

Why I Am a Post-Tributionalist

A Look at Timing of the Rapture in Light of Scripture

By George Ford

After having studied the subject of the timing of Christ's return in light of the evidence of the Scriptures, I have come to a position known as Post-tribulationism. I believe in a restored Israel and the rebuilding of a new temple in which the Antichrist will declare that he is God. I believe in a seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation that will also be a time in which God will judge this sinful world. I believe that the church will not be raptured prior to this event but will experience tribulation at the hands of an unbelieving world. However, they will be spared from the wrath of God. I believe that the Lord will return at the end of that period and destroy the Antichrist and judge the world. At the same time, His return will be inaugurated by our resurrection and gathering together to Him as we welcome Him to His rightful throne in Jerusalem. He will then reign on earth for a literal 1,000 years.

The following is a summary of the reasons which have led me to abandon my prior belief that God is going to rapture the church prior to the Tribulation. I have no desire in causing division within any church and I also recognize that I am by no means a scholar. However, I must be led by my convictions that I no longer find a Pre-tribulationist rapture to be a biblical framework and therefore I have written this document.

POST-TRIBULATIONISM IS NOT A NEW BELIEF SYSTEM

The first area that I am going to discuss is the fact that the post-apostolic church believed in a 1,000-year reign of Christ preceded by a seven-year tribulation that will then be followed by the rapture of the church in order to greet the Lord in the air upon His return to earth. The reason that I am referring to the belief of the early church is not to base my doctrinal beliefs upon the teachings of the early church, but rather to show first that this belief is not new, but in fact, is the most ancient within the church. In other words, it is to clear up any possible misunderstanding that this is a new or unusual belief.

Justin Martyr (~150 AD; *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew, 110*) wrote "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 the Christians*...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.” Justin Martyr anticipated the church to be tortured by the Antichrist and that the church would maintain its confession of faith.

The Didache (mid-late 2nd century) taught that the church would endure the Great Tribulation, after which, all the world will “*see the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven*” (*Didache* 16.5-8)

Irenaeus (130-202AD; *Against Heresies* 5.28.4) taught 1.) the Antichrist would reign for 3.5 years and sit in the temple in Jerusalem (the temple having been destroyed for 100 years at the time of this writing) and 2.) that the Great Tribulation would serve, for the church, as “*fire, [that] they may be fitted for the royal banquet.*” He believed in a millennial reign preceded by a Great Tribulation through which the church would endure.

Tertullian (early 3rd century, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 22), in describing our conduct in awaiting our resurrection said, “Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things, and to stand before the Son of man;” that is, no doubt, *at the resurrection, after all these things have been previously transacted.*” Tertullian taught that the resurrection occurred after the Great Tribulation as opposed to Pre-tribulationism which teaches that the resurrection takes place before the Tribulation.

From the extant writings of the early church, it appears that the predominant view was that the church would go through the period of the Tribulation without any mention of being raptured prior to this event. This has led leading Pre-tribulationist scholar, John Walvoord, to say:

The expectancy of the Lord’s coming was clouded, however, by the belief that the events of the tribulation were impending, and that *Christ’s coming to establish His kingdom was post-tribulational*. While all the early fathers are not clear on the question, some of them were post-tribulational. *Pre-tribulationists usually concede that none of them taught the precise interpretation of Darby (The Rapture Question, p. 54.)*

We can therefore conclude that the belief in Post-tribulationism isn’t a new teaching but was in fact the earliest and predominant teaching concerning the return of Christ within the early church.

THE HISTORY OF THE “PRE-TRIB RAPTURE”

The next subject that I want to address is that of the history of the belief of Pre-tribulationism. When Constantine had established his position as Emperor in Rome (323-4AD), the persecution that had periodically threatened the church for the previous 300 years had in many ways, all but ceased. Beginning with the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea and expounded in the *City of God* of Augustine at the beginning of the 5th century, the view of the former *chiliasts* (those who awaited a literal 1000 year reign of Christ after the 2nd Coming of Christ) had waned and, for the next 12 centuries, the church, by and large, would interpret the millennial reign of Christ in a spiritual manner in the form of what is now known as either postmillennialism or amillennialism. Both views claim the church age *is* the millennial reign (the word for one thousand, *chilioi*, taken symbolically to mean a long, unspecified period of time) spoken of in Revelation 20, and that Christ, at an undetermined time in the future, was going to return and create a new heaven and a new earth.

During the period of the Protestant Reformation, the Protestant churches almost unanimously, while still adhering to this spiritualized view of the millennia in regard to eschatology, viewed the Pope as the Antichrist. However, as the Protestant church further distanced itself from Rome and as the persecutions inflicted by the Roman Church declined, the view that the Pope was the Antichrist declined as well. In addition, as the church was reexamining many long-held doctrines in light of the evidence of the Scriptures during this period, the eschatological view of post / amillennialism was abandoned by many to reflect the premillennial view previously held by the early church. In other words, many were arriving at the conclusion that there will be a period known as the Great Tribulation and that at the end of that period, Christ will return to establish His kingdom upon the earth for a literal one thousand years.

However, it should be noted that, absent from this revived renewal in end times theology, was the teaching that God was going to rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation which is what would lead even John Darby himself to term that form of teaching as “new wine”. This teaching was virtually unknown until the early 1800s, when a series of prophetic conferences were taking place in England and Scotland. Amidst a resurgence in pre-millennialism in England in the late 1820’s (years 1826-1829), a group of devout and scholarly men, known as the Plymouth Brethren began to meet with a focus on prophecy, at what are now known as the Albury Conferences, in a gentleman’s house by the name of Henry Drummond. Many consider

the leader of these conferences to be a man by the name of Edward Irving. Irving was a known as a very gifted and charismatic man who, in 1822, had turned a dying, 50-member Presbyterian church to a thriving 1,000+ member church in a matter of months. (<http://healingandrevival.com/BioEIrving.htm>). One of the concerns within these meetings was Irving's interest in the work of a Jesuit Priest named, Manuel Lacunza. Lacunza, writing under the guise of a converted Jew with the pseudonym of Rabbi Ben Ezra, claimed that 1 Thessalonians 4:18-19 described a 'rapture before the arrival' of Christ which would take place 45 days prior to the return of Christ. In 1827, Irving translated this work into English and had insisted on using it within their discussions as he had stated in his introduction to this work that he was "deeply impressed with the truths" therein (p.12). However, there was not yet, up until this time, any public espousal of the teaching that there would be a rapture of the church prior to the Second Coming of Christ until 1830.

