioned, Matthew 24:27-31 has much more in common with the one clear rapture passage. Notice the similarities:

Matt. 24:27-31	1 Thess. 4:15-17	1 Cor. 15:52
1. Called <i>he parousia</i> , “the coming” (27)	1. Called <i>he parousia</i> , “the coming” (15)	1. Called <i>he parousia</i> , “the coming” (23)
2. Jesus appears in heaven (30)	2. The Lord descends from heaven (16)	2. ---
3. Coming on the clouds (30)	3. . . . with them in the clouds (17)	3. ---
4. Angels present (31)	4. Archangel present (16)	4. ---
5. Great sound of a trumpet (31)	5. Shout and trumpet of God (16)	5. At the last trumpet (52)
6. ---	6. Dead in Christ will rise (16)	6. Dead will be raised (52)
7. Gathering of the elect (31)	7. We are caught up to meet him (17)	7. ---

“The Rapture,” A Bad Term?

It may come a surprise to some that the word “rapture” is not in the Bible.² When we realize that Scripture does not speak of *the rapture* but rather says that at *the coming* of the Lord we will *be raptured* (caught up), it sheds new light on the discussion. It is misleading to speak of *the rapture* and then to ask when *the rapture* will take place. The Bible only mentions *the coming* of the Lord and says that when he comes we will be caught up together to meet him. But pre-tribulationists start by talking about *the rapture* and the second *coming* as if they were two separate events and then claim that post-tribulationists confuse the two. The fact is, however, that the Bible does not make this distinction. Instead, it uses the word “coming” (*parousia*) when we would expect to see the word “rapture” if indeed this were a different event.

It is also interesting to note that the New Testament does use at least two other words to describe the return of our Lord, and once again no distinction is made. They are: *apokalupsis*, “revelation” and *epiphaneia*, “appearing.” Both of these Greek words are used as the hope of the church (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:7,13; 4:13) and in clear second coming passages (2 Thess. 1:7; 2:8).³ It would seem very strange then for the writers of the New Testament to use at least three different words interchangeably to describe two different events that are separated by seven years. In other words, it would be confusing to use these three words to speak of two different events without distinguishing the two events. We would expect them to use different words for different events (such as *rapture* and *second coming* maybe?). How are we able to distinguish what Scripture does not?⁴

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

When we take a closer look at our “rapture passage,” we see that Paul is not describing a new event but is explaining that at the coming of the Lord the dead will be raised. Notice how he begins his thought in verse 13, “*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.*” This sets the tone for what he is about to discuss. It is what he will be addressing, his “thesis statement” if you will. We then see him develop his theme of the dead in Christ as he goes on:

² Actually, we get the noun “rapture” from the Latin Vulgate where the verb *harpadzo* “caught up” is translated as “raptus.” My problem is not so much with the word itself, but, since this is a verb and not a noun, it is a reference to the action “caught up” which takes place at the event “the coming,” not to the event itself. Using the noun “rapture” in our discussion leads one to believe that this is an event in and of itself. In fact, I have seen Pre-Tribulationists even make the statement, “The Bible never says that the rapture will take place after the Tribulation.” This is a meaningless statement, since the Bible never uses the term.

³ These Greek words are not always translated “revelation” and “appearing” in each of these occurrences. This is simply their usual translation.

⁴ Furthermore, the rapture has traditionally been taught to be a secret event so as to distinguish it from the second coming where the Lord is revealed in all his glory. Therefore, it would seem strange to use the words “revelation” or “appearing” for this event. These words better describe the second coming. This is why Pre-Tribulationists used to say that the “revelation” and “appearing” were specific references to the second coming after the Tribulation. However, as we have seen, Scripture does not allow for this distinction.

[14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. [15] For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore comfort one another with these words. [1 Thess. 4:14-18]

Paul's point to the believers at Thessalonica is that they need not worry about their dead loved ones. Jesus will resurrect them when he returns. He says that this will take place at "*the coming of the Lord*." There is no hint that this is any different than the coming which everyone was expecting—the one that Jesus told his apostles would take place "*after the tribulation*" (Matt. 24:29). We would also expect that the eschatology Jesus taught them would be the same as what Paul was teaching, unless we have reason to believe differently.

It is primarily this lack of evidence for multiple comings that is the basis for post-tribulationism. When it is realized that there is only one coming, post- is the only position. All agree that Christ is coming after the Tribulation, so if there is only one coming (or one stage of his coming as some prefer to call it), then the rapture must occur after the Tribulation.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

[5] This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. [6] For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, [8] dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [10] when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed -- for our testimony to you was believed. [2 Thess. 1:5-10]

As mentioned earlier, a frequent charge against post-tribulationism is that they fail to distinguish between *rapture* passages and *second coming* passages; however, since we never find the word *rapture* in the Bible, what we label as a *rapture* or *second coming* passage will depend on our view of eschatology. If we believe that the church will be raptured prior to the Tribulation then any passage speaking of Christ coming in judgment will be labeled a *second coming* passage and any passage which speaks of his coming as a hope for the church will then be labeled as a *rapture* passage. This can at times be arbitrary and even circular. However, there is at least one passage which positively links the two as one event. In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Paul clearly states that God will give the believers rest *when* Jesus comes in flaming fire, dealing out retribution (v. 7,8). Then he goes on to say that the unbelievers will pay the penalty, "*when he comes to be glorified in his saints on that day*" (v. 9,10). There is no other conclusion than that the coming for the saints and the coming to execute vengeance are the same coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

[1] Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, [2] that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [3] Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction [2 Thess. 2:1-3]

Once again, we see Paul laying out his subject matter at the beginning. He is going to be speaking, "*with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*" (verse 1). Then he states that the Day of the Lord,⁵ "*will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction*" (verse 3). This is the most clear denial of an "any moment" rapture as one could imagine. There really is not much upon which to expound. This passage speaks for itself. But if I may paraphrase, Paul is saying, "With regard to his coming and our gathering, that will not happen until . . ." It also seems quite clear that Paul links *the*

⁵ The King James, following the Textus Receptus, reads "*Day of Christ*."

coming of our Lord with our gathering together to him, because he is going to speak with regard to both. I fail to see where in the passage Paul goes on to talk about the *gathering* after discussing the *coming* if we assume these are separate events.⁶

Also, Paul is making a point here. He stresses in verse 3, “*let no one in any way deceive you*” (which is a double negative in the Greek, a very strong negation). He says this as if someone would try to tell them otherwise.⁷ But he is very emphatic for them not to be deceived, because it will not happen until these things happen first. “*It will not come*” is in italics in the KJV and NASB, thus signifying that it was supplied by the translators. However, it necessarily is demanded by the rules of grammar in the Greek and is thus translated by every major translation.⁸

Furthermore, if we follow Paul’s flow of thought from verse one to verse two, he seems to link the “*coming of our Lord*” with the “*day of the Lord.*” Not only is this the most logical way to understand this passage, but in my opinion it fits best with all of the other “*day of the Lord*” passages which will have bearing later in the discussion.

Finally, it would seem strange for Paul to tell them that the antichrist must come first if he knew they would not be around to see it. Why even say this at all? Why not tell them that the rapture must come first? It seems that he is warning them that this is what the church is to look for. Also, as we will see in chapter 7, this is how the early church understood this.

Revelation 20:4-5

*[4] Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. **This is the first resurrection.** [Rev. 20:4-5, emphasis added]*

That this is taking place after the Tribulation is obvious. People are sitting on thrones reigning with Jesus. Both sides are in agreement at this point. But what to me seems equally clear is that the Bible states this is the first resurrection. If the rapture is to be preceded by the resurrection of believers (1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:52), and this is the first resurrection, then the rapture must be after the Tribulation.

For a pre-tribulationist this *cannot* really be the first resurrection. If the rapture takes place before the Tribulation, and the resurrection takes place before the rapture, then the first resurrection had to take place at least seven years before this time. They will usually say that this is the third or fourth phase of the first resurrection, which neither this nor any other passage teaches. The literal reading of this passage is that there has been no resurrection before this (aside from the Lord himself, of course). I fail to see what would be the significance of saying, “This is the first resurrection,” if there had already been several resurrections of believers prior to this time. The book of Revelation was written to churches, who had hope of a future resurrection. When they read, “This is the first resurrection,” the most natural thing for them to assume is that this is the one they were waiting for.

Also, if the church is not included in this resurrection, then John never does mention the resurrection of the church. Why would he leave out such an important event, especially when it was to the church that he was writing? He would have left them wondering where they fit into this picture. Of course, the way in which one views the order of the book of Revelation has a bearing on the discussion, but this will be dealt with in the next chapter.

1 Corinthians 15:50-55

[50] Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. [51] Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. [53] For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. [54] But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written,

⁶ It is interesting as well that when he speaks of “*our gathering together unto him,*” he uses the word *episunagoge* which is the cognate noun of *episunago*, the word Jesus used when he spoke of gathering together his elect in Matt. 24:31.

⁷ Compare also to the warning in 2:15 & 3:14-15.

⁸ See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 52-53.

"DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. [55] "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" [1 Cor. 15:50-55]

This passage and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are probably the two most common passages people think of in relation to the rapture. We often hear it said that we will be caught up *"in the twinkling of an eye"* (verse 52). However, I think it will come as a surprise to many that the rapture is nowhere mentioned here. All it states is that a trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised and we will be changed. That's it! This passage leaves us on the earth with changed bodies. Of course, I am not denying that Paul is describing the same thing here as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. However, as was pointed out earlier, the reason we connect the two is because of the similar events that are taking place.

It is also interesting that Paul begins this discussion with his statement about how the living will inherit the kingdom (v. 50). We know that this will take place at the second coming. It seems as though Paul is saying, "Even the living will be changed in order to enter the kingdom in glorified bodies." This entire chapter is about the resurrection and Paul had already stated that you must first die to receive a glorified body (vv. 35-38, 42-44). Then he states in verse 50 that you cannot inherit the kingdom with a mortal body. The question naturally arises, "So what about those who are still alive when Christ returns? Will they be excluded from the kingdom?" Paul goes on to reveal the answer to this mystery by basically saying, "Look, those who are still living will not have to die to receive an immortal body but will be transformed while they are still alive." Not everyone will have to die first, but everyone will be changed (v. 51). He goes on to say that this is because the perishable *must* put on the imperishable and the mortal *must* put on immortality (v. 53). When Jesus returns, even those who are still alive and in their mortal bodies must be changed in order to inherit the kingdom, because it is itself imperishable (v. 50).

Verses 23 and 24 have been used by some to teach the multiple-phase coming that we discussed in the preceding section. With reference to the resurrection these verses state, *"But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at his coming, then comes the end."* Now this does show multiple resurrections: Christ, those who belong to him at his coming, then the end. In other words, the resurrections are: the Lord himself, the first (general) resurrection, then the second resurrection. This does not show multiple phases within the first resurrection but seems to preclude such an idea.

If the resurrection of *"those who are Christ's at his coming"* takes place at the rapture, then John's *"the first resurrection"* (Rev. 20:5) also takes place at the rapture, or it isn't even mentioned here. It would seem strange that what John called *the first resurrection*—as if it were a very significant event—would be completely overlooked by Paul's discussion of the order of resurrections. If indeed *"those who are Christ's at his coming"* is a reference to the second coming, then either Paul does not mention the rapture (which would seem equally as unlikely, since he is writing to the church), or the rapture occurs at the second coming. That the latter is true is demonstrated by statements in the book of Revelation showing that those who die during the Tribulation would by all means be included in *"those who are Christ's."* This is seen in passages such as Revelation 6:11; 7:14; 12:11, 17; 14:12; 17:6; 20:4.

Matthew 24:29-31

[29] But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [30] And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. [31] And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. [Matt. 24:29-31]

As was already pointed out, this passage has more similarities to the one rapture passage (1 Thess. 4:17) than any other passage in the Bible. However, since it explicitly states that it is *"after the tribulation,"* pre-tribulationists claim that this is *not* the rapture, although they readily claim 1 Corinthians 15:52 as a rapture passage based on fewer similarities. Since they go to great lengths attempting to prove this, I must take some time in reaction to their position.

