

THE RAPTURE IN TWENTY CENTURIES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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The coming of God's Messiah deserves closer attention than it has often received. The future coming of the Messiah, called the "rapture," is imminent, literal and visible, for all church saints, before the hour of testing, premillennial, and, based on a literal hermeneutic, distinguishes between Israel and the church. The early church fathers' views advocated a sort of imminent intra- or post-tribulationism in connection with their premillennial teaching. With a few exceptions, the Medieval church writers said little about a future millennium and a future rapture. Reformation leaders had little to say about prophetic portions of Scripture, but did comment on the imminency of Christ's return. The modern period of church history saw a return to the early church's premillennial teaching and a pretribulationist rapture in the writings of Gill and Edwards, and more particularly in the works of J. N. Darby. After Darby, pretribulationism spread rapidly in both Great Britain and the United States. A resurgence of posttribulationism came after 1952, accompanied by strong opposition to pretribulationism, but a renewed support of pretribulationism has arisen in the recent past. Five premillennial views of the rapture include two major views—pretribulationism and posttribulationism—and three minor views—partial, midtribulationist, and pre-wrath raptureism.

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Introduction

The central theme of the Bible is the coming of God's Messiah. Genesis 3:15 reveals the first promise of Christ's coming when it records, "He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."¹ Revelation 22:20 unveils the last promise when it records "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly,' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." In fact, the entire Bible can be

¹All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

understood in relation to this theme. The Old Testament declares, *He is coming* (Isa 7:14; 9:6). The four Gospels declare, *He has come—and is coming again* (John 1:29; 14:3, 18-19). Finally, Acts, the epistles, and the book of Revelation declare, *Having come, He is coming again* (Acts 1:11; 2 Thess 1:10; Rev 1:7).²

As Alva J. McClain points out, the revelation of the Messiah's coming is a "revelation in which the different elements are related, not mechanical, but dynamic and progressive. . . . A revelation in which the different elements are related, not in any merely *external* manner, but as the parts of a *growing plant* are related."³ As Mark 4:26-28 describes it, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil. . . . The soil produces crops by itself; first the *blade*, then the *head*, then the *mature grain* in the head." In the same way, "[T]he doctrine of our Lord's Coming into the world unfolds like a growing plant, which at every stage of revelation contains the germ of the yet unrevealed."⁴ Each element of this *progressive revelation* takes the reader deeper into the complexity of His coming.

- The Old Testament gives the promise of Christ's coming.
- The Gospels unfold this coming in two comings.
- The Gospels unfold the *first* coming as a series of events, including the Virgin conception, birth, perfect life, ministry, atoning death, resurrection, appearances, and ascension.
- The Epistles unfold the *second* coming into two main *phases*; the rapture and the revelation.
- The Book of Revelation unfolds these two *phases* into a series of events, separated by 7 years (Dan 9:27). The *first* of these is the rapture, accompanied by the resurrection, translation, judgement seat of Christ, and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The *second* of these is the revelation, accompanied by Armageddon, the millennial kingdom, and the white throne judgement.⁵

The deeper one looks into the coming of Christ, the more complex, intriguing, and astonishing it becomes, much like the beauty and complexity of human DNA under the microscope, or the heavens as viewed through a telescope (Ps 8:3-4).

Sadly, many fail to discern this intrigue and approach prophecy with the use of Ockham's Razor principle (from the great English scholastic, William of Ockham,

²Thomas Dehany Bernard (*The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament, Eight Lectures delivered before the University of Oxford on the Bampton Foundation, 1864* [New York: American Tract Society, 1891] 22) terms this dynamic of Scripture as progressive revelation and profoundly concludes that "the progressive system of teaching in the New Testament is an obvious *fact*, that it is marked by distinct *stages*, and that it is determined by natural *principles*." See 22-46 for his full development.

³Alva J. McClain, with revisions by Dr. John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "Christian Theology: Biblical Eschatology" (unpublished classroom syllabus; Winona Lake, Ind.: Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.) 39.

⁴*Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁵*Ibid.*

1280-1349). In Ockham's development of a nominalistic pursuit of the real, he insisted upon using the razor to slash away at complex explanations "of the hierarchy of being, of ideas and concepts, which sheer speculation had invented" in the realist's pursuit of what is real.⁶ He asserted that what could be done with fewer assumptions is done in vain with more, and therefore, he called for the "rejection and pruning of all concepts which are not absolutely necessary."⁷ posttribulationists, historic premillennialists, postmillennialists as well as amillennialists⁸ all say, "Apply the razor!" and in doing so, reduce the two-phase second coming of Christ to one phase. Such tragic conclusions are similar to those of anti-trinitarians who find one person in the Godhead rather than three, or early students of Christology who said one nature of Christ rather than two distinct natures in the one person of the God-man (Phil 2:6-8). Rather than "apply the razor," one should plunge into the depths of biblical teaching on the comings of Christ, making clear the biblical distinctions, and look deeply into the issues and nuances of the text, rather than being satisfied with traditional answers originating in unquestioned preunderstandings when approaching the text.

The Subject at Hand

The study of the rapture is part of a wider study of the *parousia*. The Greek word *παρουσία* (*parousia*) literally means "being along side," "presence," or "to be present."⁹ New Testament usage makes it clear that the *parousia* is not merely the act or arrival of the Lord but the total situation surrounding Messiah's coming.¹⁰ Oepke writes, "The *parousia*, in which history is anchored, is not a historical event. . . . It is rather the point where history is mastered by God's eternal rule."¹¹ The uses of the term in 2 Thess 2:1; Jas 5:7-8; 2 Pet 1:16; 1 John 2:28 all refer to the coming of Christ in general. Thus, the *parousia* looks backward to Christ's first coming on

⁶Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 27.

⁷*Ibid.*, 54.

