

Section Five –

Tribulation and the Rapture of the Church

Ideas:

1. Explain “watching” and use the diagram of proper eschatology with the pendulum showing extremes: Date and chart setting vs Denial and Ignorance...be humbling watching and comparing your time in history to the prophetic verses.
2. Match the Laodicean church comfort theology to the comfort of the rapture
3. Show premillennialism is first, second and third century church doctrine, but the pretrib rapture is not.
 - a. Show Amillennialism replaced premil after the rise of Constantine 325
 - b. Show Pretrib rapture does not exist until 1820-1830's.
 - c. Show Dominant rapture teaching was:
 - i. Clouded by amillennialism teaching of the roman catholic church and postmillennial teaching of the evangelical protestant churches
 - ii. Rapture was understood to be at the second coming in Greek orthodox who believed in the 7 year trib
4. Show Early church taught that the Church would see the antichrist
5. Demonstrate that Many teachings that are used to support the pretrib rapture are merely teachings that developed out of the assumption of pretrib rapture teaching was correct. If the preconceived understanding is pretrib rapture many, many things can begin to be assumed to be true:
 - a. Look at most arguments that favor pretrib and come against post-trib rapture
 - b. Look at Shon Anderson's arguments
6. Begin by assuming most readers understand end times that include a 7 year tribulation followed by a premillennial return of Christ...THEN, line up the general eschatology and characters with Islam's eschatology
7. Teach through (generally) to the sixth seal of Revelation to create the question, “Why does this sound like the return of Jesus?”
 - a. Then parallel all the references to Jesus' second coming and appearing to that sixth seal
 - b. Correlate the events in those parallel verses to show the consistency (as you have in the chart)
8. Point out the fact that suffering for the church is in store
9. Suffering in the church is:
 - a. Suffering is Promised in the scriptures
 - b. Suffering is promised by Jesus
 - c. Suffering was experienced by Jesus...his great victory over death came only after he had suffered
 - d. Experienced by the apostles and the first century church
 - e. Experienced by the church until Constantine's edict of Milan
 - f. Continued throughout church history to believers even at the hand of the church itself
 - g. Experienced around the world
 - h. Why would the Western church be the only place in our part of history and the only phase of church history where true believers were NOT persecuted?
10. The Western Church is going to crumble when:
 - a. The Seeker-friendly, mega-church members walk away from the church when opposition begins.
 - b. When the western Democracy based in Judeo-Christian principles is no longer a Democracy of freedom
 - c. When Islam rolls over our Western society

- d. When the antichrist persecution begins.
11. Create an eschatological timeline that matches the Scriptural references.

Awake and Watching

We are to be “watching” for the Lord’s return. This probably doesn’t mean we should be looking up into the sky like the disciples were at Jesus ascension. “Watching” means we should be living in a way that would please the Lord when he returns, but we should also be comparing our world events with Biblical prophecies to see if our current historical situation lines up with the biblical prophecies that speak of Jesus’ return. The reason we are told to be looking for the Lord’s return is to keep us alert so we are not surprised by the events that surround the day of his return. In Scripture the opposite of “alert” would be things like “drowsy”, “asleep” or “drunk”.

“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them **watching** when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.” (Luke 12:37-38, NIV)

“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds **awake** when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!” (Luke 12:37-38, ESV)

Jesus tells his disciples on a couple of occasions to be “watching” for his return. The word he uses in Luke 12:37 above is the Greek word **gregoreo** which means “to watch”. It is used in the New Testament in refer to “keeping awake” and to be “spiritually alert” (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, Virginia, page 1,224). **Gregoreo** means “to watch”, “to stay awake”, “to be vigilant. It is a word that has ethical and religious overtones. The word indicates the proper attitude of a believer. The Present imperative of Matthew 24:42 indicates a constant vigil. (Rogers, Cleon L., Jr., and Rogers, Cleon L., III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 1982, pages 55 and 480.)

Later, in the final days of his ministry Jesus says the same thing to his disciples

- Matthew 24:42-43 –
 - NIV “Therefore **keep watch**, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have **kept watch** and would not have let his house be broken into.”
 - ESV - “Therefore, **stay awake**, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have **stayed awake** and would not have let his house be broken into.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6 – “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us **keep awake** and be sober.” (ESV)

Agrupneo means to be sleepless and to be watchful. **Agrupeneo** is a compound word made from **agreuo** meaning “to chase” and **hupnos** meaning “sleep”. (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, Virginia page,

1,224) **Agrupneo** means “to chase sleep away, to be watchful, to be alert, to be on the lookout for, to be vigilant (Rogers, Cleon L., Jr., and Rogers, Cleon L., III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 1982, page 97.) Rogers and Rogers refer to Lohannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida in their edited addition of *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, New York: United Bible Societies, 1989, page 5 in their Greek Linguistic and Exegetical Key when they quote “To make an effort to learn of what might be a potential future threat” for the meaning and intention of the Greek word **agrupneo** that we translate “awake

- Mark 13:33 –
 - NIV – “Be on guard! **Be alert!** You do not know when that time will come.”
 - ESV - “Be on guard, **keep awake**. For you do not know when the time will come.”
- Luke 21:36 –
 - NIV – “**Be always on the watch**, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”
 - ESV - “But **stay awake at all times**, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Indeed, not only do we not know the day or hour, we have not even been given the ability to perceive it. It is a mystery kept with God the Father:

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only”. (Matthew 24:36, ESV; also, Mark 13:32)

“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7, ESV)

This day and the events that are included will definitely surprise the world.

There is a difference between attempting to identify the date of Jesus’ Return and being alert to prophecy. Just like there is a difference between attempting to predict the future and comparing biblical prophecy with current world events.

The results are likewise different. Besides the fact we are told in scripture that “about that day or hour no one knows” and “It is not for you to know times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Matthew 24:36 and Acts 1:7, NIV) Setting a date and attempting to predict the future will lead to deception, confusion and the loss of faith in the Truth. But, being alert to prophecy and “watching” contemporary events in history are commanded in Scripture by Jesus and the Apostles when we are told to “watch”, “be awake” and “be alert. We are told to “watch” and “be awake” so we do not fall away from the Truth (“fall away and will betray one another and hate one another”, Mt. 24:10) or become intoxicated by world events (“let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night”, 1 Thess. 5:6-7).

In other words, we are not to be predicting, but we are to be watching! We are not to be ignorant of the Lord’s return, instead we are to understand it.

Even establishing an eschatological model that details exactly how end time events will occur can be dangerous for a people’s faith. What if things don’t match the model exactly? Will they have enough independent Bible knowledge to recover, or will they lose faith? Consider the pretribulation rapture model. It has good research. It has ample Bible references. It has more than enough proponents

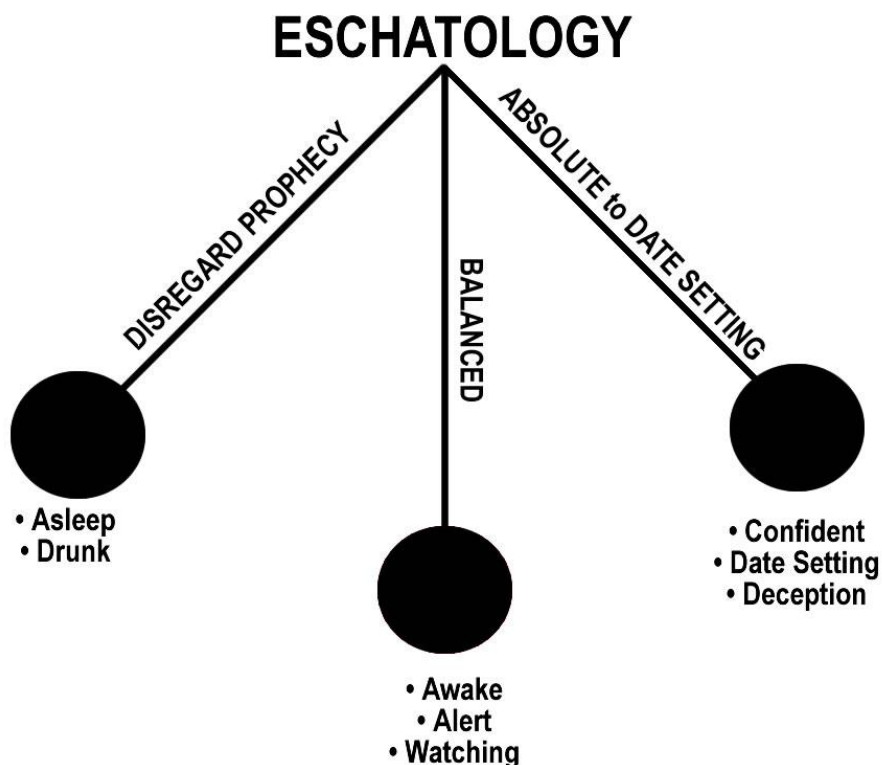
supporting it and even making it a heresy to disagree with it. Is this healthy? Is this safe? Is this good use of an individual believer's priesthood? Creating a model to suggest possible connections and sequences is practical and possible. But, getting it all the events and the sequence right is beyond human capability, because:

1. These things are known by the Father's own authority
2. These things are still in the mystery stage
3. These things are still future and have not manifested in human history
4. Everyone in every age of the Bible and in church history that claimed to have it all nailed down overstated their assurance and in their arrogance often ended up resisting the work of the Lord and in one case, rejected the prophesied Messiah and had him crucified as a blasphemer. Yes, you know that is right! The prophecy guru's and authorities of Scripture completely misunderstood the prophecy they had lectured on when it became historical events.

What's my point? We should study. We should be watching for the Lord's return. We should compare prophecy with current events. We should make eschatological models. And, we definitely should have an opinion! To deny any of these things is to deny our command in scripture to be alert, to be watching, to be ready...even if it is later than we anticipate! The alternatives are wrong:

1. Ignoring or being ignorant concerning the teaching of the Lord's return puts you in the category of the "sleeper". (1 Thessalonians 5:1-7; Matthew 25:1-13)
2. The believer who is consumed with worldly living, false philosophies and their temporal life are drunk on the world and not spiritually sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-7; Matthew 24:45-51)
3. The believer (Is such a title even possible?) who denies the Lord will actually return is the false teacher Peter warned was coming. (2 Peter 3:3-5; 16)

So, the problem is not with those who are watching, comparing events with scripture, forming an opinion and making charts. This group is clearly awake, alert and watching. This group is centered. They are the balanced group. Living in the world, but watching and waiting.



The problem comes when someone in that group of watchers and waiters becomes overconfident and in their arrogance begin to reject others who are also watching. In other words, a group of watchers can fellowship together, but once one of the watchers becomes a “knower” and establishes his model as “authoritative”, then we begin to have a conflict. “Knowers” do not like “watchers.” Watchers are alert and studying, but they are not drunk on the world or on an eschatological model. You can be committed to your idea, but you cannot be dogmatic. Why? These events have not happened yet. These events are mysteries. Jesus even told his own disciples they would be surprised when it all came together. And, most importantly, even Daniel, the great prophet whose prophecies are always used by both prophecy “watchers” and prophecy “knowers” was still asking questions at the end of his vision. Even after seeing the vision that many of us study from Daniel’s writings, Daniel himself said, “I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, ‘My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?’” If Daniel, who wrote the book, was still confused and asking questions at the end of the book, then I had better be smart enough know when to stop saying, “I know the answer.” Because, even Daniel didn’t know all the answers. And, when Daniel asked the angel for more information Daniel was told, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end...As for you, go your way till the end.” So, I need to teach what I can, diagram what I understand, but be willing to tolerate other watchers, encourage the students. And, when I speculate on the things that are not clear or diagram the mystery, I need to have enough courage to say, “I do not know, but here is my speculation or here is my model. Use it if it is useful, but make corrections when you have more insight.”

Jesus even begins his eschatological teaching in Matthew 24 by saying, “Watch out that no one deceives you!” Likewise, Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 concerning the Lord’s return, “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way.”

Egeiro is translated “awake” or “rose” in the passive voice in Matthew 25:7. According to Vines p. 94 the virgins in Matthew 25:7 where “arousing themselves from their slumber” since **egeiro** is used in the passive voice with a middle significance. (W.E. Vines, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, Virginia, page 94). Rogers and Rogers, likewise, identify the correct understanding of **egeiro** as it is used in the aorist indicative passive in Matthew 25:7 to mean “to awaken, to arouse from sleep.”

“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins **rose** (or, “arousing themselves from slumber”) and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.” (Matthew 25:5-10 ESV)

Correct Eschatological Basis

I do want to quickly attempt to establish a correct eschatological basis even though I said above that, “The problem comes when someone in that group of watchers and waiters becomes overconfident and in their arrogance begin to reject others who are also watching.” Even though I pointed out that Daniel himself said, “I heard, but I did not understand...what will the outcome of all this be?”, we do have to begin to make some distinction between right and wrong biblical eschatology. If we are going to be “watchers” we will eventually need to classify eschatological teachings as doctrinal statements, correct interpretations, possible scenarios, speculation, imaginative creations, defective interpretations, deception and denial of the Truth.

An example of what I would consider a doctrinal statement would be: "We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ and in his personal return to earth in power and glory." That statement is supported by scripture, but does not speculate on the date of his return to earth. This doctrinal statement does not include an interpretation of scriptural evidence concerning how Jesus returns to earth in power or glory. Also, this statement can be used in a variety of eschatological models amid a wide range of sequence of events.

An example of what I would consider to be a denial of the Truth would be similar to Peter's warning of the words of false teachers:

"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since the fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning." (2 Peter 3:4)

Millennium: Amillennial, Premillennial, Post millennial

The Bible mentions a millennial reign of Jesus Christ:

"They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4)

The questions concerning this "thousand year" reign of Christ might begin with "when?" which cannot be answered until we address the "how?" and "where?". For example, will Christ reign on earth or from heaven? Will Christ reign on earth through his church or will he himself return to reign the earth as a king himself? And, then, when will Christ do this? Beginning with his ascension in 30 AD? Or, will he eventually begin to reign in history as the church led governments advance around the globe? Or are we waiting for some point in the future when Jesus interrupts history with his physical return to earth in order to establish his kingdom on earth?

The early church writers who were personally acquainted with the Apostle John, the author of Revelation, and the students of John's disciples in the second century (100-200 AD), can be shown to be supporters of a literal millennium (or, thousand year) kingdom on earth ruled by Jesus Christ after his return to earth at his Second Coming. The Greek word for this position is "chiliasm", which means "millennialism." Of course, anyone who wants to argue their theological position will appeal to the early church writers after they have exhausted their argument from Scripture. I understand that and I respect that. So, I will try to briefly provide some quotes from the early church writers and make some brief commentary on these ancient texts.