One reason they deny that this is the rapture is the claim that Jesus was talking to the Jews here, and this passage does not apply to the church. Well, Jesus was talking to the disciples (Matt. 24:3), and it is true that they were Jews. Naturally, the gospel had not been given to the Gentiles yet, so most everything Jesus said was to Jews. Jesus lived in Israel. Whenever he spoke he usually was talking to Jews. If Jesus talking to Jews makes a passage

inapplicable to us, then that would take out most of the gospels. In this instance, though, he was talking specifically to the disciples in private (v. 3). These men were the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). In my opinion they represent the church better than anyone. Furthermore, Jesus had already told Peter “*Upon this rock I will build my church*” in chapter 16 and given the disciples instructions for church discipline in chapter 18.⁹

This discourse was prompted by their question, “*What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*” (v. 3). The disciples were asking him what they should look for in connection with his coming. Jesus went on to describe the Great Tribulation. The disciples lived after this awaiting his return and telling others about it. It does not seem reasonable to think that this was not really the coming they were to look for. Why answer them with a description of the Great Tribulation followed by a description of his coming in the clouds—with the sound of a great trumpet and the gathering his elect—if really they were going to miss all this by means of a pre-tribulation rapture? Would this not be what they went out and taught the church just a short time later?

Also, they asked him about events concerning *sunteleias tou aionos*, “*the end of the age.*” Four chapters later, Jesus ends the Great Commission with the statement, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to **the end of the age***” (Matt. 28:20, emphasis added) using the exact same words and speaking to the same people, and everyone applies the Great Commission to the church. Furthermore, they were instructed to make disciples, baptize, and teach until “*the end of the age*” (28:19-20). The most reasonable conclusion is that the church will be here until *the end of the age*.

Probably the main reason pre-tribulationists claim that this passage pertains only to Jews is that Jesus gives special instructions to those who will be in Judea at this time (Matt. 24:16-20). It seems that the reason he does so is because this is when the antichrist will break his covenant with Israel and set up the “*abomination of desolation*” (v. 15). This is very central to this time period and even marks the midpoint of the seven years. It is a key event worth discussing whether we are talking to the church or to Israel. Also, the Old Testament was the only Bible the disciples had at this time. He naturally builds on what they already knew. They had read in the book of Daniel about this time of great distress “*such as never was*” and about the abomination of desolation (Dan. 11:31; 12:1-2, 11). Jesus is adding to the knowledge that they already had.

Since the antichrist will be in Judea at this time as he sets up the abomination in the temple, and immediately after this he will begin persecuting God’s people, then we would expect the Lord to give instructions for those who will be in Judea at this time. This does not make the entire discourse a “Jewish passage.” Also, part of the disciples’ question was about the destruction of the temple (v. 3) which is in Israel.

It is also interesting that Jesus said in verse 9, “*Then **they** will deliver you to tribulation*” [*emphasis added*]. *Tribulation*, then, is not the “wrath of God” but is the persecution of man. *Tribulation* is what Christians suffer for being Christians.¹⁰

Also, we have no reason to believe that what Jesus taught here is any different from what Paul later taught about the Lord’s coming (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:23, 50-52). If I was a first-century Christian and heard Paul talk about the *parousia* of the Lord for the first time, I would have no idea that he meant a completely different event. He uses the same words, describes the event in an amazingly similar manner, and gives us no reason to think he had anything else in view. Basically, what I am saying is that the eschatology Jesus gave Paul is the same as the eschatology he gave the other disciples here.

Furthermore, when we combine this with what Jesus went on to say about his *parousia*, it seems inescapable that he is speaking of the same event:

[27] *For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. . . . [30] And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. [31] And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. . . . [37] For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. [38] For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, [39] and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. [40] Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.*

⁹ 16:18 and 18:17. It is also interesting these two verses are the only occurrences of the word *ekklesia* (church) in any of the gospels.

¹⁰ See chapter 5, *Tribulation*.

[41] *Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.*¹¹ [Matt. 24:27, 30-31, 37-41]

Luke 17:26-31

In a very similar account in Luke, Jesus again compared his coming to the days of Noah and of Lot:

[26] *And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: [27] they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, **until the day** that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. [28] It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; [29] but **on the day** that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. [30] It will be just the same **on the day** that the Son of Man is revealed. [31] **On that day**, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out. [Luke 17:26-31, emphasis added]*

Here Jesus shows that God came in judgment on the same day that the believers were saved. Then he says that “*it will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed*” (v. 30). My point is that the rescue and the destruction both happen on the same day. Both the rapture of the church and the coming in judgment happen at the same time. When Jesus returns it will be a “*blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13) to those who know him and judgment to those who don’t (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

2 Peter 3:8-15

[8] *Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day. [9] The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare. [11] Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness, [12] while waiting for and hastening the coming day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the heavenly bodies will melt away in a blaze! [13] But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.*

[14] *Therefore, dear friends, since you are waiting for these things, strive to be found at peace, without spot or blemish, when you come into his presence. [15] And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him, [16] speaking of these things in all his letters. [2 Peter 3:8-15, NET Bible]*

This passage has traditionally been understood to be describing events after the Millennium. Because of this, the “day of the Lord” has been understood to continue through the Millennium with these events taking place at the end. It is difficult to understand in this way when it is described as coming “*like a thief*” (v. 10). Plus this phrase “*like a thief*” is usually used with reference to the second coming of Christ. Also, Peter seems to be describing an event that the believers are presently waiting for (v. 12, 14) and which is connected with God’s promise (v. 9). Furthermore, he states that Paul wrote of these things in his letters as well. All of this does not support a post-millennial event. Their basis for a post-millennial understanding is the reading “burned up” in verse 10 (KJV, NASB¹²). This is translated from the word *katakaio*. The idea is that if the earth is going to be burned up at this time, then this could not take place before the Millennium, because Christ is going to rule on this present earth for a thousand years during the Millennium.

However, the reading “burned up” is probably not original. There are several variant readings in the Greek manuscripts, and many translations favor the reading *heuresetai* such as the NIV and NET, “laid bare;” the NLT, “exposed to judgement;” the NRSV, “disclosed;” and the NAB, “found out.” This is also the reading favored by the NA27/USB4 Greek Text. Concerning this variant the NET Bible comments:

¹¹ For a discussion of this word “*taken*” see chapter 5, *Take*.

¹² The NASB reads, “some ancient manuscripts read *discovered*” in a footnote.

One of the most difficult textual problems in the NT is found in v. 10. The reading *heurethesetai*, which enjoys by far the earliest and best support (aleph B K P 1241 1739text *et alli*) is nevertheless so difficult a reading that many scholars regard it as nonsensical. As Bauckham has pointed out, solutions to the problem are of three sorts: (1) conjectural emendation (which normally speaks more of the ingenuity of the scholar who makes the proposal than of the truth of the conjecture, e.g., *arga* for *erga* with the meaning, “the earth and the things in it will be found *useless*”); (2) adoption of one of several variant readings (all of which, however, are easier than this one and simply cannot explain how this reading arose, e.g., the reading of P72 which adds *luomena* to the verb - a reading suggested no doubt by the threefold occurrence of this verb in the surrounding verses: “the earth and its works will be found dissolved”; or the simplest variant, the reading of the Sahidic MSS, *ouch* preceding *heurethesetai* – “will not be found”); or (3) interpretive gymnastics which regards the text as settled but has to do some manipulation to its normal meaning. Bauckham puts forth an excellent case that the third option is to be preferred and that the meaning of the term is virtually the equivalent of “will be disclosed,” “will be manifested.” Thus, the force of the clause is that “the earth and the works [done by men] in it will be stripped bare [before God].” We might add that the unusualness of the expression is certainly in keeping with Peter’s style throughout this little book. Hence, what looks to be suspect because of its abnormalities, upon closer inspection is actually in keeping with the author’s stylistic idiosyncrasies. The meaning of the text, then, is that all but the earth and men’s works will be destroyed. Everything will be removed so that humanity will stand naked before God.¹³

On the translation “celestial bodies” for *stoicheia* in verses 10 and 12, it comments:

Grk “elements.” Most commentators are agreed that “celestial bodies” is meant, in light of this well-worn usage of *stoicheia* in the second century and the probable allusion to Isa 34:4 (text of Vaticanus). See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 315-16 for discussion.¹⁴

If we accept the reading of these translations, then the passage is not saying that the earth will be burned up but that the heavenly bodies will be dissolved, and the earth and mankind will alone be left before God. This is quite in harmony with Jesus’ description of the second coming. Alluding to Joel 2:31, he said that the sun and moon will be darkened and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matt. 24:29). Isaiah 34:4 and Revelation 6:14 add that during this time the sky is rolled up like a scroll (compare “the heavens will disappear,” 2 Peter 3:10). The Old Testament ties the darkening of the sun and the moon with the stars as well in passages such as Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7-8, and Joel 2:10; 3:15. Isaiah 60:2 states that darkness will cover the earth before the glory of the Lord appears. Joel 2:2, Zephaniah 1:15, and Amos 5:18-20 describe the day of the Lord as a day of darkness.

So if the events in this passage take place at the second coming, and if these events were what the believers in this epistle were to look for, then our hope and our expectation is the second coming. That this is true is evident in such places as verses 9 and 10: “*The Lord is not slow concerning his promise . . . but the day of the Lord will come.*” If we follow Peter’s flow of thought, it as though the promise in view here is fulfilled in the day of the Lord. The church is to be looking for and expecting the event described in this passage. Verses 12 and 14 state that we should be “waiting for and hastening” the coming of this day. Concerning the latter verse the NET further comments:

The Greek verb used in the phrase *strive to be found* is the same as is found in v. 10, translated “laid bare.” In typical Petrine fashion, a conceptual link is made by the same linkage of terms. The point of these two verses thus becomes clear: when the heavens disappear and the earth and its inhabitants are stripped bare before the throne of God, they should strive to make sure that their lives are pure and that they have nothing to hide.¹⁵

The conclusion we must draw, then, is that the church is expecting to see these events take place and should strive to be ready when they happen. This would hardly be applicable with a pre-tribulation rapture.

¹³ *NET Bible* (N.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 1999), 732, note 2. For information see: www.NETBible.com.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 731, note 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 732-733, note 17.

3. Order and Scope of the Book of Revelation

Introduction

Attempts to understand the book of Revelation have given rise to a great deal of controversy. I think it is because of this controversy and the variety of opinions surrounding this book that so many ministers avoid it altogether. This is very sad because it is the only book in the Bible which gives a specific blessing to him “*who reads and those who hear*” its words (1:3), and it is an epistle written to the church (v. 4). The questions I want to address in this chapter are as follows: Does this book apply to us? What is its order? When does God’s wrath take place?

Does This Book Apply to Us?

First, I would simply like to point out that the book of Revelation is an epistle, written to churches. It begins with the same customary greeting usually found in the other epistles (1:4) and ends with an exhortation as usual (22:10-21). The first verse states that the purpose of this book is to show God’s servants the “*things which must shortly take place*” (1:1). Then three verses later we read, “*John to the seven churches that are in Asia*” (1:4). It seems that, in context, the servants he is referring to are those in the churches. Seven times Jesus exhorts us to “*hear what the spirit says to the churches*” and then follows by “*to him who overcomes . . .*” It seems to me that in the remaining chapters he goes on to describe what it is we are to overcome (the Great Tribulation). Even in the final chapter of the book Jesus again states its purpose, “*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches*” (22:16). It just seems logical to conclude that the events written in this book are for the church.

Various Opinions on the Order

The opinions range from a strict chronology to the idea that there is no sequence of events whatsoever. The first view is easily dismissed. For instance, Revelation 14:1 has Jesus standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 Jews when the bowls are still yet to come in chapter 16 and his return in chapter 19. Revelation 11:15-19 states that Jesus has now received the kingdom and begun to reign, that the time for the dead to be judged has come, and that it is time to destroy those who destroy the earth. All of these are events which take place after the Tribulation. Revelation 7:15-17 seems to depict eternity (compare to 21:3-7). Revelation 10:11 states that with the seventh trumpet “*the mystery of God is finished.*” In 13:1 John first sees the Beast coming out of the sea which would be very difficult to reconcile with what has been going on if this is when he first appears (especially chapter 12). Revelation 12:4 is best understood as taking place in eternity past with verse 5 as a reference to the birth and ascension of Christ (although some would understand it differently). Revelation 14:17-20 describes the harvest by the angels which Jesus said would take place at the “*end of the age*” (Matt. 13:39). Both 14:8 and 18:2 describe the fall of Babylon as if it has just taken place. Revelation 6:12-14 describes the great cosmic signs which Jesus said would take place “*after the tribulation*” (Matt. 24:29). And both 6:14 and 16:20 describe the disappearance of all mountains and islands.

Among those who fall between a strict chronology and the idea of no sequence whatsoever, there are two major schools of thought concerning how to understand the order of the book of Revelation. The first is the view which sees the seals, trumpets, and bowls as sequential with some of the events in between as being interruptions of this order. The second view sees the seals, trumpets, and vials as all leading up to the end. It sees this as the same story told from different points of view, similar to the different accounts in the gospels. Each time John describes events that lead up to the return of the Lord and the end of the age from a different perspective.

