

The Fundamental Doctrine of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

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In our estimation, the doctrine of the Pre-tribulation Rapture is a fundamental of the New Testament faith. While I can't answer every question that can be asked on this issue (or any other major doctrine), I find more than enough clear Scripture to settle the timing of the Rapture and to be convinced that it is an essential doctrine.

Among other things, the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is necessitated by the *clearly taught* doctrine of the imminency of Christ's return and by the doctrine of the distinction between the church and Israel and a proper interpretation of Daniel's 70th Week, as we show in the following study. All of this is based on a consistent normal-literal interpretation of prophecy, which is a fundamental of Bible interpretation, as far as we are concerned.

We agree with the following statement by Charles Ryrie: "If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it in interpreting Scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist" (*Dispensationalism*, revised 1995, p. 20).

God's people are to live in expectation of the Lord's coming for them at every moment. We are taught to look for the coming of Christ, not the Antichrist. Jesus, Paul, James, and Peter taught this (Mt. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mr. 13:32-37; Ro. 13:12; Php. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Th. 1:9-10; 5:4-9; Tit. 2:12-13; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pe. 4:7). The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ's imminent return and the literal fulfillment of the prophecies (1 Th. 1:9-10).

The imminent Rapture has extreme practical implications. It is a powerful motivator for godly, pilgrim living, and it gives constant urgency to the task of world evangelism.

This is what I have believed for 46 years because this is what I see in the Bible. I have been a devoted student of Bible prophecy and have examined all positions on prophecy, as far as I know, certainly all of the positions on the timing of the Rapture. One of the first courses I published was *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, in the 1980s. The *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*, first published in 1993, has the equivalent of a course on Bible prophecy. I have also published *The Future According to the Bible, Jews in Fighter Jets: Israel Past, Present, and Future*, plus verse-by-verse commentaries on all of the prophetic books.

My writings are not inspired by God by any means, and the more I learn, the more I realize I don't know much. I feel like Augur, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man" (Pr. 30:2). Augur said that in light of God's omniscience and the infinity of God's Word, as we see in the context. See verses 4-5.

I can't speak for others, but I have never had a ministry relationship with a preacher who denies the Pre-tribulation Rapture, and I have no intention of having such a relationship today. I don't consider such preachers unsaved, just because of their views on prophecy, but I consider this a very important doctrine, and if a man does not hold to it, I will not preach at his church, I will not preach together with him in a conference, I will not participate in the ordination of such a man, I will not allow such a man to preach in our church, and I will not recommend that anyone join his church. That has always been my position.

A preacher has the right to test his doctrine by God's Word and to re-examine what he has held in the past and to change his doctrine if he is convinced that he has been wrong, but other preachers have the right to separate from him if they are convinced that he is wrong.

I am 70 years old, and I more convinced today than ever of the truth and importance of the Pre-tribulation Rapture.

There was a time when the Pre-tribulation Rapture was not clear in the 1800s when the literal interpretation of prophecy was being recovered and emphasized. At first the emphasis was on premillennialism as opposed to post or amillennialism. But soon the issue of the timing of the Rapture came to the fore and was settled in the hearts of the majority of Biblicists, whether non-denominational fundamentalists or fundamental Baptists.

The doctrine of the Pre-tribulation Rapture was the predominant view of the Bible Conference/Prophetic movement of the last half of the 19th century, of the Bible Institute movement, of the Revivalist movement, of the fundamentalist movement of the first half of the 20th century, and of the fundamental Baptist movement of the last half of the 20th century. It has been the predominant view driving the modern world missionary movement. These movements encompass *all* of the major Biblicist movements of the last century and a half.

I am convinced that this was a fulfillment of Daniel 12:4 which says that Bible prophecy would be sealed until “the time of the end” when “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”. The 1800s witnessed an explosion of knowledge and the invention of rapid speed transportation (railroad, steamship, airship, automobile).

The doctrine of the Pre-tribulation Rapture is under attack today from many sides, from theological modernism, from New Evangelicalism, from the emerging church, from Reformed Calvinism, even from a few voices from among non-denominational fundamentalism (Bible churches) and fundamental Baptists.

Steven Anderson, for example, has produced a number of videos denying the imminency of the Rapture, chiefly “After the Tribulation” and “The Book of Revelation”.

He calls the Pre-Tribulation Rapture “a demonic deception”, a “lie”, a “fraud”, a “fairy tale”.

(As we will see, emerging church leaders use similar terminology to demonize the doctrine of an imminent Rapture).

Anderson says, “The film [*After the Tribulation*] does two major things—number one, it completely demolishes the fraud that is the Pre-Trib Rapture. You know, this lie that says that Jesus Christ can come back at any moment, and that we're going to be taken out of here before the Antichrist, before the global government. So about half the movie is spent just completely destroying that idea; just a ton of Scripture is used to prove that false. And then the other half of the movie pretty much just explains how all this is going to play out..”. (*The Alex Jones Nightly News*, Feb. 1, 2013).

Anderson’s presentations on prophecy do indeed include “a ton of Scripture”, but a ton of Scripture wrongly interpreted adds up to no Scripture at all. In “After the Tribulation”, he teaches that the Rapture will occur *after* the Tribulation, but in part 2 of the video series “The Book of Revelation”, he says that the Rapture will happen 75 days after the “abomination of desolation”, which occurs at the mid-point of the Antichrist’s seven-year covenant with Israel. And in part 15 he says the Rapture will occur after the tribulation but before God’s wrath is poured out.

My Study of Positions on the Rapture

I have examined other positions on the timing of the Rapture multiple times in my Christian life, beginning during my Bible college training (1974-1977).

I didn’t go to Bible college to accept whatever I was taught. I was given a testing mindset by the man who led me to Christ. He taught me to be a Berean (Acts 17:11). He took me into a Christian bookstore and warned me that many of the books contained false teaching. He bought me a King James Bible and a Strong’s Concordance and exhorted me to learn God’s Word (2 Ti. 2:15), to continue in the Word (Joh. 8:31-32), to obey the Word (Joh. 7:17) and to test everything by the Word (Pr. 14:15; 1 Th. 5:21). As a new Christian, I set out to do this. I found a church by this method.

As best I know how, I have been willing to follow the truth wherever it leads, and I have continually, passionately asked the Lord to lift any unwitting blindness from my eyes. My prayer has been,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

As soon as I was taught the normal-literal method of interpretation at Bible college, *it resonated deeply with me*. It was like the key that unlocked a puzzle. The prophecies became clear. Things fit together. And the literal method of interpretation leads naturally to a clear distinction between the church and Israel and a pre-tribulational Rapture.

From that time, I have made the study of prophecy a major part of my Christian life and the teaching of prophecy a major part of my ministry. The first Bible course I made for the first Bible institute we started in the early 1980s was a course on Bible prophecy. An enlarged edition was eventually published in the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity* (1993) and a further enlargement was published in 2002 as the Advanced Bible Studies Series course Understanding Bible Prophecy. In 2013, we published the 500-page book *The Future According to the Bible*, and in 2018, the 600-page book and multimedia course *Jews in Fighter Jets: Israel Past, Present, and Future*.

I’m not giving this information to puff myself up or to pretend that I am an infallible authority. God forbid! I only share this to inform the reader that we have done some real research into this subject.

Through the decades, there have been times when I have come to a place wherein I felt I should re-examine my fundamental approach to Bible prophecy. At those times, I have collected the writings of men on various prophetic positions and have given them a fresh look, as prayerfully and as sincerely as I know how. Each time, it was different men presenting their best arguments in defense of their positions.

Every time I have done this, I have come away with an ever stronger conviction that the only true position on Bible prophecy is to interpret it by a normal-literal method, and this leads naturally to a pre-tribulational Rapture.

Every time I have done this, I have been increasingly convinced that mid-tribulation and pre-wrath and post-tribulation views are indefensible.

The Bible’s Description of the Rapture

It is often said that the word “rapture” does not appear in the Bible, but that’s not true. It does appear in the Latin Bibles that were widely used for nearly 2,000 years. *Rapturo* is the Latin translation for “caught up” in 1 Th. 4:17. The Greek is *harpázo*. It means “to snatch away” and is translated “pluck them out” (Joh. 10:28, 29). It is used in Acts 8:39 of the Spirit of God snatching away Philip after the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and in 2 Co. 12:2, 4 of Paul being caught up to heaven.

There are two major passages that describe the Rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Paul was answering the Thessalonian believers’ question about those who had died in Christ (1 Th. 4:13). They had been taught to expect the Lord’s imminent return and were looking for that (1 Th. 1:9-10). But some of the brethren had died, and the church didn’t know what was going on with them. Where are they? What will happen to them when Christ comes? Will the living saints be caught up with Christ, while the dead saints will have to wait for a later resurrection? We must understand that most of the New Testament was not yet written. Many think that 1 Thessalonians was Paul’s first epistle. The epistle of James might have existed, but it has no teaching about the Rapture. Christ spoke of His coming for His own in John 14:1-3, but the Gospel of John was not yet written when Paul wrote his epistle to Thessalonica.

Consider some important lessons from this key passage:

1. The Rapture is a doctrine for the church, and this is the key to understanding it.

The only way to understand the Rapture properly is to understand the clear distinction between Israel and the church, which is plainly taught in Scripture if prophecy is interpreted literally.

The doctrine of the Rapture was written to a church for the churches. It is a mystery revealed to the churches (1 Co. 15:51-52). It is not about Israel. It was not revealed to Israel and has nothing to do with Israel and her program with God and her covenants.

The Rapture is when Christ will collect His bride (Eph. 5:27) and bring her to the mansions He has prepared for her (Joh. 14:1-3) and she will see Him in His glory (Joh. 17:24). The church has nothing to do with the day of the Lord, which is a day pertaining to the unsaved world and to Israel (“the day of Jacob’s trouble”, Jer. 30:7). The church has nothing to do with Daniel’s 70 Week prophecy, which pertains to “thy people” (Daniel’s people, Israel) and “thy holy city” (Jerusalem) (Da. 9:24). The churches are not seen on earth in Revelation after chapter three. The events of Revelation 5-18 pertain to the world and to Israel. The church of God is a separate entity with her own program with God (“the Jews ... the Gentiles ... the church of God”, 1 Co. 10:32).

2. The Rapture is taught in the context of exhortations to holy living (1 Th. 4:1-12).

Bible prophecy is not for mere intellectual pursuit or the satisfaction of carnal curiosity; it is intended to change how God’s people live in this present time. We see the same thing in 1 Co. 15:50-58. After describing the Rapture, Paul says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”.