⁸Each position entails an oversimplification of the doctrine of Christ's coming. For example, posttribulationism, which often operates within a dispensational framework, regards the second coming "as having one posttribulation phase." Historic premillennialism, which takes a similar position but uses covenant theology as its underpinning, eliminates the Israel-church distinction among the people of God. Amillennialism disallows the earthly millennial kingdom and thus views Christ's future coming as a brief event followed by the eternal state. See Rolland Dale McCune, *An Investigation and Criticism of "Historic" Premillennialism from the Viewpoint of Dispensationalism* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Grace Theological Seminary, 1972) 5-9.

⁹Albrecht Oepke, "*παρουσία*," *TDNT*, 5:859.

¹⁰Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956) 20 notes, "The primary meaning seems to be *presence*, rather than mere coming, as further illustrated by 1 Cor 10:10. . . . The eschatological use of the word seems to add the thought of *arrival*, or *advent*, and is not restricted to either phase of the second coming" [emphasis original].

¹¹Oepke, "*παρουσία*" 5:870.

earth and looks ahead to the future, beginning with the rapture, followed by the seven-year tribulation, followed by the revelation (second coming), followed by Armageddon, and finally the one-thousand-year millennial or theocratic kingdom. It is a wider term than “The Day of the Lord,” which is best understood in Scripture as the judgement which climaxes the tribulation period (2 Thess 2:2; Revelation 16–18) and millennium just prior to the eternal state (2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 20:7–21:1).¹² The pretribulation view of the rapture to be considered here sees the rapture of the church taking place at the beginning of the next phase of the parousia and thus before the tribulation period begins.

The rapture represents the translation or removal of the church to be with Christ forever. Scripture describes this great event in 1 Cor 15:52 by “the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we shall be changed”; in John 14:3 by “I will come again, and receive you to myself”; and in 1 Thess 4:17 by “we shall be caught up together with them in the clouds . . . and thus shall we always be with the Lord.” The word for “caught up” in 1 Thess 4:17 is from the Greek word ἄρπάζω (*harpazō*) which means “to take by force” or “to catch up or away,”¹³ and is also related to the Latin verb *rapiō*, meaning “caught up,”¹⁴ or the noun *raptura*.¹⁵ Assuming that the rapture begins the parousia,¹⁶ several characteristics important to discussing the history of the rapture should be noted.

- The coming of Christ at the rapture is imminent, in the sense of an any-moment coming. Though there are no signs for the rapture, there are signs of the second coming to follow and these may appear before the rapture. Note Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16; Titus 2:13; Jas 5:7-9
- The coming of Christ at the rapture is literal and visible. Rev 1:7 states “Every eye shall see Him.”
- The coming of Christ at the rapture is for all church saints, deceased or living. First Thess 4:14, 17 and 1 Cor 15:51 record the order of this great event.
- This coming of Christ occurs before the outpouring of the great trial upon the earth. A literal translation of Rev 3:10 states that the believer is kept

¹²Richard L. Mayhue, “The Prophet’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985):230.

¹³Werner Foerster, “ἄρπάζω,” *TDNT* 1:472.

¹⁴Robert G. Clouse, “Rapture of the Church,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 908.

¹⁵*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1993 ed., s.v. “rapture.”

¹⁶Support for this position and the characteristics that follow can be found in other articles of this issue of *TMSJ*.

- in “a continuing state outside of” the *hour* of testing upon the earth.¹⁷
- This coming of Christ is premillennial, that is, before Christ returns to fight the battle of Armageddon and set up the 1,000-year kingdom, and judge unbelievers. First Cor 15:23-24 along with Dan 12:1-2 places the coming of Christ before these events.¹⁸
 - This coming of Christ assumes a literal, normal hermeneutic in the interpretation of Scripture, and it recognizes a fundamental theological distinction between Israel and the church.

Having identified the pretribulation rapture and its major characteristics, this article will now focus on a history of those who have held this position.

The Rapture in Church History

The rapture in church history is really a history of pretribulationism. Other related, historically held views do not distinguish between the two phases of Christ’s coming: rapture and revelation. Partial, midtrib, and pre-wrath positions are recent positions that have very little if any history.

The Early Fathers

A cursory examination of the early church fathers reveals that they were predominantly premillennialists or chiliasts.¹⁹ Clear examples in the writings of Barnabas (ca. 100-150), Papias (ca. 60-130), Justin Martyr (110-165), Irenaeus (120-202), Tertullian (145-220), Hippolytus (c. 185-236), Cyprian (200-250), and Lactantius (260-330) make this understanding impossible to challenge successfully.²⁰

¹⁷Note the careful development of the issues surrounding Revelation 3:10 by Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” in Richard Reiter et al., *The Rapture: Pre-Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984) 64-70.

¹⁸See Robert D. Culver, “A Neglected Millennial Passage from Saint Paul,” *Papers . . . read at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids, 1955) 27-33.

¹⁹Millard Erickson (*The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. [Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2001] 31) defines *chiliasm* as “Belief in an earthly millennium; in particular, in the early centuries of the church a premillennialism that held a very vivid and imaginative view of conditions during the millennium.” George E. Ladd (*Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952] 23) forcefully concludes, “[W]ith one exception [Caius] there is no Church Father before Origen who opposed the millenarian interpretation, and there is no one before Augustine whose extant writings offer a different interpretation of Revelation 20 than that of a future earthly kingdom consonant with the natural interpretation of the language.”

²⁰See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981): Barnabas, *The Epistle of Barnabas* 15 (146-47); Papias, *Fragments of Papias* 6 (154-55); Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80 (238); Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies* 5, 30, 3-4 (559-60); Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 22 (560-61); Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 65 (218); Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 55:1 (347), *The Treatises of Cyprian* 11:1-2 (496);

It is also significant to note that the early fathers largely held to a period of persecution that would be ongoing when the return of the Lord takes place and most would see the church suffering through some portion of the tribulation period.²¹ At the same time, it is very clear that the early church fathers believed in the imminent return of Christ, which is a central feature of pretribulational thought.²² This lack of precision among the fathers as to the exact time of Christ premillennial return has led to confusion among scholars as to how to understand the fathers in these areas. As Larry Crutchfield notes, "If anyone searches the fathers for a fully detailed, systematic presentation about the doctrine of last things, he searches in vain. . . ."²³ The following is a brief survey of imminency as taught by the early church fathers. Though these facts are informative and important to the contemporary discussion, that it is never appropriate to build a doctrine based on the teachings of the fathers must be kept in mind.