A Biblical Approach

Now the difference between these two views is very important to the discussion. I will attempt to show that the second is to be preferred. This is based primarily on the similarity of events described towards the end of the seals, trumpets, and bowls as demonstrated in the following chart:

Sixth and Seventh Seal	Sixth and Seventh Trumpet	Seventh Bowl
1. A great earthquake	1. A great earthquake	1. A great earthquake

2. Voices, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake 3. Angel cried with a loud voice 4. Every mountain and island taken out of their way 5. --- 6. --- 7. Day of his wrath is come 8. Silence in heaven 9. Great multitude in heaven 10. ---	2. Lightnings, voices, thunderings and an earthquake 3. Great voices in heaven 4. --- 5. Great hail 6. Temple opened; voices heard 7. Thy wrath is come 8. Mystery of God is finished 9. Time of the dead 10. Kingdom given to Christ	2. Voices, thunders, lightnings and a great earthquake 3. Great voice from heaven 4. Every island fled away and the mountains were not found 5. Great hail 6. Great voice out of the temple 7. Fierceness of his wrath 8. "It is done" 9. First resurrection (ch. 20) 10. Christ reigns 1,000 yrs (ch. 20)
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Although some of these are debatable there seems to me to be overwhelming evidence here linking these events. The most logical understanding is that these are describing the same events with some giving more details and some leaving out details. This is more plausible than the idea that all these things take place multiple times. We could look at several of these events, but I want to focus on one in particular: I grew up on an island. Imagine that every island on the planet disappears. Now imagine that every mountain is leveled. Think about it: THIS CANNOT HAPPEN TWICE! Mountains and islands do not "grow back" after five or six years. If nothing else, at least these must both describe the same event.

Not only do these events parallel each other, but they parallel other passages. For instance, the sixth seal parallels the description of the end by both Jesus and Joel:

Joel (Joel 2)	Jesus (Matt. 24)	John (Rev. 6)
1. In the last days (Acts 2:17) 2. Sun into darkness, moon into blood 3, 4. Wonders in heaven . . . 5. . . . and in the earth 6. Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD	1. After the tribulation 2. Sun darkened, moon does not give its light 3. Stars fall from heaven 4. Powers of the heavens shaken 5. --- 6. Then the Son of Man appears in the sky	1. At the sixth seal 2. Sun became black, moon like blood 3. Stars of heaven fell to earth 4. Sky receded as a scroll 5. Mountains, islands disappear 6. Jesus is seen / day of his wrath has come

Jesus plainly states that the great cosmic signs would take place "after the tribulation." John has them occurring at the sixth seal. We must therefore conclude that at least the sixth seal is after the Tribulation. Furthermore, the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15-19) clearly describes the end and is said to finish the mystery of God (10:7) as was already stated.¹⁶ Also, as John is approaching the seventh trumpet he is told that he "must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (10:11). This leads me to believe that the sixth and seventh trumpets bring us to the end, and then John starts back over from a different perspective listing different events with the bowls.¹⁷ Finally, it seems likely that this seventh trumpet parallels Paul's last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and Jesus' trumpet in Matthew 24:31.

Literary Flow vs. Chronological Order

Although I do not see a strict chronology, I do see a literary flow of the book of Revelation (characters are usually introduced into the story before they are discussed, such as the 144,000 in chapter 7 and the great harlot in chapter 17). This order may seem strange to us, but it is not foreign to other passages in the Bible and fits very well with the Semitic style of the book. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus describes the first 3 ½ years (beginning of sorrows) followed by the second 3 ½ years (Tribulation) and finishes with the coming of the end (Matt. 24:4-14). Then he

¹⁶ Compare to Daniel 9:24, where the completion of the seventieth week is said to "seal up vision and prophecy."

¹⁷ Even pre-tribulationist J. Dwight Pentecost recognizes this point, cf. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 187-188.

returns to discuss the midpoint in verse 15 and the second 3 ½ year period again in verse 21. This is similar to the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Moses tells the whole story and then returns to expound on the creation of man in more detail. This is how I understand the seals, trumpets, and vials. They are increasingly more telescopic of events leading up to the end.

Not Appointed to Wrath?

A major tenet of pre-tribulationism is based on exemption from divine wrath. Passages such as Romans 5:9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 teach that God has spared believers from his *orge* (wrath) which he will pour out on unbelievers. The question then becomes, “When does the *orge* of God take place?” If we accept the order of Revelation laid out in the preceding section, then it only takes place after the Tribulation. This word is found only six times in the book, and it is always used in a post-tribulation setting.¹⁸ It accompanies the cosmic signs and revealing of the Lord at the sixth seal (6:16, 17); it is found after the seventh trumpet (11:18); it is used to describe the final torment of believers in hell (14:10); it is found after the seventh bowl (16:19); and it is used in connection with Christ’s second coming (19:15). Therefore, there is no problem reconciling the promise of deliverance from God’s *orge* with a post-tribulation rapture. Every time this promise is made, this word *orge* is used. If the *orge* does not take place until after the tribulation is over and the church is raptured, then God’s promise is kept.

Also, as Romans 5:9 points out, exemption from God’s wrath is not some unique, special promise to the church but is connected with salvation and justification. The reason we are spared from God’s wrath is because Jesus paid the penalty for us. If there will be Christians on the earth during this time period then they, too, would be exempt from God’s wrath. These so-called “tribulation saints” are said to: “*have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (7:14); overcome by “*the blood of the Lamb*” (12:11); “*hold the testimony of Jesus*” (12:17); “*keep their faith in Jesus*” (14:12); “*die in the Lord*” (14:13);¹⁹ be “*witnesses of Jesus*” (17:6); be “*beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus*” (20:4); and possibly be our “*fellow servants and brethren*” (6:11) if you include the church with “*those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained*” (6:9). These people are Christians in every sense of the word. Concerning the body of Christ, Paul says “*that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Cor. 12:26-27). One of the most troubling teachings of pre-tribulationism to me is a divided body of Christians with some on earth suffering while the rest of us just watch from a safe distance.²⁰

Some would still object because they see God doing things *throughout* the Tribulation. My response to this is twofold. First, I do admit that some of these “plagues”²¹ seem too universal for believers not to be affected. Israel felt the effects of the first three plagues while they were in Egypt, but God was pouring out his wrath on the Egyptians, not them. Noah was at least inconvenienced by the effects of the flood. Did God pour out his wrath on Noah? Or did God spare Noah? (2 Peter 2:5) Lot was affected by God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, but he, too, was the object of salvation, not wrath (2 Peter 2:7).

Second, as was the case with Israel in Egypt, we do see God being selective at times. One place this is seen is when the bowls are poured out. The first is said specifically to affect those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image (16:2), the third bowl is said to be for those who killed the saints and the prophets (vs. 5-7), the fourth results in men blaspheming God and not repenting of their deeds (v. 9) and the fifth is poured out on the throne of the beast (v. 10). These things are shown to be aimed at sinners, not believers.²²

¹⁸ The word *thumos* is also translated “wrath” and is found in places such as chapter 16. This will be discussed in chapter 5.

¹⁹ Compare to the rapture passage where Paul says that the “*dead in Christ will rise first*” (1 Thess. 4:16).

²⁰ Pentecost appeals to this same passage to refute the partial-rapture theory which he says “dismembers the body” and “is impossible” but then has no problem with the church in heaven while “tribulation saints” are on the earth suffering, cf. *Things to Come*, p. 160, 212.

²¹ This is what the book of Revelation calls them (9:18, 20; 11:6; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18).

²² For a further discussion of wrath, see chapter 5, *Wrath*.

4. Various Themes

Day of the Lord

The “day of the Lord” has traditionally been taken by pre-tribulationists to refer to the entire Tribulation period, the second coming, and the millennial kingdom. Although not all hold to this in its entirety, most do see it as a reference to a period of time and not a specific day. It is my understanding, however, that this is simply a reference to the return of the Lord, the day that he comes back. Just the phrase *day of the Lord* is difficult for me to see as relating to the Tribulation period, which is described as a time of lawlessness (Matt. 24:12), when the “*man of lawlessness*” is ruling the world (2 Thess. 2:3-4) and destroying God’s people (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7). If anything, this would be the day of Satan. But a closer look at the references to the *day of the Lord* will show not only that it does not need to include the Tribulation or the Millennium but that it is best taken to refer simply to the second coming.

When we look in the Old Testament, the *day of the Lord* is characterized by destruction (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15); fury and anger (Isa. 13:9); doom (Eze. 30:3); clouds and darkness (Eze 30:3; Amos 5:20); people trembling (Joel 2:1); retribution (Obad. 1:15); and it is said to be great and awesome (Joel 2:11; Mal. 4:5).²³ These references could easily refer to the return of Christ when he comes “*in flaming fire taking vengeance*” (2 Thess. 1:7-8 KJV), and when people are crying out, “*Hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*” (Rev. 6:16,17). Joel actually seemed to equate the day of the Lord with the battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9-16). Also, Jesus said that the sun would turn into darkness right before he returned. This idea of darkness is routinely connected with the return of the Lord and the *day of the Lord*.²⁴

In the New Testament the *day of the Lord* is mentioned seven times, with both a positive and a negative tone. The first is Peter quoting Joel 2:31 in Acts 2:20. The next three are in the Corinthian epistles and are given as an expectation of believers. Paul says that the Corinthians were “*awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 1:7-8).²⁵ He delivered one brother to Satan “*so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 5:5, NET)²⁶ and also said that “*we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus*” (2 Cor. 1:14). In all of these cases this seems to be a day they were expecting.

The next two references to the *day of the Lord* are in the Thessalonian epistles. The first is 1 Thessalonians 5:2, in which Paul told the believers that “*you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night*” (1 Thess. 5:2). Two verses later he says, “*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief*” (v. 4, emphasis added). Why would he say that the day would not overtake them *like a thief* if it was not going to overtake them at all? In the rest of the chapter he goes on to talk about how they are of the day and of the light, not of the darkness as others. His point is that the day would not take them unexpectedly, because they knew what to look for. It seems very clear that they were expecting to see this day. As was already pointed out in chapter 2, the *day of the Lord* in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and in 2 Peter 3:10 as well seems to be something they were expecting.²⁷

Furthermore, the New Testament also refers to the *day of Christ* as a hope for believers. Some have tried to make this a different event from the *day of the Lord*, but as we saw, 1 Corinthians 1:8 makes reference to the “day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” while 2 Corinthians 1:14 refers to the “*day of the Lord Jesus*.” These seem to tie both of them together. The title *Lord* is used almost exclusively of Christ in the New Testament. The classic statement of faith is “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). If *Lord* and *Christ* are the same person I find no problem with *day of the Lord* and *day of Christ* being the same event, especially when we see that it is variously referred to as *day of Jesus Christ, his day, day of God, great day, day of wrath, the day, that day, day of redemption, and day of visitation*.

²³ I am fully aware of the range of meaning for the Hebrew *yom* (day) which can simply mean “time.” However, I am also aware that the usual meaning for *yom* as well as for the Greek *hemera* is simply a “day.”

²⁴ Concerning this day of darkness, see also chapter 2, 2 Peter 3:8-15.

²⁵ In this passage as well as 2 Cor. 1:14 in which the English reads “the day of our Lord,” the Greek literally reads “*the day of the Lord of us*.” In both instances, then, the *day of the Lord* phrase is present.

²⁶ Some manuscripts read “day of the Lord Jesus,” but “day of the Lord” is the reading favored by the USB4/NA27 Greek Text.

²⁷ See the discussions in chapter 2, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 and 2 Peter 3:8-15.

Finally, Joel states that the great cosmic signs will take place “before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Joel 2:31), and Jesus says that they will occur “immediately after the tribulation” (Mat. 24:29). Therefore, the day of the Lord must be after the Tribulation. The second to last verse in the Old Testament says that Elijah the prophet will come before the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), and even most pre-tribulationists see Elijah as one of the two witnesses during the Tribulation (Rev. 11). Also, as mentioned earlier, Paul says that the day of the Lord will not come before the antichrist is revealed (2 Thess. 2:1-3).

Last Trumpet

Paul told the Corinthians that we would be changed “at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52). Just his use of the word *last* requires: 1). a series of trumpets; 2). this one to be the last of that series; and 3). that no other trumpets follow. This one word makes an “any moment” rapture impossible. In order for there to be a *last*, there must be a *first*. Even if they are only a moment apart, the first trumpet must be blown before the rapture can take place.