In the beginning of 1830, Irving began publishing the quarterly journal entitled, "The Morning Watch." It is worth noting that there was no mention of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church in the March or June editions of that year, for it would be first made public in the September edition of the Morning Watch of 1830. In this edition of the Morning Watch, Irving claimed that the faithful church in Philadelphia represents the church that would be removed prior to the Tribulation (see Revelation 3:10) and that the lukewarm Laodicean church represents the church that would be left behind. The timing of this publishing is crucial to understanding the source of this teaching because John Cardale, contributing author to that edition of the Morning Watch, chronicles a series of prophetic utterances that both he and Irving had witnessed at Edward Irving's church in Port Glasgow, Scotland, between July and September of that same year. Describing those utterances, Cardale describes a 15-year old Margaret McDonald who was prophesying concerning the Second Coming of Christ. He states that she:

Commenced also speaking...gave testimony to the judgments coming on the earth; but also directed the church to the coming of the Lord as her hope of deliverance...denouncing the coming judgments.

Robert Norton, in his *Restoration of Apostles and Prophets; In the Catholic Apostolic Church* (shortened form of *Memoirs of James and George Macdonald of Port Glasgow (1840)*) publishes some of Mary's handwritten notes chronicling her own prophecies:

Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of His appearance,... 'Tis Christ in us that will *lift us up* - he is the light - 'this only those that are alive in him *that will be caught up to meet Him in the air...*

Those who were filled with the Spirit could see spiritual things, and feel walking in the midst of them, while those who had not the Spirit could see nothing - so that two shall be in one bed, the one taken and the other left, because the one has the light of God within while the other cannot see the kingdom of God...

This is what we at present made to pray much for, that speedily we *may all be made ready to meet our Lord in the air.*

Edward Irving himself considered Margaret as one of the pillars of his later Catholic Apostolic Church and received and began both publicizing and preaching this message. Therefore, this form of doctrine was first received from a Jesuit Priest writing under the pretense of a converted Rabbi, then prophesied with more clarity by a 15-year old Margaret Macdonald, but then publicized through Irving's Morning Watch journal. This same Irving would later be condemned on two accounts of heresy, as he would 1.) claim that Christ came in sinful nature and 2.) had allowed his zeal for the manifestation of the Spirit to get out of control. He went on to establish the Apostolic Catholic Church in which there were apostles and prophets while he served as the angel of that church. He later taught that those upon whom the apostles of his church lay their hands upon will be included in the 144,000 sealed saints that will escape the Tribulation that is coming.

Now, amongst the Plymouth brethren were other distinguished men, such as John Darby, Benjamin Newton, S.P. Tregelles, and George Mueller. Among those names, only Darby, and even he at times with fluctuating reluctance, would embrace and later become known as the founder of Pre-tribulational dispensationalism.

However, it would not be until 1833 that Darby would ever make any claim that a rapture would take place prior to the Second Coming of Christ. This is significant, because there are those who claim that either Darby came to this conclusion before Irving or that Darby did not receive this information from Irving and thus in turn, from Macdonald but that Darby came to this conclusion completely independent of the Irvingites. Nevertheless, there is no known literature that points to Darby holding to such a belief prior to 1833. The fact that prophetic utterances were again largely the impetus for Irving's adherence to the Pre-tribulational view is again confirmed by a man by the name of Robert Baxter, a lawyer and at one time of the six

apostles within Edward Irving's church. Baxter, however, broke away from Irving and recorded a book concerning the occurrences of the meetings at Edward Irving's church, entitled, *Narration of Facts, Characterizing the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Irving's Congregation* (1835). In this account, he claims that the rapture would deliver the church from the Tribulation as the ark did for Noah during the flood and as the angels did for Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Since this was written in 1835 by an eyewitness, it is more than merely probable that these occurrences were taking place prior to Darby's first public statement regarding his belief on the Pre-trib rapture in 1833. In fact, even Pre-tribulational scholar and leader, Charles Ryrie has said:

It was not until several years after leaving the Church of England that Darby became interested in prophesy. His interest was piqued *through conferences at Albury, out of which the Irvingian movement grew.*

It was therefore from these meetings in the church of a recognized heretic that the doctrine of the a Pre-tribulational rapture arose. Darby, to be true to the history, was not the founder of this doctrine, but he was merely the greatest proponent of its promulgation.

Considering the source of this doctrine, it shouldn't be surprising to discover that there were not many outside of Darby's close following that actually embraced this teaching in England and Scotland. For instance, S.P. Tregelles, known to be the most learned and scholarly of the Brethren, said concerning the Pre-trib rapture teaching and its foundation upon the prophetic utterances of Margaret Macdonald that, "It was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God." (S. P. Tregelles, *The*

Hope of Christ's Second Coming, 1864). He thus, in according with 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22, believed that he had *tested* this *prophecy* and found it *evil*. Likewise, the renowned man of faith and Plymouth Brother, George Müller, had also disagreed with John Darby concerning this new teaching. The disagreement between them was heated enough to cause Müller to write these words to a friend of his:

My brother, I am a constant reader of my Bible, and I soon found that what I was taught to believe did not always agree with what my Bible said. I came to see that *I must either part company with John Darby or my precious Bible...* I chose to cling to my Bible and part from Mr. Darby. Cameron, Robert. *Scriptural Truth About the Lord's Return*. (New York: Flemming H. Revell, 1922), p. 146-147

John Darby, on the other hand, was convinced that this truly was indeed a revelation of the Holy Spirit and became an arduous defender and promulgator of this view. In fact, he visited the US no less than six times between 1859 and 1874 to spread this view, with much success. In fact, Pre-tribulational, premillennial dispensationalism would go on to become the predominant eschatological view in the United States among evangelical Christians towards the middle of the 20th century. Darby's desire that this teaching "work like leaven" (Darby, John. *Letters of J.N.D.* in a letter to Mr. H. Barleage, p.26) because "the thoughts are new" had now been realized.

CONCLUSION: Concerning this very subject, the Apostle Paul could not have been clearer: *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our gathering together to Him**, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, **either by spirit or by word or by letter**, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; **for that Day will not come unless** the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed* (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). When both, the source of this teaching and the reluctance of other godly and scholarly contemporaries of Darby fail to accept this teaching, are considered together with the commands to *test all things* (1 Thes 5:21) and to *not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God* (1 John 4:1), at a minimum, I believe that caution is merited when embracing this view. Indeed, how much more when we consider that the first preacher to vocalize and promote such views was later denounced for his heresy that Christ came in sinful flesh, *for every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.* - 1 John 4:3

To quote George Mueller, (Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1998). *The church and the last things*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; Quoted by Frank H. White in *The Saints Rest and Rapture*).

I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgment, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light that I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful, diligent student of the Bible for nearly fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. *The Scripture declares plainly that the Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, the Man of Sin, the son of perdition shall have been revealed as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It does not, however, alter the fact that the coming of Christ, and not death, is the great hope of the Church and, if in a right state of heart, we (as the Thessalonian believers did) shall 'serve the living and true God, and wait for his Son from heaven'.