Clement of Rome (ca. 90-100)

Clement wrote, "[O]f a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, 'Speedily will He come, and will not tarry'; and 'The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.'" "Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him, in order that we may share in His promised gifts."²⁴ Clement quotes Hab 2:3 and Mal 3:1 in a clear statement of imminence.

Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 98-117).

Ignatius wrote, "The last times are come upon us. Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit, and fear the long-suffering of God, lest we despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance." On the basis of Romans 2:4, he continues, "For let us either fear the wrath to come, or let us love the present joy in the life that now is; and let our present and true joy be only this, to be found in Christ Jesus, that we may truly live."²⁵ Ignatius wrote to Polycarp, "Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit," and "Be ever more becoming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became

and Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* VII, 24-26 (219-22).

²¹Charles A. Hauser ("The Eschatology of the Early Church Fathers" [unpublished Th.D. dissertation; Winona Lake, Ind.: Grace Theological Seminary, 1961] 25-57) carefully surveys the early fathers on this issue and concludes, "These men are sure that the Church would go through the tribulation" (56).

²²John F. Walvoord, *The Return of the Lord* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 80; also *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 51-54.

²³Larry V. Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 88.

²⁴Saint Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians* 23, 35 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:11,14.

²⁵Ignatius, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* 11 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:54.

visible for our sakes.”²⁶

The Didache (ca. 100-160)

The final chapter of the *Didache* provides one of the clearest and comprehensive statements on imminency: “Be watchful for your life; let your lamps not be quenched and your loins not ungirded, but be ye ready; for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh.”²⁷ In the same paragraph, the author urges “gathering yourselves together frequently,” in light of the imminence of the Lord’s return. He then speaks of the appearance of the “world-deceiver” (which the context indicates is the Antichrist) and the persecution associated with his coming.

Barnabas (ca. 117-138)

The *Epistle of Barnabas* reflects a similar view of imminency when it states, “For the day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near and his reward.”²⁸

Shepherd of Hermas (ca. 96-150)

The theme of imminency continues in the *Shepherd of Hermas* as the church is compared to a tower: “Let us go away, and after two days let us come and clean these stones, and put them into the building; for all things round the tower must be made clear, lest haply the master come suddenly and find the circuit dirty, and he be wroth, and so these stones shall not go to the building of the tower, and I shall appear to be careless in my master’s sight.”²⁹

Summary

These statements of imminency have led George Ladd, J. Barton Payne,³⁰ and Robert Gundry to affirm that the early fathers held to posttribulationism in the modern sense. Gundry states, “Irenaeus, who claims to hold that which was handed down from the apostles, was as forthright a posttribulationist as could be found in the present day.”³¹ Gundry’s assumption, however, is unwarranted for several reasons. First, the early fathers (before 324) lived in a world of Roman persecution which was for them a way of life and a factor in all they believed and did. The

²⁶Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp* 1, 3 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:93-94.

²⁷*The Didache, or Teaching of the Apostles* 16 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, rev. and trans by J. B. Lightfoot (London: Macmillan, 1926) 235.

²⁸Barnabas, *The Epistle of Barnabas* 21, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:149.

²⁹*The Shepherd of Hermas* S.9,7 in *The Apostolic Fathers* 465.

³⁰George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 20. J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 17.

³¹Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 175.

Romans called them “atheists” for failing to worship their gods.³² Second, the early fathers treated these issues of persecution in a simplistic, unreflective manner, which is hardly a well developed posttribulation position.³³ This data leads Crutchfield to describe thoughtfully the still unclear writings of the fathers as “intratribulation-al,” that is, “within” or “during” the tribulation.³⁴

In the end, no one can produce a clear statement of patristic eschatology regarding the rapture. What can be concluded is the following:

- The early fathers placed strong emphasis upon imminency.
- They early fathers understood a literal coming of Christ, and a literal 1,000-year kingdom to follow.
- A type of imminent intratribulationism (Crutchfield) or imminent posttribulationism (Walvoord)³⁵ with occasional pretribulation inferences was believed.³⁶
- The early fathers understood a kind of “practical persecution,” due to times of general Roman persecution that they experienced, rather than a specific fulfillment of future tribulation wrath.

Crutchfield rightly concludes,

This view of the fathers on imminency, and, in some, references to escaping the time of the Tribulation, constitute what may be termed, to quote Erickson, ‘seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture could be developed. . . .’ Had it not been for the drought in sound exegesis, brought on by Alexandrian allegorism and later by Augustine, one wonders what kind of crop those seeds might have yielded—long before J. N. Darby and the nineteenth century.³⁷

The Medieval Church

The period between Augustine and the Renaissance was largely dominated by “Augustine’s understanding of the church, and his spiritualization of the

³²W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) 238-40.

³³These two reasons are well developed by Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope” 91-94.

³⁴Ibid., 101.

³⁵Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* 53-54.

³⁶Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope” 77. Millard J. Erickson (*Contemporary Options in Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977] 131) concludes the following, “While there are in the writings of the early fathers seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture could be developed, it is difficult to find in them an unequivocal statement of the type of imminency usually believed by pretribulationists.” In response to this Crutchfield adds, “The seeds were indeed there but were crushed under the allegorist’s foot before they could sprout and bear early fruit” (454).

³⁷Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope” 103.

Millennium as the reign of Christ in the saints.”³⁸ There were only “sporadic discussions here and there of a literal, future Millennium,”³⁹ making examples of pretribulationism very rare. Medieval scholar, Dorothy deF. Abrahamse further explains the situation when she notes, “. . . Augustine had declared that the Revelation of John was to be interpreted symbolically rather than literally, and for most of the Middle Ages Church councils and theologians considered only abstract eschatology to be acceptable speculation.”⁴⁰ She goes on to observe, “Since the nineteenth century, however, historians have recognized that literal apocalypses did continue to circulate in the medieval world and that they played a fundamental role in the creation of important strains of thought and legend.”⁴¹ Consistent with this conclusion, several important instances of pretribulationist thought have come to light in recent years.

Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373)

Ephraem was an extremely important and prolific writer. Also known as Pseudo-Ephraem, he was a major theologian of the early Eastern (Byzantine) Church. His important sermon, “On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World,” (ca. 373) is preserved in four Latin manuscripts and is ascribed to St. Ephraem or to St. Isidore.⁴² If not written by Ephraem, it is written by one greatly influenced by him.⁴³ This Pseudo-Ephraem sermon declares the following: “All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.”⁴⁴ Alexander offers an insightful comment on these words when he says, “This author, however, mentions another measure taken by God in order to alleviate the period of tribulation for his saints and

³⁸John Hannah, *Our Legacy, The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs, Col.: NavPress, 2001) 315. See also, Robert E. Lerner, “The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGuinn (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1992) 51-53.

³⁹Hannah, *Our Legacy* 315-16.

⁴⁰Dorothy deF. Abrahamse, “Introduction,” in *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* by Paul J. Alexander (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1985) 1.

⁴¹Ibid., 1-2. For further development of this important field of research, see Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation,” *BSac* 152 (1995):308-11.

⁴²Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 136. The full text of the sermon may be found at <http://www.geocities.com/lasttrumpet_2000/timeline/ephraem.html> or in Grant R. Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 109-15.

⁴³Paul J. Alexander, “The Diffusion of Byzantine Apocalypses in the Medieval West and the Beginnings of Joachimism,” in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. Ann Williams (Essex: Longman, 1980) 58-95.

⁴⁴Pseudo-Ephraem, *On the Last Times* 2.

for the Elect.”⁴⁵

In this sermon, Pseudo-Ephraem develops an elaborate biblical eschatology, including a distinction between the rapture and the second coming of Christ. It describes the imminent rapture, followed by 3½ years of great tribulation under the rule of Antichrist, followed by the coming of Christ, the defeat of Antichrist, and the eternal state. His view includes a parenthesis between the fulfillment of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks and his seventieth week in Daniel 9:24-27.⁴⁶ Pseudo-Ephraem describes the rapture that precedes the tribulation as “imminent or overhanging.”⁴⁷

Codex Amiatinus (ca. 690-716)

This significant⁴⁸ Latin manuscript from England was commissioned by Abbot Ceolfrid of the monasteries of Jarrow and Wearmouth in Northumberland. Ceolfrid intended to give it to the Pope as a gift but died on his way to see him. It was produced during the era of the commentaries of Venerable Bede, who was also a monk at Jarrow and whose works were heavily influenced by Jerome's Vulgate.⁴⁹ In the title to Psalm 22 (Psalm 23 in the *Vulgate*), the following appears: “Psalm of David, the voice of the Church after being raptured.”⁵⁰ The Latin phrase *post raptismum* contains a verb from the root *rapio* which can mean either “to snatch, hurry away” or “to plunder, take by assault.”⁵¹ This title is not carried over from Jerome's *Vulgate* and thus is likely the product of the Jarrow monastery. A history of the period of Ceolfrid's life presents no evidence of invasion or suffering⁵² as if the title was inserted for comfort in light of a difficult condition in the church. In contrast, Ceolfrid writes of the Christ's future sudden return and the resurrection of the believer, “[W]e show that we rejoice in the most certain hope of our own

⁴⁵Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 210. For issues relating to the authorship, interpretation, and date of Pseudo-Ephraem, consult Demy and Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation” 311-13.

⁴⁶Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement” 116-18.

⁴⁷Pseudo-Ephraem, *On the Last Times* 2.

⁴⁸F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947) 179.

⁴⁹Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 206.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 207.

⁵¹Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary* (New York: American Book Company, 1907) 1523.

⁵²William Hunt, “Ceolfrid,” in *Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (Oxford: Oxford University, 1922) 3:1333-34; H. W. Gwatkin et al., eds, *Germany and the Western Empire*, in *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922) 7:554-56.

resurrection, which we believe will take place on the Lord's Day."⁵³ Though not conclusive and still in need of further study, it appears that Codex Amiatinus presents another example of pretribulational thought in the Middle Ages.

Brother Dolcino (d. 1307)

A recent study of the fourteenth-century text, *The History of Brother Dolcino*, composed in 1316 by an anonymous source, reveals another important pretribulational passage.⁵⁴ As leader of the Apostolic Brethren in northern Italy, Brother Dolcino led his people through times of tremendous papal persecution.⁵⁵ One of the group wrote the following astonishing words:

. . . [T]he Antichrist was coming into this world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and after he had come, then he [Dolcino] and his followers would be transferred into Paradise, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist.⁵⁶

Thus, the writer of this *History* believed that Dolcino and his followers would be transferred to paradise, expressing this belief with the Latin word *transferrentur*, the past participle of which is used to derive the English word "translation," a synonym for rapture.⁵⁷ Dolcino and his followers retreated into the mountains of northern Italy to await their removal at the appearance of Antichrist. While Dolcino and many of his followers were killed by a papal crusade in 1306, the movement lasted into the fifteenth century.⁵⁸

The Reformation Era

The Reformation in general is bleak with regard to prophetic teaching, as evidenced by the lack of writings and commentaries on prophetic books.⁵⁹ The strongest statements concerning imminency during this period actually come from Anabaptists, known as the Taufer, who drew their theology from the Scriptures more

⁵³"Ceolfrid's letter to Nechtan," in Venerable Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. and with an Introduction by Leo Sherley-Price, rev. by R. E. Latham (New York: Dorset Press, 1968) 323.

⁵⁴This research is fully developed by Francis Gumerlock, "A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century," *BSac* 159 (2002):349-62.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 356-57.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 354-55.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 357.

⁵⁸Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969) 246-47.