Justin Martyr, 150 AD – In a recorded debate with a Jew named Trypho we have a doctrinal testimony from a Christian apologist from 150 AD. Justin is responding to this question by Trypho: "Trypho to this replied, 'Tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?'" To this Justin says:

"I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise. Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical, and foolish. But that you may know that I do not say this before you alone, I shall draw up a statement, so far as I can, of all the arguments which have passed between us; in which I shall record myself as admitting the very same things which I admit to you. For I choose to follow not men or men's doctrines, but God and

the doctrines [delivered] by Him. For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians, even as one, if he would rightly consider it, would not admit that the Sadducees, or similar sects of Genistæ, Meristæ, Galilæans, Hellenists, Pharisees, Baptists, are Jews (do not hear me impatiently when I tell you what I think), but are [only] called Jews and children of Abraham, worshipping God with the lips, as God Himself declared, but the heart was far from Him. But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."

Justin is confirming his belief in:

1. the physical resurrection of believers
2. a thousand year reign in Jerusalem by Jesus
3. the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies given to the Jews.

At the same time Justin is calling groups of Christians who deny a physical resurrection yet say believers will be with God in heaven with no hope of a physical resurrection to be making grievous error. In fact, Justin says, "do not imagine that they are Christians". This is an amazing statement since many Christians in the Western church today have never ventured past this assumption. They comfortably believe that if they "get saved" their souls will go to heaven after death. And, that's the end of their understanding. This is the same corruption Greek philosophy had on the Corinthians in Paul's day in 55 AD when Paul writes chapter 15 of First Corinthians to correct the Corinthians denial of a physical resurrection of the dead. The point we want to see here though is the early church's persistence in holding to a physical resurrection and a physical kingdom of God on this physical earth. This is in agreement with a literal understanding of Old Testament prophecies, Jesus' teaching and his physical resurrection from the grave and physical ascension into heaven, the Apostles teaching, especially Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15.

Along these same lines Justin wrote in chapter 10 his work *On the Resurrection*:

"The resurrection is a resurrection of the flesh which died...The Savior in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh, why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth."

Notice the battle was still with the Christian Truth being compromised so it fit the culturally relevant thinking of Greek philosophy.

Clement of Rome, who traveled and ministered with Paul (Philippians 4:3), wrote while John was still alive around 98 AD the following:

"Abraham, called "the friend," was found faithful, inasmuch as he obeyed the words of God. He, in the exercise of obedience, went out from his own country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house, in order that, by forsaking a small territory, and a weak family, and an insignificant house, he might inherit the promises of God. For God said to him, "Leave your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, and go into the land which I shall show you. And I will make you a great nation, and will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be blessed. And I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you;

and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And again, on his departing from Lot, God said to him. "Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you now are, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever (*1 Clement to the Corinthians, chapter 10*) ... "Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, "Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;" and, "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom you look." (*1 Clement, chapter 23*)

Irenaeus, who wrote extensively between 150-202 AD, says:

"Since, again, some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption, they thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and the Demiurge, and go to the Mother or to that Father whom they have feigned. Those persons, therefore, who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man, and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme], how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection? For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day; but immediately upon His expiring on the cross, undoubtedly departed on high, leaving His body to the earth. But the case was, that for three days He dwelt in the place where the dead were" (Irenaeus, *Against Heretics*, Book V, Chapter XXXI, 1)

"Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain [orthodox persons] are derived from heretical discourses, they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, by means of which kingdom those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature; and it is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that it behoves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards. For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous; and the apostle has made this plain in the Epistle to the Romans, when he thus speaks: 'For the expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature has been subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; since the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.' Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast. For thus He said: 'Lift up thine eyes, and look from this place where now thou art, towards the north and south, and east and west. For all the earth which thou seest, I will give to thee and to thy seed, even forever.' And again He says, 'Arise, and go through the length and breadth of the land, since I will give it unto thee;' and [yet] he did not receive an inheritance in it, not even a footstep, but was always a stranger and a pilgrim therein. And upon the death of Sarah his wife, when the Hittites were willing to bestow upon him a place where he might bury her, he declined it as a gift, but bought the burying-place (giving for it four hundred talents of silver) from Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite. Thus did he await patiently

the promise of God, and was unwilling to appear to receive from men, what God had promised to give him, when He said again to him as follows: 'I will give this land to thy seed, from the river of Egypt even unto the great river Euphrates.' If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For his seed is the Church, which receives the adoption to God through the Lord... Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' " (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter XXXII, 1,2)

Here Irenaeus is arguing for a physical resurrection and an earthly kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ. Where Justin Martyr argued against a Jew in favor of a premillennial return of Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. Irenaeus is arguing against the Greek philosophy of the ancient world. Thus, both the Jew and the Gentile philosophy of this time is seen to be in opposition to the Christian understanding of a premillennial physical kingdom of God on earth.

Dr. Thomas Ice, the Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, has said in an online article (<http://www.ldolphin.org/premillhist.html>) the following concerning premillennialism:

It is generally recognized within the scholarly world of early church historians that premillennialism was the most widely held view of the earliest church tradition. One of the leading experts on the doctrine of the early church is J. N. D. Kelly, who says:

"Millenarianism, or the theory that the returned Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years came to find increasing support among Christian teachers... This millenarian, or 'chiliastic' doctrine was widely popular at this time... The great theologians who followed the apologists Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism... They are all exponents of millenarianism." (J. N. D. Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco Harper & Row, 1978). p.465, 467, 469.)

Philip Schaff, the dean of American church historians and himself a postmillennialist, provided the following summary of the early church's view of the millennium:

"The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VIII vols., Grand Rapids. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, vol. II, p. 614)

European scholar and church historian, Adolph Harnack echoes Schaff and tells us,

"First in point of time came the faith in the nearness of Christ's second advent and the establishing of His reign of glory on the earth. Indeed it appears so early that it might be questioned whether it ought not to be regarded as an essential part of the Christian religion." (Adolph Hamack, "Millennium," *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edition (New York Charles Scribner's Sons. 1883), vol. XVI p. 314 cited in Ronald E. Showers. *There Really Is a Difference*, (Bellmawr, NJ, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), p. 117)

As the church continued to take root in the Western World of Asia, Greece and Rome there was continual pressure of Greek philosophy on Christian theology to “straighten up and fly right.” As is seen above Greek philosophy from the days of Plato had held to the immortality of the soul, but had rejected the eternal state of the physical body. Greek philosophers, such as Origen in Alexandria, Egypt, who converted to Christianity brought with them their Greek philosophy and their exegetical style of allegorical interpretation. Between the years of 205-254 Origen taught Christianity and suffered persecution for his faith on numerous occasions. Yet, Origen set the stage for others to follow his creative allegorical approach to scriptural interpretation instead of the literal approach to interpretation. Origen destroyed much of the eschatological teaching in the church and was one of the first to introduce the concept of amillennialism to the church. In fact, in his commentary on Matthew Origen had completely spiritualized Christ Second Coming by associating it with Christ revealing of himself to individuals. This set the stage for Augustine and the whole of Christian theology through the Middle Ages. Augustine (354-430) was a convert from premillennialism to amillennialism. Dr. Norman Geisler writes in Systematic Theology, volume four, page 571,

“The early Augustine was premillennial, but he changed his view when he overreacted to a chiliastic cult and adopted an allegorical approach, a crucial error that amillennialist and postmillennialists have perpetuated since his time...Why did Augustine forsake premillennialism?” (Geisler then quotes Augustine from Augustine’s book *City of God*)

“They assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feelings of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself; such assertions can be believed only by the carnal”

“With what did Augustine replace literal interpretation? With allegorical: ‘This resurrection [in John 5] regards not the body, but the soul. For souls, too, have a death of their own wickedness and sins....’”

But, as Geisler points out it is highly improbable that Jesus was speaking allegorically here about the soul since in context and in his own words Jesus was speaking about bodies coming out of the graves to live again.

If a person is will the Scriptures fully support the concept of a premillennial return of Jesus to the earth and the Lord’s establishment of his kingdom on earth:

- “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)
- “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:2-3, ESV)
- “The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” (Daniel 7:27, ESV)
- “Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Philippians 3:21, ESV)
- “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.” (Isaiah 2:2, ESV)
- “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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:29-30, ESV)

- “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses... Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ... When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, (Revelation 19:11-20:9)
- “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one. Whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s winepresses. And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security. (Zechariah 14:4-11, ESV)

Rapture

In 2012 I was teaching through the book of Revelation like I have since 1986. It was at least the sixth or seventh time in twenty-five years that I had taught verse by verse through John’s epistle addressed to the seven churches of Asia. In addition to these teachings, I had also used Revelation on innumerable other occasions as I taught through other books of the Bible or explained other subjects and areas of theology and eschatology. But, one night during class in 2012 I hit a snag as I was rolling through my notes and firing away with my verbal commentary in front of the class. It was the sixth seal that caused that overwhelming feeling of anxiety that a teacher recognizes when what they are thinking doesn’t agree with what they are saying. It is that time in the midst of a lecture when the teacher realizes their notes and their explanation are illogical. As a teacher you don’t know where to go with your next point. Your thought process stops! You can’t remember how you explained this verse the other times you taught it. In 2012 I didn’t know how to logically explain what I had just read out loud from Revelation 6:12-17.

Actually, this happens more than once every twenty-five years for me, but usually it is because of my insufficient study or lack of understanding. As a teacher it is easy to track other teachers’ thought process as they speak or write. Listening to them teach I can feel their discomfort as they hit these road blocks of theological logic. Most drive right through the barriers that warn them of an approaching theological “construction zone”. In an attempt to get to their point or to cover the material these teachers ignore the flashing signs that indicate the road they are driving on is not complete.

When that happens to me while I am teaching I can feel my body respond to the mental panic with the rising blood pressure and the adrenalin rush. I usually do not stop to observe the construction zone during class, but quickly take the most convenient detour around the deconstructed theological mess. Other times I look around at the passengers in my class to see if any of them may have also saw the “warning” sign. If no one seems to have noticed the conflict in the text of scripture with my verbal commentary I just step on the gas, pick up in the text and read right through it. Then, I figure it out later on my own. As a teacher this problem never goes away. Theological road construction is never finished. The more you study and the more you teach the more information you have traveling on these highways and it is inevitable in our fallible human understanding that there is going to be times we need to stop and revisit some intersections of concepts, widen some lanes to accommodate more understanding and improve entrance and exit ramps to access a growing number of topics we address. The best scenario is when, as a skilled teacher, you have the ability to not only maintain speed, but also do the required road maintenance and theological construction as you drive through the construction zone. I have also successfully done this. This happens most often when the passengers start asking questions during class as we are moving through a rough patch of road.

In 2012, I came upon some road construction in a long stretch of the eschatological interstate. I was driving about 5-10 miles an hour over the posted speed limit because I had traveled this road before. But, when I read Revelation 6:12 the road seemed to have been completely washed out. I remember thinking that this patch of road had been rough in the past and may have needed some work, but this time it had really deteriorated. Since I had not been looking for detour signs and I realized I could not honestly make an Evel-Knievel-like daredevil jump over my washed out theology surrounding this verse, I hit the brakes. I told the class that night, “I don’t understand this. It doesn’t fit! It seems like we are talking about the final day of the tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ, but we are just at the sixth seal?! How does this fit?”

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can stand?’” (Revelation 6:12-17)

Now, in 2015, after three years, I have reconciled this verse. The reconstruction has made some improvements and some changes on this stretch of theological highway.

Consider Paul’s statement, “according to the Lord’s own word” used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15. Was Paul referring to a personal revelation Jesus had shared with the Apostle Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles sometime after Paul’s conversion in 35 AD, but before 50 AD? Or, when Paul wrote “according to the Lord’s own word” was Paul referring to “the Lord’s own word” spoken to the disciples during Jesus’ earthly ministry which had surely been taught in the churches during the first 20 years (30-50 AD). These words of Jesus was already recorded and available to the church in written form when Paul wrote the Thessalonians in 51 AD (Matthew may have been written in 50 AD and there were many other written sources in existence according to Luke 1:1 who wrote between 60-62 AD.) If Paul was referring to a revelation he had received personally from Jesus we would assume, at the least, it was in agreement with Jesus’ teaching given to his disciples. But, it is more likely that when Paul is attempting to untangle a misunderstanding in the Thessalonian church and at the same time comfort the Thessalonians by appealing to already established text and teaching circulating in the churches when he says, “according to the Lord’s own word”. This means that the events described and explained by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 could find a parallel set of

verses in the Gospels. In fact, this is what I am going to show you now. This is not a mere theological exercise, but may be part of the map you will need in the coming days. Before you run me off the highway in a fit of theological road rage, I literally beg you to please consider that what I am telling you might be true. At the least, I think the eschatological model I am presenting has merit. But, merit does not mean it is true. And, in the same way, no eschatological model can be said to be “true” today. At least, not yet! Yes, scripture is True. Jesus’ eschatological teaching is perfect and exact. Paul’s words are divinely inspired and without error. John’s book of Revelation testifies to itself with the testimony of John, an angel and Jesus Christ when it says:

“John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ... The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’ ... ‘I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Mornings Star.’” (Revelation 1: 1-2; 22:6, 16)

Every eschatological model is supported by the study of its academic scholars which is then orbited by hundreds of personal blogs arguing for their side of the debate. This book is not in those debates, but is instead providing a map through those endless debates. There is no real answer to any of these debates since each of them have their strengths. What matters is history. What happens historically will be True. What is happening historically?

This is not about who wins the eschatological argument in a debate or online in a Facebook post. This is about what happens in history. The same person who wins the argument, could be completely taken by surprise when history doesn't behave the way an argument has presented itself. The academic who stuns his class into silence with graphs, models, texts and charts may himself be confused when history doesn't follow an eschatological model. History follows the Truth.