OVERVIEW OF KEY PASSAGES THAT PURPORTEDLY TEACH A “PRE-TRIB RAPTURE”

But where in the Bible is the teaching that God is going to rapture the church prior to the seven-year period tribulation? I will now briefly show why I do not believe it is taught anywhere but is rather used as an interpretive inference that is *brought into* the passages that describe the 2nd coming of Christ, but not *gathered from* the Scriptures. One of, if not the primary teaching on the rapture of the church is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

16. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The word rapture (*harpazo* in Greek, *rapio*, Latin), translated here as “*caught up*” is what we all agree to be considered the “rapture” of the church. According to a Pre-tribulationist view, this is a secret, invisible, any moment occurrence, in which Jesus is going to snatch His church away from the earth in order to deliver her from the Great Tribulation that is coming upon the inhabitants of the earth. At the end of this period, Jesus will then descend with His church to bring final judgment to the world and establish His 1,000 year, or millennial, reign.

It must be noted, however, that one does not *gather* the idea or concept of a secret and invisible coming of Jesus in which He will take the church to be with Him for seven years *from* this passage, but instead we find that the most natural deduction that is *gathered from* this text is that this will be a very public event.

1. The Lord will descend, without any mention of a subsequent return to heaven
2. It will be accompanied with a shout
3. There will be a voice of an archangel
4. Together with the trumpet of God

In all fairness, the only way that one could discern a secret and invisible snatching away of the church followed by a subsequent return to heaven with the saints, is if one were to *bring* that exegetical framework *into* the text. Again, the idea of a Pre-tribulation rapture is not taught explicitly in this passage. It is inferred.

Are there any other places found within the Scriptures that unite these events that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 with the 2nd coming of Christ? Yes. In fact,

postmillennialists, amillennialists and post-tribulational premillennialists have interpreted these two passages as describing the same event since the dawn of the church. Please notice the similarities that are found in Jesus' Olivet discourse with Paul's words to the Thessalonians. In Matthew 24:30-31, we read, *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the **Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And He will send His **angels** with a great **sound of a trumpet**, and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*

The similarities are striking:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17	Matthew 24:30-31
<i>the Lord Himself will descend</i>	<i>the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven</i>
<i>voice of an archangel</i>	<i>He will send His angels</i>
<i>the trumpet of God</i>	<i>with a great sound of a trumpet</i>
<i>Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air</i>	<i>they will gather together His elect from the four winds</i>

Therefore, not only does one not *gather* an invisible, secret rapture of the church *from* 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, but in fact we see Jesus describing in striking similarity events that are clearly describing the return of Jesus. Concerning the connection of these two passages, renowned post-tribulational preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said:

And we are told that His coming will be one attended by a peculiar sign, 'Behold, He cometh with clouds.' (referring to Matthew 24:30). We shall have no means to question whether it is the Son of Man who has come, or whether He is indeed come. *This is to be no secret matter*. The clouds also denote the terror of His coming to the ungodly. His saints shall be caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet Him in the air (referring to 1 Thessalonians 4:17) ...

Spurgeon saw that the clouds upon which the Son of Man descends at His Second Coming as described in Matthew 24:30 are the same clouds to which the saints will be caught up to in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, thus connecting the 1 Thessalonians passage, not to a secret, invisible rapture of the church, but to the very public event of the Second Coming of Christ.

When comparing these scriptures, it appears that Paul and Christ are describing the same event, namely the 2nd Coming or Return of Christ.

A common objection to the view that 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is dealing with the final return of Christ is that it seems foolish to believe that we would meet the Lord in the air, simply to return to the earth almost immediately afterwards. However, when we understand the usage of the Greek words that Paul used to describe the rapture, it then becomes clear that this is exactly what Paul is saying.

The *coming* or *parousia* was a word often used to describe the coming of a great figure into the city. The imperial visit's *parousia* would often be accompanied by sacrifices, games, donations, new building projects, etc. (*TLNT*, 3.53–54; *LAE*, 368–73; Brent Kinman, *Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 25–47; Erik Wistrand, *Felicitas Imperatoria* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothobergensis, 1987). The *parousia* was a great celebration in which a certain city would celebrate the arrival of a particular individual. This word, *parousia*, is the word that is often used to describe the *coming* of Christ. For instance, the disciples upon hearing that the temple was going to be destroyed, asked Jesus, “*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming (parousia), and of the end of the age?*” (Matthew 24:3). Notice they referred to it as “*Your coming (parousia)*”, which denotes amongst the many *parousias* that have occurred, when does *Yours* occur. In a similar manner, the epistles referred to the *parousia* as something that pertained to Christ by calling it “*His coming (parousia)*” (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Peter 3:4; 1 John 2:28).

The word, *parousia*, is defined as “the visit of a ruler”, and that “The customary honours on the *parousia* of a ruler are: flattering addresses, tributes, delicacies, asses to ride on and for baggage, improvement of streets, golden wreaths in natura or money, and feeding of the sacred crocodiles” (*Oepke, A. Theological dictionary of the New Testament (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 859)*). *Parousia* is elsewhere defined as a “solemn visit of a king” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*).

To summarize, the word *parousia* signified the arrival of a great figure in which the inhabitants of a city would, with great celebration, welcome that figure. The *parousia* or *coming* of the Lord is now understood as an event that will take place upon His return to earth and not in an invisible snatching away of the church to heaven. At the *parousia*, the saints will join Him and celebrate His arrival as the ancients would with their rulers, albeit in a completely sanctified manner.

The word in v.17 translated *meet* (*apantasis*) was the word that was used to describe how the citizens of the city would align the highways to cheer on and welcome or greet this great

individual into their city (Green, G. L. (2002). The letters to the Thessalonians. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.) at that specific ruler's *parousia*. Josephus describes the citizens of Rome going out to *meet* Vespasian, their newly appointed Caesar, in this manner:

The good will to Vespasian was universal, those that enjoyed any remarkable dignities could not have patience enough to stay in Rome, but made haste to meet him [hapantōn] at a very great distance from it; (69) nay, indeed, none of the rest could endure the delay of seeing him, but did all pour out of the city in such crowds, and were so universally possessed with the opinion that it was easier and better for them to go out than to stay there, that this was the very first time that the city joyfully perceived itself almost empty of its citizens; for those that staid within were fewer than those that went out; (70) but as soon as the news was come that he was hard by, and those that had met him at first related with what good humor he received everyone that came to him, then it was that the whole multitude that had remained in the city, with their wives and children, came into the road, and waited for him there; (71) and for those whom he passed by, they made all sorts of acclamations on account of the joy they had to see him, and the pleasantness of his countenance, and styled him their Benefactor and Savior, and the only person who was worthy to be ruler of the city of Rome; (72) and now the city was like a temple, full of garlands and sweet odors;

Josephus, Bellum Judaicum 7.68-72

Josephus used this word to describe the activity of the citizens of Rome in welcoming Caesar into their city. They aligned the highways as they welcomed and cheered him as he arrived to his final destination, Rome. Notice that they did not meet Caesar to go back with him in the direction that he came, but instead they went out to welcome him *into* the city in that already existed. In over-simplified sports terms, the *meeting* of describes the act of catching a football (keeping it where it is) rather than hitting a tennis ball (hitting it back to where it came).