⁵⁹Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman, 1988) 323.

than other groups that bore the name Anabaptist.⁶⁰ One such learned man was Balthasar Hubmaier, who after rebuking his radical chiliastic contemporaries, then says, “[A]lthough Christ gave us many signs whereby we can tell how near at hand the day of his coming is, nevertheless, no one but God knows the exact day. . . . Take heed, watch and pray; for you know either the day nor the hour. . . . [T]he Judge is already standing at the door. . . .”⁶¹

Martin Luther and John Calvin also make similar statements concerning imminency. Calvin, when commenting on Zechariah and Malachi, writes, “Whenever the day of the Lord is mentioned in Scripture, let us know that God is bound by no laws, that he should hasten his work according to our hasty wishes; but the specific time is in his own power, and at his own will.” Commenting on Christ’s teaching in the Gospels, he writes, “[Jesus] wishes [the disciples] to be uncertain as to his coming, but to be prepared to expect him . . . every moment.”⁶² Truly, the Lord’s return was one of the great undeveloped themes of the Reformation era.⁶³

The Modern Period up to Darby

The modern period is usually understood as beginning in 1648 with the final acceptance of the Protestant Reformation at the Peace of Westphalia. The period saw the rebirth of premillennialism for at least three important reasons.⁶⁴

- Due to the influence of Renaissance humanism, the Reformers went back to the investigation of original written sources by the fathers and the Scriptures. This gave them access to fresh and accurate Greek texts, uncorrupted by the Vulgate traditions. It also exposed them to new editions of the early fathers including the distinct premillennial teaching of Irenaeus.⁶⁵
- Much of the allegorical hermeneutic that dominated the Medieval period was repudiated. Calvin particularly reintroduced exegetical exposition

⁶⁰George H. Williams, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, vol. 25, *Library of Christian Classics* (London: SCM, 1957) 19-40, identifies this element of the Radical Reformation as the Evangelical Anabaptists, as distinct from the Spiritualists, Revolutionaries, and the Evangelical Rationalists. The Spiritualists and Revolutionaries, particularly, had elaborate futuristic views based on speculation.

⁶¹Balthasar Hubmaier, “Apologia,” *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and eds. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1989) 541-43.

⁶²For these and other examples of Calvin’s comments on the second advent, see J. Graham Miller, *Calvin’s Wisdom, An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically by a Grateful Reader* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992) 336-38.

⁶³George (*Theology* 323) quotes the great Pilgrim pastor, John Robinson (1576?-1625), commenting soon after the passing on of Calvin, “The Lord hath yet more truth and light to break fourth out of his holy Word.”

⁶⁴Thomas Ice, “Rapture, History of the,” *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996) 346.

⁶⁵Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:31-36 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:560-67.

back into the church.⁶⁶

- Many Reformers contacted Jewish sources and had learned Hebrew. This moved many of the Reformers to take passages concerning Israel more historically rather than continuing to take them allegorically. This led to more historical or realized eschatological positions among the Reformers.⁶⁷ Futurist interpretations including premillennialism began to be more prominent in the church as noted earlier.

This more recent focus on premillennial thought in the late 1500s and early 1600s is not surprising. James Orr makes an astute observation concerning the way various doctrines have been the focus of interest and development at various periods of time. He writes, “[T]he articulation of the system [of dogma] in text-books is the very articulation of the system [of dogma] in its development in history.”⁶⁸ Theological articulation moves from Prolegomena to Theology Proper, to Anthropology, to Christology, to Soteriology, and finally to Eschatology as the last major doctrine to be clarified. Orr speaks of law and reason underlying this development with the law having both a logical and historical development.⁶⁹ It is very significant that God in His providence brought into the church a rich development of eschatology. The following is a brief survey of pretribulational thinking that occurs during this period.

Joseph Mede (1586-1638)

Mede is considered the “father of English premillennialism,”⁷⁰ having written *Clavis Apocalyptica* (“Key of the Revelation”) in 1627 in which “He attempted to construct an outline of the Apocalypse based solely upon internal considerations. In this interpretation he advocated premillennialism in such a scholarly way that this work continued to influence eschatological interpretation for centuries.”⁷¹

⁶⁶Consult “Calvin’s Method and Interpretation” and “Prolegomena to Exegesis,” T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 2d ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 85-108, 192-205. See also Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel, 1990) 136.

⁶⁷Luther performed all his deeds in the conviction that the Last Days were at hand, seeing the Pope as the Antichrist. See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957) 261.

⁶⁸James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (1901; reprint Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, n.d.) 21.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 22. Hannah (*Our Legacy* 29) enumerates seven areas in the historical progressive articulation of doctrine ending with “The Doctrine of Last Things, or Eschatology (1650-present).”

⁷⁰Ice, “Rapture” 346.

⁷¹Robert G. Clouse, “Joseph Mede (1586-1638),” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 646.

Increase Mather (1639-1723)

This theologian and president of Harvard College (1685) was a significant American Puritan. Concerning the future coming of Christ, he wrote that the saints would “be caught up into the air” beforehand, thereby escaping the final conflagration.⁷²

Peter Jurieu (1637-1713)

Jurieu was a “prominent theologian and apologist in the French Reformed Church. He came to believe that Calvinists would be restored to France, because of his interpretation of the prophecies of the Apocalypse.”⁷³ In his work, *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687), he taught that “Christ would come in the air to rapture the saints and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon. He spoke of a secret rapture prior to His coming in glory and judgement at Armageddon.”⁷⁴

John Gill (1697-1771)

Gill was a profound scholar, Calvinist theologian, and Baptist minister at Horsleydown, Southwark, for over fifty years.⁷⁵ He published his *An Exposition of the New Testament* in three volumes between 1746-48. In his commentary on 1 Thess 4:15 he wrote,

The Apostle having something new and extraordinary to deliver, concerning the coming of Christ, the first resurrection, of the resurrection of the saints, the change of the living saints, and the rapture both of the raised, and living in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, expresses itself in this manner. The dead saints will rise before the living ones are changed, and both will be caught up together to meet the Lord.⁷⁶

Concerning 1 Thess 4:17 he comments,

Suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which rapture will contribute the agility, which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have; and the rapture of the living saints will be together with them; with the dead in Christ, that will then be raised; so that the one will not prevent the other, or the one be sooner with Christ than the other; but one being raised and the other changed, they'll be joined in one company and general assembly, and be rapt up together: in the clouds; the

⁷²Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1992) 75.