History will not follow my eschatological model any more than it will choose to follow your eschatological model. The prophetic future is apparently written in the *Book of Truth* (Daniel 10:21) which is referred to by the angel Gabriel (Daniel 8:16). History will happen as it has been recorded. The great advantage of arguing with hermeneutics, theological systems and exegetics is that, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17) But, in the process you might want to keep your options open so that you are not deceived. As surely as you can be deceived by committing to nothing or tolerating everything, you can be deceived because you committing to something without considering the reality that no one of us gets it absolutely right. Do I need to take time to provide the long list of biblical people who got eschatology wrong in their day? I will not take time to explain Noah’s understanding of Enoch’s prophecy; Abraham with Isaac on Mount Moriah; Moses frustration in the wilderness with Israel for forty years; Elijah’s depression with God’s patience with the historical process; Jeremiah, who said God had betrayed him, as he expressed his frustration with God’s final decision to destroy Jerusalem; Habakkuk’s dismay at God’s choice of the savage Babylonians; Daniel’s inability to understand the final consummation after having been walked step by step through pages of prophecy; John the Baptist sending messengers to ask Jesus if maybe the Jews should be looking for a different Messiah other than Jesus; Peter rejecting Jesus’ self-defeating plan of giving up and going to Jerusalem to die; the disciples not understanding what Jesus meant by “in three days I will rise again!”; Paul’s prayer being rejected when God told him, “My grace is sufficient”; Peter understanding the vision of the sheet in Joppa, but then acting completely different in Antioch; John falling down to worship an angel, two times, in the midst of writing the book of Revelation. This list does not include all the people who heard the prophets and then killed them. The biblical scholars, scribes and priests were the ones who quoted verses of Scripture to rebuke Jesus as he historically fulfilled the very text of Scripture they were using against him. On the cross Jesus quotes Psalm 22 while the religious leaders literally act out their parts and speak their lines just as Psalm 22 prophesied.

So, argue your case. Present your charts. Develop your model. And, I especially encourage you to form an educated, defensible eschatological opinion. But, realize that no one will boast about their eschatological savvy on the day it happens, instead, as the Lord once warned his people through Jeremiah, “Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understand and knows me.”

“This is what the Lord says:

‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom

Or the strong man boast of his strength

Or the rich man boast of his riches,

But let him who boasts boast about this:

That he understands and knows me,

That I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,

Justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

(Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Paul used the same quote from Jeremiah when he debated with the Corinthians “advanced theology” that had taken Christianity and weaved it into Greek philosophy to give the message of Christ some merit:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength...He chose the lowly things of this world and the despise things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

Now, I would like to return to paralleling Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 with Jesus’ words in Matthew 24. Then I would like to parallel the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17 with the same words of Jesus in Matthew 24 to begin the reconstruction of my own eschatological interstate system. My intentions are to present a map through coming historical events that might be useful.

The early writers in the church after the days of the apostles seem to be consistent regarding the timing of the rapture. There seems to be agreement on these basic points in the early church after the

closing of the New Testament and the students of the apostles were left to hand down the traditions and teachings of the disciples of the Lord. They all seemed to understand the intention of the Apostles teaching to support:

1. A future time period known as the tribulation
2. A literal man in future history known as the antichrist
3. A serious persecution of the church in the tribulation by the antichrist
4. A Second Coming of Jesus to take his church after this time of great suffering

Polycrates (130-196 AD), bishop in Ephesus after Paul, Timothy, John, etc. is recorded by Eusebius to have said:

“For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints.”

Pretribulation Rapture

I will not attempt a complete obliteration of the pretrib rapture theory, but I will call it into question.

1. Pretrib rapture is possibly not supported by the best interpretation of scripture or the original intention of the writers of scripture.
2. Pretrib rapture is possibly not the ancient church's understanding of scripture
3. Pretrib is possibly a relatively recent innovation that began in the Western church and rapidly infested the eschatology of the Laodicean church period. The Western Laodicean church has also embraced a variety of other novel, self-centered, success-driven, pain-free theological systems to accommodate their materialistic culture.

If the pretribulation rapture proves to be a historic truth, I will be the first to say, “Thank you, Lord!” To hope that the pretrib rapture does not occur would be the equivalent of hoping the Titanic sinks. If I were a passenger on board the Titanic why would I be disappointed if the ship I was sailing on arrived safely on the North American coast? As the passengers happily disembarked would my response to a safe arrival be to sit and pout on the docked ship because we did not plunge to our deaths in the icy water? No! Who doesn't want the pretrib rapture to be true? Who would rather attempt to build a seeker church on an eschatological system that promises that seekers who actually become converts might likely die as martyrs because of their faith. So, if you are going to have a market driven church focus on attracting seekers from the modern Western culture you may want either to include the pretrib rapture theory in your eschatology or simply follow the postmodern philosophical system that basically remains neutral and leaves the door wide open to personal interpretation. So, yes, pretrib rapture is preferable and has been the pop eschatology that I have held to since 1977 and taught since 1986. I can still teach the pretrib system. The audio and notes are still available online.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is a future rapture (the **harpazo** which means “catch up”, “take by force”, “carry away”, “to seize” and is a word used in Acts 8:39 of Philip, 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 of Paul and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 of the church.) There will be a rapture of the church. This is the exegetical meaning, the literal interpretation, the consistent theological understanding and the early church's historical position for reading Paul's reference in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

What I am calling into question is the timing of the rapture in relationship to Jesus' Second Coming. I am going to present to you an eschatological model that will move the event known as the rapture as little as 43 months to as much as 72 months. Remember, NO ONE knows the day or hour. Even if you read in the news about the seven year treaty being signed or hear that the antichrist has proclaimed himself “God” on the Temple Mount and put a stop to the Jewish sacrifices, this window of

roughly 30 months does not give you a day or an hour of the Lord's return. You will still have to follow Jesus' and Paul's admonition to "watch" and to see the signs. You will know the time is near IF you are spiritually "awake" and "sober." In a sense this is no different than knowing with the pretrib model that the Second Coming is exactly 84 months after the rapture. Or, in the posttrib model we know the Second Coming and Rapture are 84 months after the signing of the seven year treaty or three and a half years (42 months or 1,260 days) after the antichrist claims himself to be God on the Temple Mount.

I am going to say as Jesus, Daniel and Paul did that the signs of the seven year treaty, the revealing of the antichrist, the abomination of desolation and the forsaking of the faith by many are the signs for the church to know the Lord's return is near. No one predicted the day or hour, but they did tell us in scripture to, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."! (Luke 21:28)

Remember, I am simply suggesting you consider this as a possibility. In fact, you can even hold to a pretrib position, but keep a note of this concept in the back of your Bible just in case you find yourself in the midst of a seven year treaty and face to face with the antichrist. The model I present here can be your back up model you turn to when history gives you no other option. This model can help prevent your love from growing cold, direct you so you do not lose your faith, strengthen you to not betray the others and keep you from believing the great delusion. (Matthew 24:10-12, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

CHURCH IN TRIBULATION

"If the burden of proof rather rests on pretribulationists to show that tribulation saints will not belong to the Church, the "failure" of NT writers to single out a tribulation generation of the Church on earth as possessive of the "mysteries" weighs nothing - (A, page 13)

" "The mystery of lawlessness", even now working, will culminate in the tribulation (2 Thess. 2:7)" (A,13)

" "The mystery of God" will be finished late in the tribulation (Rev. 10:7)." (A,13)

"The mystery of the harlot Babylon will continue through the tribulation (Rev. 17:5-7)" (A.13)

(E, 110) "I will show that the church will enter the last half of Daniel's seventieth 'week'; then I will show that the church will be raptured before the end of that week, prior to the outpouring of God's wrath... Three passages in Scripture are especially important in demonstrating that the church will enter the last half of Daniel's seventieth week: the Olivet Discourse [Matthew 24], 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus seems to indicate that his disciples would see both the Danielic abomination of desolation and the subsequent tribulation (Matt. 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-200 immediately prior to his parousia. Paul appears to expect the former in 2 Thessalonians 2, and John appears to expect at least the latter in Revelation 2, 7, 13, and 17.....the author(s) does in fact expect the church to see the abomination of desolation or to experience the Danielic tribulation and thus to enter the last half of Daniel's seventieth week... The Olivet Discourse is a response by Jesus to his disciples... designed in part to distinguish the first-century destruction of the temple from the end of the age when the Son of Man comes. Thus Jesus notes that the disciples will see certain catastrophic events surrounding the destruction of the temple but that **explicitly do not signal the**

end (Matt. 24:5-13)...These, Jesus says, are merely the beginning of birth pains (Matt. 24:8). The primary sign of the end will be ‘ “the abomination that causes desolation” spoken of through the prophet Daniel’(24:15), which will initiate the great Danielic tribulation (24:21; Daniel 12:1). The tribulation will end when the ‘sign of the Son of Man’ will appear in the sky and the angels will gather his elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:29-31).” (e, 110-112)

(E, 115-117) “This point is confirmed in Paul’s teaching on the rapture and the return of Christ in the Thessalonian epistles, which is itself a reflection of the tradition underlying the Olivet Discourse. In particular, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul also identifies the abomination of desolation as the major sign by which the approach of the rapture could be known, thus placing the rapture after the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week...This teaching included the certainty of tribulation (1 Thess. 3:4), the uncertainty of the timing of the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-2, and the fact that **certain events must precede the day of the Lord** (2 Thess. 2:1-5). Paul refers to this teaching as ‘traditions’ (ESV: *paradoxeis*) passed on to the Thessalonians by himself and his coworkers, Silas and Timothy (2 Thess. 2:15) and many have noted the probable dependence of at least some of these traditions on those underlying the Olivet Discourse, as indicated by the extensive correspondence between Matthew 24 (and parallels) and the Thessalonian epistles....The parallels between this passage (1 Thess. 4:15-17) and Matthew 24:30-31 are noteworthy. In both, there are references to:

- the *parousia* of Jesus in the clouds
- to gather his saints,
- accompanied by a trumpet blast
- and angels.

Some of these elements feature into other *parousia* passages in the Thessalonian epistles as well; for example:

- Jesus’ coming with angels (2 Thess. 1:7 and perhaps 1 Thess. 3:13)
- His gathering the saints (2 Thess. 2:1 and perhaps 1 Thess. 1:10; 3:13; 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:13).

An especially interesting parallel is 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, in which there is an emphasis on Jesus’ powerful vengeance on his enemies and glorification in his saints when he ‘is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire’ (ESV; cf. Matt. 24:30-31). This evidence indicates that, though no ‘rapture’ is explicitly mentioned in Matthew 24:31, it is precisely there in the tradition that Paul places the rapture....The dependence of Paul on the Jesus tradition underlying the Olivet Discourse continues in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (cf. Matt. 24:13-15, 24). Like Matthew 24:15, Paul points the Thessalonian church to certain signs related to the appearance of the Danielic Antichrist that must precede the coming of Christ to reassure them that ‘the day of the Lord’ has not arrived.” (E, 115-117)

(mine) A reference to the “day of the Lord” carries with it the original meaning assigned to this phrase in the Old Testament. The “day of the Lord” was a day, an event or a period of time when God would intervene in human history to punish his enemies and vindicate his people or the words of his prophets. Ultimately in the Old Testament “the day of the Lord” would culminate in what we know today from New Testament revelation in the Second Coming of the Christ. (The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, volume 2, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, page 46) This “day of the Lord” in the Old Testament is followed by a special time of divine blessing and kingdom of the Messiah. Today many refer to this as the millennial kingdom. (See Isaiah 2:12-21; 13:6-16; Ezekiel 30:3; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:14-2:3.) This must be the context that the Jewish Pharisee, educated rabbi and highly skilled scholar we know as the Apostle Paul must use the phrase “day of the Lord.” So, now we note that in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 Paul uses “*parousia* of the Lord Jesus” and the church’s “gathering to him” as “the day of the Lord.”

“Now concerning the **coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him**, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect **that THE DAY OF THE LORD has come**. Let no one deceive you in any way. **For THAT DAY will not come, unless:**

- (1) the rebellion comes first, and
- (2) the man of lawlessness is revealed,

the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?” (2 Thess. 2:1-5)

Do note here the wording of Matthew 24:30-31:

“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and **they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:30-31)

CHURCH AND ISRAEL

“In the chronological question concerning the rapture, the dispensational issue centers in the field of ecclesiology. An absolute silence in the OT about the present age, a total disconnection of the Church from the divine program for Israel, and a clean break between dispensations would favor pretribulationism: the Church would not likely be related to the seventieth week of Daniel, or tribulation, a period of time clearly having to do with Israel. But a partial revelation of the present age in the OT, a connection (not necessarily identification) between Israel and the Church, and a dispensational change involving a transitional period open the door to the presence of the Church during the tribulation.” (A, page 12)

“The current session of Christ at the Lord’s right hand fulfills the Messianic prediction in Psalm 110:1 (see Acts 2:34,35)” (A,14)

“The Church now occupies a period of time foretold concerning Israel, viz., the period of Israel’s world-wide dispersion (Deut. 28:25, 64, 65, 30:1-4). Dispensationally speaking, if the Church presently occupies the predicted time of Israel’s dispersion, she may also occupy the predicted time of Israel’s final tribulation.” (A,14)

“If an event such as the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied in the OT (Daniel 9:26) fell within the Church age (70 AD) , from the dispensational standpoint other events foretold in the OT and relating to Israel, such as tribulational events, might equally well fall within the Church age.” (A,15)

“Not only did the OT predict the present age, but the NT applies OT prophecy to the Church...They affirm at least partial fulfillments of the OT in the Church and the present age. Peter says, ‘This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...’ (Acts 2:16-21) A stronger equation between OT prophecy and fulfillment in the Church age could NOT be stated. WE do not read, ‘This **is like** what was spoken,’ but, ‘This **is what** was spoken.’...If then the main event on the very birthday of the Church was prophesied in an OT passage within an Israelitish context, it should not seem strange that the Church bears a relationship also to end-time events similarly prophesied in the OT, even though they are Israelitish in cast. In fact, since the beginning of the Church age bears a marked relationship to OT predictions concerning Israel, we are not hindered dispensationally from presuming that the same will be so at the end of the Church age.” (A,15)

- Galatians 3:16 quotes Gen. 13:15 and 17:8
- Isaiah 49:6 the OT predicts God turning to the Gentiles is referred to in Acts 13:46, 47 and 26:22, 23)
- Romans 15:7-13 is based in 2 Samuel 22:50; Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Isaiah 11:10)
- Ephesians 3:3, 6
- The OT prophets foretold the church age grace and wanted to see it as stated by Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12. Four times Peter says “to you” the church, but the OT prophets did not fully understand their own prophecies.
- Jeremiah prophesied the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 26:28 and explained as fulfilled in the church in Hebrews 8:8-13; 10:15-17). No distinction is made between a Jewish New Covenant and a Church New Covenant. The Church has received the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah to the Jews. The Jews are still waiting to fully understand and receive this New Covenant, and they will when the church is removed from the Tribulation to meet the Lord in the Air at the Sign of the Son of Man and thus make Israel realize they have missed the Messiah:
 - Zechariah 12:10-13-6 – “They will look on me the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo....”
 - Malachii 3:1-5 - the Lord will purify Israel
 - Jeremiah 30:7-11, Judgment and tribulation for Israel comes before the cleansing and deliverance
 - Romans 11:26-27 – “All Israel will be saved... ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion’...”
 - Romans 11:13-14 – Israel becomes envious of the Church. Paul says, - “I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow **arouse my own people to envy** and save some of them.”
 - Deuteronomy 32:21, “I will **make you envious** by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” As quoted by Paul in Romans 10:19

(mine) If the church began in Acts and existed before 70 AD while the final forty years before Israel’s dispersion began, then it is totally possible and extremely likely that the church will be active in the days of Israel’s restoration.