3. Paul wanted the believers to be educated about prophetic events (“***But I would not you to be ignorant, brethren***”, 1 Th. 4:13).

Prophetic truth permeates the New Testament. It is the major theme of Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23; 2 Th. 1:6-10; 2:1-12; 3:5). It is a major theme of the gospels (Mt. 16:27-28; 24:1-51; 25:1-46; 26:64; Mr. 13:1-37; 14:62; Lu. 21:5-38; Joh. 14:1-3). It is a major theme of all of the New Testament epistles (Ac. 1:11; 3:19-20; Ro. 11:26; 13:12; 1 Co. 1:7-8; 4:5; 11:26; 15:51-58; Php. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:20-21; 4:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Ti. 6:14; 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13; Jas. 5:7-9; Heb. 9:28; 10:37; 1 Pe. 1:7; 4:7; 5:4; 2 Pe. 1:19; 3:10-13; Jo. 2:28; 3:2; Jude 1:14-15, 21). It is obvious that is God’s will that every believing individual, home, and church be well educated in the events of Christ’s coming.

4. The Rapture is the believer’s “***hope***” (1 Th. 4:13). This is what we are waiting for. We are looking for Christ, not the Antichrist. This is the believer’s “blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13).

Note that believers do not sorrow “***as others which have no hope***”. Those without Christ have no hope. Ephesians 2:12 says those “without Christ” have no hope and are without God in the world. Any hope they might have is vain hope that is based on fables rather than God’s Word. In contrast, the saved have true hope based on Christ’s atonement and God’s promises. We see that believers do sorrow, but not like the world. The believers at Jerusalem “made great lamentation” when Stephen was martyred (Ac. 8:2). Paul had sorrow when Epaphroditus was sick nigh unto death (Php. 2:25-27). On a personal basis, death is a blessing for the believer. Paul said, “For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain” (Php. 1:21).

5. The Rapture was taught to Paul “***by the word of the Lord***” (1 Th. 4:14).

It is divine revelation, and there is no other means by which man can know the future with certainty.

The Rapture is a mystery that was first revealed to Paul. The Rapture was not described in Old Testament prophecy (1 Co. 15:51-52), yet the second coming of Christ is described in much detail (e.g., Ps. 50:3-6; 96:13; 97:1-4; 98:9; 102:13-14; Isa. 26:21; 28:21-22; 30:27-30; 35:4; 40:10-11; 42:13-17; 59:16-20; 62:11; 63:1-6; 66:15-16; Jer. 25:30-33; Da. 7:9-14; Joe. 3:16; Mic. 1:3-4; Zec. 2:10-13; 8:3; 14:3-7; Mal. 3:1-5; 4:1-2).

Bible prophecy is irrefutable evidence of the divine inspiration of Scripture. Christ’s coming was preceded by prophecies of His birthplace (Mic. 5:2), virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), healings (Isa. 35:4-6), betrayal by a friend for 30 pieces of silver (Ps. 41:9; Zec. 11:12-13), the injustice of his trial (Isa.

53:8), crucifixion (Ps. 22:14-16), no bones broken (Ps. 22:17), burial with the rich (Isa. 53:9), resurrection (Ps. 16:10), and ascension (Ps. 110:1).

6. The Rapture is based on Christ's death and resurrection ("***For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again***", even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him", 1 Th. 4:14).

The reason a sinner can go to heaven when he dies and be with Christ and rise to immortality is because Christ died and paid the full atonement for our sins, and His resurrection is the evidence that the payment was accepted.

7. The Rapture is for every individual who is in Christ ("***them also which sleep in Jesus ... we which are alive and remain***", 1 Th. 4:14, 15). Compare 1 Co. 15:23, "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming". There is no "partial" or "split" Rapture taught in Scripture.

8. The Rapture is an event in which the dead in Christ will be raised and the living saints will be changed and glorified (1 Th. 4:14-17).

"them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Th. 4:14)

- We see that the dead in Christ are not sleeping in the grave as some falsely teach. Their spirits are with Christ in heaven and they will come with Him and be joined to their resurrection bodies. Death is called "sleep" (1 Th. 4:13, 14) because it appears to be sleep from an earthly perspective. The term "cemetery" is from the Greek *koimeterion*, which means "sleeping place". (The word for sleep in 1 Th. 4:14 is *koimáo*, "to lie outstretched, to lie down"). Death is the departure of the spirit from the body (Jas. 2:26). The New Testament teaches that death is a journey either to heaven or hell, depending on whether the individual is saved or lost (Lu. 16:22-23; 2 Co. 5:8; Php. 1:23; 1 Th. 5:10; 2 Ti. 4:6; 2 Pe. 1:14). In Re. 6:9 we see "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God". They are not sleeping in the grave; they are alive and well in heaven!

"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven" (1 Th. 4:16)

- Christ Himself will come. Presently Christ sits at the right hand of God in heaven making intercession for His people (Ro. 8:34). He will leave there and come to fetch His bride. This will be the fulfillment of Christ's promise in Joh. 14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also".

"with a shout" (1 Th. 4:16)

- This is the Greek *kéleusma*, "to order, command (military command); Christ will come as Conqueror" (*Robertson's Word Pictures*). "The shout denotes His supreme authority. The Greek word is *kélusma*, which means literally 'a shout of command,' used in classical Greek for the hero's shout to his followers in battle, the commanding voice to gather together. ... The shout may be the single word 'Come!' ... Before Lazarus' tomb He spoke with a loud voice, 'Come forth.' ... 'Come' is the royal word of grace, and grace will do its supreme work when He comes for His own" (*The Annotated Bible*).

"with the voice of the archangel" (1 Th. 4:16)

- The angels are organized by rank, and an archangel is a high angel. The archangel is identified as Michael. He contended with the devil over Moses' body (Jude 1:9). In Da. 10:13 he is said to be "one of the chief princes", so it appears that he is one of a plurality of archangels. In Da. 12:1, Michael is called "the great prince that standeth for the children of thy people", referring to Daniel's people, Israel, and he will assist Israel in the Tribulation. He is named in Re. 12:7 as leading the angels in war against Satan.

"and the trump of God" (1 Th. 4:16)

- 1 Co. 15:52 also mentions the trump at the Rapture. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed".

- The trumpet that will sound at the Rapture of the church-age saints is not the same as the last trumpet that will sound in Revelation (Re. 11:15-18). That trumpet pertains to the world. The "last trump" in Revelation releases the last seven judgments (Re. 15:1).

- The trumpet of the Rapture is not the trumpet that will sound at the fulfillment of Israel's feast of

trumpets (Nu. 29:1), which is a prophecy of Christ's return. See Isa. 27:13; Mt. 24:31.

- The church is not a part of these other programs. Her "trump" is a different one.

"and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Th. 4:16)

- The "dead in Christ" refer to church saints, not Old Testament saints, who are never said to be "in Christ". The Old Testament saints will probably be raised after the Tribulation (Re. 20:4-6; Da. 12:1-3).

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Th. 4:17).

- The saints that are alive will be instantly changed as described in 1 Co. 15:51-53, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality".

- "***Caught up***" is *harpázo*, "to snatch away". It is translated "pluck them out" (Joh. 10:28, 29). It is used in Acts 8:39 of the Spirit of God snatching away Philip after the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and in 2 Co. 12:2, 4 of Paul being caught up to heaven.

- To meet Christ "in the air" is a great miracle. It reminds us that the resurrection body is not subject to the law of gravity or dependent on oxygen as the natural body is. Christ ascended in His resurrection body up through space to heaven (Lu. 24:51; Ac. 1:9).

"and so shall we ever be with the Lord".

- This will be a fulfillment of Christ's wonderful promise. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also" (Joh. 14:3). In this present world, the saints are not with the Lord physically, but they want to be with him. Paul desired to be "absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Co. 5:8) and to "depart, and to be with Christ" (Php. 1:23).

9. The Rapture is not the second coming of Christ which is described in many other passages.

As we have seen, the Rapture is a mystery that was not described in Old Testament prophecy (1 Co. 15:51-52), yet the second coming of Christ is described in much detail in those prophecies.

In the Rapture there is no gathering together of the elect by the angels as in the second coming in glory (Mt. 24:30-31). The elect in Mt. 24 are the saved of Israel and those who believe the gospel of the kingdom among the nations who are alive at Christ's return (Mt. 24:14). "The elect in Matthew xxiv are not the church, but Israel. Dispersed Israel will be regathered and angels will be used in this work" (*Annotated Bible*).

In the Rapture the saints meet the Lord in the air, but in the second coming they accompany Him on white horses (Re. 19:11-14).

10. The Rapture is the believer's "***comfort***" (1 Th. 4:18).

The fact that the Rapture is a comfort proves that it will precede the terrible day of the Lord. There would be no comfort in knowing that I must go through the events described in Revelation 6-18. The believer has unspeakably wonderful hope and comfort in Christ. His entire worldview is different from the unbeliever's. He knows that his sins are forgiven, that he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, that he is reconciled and justified, that he has eternal life, that his life is hidden in Christ, that he is already seated in Christ in heavenly places, that he is a joint-heir with Christ and part of the very bride of Christ, and that when he dies he will be with Christ and will return with Christ for the bodily resurrection.

11. The Rapture occurs before the day of the Lord (1 Th. 5:1-11).

Immediately after describing the Rapture, Paul describes the day of the Lord and says the New Testament believer will not be overtaken by it. Again, we see that the Rapture is Pre-tribulational.

The "day of the Lord" is the time when God will judge the world for its sin and idolatry. In that "day", God will be exalted and rebellious men will be humbled. It is described in Isaiah 2, 13, 34; Jer. 46; Eze. 13, 30; Joe. 1, 2, 3; Am. 5; Ob. 1; Zep. 1; Zec. 14; and Mal. 4. See Isa. 2: 10-12, 17-21.

The day of the Lord is described in great detail in Revelation 6-19.

Note the change in pronouns in 1 Thessalonians 5. In verse 3 the pronoun “they” is used, because the day of the Lord will come upon the unsaved world. But in verses 4-5 the pronoun “ye” is used, referring to believers. That day will not overtake us.

The believer is to be watching for the Lord’s return (1 Th. 5:6). We do not know when it will happen. It is *imminent*.

Believers are not appointed to go through the time of God’s wrath (1 Th. 5:9). Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:10, which says the Lord has delivered New Testament believers from the wrath to come. Church-age saints have been subject to the wrath of men and devils throughout the age, but we are not appointed to go through the wrath of God that will be poured out upon this wicked world. Compare Isa. 2:9-21.