Furthermore, it is quite interesting that John also tells us about a series of trumpets, the last of which describes the end, the resurrection, the time to reward the saints, the time that Christ receives the kingdom of the world, and the completion of the mystery of God (Revelation 10:7; 11:15-19).²⁸ It also follows right on the heels of at least two dead saints being raised and raptured (Rev. 11:11-12). It seems that both Paul and John were describing the same thing unless there is reason to believe otherwise. Even if they were not, Paul’s “last trumpet” would not really be the last if there were seven more to follow during the Tribulation.

Last Day

Four times in John 6 Jesus said that he would raise up those who believe in him *on the last day* (vv. 39, 40, 44, 54, see also 11:24). First of all, those who believe in him would certainly include those who are saved during the Tribulation. Jesus also said that this resurrection would include “all that He [the Father] has given Me” (v. 39). If they are raised at the same time as all other Christians then it can only be after the Tribulation.

I fail to see how the *last day* could refer to a day at least seven years before the return of Christ, which is called *the end of the age* (Matt. 24:3). We know Joel prophesied about events in the *last days* which still await fulfillment in the Tribulation (Acts 2:17-21). It would seem to me that the *last day* could only be the last of these *last days*. Some would object and say that this refers to the last day of the *church age*, which they claim is before the Tribulation. The problem is that not only is the phrase *church age* not found in Scripture, but Jesus only speaks of two ages: this age and the age to come (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). If there are only two ages mentioned in Scripture, and this age ends with the post-tribulation return of Christ (Matt. 24:3, 29-30), then the *last day* must also be after the Tribulation.

The Restrainer

Paul said that someone (or something) is presently restraining the antichrist from being revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-8). Although many pre-tribulationists would now disagree, it has been claimed by some in the past that this restrainer is the church or the Holy Spirit (which those in the church possess). This would mean that we would be gone before the antichrist comes on the scene. The difficulty here is that Paul refers to this restrainer both in the neuter (v. 6) and in the masculine gender (v. 7). Whatever is in view, this cannot be the church, for the word *ekklesia* (church) is feminine. The *pneuma* (Spirit) is neuter, and, although many have tried to see references to it in the masculine, Wallace has demonstrated that these are better taken as simple agreement with the masculine “comforter” than personification of the Spirit.²⁹ Besides, it is not possible for the Spirit to be removed from the earth during the Tribulation, since Joel prophesied that it would be during the Tribulation that God would pour out his Spirit on all mankind (Joel 2:28).

Furthermore, the Spirit is never seen fighting or restraining demonic forces in Scripture. This job is always done by angels. God never handles the devil or his demons directly but leaves this to his angels. He doesn’t “get his hands dirty” with him so to speak. Even when the devil is cast into the abyss, this is done by an angel (Rev. 20:1-3). Almost every time Michael the archangel is mentioned in Scripture, he is fighting the devil and his demons.³⁰

²⁸ See chapter 3, *A Biblical Approach*.

²⁹ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 331-332.

³⁰ See Daniel 10:13, 21; Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7. The only exception would be the verse we discuss in Daniel 12:1.

Furthermore, Daniel says that the “*time of distress*” begins right after Michael “*gets up*” (Dan. 12:1). The Greek in our passage for “*taken out of the way*” (*ek mesou genetai*) could also be translated “*until he is out of the way*” (RSV), “*steps out of the way*” (NLT), “*until he be gone*” (Darby) or “*till he may be out of the way*” (YLT). Basically, it is ambiguous whether he is taken away or leaves himself. Possibly, the masculine reference is to Michael personally, and the neuter is to the angelic army as a whole. The antichrist would not be revealed, then, until Michael and his forces get out of the way. However, I would not push this interpretation but provide it only as a possibility. I wish merely to show that this does not refer to the church or the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Thessalonians, “*you know what restrains*” (v. 6). I suppose that if it was necessary for us to know who this was, God would have told us as well.

The Legitimacy of Parallels (Similar or Identical?)

Another accusation pre-tribulationists make against post-tribulationists is that we take similar events and make them identical (such as the rapture and the second coming).³¹ My first response, as I mentioned in chapter 2, is that they connect passages as the same event based on much fewer parallels (such as 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thess. 4:17). Obviously, no one description of the Lord’s return is exhaustive of all that will be taking place. We must put them together to get the whole picture. If we applied their line of thinking to the gospels we would conclude that such things as the various resurrection accounts or even the accounts of the Olivet Discourse are not the same.³² The only time we should conclude that two accounts can not be referring to the same event is when we see a definite contradiction. I think that all the parallels we have looked at combined are strong evidence for a post-tribulation rapture. The burden of proof rests upon them.

³¹ Of course, we would say that they turn the same event into different events.

³² Compare Matt. 28 with Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20-21, also Matt. 24:1-25:46 with Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36.

5. Key Greek Words and Terms

Coming, *parousia*

BAGD:

1. *presence*
2. *coming, advent* as the first stage in presence
 - A) of human beings, in the usual sense
 - B) in a special technical sense of Christ (and the Antichrist).
 - a) of Christ, and nearly always of his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age.³³

Louw-Nida:

- a. (presence) the presence of an object at a particular place – ‘presence, being at hand, to be in person’
- b. (arrival) to come to be present at a particular place – ‘to come, to arrive, to come to be present’³⁴

Liddell-Scott:

1. a being present, presence
2. arrival, the Advent – N.T.³⁵

Vine:

literally, “a presence,” *para*, “with,” and *ousia*, “being” (from *eimi*, “to be”), denotes both an “arrival” and a consequent “presence with.”³⁶

Thayer:

1. *presence*
2. the presence of one coming, hence *the coming, arrival, advent*³⁷

This word, *parousia*, is the word usually translated “coming” with reference to the coming of Christ. The nature of this word alone does not lend itself too easily to a pre-tribulation rapture theory in which Jesus only temporarily appears in the sky. The idea is “he has come, he has arrived, he is now here.” This is the word used in the two major “rapture passages” (1 Cor. 15:23, 50-52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17) as well as others as the hope for the church (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:12; 1 John 2:28). It is also used in passages where it clearly relates to the second coming after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Peter 3:12). The same could be said for *apokalupsis*, “revelation,” and *epiphaneia*, “appearing.”³⁸

Once again, the most reasonable conclusion is that they refer to the same event, unless there is reason to believe otherwise. Pre-tribulationists claim that *parousia* is used differently for Christ’s coming with his saints and Christ’s coming for his saints. The problem with this is that in the chapter before the one clear rapture passage, the *parousia* which Paul had in mind had already been described as “with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13), and even in the rapture passage it states that he will bring the dead in Christ with him when he comes for the church (4:14-16).

Furthermore, if Paul uses the word *parousia*, “coming,” to refer both to the second coming after the Tribulation and to a pre-Tribulation rapture, then how would even the Thessalonians he was writing to know when he was referring to each one? If these are different events we would expect him to differentiate more clearly. Or, to

³³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*; 2d ed.; ed. by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 629-630.

³⁴ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Louw-Nida Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*; 2nd ed, from BibleWorks version 4.0 (Big Fork MT: Hermeneutika Bible Research Software) CD-ROM.

³⁵ *The Abridged Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon*, from BibleWorks version 4.0 (Big Fork MT: Hermeneutika Bible Research Software) CD-ROM.

³⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 111.

³⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, ncd.), 490.

³⁸ See chapter 2, “The Rapture,” *A Bad Term?*

put it differently, if post-tribulationists are guilty of confusing the rapture and the second coming then how can you blame us when even Scripture does not make a clear distinction?

Tribulation, *thlipsis* – NOT Wrath

BAGD:

rare in extra-Biblical Greek, and there literally, *pressing, pressure*. Frequent in the LXX and our literature, in the figurative sense of *oppression, affliction, tribulation*.³⁹

Louw-Nida:

trouble involving direct suffering – ‘trouble and suffering, suffering, persecution’⁴⁰

Liddell-Scott:

literally *pressure, a pressing together*; only figuratively in the NT of suffering brought on by outward circumstances *affliction, oppression, trouble* (Rom. 5:3); especially to be regarded as participation in the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24); of sufferings of the end time, *tribulation, trouble, distress* (Mark 13:19); *called the great tribulation, the time of great trouble* (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14).⁴¹

Vine:

primarily means “a pressing, pressure,” anything which burdens the spirit.⁴²

Thayer:

properly *a pressing, pressing together, pressure*; in Biblical and ecclesiastical Greek metaphorically, *oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits*.⁴³

This word is found forty-five times in the New Testament. In the majority of these instances it is used of *Christians who are suffering for being Christians*. Tribulation is *for* believers. I could find only three clear examples where it is used of unbelievers.⁴⁴ Jesus said, “*In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). It would seem that the Great Tribulation is merely the time of *great* pressure for Christians. Persecution has been bad in the past, and it is still bad in other countries today, but there is yet to come a time of “*great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will*” (Matt. 24:21). But this is NOT the wrath of God. Even regarding this time period Jesus states that the tribulation in view is by unbelievers on believers: “*Then **they** will deliver you to tribulation*” (v. 9, emphasis added).

Christians have suffered persecution since the church began. History shows that when the church was regularly being persecuted they were able to endure, but when persecution let off for a good period of time and then began again—every time without fail—*multitudes* would renounce their faith in Christ. If we are going to go through this time period, then it is of utmost importance that we are psychologically ready for it. There is no excuse for this to take us by surprise. Jesus said, “*Behold, I have told you in advance*” (Matt. 24:25).

Wrath, *orge/thumos*

BAGD:

orge – *anger, indignation, wrath*

1. as a human emotion
2. of the wrath of God . . . of the divine reaction towards evil; it is thought not so much as an emotion as in terms of the outcome of an angry frame of mind (*judgment*), already known to OT history, where it sometimes runs its course in the present, but more often is to be expected in the future, as God’s final reckoning with evil.

thumos –

³⁹ BAGD, 362.

⁴⁰ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁴¹ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁴² Vine, 17

⁴³ Thayer, 291.

⁴⁴ Rom. 2:9, 2 Thess. 1:6 and Rev. 2:22.

1. *passion, passionate longing*
2. *anger, wrath, rage*⁴⁵

Louw-Nida:

orge –

- A) anger – a relative state of anger – ‘anger, fury’
- B) punishment – divine punishment based on God’s angry judgment against someone – ‘to punish, punishment.’ Though the focal semantic element in *orge* is punishment, at the same time there is an implication of God’s anger because of evil.

thumos –

- A) fury – a state of intense anger, with the implication of passionate outbursts, - ‘anger, fury, wrath, wrage’
- B) intense desire – an intense, passionate desire of an overwhelming and possible destructive character – ‘intense desire, overwhelming passion’⁴⁶

Liddell-Scott:

orge –

1. *passion, anger, wrath*⁴⁷

thumos –

1. *the soul, heart of desire for meat and drink*
2. *as the seat of anger*⁴⁸

Vine:

orge –

originally any “natural impulse, or desire, or disposition,” came to signify “anger,” as the strongest of all passions.

thumos –

“wrath” (not translated “anger”), is to be distinguished from *orge*, in this respect, that *thumos* indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation, while *orge* suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge. *Orge* is less sudden in its rise than *thumos*, but more lasting in its nature. *Thumos* expresses more the inward feeling, *orge* the more active emotion. *Thumos* may issue in revenge, though it does not necessarily include it. It is characteristic that it quickly blazes up and quickly subsides, though that is not necessarily implied in each case.⁴⁹

Thayer:

orge –

In Biblical Greek *anger, wrath, indignation . . . anger exhibited in punishing*, hence used for the *punishment* itself. . . . The *orge* attributed to God in the N. T. is *that in God which stands opposed to man’s disobedience, obduracy* (especially in resisting the gospel) *and sin, and manifests itself in punishing the same.*

thumos –

1. *passion, angry heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again, (orge on the other hand, denotes indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled.)*⁵⁰

The first thing I want to do is to distinguish *both* of these words from *thlipsis*, “tribulation.” We are not appointed for wrath, but we are to expect tribulation. Second, I am not saying that although believers are exempt from God’s *orge*, they will have to endure his *thumos*. I am merely saying that we are only specifically promised to

⁴⁵ BAGD, 578-579 and 365.

⁴⁶ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁴⁷ Liddell-Scott also gives the meaning “*natural impulse or propension: one’s temper, temperament, disposition, nature.*” However, it reaches further back in time to cover classical Greek as well and this meaning no longer seems to be in usage by New Testament times. The same is true for *thumos* which it also defines as “*soul, breath, life.*”

⁴⁸ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁴⁹ Vine, 26-27.