⁷³Robert G. Clouse, “Jurieu, Pierre (1637-1713),” *The New International Dictionary* 557.

⁷⁴Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 197-98; see also Grant R. Jeffrey, “Was the PreTrib Position of the Rapture Seen Before John Darby” (unpublished paper presented at the Pretrib Study Group, Dallas, Tex., 1993) 2-3.

⁷⁵Robert G. Clouse, “John Gill (1697-1771),” *The New Dictionary* 413.

⁷⁶John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1853) 2:561.

same clouds perhaps in which Christ will come, will be let down to take them up.⁷⁷

As Jeffrey observes, “there is some ambiguity in Dr. Gill’s 1748 teaching of the timing and sequence of prophetic events.” Yet Jeffrey notes many important conclusions, including

- The Lord will descend in the air.
- The saints will be raptured in the air to meet Him.
- Christ will preserve the saints with Him until the general conflagration and burning of the world is over.
- The saints will reign with Christ for a thousand years.⁷⁸

Similar pretribulational views can be found in commentaries by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), James MacKnight (1721-1800), and Thomas Scott (1747-1821).⁷⁹

Morgan Edwards (1722-1795)

Edwards was a Baptist preacher, evangelist, historian and educator, having founded Rhode Island College (Brown University). During his student days at Bristol Baptist Seminary in England (1742-44), he wrote an essay on Bible prophecy. The essay was published in Philadelphia in 1788 as *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties*. After a careful examination of this document, Thomas Ice concludes the following about Edwards’ position on the rapture from his statement, “The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years.”⁸⁰

- He believes that 1,003.5 years will transpire between resurrections.
- He associates the first resurrection with the rapture of 1 Thess 4:17, occurring at least 3.5 years before the start of the millennium.
- He associates the meeting of believers with Christ in the air with John 14:2.
- He sees believers disappearing during the time of the tribulation.⁸¹

Concluding Analysis

Critics of rapture history who have argued that belief in the pretribulational rapture was not embraced before John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) deny the clear

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement” 121-22.

⁷⁹Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* 198. Scott taught that “the righteous will be carried into heaven, where they will be secure until the time of the judgement is over.”

⁸⁰Thomas Ice, “Morgan Edwards: Another Pre-Darby Rapturist,” *The Thomas Ice Collection* (<<http://www.according2prophecy.org/apredarby.html>>) 1. See also, Frank Marotta, *Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist* (Elkton, Md.: n.p., n.d.).

⁸¹Ibid., 2.

testimony of theologians and commentators of earlier periods. The clear statements of Pseudo-Ephraem, John Gill, and others now make clear that pretribulationism has had a long and credible history of people who understood it,, taught it, and who lived their lives in light of it. George Ladd is no longer credible when he writes, "We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church, and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century."⁸² Rapture critic John Bray makes a similar inappropriate comment in the form of an offer.

People who are teaching the pretribulation rapture teaching today are teaching something that never was taught until 1812. . . . Not one of the early church fathers taught a pretribulation rapture. . . . I make the offer of five hundred dollars to anybody who will find a statement, a sermon, article in a commentary, or anything, prior to 1812 that taught a 2 phase coming of Christ separated by a stated period of time, such as the pretribulation rapturists teach.⁸³

It is time for Mr. Bray to make good on his \$500.00 offer!

The Modern Period from Darby to the Present

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

Darby was a man of significant influence in the shift from historicism to futurism in premillennial thought and the modern force behind the development of dispensationalism. Darby was well educated and had a fruitful ministry in the Church of England up until 1826.⁸⁴ After much consideration and a series of providential circumstances, Darby broke with the Anglican church in 1828-29, envisioning "A spiritual church, joined to a heavenly Christ, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and awaiting their Lord's return."⁸⁵ Darby soon began to teach openly an Israel-church distinction and a two-stage distinction in the second coming of Christ. This included a quiet appearance of Christ to remove all true Christians from the earth (the presence of Christ), followed by the removal of the restraining work of the Holy Spirit from the earth and the reign of Antichrist, after which would be the public appearing of Christ in glory. The pretribulation rapture view which Darby had discovered while in Bible study between 1826-27, was later supported by Edward Irving (1792-1834) and challenged by B. W. Newton.⁸⁶ His views of the

⁸²*Blessed Hope* 31.

⁸³John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, Fla.: John L. Bray Ministries, 1980) 30-31.

⁸⁴For a brief survey of his life and thought, see Floyd Elmore, "J. N. Darby's Early Years," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Ice and Demy 127-59.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁶F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic, 1968) 129-30.

church and especially his prophetic teaching spread like wildfire through the Plymouth Brethren movement, and after a visit America, they became popular throughout American evangelicalism.⁸⁷ Two early proponents of Darby's views in America were James H. Brookes (1830-97) and J. R. Graves (1820-89).

Post Darby Period

The pretribulational position spread through influence of the Niagra Bible Conference era (New York, 1878-1909)⁸⁸ and received wide exposure in the popular prophetic publications, *The Truth, Our Hope, The Watchword*, and *Maranatha*. It was also carried forward in William Backstone's book, *Jesus is Coming* (1909), and the work of C. I. Scofield in his popular *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), published in Britain and America, and other works.⁸⁹ Prominent pretribulational Bible teachers articulated the position on the Bible conference circuit, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1945), A. J. Gordon (1836-1895), James M. Gray (1851-1935), R. A. Torrey (1856-1928), Harry Ironside (1876-1951), John F. Strombeck (1881-1959), Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952), Alva J. McClain (1888-1968), Clarence E. Mason, Jr., Charles Lee Feinberg (1909-1995), J. Dwight Pentecost (1915-), John F. Walvoord (1910-), Gerald B. Stanton (1918-), and Charles Ryrie (1925-). During this period, critics attacked it as the "any-moment theory."⁹⁰

In the mid twentieth century almost every North American Bible institute, Bible college, and evangelical seminary expounded dispensational pretribulationalism. This included Moody Bible Institute, Philadelphia College of Bible, The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Talbot Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Grace Theological Seminary. Many evangelical denominations and movements held to pretribulationism, including the Bible Presbyterian Church, The Evangelical Free Church, the Fellowship of Grace Brethren, many independent Bible churches, independent Baptist churches, and Pentecostal denominations including Assemblies of God and Foursquare Gospel churches. The position was again popularized in 1970 by Hal Lindsey.⁹¹

A resurgence of posttribulational thought after 1952 challenged

⁸⁷See John M'Culloch, "Brethren (Plymouth)," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928) 2:843-48.