The place of protection during the days of apostasy before the Rapture is the Bible-believing church.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Th. 5:12-14).

In the context of his warning about the coming day of the Lord, Paul mentions the church and its leaders. This is very instructive. Each believer needs to be a faithful member of a scriptural church that is led by godly men who are sound in the New Testament faith. The leaders and the church members work together to accomplish God’s will on earth in preaching the gospel to every nation while they wait for the Lord’s return.

The way to have peace in the churches is for the leaders to teach the Bible faithfully and for the members to show respect to the leaders and to follow them. Church leaders should be honored and obeyed as long as they are following the Bible.

Those who are unruly in the churches should be rebuked, because they hurt the Lord’s work.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

The Rapture is a “*mystery*”.

- A NT mystery is something “which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest” (Ro. 16:25-26). The mystery in 1 Corinthians 15 is the revelation of the Rapture itself and particularly the instant glorification of living saints at the Rapture.

- The Rapture is the two-fold event of the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of the living (“the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”, 1 Co. 15:52). This is the Rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

- The Rapture will happen “*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*”. “Moment” is the Greek *atomos*, from whence the word “atom” is derived. The Rapture will occur instantaneously. There will be no warning. There will be no opportunity to make further preparation. It is an event that must be prepared for beforehand by salvation and service (for reward).

- The Rapture will happen “*at the last trump*”. This is the trump of 1 Th. 4:16. The trumpet that will sound at the Rapture of the church-age saints is not the same as the trumpets that will sound in Revelation as judgments on this world or the trumpets that sound in reference to Israel. The church is not a part of these other programs. The church’s last trump is when she shall finally be congregated together to the Lord. “There is no basis for posttribulationists equating this trumpet with the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15-19. The trumpets in Revelation pertain to judgments during the Tribulation, whereas the trumpet in 1 Co. 15:52 is related to the church” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

- “*We shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*”. “Incorruptible” means that the resurrection body will be incapable of sickness and

disease. “Immortal” means incapable of dying. “Shall be raised” and “shall be changed” are future passive. God will do it.

The Rapture is sure (1 Co. 15:49-52).

- The Rapture is as sure as the Word of God. “**Shall**” is repeated five times in this passage: “we **shall** also bear the image of the heavenly ... we **shall** all be changed ... the trumpet **shall** sound ... the dead **shall** be raised ... we **shall** be changed”.

The Rapture is cause of praise to God. “**Death is swallowed up in victory**” (1 Co. 15:54-57).

- This amazing passage on the resurrection concludes with a passionate note of praise to God.

- In 1 Co. 15:54, Paul cites Isaiah 25:8, “He will swallow up death in victory”. Isaiah 25:1-12 is a prophecy of the destruction of the present Gentile kingdoms and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom. Isaiah speaks of death swallowed up in the future tense, while Paul speaks of it in the aorist indicative, which is action that is past.

- In 1 Co. 15:55, Paul makes a reference to Hosea 13:14, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes”. Here, God promises to ransom Israel from the power of the grave, and He will do it by Himself becoming death’s plagues. God Himself paid the full penalty for sin required by the law.

- Paul triumphantly addresses death and the grave. He personifies them as if they are animate and pronounces victory over them. Death and the grave have held sway over mankind for 6,000 long years. “... by one man’s offense death reigned” (Ro. 5:17). One by one, the descendants of Adam have lived their short lives and been carried away by death in the myriad of its terrible forms. We live our lives with the certainty of death waiting in the wings. In this revelation of the resurrection, Paul sees the end of death, and he is exultant.

- “**The sting of death is sin**”. Death is the wages of sin (Ro. 6:23). Christ took the sting of death upon Himself in our place. “**The strength of sin is the law**”. This is explained in Romans 4:15, “where no law is, *there is* no transgression”, and Romans 5:13, “sin is not imputed when there is no law”, and 1 John 3:4, “sin is the transgression of the law”. The law of God brings guilt (Ro. 3:19) and curse (Ga. 3:10). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Ga. 3:13).

- He gives thanks to “**God**”. It is God alone who has wrought salvation for fallen sinners. All is of God. He planned it and carried it out. Man has done nothing and can do nothing. It is 100% God’s grace.

- The victory is “**through our Lord Jesus Christ**”. The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jo. 4:14). He is *Lord*; He is *Jesus* the Saviour; He is *Christ* the Anointed of God, the fulfillment of Bible prophecy; He is *ours*. He is the Lord Jesus Christ for all who receive the gospel.

- The revelation of victory over death shows the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of the Bible that reveals it. Non-Christian religions do not offer any such victory. Human philosophy does not understand death and has no victory over it. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote, “And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*). Pagan religions do not offer victory over death; they offer only an uncertain and vague “hope” through works and rituals. Only through the Bible can we understand the cause of death and where man goes after death and how to have certain victory over death through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Rapture explains how that flesh and blood will inherit the kingdom of God and how that corruption will inherit incorruption (1 Co. 15:50).

- The Corinthians thought they were already in the kingdom (1 Co. 4:5-8). “Because the underlying problem causing the denial of the resurrection was a view of the present earthly body as already fit to enter the kingdom. Paul expressed his thought two ways (15:50). ‘Flesh and blood’ could not inherit the kingdom. Did anyone think it could? Yes, the Corinthians did, as 4:5-8 indicated. Their

problems with resurrection seem to indicate an ‘I’m already in the kingdom’ attitude” (*Everyman’s Bible Commentary*).

The Rapture is a source of great encouragement and motivation to godly Christian service. **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”** (1 Co. 15:58).

- The Rapture is a very important doctrine. Bible prophecy is not given merely to enlighten the intellect and satisfy our interest in the future; it is given to sanctify. The doctrine of the Rapture is to motivate God’s people to stay awake spiritually and to stay busy in the work of preaching the gospel to lost souls before it is too late. The doctrine of the Rapture is repeated throughout the New Testament, and it must be taught and emphasized in every church.

- Paul addresses the **“beloved brethren”**. One must be saved to have these promises, to have the hope of this future, and to live this life.

- **“Be ye”**. This is present imperative active. It is a command, and it is a command to be doing this in a continuous, repeated action.

- **“steadfast, unmovable”**. “Steadfast” is the Greek *hedraios*, “from *hedra*, seat, chair”. It is translated “settled” (Col. 1:23). The believer is to remain perfectly settled in his faith in Christ, like sitting down in a chair and refusing to move. He is steadfast in God’s Word and God’s truth and God’s will and God’s promises. Steadfast describes the believer’s commitment to Christ and His will. I am committed; I am settled. “Unmovable” describes the believer’s determined resistance to every force that would move him out of God’s will: the seductions of the world, the attacks of the devil, the lies of false teachers, persecution, suffering, discouragement, fear. The words “steadfast, unmovable” mean nearly the same thing and are repeated by way of emphasis. A great many saints have been steadfast, unmovable. We think of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Hannah, Samuel, Ruth, David, Elijah, Peter, John, Paul, Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla. They put their faith in God and were never moved away. On the other hand, many were not steadfast. Lot was moved by his covetousness (Ge. 13:10-11). Esau was moved by a bowl of soup (Ge. 25:34). Demas was moved by his love for this present world (2 Ti. 4:10).

- **“always abounding in the work of the Lord”**. The Christian life is not just standing in the faith and not being moved; it is being busy in God’s work. There is a great work for God in this present world, and every child of God has his part. There is a good, and acceptable and perfect will of God (Ro. 12:1-2). There are the works “which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). There is praying work and worship work and church work and soul winning work and home making work and fathering work and mothering work and parenting work and works of holiness and works of separation and works of compassion and and works of edifying the brethren and many other works that are spelled out in the New Testament Scriptures. There is ambassador work in preaching the gospel (2 Co. 5:20). There is work building up the church (Eph. 4:16). There are spiritual gifts and ministries to be exercised (Ro. 12:3-8). There is priestly work (1 Pe. 2:5). Note the words **“always abounding”**. Every saint is to be *always* engaged in the work of the Lord, not part time, not once in a while. Every saint is to be *abounding* in the work of the Lord. This is the opposite of lazy, lukewarm, half-hearted, half-committed. This is sold out Christianity. This is true discipleship. Christ did not take the sting of death and purchase salvation so that the redeemed could continue to live their lives for themselves. “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

- **“forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”**. This is a great encouragement, and it has encouraged multitudes of saints as they have walked through this fallen world. God’s work is the only work in this world that is guaranteed successful. Labor in Christ is not in vain because it is blessed by God in this present life and it has eternal reward. It is sanctified in Christ and therefore acceptable to God. No matter what happens or how things “look”, just keep believing God’s Word, just keep serving Him; remain steadfast, don’t be moved.

The Time of the Rapture

Among those who believe in a literal Rapture of church-age saints, there are three positions regarding its timing in relation to the Tribulation. The three views are as follows:

Pre-tribulational -- church-age saints will be raptured before the Tribulation

Mid-tribulational (also called Pre-wrath) -- church-age saints will go through the first half of the Tribulation

Post-tribulational -- church-age saints will go through the entire Tribulation period

For the following reasons we are convinced the Bible teaches a pre-tribulational Rapture. In this study, we are using the term “church” in a general, institutional sense.

1. Church-age believers are promised salvation from wrath.

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; 10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:9-10).

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Th. 5:2-4)

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Re. 3:10).

The Great Tribulation is expressly called the day of God’s wrath. Today the Lord is withholding the full severity of His anger; He is offering men salvation through the preaching of the gospel, but the day approaches when He will take the seat of judgment. Then “*the day of his wrath*” will be upon all the world (Ps. 110:5; Isa. 13:6-13; Re. 6:16-17).

It is true that in every century, Bible-believing churches have been subjected to persecution, but this is different from the Great Tribulation. The persecutions of the saints are caused by the wrath of wicked men and the wrath of the devil, whereas the Tribulation is a period especially pertaining to **God’s wrath** (Re. 6:16-17; 14:10).

Some believe that the church will not be saved *out of* the time of wrath, but will be saved *through* it. This cannot be true, since the Bible clearly reveals that those who are on earth during the Great Tribulation will not be delivered from wrath but will be overcome (Re. 13:7). The Scriptures that promise church-age believers deliverance from wrath must refer to salvation out from the very presence of the wrath. Concerning the Great Tribulation, we are told that “*as a snare shall it come on ALL them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*” (Lu. 21:35). Church-age believers must either be physically removed from the earth, or they will be involved in the day of wrath. God promises removal.