⁵⁰ Thayer, 452 and 293.

be “*delivered from*” the *orge* of God (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10). It is this slow, steady anger of God that has been building up for thousands of years which will be released on unbelievers when he returns. A believer cannot experience this. This would apply whether they were saved before or during the Tribulation. The anger of God is against sinners, unbelievers.⁵¹ As already pointed out, *salvation* entails being saved from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9). One cannot hold that people will be saved during the Tribulation and yet will experience the wrath of God. If this is possible, then in what sense are they saved?

Now concerning the word *thumos*, I do not believe that Christians will experience this either, but the way in which we are spared is different. As discussed earlier, when we read about the bowls of God’s wrath (*thumos*) being poured out in Revelation 16, we see the selective nature of this judgment. I do realize that there may be some overlap in these words. My point is not to deny any similarity.⁵² I am merely saying that when the Scripture speaks of *the wrath to come* or *the day of wrath* (*orge* in both cases) it is specifically making reference to the second coming when Jesus comes “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thess. 1:8, KJV). This is what believers are promised to be “*delivered from*” (1 Thess. 1:10). I believe we will also be spared from the less intense but more immediate *thumos* of God in a way similar to the way in which he spared Israel from the plagues in Egypt. Even so, we would not *have* to be spared from the *thumos* for his promise to be fulfilled.

Take, *paralambano*

BAGD:

1. *take (to oneself), take with or along with* accompanying of the persons
2. *take over, receive*⁵³

Louw-Nida:

to take or bring someone along with⁵⁴

Liddell-Scott:

1. *to receive from* another
 2. *to take upon oneself, undertake*
 3. *to take in pledge, Id.: also, to take by force or treachery, get possession of*
 4. *to receive by hearsay or report, to ascertain*
 5. *to take up, catch up*
- II. c. acc. pers. *to take to oneself, associate with oneself* as a wife or mistress, an adopted son, a partner or ally
2. *to invite*
 3. *to wait for, intercept*⁵⁵

Vine:

besides its meaning “to receive,” denotes “to take to (or with) oneself”⁵⁶

Thayer:

1. *to take to, to take with one’s self, to join to one’s self*
2. *to receive something transmitted*⁵⁷

The purpose for the study of this word is that, with reference to the second coming, Jesus says that in some cases, one will be “taken” and another left (Matt. 24:37-42). Pre-tribulationists have claimed that this means that those who are “taken” are killed in judgment. They appeal to the fact that Jesus had just said that when the flood came many people were “taken” away. Now a casual reading of the English would seem to support their view;

⁵¹ This is also illustrated in passages such as John 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 8:1; Eph. 2:3; 5:6.

⁵² I also realize that twice Revelation speaks of the *thumos* of his *orge* (16:19; 19:15) but, as already shown, this occurs after the tribulation when we will no longer be here.

⁵³ BAGD, 619.

⁵⁴ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁵⁵ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁵⁶ Vine, 615.

⁵⁷ Thayer, 484.

however, in Greek these are two completely different words which only overlap in the vague sense of our English word “taken.” The first is *airo* which can mean “to take away, remove . . . even by killing,”⁵⁸ but the second is this word *paralambano* which means “to receive, or to take with oneself.” It is used of Joseph “taking” Mary to be his wife (Matt. 1:20, 24) and later of “taking” her and baby Jesus into Egypt (2:13, 14). Again it is used of the devil “taking” Jesus to the temple and to the mountain (4:5, 8), of Jesus taking Peter, James and John with Him (17:1; 26:37), of Him “taking” the twelve (20:17). It is also used for “receive,” as in John 1:11, “*He came unto His own and His own received Him not.*”⁵⁹ The meaning of “receive” or “take with” fits with every occurrence of this word in the New Testament, and most demand such a meaning. The meaning of “take away” is nowhere found. Now this is very significant in our understanding of this passage. Jesus is going to receive these people or take them with himself. Once again this fits in nicely with the rapture, but in context the *parousia* in view is “*after the tribulation of those days*” (Matt. 24:29).

Now Concerning, *peri de*

Without going into a detailed discussion of the meaning of this phrase, it has been stated by pre-tribulationists that, since this is Paul’s usual way of introducing a new topic (*now concerning . . .*),⁶⁰ he begins to speak of something different in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 from what he had been talking about in the preceding chapter. They claim, therefore, that the day of the Lord must be different from the rapture.

Now I would agree with them that Paul does change his topic somewhat, but the two are not completely unrelated. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul begins with “*Now concerning the things about which you wrote . . .*” Most scholars would agree that not only what immediately follows but most of the rest of the book is a response to what they had written him. What I see in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 is not that Paul now moves on to discuss a different event but that he now moves to discuss the “*times and seasons*” of that event. He says “*Now concerning the times and seasons,*” not, “*Now concerning the day of the Lord.*”

Falling Away, *apostasia*

BAGD:

rebellion, abandonment in the religious sense, apostasy . . . Of the rebellion caused by the Antichrist in the last days 2 Thess. 2:3.⁶¹

Louw-Nida:

to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands.⁶²

Liddell-Scott:

late form of *apostasis, defection.*⁶³

Vine:

“a defection, revolt, apostasy,” is used in the NT of religious apostasy . . . In 2 Thess. 2:3 “the falling away” signifies apostasy from the faith. In papyri documents it is used politically of rebels.⁶⁴

Thayer:

*a falling away, defection, apostasy; in the Bible namely from the true religion: Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3.*⁶⁵

⁵⁸ BAGD, 24.

⁵⁹ These are not isolated passages. I used the occurrences in Matthew to show how the same author used this word and the one in John to show that it also has the meaning of “receive.”

⁶⁰ This is illustrated best in 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1 & 12.

⁶¹ BAGD, 98.

⁶² Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁶³ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁶⁴ Vine, 223.

⁶⁵ Thayer, 67.

Whether this refers to a rebellion, a religious apostasy, or a combination of the two in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is not relevant to the discussion. The point here is that some pre-tribulationists have tried to say that *apostasia* refers to a physical “departure.” Since Paul said that the day of the Lord will not come until the *apostasia* comes first, they see this as a reference to the rapture. Their basis for this meaning is that the cognate verb, *aphistemi*, can mean “to depart.” In addition, every English translation before the King James version translated this word as “departure.”

Now, taking the last point first, I would think that, since most modern translations are done by pre-tribulationists, if they could legitimately translate this as “departure,” then they would. However, not one of them does. Second, it is fallacious to define a noun by its cognate verb, especially when we have many occurrences of the noun itself in extra-biblical literature to examine for its meaning. This is called the “root fallacy.” However, even the *primary* meaning of the verb is “to revolt.”⁶⁶ Wayne House argues for the meaning of “departure” at length but can not provide one example of this meaning in the Koine period.⁶⁷ It is interesting that Paul does not use the word *apostasia* for his own departure (2 Tim. 4:6), and neither does Peter (2 Peter 1:15). Third, in addition to the fact that knowledge of Koine Greek has come a long way since before the KJV, simply because they translated this word as *departure* does not mean that they had a *physical* departure in view but probably meant a departure from the faith. This is strengthened by the fact that no one was a pre-tribulationist at this time, which we will discuss in chapter 7.

Descend From, *katabaino ek*

BAGD:

*come down, go down, climb down*⁶⁸

Louw-Nida:

to move down, irrespective of the gradient – ‘to move down, to come down, to go down, to descend’⁶⁹

Liddell-Scott:

1. *to step down, go or come down*
2. *to go down from the inland parts to the sea*
3. *to come to land, get safe ashore*
4. *to g down into the arena*
5. of an orator, *to come down from the tribune*⁷⁰

Vine:

“to go down” (*kata*, “down,” *baino*, “to go”), used for various kinds of motion on the ground (e.g., going, walking, stepping), is usually translated “to descend.”⁷¹

Thayer:

to go down, come down, descend - 1. of persons, 2. of things⁷²

The definitions given above are simply for the word *katabaino*. The preposition *ek* means “*from, out of, away from.*”⁷³ Taken together, this means that the Lord will be *coming down out of or from* heaven when we are caught up to meet him (1 Thess. 4:16-17). If he is *coming down* then where is he going? Why would he be coming down from heaven if not to return to the earth? Pre-tribulationists ask why we are caught up only to turn around, but they must answer why Jesus is here in movement, coming down from heaven only to turn around. Obviously one of us has to turn around once we meet. My point is that the word used for our meeting (*apantesis*) combined with the fact that Jesus is already on his way down when we meet him strongly favors a return for us, not for him.

⁶⁶ BAGD, 126.

⁶⁷ H. Wayne House, “Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 261-296. It is interesting that Paul Feinberg, also a pre-tribulationist, takes the opposite position in the very next chapter of the same book.

⁶⁸ BAGD, 408.

⁶⁹ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁷⁰ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁷¹ Vine, 160.

⁷² Thayer, 329.

⁷³ BAGD, 234.

To Meet, *apantesis*

BAGD:

meeting only in the formula *eis apantesin* (LXX frequently in friendly and hostile meaning) *to meet*⁷⁴

Louw-Nida:

to come near to and to meet, either in a friendly or hostile sense⁷⁵

Liddell-Scott:

as an action *a meeting, encountering; eis apantesin – to meet*⁷⁶

Vine:

“a meeting” It is used in the papyri of a newly arriving magistrate. “It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary” (Moulton, *Greek Test. Gram.* Vol. I, p. 14).⁷⁷

Thayer:

*a meeting; eis apantesin tinos or tini – to meet one.*⁷⁸

Moulton-Milligan:

The word seems to have been a kind of *technical term* for the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary – a usage which accords excellently with its NT usage.⁷⁹

NIDNTT:

The use of *apantesis* in 1 Thess. 4:17 is noteworthy. The ancient expression for the civic welcome of an important visitor or the triumphal entry of a new ruler into the capital city and thus to his reign is applied to Christ. “Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord (*eis apantesin tou Kyriou*) in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.” The same thoughts occur in the parable of the ten virgins. The virgins leave to meet the bridegroom (*eis apantesin tou nymphiou*) i.e. the Lord, to whom they wish to give a festive reception (Matt. 25:1).⁸⁰

The point I wish to make here is that according to the papyri, which are what Vine, Moulton-Milligan, and NIDNTT are making reference to,⁸¹ this word came to have the idea of welcoming the arrival of someone important into the city. The purpose of the “meeting” is to escort the person in. This word occurs only three times in the New Testament and this meaning fits very well every time. It is first used in the parable of the ten virgins, in which they are told, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him” (Matt. 25:6). The bridegroom has been gone, and, as they see him returning, they run out to meet and welcome him. The second time this word is used is when Paul is on his way to Rome, and the disciples in the city went out to Three Inns “to meet” him. Once again, he is on his way to Rome and they go out to meet him halfway. The final use of this word is in the one rapture passage, in which the Lord is *descending from* heaven and we are caught up “to meet” him. As has been pointed out, he is already coming down when we are caught up to welcome him back. This answers the question some have asked, “Why are we

⁷⁴ BAGD, 80.

⁷⁵ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁷⁶ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁷⁷ Vine, 402.

⁷⁸ Thayer, 54.

⁷⁹ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 53.

⁸⁰ Colin Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 325.

⁸¹ The papyri are the common Greek writings which have only been discovered about 150 years ago. These are held to be much more reliable in defining New Testament words than the literary works which the other lexicons are referring to. This is because it has now become evident that, unlike the other literary writings, the New Testament was written in the language of the common people.

caught up only to immediately return?" We are caught up to welcome our Lord back to earth. In fact, I believe that this is the very *purpose* for the rapture.

Remain, *perileipomai*

BAGD:

*remain, be left behind*⁸²

Louw-Nida:

to be left behind, with the implication of continuing to exist⁸³

Liddell-Scott:

*to be left remaining, remain over, survive*⁸⁴

Vine:

“to leave over”⁸⁵

Thayer:

*to leave over; pass. to remain over, to survive*⁸⁶

This word is found only twice in the New Testament, both times in our rapture passage, and both times as a passive participle. This is where Paul speaks of the ones “*who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord . . .*” (1 Thess. 4:15 & 17). My point here is simply that the meaning of this word fits very nicely with a rapture that occurs right after a time of great persecution (tribulation). Those who are “*alive and remain*” will be those who have survived the persecution of the antichrist when the Lord returns.

⁸² BAGD, 648.

⁸³ Louw-Nida, CD-ROM.

⁸⁴ Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

⁸⁵ Vine, 521.

⁸⁶ Thayer, 503.

6. But What About . . .

Imminency?