⁸⁸Richard R. Reiter ("A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," *The Rapture* 12) notes, "Many readers concluded that pretribulationism held by many Plymouth Brethren in Britain was adopted wholesale by the [Niagara] conference."

⁸⁹C. I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (New York: A. C. Gaebelein, 1902) 89-103.

⁹⁰See *ibid.*, 11-34, for a helpful history of this period. Also note the respective articles in Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*.

⁹¹Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). Also, for a general history of this period, see *ibid.*, 35-44.

pretribulationism with the writings of George Ladd (1911-1982),⁹² J. Barton Payne (1922-1979),⁹³ and Robert Gundry (1932-).⁹⁴ These challenges have prompted excellent responses which have added credibility to the pretribulationist rapture view.⁹⁵

In the past decade have come new important works supporting pretribulationism, including those by Paul Benware, Mal Couch, Larry Crutchfield, Timothy Demy, Paul Feinberg, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Grant Jeffrey, Thomas Ice, Paul S. Karleen, Renald Showers, and Robert Thomas.⁹⁶

David MacPherson, a Less Than Credible Side Issue

David MacPherson has now published five books, all setting forth the same contrived view of the origin of the pretribulationist rapture.⁹⁷ Having first made his assertions, MacPherson approaches his subject looking for proof. He uses his skills as a former investigative newsmen to assemble selectively huge amounts of data, presenting his view with a vindictive, preachy, sarcastic tone.⁹⁸ MacPherson aggressively attacks pretribulationism by attributing its origin to Margaret MacDonald, as a result of a prophetic revelation she had in the spring of 1830, at the age of fifteen. Margaret was attracted to the charismatic influence of the Irvingite Movement by 1830 and her pretribulationist rapture vision was recorded and published by Robert Norton in 1861. "MacPherson uses this finding to project the notion that the doctrine of the pretribulationist rapture is of demonic origin through 15-year-old Scottish lassie."⁹⁹ MacPherson then claims that J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, who taught the pre-trib view, received it from Margaret

⁹²George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*.

⁹³J. Barton Payne *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1962).

⁹⁴Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). See John A. Sproule, *A Revised Review of "The Church and the Tribulation"* (Postgraduate Seminar: New Testament Theology; Winona Lake, Ind.: Grace Theological Seminary, 1974; Birmingham, Ala: Southeastern Bible College, n.d.).

⁹⁵A little known example of this is McCune, *An Investigation and Criticism of "Historic" Premillennialism from the Viewpoint of Dispensationalism*.

⁹⁶See notes in this article and the general bibliography (255-63) for the respective contributions of these authors. See also publications of the Pre-Trib Research Center (P.O Box 14111, Arlington, Tex. 76094-111; e-mail <icet@711online.net>).

⁹⁷In order of publication, Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas City, Mo.: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973), *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City, Mo.: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974), *The Incredible Cover-up, the True Story on the Pre-Trib Rapture* (Plainfield: Logos International, 1975), *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, N.C.: New Puritan Library, 1983), *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, S.C.: Millennium III Publishers, 1995).

⁹⁸Adequate assessments of MacPherson may be found in Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulationist Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald," *BSac* 147 (1990):155-68, and John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 42-51.

⁹⁹Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulationist Rapture Did Not Begin" 157.

MacDonald after 1830. MacPherson then asserts that an elaborate plot was devised by Darby, William Kelly (1821-1906), and others to cover up the origin.¹⁰⁰

The reality of MacPherson's five books is that he has still not produced the evidence for his claims and what he does offer has fundamental flaws.¹⁰¹

- Margaret MacDonald does not teach a pretribulationist rapture in her prophecy and thus she could not give to Darby what she never believed herself. Even anti-tribulationist John Bray acknowledges this!¹⁰²
- MacPherson amasses an overwhelming amount of evidence that does not relate to his case, but which serves as a kind of smoke screen around the edges.
- Darby developed his view in 1826-27, at least three years before MacDonald's vision! His visit with Margaret in 1830 was of no consequence.
- The Brethren were not united on this issue, so Newton, Mueller, and Tregelles would certainly have exposed such a fraud on Darby's part.

MacPherson engages in biased revisionism. No major scholar familiar with original sources has sided with him.¹⁰³ Sandeen calls it a "groundless and pernicious charge."¹⁰⁴ F. F. Bruce, himself a Brethren author, writes, "Where did Darby get [his view]? . . . [I]t was in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager Bible students of unfulfilled prophecy. . . . [D]irect dependence by Darby on Margaret MacDonald is unlikely."¹⁰⁵ It appears that MacPherson's converts are rabid anti-pretribulationists because MacPherson has "proved" only what he set out to find.¹⁰⁶

Concluding Remarks

It is important to point out that judgment of the credibility of the pretribulationist rapture is whether it is found in the Scriptures! Though history informs one's interpretation of Scripture, it should not drive his interpretation. The real source of the pretribulationist rapture will be developed in the ensuing articles

¹⁰⁰MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot* 87-120.

¹⁰¹See Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulationist Rapture Did Not Begin" 158-61.

¹⁰²John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulationist Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, Fla.: Christian Chiasm; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 250. Charles R. Smith, "Review of *Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, by Dave MacPherson," *Grace Spire* (May-June, 1974):9.

¹⁰³Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulationist Rapture Did Not Begin" 161-63.

¹⁰⁴Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) 64.

¹⁰⁵F. F. Bruce, "Review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, Dave MacPherson," *Evangelical Quarterly* 47 (1975):58.