“*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly ..*” (Re. 3:10, 11)

Christ promises to keep the true New Testament saints “**from**” (Greek *ek*) the Tribulation, not “in” (Greek *en*) or “through” (Greek *dia*) it. *Ek* has the meaning “out of”.

Christ promises to keep the faithful New Testament saints from “**the hour of temptation**”. He promises to keep them from that period of time, not merely to keep them from that temptation. “Illustrations of the use of ‘hour’ where emphasis falls on the experience within the time, not the period itself (Mt. 26:45; Mr. 14:35, 41; Joh. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1), are not relevant nor are they persuasive even if they were relevant” (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*). Compare Christ’s words in John 12:27, “Father, save me from this hour..”. (*sozon me ek tes horas tautes*). “Of particular interest is the occurrence of the verb *sozon*, a word akin to *tereo*, in referring to deliverance, combined with the phrase *ek tes horas*, the same phrase as in Revelation 3:10. In this other Johannine passage Christ prayed to be saved from the hour of His crucifixion, meaning obviously that, humanly speaking. He wanted to be delivered from the awful agony of that experience. In other

words, He wanted to be spared the necessity of living through the time period when it took place. It was not that He prayed for strength to go through it without giving in or feeling its effects. This is a prayer for complete exemption from the hour of crucifixion. This meaning, transferred to Rev. 3:10, shows it to be a promise of complete exemption from 'the hour of trial.' In essence, the promise is, 'I will protect you (at a place) away from the period of misery on earth.' The contention that Jesus in John 12:27 has already entered into His hour of trial cannot be sustained. The hour referred to was the hour of His impending crucifixion, which was yet future (cf. John 7:30). So the comparable construction and terminology from another Johannine book lend weight to the view of removal from the scene of tribulation" (Thomas, *Revelation*).

Further, the wrath of God refers to the entire period of Daniel's 70th Week as described in Revelation 6-18 and not merely to the last half. "Wrath" is mentioned 13 times in Revelation, beginning in Re. 6:16-17, which refers to the beginning of the trouble. Already the inhabitants of the earth will be saying that "*the great day of his wrath is come*". (Re. 6:17). Consider the wrath that happens during the first part of the events described in Revelation 6-9, before the bowls of wrath are poured out in Revelation 15.

- one fourth of the earth's population are killed by violence and hunger (Re. 6:8)
- a multitude of saints that cannot be numbered are killed (Re. 7:1, 14)
- first trumpet: third part of the earth's vegetation is burned up (Re. 8:7)
- Second trumpet: third part of the creatures in the sea die and a third part of the ships are destroyed (Re. 8:8-9)
- Third trumpet: third part of the waters on earth become wormwood and many die from the bitter water (Re. 8:11)
- Fifth trumpet: All men who are not sealed are tormented for five months by a demon army from the bottomless pit (Re. 9:1-11).
- Sixth trumpet: one-third of the earth's population is killed by an army of 200 million from the east (Re. 9:12-21)

2. The Holy Spirit will be removed before the Tribulation.

"And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (2 Th. 2:6-8).

In other passages of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is said to be the restrainer of sin (Ge. 6:3; Isa. 59:19). He dealt with hearts during the 120 years when Noah was preparing the Ark. In this present dispensation, the Holy Spirit came into the world at Pentecost (Acts 2), when He came to empower the church for the Great Commission (Acts 1:8). He will remove the church-age believers before the time of God's great wrath. This does not mean the Holy Spirit will not be present in the world then. The Holy Spirit, as God, is omnipresent. It means that He will not be present in the same sense that He is in this age.

3. Church-age believers are promised mansions in heaven.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Heaven is called "my Father's house". It is where God's throne resides. It is called "paradise" (Lu. 23:43; 2 Co. 12:4; Re. 2:7). This is the Greek *paradeisos*, which was borrowed from the Persians and referred to delightful royal parks. "Socrates said that the king of Persia took particular care, wherever he was, to have gardens or enclosures full of every beautiful and good thing the earth could produce" (*Complete Word Study Bible*).

At His ascension, Jesus went to prepare a place for His bride. By Jewish custom, after the engagement, the bridegroom built an apartment onto his father's house, then he returned at the wedding to

fetch her. The departure and return of the bridegroom is described in Christ's Parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt. 25:1-6).

"Mansion" is the Greek *mone*, a dwelling. It is translated "abode" in Joh. 14:23. The English "mansion" is from the Latin "mansiones". The word *mone* itself does not mean a splendid dwelling, but the context demands it.

Christ promised to return and "receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also". This will occur at the Rapture, when Christ will resurrect the dead saints and transform the living ones. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Th. 4:16-17). John 14 tells us that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation, because at Christ's coming after the Tribulation, He will ride with the armies of heaven, defeat the antichrist armies, descends to the Mt. of Olives, and begins to establish His earthly kingdom (Zec. 14:3-4; Re. 19:11-21). This event obviously is not about catching away His bride to the Father's house. Church-age believers are a heavenly people with a heavenly hope (Eph. 1; Php. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3). Some dispensationalists teach that the church-age saints will live in heaven during the millennium. I believe they will live both in heaven and in earth. The Lord Jesus promised church-age overcomers that they will rule the nations (Re. 2:26-27), and He promised the apostles, who are the foundation builders of the church (Eph. 2:20), that they will sit on thrones and reign with Him over Israel (Mt. 19:28). That is earthly language. In the resurrection, the physical limitations of this present life will be removed, as we see Jesus ascending to heaven, appearing and disappearing, etc., so to live in heaven and on earth will no longer be an impossibility.

4. The Rapture of church-age saints is imminent.

The imminency of the Rapture means it can happen any time, whereas the Second Coming is said to be preceded by specific signs.

Christ taught that the Rapture is imminent.

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Mt. 24:42)

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 24:44).

"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 25:13).

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mr. 13:33).

Paul taught that the Rapture is imminent.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Ro. 13:12).

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Php. 4:5).

"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Th. 5:4-9).

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13).

James taught that the Rapture is imminent.

"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door" (Jas. 5:8-9).

Peter taught that the Rapture is imminent.

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pe. 4:7).

The early Christians were living in constant expectation of Christ’s return.

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:9-10).

The apostle Paul instructed the church at Thessalonica that they did not need to heed signs and times, because the New Testament believer has been promised redemption from the “day of darkness” that shall overcome the whole world (1 Th. 5:1-9). The New Testament believer is not waiting for the Antichrist, but for Christ Himself.

The expression “at hand”, which is used to describe the coming of Christ (Ro. 13:12; Php. 4:5; 1 Pe. 4:7), is from *eggizo*, meaning “near, approaching”. The English phrase “at hand” is a metaphor to indicate something that is close by, at the ready, like your hand. It is used to describe the location of Jesus’ tomb, which was “nigh at hand” to the place of His crucifixion (Joh. 19:42). It is used to describe the nearness of summer (Lu. 21:30). Paul used it to describe his imminent death (2 Ti. 4:6). The coming of Christ for church-age saints is always at hand; it is imminent, impending. It can happen at any time.

The imminency of Christ’s return teaches us that the Rapture precedes Daniel’s 70th Week (Da. 9:27). If it occurred at any time during that seven-year period, it could not be imminent, because the events of that period are laid out clearly in Scripture. It begins with the Antichrist’s seven-year covenant with apostate Israel: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week”. During the first three and a half years, the third temple will be built (Re. 11:1-2), the preliminary judgments will occur as described in Revelation 6 (war and famine that will destroy one-fourth of the earth’s population, a great earthquake, signs in the heavens), the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will preach and produce a great harvest of souls in the midst of terrible persecution (Da. 7), and the two witnesses will prophesy in Jerusalem (Re. 11:3-6). After three and a half years, the Antichrist will break his covenant and set up the abomination of desolation in the temple as described by Daniel, by Jesus, and by Paul. “... and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease” (Da. 9:27). See also Matthew 24:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. The two witnesses will be killed and a great earthquake will destroy one-tenth of the city (Re. 11:7-13). The events of the last half of Daniel’s 70th Week are described in other places in Revelation. These events include the hail and fire that destroy one-third of the trees and grass (Re. 8:7), the third part of the sea turning to blood (Re. 8:8-9), the third part of the waters becoming Wormwood (Re. 8:10-11), the terrible locusts from the bottomless pit (Re. 9:1-11), the 200 million-man army from the east whereby one-third of mankind will be destroyed (Re. 9:13-21), the worldwide worship of the Antichrist and his dictatorial rule (Re. 13), the rivers and fountains turning to blood (Re. 16:4-6), the scorching of men with great heat (Re. 16:8-9), the darkness (Re. 16:10-11), the destruction of the Mystery Babylon religion (Re. 14:8; 17:16-18), the destruction of commercial Babylon (Re. 18:5-24), Armageddon (Re. 16:12-16).

If the Rapture does not precede Daniel’s 70th Week, it could not be “at hand”, because it would be preceded by these events and its time would be known exactly when those events were witnessed. If the Rapture were “mid-tribulation” or “pre-wrath”, then the church-age saints would know that Christ would not return for them until the events pertaining to the rise of the Antichrist (e.g., the covenant with Israel, the building of the third temple, the ministry of the two witnesses), and when they witnessed the beginning of those things, they would know that the Rapture would occur three and a half years later. If the Rapture does not precede Daniel’s 70th Week, it would teach us to look for the Antichrist rather than Christ.

5. The church is a mystery that is not revealed in the Old Testament.

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:3-6).

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:24-27).

Dispensational theology makes a clear distinction between the church and Israel. This has far-reaching implications. It means that the church has not “replaced” Israel. It means that all of the anti-Jew and anti-Israel fervor on the part of professing Christians throughout the church age was unscriptural. It means that the Tribulation of Revelation pertains to Israel; it is “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Je. 30:7); it is the fulfillment of Daniel’s 70th week (Da. 9:27). It means that the Israel that is back in the land today is the very Israel that was scattered to the ends of the earth by Babylon and Rome and is the focus of Old Testament prophecy. Though still blind and spiritually dead, this Israel of Bible prophecy is setting the stage for the fulfillment of Daniel’s 70th Week.

Following are some of the fundamental teachings of Scripture about the church and Israel:

1. The church is a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament. See Colossians 1:24-27. In contrast, God’s plan for Israel was fully revealed in the Old Testament. The church is Christ’s spiritual body (v. 24). This is never said of Israel. The church is “Christ in you” (v. 27). This is a relationship that is never spoken in connection with Israel. Not even the greatest saints of Israel, such as David, had this promise.