Webster: *imminent* –

1. likely to occur at any moment; impending
2. projecting or leaning forward; overhanging⁸⁷

I had to use an English dictionary here, since the Bible never uses the word *imminent* in relation to the Lord's coming. The teaching of imminency is based upon passages of Scripture which describe his coming as something we are to expect, as if it could be soon. The question then becomes whether this is an any-moment coming (meaning 1) or an overhanging, possibly-in-the-near-future coming (meaning 2). If we define *imminent* by meaning 2, then post-tribulationists have no problem with the term.

Jesus said that no man knows the day nor the hour of his return (Matt. 24:36; 25:13; Mark 13:32). He also said that, at least to some, it would come unexpectedly (Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:40). He also exhorted believers to "watch" for his coming (Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35, 37; Luke 21:36). I believe that this is what *most* people have in mind when you mention the Lord's imminent return. A good pre-tribulationist, however, will not appeal to these passages to support his doctrine, because these are all in reference to the post-tribulational *second coming*. This is seen in one of the classic books on pre-tribulation dispensationalism, *Things to Come*, under the title "The Doctrine of Imminence," where the only passage Pentecost gives to support imminency from the gospels is John 14:2-3.⁸⁸ The other passages he appeals to are Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 6:14; Jas. 5:8 and 2 Peter 3:3-4.⁸⁹ I would like to look at each of these passages and see if they demand an "any-moment" coming.

Although I will return to discuss other implications of this passage later, John 14:2-3 in no way implies that this return must be at any moment. Jesus simply states, "I am going, but I will be back." Even if this was referring to a pre-tribulational coming, it need not be "at any moment."

Acts 1:11 states that after Jesus was taken up into the sky, the disciples continued to look up into heaven. Then the angels who were standing by told them Jesus would one day "*come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.*" I believe the idea is that, just as he ascended from the earth up into the sky, he would one day come back from the sky down to this earth. If anything, this sounds like a post-tribulational coming. The fact that the disciples were told that Jesus would one day return is no different from what he had been telling them himself. Unless Pentecost is referring to the fact that they are left gazing up into heaven, (which suggests more their amazement with what just transpired than the idea that they expected him immediately to come back down), I see nothing in this passage which implies an any moment return.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 does not teach an any-moment return but rather states that at the resurrection those who are still alive will be *changed* instantly: "*we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.*"

Philippians 3:20 states that we "*eagerly await*" for the return of the Lord. The point Pentecost is trying to make is that we would not "eagerly await" for an event which we knew could not happen at any moment. The problem with this is that this same word, *apekdexomai*, is used of God waiting for Noah to finish building the ark (1 Peter 3:20). Obviously God did not expect him to be done at "any moment."

Colossians 3:4 says that "*when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*" This says nothing about the nearness of the event but simply states that when Jesus is revealed to the world, we also will be revealed with him in glory.⁹⁰ Actually, that fact that we will be revealed with him seems to demand a post-tribulational setting. It is after the Tribulation that Jesus Christ will be revealed to the world in all his glory and it is the hope of the believer to take part in this event as well (Rom. 8:19; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7; 4:13).

In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul mentions how the Thessalonians had turned to God to serve him and "*to wait for His Son from heaven.*" This is similar to the argument used in Philippians 3:20, but, since this word is found only here in the New Testament, I will have to refer to the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—for comparison. It is found only a handful of times there as well, where the meaning also seems to be "to wait" with

⁸⁷ *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), 957.

⁸⁸ Pentecost, 203.

⁸⁹ Actually, Pentecost lists 1 Peter 3:3-4, which has nothing to do with the return of the Lord. I assume he meant 2 Peter.

⁹⁰ For the discussion on how we are caught up only to return and be revealed to the earth, see chapter 5, *To Meet..*

some expectation, but one verse of particular interest is Job 7:2. Here Job speaks of a “*hired man who eagerly waits for his wages.*” Obviously a hired man would be anxious to receive his wages but would not expect them at “any moment.”

In 1 Timothy 6:14, Paul urges Timothy to “*keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Apparently what Pentecost is implying is that if Timothy had known that there would be a time period before the Lord came back, then he would not have kept the commandment “*without stain or reproach.*” This is a common idea which pre-tribulationists use to discredit post-tribulationism and to support imminency. The idea is that imminency urges us to holy living while post-tribulationism leads people to grow cold. I will discuss this in the next chapter, but let it suffice to say that I think Timothy had enough love for God to live for him whether he was to return at any moment or was going to be a while. Paul’s point in this passage is that our struggle is over once Jesus comes back. This is when we will receive glorified bodies, and sin will no longer have power over us.⁹¹

James 5:8 states that “the coming of the Lord is near.” Well, was it truly near or was James simply telling them this so that they would be constantly expecting it? Obviously the latter is ridiculous. In some real way, the coming of the Lord was near to them. Jesus says that he is coming quickly four times in the book of Revelation and yet it has already been close to two thousand years and he still has not come. Peter addresses this dilemma in 2 Peter 3:3-4, and answers it directly in verses 8 and 9: “*But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*” I believe that the idea is that in the scope of eternity this really is a short time.

Furthermore, to say that the coming of the Lord is *near* still does not require an “any moment” coming. It is no wonder that Pentecost did not quote the preceding verse, “*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains*” (5:7). James’ point here seems to be the exact opposite. We are to expect a delay, but we should still be patient.

Now, since Pentecost also uses the 2 Peter passage to support an any-moment rapture, we must address it as well. This passage states that in the last days mockers will be saying, “*Where is the promise of his coming?*” (2 Peter 3:3-4). I fail to see how this requires an imminent coming but could easily see why people would be saying this who had been taught a pre-tribulation rapture. Once the Tribulation has begun, and Christians are still here who had been telling everyone that they wouldn’t be, I could easily see mockers come and say, “Oh, really? What happened?”

Also, if teaching that certain events must be fulfilled before the Lord returns in is opposition to some fundamental truth then no prophecy in the New Testament would be possible. Jesus told Peter that he would die as an old man by crucifixion (John 21:18-19). He also told the disciples to go and preach the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), which would require a considerable amount of time. Paul said that in latter times some would depart from the faith and teach false doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Peter also prophesied that later there would be false teachers “*among you*” (ie. in the church) whom many would follow (2 Peter 2:1-2). None of this could be possible if they were expecting the Lord to return at any moment. They expected more time to transpire before the coming of the Lord.

Returning to what I said in the beginning, most people think of Jesus’ statements about no man knowing when he will return and his exhortations to watch for him when they think of imminency.⁹² However, since these are in clear reference to the second coming after the Tribulation, this is a problem for pre- and post-tribulationists alike. It is difficult to explain how the second coming could be “imminent” when we know it will take place exactly seven years after the Tribulation begins.

However, this is more of a problem for pre-tribulationists because they use imminency to support their position, and Jesus’ description of the second coming is more “imminent” than any which they claim as reference to the rapture. In other words, their doctrine is self defeating. If they reject post-tribulationism because of the fact that the rapture is imminent, then they must explain how the second coming, after the Tribulation, could also be

⁹¹ See especially 1 Corinthians 15:53-57.

⁹² One of these is of particular interest. In Revelation 16:15, immediately before the seventh bowl is poured out at the very end of the Tribulation, Jesus says “*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.*” (NKJV) The is the terminology so often connected with the church waiting for his return, yet this is at the close of the Tribulation, right before the second coming.

imminent. Post-tribulationists must also deal with these passages as well, but, since we don't rely on imminency to defend our position, leaving them as an unknown mystery neither helps nor hurts us.

However, I will attempt to reconcile this the best that I can. First, it seems possible that the day will only come unexpectedly on unbelievers and those who are not watching. In fact, this is why Jesus exhorts us to watch. In his parable about the fig tree he states that just as you know summer is near by watching the leaves on the tree, "*so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door*" (Matt. 24:33). When he said "watch," he obviously didn't mean to literally look up in the sky watching for his return. Rather, it seems that he meant "watch for the signs which will be taking place." In another parable he told the disciples that "*if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into*" (v. 43). It was as though he were saying, "You don't know, but you should know," or "It is not possible to know now, but as that day approaches it will become evident to those who are watching." Paul said that the day of the Lord would overtake the world "like a thief," but, since the believers were of the light, it would not overtake *them* "like a thief" (1 Thess. 5:2-4). Jesus told the church at Sardis that, "*if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you*" (Rev. 3:3, NKJV).

Finally, as was discussed previously, it seems that Paul's primary reason for writing 2 Thessalonians is to refute the idea that the day of the Lord could now be present (2:2).⁹³ He says emphatically that that day will not come until the man of sin is revealed and the great apostasy takes place (2:3). Also, as I said before, the plain reading of the first two verses is that he connects *his coming* and *our gathering* with the *day of the Lord*.⁹⁴ This would completely exclude a pre-tribulation rapture.

Mortals in the Kingdom?

Another argument which pre-tribulationists use to refute post-tribulationism is that, if all believers are raptured after the Tribulation, and all unbelievers are killed, then from where do the mortals come to populate the kingdom? However, first it must be demonstrated that all unbelievers are killed. Revelation 19:21 states that after the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, "*the rest were killed with the sword.*" On the surface this seems to support their view, but a closer look will show that in context "*the rest*" refers to "*the kings of the earth and their armies*" (v. 19), not every living person on the earth. Even so, it is more likely that this means that the rest *who were killed* were killed with the sword. In other words, the antichrist and the false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire alive, but he used the sword on the others.

Also, concerning the Millennium, Zechariah 14:16 reads, "*Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*" Here are people who had gone to war against Jerusalem and are now living in the Millennium. The fact that they were fighting Jerusalem shows us that they were not Christians. I see no other conclusion but that these were unbelievers who lived in the Tribulation and are now in the Millennium.

Furthermore, Daniel states that the other three beasts (kingdoms) which he saw were allowed to live after Christ returns and the antichrist is destroyed (Daniel 7:11-12). These are kingdoms which are on the earth while the antichrist is and yet live on into the Millennium.⁹⁵ These are also distinguished from the kingdom which is given to "the saints" (vv. 17-18). In fact, this book is very clear that all other kingdoms will serve and obey this kingdom (vv. 14, 26-27). It seems from these two passages, then, that nations or "kingdoms" will live on into the Millennium and be subject to the kingdom and rule of Christ.

Revelation 3:10?

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. [Rev. 3:10]

⁹³ Or "at hand," see chapter 8, *Present or Imminent?*

⁹⁴ See the discussion in chapter 2, *2 Thessalonians 2:1-3*.

⁹⁵ Some have thought that these beasts represent ancient kingdoms, such as in chapter 2. I fail to see how this could be if Daniel says that they are alive while the fourth beast (antichrist) is and even live on after he is destroyed (vv. 11-12). Furthermore, although the Hebrew word *qum* ("will arise," piel imperfect, v. 17) could be taken as past, present, or future, the context favors a future translation. By this time the Babylonian empire had already come to an end, so it could not have been one of the four kingdoms in view.

This has been said to be one of the most disputed passages concerning the rapture question. I have read countless pages in which scholars from both sides trace the meaning of the words *tereo* and *ek*, “*I will keep you from,*” from classical Greek, through the Septuagint and the New Testament and on through the patristic writings. The question has been whether the idea of emergence on account of a prior existence is in view or whether it refers to keeping the believers in a position outside of the field of testing.

I avoid the discussion all together because I see no reason to apply this verse to us. Seven times John is instructed to write a specific message to a specific church, “*to the angel of the church in . . .*” He then writes a message which pertains particularly to them and follows it with an exhortation to anybody who has at least one ear. (This would even include Van Gogh.) This pattern is followed seven times. We would not apply the prophecy to the church at Smyrna to us which says, “*Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (2:10). This is obviously written to a specific church in a specific time. The rules of grammatical-historical interpretation (which pre-tribulationists emphasize so strongly) demand such an interpretation.

One interpretation that many pre-tribulationists appeal to states that not only were these literal churches but that they also represent successive “church ages” (which does not grow out of the grammatical-historical method but is quite allegorical). Now even if this were true, it would still be a secondary meaning, and they would first need to explain how this promise was fulfilled to the literal church at Philadelphia. First we see how they were “kept from” the hour of trial; then we can discuss how we will be kept from it. Furthermore, this promise is one based on merit: “*Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you . . .*” (emphasis added). It was not a universal promise to all the churches but was to *you* (singular in the Greek), Philadelphia.

Also, the analogies do not hold up very well. For instance, Tim Lahaye puts Smyrna as the “persecuted church” (100-312),⁹⁶ the time when believers were being put to death for their faith, but it is in the church at Pergamum where Antipas, the Lord’s faithful martyr, is killed. I also find it interesting that he connects Sardis, which he calls the “dead church,” with the church of the Reformation. Also, Thyatira is connected with the medieval church (the most corrupt point in history), but the Lord actually gives them much praise (except for Jezebel).