(mine) At least, the above presentation means it is possible, and it is not heretical, to consider that the church may move into the days of the tribulation. With this kind of scriptural support it is not a doctrinal error to look into the prospect that the rapture may not occur before the seventieth week begins, but, instead, may occur during those final seven years. Biblically speaking the church may meet the antichrist!

JEWS

(From B, pages 54-56)

“In 1981, Father Seraphim Rose gave a lecture [as viewed from the Greek Orthodox position of

eschatology] at the University of California at Santa Cruz in which he said, 'Another sign that the times of the end are approaching is the present state of the Jews in Israel, in the city of Jerusalem. According to the prophecies of the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers., Jerusalem will be the world capital of Antichrist, and there he will rebuild the temple of Solomon where he will be worshipped as God...Of course, it is very significant that only since 1948 has Jerusalem been once more in the hands of the Jews, and only since 1967 has the place where the temple was, the Mosque of Omar, been in their hands, since this had been in the part held by the Moslems...If you were to ask anyone who's aware at all of political events in the world a question, 'What would be the ideal city to have as the world capital if there was going to be a world empire?' – it's obvious what the answer would be in most people's minds. It can't be New York because that's the capital of capitalism; it can't be Moscow because that's the center of Communism. It can't even be Rome, because Roman Catholicism is still some kind of limited division. The logical place is Jerusalem, because there three religions come together, three continents come together. It's the most logical place where there could be peace, brotherhood, harmony: all those things which look good, but unless they have a solid Christian foundations are not God-pleasing. These things will be used by Antichrist.' Significant preparations are presently underway in Israel to restore the actual worship ceremonies formerly conducted within Solomon's temple. Sacred vessels have been formed, priestly garments sewn. As Ice and Price report in their 1992 book, *Ready to Rebuild*, 'The Temple Institute, then, is preparing vessels and garments for the Temple service, and seeking to produce a valid red heifer in Israel for the future purification of the priests and worshipers in the Temple. The leaders of this organization firmly believe that we are in the *achari ha-yamim* ('last days') which include the coming of the Messiah. They expect the building of the Temple to begin shortly.' The Messiah whom the Jews anticipate, however, bears little resemblance to the Jesus Christ who voluntarily died to save sinners. They look for a world leader to rule all the nations from his capital of Jerusalem, to initiate a political regime of 'peace' and 'prosperity,' and to vindicate Israel for her centuries of suffering at Gentile hands. 'They do not want Christ as He is,' cries contemporary writer Alexander Kalomiros. 'They do not want the Christ Who refused to submit to the devil's temptations in the desert...They want a Christ Who desires the kingdoms of the earth, a Christ Who will turn the stones into bread so that men may be satiated, a Christ who will overwhelm the world with miracles that inspire awe and constrain men to submit...a Christ Who will talk about his life and not the other, a Christ Who will offer the pleasures of this life and not of the next...They do not want Him as ruler of the future age, but of the present one.' In a word, after two centuries of incredible suffering for their blindness, the Jews as a whole have not changed. Myopically, they still want what they wanted two thousand years ago. And this time, they will get it!"

TIME OF END

Advice from Ephriam the Syrian from the 300's: "Cease not to inquire of thy Mother the Church: when the hoped-for Bridegroom shall come. Ask about, and ascertain the signs of His coming, for the Judge will not tarry. Cease not to ask, though you shall not know with accuracy; cease not to flee to the aid of them that know of this exactly."

Jesus rebuked the people of his generation who did not watch for nor understand the signs that confirmed where they were at in the prophetic scheme, since words and events promised by the OT prophets had been being fulfilled and were being fulfilled in Jesus' day. Jesus mocked them saying, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.' So he left them and departed." (Matthew 16:3-4)

“Signs are not given so the idle or curious can predict dates and speculate on personalities, but so believers can prepare to do battle against evil” (B, 28)

Augustine: “In connection with [the last] judgment the following events shall come to pass, as we have learned: Elijah the Tishbite will come; the Jews will believe; Antichrist will persecute; Christ will judge; the dead will rise; the good and the wicked will be separated; the world will be burned and renewed. All these things, we believe, will come to pass; but how, or in what order, human understanding cannot perfectly teach us, but only the experience of the events themselves. My opinion, however, is, that they will happen in the order in which I have related them.” (*The City of God*, Book XX, ch. 30)

“Christians must guard against assigning interpretations based on fallen human reason, or confidently assuming that ‘Y’ is impossible because ‘X’ has not happened yet.” (B, 45)

“In 1948 the tiny state of Israel was reborn in spite of overwhelming (et understandable) Arab hostilities, thus fulfilling God’s prophecy to restore the Jewish homeland. The ending of Jacob’s captivity meant that God’s other prophecies could be fulfilled – the regathering of ‘the whole house of Israel.’

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. . . . When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations.’ ” (Ezekiel 39:25, 27) (B, 51)

(mine) The Day of the Lord comes after celestial disasters that follow a time of human oppression and tribulation against the believers. Biblically the events transpire like this:

1. Tribulation and persecution of the church
2. Celestial disturbances and disasters caused by the Lord’s appearing or the “Sign of the Son of Man”
3. The Day of the Lord which is the Lord’s judgment of sinful mankind after the Lord has delivered the church out of the Tribulation
 - Joel 2:30-31 says, “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” (ESV)
 - Joel 2:10-11 says, “The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?”
 - Isaiah 13:9-10, “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.”

(mine) The believers that suffer the persecution of the antichrist in the Tribulation will not have the bowls of God’s wrath poured out on them:

Ryrie says, “Though I believe that the rapture precedes the beginning of the Tribulation-, actually nothing is said in the Scriptures as to whether or not some time (or how much time) may elapse between the rapture and the opening of the Tribulation.” (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Final Countdown*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1982, pages 90-91)

In Luke 21:34-36 and Matthew 24:42-51 the disciples are warned to be sober and alert so that they may be aware of the signs and “when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28). Likewise, 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 seems to be saying similar things:

- “you are not in darkness”,
- that day will not “surprise you like a thief”,
- “let us not sleep,”
- “let us keep awake”,
- “let us be sober”

Jesus says:

“it will come upon ALL who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:35-36, ESV)

Jesus appears to be saying “ALL”, not “all, except the church” will experience these times. He also warns them to “stay awake” in order to be aware of the signs and the times. Jesus commands them to pray that they will “have strength to escape all these things”, which is not a reference to escaping the tribulation by means of the rapture, but escaping the evil of those days so that when Jesus does appear they will not have fallen asleep with the philosophies of the world, but would instead be awake and alert waiting for Jesus to return so they might meet him in the air and stand before him instead of being left in the world to endure the trumpets and the bowl judgments.

SIGNS: Warned to Watch for These Signs

JESUS
(Mt. 24)

"They will deliver you up to tribulation and **put you to death**...hated by all nations for my name's sake... then **many will fall away**...betray one another...hate one another...the love of many will grow cold... when you see **the abomination of desolation** ... standing in the holy place... then there will be **great tribulation**..." (Mt. 24:9-21)

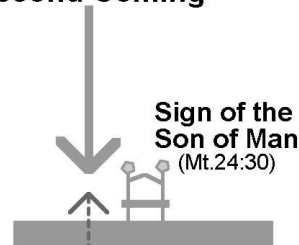
PAUL
(1 Th. 5:3)

"While people are saying, '**Peace and safety**', destruction will come on them suddenly" (1Th.5:3)

PAUL
(2 Th. 2:3-4)

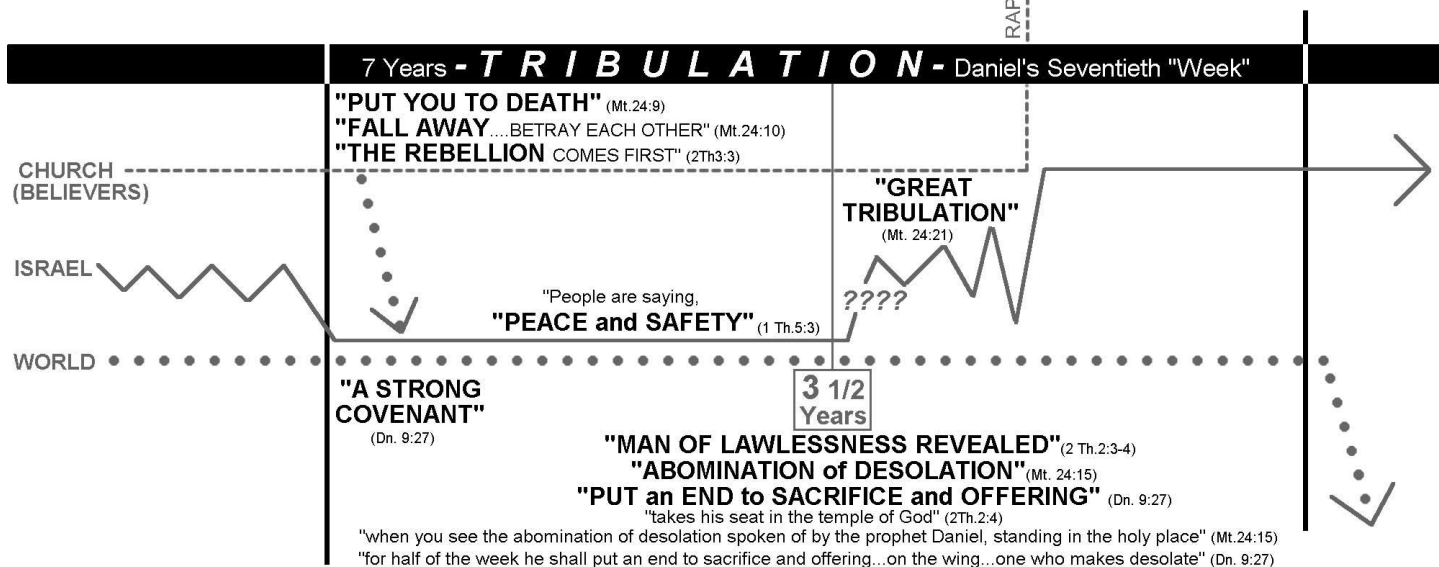
"That day will not come unless:
1) **the rebellion comes** first, and
2) the **man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction,
a) who **opposes and exalts himself** against every so-called god or object of worship,
b) so that he **takes his seat in the temple of God**,
c) **proclaiming himself to be God**

Second Coming



DANIEL
(Dn. 9:27)

"He shall make a **strong covenant** with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall **put an end to sacrifice** and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate." (Dn.9:27)



EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (347-407) explains 'imminence' and 'signs' of Christ's Second Coming:

"But it may be worthwhile to ask, If antichrist comes, and Elijah comes, how is it 'when they say peace and safety', that then a sudden destruction comes upon them? For these things do not permit the day to come upon them unawares, being signs of its coming. But he [Paul] does not mean this to be the time of antichrist, and the whole day, because that will be a sign of the coming of Christ, but Himself will not have a sign, but will come suddenly and unexpectedly. For travail, indeed, you say, does not come upon the pregnant woman unexpectedly: for she knows that after nine months the birth will take place. And yet it is very uncertain. For some bring forth at the seventh month, and others at the ninth. And at any rate the day and the hour is uncertain. With respect to this therefore, Paul speaks thus [in 1 Thessalonians 5:3]. And the image is exact. For there are not many sure signs of travail; many indeed have brought forth in the high roads, or when out of their houses and abroad, not foreseeing it. And he has not only glanced here at the uncertainty, but also at the bitterness of the pain. For as she while sporting, laughing, not looking for anything at all, being suddenly seized with unspeakable

pains, is pierced through with the pangs of labor – so will it be with those souls, when the Day comes upon them.”

- John Chrysostom, Thessalonians, Homily 9 on 1 Thessalonians 5:3

(mine) Chrysostom has captured the concepts of watching for the signs of Christ's return, knowing his return is imminent but yet preserving the warning that no man knows the day or hour. Christ's return will be a surprise, but it is imminent. The signs will indicate when it is near, but we will not be able to neglect our daily responsibilities in order to wait upon a hill for Jesus to return.

Augustine

“In connection with [the last] judgment the following events shall come to pass, as we have learned: Elijah the Tishbite will come; the Jews will believe; Antichrist will persecute; Christ will judge; the dead will rise; the good and the wicked will be separated; the world will be burned and renewed. All these things, we believe, will come to pass; but how, or in what order, human understanding cannot perfectly teach us, but only the experience of the events themselves. My opinion, however, is, that they will happen in the order in which I have related them.” (*The City of God*, Book XX, ch. 30)

Didache

The *Didache* is a Syrian church manual from 85-120 AD that likely originated from Antioch, Syria is fully titled “*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*”. The *Didache* fully teaches that the Christian church is going through the Tribulation. The *Didache* is made up of a collection of traditions and teachings of the apostles as the second generation of Christians remembered them. The *Didache* was recorded during the years 100-150 AD. It will be interesting to see what the *Didache* records about meeting the Lord in the air, antichrist, tribulation and the Second Coming. Remember, one of the largest cities of Syria was Antioch the home church of the Apostle Paul and a church that heard the teaching of Barnabas, Peter, John Mark and many others early church leaders coming up from Jerusalem and from the Gentile churches. The *Didache* states the following in chapter 16:4-8:

“For as lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another. And then the deceiver of the world [Antichrist] will appear as a son of God and “will perform signs and wonders,” and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will commit abominations the likes of which have never happened before [great tribulation]. Then all humankind will come to the fiery test, and “many will fall away” and perish; but “those who endure” in their faith “will be saved” [delivered from the day of the Lord] by the accursed one himself. And “then there will appear the signs” of the truth: first the sign of an opening in heaven, then the sign of the sound of a trumpet, and third, the resurrection of the dead [resurrection] — but not of all; rather, as it has been said, “The Lord will come, and all his saints with him.” Then the world “will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven” (The *Didache* 16:4-8)

(mine) Notice the order and the details that were traditions handed down in an apostolic church that had received the teaching of Peter, Paul, Barnabus, John Mark and unknown others under the direction of the apostles within 40-90 years of these men teaching. It is even possible that John is still alive when this document is being recorded, but it is sure Ignatius, a disciple of John and the bishop of Antioch, Syria was alive or had recently faced martyrdom. In its presentation of events the *Didache* clearly presents a chronology that has the church enduring the persecution of the antichrist and there is no clue or hint of meeting the Lord in the air before the end time trouble begins. Here is the order as presented in the *Didache*:

1. Persecution, betrayal and hate
2. Antichrist appears as a son of God
3. Antichrist performs signs and wonders

4. Antichrist rules the earth
5. Antichrist commits abominations never committed before
6. Many will fall away from the faith and perish with the world
7. Some will endure and will be saved
8. Signs of the Truth will appear:
 - a. Heaven will be open
 - b. The Trumpet will sound
 - c. Resurrection of those that are in Christ who are returning with Christ
9. The world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven

This matches the presentation put forth here: Antichrist persecution of the church causing many to fall away, but others stand firm and are destroyed. There will be deliverance when the Sign of the Son appears in the sky and the church is raptured from the earth and the dead in Christ are resurrected to meet the Lord in the air. The world will visually see the Lord return and the raptured church with him in glory before the judgment of the earth begins.