The Church is not mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew until 16:18 after Jesus was rejected as the Messiah. Before that, Jesus had presented Himself as the Messiah and shown the miracles promised for the Messianic age (Isaiah 35:5-6). The cities of Galilee where Jesus did mighty miracles rejected him (Mt. 11:20-24); the Pharisees attributed his miracles to the devil (Mt. 12:24); the people of Nazareth tried to kill him (Mt. 13:53-58); John the Baptist was beheaded (Mt. 14:1-12). At this point, Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Mt. 16:18). The church age officially began at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit and is the time of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8) which will last to the end of the age (Mt. 28:19-20). The church age is the time when God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for his name (Ac. 15:13-14). It will conclude with the Rapture, and then God’s business with Israel will be finished.

2. The church age is an interregnum or parenthesis between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel’s 70 Week prophecy. See Daniel 9:24-27. This foundational prophecy pertains to the completion of God’s plan for Israel (“thy people and upon thy holy city”, v. 24). It will finish Israel’s sins. It will make reconciliation for iniquity, referring to Israel’s repentance and conversion. It will “seal up the vision and prophecy” (v. 24).

- It is 70 weeks of years (490 years). The Hebrew literally says 70 sevens. It can refer to days or years. It is used in Genesis 29 to describe the seven years that Jacob worked for Rachel (Ge. 29:27-28).

- The first 69 weeks (483 years) begin with the announcement to rebuild Jerusalem. We read about that in Nehemiah 2:1-8. The first 69 weeks encompass the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the coming of the Messiah to be “cut off, but not for himself”, and the destruction of the Second Temple and Jerusalem (v. 25-26). These events happened exactly as prophesied. The rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls is described in the book of Nehemiah. It happened in “troubulous times”. Christ came and offered Himself as the prince of Israel, but He was rejected by His own nation. He was cut off or crucified, “but not for himself”. He was cut off for the sins of the world. It was 483 years from the time of the announcement of the rebuilding of Jerusalem until Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and was acclaimed as “the King that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Zec. 9:9; Lu. 19:37-38). Robert Anderson, a lawyer and an investigator with Scotland Yard and a brilliant Bible student, concluded that the commandment was given March 14, 445 BC and Christ entered Jerusalem on the donkey April 6, 32 AD. He documented this in his 1895 book *The Coming Prince*. About 35 years later, Rome destroyed the city and the sanctuary (the temple), and there were terrible wars and desolations.

- Since the events of the first 69 weeks were fulfilled exactly and literally, it is obvious that the events of the 70th week will be fulfilled in the same way. Thus, they are yet future.

- The events of the 70th week require that Israel return to the land in an unbelieving condition, and that is what has happened since the 20th century. The modern state of Israel was founded in 1948, but it is a secular state and does not obey God's Word.

- The 70th week begins with a covenant made between "the prince that shall come" and apostate Israel. The prince is the prince of the people who destroyed the city after the cutting off of the Messiah, so he will be a prince of the old Roman Empire. In the middle of the week, or after 3.5 years, he will break the covenant and desecrate the temple. The prophecy predicts that a third temple will be built by then. He will commit abominations that will make it desolate, and Jesus plainly taught that this refers to the Antichrist standing in the holy place of the Third Temple at the onset of the Great Tribulation just preceding His return in power and glory (Mt. 24:15-21, 29-30). The desolations will continue until the consummation of the prophecy (Da. 9:27). This refers to the Great Tribulation, the conversion of Israel, and the return of Christ. (For a complete study on Daniel's 70 Weeks, see the course *Understanding Bible Prophecy* or the *Way of Life Commentary Series* on Daniel, available from Way of Life Literature).

3. Israel's covenants will be fulfilled literally in Israel and not spiritually in the church. See Romans 11:25-27. In this fundamental passage, we see that the present time is a time of blindness for Israel (Ro. 11:25). This blindness will last until "the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Ro. 11:25). This is the completion of the church. Compare Acts 15:14, which says that God is taking out a people for His name among the Gentiles. Then Israel will be regenerated according to the promises of her covenants (Ro. 11:26-27).

4. Israel's law is not the church's law. See Galatians 3:24-26. The believer is not under the law of Moses. He is under a higher law. It is the law of the Spirit (Ro. 8:2) and the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). It is described in 2 Corinthians 3:15-18. When the sinner's heart turns to the Lord in saving faith, the veil of darkness is removed, he is indwelt by God's Spirit, and he lives according to the image of Christ as the Spirit changes him into that image. We have the image of Christ in the New Testament epistles. That New Testament believers are not under the law of Moses means that we are not obligated to keep the Levitical rituals. We don't have a special priesthood. We are not under the Mosaic dietary rules. We don't keep the sabbath. Israel's sabbath is her sign from God and has nothing to do with the church (Eze. 20:10-12).

5. Israel and the church share many things and are closely associated, but they are different bodies of believers. They share the same God, the same Saviour, the same spiritual blessings in Abraham (referring to believing Israel), the same Bible. Both will rule with Christ in the Millennial kingdom. Both will dwell in the New Jerusalem. But even then, the distinction will remain. The names of the 12 tribes of Israel are written on the gates, while the names of the 12 apostles are written in the wall's foundations (Re. 21:12-14).

The New Testament church has no part in the chronology of events foretold by the Old Testament prophets. They clearly foretold the first coming of Christ, His miraculous birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. They also described Christ's Second Coming in glory, preceded by a time of unprecedented worldwide tribulation and followed by the establishment of the glorious Messianic kingdom centered in Jerusalem.

But these prophets did not see the church age--"*which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*" (Eph. 3:5).

Between the first and second coming, there is a time gap that is not described in Old Testament prophecy. This gap is the church age. "The church" is the name that Christ gave this entity the first time He mentions it in Matthew 16:18.

The prophets did not see that Israel would be set aside temporarily while God called out from among all nations a special body of people (Ac. 15:14). After He has accomplished this purpose and "the fullness of the Gentiles be come in", God will restart Israel's prophetic clock with the last se-

ven years of Daniel's 70th Week and will fulfill all Old Testament prophecies in relation to His ancient chosen nation.

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. “... *blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*” (Ro. 11:25-27).

The Tribulation pertains to God's dealing with Israel and the Gentile nations, not to the church.

This present mystery period will end with the removal of church-age believers from the earth, and the Lord will then pour out His judgments on the Gentile nations and fulfill His covenants with Israel.

The Great Tribulation is called “the time of the heathen” (Eze. 30:3), referring to the Gentile nations, and “the time of Jacob's trouble” (Je. 30:7), referring to Israel.

It is “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 2:11-22; 13:9-13; Jer. 30:7-9; Eze. 30:3; Joel 2:31; 3:14-16; Am. 5:18-20; Zec. 14:1-3; Mal. 4:1).

6. The book of Revelation shows that the church is not on earth during the Tribulation.

The church is not seen on earth in chapters 4-18.

The witness for God in the earth during the Tribulation is Israel, not the church. See Revelation 7, where the Lord seals 144,000 Jews from the 12 tribes and through their preaching a great multitude is saved.

The prayers of the saints in Revelation 8 are prayers for judgment. Only Israel prayed such prayers. Church-age saints are instructed to pray for her enemies, not *against* them (Lu. 9:51-56). The imprecatory prayers of Revelation are those of the Psalms and are based on God's promise to Abraham to curse those that cursed Israel (Ge. 12:1-3).

Revelation 10 identifies the events of Revelation 6-18 with those foretold by Old Testament prophets--the days of the Great Tribulation, the “day of the Lord”. The church age was never in the view of these Old Testament prophecies; it was a mystery not yet revealed. The church has a different purpose and program than national Israel. It is Israel that is in view in Old Testament prophecy and in Revelation 6-18.

The ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 identifies them with national Israel and with Old Testament prophecies of the “*day of the Lord*”. The two witnesses minister from Jerusalem, Israel's capital. The churches have no such capital, her hope being heavenly, not earthly (Col. 3:1-4; Php. 3:17-21). The two witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, which speaks of Israel, the sackcloth signifying repentance from sin or sorrow because of some calamity (1 Ki. 21:27; 2 Ki. 19:1; Est. 4:1; Isa. 15:3; Jer. 4:8). Nowhere are the churches seen in sackcloth. The churches are told, rather, to “*rejoice in the Lord alway*” (Php. 4:4). The church-age believer's judgment is forever past, and he is to keep his mind centered in the heavenlies where, positionally, he is already seated, eternally victorious with Christ (Eph. 2:5-10). Revelation 11:4 identifies the two witnesses with the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah 4:3, 11, 14. This is a prophecy about Israel, not the church. Further, the two witnesses call down judgment upon their enemies in Revelation 10:5-6. Jesus rebuked his disciples for desiring to do just this and instructed the church-age believer to pray for the well-being of his enemies, not for their destruction (Lu. 9:54-56; Ro. 12:14, 17-21).

The devil persecutes Israel, not the church, during the Tribulation (Re. 12). There can be no doubt that the woman in this chapter signifies Israel. Verse 5 shows the woman bringing forth Christ; it is obvious that Jesus was brought forth by Israel, not by the churches (Isa. 9:6-7; Ro. 9:5). Also, the symbols of Revelation 12:1-2 recall familiar Old Testament typology of Israel. She is referred to as a woman. Compare Isaiah 54:5-7. The sun and moon and the 12 stars of Revelation 12:2 remind us of Joseph's dream regarding Israel (Ge. 37:9). The words of Revelation 12:2 are almost an exact quote from Micah 5:3. “Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath

brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel". Again, this speaks of Israel's delivery of the Messiah. These symbols are not used in the New Testament of the churches.

7. The pre-wrath, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation views are a wilderness of uncertainty and disharmony and do not follow a consistent literal method of interpretation.

Among these views, there is no consensus that Revelation 6-20 describes literal future events, that Matthew 24 describes literal future events, that Daniel's 70th week (Da. 9:27) describes literal future events, that there is a literal seven-year tribulation, that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 are Israel, that the day of the Lord is the Great Tribulation, that the Antichrist will sit in a literal temple, that the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation of Matthew 24:15-21 are yet future, that the ministry, death, and resurrection of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are literal future events, and that the coming of Christ is really imminent. About the only thing that post-tribulationists agree on, and are dogmatic on, is that there is no pre-tribulation rapture!