Moreover, this word for *meet* is found in only two other passages in the NT, and both are significant. In Matthew 25:6, the virgins *meet* the bridegroom and do not turn the bridegroom in the opposite direction to follow him, but instead they *meet* him and then continue with him to his final destination, which is the great wedding feast. It is used again in Acts 28:16, where the church in Rome *met* Paul to greet him, and likewise, upon meeting him, they continued with him in the same direction that he was heading. As opposed to the teaching of Pre-tribulationism,

the word for *meet* does not imply that the church will ascend in order to arrive at the place from which Christ is coming, namely heaven. Instead, it implies that we will *meet* the Lord in the air in order to welcome Him and thus follow Him to His final destination: the earth.

Understanding now, the usage of these words to describe the welcoming of a great figure into a city and the details concerning the word translated *meet*, it now becomes as clear to us as it would have been to the church at Thessalonica 2,000 years ago. Christ will descend from heaven at His *parousia* and we will *meet* Him in the air in order to welcome Him and praise Him as He enters into our sin laden world to take His rightful place upon His throne in Jerusalem.

Another passage that Pre-tribulationism claims is describing a rapture of the church prior to the Great Tribulation is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

1. *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,*

2. *not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.*

3. *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*

4. *who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Paul is here referring to the rapture of the church that he had earlier described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, however this time he uses the phrase, “*our gathering together (episunagoge) to Him*” as opposed to us being *caught up together ... to meet Him*. I want to again ask the question, what is the natural reading of this text? Do we see here that one *gathers* the idea of a rapture prior to the tribulation *from* this passage, or is it *brought into* the text? To answer that question, I want to ask another question: Let’s assume there is a Christian who is fearful that we are currently living during the period of the Great Tribulation, or to phrase it as Paul did in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, *as though the day of Christ had come*. He, in order to get counsel and support, seeks a Christian friend who happens to be a Pre-tribulationist and relays to him his concerns. How would this Pretribulationist friend respond to his worries? It would probably go something like this: “Don’t worry friend. We know we are not living during the Great Tribulation because God is going to rapture the church prior to that great and awful day.”

Keeping that in mind, how does Paul answer this very same concern that the Thessalonian church had, for they *were troubled...as though the day of Christ had come*? Not only does Paul not tell this church that they will be raptured prior to that Day, he then goes on to say that the rapture of the church will be preceded by the revelation of the Antichrist (man of sin (Textus Receptus) / man of lawlessness (Nestle Aland 27)). However, if the rapture of the church happened *BEFORE* the revelation of the Antichrist as is taught within Pre-tribulationism, this would then reduce Paul's words of comfort and exhortation to mere academia. That is to say, if the rapture happens prior to the tribulation, they will never meet the antichrist and any information regarding him only concerns their knowledge but says nothing of way of application for them. One does not *gather* the doctrine of a secret, invisible rapture of the church prior to the 2nd coming of Christ *from* this passage. In fact, the simple and most plain reading of this text leads to another conclusion, such as follows: The *coming of the Lord* and *gathering together* (v.1) will not happen until 1.) the apostasy takes place and 2.) the antichrist is revealed (v.3). In other words, Paul is warning the church today as much as he was the Thessalonian church nearly 2,000 years ago: *Do not be deceived, for that Day WILL NOT COME UNTIL* the apostasy takes place and the Antichrist is revealed. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, not only doesn't teach that the church will be raptured prior to the Great Tribulation, but in fact, he seemingly says the opposite! The Antichrist will be declaring himself as God halfway through the seven-year Tribulation (Daniel 9:27) which in turn sets in motion the "Great Tribulation" (Matthew 24:15, 21). If the rapture cannot occur until the antichrist is revealed, this therefore means that the church will at least be present for the first half of the Tribulation. Paul warns that to believe contrary to this view is to *be deceived*.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus ascended to heaven, that He is coming back with His angels, that His appearing will be preceded by a time of great suffering and great judgment upon the earth which will be accompanied by many supernatural signs. We have many of the details associated with the return of Christ, but nowhere is there an explicit passage that clearly teaches that Jesus will secretly take His church into heaven for seven years prior to His return. It must be *brought into* the passages that cover the return of Jesus.

One of the key texts used to teach a rapture prior to the Tribulation is found in Revelation 3:10, as Jesus encourages the church in Philadelphia, saying:

*“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will **keep you** from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”*

Remember, this was the first published Scriptural basis for the pre-tribulational rapture found in Edward Irving’s September edition of “The Morning Watch” in September, 1830. The *hour of trial* here described is thus believed to be the Great Tribulation and the promise to *keep you from* this difficult time is then understood to be a reference to rapturing the church prior to the Great Tribulation.

However, this phrase to *keep from* (thrheō ek - *I will keep from* - Rev 3:10) is used in only one other place in the NT, which also is Johanne. In John 17:15, Jesus prayed, “*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should **keep them** (thrshs autous ek - you should keep them from - John 17:15) **from** the evil one.*” Jesus in praying this prayer then let’s us understand with further clarity the meaning of His words to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10. When Jesus prayed the Father that He would **keep** the disciples **from** evil, He certainly didn’t pray that God would remove them from the world. In fact, Jesus prayed the opposite. They would be experience tribulation and many would even be martyred for their faith in Jesus while remaining in the world, yet Jesus still says they were **kept from** evil. Applying this now to Revelation 3:10, we then understand that Jesus will **keep** the church **from** hour of trial that is coming, not by removing them from it, but by preserving them through it.

Many have seen that Jesus taught that the church would be raptured prior to the

Tribulation in His words that “one will be taken and the other left” (Matthew 24-40-41; Luke 17:34-36) and in fact, the New York Times bestselling *Left Behind* series is entitled after that very interpretation. First, let the reader be reminded that this interpretation was first given to these passages by Margaret Macdonald, the supposed prophetess in Edward Irving’s church. Second, in Luke’s passage, after Jesus tells His disciples that “one will be taken and the other left” (Luke 17:36), the disciples in turn disciples ask, “Where Lord?”, in other words, “where will they be taken?”, to which Jesus responds, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Luke 17:37). Jesus did not tell them that they would be taken into heaven, but into judgment. Therefore, those taken, like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the inhabitants of the antediluvian world were taken *in judgment*, so also those who are not in Christ will be taken in judgment. To quote Pre-tribulational theological scholar, Norman Geisler,

The illustrated parallel indicates that those “taken” were not taken in the Rapture, but, rather, like those “taken” in the Flood, at the end of the Tribulation, taken in judgment. This is further supported by the parallel passage, where those “taken” were brought to a place of judgment. The disciples asked where they would go, and Jesus replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather” (Luke 17:37). Those “left” to go into the Millennium after the judgment of the Tribulation were the ones saved. Geisler, N. L. (2005). ST4 (pp. 625-626).