(F, 20-21) "The last chapter is devoted to exhortations in view of the woes expected at the end of the world. The author urges an attitude of watching in view of the uncertainty of the time of the end.... This language, however, cannot be taken to mean an 'any-moment rapture,' for the author proceeds to sketch the consummation of the age in which he warns the Church against the peril of falling away from the faith when Antichrist appears... The Didachist looks forward to the appearance of Antichrist who will rule the world and inflict men with severe persecution. The many who are to be offended and be lost are professing Christians who do not stand true; for only those who endure in their faith shall be saved... The purpose of the Didachist in writing this exhortation was to prepare the church for the Great Tribulation and the sufferings to be inflicted by the Antichrist."

'Watch over your life; let your lamps be not quenched and your loins be not ungirded, but be ready, for you know not the hour in which your Lord comes. And you shall gather yourselves together frequently, seeking what is fitting for your souls; for the whole time of your faith shall not profit you, if you be not perfected at the last season.' (Didache 16:1-5)

The Epistle of Barnabas

George Eldon Ladd in his book *The Blessed Hope* writes the following about *The Epistle of Barnabas*, whose actual author is anonymous, but written between 70-130 AD:

"The author of this little tract is looking not only for the second coming of Christ but also for the last time of trouble. He warns believers to seek out earnestly those things which are able to save them, and to flee from all the works of lawlessness and to hate the era of to his present time that they might be loved in that which is to come... for 'the final stumbling block is at hand'... This means that the Antichrist is at hand... According to this, Barnabas expected the Church to go through the Tribulation and Christ to return only at its termination. This is again asserted in 15:5:

'When his Son comes, he will destroy the time of the wicked one and will judge the godless, and will change the sun and moon and the stars, and then he will truly rest on the seventh day.'

...That Barnabas could not have looked for an any-moment return of Christ is proven by his expectation that the end would not come until the Roman empire should fall.... Antichrist would arise after the Roman empire had broken down into ten kingdoms. This obviously could not occur at once, for in the first century Rome's might and stability was at its apex."

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas was written around 100 AD. Paul addressed a man named Hermas in Romans 16:14 and in 200 AD Origen wrote that this man was the author which could date the writing of the book to 90 AD which would make sense since Hermas mentions Clement of Rome. Three ancient witness date Hermas to around 140-150 AD and claim that Hermas was the brother of the bishop of or Rome at that time. Either way, this book, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, is an early church document from the second or third generation of Christians. *The Shepherd of Hermas* says in Vision 2:2:7-8 –

“Blessed are you, as many as will endure patiently the great tribulation that is coming, and as many as shall not deny their life. For the Lord has sworn concerning His Son, that those who denied their Lord should be rejected from their life, even they that are now about to deny Him in the coming days; but to those who will never deny Him, to them mercy was given of His great loving kindness.” (*The Shepherd of Hermas* 2:2:7-8)

Justin

In 150 AD Justin Martyr clearly anticipated the church being present in the tribulation and facing the persecution of the antichrist when he wrote in his *Dialogue with Trypho*:

“He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us Christians, who, having learned the true worship of God from the law, and the word which went forth from Jerusalem by means of the apostles of Jesus, have fled for safety to the God of Jacob and the God of Israel...Now it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world. For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus”

Irenaeus

Irenaeus (130-202 AD) came from Smyrna in Asia Minor and was trained by Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and the pastor of the church of Smyrna who is addressed in Revelation 2:8. Irenaeus writes the following around 180 AD in his book *Against Heresies* (Heresies 5:26:1 and 5:30:1-4). In the sections below Irenaeus clearly states that the antichrist will “put the Church to flight” and “when this man comes we may avoid him”. Irenaeus also provides other insights into his understanding of the chronological order of events and what he considers is a correct eschatological view as we watch and wait:

“In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel, telling us that thus it had been said to him:

‘And the ten horns which thou saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but shall receive power as if kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and give their strength and power to the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.’

It is manifest, therefore, that of these [potentates], he who is to come shall slay three, and subject the remainder to his power, and that he shall be himself the eighth among them. And they 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. For that the kingdom must be divided, and thus come to ruin, the Lord [declares when He] says: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." It must be, therefore, that the kingdom, the city, and the house be divided into ten; and for this reason He has already foreshadowed the partition and division [which shall take place]."

- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:26:1 (180 AD)

Concerning the number of the beast, 666, Irenaeus says in *Against Heresies*:

"This number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse, the book of Revelation], and those men who saw John face to face [Polycarp, Papias, Ignatius, etc.] bearing their testimony [to it]; while reason also leads us to conclude that the number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six; that is, the number of tens shall be equal to that of the hundreds, and the number of hundreds equal to that of the units ... there shall be no light punishment [inflicted] upon him who either adds or subtracts anything from the Scripture, under that such a person must necessarily fall. ... These men, therefore, ought to learn [what really is the state of the case], and go back to the true number of the name, that they be not reckoned among false prophets. But, knowing the sure number declared by Scripture, that is, six hundred sixty and six, let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten; then, in the next place, when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order, and advance their kingdom, [let them learn] to acknowledge that he who shall come claiming the kingdom for himself, and shall terrify those men of whom we have been speaking, having a name containing the aforesaid number, is truly the abomination of desolation. This, too, the apostle affirms:

'When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them.'

And Jeremiah does not merely point out his sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he shall come, where he says,

'We shall hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses: he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fullness thereof, the city also, and they that dwell therein.'

This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation) along with those which are saved. It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfilment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. For if there are many names found possessing this number, it will be asked which among them shall the coming man bear. It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth:

- for the name ***Evanthas* (ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ)** contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it.
- Then also ***Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ)** has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by

Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence].

- *Teitan* too, (TEITAN, the first syllable being written with the two Greek vowels ε and ι, among all the names which are found among us, is rather worthy of credit. For it has in itself the predicted number, and is composed of six letters, each syllable containing three letters; and [the word itself] is ancient, and removed from ordinary use; for among our kings we find none bearing this name Titan, nor have any of the idols which are worshipped in public among the Greeks and barbarians this appellation. Among many persons, too, this name is accounted divine, so that even the sun is termed “Titan” by those who do now possess [the rule]. This word, too, contains a certain outward appearance of vengeance, and of one inflicting merited punishment because he (Antichrist) pretends that he vindicates the oppressed. And besides this, it is an ancient name, one worthy of credit, of royal dignity, and still further, a name belonging to a tyrant. Inasmuch, then, as this name “Titan” has so much to recommend it, there is a strong degree of probability, that from among the many [names suggested], we infer, that perchance he who is to come shall be called “Titan.”

We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him [John] who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign. But **he indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is:** the name, however, is suppressed, because it is not worthy of being proclaimed by the Holy Spirit. For if it had been declared by Him, he (Antichrist) might perhaps continue for a long period. But now as “he was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the abyss, and goes into perdition,” as one who has no existence; so neither has his name been declared, for the name of that which does not exist is not proclaimed. But when:

- this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world,
- he will reign for three years and six months, and
- sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and
- then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father,
- sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire;
- but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day;
- and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that:

‘many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’”

– Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:30:1-4 (180 AD)

In summary, Irenaeus writes about 80 years after the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation and after having been trained in John’s church in Smyrna by several of John’s disciples that the church should await the fulfillment of prophecy, but will need to be prepared to avoid the antichrist when he comes since the antichrist will pursue the church.

Tertullian

Tertullian, from Carthage in North Africa, wrote *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* in 208-212.

Tertullian clearly teaches that the rapture and glorification of the church occurs at the Second Coming and after the reign of Antichrist when Tertullian quotes 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17:

“For the apostle makes a distinction, when he goes on to say,

‘For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked,’

which means, before we put off the garment of the flesh, we wish to be clothed with the celestial glory of immortality. Now the privilege of this favor 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:

‘For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.’ ”

- Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, chapter 41,
“The Dissolution of Our Tabernacle Consistent with the
Resurrection of Our Bodies”

Tertullian clearly states around 210 AD that those who suffer at the hand of the antichrist “deserve by an instantaneous death, which is accomplished by a sudden change, to become qualified to join the rising saints” at “the coming of the Lord” that occurs at “the time of Antichrist”. Tertullian then sites Paul’s words to the Thessalonians concerning the rapture! Tertullian also understood the rapture to take place at the time of the Second Coming which delivered the Church from the antichrist.

“Tertullian believed that the end could not come at any moment but would be heralded by signs of warning...The object of Tertullian’s hope and prayers is not a secret any-moment coming of the Lord to rapture the Church; it is the hope of standing before the Son of man after a series of cosmic signs have appeared and ‘all of these things have taken place.’” (F, p27-28

Pseudo-Ephraem

Many supporters of the pretribulation rapture theory use the text of *Pseudo-Ephraem* as proof that the early church’s eschatology supported a pretribulation rapture. The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem* is a document from Syria dating to the 600’s AD. The writer of this document attempts to credited the writing to Ephraem of Syria (306-373) a bishop and teacher in theological schools in the 300’s AD. The document itself is NOT written by Ephraem, but comes from sometime between 450-700 AD. Four Latin copies survived and one is credited to Isidore of Seville (560-636 AD).

Grant Jeffrey says in his book “When the Trumpet Sounds” on page 105 in an essay called “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church”:

“...that the pretribulational rapture is taught so clearly in the New Testament that it is virtually impossible that no one ever taught this doctrine in the 18 centuries before 1830.”

Jeffrey wants to believe he found pre-1830 support for the pretrib rapture in Pseudo-Ephraem when the author writes around 600 AD the following:

“Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world?...Because **all saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered before the tribulation which is to 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.” (Pseudo-Ephraem, Section II)

First, we will take a look at the linguistics of this passage. It is worth mentioning that in his book *First the Antichrist* Bob Gundry who writes on page 175-176 the following:

“Let us first observe the use of the present tense of the verbs of **gathering** (*colliguntur* both in Section 2 of Pseudo-Ephraem’s Latin sermon and in the sermon’s Latin Ephraemic source; ***sunagontai*** in the Greek Ephraemic source) and of **taking** (*adsumuntur* both in Section 2 of Pseudo-Ephraem’s Latin sermon and in that sermon’s Latin Ephraemic source). Of course, the present tense is often used in a futuristic sense, as elsewhere in Pseudo-Ephraem’s sermon. Section 1 provides an example: ‘Whenever the Roman Empire has begun to be consumed by the sword, the coming of the Evil one is at hand [Latin: *adest* – present tense]In those days two brothers will come [followed by a string of further verbs in the future tense, so that ‘is at hand’ must mean ‘will be at hand’].” But more frequent than a futuristic use of the present tense is its use for an action or state of being in progress. As every student of Greek and Latin knows, this use is often translated best into English by a form of the verb *to be* plus an *–ing* form. Thus, a likely better translation of the second passage under contention in Section 2 reads as follows: (Bold mine)

“For all the saints and elect of God ***are being gathered*** prior to the tribulation that is to come, and ***are being taken*** to the Lord lest they ever see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.” (Bold mine)

This understanding is favored not only by the greater frequency of the progressive present tense, but also by the contrast between meeting the Lord Christ after the tribulation, and being gathered and taken to the Lord before the tribulation.”

The real Ephraem used the image of a Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a symbol of nations being evangelized and gathered to the Lord. It would seem that Ephraem is referring to believers being gathered and taken to the Lord through evangelism and conversion not in the rapture before the Tribulation begins. These church age believers are renewing their minds as they grow into spiritual maturity. They are obeying admonition of Jesus and the apostles to be alert and sober as they prepare themselves for the Day of the Lord.

Second, we will compare this verse to the very text that proceed this sentence to establish the context of Pseudo-Ephraem’s text:

“**We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging**. 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 (consummated), and **there is no other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one** in the completion of the Roman kingdom. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or on the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of worldly business, and why is our mind held

fixed on the lusts of the world or on the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and **prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion**, which overwhelms all the world?" (Section II)

It seems clear the writer is focusing on rousing the believers in the church to awaken and be sober and, prepare themselves for "meeting the Lord" [renewing their minds and maturing in their faith] so that the Lord can "draw us from the confusion. This is just as Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13 and Paul says in Romans 12:2-3:

"Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13)

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

Third, we will compare this verse to scripture to see if any of the themes that the Bible associates with the rapture are mentioned in the context of Pseudo-Ephraem's text and we will find that there is nothing in the text that can be paralleled with:

- Christ's coming as in the 1 Thess. 4:16-17 rapture
- Resurrection of the dead as in 1 Cor. 15:51-52
- Glorification of living Christians as in 1 Cor. 15:51-52
- Believer's taken into heaven according to pre-trib doctrine based on John 14:2-4; Rev. 4:1-2.