Even among post-tribulationists, "it is difficult to state a normative or standard view because of the variety of explanations which are given for each point in dispute. ... there is no agreement as to the doctrine of the tribulation ... no agreement as to whether the return of Jesus Christ will establish a literal thousand year period of peace

Consider the following examples from Douglas Moo's teaching on a post-tribulation Rapture in the book *Three Views on the Rapture* (Zondervan, 1996):

"I take it, for instance, that the seventy 'sevens' of Daniel 9:24-27 describe the process by which this kingdom will be established, with the seventieth 'seven' referring to the entire package of events spanning the time from Christ's first coming to his second coming in glory" (p. 190).

"I doubt that Mark 13:14-23 and Revelation 6-16 describe the final tribulation *per se*" (p. 191).

"... the New Testament consistently predicts that believers will suffer tribulation. Nothing in these texts suggests that the suffering of the final tribulation will be any greater in degree than what many believers throughout the age must suffer" (p. 192).

"... is the final tribulation also part of the day of the Lord? Several factors suggest that it is not" (p. 202).

"Paul's claim that this last and greatest 'antichrist' will take his seat in the temple may suggest that this Antichrist will work from within the church, since the New Testament suggests that the presence of God that was formerly found in the temple is now found in the new covenant community, the body of Christ. But it is also possible that Paul envisages the Antichrist revealing himself in a literal Jerusalem temple" (p. 210).

"... several other factors suggest that Jesus associates the 'abomination of desolation' with the events of AD 70, when the Romans, in putting down the Jewish rebellion, entered the sanctuary (thus desecrating it) and destroyed much of it" (p. 213).

"I therefore suggest that Matthew 24:4-28//Mark 13:5-23 describes the entirety of the church age, which will be marked by great tribulation and by the important event of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem ('the abomination that causes desolation') in AD ... Jesus may refer to the greatest distress of all time in this context (Matt. 24:21//Mark 13:19) as a hyperbolic way of emphasizing the suffering that the Roman destruction of the city would cause. But it is perhaps likelier that he refers to the sufferings of God's people throughout the 'church age'" (p. 216).

"Most contemporary interpreters of Revelation combine two or more of these perspectives, and I (though by no means an expert on the book) tend to agree. P 223 (futurist, preterist, historicist, idealist)

"Particularly important for our purposes, however, is the debate between the 'preterist' and the 'futurist' models. I would hesitantly suggest that this debate is to some extent misguided and perhaps not even necessary" (p. 223).

“John’s visions relate both to first-century realities and to the end of the age — with John, like Jesus, not being able to distinguish clearly between the two” (p. 223).

“... it is therefore probable that the resurrection of the two witnesses is posttribulational” (p. 227).

“The witnesses prophesy for forty-two months (11:2) and then lie in death for ‘three and a half days’ (11:9). If the former reference is to the first half of the final tribulation period, the second reference could indicate the second half” (p. 227).

“I think it very likely that the 144,000 of Revelation 7:2-8 is to be identified with the church” (p. 241).

“It is our contention, then, that the final tribulation predicted for Israel by, for example, Daniel, is directed to Israel as the people of God. It can therefore be fulfilled in the people of God, which includes church as well as Israel” (p. 235).

“[N]one of the many words used to describe the nearness of the *parousia*, or the believer’s expectation of it, requires an ‘any moment’ sense of imminency” (p. 235).

“I think (although I am by no means dogmatic about the matter) that this coming will take place before the millennium” (p. 239).

The post-tribulationist wanders in this wilderness of confusion and uncertainty for the very reason that he does not exercise the fundamental principle of interpreting prophecy by the normal-literal method, because *all* of these things are *settled* by a literal method.

It is true that a literal method of interpretation does not settle every difficulty and give a clear answer to every question that can be raised. Some prophecies will probably not be fully clear until they are fulfilled. This was true of some prophecies of Christ’s first coming.

But the literal method gives maximum certainty, and it is for this reason that pre-tribulationists are united on major things, such as those mentioned previously (e.g., Revelation 6-20 and Matthew 24 and Daniel’s 70th week describe literal events, a literal seven-year tribulation, the 144,000 of Revelation 7 are Israel, the day of the Lord is the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will sit in a literal temple, the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation of Matthew 24:15-21 are yet future, the ministry, death, and resurrection of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are literal future events, and the coming of Christ is really imminent).

The fact that the pre-wrath, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation views are a wilderness of uncertainty and disharmony is very telling to me. The Bible says, “For God is not the author of confusion ..”. (1 Co. 14:33).

And the fact that these positions are complicated, is very telling.

It is difficult even to summarize the arguments in support of these views.

In contrast, I can summarize the arguments for the pre-tribulation Rapture with ease and can teach it to simple people who are not highly educated.

When Was the Pre-Trib Rapture First Taught?

Steven Anderson follows Replacement theologians in claiming that John Darby was the first to teach a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, but it isn’t true.

As we have seen, two thousand years ago, all of the churches were looking for an imminent return of Christ. That was a long time before Darby.

In the 4th century, the Pre-Tribulation Rapture was taught by **Ephraem the Syrian** (c. 303-373). Ephraem is called “the Syrian” because he lived in that region.

Ephraem is venerated as a “saint” by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, but they would not allow him to teach his doctrine of prophecy today.

He was a voluminous writer. Many of his sermons and psalms are included in the 16-volume *Post-Nicene Library*. (The Council of Nicea was held in AD 325, and historians divide the “fathers” into Ante-Nicene, before 325, and Post-Nicene, after 325).

In the 1990s some of Ephraem's writings were translated into English for the first time, one of these being *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, A.D. 373.

The translation was done by Professor Cameron Rhoades of Tyndale Theological Seminary at the bequest of Grant R. Jeffrey. It was subsequently published in Jeffrey's 1995 book *Final Warning*.

It is obvious that Ephraem believed in a literal fulfillment of prophecy, including a Rapture of New Testament saints prior to the Tribulation.

“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” (Ephraem the Syrian, *On the Last Times*).

Observe that Ephraem taught that the saints will be taken to the Lord so they will not see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world, which is exactly what 1 Thessalonians 5:3-9 says.

Ephraem taught a literal Antichrist who will sit in a literal rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, a literal 3.5 year Tribulation, a literal Two Witnesses or prophets who will preach in Jerusalem, a literal battle of Gog and Magog.

“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 or 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 word of salvation going before him, and also even with all the powers of the heavens with the whole chorus of the saints. ... 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 for ever and ever” (Ephraem the Syrian, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, A.D. 373).

Ephraem believed in the imminency of the return of Christ and urged his fellow Christians to live godly lives in expectation of His return.

Actually, Ephraem the Syrian was not alone in interpreting Bible prophecy literally in his day.

He was living one generation from the era of Augustine (354-430), at which time there was a dramatic change. When Ephraem died in 373, Augustine was 19 years old.

It was in the era of Augustine that allegoricalism widely replaced the previous method of interpretation. Prior to this, it was common among Bible believers to interpret prophecy literally. They believed that Christ would return literally (and imminently), bind Satan, and establish a literal millennial kingdom on earth.

This is acknowledged by church historians.

William Newell said, “The early Church for 300 years looked for the imminent return of our Lord to reign, and they were right” (Newell, *Revelation*).

Phillip Schaaf said, “... the most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age [prior to AD 325] is the prominent chiliasm, or millennialism, 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” (*History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960, 2:614).

Henry Thiessen said, “It is clear ... that the Fathers held not only the pre-millennial view of Christ's coming, but also regarded that coming as imminent. The Lord had taught them to expect His return at any moment, and so they looked for Him to come in their day. Not only so, but they also taught His personal return as being immediately, with the exception of the Alexandrian Fathers, who also rejected other fundamental doctrines” (Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 477).

In fact, Augustine, “the father of amillennialism”, once believed in a literal millennium himself. He said, “I myself, too, once held this opinion. ... They who do believe them are called by the spiritual, Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians” (Augustine, *City of God*, book 20, chapter 7).

The following statement by **Irenaeus** (c. 120-203) is an example of what was commonly believed among the early “church fathers”, as they looked forward to Christ’s return and the establishment of His kingdom:

“The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth. ... In like manner [the Lord declared] that ... all animals feeding [only] on the productions of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers).

The church at Antioch long interpreted Bible prophecy literally. Antioch was an important church founded by Barnabas and Paul, and it is from this church that the first foreign missionaries were ordained and sent out (Ac. 11:19-26; 13:1-4). It was at Antioch that the disciples of Christ were first called Christians.

Some of the preachers associated with Antioch were Lucian (died 312), Theodore (AD 350-428), Chrysostom (AD 354-407), Theodoret (AD 386-458), and Diodorus of Tarsus. These men interpreted Bible prophecy literally and believed in a literal millennium.

In *History of Interpretation*, F.W. Farrar observed, “Diodorus of Tarsus’ books were devoted to an exposition of Scripture in its literal sense, and he wrote a treatise, now unhappily lost, ‘on the difference between allegory and spiritual insight’” (Farrar, pp. 213-15).

“The Antioch’s school’s two greatest exegetes, Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350-428) and John Chrysostom (AD 354-407), were ‘anti-allegorical’” (Matthew Allen, “Theology Adrift: The Early Church Fathers and Their Views of Eschatology”, bible.org).

Some of the early Christians after the apostles taught a form of dispensationalism. Examples can be found in the extant writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Methodius. Justin Martyr (100-165) believed in four phases of history in God’s plan: From Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the eternal state. Irenaeus (120-202) taught something similar, dividing the dispensations into the creation to the flood, the flood to the law, the law to the gospel, the gospel to the eternal state.

Dr. Larry Crutchfield observes that some of the early church leaders “came very close to making nearly the same divisions modern dispensationalists do” (“Rudiments of Dispensationalism in the Ante-Nicene Period”, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1987).

The allegorical method of interpretation was invented by false teachers after the apostolic era as the apostasy was growing and spreading toward the formation of the Roman Catholic Church.

A school was established at Alexandria, Egypt, which became the headquarters for the allegorical method of interpretation. Egypt was a place where false teaching proliferated in the first centuries after Christ.

Clement, who headed the school from AD 190 to 202, corrupted the Christian faith by mixing it with the worldly philosophy and allegoricalism of Philo. He taught many false doctrines, including purgatory, and believed that most men would eventually be saved even though Jesus said only a few would be (Mt. 7:14). “Clement saw the literal meaning of Scripture as being a ‘starting point’ for interpretation. Although it was ‘suitable for the mass of Christians,’ God revealed himself to the spiritually advanced through the ‘deeper meaning’ of Scripture. In every passage, a deeper or additional meaning existed beyond the primary or immediate sense” (Matthew Allen, “Theology Adrift: The Early Church Fathers and Their Views of Eschatology”, bible.org).