Another problem with this view is that nobody wants to be Laodicea. If Philadelphia is the church of the rapture then you have a church in the Tribulation. Although Jesus does say that the church at Laodicea is “lukewarm,” he still calls them a church and addresses them just like the others, finishing as usual with a promise to “*him who overcomes.*” Also, every church except Sardis and Philadelphia was rebuked, not just Laodicea.

Revelation 4:1-2?

[1] After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." [2] Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. [Rev. 4:1-2]

Although this is being abandoned today, some pre-tribulationists have used this verse as symbolic of the rapture of the church. They then conclude that, since John sees the Tribulation after this, then the rapture of the church must be before the Tribulation. First of all, it would not be *possible* for John to be taken to heaven after these things took place, since he had to be in heaven to see them. Of necessity, he had to have been taken up before. Also, most pre-tribulationists see the twenty-four elders as also being the church. If John represents the rapture, then why are the elders already present and seated when he arrives?

In addition, it seems that when John is first taken up he is taken into eternity. He obviously was not taken up to heaven in his own time. Jesus told his disciples that in his kingdom they would be seated on thrones around him (Matt. 19:28). Also, the fact that “*every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them*” (Rev. 5:13) is here worshipping God would seem to demand that this be in eternity, when “*all things are subjected to Him*” (1 Cor. 15:28). I believe that he begins in eternity, and a drama is enacted before him in which they are going back and reliving what took place. In other words, they are telling the story once again of how things got to be they way they now are.

Also, the description of what takes place doesn’t line up too well with Paul’s description of the rapture. Instead of Jesus appearing in the sky, John merely sees a door open in heaven. We can not be gathered together to meet Jesus if he isn’t there. John does not actually hear a trumpet but he hears a voice which is *like a trumpet*, which is how he had already described the voice of Jesus (1:10).

⁹⁶ Tim Lahaye, *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 8.

Finally, it seems that Jesus tells John why he is being taken up, so that he could “*show you what must take place after these things.*”⁹⁷ Paul experienced a similar event and even used the same word used to describe the “catching away” (*harpadzo*) of the church and no one claims that this is the rapture (2 Cor. 12:2-4). The fact in both cases is that they were merely taken up to heaven in order to see things take place in heaven.⁹⁸

The Sheep and the Goats? The Wheat and the Tares?

Jesus taught that after he returns he would separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:30-46), the wheat from the tares (13:24-30, 36-43), or the good fish from the bad fish (13:47-50). He also said that the sheep would inherit the kingdom, and the goats would be thrown into eternal fire. If everyone is included in one of these two groups, and if this takes place immediately after he returns, then we are back to the question: “Where do the mortals come from to populate the kingdom?”⁹⁹ This is complicated by some other issues.

First of all, Jesus also said that no one can enter the kingdom who has not been born of water and Spirit (John 3:5), and Paul said that “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*” (1 Cor. 15:50). So if only born again, immortal believers can inherit the kingdom and everyone else is destroyed then this is just as much of a problem for pre-tribulationists. Second, the result of this judgment is eternal. Jesus said to the goats, “*Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt. 25:41). The *fire prepared for the devil and his angels* is undoubtedly the “*lake of fire*” in Revelation 20. This is where the devil is destined to go. The problem is that this judgment does not take place until after the Millennium is completed (Rev. 20). He also said that the wicked would “*go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*” (Matt. 25:46). Once again, where are the mortals in this scenario?

So I am suggesting two possibilities: 1). Not everyone is included in this judgment; 2). This is the same as the Great White Throne judgment, which takes place after the Millennium. Both of these options leave some unanswered questions but less than the pre-tribulationists’ position. Either way, simply because one position solves some of the difficulties of the other does not make it correct. This can only be used as supporting evidence once the teaching is established elsewhere (which hopefully is where the Bible speaks directly to the subject).¹⁰⁰

Daniel’s Seventieth Week? – for Israel Only?

It is not uncommon to hear pre-tribulationists state that Daniel’s seventieth week (the Tribulation) *pertains* to Israel or that this time period is *for* Israel (Daniel 9:24-27). They claim that because of this the church must be gone before this time period begins. Also, based on Romans 11:25-27, they say that the church will be on earth until the “*fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” but that after this God will *turn back* to Israel and begin dealing with them again.

It is true that Gabriel’s message to Daniel was about Israel, God’s people at this time. What would we expect? The church did not exist yet. But this alone does not require that the church leave the earth before God can fulfil his promise to Israel. I think God is big enough to do two things at once. God has already begun *dealing* with Israel and fulfilling promises he made to them. Just the fact that there *is* an Israel today is the fulfillment of prophecy. At the end of many of the books of the prophets in the Old Testament, God promised Israel that after they had been dispersed for a time he would bring them back to their homeland from various parts of the world. On May 14, 1948, Israel was once again declared to be a nation. God kept his promise. Therefore, since God is *dealing* with both Israel and the church right now, and both are on the earth, then what would preclude Israel and the church from coexisting during the Tribulation?

Second, concerning the passage in Romans, I fail to see how a pre-tribulation rapture could be when the “*fullness of the Gentiles has come in,*” since multitudes of Gentiles will be saved *during* the Tribulation (Rev. 7:9-14). But Paul answers this dilemma in the same passage. He states that once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, “*all Israel will be saved*” (Rom. 11: 26). He then states how this will happen, “*The deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.*” (26-27). So

⁹⁷ The NET Bible even translates this as, “*Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things.*”

⁹⁸ Or hear things in Paul’s case.

⁹⁹ See *Mortals in the Kingdom*, preceding section.

¹⁰⁰ For example, amillennialism answers many of the difficulties with premillennialism but must be rejected because it is not the teaching of Scripture.

when does the deliverer come from Zion and remove ungodliness from Jacob? This is a reference to the return of Christ after the Tribulation. Right up until he comes back, Gentiles may still “come in” and be saved.

John 14:1-3?

[1] Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. [2] In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. [3] If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. [John 14:1-3]

It has been argued from this passage that when Jesus comes for the church he will take us to heaven. It therefore follows that this can not be his post-tribulational second coming where he comes to the earth. This is a good example of the inconsistency with pre-tribulationism. Jesus is talking to his disciples, the same people he addresses in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25). The only reason pre-tribulationists conclude that this passage applies to the church but the Olivet Discourse does not is the bias which they bring to the passage.

However, a close look will show that he does not say that he will take them to heaven when he returns. He only states that he is leaving to go build them a house but that he will return so that they will all be together again. The question, then, is where will he be at his return? Now I readily admit that if this was the only verse in the Bible which described the Lord’s return, I would assume that he was saying that he was going to take us to heaven when he comes back. However, it does not *demand* such a meaning. When we interpret this passage in light of the many other passages which describe his coming as a return to the earth, then there is no problem seeing the same thing here. All that is required is that he and the disciples be together after he returns.

Also, it would seem strange for him to tell them about this house which they would go to live in when he comes, if they would live there seven years only to vacate it for a thousand. He does not present the New Jerusalem to his bride until after the Millennium (Rev. 21:2). What Jesus is doing here is discussing events which will take place in the future but not at the same time. Although he does not specify the “gap,” he does leave room for it.

Revelation 19 and 20?

Revelation 19 describes the second coming of Jesus Christ. Revelation 20 mentions the resurrection of believers. Since the rapture and resurrection of church saints takes place with Christ in the air, pre-tribulationists claim that this passage requires a separate event. If the resurrection takes place after Christ comes, then they would be right. However, a closer look will show that John does not actually tell us when the resurrection happens. It seems that when he sees those who had been beheaded for Christ they are already alive.

Some translations say that at this point they “*came to life*” (ingressive aorist), while others simply say that they “*lived*” (constative aorist). Both translations are possible, so this is a matter of interpretation. However, since *ebasileusan*, “*they reigned*,” is definitely a constative aorist,¹⁰¹ it is likely that “*lived and reigned*” is one thought. In other words John is saying that they “*lived and reigned*” with Christ for a thousand years.

The Two Mountain Peaks?

Some pre-tribulationists see the point I have been trying to make that the Bible does not teach two different comings but that the writers of Scripture only saw one event. Their answer to this is that prophets would sometimes see two events as one, the way that two mountain peaks appear to be right next to each other from a distance but are really far apart when you get closer. This is seen in Old Testament prophecies of Jesus’ suffering and reigning. Now I agree that this phenomenon does appear in Scripture and have used this argument in my discussion of John 14:1-3. Although I didn’t mention it, I also think this is a possibility for Jesus’ parables about the wheat and tares, good and bad fish, and the sheep and the goats.

However, when this happens the “gap” is only discovered after the fact or when it is later revealed in Scripture. The separation of Jesus’ return and the Great White Throne judgment by one thousand years is not taught until the book of Revelation. Therefore, if Paul—who is the only one who taught the “catching away” of the church—did not see that this was a separate event, then where else is it revealed in Scripture? If the writers of the New Testament did not see two comings, then how can we?

¹⁰¹ John is definitely not saying that their reign *began* for a thousand years, which would be the alternative.

Also, when this phenomenon of the two mountain peaks does occur, even though Scripture does not state that there is a gap, it does leave room for one. I do not believe that the passages which we have discussed do this. For example, as I already stated, Paul told the believers at Thessalonica that they would receive their rest *when* Jesus comes in flaming fire, taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Jesus specifically stated that his return would be after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:29-30), and I have tried to show that this is the same event which Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Necessary Time Interval?

Pre-tribulationists claim that there must be a time interval between the Lord's coming for his church and his return to earth in order for the rewarding of the saints and the marriage to take place. As far as the rewards go, I think Revelation 11:18 makes it abundantly clear that the rewarding of the saints takes place after Jesus returns to set up his kingdom. Jesus himself taught that at least part of the rewards would consist of levels of rulership in the kingdom (Luke 19:16-19). In no passage which mentions rewards for the saints do I see the need for this to take place before Christ returns. On the contrary, Paul calls our reward "*the reward of the inheritance*" (Col. 3:24) and at least part of our inheritance is the kingdom of God (Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 15:50; Gal. 5:21).

As for the marriage, I do not see why this needs to take place before the second coming either. In fact, in Revelation 19:7, right when Jesus is about to return, we are told that "*the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*" It seems here that she is ready for the Lamb to return so that she can get married. In 19:9, an angel tells John to write, "*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper [deipnon] of the Lamb.*" The only other time we find this word in the book of Revelation is after his return in verse 17 when an angel is inviting birds to the great supper (*deipnon*) of God.

No Church in Revelation 4-19?

Another reason some argue for a pre-tribulation rapture is that John does not use the word *ekklesia* "church" in Revelation 4-19 when he is describing the Tribulation. My first response to this is that John also sees scenes in heaven as well as on earth. If the church is in heaven, then why doesn't he see them there? Also, he does not use the word *ekklesia* in Revelation 19-22:15 either. This time period describes the return of the Lord, the marriage to his bride, his millennial kingdom and eternity. We would expect to see the church here as well. However, in all of John's writings¹⁰² he never uses the word *ekklesia* to refer to the universal body of believers but only to the individual assembly. John does, however, speak of the "saints" throughout the book of Revelation. And, as we have discussed earlier, at the close of the book of Revelation, Jesus says that these things were written for the benefit of "the churches" (Rev. 22:16).¹⁰³

Doesn't Post-Tribulationism Make Everybody Lukewarm?

The argument is that pre-tribulationism keeps everybody "on their toes," whereas post-tribulationism leads towards a lukewarm lifestyle. Well, I am a post-tribulationist and as I consider that I may one day suffer persecution and possibly even give my life for my faith in Christ, "lukewarm" is hardly the attitude which comes to mind. However, how people may respond is not the way in which we determine what is truth. Many people have set dates for the rapture in the past. Some took this seriously and adjusted their behavior accordingly.¹⁰⁴ However, just because it had a positive result does not make it true. I could just as easily argue that because of pre-tribulationism many people figure that they'll just wait and see what happens, and, if they miss the first boat, they'll just catch the second one. I think that Jesus warned us of the Tribulation so that we would prepare to endure this difficult time.

¹⁰² The gospel of John, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation.

¹⁰³ Here the plural "churches" is used as a collection of the individual assemblies to whom this book was written (as it is in 1:4).

¹⁰⁴ When I was young and naive, I myself was affected by the *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* scare.