Fourth, we examine other passages in Pseudo-Ephraem that seem to describe and prepare Christians who are on earth during the Tribulation facing the terrors and persecution of the antichrist:

- "When therefore the end of the world comes, there arise... constant persecutions, slaughters and massacres everywhere, fear in the homes, panic in the cities." (Section III)
- "In those days people shall not be buried, neither **Christian**, nor heretic, neither Jew, nor pagan, because of fear and dread there is not one who buries them; because all people ignore them while they are fleeing." (Section IV; Bold mine)
- "In these three years and a half...there will be in those days lack of bread and water, and no one is able to sell or to buy of the grain of the fall harvest, unless he is one who has the serpentine sign on the forehead or on the hand...those who wander through the deserts, fleeing from the faces of the serpent, bend their knees to God, just as lambs to the udders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord, and while wandering in states of desertion, they eat herbs." (Section VIII)
- "When this inevitability has overwhelmed all people, just and unjust, the just, so that they may be found good by their Lord; and indeed the unjust, so that they may be damned forever with their author the Devil, and, as God beholds the human race in danger and being tossed about by the breath of the horrible dragon, he sends to them consolatory proclamation by his attendants, the prophets Enoch and Elijah, who, while not yet tasting death, are the servants for the heralding of the second coming of Christ, and in order to accuse the enemy. And when those just ones have appeared, they confuse indeed the antagonistic serpent with his cleverness and they call back the faithful witnesses to God, in order to (free them) from his seduction (Section IX)

- “When the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, in the hour which the world does not know, and on the day which the enemy of son of perdition does not know, will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty, with the sign of the wood of salvation going before him, and also even with all the powers of the heavens with the whole chorus of the saints, with those who bear the sign of the holy cross upon their shoulders, as the angelic trumpet precedes him, which shall sound and declare: Arise, O sleeping ones, arise, meet Christ, because his hour of judgment has come! (Section X)

And, finally, fifth, we ask if the author of the text of Pseudo-Ephraem held to a pre-trib rapture why does he not focus on the hope the church has in the pre-trib rapture and encourage the believers that they will not face any of the hardships and persecutions described in his document? Instead, he expends his energy detailing the horrors of the tribulation and his best exhortation is to tell the Christians to prepare for it by drawing close to the Lord and leaving their worldly passions behind. And, what is more, the author is NOT using his description of the horrors of the tribulation as leverage to convince the unbeliever to get saved in order to escape the coming antichrist, and likewise, he does not warn the backslidden Christian that if they don't straighten up and walk the walk they will miss the rapture and enter the tribulation. The author of Pseudo-Ephraem seems to be focused on preparing believers in the church for the day they encounter the antichrist. To me he seems to be saying, “Stop trying to have your best life now and get spiritually sober so the Lord can draw you into the Truth and lead you through this most difficult time period you are about to face.”

After observing the entire text (ten brief sections available below in this book) I conclude that it appears that as Pseudo-Ephraem wrote his sermon he considered:

- The church would be face to face with the “serpent” (antichrist)
- The resurrection of the saints would occur at the Second Coming of Christ, and not seven years before

This document of Pseudo-Ephraem is important to examine because it is the “strongest claim” the pretribulation teachers have of an early church document that “clearly teaches” the pretribulation rapture. But, the fact is, it is not even close to pretrib and is even further from the modern Western seeker church mentality.

Below is the text of Pseudo-Ephraem:

On the Last Times, the Anti-Christ, and the End of the World

A Sermon by Pseudo-Ephraem

The Last Trumpet - Pseudo-Ephraem

Section I

Dearly beloved brothers, believe the Holy Spirit who speaks in us. We have already told you that the end of the world is near, the consummation remains. Has not faith withered away among mankind? How many foolish things are seen among youths, how many crimes among prelates, how many lies among priests, how many perjuries among deacons! There are evil deeds among the ministers, adulteries in the aged, wantonness in the youths--in mature women false faces, in virgins' dangerous traces! In the midst of all this there are the wars with the Persians, and we see struggles with diverse nations threatening and "kingdom rising against kingdom." When the Roman Empire begins to be consumed by the sword, the coming of the Evil One is at hand. It is necessary that the world come to an end at the completion of the Roman Empire. In those days two brothers will come to the Roman Empire who will rule with one mind; but because one will surpass the

other, there will be a schism between them. And so the Adversary will be loosed and will stir up hatred between the Persian and Roman empires.

In those days many will rise up against Rome; the Jewish people will be her adversaries. There will be stirrings of nations and evil reports, pestilences, famines, and earth quakes in various places. All nations will receive captives; there will be wars and rumors of wars. From the rising to the setting of the sun the sword will devour much. The times will be so dangerous that in fear and trembling they will not permit thought of better things, because many will be the oppressions and desolations of regions that are to come.

Section II

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, **what is imminent or overhanging**. 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 (consummated), and **there is no other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one** in the completion of the Roman kingdom. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or on the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or on the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world? Believe you me, dearest brother, because the coming (advent) of the Lord is nigh, believe you me, because the end of the world is at hand, believe me, because it is the very last time. Or do you not believe unless you see with your eyes? 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!" **For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.** And so, brothers most dear to me, it is the eleventh hour, and the end of the world comes to the harvest, and angels, armed and prepared, hold sickles in their hands, awaiting the empire of the Lord. And we think that the earth exists with blind infidelity, arriving at its downfall early. Commotions are brought forth, wars of diverse peoples and battles and incursions of the barbarians threaten, and our regions shall be desolated, and we neither become very much afraid of the report nor of the appearance, in order that we may at least do penance; because they hurl fear at us, and we do not wish to be changed, although we at least stand in need of penance for our actions!

Section III

When therefore the end of the world comes, there arise diverse wars, commotions on all sides, horrible earthquakes, perturbations of nations, tempests throughout the lands, plagues, famine, drought throughout the thoroughfares, great danger throughout the sea and dry land, **constant persecutions, slaughters and massacres everywhere**, fear in the homes, panic in the cities, quaking in the thoroughfares, suspicions in the male, anxiety in the streets. In the desert people become senseless, spirits melt in the cities. A friend will not be grieved over a friend, neither a brother for a brother, nor parents for their children, nor a faithful servant for his master, but one inevitability shall overwhelm them all; neither is anyone able to be recovered in that time, who has not been made completely aware of the coming danger, but all people, who have been constricted by fear, are consumed because of the overhanging evils.

Section IV

Whenever therefore the earth is agitated by the nations, people will hide themselves from the wars in the mountains and rocks, by caves and caverns of the earth, by graves and memorials of the dead, and there, as they waste away gradually by fear, they draw breath, because there is not any place at all to flee, but there will be concession and intolerable pressure. And those who are in the east will flee to the west, and moreover, those who are in the west shall flee to the east, and there is not a safer place anywhere, because the world shall be overwhelmed by worthless nations, whose aspect appears to be of wild animals more than that of men. Because those very much horrible nations, most profane and most defiled, who do not spare lives, and shall destroy the living from the dead, shall consume the dead, they eat dead flesh, they drink the blood of beasts, they pollute the world, contaminate all things, and the one who is able to resist them is not there. In those days people shall not be buried, neither **Christian**, nor heretic, neither Jew, nor pagan, because of fear and dread there is not one who buries them; because all people, while they are fleeing, ignore them.

Section V

Whenever the days of the times of those nations have been fulfilled, after they have destroyed the earth, it shall rest; and now the kingdom of the Romans is removed from everyday life, and the empire of the Christians is handed down by God and Peter; and then the consummation comes, when the kingdom of the Romans begins to be fulfilled, and all dominions and powers have been fulfilled. Then that worthless and abominable dragon shall appear, he, whom Moses named in Deuteronomy, saying: -Dan is a young lion, reclining and leaping from Basan. Because he reclines in order that he may seize and destroy and slay. Indeed (he is) a young whelp of a lion not as the lion of the tribe of Judah, but roaring

because of his wrath, that he may devour. "And he leaps out from Basan." "Basan" certainly is interpreted "confusion." He shall rise up from the confusion of his iniquity. The one who gathers together to himself a partridge the children of confusion, also shall call them, whom he has not brought forth, just as Jeremiah the prophet says. Also in the last day they shall relinquish him just as confused.

Section VI

When therefore the end of the world comes, that abominable, lying and murderous one is born from the tribe of Dan. He is conceived from the seed of a man and from an unclean or most vile virgin, mixed with an evil or worthless spirit. But that abominable corrupter, more of spirits than of bodies, while a youth, the crafty dragon appears under the appearance of righteousness, before he takes the kingdom. Because he will be craftily gentle to all people, not receiving gifts, not placed before another person, loving to all people, quiet to everyone, not desiring gifts, appearing friendly among close friends, so that men may bless him, saying; -he is a just man, not knowing that a wolf lies concealed under the appearance of a lamb, and that a greedy man is inside under the skin of a sheep.

Section VII

But when the time of the abomination of his desolation begins to approach, having been made legal, he takes the empire, and, just as it is said in the Psalm: -They have been made for the undertaking for the sons of Loth, the Moabites and the Ammanites shall meet him first as their king. Therefore, when he receives the kingdom, he orders the temple of God to be rebuilt for himself, which is in Jerusalem; who, after coming into it, he shall sit as God and order that he be adored by all nations, since he is carnal and filthy and mixed with worthless spirit and flesh. Then that eloquence shall be fulfilled of Daniel the prophet: -And he shall not know the God of their fathers, and he shall not know the desires of women. Because the very wicked serpent shall direct every worship to himself. Because he shall put forth an edict so that people may be circumcised according to the rite of the old law. Then the Jews shall congratulate him, because he gave them again the practice of the first covenant; then all people from everywhere shall flock together to him at the city of Jerusalem, and the holy city shall be trampled on by the nations for forty-two months, just as the holy apostle says in the Apocalypse, which become three and a half years, 1,260 days.

Section VIII

In these three years and a half the heaven shall suspend its dew; because there will be no rain upon the earth, and the clouds shall cease to pass through the air, and the stars shall be seen with difficulty in the sky because of the excessive dryness, which happens in the time of the very fierce dragon. Because all great rivers and very powerful fountains that overflow with themselves shall be dried up, torrents shall dry up their water-courses because of the intolerable age, and there will be a great tribulation, as there has not been, since people began to be upon the earth, and there will be famine and an insufferable thirst. And children shall waste away in the bosom of their mothers, and wives upon the knees of their husbands, by not having victuals to eat. Because there will be in those days lack of bread and water, and no one is able to sell or to buy of the grain of the fall harvest, unless he is one who has the serpentine sign on the forehead or on the hand. Then gold and silver and precious clothing or precious stones shall lie along the streets, and also even every type of pearls along the thoroughfares and streets of the cities, but there is not one who may extend the hand and take or desire them, but they consider all things as good as nothing because of the extreme lack and famine of bread, because the earth is not protected by the rains of heaven, and there will be neither dew nor moisture of the air upon the earth. But those who wander through the deserts, fleeing from the face of the serpent, bend their knees to God, just as lambs to the adders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord, and while wandering in states of desertion, they eat herbs.

Section IX

Then, when this inevitability has overwhelmed all people, just and unjust, the just, so that they may be found good by their Lord; and indeed the unjust, so that they may be damned forever with their author the Devil, and, as God beholds the human race in danger and being tossed about by the breath of the horrible dragon, he sends to them consolatory proclamation by his attendants, the prophets Enoch and Elijah, who, while not yet tasting death, are the servants for the heralding of the second coming of Christ, and in order to accuse the enemy. And when those just ones have appeared, they confuse indeed the antagonistic serpent with his cleverness and they call back the faithful witnesses to God, in order to (free them) from his seduction ...

Section X

And when the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, in the hour which the world does not know, and on the day which the enemy of son of perdition does not know, will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty, with the sign of the wood of salvation going before him, and also even with all the

powers of the heavens with the whole chorus of the saints, with those who bear the sign of the holy cross upon their shoulders, as the angelic trumpet precedes him, which shall sound and declare: Arise, O sleeping ones, arise, meet Christ, because his hour of judgment has come! Then Christ shall come and the enemy shall be thrown into confusion, and the Lord shall destroy him by the spirit of his mouth. And he shall be bound and shall be plunged into the abyss of everlasting fire alive with his father Satan; and all people, who do his wishes, shall perish with him forever; but the righteous ones shall inherit everlasting life with the Lord forever and ever.

Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome (referred to in Philippians 4:3) writes 70-90 AD:

“Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, “Speedily will He come, and will not tarry; and ‘The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom we look.”

“Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him in order that we may share in His promised gifts.”

Cyril of Jerusalem

Cyril of Jerusalem (315-387):

“Let us wait and look for the Lord’s coming upon the clouds from heaven. Then shall Angelic trumpets sound; the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

Commodianus

Commodianus (around 250-450 AD):

“We shall rise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under Antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years...the earth renewed without end pours forth abundantly.”

NOT PRE-TRIB RAPTURE

1 Thess. 5:2-4 that day coming “as a thief” has no point if the Christians are not here for it. The Christians do NOT need instructions (1 Thes. 5:1) concerning “times and seasons” because they already know whose coming will precede the Lord’s coming. Who? The Antichrist! Paul told them when he was with them (2 Thes. 2:5) and refers to it again.

(mine) The reason the pretrib rapture is “secret” is because it is NOT identified in the Bible. All the “rapture” verses connect with the boldly proclaimed Second Coming verses. So, actually, the rapture is not quite and it is not secret. The Rapture is bold, revealed, proclaimed and every eye will see it, including the Jews.

(mine) Jesus does not describe a pretribulation rapture. If the pretrib rapture is described in the New Testament it does not come from the writings of John. The writer of the book of Revelation addresses the church and he goes into great detail about the return of Jesus. Two questions should be asked: One, why so much detail about the Second Coming of Jesus if the church is going to be taken seven years before the Second Coming? And, two, why is there no reference to the rapture of the church in a book about eschatology that is addressed to the church? John had no trouble making things vivid, clear and unforgettable, yet the pretribulation rapture is at best vague, illusive and unrecognizable unless you are trying to find it in the text before you start to reading.

(mine) It has often been argued that the word "church" is only found in Revelations chapters 1-3 and once more in 22:16. This is supposed to be proof that the church is not referred to in chapters 4-21 which is supposed to mean that the church is not in the tribulation which then is presented as scriptural evidence of a pretribulation rapture. To begin it is not necessarily useful, but it is interesting that John uses the word "church" eighteen times in the book of Revelation in chapters 1-3 and 22. In John's other writings he uses the word "church" zero times in the Gospel of John, the letter of First John and the letter of Second John. It is only 3x in the fourteen verses that make up Third John that John uses the word "church" outside the book of Revelation. If we want to use this as an argument as scriptural support for a pretrib rapture then are we to assume that Jesus' words in John 14-17 about sending the Holy Spirit, the world knowing us by our love, the vine and branches, bearing fruit and us having a place prepared for us in heaven do not apply to the church since the word "church" is nowhere in the Gospel of John? We know John is talking about the church in John 14-17 by the context and by other ways of referring to the church and the church age. Is it possible to do the same in Revelation chapters 4-21? No. When John uses the word "church" in Third John he is not talking about the church universal but instead is addressing a situation in a particular local church. This is also how John uses the word "church" in Revelation. Every time John writes "church" in Revelation he is talking about a local church or the local churches he is addressing. In the Gospel of John or the epistles of John any reference to the universal body of Christ is identified through other appropriate language: children, brother, lady, sister. The real problem with stating that the "church" is not in Revelation 4-21 is with the fact that the church has to be mentioned somewhere and somehow in these verses since there are scenes describing believers on earth and believers in heaven. There are believers in the presence of God the Father and the Lamb and believers in the presence of the antichrist and the false prophet. Are none of these the church? The church is either on earth or in heaven and the church is either in the presence of God or in the presence of the antichrist. But, if we accept the theory that no mention of the "church" is scriptural support which makes the pretrib doctrine irrefutable we have a problem since if we continue along these same lines the church has ceased to exist in Revelation 4-21 since references such as these would not be references to "church" people:

- "souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained"
- "servants"
- "brothers"
- "elders"
- "saints"
- "kingdom of priests"
- "they who have come out of the great tribulation"
- "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"
- "servants the prophets"
- "a great multitude"
- "his bride"
- "those who are invited"
- "armies of heaven were following him"

- “souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.”
- “those who wash their robes”
- “God’s people”

In the pretrib system the church comes back with Christ in Revelation 19:11-16, but yet there is no mention of “church” in those verses. This undermines the scriptural evidence the pretrib model claims to use. If we are to be consistent the lack of “church” in these verses means the church is still on the earth which would then be scriptural “proof” that there is no rapture at all in the way Paul understood it...?