Origen (AD 185-254) was one of the chief fathers of allegoricalism. He led the school at Alexandria from AD 202 to 232. Though he endured persecution and torture for the cause of Christ under the Emperor Decius in 250, Origen was laden down with heresies. Like Clement, he mixed the truth of the Bible with pagan philosophy. He taught that celibacy was a holy state above marriage, contrary to the teaching of the apostles. He taught baptismal regeneration, purgatory, and the pre-existence of the human soul. He taught that all men, even Satan and demons, would eventually be saved. He taught that the Holy Spirit was the first creature made by God, and denied the full God-head and eternity of Jesus. He did not believe that the Scriptures are wholly inspired by God.

Origen claimed that “the Scriptures have little use to those who understand them literally”. He described the literal meaning of Scripture as “bread” and encouraged the student to go beyond this to the “wine” of allegoricalism, whereby one can become intoxicated and transported to heavenly realms. Origen’s commentaries contained a wealth of fanciful interpretations, abounding in “heretical revisals of Scripture” (Frederick Nolan, *Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, p. 367).

Another father of allegoricalism was **Augustine** (AD 354-430), one of the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church. He was exalted as one of the “doctors” of Rome. Augustine invented the terrible and unbiblical doctrine of the inquisition that was used by the Catholic Church against Bible believers for more than 1,000 years. The German historian Neander observed that Augustine’s teaching “contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition”. Augustine instigated persecutions against the Donatists who were striving to maintain pure biblical churches. He taught that “the sacraments”, such as baptism, were the means of salvation. He taught that Mary did not commit sin. He taught the heresy of purgatory. He was one of the fathers of infant baptism, claiming that unbaptized infants are lost and calling all who rejected infant baptism “infidels” and “cursed”. He exalted the authority of “the church” over that of Scripture.

“Through Augustine, Origen's allegorical hermeneutic became the backbone of medieval interpretation of the Bible” (Matthew Allen, “Theology Adrift: The Early Church Fathers and Their Views of Eschatology”, bible.org).

These heresies grew and became a fundamental part of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

When the Protestant denominations (e.g., Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist) broke away from Rome, one of the errors they brought with them was the allegorical interpretation of prophecy.

The Attack on the Pre-Tribulational Rapture

The doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is under severe attack today. Consider some examples from the emerging church:

Brian McLaren calls the imminent return of Christ the “eschatology of abandonment” (interview with Planet Preterist, Jan. 30, 2005). This is because he believes that Christians should build the kingdom of God on earth today instead of waiting until Christ returns, so he claims that those who believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture are abandoning their alleged duty to save the earth from global warming and to solve the problems of hunger, disease, war, etc.

Jonny Baker of Grace in London, England, rejects dispensationalism as “escapology theology” and “advocates that Christians need to invest themselves in the current culture, not live on hold until time runs out” (*Emerging Churches*, pp. 78, 79).

N.T. Wright, who has a great influence on the emerging church, says the doctrine of an imminent rapture is dangerous because it interferes with kingdom building and environmental activities. “If there’s going to be an Armageddon, and we’ll all be in heaven already or raptured up just in time, it really doesn’t matter if you have acid rain or greenhouse gases prior to that. Or, for that matter, whether you bombed civilians in Iraq. All that really matters is saving souls for that disembodied heaven” (“Christians Wrong about Heaven, Says Bishop”, *Time*, Feb. 7, 2008).

Tony Campolo says: “I think that we need to challenge the government to do the work of the Kingdom of God, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. That whole sense of the rapture, which may occur at any moment, is used as a device to oppose engagement with the principalities, the powers,

the political and economic structures of our age” (“Opposition to women preachers evidence of demonic influence”, Baptist Press, June 27, 2003).

Mark Driscoll refers to the pre-tribulational Rapture as “pessimistic dispensationalism” (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, p. 146). He has said that “eschatology-minded Christians” are not welcome in his church.

The Importance of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture

The doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is not a minor one. As we have seen, Jesus, Paul, James, and Peter taught that the return of Christ is imminent and is to be expected at any time (Mt. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mr. 13:32-37; Ro. 13:12; Php. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Th. 1:9-10; 5:4-9; Tit. 2:12-13; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pe. 4:7). The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ’s imminent return and the literal fulfillment of the prophecies (1 Th. 1:9-10).

The doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture is a great motivator for right Christian living.

1. It encourages the believer in trials and persecutions. “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Th. 4:17-18).
2. It keeps the church’s focus on the Lord’s Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lu. 24:44-48; Ac. 1:8). It teaches us that preaching the gospel, winning people to Christ, and establishing churches as the pillar and ground of the truth is the most urgent matter. D.L. Moody had it right when he said: “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’”
3. It motivates us to be busy in the Lord’s work. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Co. 15:58).
4. It motivates us to live obedient lives. “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Th. 5:6). “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 Jo. 3:3).
5. It motivates us to live holy and separate from evil. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:13-14).
6. It keeps believers aware of and on the outlook for heresy and apostasy (2 Ti. 4:3-4). A proper view of Bible prophecy instructs God’s people that the church age is characterized by the growth of apostasy. It is a leaven that began in the days of the apostles and increases throughout the age (Mt. 13:33; 2 Ti. 3:13). This refutes the principle of ecumenism that is so pervasive today. Ecumenists do not talk about apostasy. They do not understand it and do not see it. A right view of prophecy and the practical application thereof refutes this mindset.

The imminency of Christ’s return is very practical. It is a major motivator of pilgrim Christianity. It motivates to holy living, and it motivates to zeal in world evangelism. It teaches us that God’s people aren’t on earth today to build Christ’s kingdom through social-justice activities. It refutes the social gospel. Church age believers are on earth to preach the salvation gospel to the ends of the earth through which God is calling out a people for His name from among the nations (Ac. 15:14). God calls through the gospel (2 Th. 2:14), which is to be preached to every nation (Mt. 28:19; Ac. 1:8) and to every individual (Mr. 16:15). Christ is coming, and He can come at any time. We must be living in such a manner that Christ will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21, 23; Lu. 19:17). We must work while it is day. We must reach unsaved men with the gospel to the ends of the earth while we can.

When the literal interpretation of prophecy was restored in the 19th century after a long period of dormancy, it produced spiritual revival and great light on the times. It produced an emphasis on holy, separated Christian living and a vision for world evangelism. The literal interpretation of prophecy was at the heart of the Bible conference movement of the last quarter of the 19th century, and

of the fundamentalist movement of the first half of the 20th century, and it has been one of the hallmarks of the fundamental Baptist movement since the last half of the 20th century. For example, the announcement for the American Bible and Prophecy Conference in New York City in 1878 stated, “The precious doctrine of Christ’s personal appearing has, we are constrained to believe, long lain under such neglect and misapprehension. So vital indeed is this truth represented to be that the denial of it is pointed out as one of the conspicuous signs of the apostasy of the last days. ... after the long sleep of the church, the wise are at long last rising up and trimming their lamps in preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom”. One of the nine fundamentals published by the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals held in Philadelphia in 1919 was “We believe in ‘that blessed hope,’ the personal, premillennial, and imminent return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”. Prior to this, most churches and denominations in America (including Northern and Southern Baptists) preached amillennialism or post-millennialism. There was no expectation of an imminent return of Christ. There was no expectation of the return of Israel to the land. Fundamentalist leader William B. Riley said that when he graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1888, there was no premillennial teaching in the school (William Trollinger, *God’s Empire*). When he arrived in Minneapolis in 1897 to pastor First Baptist Church, there was only one other pastor in the city that held to a premillennial faith (Trollinger, p. 84).

In his history of the downfall of the Conservative Baptists, Richard Clearwaters emphasized the importance of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture several times. He showed that one of the principles of both theological modernism and New Evangelicalism is the denial of the imminency of the return of Christ and a replacement of a concentrated focus on the Great Commission of world evangelism with a kingdom building emphasis. Clearwaters observed that one of the elements of the downgrade was “a more tolerant attitude toward varying views of eschatology”. In 1956, he wrote, “Students have gone from Northwestern [founded by W.B. Riley and Pre-Trib from its inception] and other similar schools to these schools [Fuller Seminary and Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary] with a simple faith in the Word of God about the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming only to later come to me disturbed, not knowing whether they were now looking for the Christ to rapture His Church or for Anti-Christ; whether the ‘blessed hope’ of the church was half or all of the Tribulation; whether Christ was coming with His Church or for His Church” (*The Great Conservative Baptist Compromise*, chapter 3, “The Bible, the Unchanging Evangelical”, p. 48).

Clearwaters said, “The only contribution made by rethinking eschatology has been a glorified question mark” (p. 49).

Clearwaters emphasized that the dispensational Pre-tribulational doctrine is established by a consistent literal method of interpretation (p. 50).

Clearwaters said the early Christians believed in and were looking for the imminent return of Christ. “Clement of Rome, fellow-laborer with Paul (Phil. 4:3) wrote (AD 95), ‘Let us every hour expect the kingdom of love and righteousness, because we know not the day of His appearing.’ ... They were not looking for one half or all of the Tribulation to prepare them for it” (*The Great Conservative Baptist Compromise*, p. 197).

The prominent role of post-tribulationism in the downfall of the Conservative Baptists was emphasized in the report “Conservative Baptist Cross Currents in Colorado”, published in May 1962 in the *Baptist Missionary-Evangelist*. Written by four preachers who had been active in Conservative Baptist work in Colorado since the 1940s, it documented the invasion of new evangelicalism. They emphasized that one of the ways the new evangelicalism showed itself was in the rejection of dispensational Pre-tribulation theology. “By 1954 it was evident that the [Denver Baptist Theological] Seminary had introduced a doctrine foreign to Colorado Conservative Baptists--the accepted dispensational premise was being abandoned in favor of reformation theology. In relation to this position is the theory of the post-tribulation rapture of the church. Dr. Burdick is reported to hold strongly to this ‘post-trib’ position, and President Vernon Grounds has stated, ‘As for myself, I am in a state of indecision. ... I will not say that I am a pretribulationist. ... I simply do not know, though I incline toward the ‘post’ view” (from ‘Divided We Fall,’ page 5, compiled by Wayne Musson, Lake Crystal, Minnesota). In 1962, it was estimated by a Denver Seminary graduate that

‘half of the graduates now take the post-trib position, about 25% take the pre-trib position, and the other 25% are so confused they do not know what to believe.’”

Pre-Wrath?