7. History of Pre- and Post-Tribulationism

No Pre-Tribulationists Before the Last Century

It has long been pointed out that pre-tribulationism is a relatively new doctrine. With one possible exception, there is no record of it being taught before the past century. Now this does not in itself mean that it is false, but it should raise some eyebrows. If Peter and Paul taught pre-tribulationism, then we would expect the early church to have been pre-trib. This challenge intrigued Grant R. Jeffrey so much that he searched for over ten years for evidence of pre-tribulationism before the 1800s.¹⁰⁵ He found one person in the fourth century whom he claims was a pre-tribulationist.¹⁰⁶ This person is called Pseudo-Ephraem.¹⁰⁷ Since there had been no official translation of this work into English, Jeffrey had someone translate it for him.

According to his translation, Pseudo-Ephraem wrote “See to it that this sentence be not fulfilled among you of the prophet who declares: ‘Woe to those who desire to see the Day of the Lord!’ Because all saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.” Now on the surface this does seem to support Jeffrey’s claim. But a few things are worthy of note. According to this document, Pseudo-Ephraem correctly understood the Tribulation to refer to the second 3 ½ years of Daniel’s seventieth week, not in the common way it is used today, which is to refer to the entire period.

Also, in this same document Pseudo-Ephraem says, “Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been predicted by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled, and there is not other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom.” If Pseudo-Ephraem is claiming that some of the things which Jesus had predicted were then being fulfilled, then he thought that he was already in Daniel’s seventieth week. Also, he expected to see the antichrist before the Lord would return. At best, Pseudo-Ephraem was what we would today call a mid-tribulationist.

Furthermore, I think it is amazing evidence against Jeffrey’s position that in over ten years of research this is all that he could find. This shows that even if Pseudo-Ephraem was a pre-tribulationist, this was the exception, not the rule.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Grant R Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Midieval Church” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 105-125.

¹⁰⁶ Actually, he claims two. John Gill taught that after the church is caught up to meet Christ we will be taken away while the earth is burned and then return. Since this happens *after the Millennium*, John Gill could hardly be considered a pre-tribulationist.

¹⁰⁷ It was common in antiquity for unknown writers to write in the name and style of someone who was rather well respected, hence the name “Pseudo-Ephraem.”

¹⁰⁸ After I had completed the rough draft of this book I began to read some of the works of other post-tribulationists. Robert Gundry in his book, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), gives very convincing evidence that this passage has been taken out of its context and misapplied. A summary of his argument is as follows:

First, he states that “neither of the slightly separated passages cited for early pretribulationism mentions a coming of the Lord (as in the classic New Testament description of the rapture at 1 Thess. 4:16-17), or a resurrection of deceased Christians and translation of living ones (as in 1 Cor. 15:51-52; see again 1 Thess. 4:16-17 for the resurrection), or a heavenly destination (as in a pretrib understanding of John 14:2-4 and, often, of Rev 4:1-2).”

Second, just a casual reading of the some of the surviving works of the real Ephraem (which Pseudo-Ephraem is undoubtedly building on) will show that he was clearly a post-tribulationist. Ephraem expected to see the antichrist and stated that he would come before Jesus would. He said that “the tribulation will be upon us . . . the dawn of the morning will be near to us for the good news and joy of our Lord; as also our Savior said, . . . ‘For the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.’” Also that “before the rise of the Man of Wickedness we must teach and admonish people (about) his ways, and his deceits . . . Even our Savior said, . . . ‘If possible, he would lead astray many of the elect.’” This passage goes on to describe as our hope the coming of Christ after the tribulation. He also warns Christians against being deceived by “the Man of Sin” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-12). He says that Jesus spoke his command to flee to the mountains (during the tribulation, Matt. 24:16) “concerning the church.” Gundry also gives several other examples and states that such quotations could be multiplied indefinitely.

Finally, Gundry demonstrates that Ephraem very commonly spoke of “gathering” in reference to evangelism and conversion. Once again, many examples are cited. He even states that “This theme of Christ’s

The Early Church

In this section I wish to show evidence of post-tribulationism in the early church. From what we can gather, they expected to see and be persecuted by the antichrist before the Lord came back, and they expected to go through the Tribulation. They also applied passages which speak of the Tribulation to the church while pre-tribulationists would say that these are for the Jews or for the “tribulational saints” who will be on earth during that time.

The Didache (possibly before A.D. 100)

The author of this work substituted “church” for “elect” where Jesus spoke of gathering together his elect after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27).

So let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom [chapter 9].

Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou hast prepared for it [chapter 10].¹⁰⁹

Barnabas (A.D. 100)

The final stumbling-block approaches . . . [here the author begins to describe the beast, or antichrist]. We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole [past] time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh the sons of God. That the Black One may find no means of entrance [The Epistle of Barnabas, chapter 4].¹¹⁰

Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165)

The man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians . . . [Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 110]¹¹¹

Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202)

Tradition says that Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John the apostle.

And they [the ten kings] shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and put the Church to flight. After that they shall be destroyed by the coming of our Lord [Against Heresies 5.26.1].

But he [John] indicates the number of the name now [the mark of the Beast], that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is [Against Heresies 5.30.4].

For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in [the times of] which [resurrection] the righteous shall reign in the earth [Against Heresies 5.35.1].¹¹²

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220)

He equates Paul’s description of the rapture of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with Daniel’s description of the second coming.

For we shall, according to the apostle, be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord [even the Son of man, who shall come in the clouds, according to Daniel] and so shall we ever be with the Lord [Against Marcion 3.25].

gathering Christian believers to himself attains so much force that Ephraem even makes the Antichrist imitate that gathering with one of his own: ‘Like a partridge he [Antichrist] will *gather* to himself the sons of confusion.’” If there is any question on this matter the reader is urged to read Gundry’s book, *First the Antichrist* for himself.

¹⁰⁹ Taken from *Sage Digital Library*, CD-ROM

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

And that the beast Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God . . . Since, then, the Scriptures both indicate the stages of the last times, and concentrate the harvest of the Christian hope in the very end of the world [On the Resurrection of the flesh, chapter 25].

Now the privilege of this favor [to be clothed with immortality] awaits those who shall at the coming of the Lord be found in the flesh, and who shall, owing to the oppressions of the time of Antichrist, deserve by an instantaneous death, which is accomplished by a sudden change, to become qualified to join the rising saints; as he writes to the Thessalonians: [He goes on to quote 1 Thess. 4:15-17, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, chapter 41]¹¹³

Hermas (A.D. 160)

Happy are ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on, and happy they who shall not deny their own life [The Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 2:2].

Now some have seen a pre-tribulation rapture in the following passage:

Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly [Vision 4:2].

However, if we keep reading we see that the way of escape is by protection through the Tribulation:

For as gold is tested by fire, and thus becomes useful, so are you tested who dwell in it. Those, therefore, who continue steadfast, and are put through the fire, will be purified by means of it. For as gold casts away its dross, so also will ye cast away all sadness and straitness, and will be made pure so as to fit into the building of the tower. But the white part is the age that is to come, in which the elect of God will dwell, since those elected by God to eternal life will be spotless and pure. Wherefore cease not speaking these things into the ears of the saints. This then is the type of the great tribulation that is to come. If ye wish it, it will be nothing [Vision 4:3].¹¹⁴

However, this is not a doctrinal work but is the record of a vision which Hermas experienced. Here a woman is telling him these things which he is in turn recording. This entire book is riddled with very strange teachings.

Hippolytus (170-236)

Now, concerning the tribulation of the persecution which is to fall upon the Church from the adversary, John also speaks thus: “And I saw a great and wondrous sign in heaven . . .” That refers to the one thousand two hundred and threescore days [the half of the week] during which the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church [Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, chapters 60-61].¹¹⁵

Cyprian (A.D. 200-258)

With the exhortation of His fore-seeing word, instructing, and teaching, and preparing, and strengthening the people of His Church for all endurance of things to come, He predicted and said that wars, and famines, and earthquakes, and pestilences would arise in each place . . . as the Lord Himself promises, saying, “But when ye see all these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is at hand” [Treatise 7.2].

The day of affliction has begun to hang over our heads, and the end of the world and the time of Antichrist to draw near, so that we must all stand prepared for the battle . . . A severer and a fiercer fight is now threatening [Epistle 55:1].¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Victorinus (third or fourth century)

Victorinus wrote the first known commentary on the book of Revelation. Notice how he expects the church to see these events in his comments on 7:2:

He speaks of Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution [Commentary on the Apocalypse of John 7:2].¹¹⁷

Augustine (354-430)

But he who reads this passage [Daniel 12], even half asleep, cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church before the last judgment of God shall introduce the eternal reign of the saints [The City of God, Chapter 23].¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 2, (Grand Rapids MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 443.

8. Supporting Arguments

First, I would like to make it clear that I would not push any of these points. I merely give them as possible supporting evidence to what has already been said.

John Fellow Partaker in THE Tribulation

In Revelation 1:9 John tells the churches to which he is writing that he is their “*brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation¹¹⁹ and kingdom and perseverance¹²⁰ which are in Jesus.*” Later in this book he goes on to describe the events of the Tribulation which are followed by the kingdom. John seems to link himself to both of these.

Behold He Is Coming (Rev. 1:7)

In Revelation 1:7 John tells the churches, “*BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*” Why would John be telling them “Look, he is coming . . .” and then go on to describe the second coming if this was not something they expected to see? It seems that the second coming was an event they were “looking” for.

Don’t Take Them Out of the World (John 17:15)

When Jesus prayed for his disciples, he specifically asked the Father, “*I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one*” (John 17:15). The idea is that he didn’t want them removed from danger or temptation but rather for God to protect them. Would he not want the same thing for us? pre-tribulationism, on the other hand, teaches that God will “take us out of the world” instead.

Through Many Tribulations we Must Enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22)

Paul and Barnabas told the believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “*Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:21-22). It seems that they expected tribulation before they would enter the kingdom. It is also possible that their words may have been unintentionally prophetic, as those of Caiaphas were when he said “*it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish*” (John 11:50-51).

Signs of A Divine Visitation

I cannot help but notice that when the Lord came down upon Mt. Sinai the first time there was: the loud sound of a trumpet; lightnings; thunderings; an earthquake; a thick cloud; fire; smoke; thick darkness; and mankind trembling in the presence of God (Exodus 19:16-21; 20:18, 21). These same things are also found in many of the descriptions of the second coming, although pre-tribulationists do not recognize them as such.

Present or Imminent?

It appears that the word *enistemi* can not only mean “present” but also “imminent” or “at hand.” BAGD gives a secondary meaning of “*impending, be imminent,* with the connotation of threatening”¹²¹ as does Friberg,¹²² USB,¹²³ Louw-Nida, Liddell-Scott¹²⁴ and Berry.¹²⁵ Robertson and Lightfoot argue for the meaning “is imminent” in

¹¹⁹ Some English translations lack the definite article here, but it is present in the Greek.

¹²⁰ Compare to the *hupomone*, “patience of the saints,” which are in the Tribulation, where this same word is used (Rev. 13:10; 14:12).

¹²¹ BAGD, 266.

¹²² Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, from *Bible Works* CD-ROM.

¹²³ Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* for the USB Greek Text, from *Bible Works* CD-ROM.

¹²⁴ Louw-Nida, Liddell-Scott, CD-ROM.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 specifically.¹²⁶ Thayer gives the meaning “to stand in sight, stand near, be upon, impend, threaten”¹²⁷ for this verse, and it is translated “at hand” in the KJV, ASV, WEB, DRA, and NAB. If the meaning of “imminent” is meant in our passage, then it would read, “*With regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed . . . to the effect that the day of the Lord is imminent. Let no one in any way deceive you*” (2 Thess. 2:1-3, emphasis added).

Also, if the day of the Lord is the same as the second coming, as I have tried to demonstrate,¹²⁸ then the strict meaning of “present” would be difficult. How could the Thessalonians have been tricked into believing that the second coming was then “present,” since this will be an obvious event where “*every eye shall see him*” (Rev. 1:7)?

Israel in Egypt, Noah, etc.

It is not good practice to build our theology on types and shadows, but they can lend support to what is taught elsewhere. When we look at Israel in Egypt, we see that God did not remove them until after the plagues were over. Instead, he protected them from the worst of what took place. In the case of Noah, he went *through* the flood but was protected in the ark. Rahab went *through* the destruction of Jericho and was delivered afterwards. Daniel went *through* the lion’s den, but God protected him. His friends went *through* the fire, but God sent an angel to be there with them. The same could be said for Joseph in the pit and in the dungeon, the disciples in the storm, and many others. It just seems that God is more likely to see his people *through* hard times than around them.

¹²⁵ George Ricker Berry, *Greek-English New Testament Lexicon in The Interlinear KJV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 36.

¹²⁶ A. T. Robertson, *Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures*, from *Bible Works* CD-ROM.

¹²⁷ Thayer, 216.

¹²⁸ See chapter 4, *Day of the Lord*.