One more key verse is found in Revelation 4:1-2, which reads:

1. *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”*

2. *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*

It is worth noting that Margaret Macdonald’s prophetic writings likewise liken the rapture of the church to John’s spiritual ascension to receive the apocalypse, as is referred to here. Many, though not all, Pre-tribulationists believe that this symbolically represents the rapture of the church prior to the Tribulation. Since John had just spoken of things that he *has seen, and that the things that are* (Revelation 1:19), he is now, as some teach, raptured into heaven prior to receiving information concerning *the things that will take place after* (Revelation 1:19). Since the *things that take place after* primarily concern the wrath of God upon the earth, it is therefore believed that this must be a reference to the rapture prior to that wrath.

It is not only the conclusion of those who do not hold to the Pre-tribulationist persuasion that claim that there are not any explicit biblical passages that clearly teach that God is going to rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation, but this is also the general consensus of even those who hold to the Pre-tribulationist view. For example, John Walvoord has admitted that, “Pre-tribulationists...have strained to find some specific reference in support of their views...most adherents...concede that there is not explicit reference”, and that concerning the pre-trib rapture being an explicit teaching in the scriptures, he says, “...the bible does not say so in so many words” (Walvoord, John. *The Rapture Question*, p. 148,182). Grace Theological Seminary’s Dr. Richard Mayhue in *The Prophet’s Watchword: Day of the Lord* said, “the pre-trib theory is not taught, directly in Scripture, and pre-tribulationists still have problems to solve in regard to their position.” Even Tim LaHaye, author of the New York Times bestselling *Left Behind* series, in

his book, *No Fear of the Storm*, on p.69, says, “One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that no one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true.”

The fact is that the belief that God is going to rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation is not taught explicitly anywhere in the Scriptures. It is an eschatological framework that one must read into end times passages. The teaching must be *brought into* the passage but it is nowhere *gathered from* them.

WRATH -VS- TRIBULATION

One of the most significant driving forces behind the belief in the concept that God will rapture His church prior to the Great Tribulation is that *God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). It is held that since the period of the Great Tribulation is the period in which God is going to unleash His holy wrath upon the world, that it is therefore impossible that His elect children could suffer that same wrath with an unbelieving world.

It is true that it is unimaginable that God would punish His children with wrath, considering that we are those who have *been justified by His blood*, and therefore *we shall be saved from wrath through Him*. (Romans 5:9). But, does this therefore necessitate that God deliver us by means of a rapture prior to the judgment upon the earth? Is it possible that the church could remain upon this earth as God is unleashing His fury upon a world of disobedience, meanwhile protecting His church completely from that wrath? This is similar to what happened to Israel in Egypt. While Pharaoh and his people were experiencing judgment upon their gods and their systems of false worship, the Israelites were preserved from this very same judgment. Yet, while the judgment of God was being poured out upon Egypt, Pharaoh persisted in persecuting Israel (Exodus 5:10-14; 14:9). In other words, the wrath of God was poured out upon unbelieving Egypt while Pharaoh in turn was creating tribulation for Israel. This concurrent wrath of God upon Egypt and tribulation for God's elect nation of Israel was then culminated at the Red Sea. The Red Sea that served as a final act of judgment upon Egypt also served as the final act of God's deliverance for Israel. In like manner, God will deliver the church from His *wrath* but the church will not be preserved from the Great *Tribulation* that will be unleashed by the antichrist upon the church because there is a distinction between God's wrath and the tribulation that the church receives. And just as the Red Sea was the culmination of both the wrath of God upon

Egypt and salvation for Israel, likewise the return of Christ will be the consummation of the wrath of God upon an unbelieving world as it also serves as final “*salvation... to those who eagerly wait for Him*” (Hebrews 9:28).

Does the Scripture warrant this view that one can discern between the wrath of God and the Tribulation that is coming or should they be viewed as the same occurrence (i.e. the wrath of God = the Great Tribulation)? First of all, it should be clear that the wrath of God is only enacted upon unbelievers, for *God did not appoint us to wrath* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). In fact, it is impossible for a child of God to experience any form of God’s wrath. God’s wrath for us, which is merited because we are *by nature children of wrath* (Ephesians 2:3), was completely removed through the cross of Christ for, we are those who have *been justified by His blood*, and therefore *we shall be saved from wrath through Him* (Romans 5:9).

The verb form or nominal form of the word “tribulation” (thlibō; thlipsis) is used 55 times in the NT. In 46 of these occurrences, the word is describing in some way or another, that which believers (or those aspiring to be believers) will endure. Only three of the occurrences describe what an unbeliever will endure (It is worth noting that in one of those threes uses, namely 2 Thessalonians 1:6, as Paul was referring to the unbelievers in the Thessalonian community that were causing the church *tribulation*, God is just and will therefore repay the unbelievers in return with *tribulation*. So, in the 2nd usage of the word in which it is applied to unbelievers, Paul was using it loosely as a rhetorical device in order to repeat that word, *tribulation*). Of the 49 times that thlibō or thlipsis is applied to either what a believer will experience or what an unbeliever will experience, it is referring to what a believer will experience 94% of the time (see attachment on θλίβω and θλίψις). Therefore, by the very title, “Great Tribulation”, we can infer that Jesus is describing a time that believers will experience, for Jesus said, *in this world you will have tribulation* (John 16:33).

Pre-tribulationism believes that 1 Thessalonians 5:9, in which we read that *God did not appoint us to wrath* (or *orh*) *but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*, teaches that, since the Great Tribulation is one and the same as the wrath of God, God will therefore rapture the church prior to the Tribulation in order that the church might *obtain salvation* prior to that time. What was this wrath of God to Paul to which the church was not appointed to one and the same as the Great Tribulation? This *salvation* appears to be what Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

7. *and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,*

8. *in flaming fire **taking vengeance** on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

9. *These shall be **punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*

10. *when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

There are two things that we should notice: 1.) Paul included both the 1st century, Thessalonian church along with himself among those who would receive *rest* from the Lord on the very same day that Jesus takes *vengeance on those who do not know God*. (i.e. at the 2nd coming of Christ). If the rapture happened seven years before this day of vengeance at the 2nd coming of Christ, then neither Paul nor the Thessalonians church would be there. In fact, they would receive rest seven years prior to the day of Christ's judgment. However, Paul said that both he and the church in Thessalonica would receive *rest* on the day that is clearly a reference to the 2nd coming of Christ. 2.) This vengeance is the same event as the culmination of the wrath of God that Paul referred to in 1 Thessalonians 5:9. Like the Red Sea, the 2nd coming of Christ is the means of final judgment upon an unbelieving world while at the same time, it is our day of final salvation and deliverance.