In all honesty, it is best to at least allow room for a possible understanding that the church is on the earth during part of the tribulation and that there could be a rapture of the church during the tribulation before Jesus returns. My intention is to call into question the absolute doctrinal authority claim of the pretrib rapture advocates and suggest we make room for a possible tribulation confrontation with the kingdom of the antichrist. I am simply watching and attempting to prepare the church for what would be the most horrific days of church history. And, I understand, that if we get raptured before the tribulation begins I will not get invited to the after-parties in heaven sponsored by the pastors and Bible teachers of the twenty-first century Western church. In that way it will be a lot like being on earth.

JOHN DARBY

(quote D, page 72) “The early nineteenth century was a time of great apocalyptic expectation in America, as we’ve just seen with the movement William Miller so easily started. At the same time, a self-proclaimed prophet named Joseph Smith, Jr., was weaving bizarre fantasies into a book known as the Book of Mormon, published in 1830. Joseph Smith, Jr., gave his group of followers, whom people were calling Mormons, the apocalyptic-sounding name of the Latter Day Saints. Also, 1830 is the year that a man by the name of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) took complete control of a somewhat obscure sect of Protestants in England known as the Plymouth Brethren...According to Floyd Elmore, a modern disciple of Darby, ‘His parting of the ways with the established church [of England] corresponded with his new understanding of the division between Israel and the true church...Darby’s belief in eschatology [the doctrine of future things] grows out of his ecclesiology [the doctrine of the nature of the Church]’...Darby asserted ‘None are more untrustworthy on every fundamental subject than the mass of primitive Fathers.’ In other words, Darby believed he had a clearer insight into the Scriptures than all who came before him, especially the early Church – which had the preaching of the Apostles still ringing in its ears. Darby actually seemed to revel in the novelty of his doctrines, which he frequently characterized as ‘rediscovered truths’...This disdain for Church history, though, was hardly unique to Darby during the nineteenth century.” (D, 72-73)

(D, 203) “William Miller predicted the end for 1843, gathering thousands of Americans into an apocalyptic frenzy. A contributing factor to this mania was a spectacular meteor shower that filled the

skies for several nights in November of 1833. Rural folk, their minds full of Miller's predictions of Armageddon, remembered Christ's words in Matthew 24:29 about heavenly phenomena preceding the Second Coming. Surely, they thought, doomsday couldn't be far off. To add further fuel to the flame, a large comet streaked across the sky in February of 1843, a month before Miller's March 21, 1843, deadline for the Second Coming."

(F, 61) "Pretribulationism is a teaching which arose in the nineteenth century among the Plymouth Brethren whence it came to America where, for historical reasons which can be discerned, it was warmly received and widely propagated. However, many devout men who first accepted this teaching were later, upon mature study, compelled to reverse themselves and admit that they could not find this doctrine in the Word of God." (F, 612)

(I, page 480 - Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996) "Evangelicals often cooperated in Bible conferences, beginning in 1875. These conferences, organized to study the Bible and prophecy, were held at Niagara-on-the-Lake, New York, from 1883 to 1898. The so-called five points of fundamentalism were linked with the 1878 conference, but the statement at that conference had fourteen points composed by a Presbyterian minister, James H. Brooks (1830-97). The premillennialism in the conferences was linked to dispensationalism by J. N. Darby (1800-1882), who preached these ideas on his seven trips to the United States and Canada from 1859 to 1874. He said that Christ would come for His church before the Great Tribulation and that the Jewish Millennial kingdom would be set up on earth after the completion of the Tribulation. William E. Blackstone (1841-1935) in his popular *Jesus Is Coming* (1908) and D. I. Scofield in his Scofield Bible of 1909 popularized these ideas as well as inerrancy." (I, page 480)

The SIXTH SEAL

When the throne of God and the wrath of the Lamb appear to the people on earth after the sixth seal is opened (Rev. 6:12-17), Revelation chapter six ends asking this question: "The great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17) This question is answered in the beginning of the next chapter, Revelation 7. There are two groups identified as being able to stand: believers who have been taken to meet the Lord in the air and stand before the Lord who has just appeared on his throne and unbelieving Jews left on the earth who have just recently converted who will receive the seal of God before the wrath of God is sent to destroy the earth.

Group One, the raptured church, is the group discussed in Revelation 7:9-17. This is the church that went to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) when the Sign of the Son of Man appeared (Matt. 24:30) on his throne (Revelation 6:16) whose glory had overwhelmed the light of the sun, moon and stars (Rev. 6:12; Luke 21:25-27) while causing cataclysmic events in the physical world (Matt. 24:27-29; Rev. 6:12-14). The angels gathered the elect from the four winds of the heaven (Matt. 24:31) and the Church is the only ones who can stand before the Lord (Rev. 6:17; 7:9; Luke 21:36) as they meet him in the air to appear before him on his throne to "be with the Lord forever" and "are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple" (1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 7:15) where, "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:16-17). This is what Paul meant when he said,

“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words...For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him,...Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thes. 4:17-18; 5:9-11)

Group Two, the Jews left on the earth who have just recently repented, is the group identified and discussed in Revelation 7:1-8. The angels are seen “standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.” This may be the same “four winds of heaven” that Daniel saw in his vision in 553 BC (Daniel 7:2):

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.” (Daniel 7:2)

And, also in Zechariah 6:5, the four winds (spirits) of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. They are sent out to accomplish the Lord’s eschatological purposes for Israel during their days of restoration after Babylonian captivity in 519 BC.

In Revelation 7 the angels in charge of these four winds are told “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then 144,000 Jews are sealed after apparently having repented after having seen the Sign of the Son of Man appear and the Church receive deliverance.

Up until this point the unbelieving Jews will have continued to look for the rise of their militant, worldly Messiah until they find what they have been looking for when the antichrist presents himself to them. This faulty thinking of the Jews reaches back to the earliest days of King David. In the Old Testament the Jews looked to their kings in Judah for Messianic leadership. After the rise of Syrian opposition in 168 BC the Jews looked to Judas Maccabaeus and his family that followed him, the Hasmoneans. In the days of Jesus Christ the Jews rejected and pierced their Messiah with Roman crucifixion in 30 AD. In the same generation of Jesus’ crucifixion the Jews followed their insurgents and the Zealots of 66 AD into a disastrous nation-ending war with Rome. They did this again in 132 AD when they followed an assumed militant Messiah, Simon bar Kokhba, to total annihilation and a deportation that lasted until the 1900’s AD. With the rise of the antichrist the Jews find their militant, worldly messiah as Jesus warned in John 5:43: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.” They are given a treaty by the antichrist (Daniel 9:27), the worthless shepherd of Zechariah (Zechariah 11:4-17) and gain access to the Temple Mount in the early days of the Tribulation. By doing this the Jews will have continued their error of rejecting Jesus and looking for another more militant, more worldly, more kingdom oriented Messiah. This is the false Messiah (antichrist) of Zechariah 13:7-9 who will accept the same offer Satan gave Jesus in Matthew 4:8-9: “The devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ ” The Jews will be aligned with the world conquering, politically savvy, nation unifying Messiah that they have been looking for. The only problem is this Messiah is in some fashion the incarnation of Satan whose intention is to destroy the Jews. Half way through the treaty the antichrist ends the treaty, ends the sacrifices and enters the temple proclaiming himself to be God as is revealed by Daniel, Jesus and Paul:

Daniel: “He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who

makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:27, ESV)

Jesus: “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak...For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” (Matthew 24:15-21)

Paul: “While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ (a reference to the treaty between the Jews and the antichrist) then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:3, ESV) and “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, ESV)

When the Jews realize they have been betrayed by what they thought was the Messiah or at least the man who would lead them to the Age of the Messiah, they will not know where to turn. The Jews will be out of options. The persecution that the believing Church has faced for three and a half years now expands and begins to afflict the Jews all around the world. As the Jews cry out to help to a savior they do not know and have rejected the Sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky and every eye will see him. Those who pierced him, the Jews, will see him:

Zechariah: “when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

John: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” (Revelation 1:7, ESV)

The Jews will see their deliverer appear in the sky, but the deliverer will be the pierced one, the crucified one, the lamb that had been slain! When the Lord appears it is actually his re-appearing, or Second Coming. What is more when the Lord appears in his wrath he brings deliverance and salvation to his church, not to the Jewish people. The Lord will gather his church from the four winds of the heavens to meet his people in the air at the time of his coming. The Jews will witness the Lord’s deliverance of a people who are not even a physical nation. Upon his appearing the Lord will chose, deliver and cloth with salvation the *ekklesia* (church) instead the Jews. On that day it will be the believers in the crucified Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will be delivered. It will not be the chosen nation (Jews) who stand in the presence of the Lord and in his glory “when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed.”

It is at this time Moses words spoken to Israel in 1400 BC are fulfilled:

“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” (Deuteronomy 32:21)

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:19 before Paul describes his own ministry as having this as its very goal:

“I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” (Romans 11:13-14)

It is this context that Paul’s statement, “All Israel will be saved”, will find fulfillment. After having rejected Jesus Christ, the pierced, crucified Messiah and seeking after a worldly, kingdom building Messiah the Jews finally realize their mistake when they are betrayed by the worldly Messiah (antichrist) and are forced to observe a worldwide manifestation of the Lord’s deliverance of the church, a people who are not even a nation, the Jews had been will repent. They will repent in mass numbers. They will repent as they did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41) when after explaining the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and proclaiming that “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs”, Peter accused them of having crucified the Jewish Messiah:

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” (Acts 2:23, ESV)

On that Day of Pentecost in 30 AD when confronted with the sign of tongues and the realization that they had pierced their Messiah the Jews cried out in to the early church.

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ (Acts 2:7)

The Jewish response to the rapture and deliverance of the church out of the Tribulation will result in national mourning and repentance:

“On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of teahouse of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left each by itself, and their wives by themselves. On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” (Zechariah 12:11-13:1, ESV)

God seals 144,000 of these Jews as believers in Jesus Christ, the pierced and bruised Messiah, and they divine protection from God against Satan’s last attempt to wipe them out. With the appearing of the Sign of the Son of Man and the Lord’s glorious presence in the earth’s atmosphere not only has the sun, moon and stars light no longer visible and earth’s gravitational forces are wreaking havoc with tsunamis, disappearing islands and collapsing mountains, but Satan himself has lost his place as “the prince of the power of the air” and has been cast to the earth:

“ ‘Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’ And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child...” (Revelation 12:12-13)

This will continue the time of judgment and tribulation for Israel’s testing, cleansing and purifying before their day of deliverance comes.

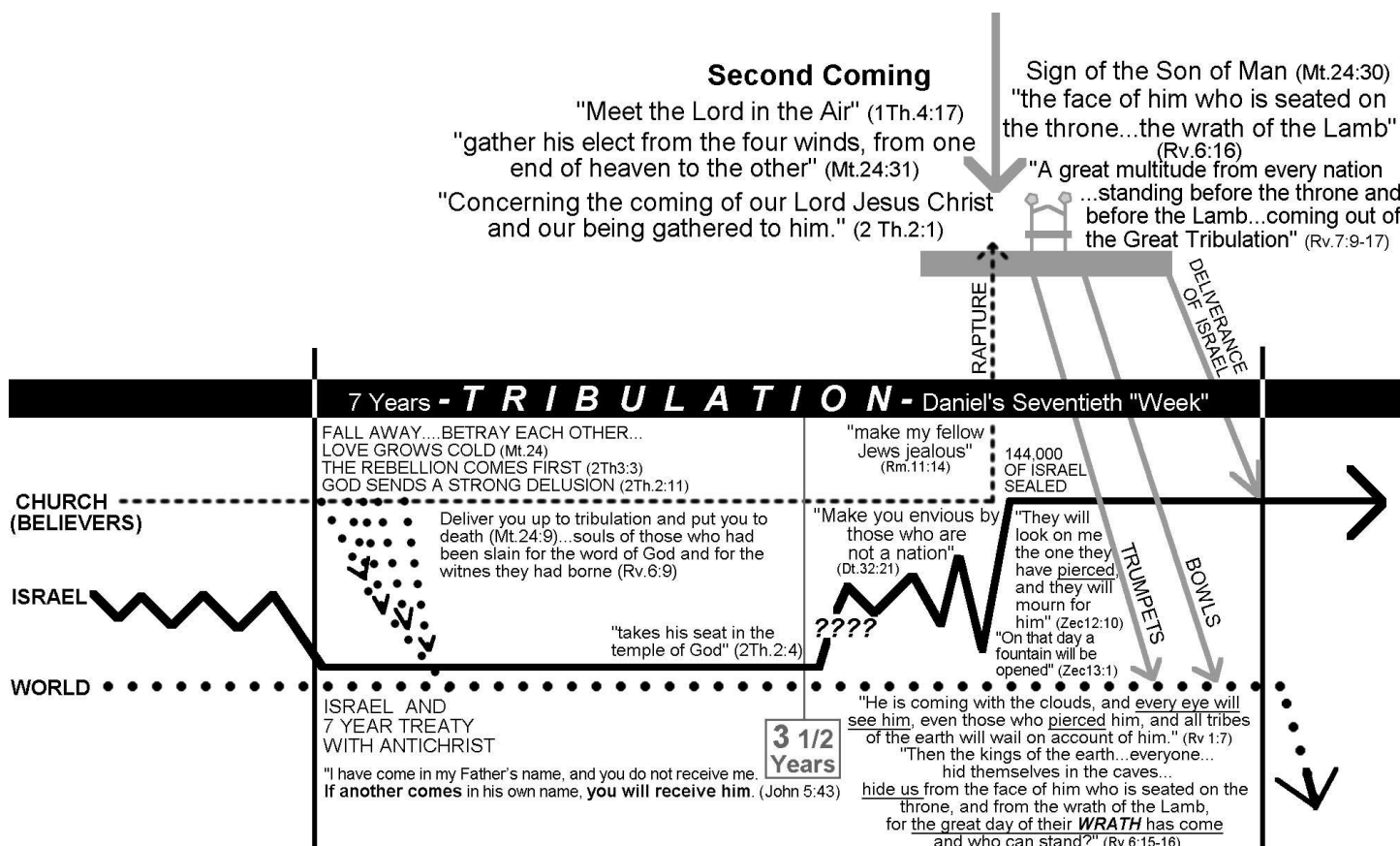
Malachi: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his

coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap." (Malachi 3:1-4, ESV)

Jeremiah: "Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it...I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished...All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you...Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound and the palace shall stand where it used to be." (Jeremiah 30:7-18, ESV)

Paul: "Has God rejected his people? By no means!...if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?...So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you (referring to the Gentile church)...Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:1-26, ESV)

Once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in the Sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky, the believers rise to meet him in the air, Israel witnesses this deliverance of a people who are not a nation and Israel repents. It is at this point and in this way the words of Scripture are fulfilled: "In this way all Israel will be saved."