What about the pre-wrath position that says believers will not be raptured until part way through the Tribulation?

The “pre-wrath” doctrine says that the Rapture occurs in the midst of Daniel’s 70th Week. It is based on the view that the church is to be kept from God’s wrath and the wrath is limited to the very last part of the seven-year Tribulation when the seven vial judgments are poured out.

I reject this position for three reasons, chiefly.

First, the doctrine of the imminency of the Rapture refutes this view. See Mt. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mr. 13:32-37; Ro. 13:12; Php. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Th. 1:9-10; 5:4-9; Tit. 2:12-13; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pe. 4:7. If the church age believer is not taken away until part way through Daniel’s 70th Week, he would know the time of the Rapture precisely, almost to the day, because he would see the events unfold during the first half of Daniel’s 70th week. He would see the Antichrist come on the scene with his peace program. He would see the “Middle East problem” seemingly solved. He would see the building of the Third Temple. He would see the Two Witnesses preaching in Jerusalem. He would see the judgments of Revelation 6, the preaching of the 144,000 of Revelation 7, etc.

Second, we do not accept the view that only the last seven judgments are the wrath of God. It’s true that the seven last plagues are called “the wrath of God” (Re. 15:1; 16:1). But the wrath of God is also mentioned in Revelation 6 at the beginning of the Tribulation.

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Re. 6:15-17).

The fact is that the entire period of Daniel’s 70th Week is the wrath of God, each part growing in intensity. The seal judgments affect a fourth of the world (Re. 6:8). The trumpet judgments affect a third of the earth (Re. 8:7-11; 9:15). The vial judgments affect the entire world (Re. 16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 14, 20). But all of the seal judgments are outpourings of God’s wrath on the earth.

Third, the entire period of Daniel’s 70th Week pertains to Israel and not to the church. As we have seen, the church is not seen on earth after Revelation 3. Everything described on earth in Revelation 6-18 pertains to the Gentile nations and Israel. The “pre-wrath” position does not make a proper and consistent distinction between Israel and the church.

(An excellent critique of Marv Rosenthal’s pre-wrath doctrine is “Pre-wrath Confusion” by George Zeller, www.middletownbiblechurch.org/proph/prewrath.htm).

What about 2 Thessalonians 2?

Some use this passage as a proof text to support the position that the Rapture of church age saints occurs *after* the appearance of the Antichrist, but it teaches the opposite.

If Paul is saying in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Rapture will occur after the revelation of the Antichrist, then he is contradicting what he taught in the first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Paul had taught the Thessalonians a lot about Bible prophecy in general and about the Rapture in particular. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians mentions the coming of Christ. 1 Thessalonians contains the greatest teaching on the Rapture in the Bible (1 Th. 4:13-18). Paul used this doctrine to comfort the believers (“wherefore comfort one another with these words”, 1 Th. 4:18). The Rapture would not be a comfort if it occurred after the coming of the Antichrist and the judgments described in Revelation. Paul had taught them that the coming of the Lord for them is to be expected at any time; it is imminent (1 Th. 1:10). He taught them that they were waiting on the coming of the Lord

Himself, not the Antichrist. He taught them that they would not be overtaken by the destruction and darkness and wrath that will come upon the world at the day of the Lord (1 Th. 5:1-9).

Sometime after they had received the teaching of 1 Thessalonians, the saints at Thessalonica had been shaken by false teaching that the day of Christ was at hand or *already* present. In 2 Th. 2:2, “at hand” means present. The Greek word, “enistemi”, is usually translated “present” (Ro. 8:38; 1 Co. 3:22; 7:26; Ga. 1:4; He. 9:9).

We believe that the solution to the apparent contradiction between what Paul taught about the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians and about the “day of Christ” in 2 Thessalonians is to understand that the “day of Christ” here refers not to the Rapture, but to “the day of the Lord” that Paul warned about in 1 Th. 5:2-9 and described as destruction and darkness and wrath. If we read 2 Th. 2:3 as follows, there are no contradictions: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the day of the Lord] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition”.

2 Thessalonians 2 was specifically written so that the believers would not be shaken in mind and troubled by the false teaching that the day of Christ had already happened. In some places, “at hand” means imminent”, but here, it means present. As we have seen, the Greek word here, “enistemi”, is usually translated “present” (Ro. 8:38; 1 Co. 3:22; 7:26; Ga. 1:4; He. 9:9). (On the other hand, in Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7; and Revelation 1:3, “at hand” is translated from “eggus”, meaning near, imminent). The comfort is the fact that we will be gathered unto Christ before the wrath and darkness come. This is the believer’s Blessed Hope. We are looking for the coming of Christ, not the coming of the Antichrist. What comfort would there be in teaching that we are waiting for the Antichrist? That would be a strange type of comfort! It would have the effect of doing the very thing that Paul was wanting to correct, that is to trouble and shake the mind. “A crucial question arises in verse 1 concerning the small word which Paul uses: ‘concerning’ (Greek ‘huper’). The problem is whether he is beseeching the saints ‘about’ the coming of our Lord or ‘by’ the coming of our Lord. If the first is the meaning, then the passage seems to teach that the Rapture and the Day of the Lord are one and the same event, since the following verses clearly deal with the Day of the Lord. If the second is the meaning, then Paul is appealing to them on the basis of the prior Rapture, that they should not think they were in the Day of the Lord. The question is debatable. We agree with William Kelly when he adopts the second view: ‘The comfort of the Lord's coming is employed as a motive and means for counteracting the uneasiness created by the false presentation that the day (of the Lord) was there.’ We understand Paul to be saying, ‘I appeal to you on the basis of the Rapture that you should not fear that you are in the Day of the Lord. The Rapture must take place first. You will be taken home to heaven at that time and will thus escape the horrors of the Day of the Lord’ (*Believer’s Bible Commentary*).

The “falling away” is the final apostasy that accompanies the revelation of the Antichrist. It is not merely the widespread apostasy of the end of the church age as described in 2 Timothy 2-3; it is the complete apostasy of the revelation of the religion of Revelation 17 which is associated with the rise of the Antichrist. After the Rapture, there will be no born again churches on earth, only unregenerate Christians in all of the denominations, and they will be swept up in accepting the Antichrist.

Speculative Prophecy

There are dozens of ministries that focus almost exclusively on prophecy. They are keen Middle East watchers; they delve into the New Age; they find signs in the heavens; they speculate about the mark of the Beast and keep track of computer technology.

I call this speculative prophecy.

Sometimes they set dates. A prominent example is Harold Camping, founder of Family Radio. He set dates for the Lord’s return in 1988, 1994, and 2011. Finally in 2012, not long before he died, he repented of his dating-setting schemes. But by then he had confused a lot of people!

More often, they are “semi-date setters” in that they come *near* to setting a date.

For example, in 1999, Jack Van Impe published a video entitled *A.D.2000--The End?* Note the question mark. Though Van Impe didn't say for sure that the Lord would return in 2000, he came very close.

In 2015, Tom Horn published *Zenith 2016*, in which he presents his case that the Antichrist "might" appear in 2016.

This type of thing is unscriptural and wrong, but it tends to sell materials and draw a lot of traffic to blogs.

There are some fundamental biblical reasons why I know that all date setters and semi-date setters are wrong and not worth listening to.

First, Christ said that no man knows the day of His return (Mt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). If it is not possible to know the day of Christ's return, then it is not possible to know the time of the Antichrist's appearance, since Christ's return can be prophetically dated from events in the Antichrist's ministry.

Second, the Rapture is imminent, meaning that it is always at hand but its exact time cannot be known (Mt. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mr. 13:32-37; Ro. 13:12; Php. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Th. 1:9-10; 5:4-9; Tit. 2:12-13; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pe. 4:7).. The apostle Paul instructed the church at Thessalonica that they did not need to heed signs and times, because the New Testament believer has been promised redemption from the "day of darkness" that shall overcome the whole world (1 Th. 5:1-9). The New Testament believer is not waiting for the Antichrist, but for Christ Himself. The imminency of Christ's return for the church-age believer means that we will not and cannot know the day, the week, the year, or even the decade. If we could know any of that, Christ's return would not be imminent.

Third, the Bible says that "he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (2 Th. 2:7). The context is the devil's mystery of iniquity program to put the Antichrist on the throne of the world, and the One who restrains this program is God the Holy Spirit. Paul is saying that the Spirit of God will restrain the forces of evil until He is ready to allow the final events to proceed to fulfillment. The times are always in God's hands (Da. 2:21).

2 Thessalonians 2:7 has some wonderful implications. For one, regardless of how brightly the prophetic signs glow, we can never know when the church age will end and Daniel's Seventieth Week will begin. Another implication of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is that God's people need never fret about the times (Psalm 37:1-4).

Fourth, Jesus taught His people to focus on the Great Commission, not on speculative prophecy (Acts 1:6-8). Christ's words here don't mean that the study of prophecy is without value. In fact, a large part of Scripture consists of prophecy, and it has great value. It is a great light and motivator in the Christian life. But Acts 1:6-8 is a warning that constant speculation about the "times and seasons" is the wrong emphasis, at best.

These biblical truths have helped me immensely through the years. Not only have they enabled me to reject every date setter, even the vaguest, but also to avoid being swept up in various hysterias, such as Y2K.

In October 11, 1998, I published "Y2K Hysteria", stating,

"There should be no hysteria about this. I have no survivalist plans. I do not plan to pull my money out of the bank or stockpile food and water. I do not believe planes will fall out of the sky or the electric grid will fail or the water system will cease to flow or the banking system will collapse or the military will dissolve into confusion. I would not be afraid to be on a commercial flight at midnight on December 31. ... Many of those who are sounding the Y2K hysteria are the same scare-mongers, the same prophetic speculators, the same 'Chicken Little' crowd that have been proven wrong many times before".

I made that statement on the basis of the aforementioned biblical truths.

A right understanding of Bible prophecy and the Pre-tribulation Rapture is why I don't join the prepper movement and build an armored escape den and store up food and weapons.

The Lord's Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is in force until the Rapture. We aren't looking for the antichrist; he pertains to Israel, not to the church. We aren't expecting the time of Great Tribulation; that pertains to Israel, not to the church. It is the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). New Testament saints are sons of Abraham by faith (Ga. 3:7), but they aren't sons of Jacob (except converted Jews). Until the Rapture, church-age saints are to keep doing what we see the church of Antioch doing in Acts 13-14. This is the pattern until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in and God turns His attention, so to speak, to completing His program with Israel according to Daniel's 70 Week prophecy (Da. 9:24-27).

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