In Revelation 7:1-8, we see that God seals 144,000 men of which an angel declared in the midst of the Tribulation, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3). This means that God is completely sovereign over when and where His wrath is poured out. Could not God, to whom a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His knowledge, sovereignly protect His children from His wrath during the period of the Great Tribulation without removing them from the earth? The answer of course is, yes. However, while God will protect His children from His wrath, the church is not and never has been exempt from experiencing persecution and tribulation from the hands of unbelievers. And thus, later in Revelation 12:17, we find that the dragon made "war with the rest of her offspring (i.e. the church) who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." This is describing the efforts of persecution from the devil enacted upon the church.

Therefore, since there is no explicit reference to a secret, invisible rapture of the church taking place before the period of the Great Tribulation and since the very word *tribulation* describes the experience of suffering that believers receive from unbelievers, Post-tribulationism concludes that the church will experience the Great Tribulation. The wrath from which the church will be delivered from is the wrath of God described in the seals, trumpets and bowls of God's wrath in Revelation and finalized in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9 at return of Christ.

THE BIBLE SAYS THE RESURRECTION OCCURS AFTER THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Pre-tribulationism teaches that the resurrection takes place at the moment of the rapture of the church, and thus occurs seven years before the return of Christ. In addition, Pretribulationism teaches that there will be another resurrection of those who believed in Christ during the period of the Great Tribulation at the return of Christ. Therefore, the resurrection of the righteous occurs at two intervals: 1.) before the seven year Tribulation and 2.) after the seven year Tribulation any the 2nd coming of Christ. These two intervals together, are considered to be the "resurrection of life" (John 5:29) or the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5). Post-tribulationism believes that the "first resurrection" occurs at one interval: at the second coming of Christ.

The book of Revelation describes the timing of the "first resurrection" in accordance with the teaching of Post-tribulationism. Revelation 6-19 describe the wrath of God and the period of the Great Tribulation. Then, AFTER the period of the Great Tribulation, we find those who sit upon thrones on the earth. This is known as, in Revelation 20:5, *the first resurrection*. Therefore, as opposed to the teaching of Pre-tribulationism, we find no reference to a resurrection prior to the Tribulation, but only afterwards as Post-tribulationism teaches.

CAN THE RAPTURE HAPPEN AT ANY MOMENT?

One of the strongest reasons in favor of believing in a Pre-tribulational rapture is that it provides a framework of understanding that enables us to understand how Jesus will come at any moment, or, *as a thief in the night* (1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), that it to say, at a moment in which we least expect it. The framework then of this approach to the 2nd coming of Christ has a sufficient amount of explanatory power. For instance, how can it be that Christ will come when men and women are given in marriage and in a time in which it appears that certain members of the human population will be celebrating (Luke 17:26-30), if the *return* of Christ will be preceded by famine, war, and cosmic darkness? The Pre-tribulationist can explain this very simply: the Rapture of the church will happen at at any moment, and thus, while the world is carrying on as

normal, the Lord will come and rapture His church. Only after this will God's wrath will be unleashed upon the earth. In addition, this also enables us to understand that 1.) Jesus can come at a moment when we least expect it, and yet at the same time, calculate the time of His return since, 2.) from the time that the antichrist "*confirms (with force)*" (גָּבַר *gâḇar* in Daniel 9:27) a covenant with Israel there will be 7 years and even more so, there will be 3.5 years until the return of Christ from the moment that the Antichrist declares that he is god (Daniel 9:27, 2 Thessalonians 2:4; see also Revelation 11:3 & 12:6).

However, explanatory power alone is not sufficient grounds for belief if this isn't what the Scriptures teach. Remember that the passages that are used for teaching a Pre-tribulational rapture must have this framework read into the text in order to arrive at that conclusion, and thus we remain with the problem that nowhere is the teaching that God is going to snatch the church into heaven for seven years prior to the Tribulation ever *explicitly* taught. At best, for its explanatory power, it is then *inferred*.

With that said, how do we explain such passages that apparently teach that Christ can come at any moment if they are not referring to a Pre-tribulational rapture? Or, maybe a better question is, Do the Scriptures teach that Christ can come back at any moment?

First of all, the 'any moment' rapture of Pre-tribulationalism cannot have always been true, because it is not true that Christ could have always come back at any moment. For instance, Jesus told the disciples that, prior to His *coming* (Matthew 24:3) that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2). Therefore, it would have been incorrect for the church to believe that Christ could have returned at any moment prior to the destruction of the temple in 70AD. In other words, the destruction of the temple had to take place before the *coming* of Christ. Jesus declared that Peter would grow old and be crucified prior to Christ's return (John 21:18-19) and thus, as long as Peter was alive, the church would have incorrectly assumed that Christ could have returned at any moment. Therefore, we can conclude, that the New Testament doesn't teach that Christ could have always come at any moment but that, at a minimum for the first ~40 years of the church, there were antecedents that had to have been fulfilled prior to His return.

Secondly, the general sense of the parables of Christ imply that a significant amount of time would transpire prior to His coming. For instance, the "master" was thought to have been "*delaying his coming*" (Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:44).

Thirdly, where does this belief that Christ can come at any moment arise from? It finds its source in the commands of Jesus to “watch” for “you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42) and that His coming is likened to that of a thief (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39). Again, in at least three of the parables in which He exhorts His disciples to be ready for His return, He seems to imply that His return would not come at any moment, but would in fact be delayed. For example, we see in the parable of the virgins and the return of the bridegroom, in which the central focus is continued readiness for the return of Christ, that there was to be expected a delay before His return. Jesus said, concerning the foolish virgins, that, “while the bridegroom was *delayed*, they all slumbered and slept” (Matthew 25:5). Thus, in some of the parables that exhort an expectant demeanor, Jesus implies that there will be a delay before His return and thus, an “any moment” return is not taught.

Post-tribulationism teaches that, that just as Pre-tribulationism must concede that the rapture could not have occurred prior to 70AD due to necessary antecedents, there are certain events that must transpire before the return of Christ and thus, Christ cannot return at any moment. The primary reason in which Paul, Timothy and Silas were prompted to write 2

Thessalonians is that the Thessalonian church *believed that the Day of Christ had already come* (2 Thessalonians 2:2). It is true Christ will come as a thief in the night, as Paul had written earlier to them (1 Thessalonians 5:2), but this need not mean that to us that He can come in any moment.

First let us consider the passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7:

1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

What we find here is that prior to the coming of the *day of the Lord* (v.2) there will be a sense of some kind of *safety* (v.3) amongst the unbelieving world. It is at this time that *sudden destruction comes upon them* (v.3), for that *day...comes as a thief in the night*.