Meet in the Air

(F, p50) "W. G. Moorehead of Xenia Theological Seminary from 1873-1914, appears in the call for the first prophetic conference in 1878 and his name will be found in the Scofield Reference Bible as a consulting editor...has written, 'There are only two other places in the New Testament where the phrase "to meet" occurs...and in both of them the party met continues to advance still in the direction in which he was moving previously. Augustine perceived this:

"It is as He is coming, not abiding, that we shall go to meet Him."

Christ does not return to heaven with His saints; He comes on with them to the earth. As an ancient writer expresses it,

"We shall be caught away to meet Christ, that all may come with the Lord to battle,"

Here is a clear rejection by an editor of the Scofield Bible of the pretribulation rapture of the Church with the two comings of Christ which is found in the Scofield Bible." (F, p50)

WRATH

The believers (the saints, the church, etc.) in the tribulation will not face the trumpets or receive the bowls of God's wrath which are poured out on the unbelievers who are identified as:

- First bowl – "So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image." (Rev. 16:2) and "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev. 14:9-10)
- Second and third bowl – "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!" (Rev. 16:5-6)
- Fourth bowl – "They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory." (Rev. 16:9)
- Fifth bowl – "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds."
- Sixth bowl – "They are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty...they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Rev. 16:14-16)
- Seventh bowl – "God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath." (Rev. 16:19)

Two Witnesses

A comparison of the martyrdom, resurrection and rapture of the two witnesses correlates with the events and description of a Second Coming rapture. Compare Revelation 11:11-12 with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, ESV)

“After the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.” (Revelation 11:11-12)

If these events are parallel references to the rapture then the visual witness of this event by unbelievers of the world parallels these verses:

“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him” (Zechariah 12:10, ESV)

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” (Rev. 1:7, ESV)

“Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17, ESV)

““I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14, ESV)

BRIDEGROOM and the VIRGINS

The bride has prepared herself for the marriage supper (Rev. 19:7)

It is more scriptural that the bride has prepared herself while on earth during the tribulation, than she went to heaven to prepare herself there. Most often a person is prepared through test, trials, suffering, persecution, growth and maturity while on earth and is rewarded in heaven, instead of being prepared in heaven after their life of service is over. The white linens are the “good deeds” not the rewards. Revelation 19:8

WATCHING

“So first the Antichrist. Only then the Christ. First the tribulation. Only then the Day of the Lord. Christians aren’t in the dark. They won’t be surprised by the Day of the Lord, the coming of Christ. They’ll know ahead of time that the Antichrist’s rebellion and revelation signal its near ness.” (C, 22-23)

“In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul recognizes that seeds of the rebellion’ are already germinating (‘For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work’ – verse 7)...Paul says that this rebellion comes first, not that the rapture does.” (C, 31)

(mine) This generation (Laodicea) in the Western Church of the USA is on a sedative. The church is spiritually drugged in life with luxury, pleasure and self-help sermons based on a best-life-now-theology. In addition to this the Western Church of today has been promised that they will avoid any kind of judgment or evaluation of their life in eternity because they have this get-your-mansion-for-free

coupon through faith in Christ. If that isn't enough to put the believer to sleep they are also taught that there will be a prompt evacuation of all believers from earth before any eschatological conflict or tribulation persecution begins. With this kind of thinking a believer can basically live their life in a spiritual coma.

THE REBELLION (APOSTASY/FALLING AWAY)

"By New Testament times the noun has advanced beyond the notion of simple departure of a spatial kind and has acquired the special connotation of a political or religious departure, that is, a rebellion or apostasy." (C, 20-21)

(mine) The "rebellion" or "falling away" is the political or religious abandonment of Christianity by the Western, Laodicean Church.

IMMINENCE

(D, 172-174) "A variety of difficulties arises once we begin to set up such a dichotomy between scriptures that speak of Christ's unexpected and imminent coming and scriptures that speak of Christ's coming being preceded by signs. In fact, Hunt himself is conscious of a damaging inconsistency in this argument for the rapture. For Hunt's reasoning to have full force, he must stress that there is an absolute distinction between two sets of scriptures that speak of Christ's return. The 'second' coming, meaning the rapture, cannot be preceded by signs: 'There will be no signs for the Rapture, no warning that it is about to occur,' as Hunt repeatedly stresses. Yet, as anyone who peruses the doomsday literature quickly learns, the current belief that the rapture can happen at any moment is not based on a merely generic doctrine of 'imminence,' but on the signs of Christ's return supposedly being reported each day on CNN's 'Headline News' and ABC's 'World News Tonight.' Indeed, Hunt answers the question in the title of his book, *How Close Are We?* (referring to the imminence of the rapture, by pointing to the 'signs.' These are, for example, the 1948 restoration of Israel and the talk of 'peace and safety' (1 Thess. 5:3) that may believe will occur before the rapture...Hunt can't resist seeing in contemporary events pointers to the rapture that mark our times as unique in all of history: 'Thus it is not only possible for the Rapture to occur at any moment, as it always has been, but now it is highly probable – certainly more probable than at any time in history!'...In other words, why would Christ leave signs to indicate the nearness of His final return in glory if the Church has been raptured off the planet and there is no one around to watch for them? Jesus surely didn't leave these signs for non-Christians, who wouldn't believe them anyway even if they happened to know them. So why leave signs and ask Christians to 'watch' for them, as our Lord commands in numerous places (Matt. 24:42; Mark 13:35; Luke 21:36; et. Al.)? Hunt continues: 'Yes, but if the Rapture occurs seven years prior to the Second Coming, then those signs are not for us. So it would seem. Yet Christ commanded His own to watch for His coming and warned against being caught by surprise at His return – and surprise could only apply to the Rapture. Are we faced again with a contradiction, and this time one that cannot be resolved?' The answer is 'yes,'...Hunt stresses that the signs Jesus says will precede His return are like birth pangs, slowly growing in intensity until the end arrives: 'Moreover, it would seem that these signs begin prior to the Rapture. Then how could the Rapture comes as a surprise? Because these signs when they begin, will by their very nature be phenomena which have always been known on the world scene: earthquakes, famines, pestilences, wars.' In other words, Jesus told us to watch for 'signs' so vague as to be virtually meaningless, leaving us without a clue as to the nearness of the rapture. But, according to Hunt, we know the rapture is near today because of the signs pointing to the Second Coming – but

these signs are so vague and general they don't really count as 'signs' of the imminent rapture. After all, these signs have always been present in the world. But how do we know then that ours is the generation that will see the rapture? Because of the signs...Well, the reader gets the picture. Hunt reasons in so many circles that one wants to take pity...Worse still for Hunt is a verse he has totally overlooked: Revelation 16:15, which, according to the dispensationalist's chronological interpretation of Revelation, is situated right in the middle of the Great Tribulation (after the rapture and before the Second Coming). In this verse Jesus states quite plainly, 'Behold, I am coming as a thief.' Jesus couldn't be referring to the rapture, which has supposedly already taken place. He must therefore be speaking of the unexpectedness of His Second Coming, which will sneak up on us like 'a thief.' With just this one verse, Hunt's strained dichotomy between the rapture and the Second Coming completely unravels."

(F, page 20) Referencing Clement in 1 Clement 23, George Eldon Ladd comments in his book, *The Blessed Hope*, the following:

"The early church lived in expectation of Christ's return.

'You perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying,

"Speedily will He come and will not tarry,"

and

"The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom you look" ' (1 Clement 23)

To deduce from this attitude of expectancy a belief in a pretribulation rapture and an any-moment coming of Christ, as has often been done, is not sound. ***The expectation of the coming of Christ included the events which would attend and precede His coming.*** The early fathers who emphasized an attitude of expectancy believed that this entire complex of events –

- Antichrist,
- Tribulation,
- Return of Christ

- would soon occur. This is not the same as an any-moment coming of Christ."

SUFFERING (PARADOX)

"Christians of the end times must learn what their brethren of the Church's earliest years knew well – how to suffer. As Saint Paul reminded young Timothy, 'All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). God's gift of salvation in heaven does not necessarily improve one's earthly situation; it merely renders it irrelevant. 'It is of no consequence where you are in the world – you who are not of it,' Tertullian pointed out." (B, 224-225)

“Leonid Ouspensky described the paradox in these terms: ‘The Cross is then the concrete expression of the Christian mystery, of victory by defeat, of glory by humiliation, of life by death – symbol of an omnipotent God, Who willed to become man and to die as a slave, in order to save His creature.’ The paradoxes of Christianity range from the historical to the doctrinal. The Lord taught that ‘the last will be first, and the first last’ and Saint Paul declared that ‘the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.’...The Church makes no attempt to resolve this spiritual mystery in a material fashion, or according to human logic. Instead, she opens the eyes of her children to faith and wisdom, and bestows a vision which, encompassing more than this earthly domain, reaches into heaven itself.” (B, 228-229)

“Giving all for the faith has always meant enduring some degree of isolation, ridicule, and estrangement from the society of man. This is not an easy task, and there is always the danger of complacency and compromise with worldliness. In apostolic times, as now, Christ called His followers to be on guard against this.” (B, 230)

Robert Cameron had accepted John Darby’s teaching about a pretrib rapture in 1878, but in 1922 Cameron wrote a work devoted to refuting Darby’s pre-trib rapture theory entitled *Scriptural Truth About the Lord’s Return* where he says:

“The Coming for and the Coming with, the saints, still persists, although it involves a manifest contradiction, viz., two Second Comings which is an absurdity...Everywhere in the New Testament it is taught that to suffer for Christ is one of the highest honors Christians can have bestowed upon them. Desire to shirk suffering for Christ is a sign of degeneracy. At the close of this dispensation, it will still be counted an honor to suffer shame for our adorable Lord.”

ROME AND ISLAM

Irenaeus says: “For that the kingdom must be divided, and thus come to ruin, the Lord [declares when He] says: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself...shall not stand.’ It must be, therefore, that the kingdom, the city, and the house be divided into ten; and for this reason He has already foreshadowed the partition and divisions ... The ten toes, therefore, are these ten kings, among whom the kingdom shall be partitioned, of whom some indeed shall be strong and active, or energetic; others, again, shall be sluggish and useless, and shall not agree; as also Daniel says: ‘Some part of the kingdom shall be strong, and part shall be broken from it.’” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, chapter XXVI, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, page 555)

Augustine was concerned that both those who were trying to figure out who the ten kings were along with those who paid no attention to Bible prophecy would be deceived or misled: “As for the ten kings who, as it seems, Antichrist is to find in the person of ten individuals when he comes, I own I am afraid we may be deceived in this, and that he may come unexpectedly while there are not ten kings living in the Ramona world.” (Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX, ch. 23)

(Quote from D, page 54) – talking about Pseudo-Methodius

“The account then leaps to the seventh century, when Islam has broken out of the deserts of Arabia to conquer everything from India to Egypt and beyond. The Muslims, called ‘Ishmaelites’, persecute the Church because of the sins of the Christian people. The Ishmaelites kill priests, destroy churches, pillage holy relics, and cause many to apostatize. For Pseudo-Methodius, this time of tribulation is undoubtedly the fulfillment of 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the falling away that will eventually reveal the

Antichrist, the Son of Perdition. The Ishmaelite oppressors then speak blasphemously: There is no savior for the Christians.

‘Then suddenly there will be awakened perdition and calamity...and a king of the Greeks will go forth against them in great wrath.’

This is the last Roman emperor, and he will ride out to defeat the infidels. Their servitude will be a hundred times worse than what they inflicted upon their Christian subjects – a fit payment for their aggression. The last Roman emperor will also punish those Christians who denied the Faith. Then will come a millennial paradise, when the world will be at peace and the Church will prosper.” (D,54)

(F, page 31) “During the Middle Ages, the ‘historical’ interpretation of Revelation arose in which the book was thought to give in symbolic form an outline of the history of the Church. Antichrist was frequently interpreted to mean the Saracens [or, Muslims], and the false prophet to mean Mohammad. Pope innocent III made effective use of the Revelation to stir up support for his crusade.

(mine) As T. L. Frazier writes in *A Second Look at the Second Coming* concerning the rise of Islam and the decline of the Roman Empire, he points out that the real power of the Roman Empire was NOT Europe in the West, but the Eastern world:

“Obviously, the Roman Empire came and went hundreds of years ago. Rather than fracturing into ten kingdoms, the Roman Empire continuously shrank over the centuries as it lost territory to invaders. Nobody today can argue that it was the last world empire. The Turkish Empire [Muslim] that conquered New Rome (Constantinople) in 1453 was an empire no less powerful than Rome was at its height. Moreover, the only ‘Antichrist’ to appear at the Eastern Empire’s demise was Sultan Mehmet II, who marched triumphantly into Hagia Sophia, the main church of the empire in Constantinople, and claimed it as a Turkish mosque.

Although the patristic interpretation of Daniel is similar in some respect to dispensationalists, there is a significant difference: the Fathers of the Church did not picture the ten kingdoms as a resurrected empire appearing hundreds of years after Rome’s fall. Nor, we might add, did they see the Roman Empire as merely a ‘unified’ Western Europe. In fact, Western Europe was the backwater of the empire. The Eastern Mediterranean was where the strength of the empire actually lay, and this is why the Roman emperors allowed the Western Empire to fall to barbarian invaders while they consolidated their power in the East. The ten kingdoms of Daniel’s prophecy would certainly have included the Eastern Empire in the thinking of the Fathers.” (D, 196)

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