The question addressed here is whether this lack of discernment of unbelievers is really due to the idea that it can happen at any moment (i.e. an any moment rapture) or could there be other underlying causes to their unawareness. He is clear that this day will not *overtake* the believing Thessalonians, but nowhere does he mention anything about being raptured at or prior to this moment. Though it's an argument from silence, if they were going to be raptured prior to *that day*, why didn't Paul simply say so? For Paul, not allowing *that day* to *overtake* the believer is not a matter of waiting for an any moment snatching away of the church, but rather it is a spiritual attitude of godliness, for he says that we are those who are alert and *sober*, as opposed to unbelievers who are *those who sleep*. The unbelieving world will not be aware, despite of the signs that are taking place, that the day of the Lord has come upon them. And thus, *when they say peace and safety*, which could simply be describing the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation, *then sudden destruction comes upon them* when the antichrist declares that he is God in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

The way in which *that day* will come as a *thief in the night* will be through deception *because they did not believe the truth but loved unrighteousness* (2 Thessalonians 2:12). That is to say, despite the evidence of what is going on around them signifying that the day of the Lord was upon them, just as God *gives over* those who refuse to *retain God in their knowledge to a debased mind* (Romans 1:28), and just as He hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that he might not understand that he would be destroyed, so also *God will send them strong delusion that they should believe the lie*. (2 Thessalonians 2:11). The reason *that day* will come upon them like a *thief* is because they *have pleasure in unrighteousness* (2 Thessalonians 2:12) and are therefore those who are *of the night* (1 Thessalonians 5:7), and will be *deluded* (2 Thessalonians 2:12) into not realizing that *sudden destruction was upon them* (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

As mentioned earlier when addressing the passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul specifically says that, *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him ... will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition*. So, when putting this together, *the day of the Lord that comes as a thief in the night* (1 Thess 5:2) *will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed* (2 Thess 2:3). Therefore, the rapture 1.) can't come at any moment

but must be preceded by at least two events that have yet to occur and 2.) it cannot happen before the revelation of the antichrist. #2 is likewise in opposition to Pre-tribulationism, as Pre-tribulationism teaches that the church will be raptured and thus in heaven when the antichrist is revealed.

We see something similar in Matthew 24:44-51. Jesus compares two servants who were given charge over his master's goods while the master is away. In verse 46, He says, *blessed is that servant* who is doing the will of the master upon His return. He then describes the other wicked servant who *beat his fellow servants* and got drunk. Jesus then describes that wicked servant as one who *was not looking for him* and upon whom the master came *at an hour, he was not aware* (v.50). The servant who was caught off guard *at an hour he did not know*, like the *deceived* unbelievers in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7, wasn't caught off guard because the Pre-Trib rapture came when he least expected it, but because the master *came at a day when he is not looking* (οὐ προσδοκᾷ - lit - "not expecting") for him and *at an hour that he is not aware of* (οὐ γινώσκει - lit - "not know"). Spiritual alertness is an attitude of godliness that thus gives spiritual awareness to the individual.

The master comes back to household in one trip, not two. One servant was prepared for his coming which is described by *the servant* who was *found* doing the will of the master. The other servant was *not looking* and was *aware*, being described as someone who beats his servants and gets drunk. He says nothing of a pre-trib rapture, but only that the wicked servant was lacking wisdom and discernment to understand that the servant was coming and thus, was taken off guard.

To summarize, though Christ gives the warning that *the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect* (Matthew 24:44) this does not equate to the teaching Christ can come at any moment without any events that must precede His return. In fact, a majority of Matthew 24 is an account of the events that must take place before that day. He said, *many will come in My name, nation will rise against nation, there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, false prophets will arise and deceive many, and the gospel will be preached in the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*. Not only does Jesus not teach that the rapture of the church can take place at any moment, He specifically says that there are things that first must precede this event.

COMPARING IMPORTANT ESCHATOLOGICAL WORDS

παρουσία -vs- ἀποκαλύπτω / ἀποκάλυψις -vs- ἐπιφάνεια
(parousia -vs- apokalyptō / apokalypsis -vs- epiphaneia)

There are three significant words that are used to describe the 2nd coming of Christ: 1.) parousia (coming), 2.) apokaluptw / apokalupsis (to reveal / revelation), and 3.) epiphaneia (appearing). We are going to see how these three words are related, then see what we *gather from* the scriptures about them and ultimately make an assessment.

In Matthew 24:3, the disciples ask Jesus, “*what is the sign of your parousia (coming)?*” later followed by Jesus saying that *the parousia* will be as *lightning flashes from the east to the west* in Matthew 24:27. Therefore, we know that the parousia will be visible.

Then in Luke 17:23, Jesus describing the exact same event in context, describes it as the *day when the Son of Man is apokaluptw* (revealed). Therefore, the parousia of the Son of Man is equivalent to the apokaluptw of the Son of Man (i.e. parousia = apokaluptw).

Paul, describing the order in which the resurrection will take place, says in 1 Corinthians 15:23, *But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His parousia.*

Therefore, we see as well that the resurrection of the saints takes place at the parousia or coming of Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 we see that those *who are alive and remain until the parousia of the Lord will not precede* those who are dead. Comparing this with verse 17, we discover that the rapture of the church therefore takes place at the parousia of the Lord.

Again, comparing 2 Thessalonians 2:1, in which we read, *concerning the parousia of the Lord and our gathering together to Him*, with 2 Thessalonians 2:3, we see that the parousia and rapture will not take place until the 1.) apostasy and 2.) the revelation of the antichrist.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8, we see that Jesus will destroy the antichrist with the *epiphaneia of His parousia*. It is therefore warranted to equate epiphaneia with parousia.

Paul exhorts Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:14 that *he keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s epiphaneia*. Therefore, Paul and Timothy expected to meet Christ at the epiphaneia.

In 2 Timothy 4:1, we see that *God and the Lord Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead at His epiphaneia*.

At the same time, in 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul awaits *the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day* (see 2 Timothy 4:1), *and not to me only but also to all who have loved His epiphaneia*. Thus, we see that the same day that God judges the living and dead (2

Timothy 4:1) is also the day in which Paul receives his reward and that we are to love His epiphaneia.

In Titus 2:3, we are those who are *looking for the blessed hope and glorious epiphaei of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*.

Peter stated that *the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the epiphaneia of Jesus Christ* in 1 Peter 1:7, thus saying that we are rewarded at the epiphaneia.

Assessing the data concerning these eschatological words, we see that the parousia of the Lord is described as visible. In Matt 24:27 it is like lightning and in Luke 17:23, it is the day in which Jesus is revealed (apokaluptw). Therefore, the coming of the Lord cannot reference a Pre-Tribulational rapture because the Pre-tribulational rapture is to be invisible.

We find in 1 Thessalonians 4:15&17 that the parousia of the Lord, which was just confirmed as visible, is also the time in which Christ raptures the church. Therefore, the rapture of the church is not a secret, invisible event, but a very visible one.

As stated earlier, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, the parousia takes place after the antichrist is revealed and is also the time in which the church is raptured. Therefore, the rapture cannot occur prior to the Tribulation.

Paul and Timothy anticipated meeting the Lord upon His epiphaneia (1 Timothy 6:14). When we consider that the word epiphaeia means “to appear” or “the appearing”, Paul was therefore not awaiting a secret and invisible rapture, but a visible event in which Christ would manifest Himself or *appear* to the world.

This same epiphaneia is the time in which Jesus is going to judge the world (2 Timothy 4:1), such as all Pre-tribulationists would agree. However, Paul went on to refer to this *revealing* or *appearing* of Christ as the “blessed hope”, therefore equating the day of judgment of the unbeliever with the same day as the day of reward for the believer. They are one and the same event. Peter agrees with this idea, that the reward of Christ takes place at his epiphaneia, not at His invisible rapture.

To summarize the data: the parousia of the Lord is the apokalupsis of the Lord which is also the epiphaneia of the Lord. There are different words describing the same day. Jesus is going to return once to judge the living and the dead at His return. However, that day is also our

blessed hope in which our trust will be vindicated as we meet the Lord in the air to welcome Him to His rightful throne in Jerusalem.

THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS ENDURED TRIBULATION

The history of the church is filled with courageous men and women of whom this world is not worthy (Hebrews 11:38) and who have suffered and many even died for the faith. Why therefore should the modern church believe that they are any different, especially in light of Jesus' promise that *in this world you will have tribulation* (John 16:33)? Consider the beatings of Paul, and the crucifixion of Peter. Were they truly awaiting to be delivered from such suffering? Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th century German theologian who suffered and died in a Nazi concentration camp. Was God unfaithful in allowing him to experience tribulation? Or, likewise, Corrie Ten Boom, who also suffered but survived a Nazi concentration camp. Was her blessed hope to be raptured at that moment? Not only was her hope not in a rapture, but she considered that doctrine very dangerous to the church. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Corrie Ten Boom (<http://www.tedmontgomery.com/bblovrrw/rapture/corrie.html>):

In China, the Christians were told, "Don't worry, before the tribulation comes you will be translated – raptured." Then came a terrible persecution. Millions of Christians were tortured to death. Later I heard a Bishop from China say, sadly, We have failed. We should have made the people strong for persecution rather than telling them

Jesus would come first. Tell the people how to be strong in times of persecution, how to stand when the tribulation comes – to stand and not faint.

The church has always endured tribulation and the idea that the church would escape a period of tribulation is contrary to the admonition from Paul and Barnabas to the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch saying, "We must through many *tribulations* enter the kingdom of

God" (Acts 14:22). As Paul would elsewhere say, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to *suffer* for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). The church has always suffered and experienced tribulation. Therefore, the teaching that the church would escape a period of Tribulation is not only contrary to the pattern of the history of the church but is also contrary to the plain teaching of the Scriptures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ladd, G. E. (1956). *The Blessed Hope*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Erickson, M. J. (1998). *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964-). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Green, G. L. (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.
- Bruce, F. F. (1998). *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 45). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1998). *The church and the last things*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Svigil, Michael, *End Times (Eschatology)*, Dallas Theological Seminary iTunes U video lecture series <https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/end-times-eschatology/id545432622?l=es>
- Lust, J., Eynikel, E., & Hauspie, K. (2003). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*:
Revised Edition. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart.
- Gonzalez J.L. (2010). *The Story of Christianity, Volumes 1&2*. Haper One
- Spurgeon, Charles H. *12 Sermons on the Second Coming of Christ*. Baker House Books: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1976)
- Norton, Robert. *Memoirs of James and George Macdonald of Port-Glasgow* (London: 1840), pp. 171-176
- Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism* (Moody Publishers, 2007)
- Walvoord, John F. *The Rapture Question*. (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1957)
- Darby, John Nelson. *Letters of J.N.D.* (London: G. Morrish, 1915; reprint, Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1971)
- Geisler, N. L. (2005). *Systematic theology, volume four: church, last things* (pp. 625-626).

Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers.
<Lema = lbs/el/θλιβω> OR <Lema = lbs/el/θλιψις>

The New King James Version 55 results in 52 verses

Verses in *red* are those where it is the believer or one aspiring to be a believer that is experiencing the 'tribulation' showing that the phrase, "Great Tribulation" by definition means that the church will be there.

- 46 of the 55 occurrences apply *thlipsis* or *thlibw* to believers
- 3 apply it to unbelievers
- The remaining 6 are general usage

Matt 7:14

Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

NOTE: it's *thlibw* for believers

Matt 13:21 yet he has no root in himself but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

NOTE: the unbeliever flees *thlipsis*. The believer endures it.

Matt 24:9

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

Matt 24:21

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Matt 24:29

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Mark 3:9

So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.

Mark 4:17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

Mark 13:19

For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

Mark 13:24

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

John 16:21

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Acts 7:10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

NOTE: Moses had *thlipsis* but God delivered him out of them all (not by removing him, but by preserving him)

Acts 7:11

Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.

NOTE: the chosen children of Israel including Jacob himself had *thlipsis*

Acts 11:19

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

NOTE: the disciples experienced *thlipsis*

Acts 14:22

strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

NOTE: Paul does not say we will not experience *thlipsis* but that we must

Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

NOTE: Paul would experience *thlipsis*

[Rom 2:9](#)

[tribulation](#) and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;

NOTE: 1 of the 3 times in which it describes what an unbeliever will receive

[Rom 5:3](#)

And not only *that*, but we also glory in [tribulations](#), knowing that [tribulation](#) produces perseverance;

[Rom 8:35](#)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* [tribulation](#), or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

[Rom 12:12](#)

rejoicing in hope, patient in [tribulation](#), continuing steadfastly in prayer;

[1 Cor 7:28](#)

But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have [trouble](#) in the flesh, but I would spare you.

[2 Cor 1:4](#) who comforts us in all our [tribulation](#), that we may be able to comfort those who are in any [trouble](#), with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. NOTE: referring to *thlipsis* from Asia (Ephesus) see 2 Cor 1:8

[2 Cor 1:6](#)

Now if we are [afflicted](#), *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.

[2 Cor 1:8](#)

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our [trouble](#) which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

[2 Cor 2:4](#)

For out of much [affliction](#) and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

[2 Cor 4:8](#)

We are [hard-pressed](#) on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;

2 Cor 4:17

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,

2 Cor 6:4

But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses,

2 Cor 7:4

Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

2 Cor 7:5

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts, inside *were* fears.

2 Cor 8:2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

2 Cor 8:13

For *I do not mean* that others should be eased and you burdened;

Eph 3:13

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Phil 1:16

The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;

Phil 4:14

Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

Col 1:24

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

1 Thess 1:6

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

1 Thess 3:3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

1 Thess 3:4

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

1.Thess 3:7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

2.Thess 1:4

so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

2 Thess 1:6

since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

NOTE: this is the 2nd passage that applies thlipsis to unbelievers. This time, it is done as an act of vengeance from God upon unbelievers as they give them tribulation, God will do so to them

2 Thess 1:7

and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

1 Tim 5:10

well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

Heb 10:33

partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

Heb 11:37

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented

James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Rev 1:9

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Rev 2:9

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev 2:22

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.

NOTE: this is the 3rd use of the word as applied against unbelievers

Rev 7:14

And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Page. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#)