¹⁰⁶Note Robert Gundry's endorsement on the cover of *The Rapture Plot*, "As usual, Dave MacPherson overwhelms his critics with a superior knowledge of the primary sources. His is a rare combination of historical research and investigative reporting."

of this issue of *TMSJ*. Church history records a long and at times painful development of the articulation of the doctrine. As pointed out earlier, such is also the case with Christology, soteriology, and other doctrines as well. The following is a brief summary of the history of doctrine as it relates to the pretribulation rapture:

- The apostolic fathers were premillennial but the details and implications of the rapture doctrine were not worked out.
- By the fifth century the amillennialism of Origen and Augustine had all but eliminated premillennialism.
- This continued through the Reformation with the Reformers preferring to ignore the millennium rather than teach against it. They were more “no-mil” than “a-mil.”
- The seventeenth century brings a rebirth of premillennialism. A long with it flourished postmillennialism until the end of the French Revolution (1789). After 1800, premillennialism made a great surge but was still dominated by historical schools of interpretation.
- By 1826 literal interpretation of prophecy took hold and “futurism” saw the light of day!¹⁰⁷

Ice concludes, “This environment of a literal, futurist, premillennial framework interacting with the progress made by systematic theology provided the momentum that led to the understanding of the pre-tribulation rapture.”¹⁰⁸ In the providence of God, the early eighteen hundreds became the first time since before the rise of allegorical interpretation that a climate existed conducive to the development of the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture. Features of this period include:

- The thriving of premillennialism which gave rise to pretribulationism.
- The return of premillennialism brought with it the application of literal, normal hermeneutics to prophetic passages of Scripture such as Daniel and Revelation. A literal hermeneutic leads to futurism in interpretation.
- The return to a strong belief in imminency just as was seen in the early centuries.
- These teachings of imminency and a pretribulation rapture received wide acceptance.¹⁰⁹

In conclusion, this historical study leaves two striking realities:

- That dispensational premillennialism with its articulation of a pretribulation rapture is recent, and

¹⁰⁷Ice, “Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin” 166.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 166-68.

- That history is normative to (i.e., sets the standards for) the truthfulness of doctrine.

Five Premillennial Views of the Rapture

Once premillennialism is embraced there are five views held concerning the rapture. The following is a brief identification of these views to serve as a reference point for further study in this series of articles.

Pretribulationism—a major view

This view holds to the supernatural removal of the church out of the world before the tribulation (70th week of Daniel) begins. It has the following main features: (1) it maintains a clear distinction between Israel and the church; (2) the church is exempted from the wrath of God (1 Thess 5:9); (3) it maintains imminency concerning the coming of Christ; and (4) it distinguishes between the rapture and the second coming.¹¹⁰

Partial Rapture View—a minor view

This view holds that only faithful, spiritual Christians will be taken by Christ at the rapture. Thus only those who are “watching and waiting” are taken. The rest will repent of their carnality during the tribulation. Matthew 24:40-51 is interpreted as “be on alert.” Issues related to the doctrine of salvation and divisions of the body of Christ plague this view.¹¹¹

Midtribulation Rapture View—another minor view

This view teaches that the rapture will take place at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation or after 3 1/2 years. The view holds that only the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week is tribulation.¹¹² The position struggles for convincing texts. Though asserting that only the last half of the tribulation contains judgement, they struggle to deal with the fact that God pours out His wrath through the entire 70th week.

Pre-Wrath Rapture View—another minor view

This view was recently developed and popularized by Marvin Rosenthal and Robert Van Kampen.¹¹³ The view holds that the church will be raptured about

¹¹⁰Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* 164-87.

¹¹¹Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* 97-113.

¹¹²Gleason L. Archer, “The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position,” *The Rapture* 113-46.

¹¹³Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990); Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign of Christ’s Coming and the End of the Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1992).

three quarters of the way through the seventieth week of Daniel. The view divides the tribulation period up into (1) the beginning of sorrows, (2) the great tribulation, and (3) the Day of the Lord. The third period is the time of God's wrath from which Christians will be spared. This threefold division creates numerous and significant linguistic, exegetical, and theological problems regarding the seven-year length of God's wrath and the length of the Day of the Lord.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church, Is It Biblical?* (Langhoren, Pa: BF Press, 1991) 88-91.

Posttribulation Rapture—a major view

This view has been widely popularized by Ladd, Gundy, and others.¹¹⁵ It holds that the rapture occurs at the end of the great tribulation period, when Christ returns. Posttribulationism differs from pretribulationism on several basic issues: (1) the nature of the tribulation, (2) the distinction between Israel and the church, (3) the doctrine of imminency, (4) the distinction between the rapture and the second coming, (5) the meaning of eschatological terms, and (6) sometimes hermeneutical issues.¹¹⁶ There are four distinct positions within this view.¹¹⁷

- Classic posttribulationism or historic premillennialism. Here the events of the tribulation are understood to have always been in place and the church is already under God’s wrath. Christ’s return is “imminent,” but the view relies on both allegorical and literal hermeneutics. This is the view of J. Barton Payne,¹¹⁸ and is sometimes known as moderate preterism as well.¹¹⁹
- Semiclassic posttribulationism This view also holds that the tribulation is a contemporary event but teaches that some events of the tribulation are still future. The view forsakes imminency and also draws on conflicting hermeneutical principles. There are considerable differences between proponents of this view. This is a kind of catch-all view for those who do not fit the other categories.
- Futurist posttribulation view. A relatively new but very popular view held by George Ladd and others. This view holds to a future seven-year tribulation followed immediately by the second coming. The church goes through the entire tribulation and the Israel/church distinction is blurred. Hermeneutics are more literal in this view.
- Dispensational posttribulation. This is the view of Robert Gundry¹²⁰ who attempts to keep the distinction between Israel and the church clear, while believing that the church will live through all seven years of tribulation. At the same time he believes that the church will also in some way be “exempt” from God’s wrath. In this view, imminency is aggressively denied.

These views mutually exclude each other so that they cannot be combined. The posttribulation view puts great confidence in the length of time during which it has

¹¹⁵In addition to references cited above, see, Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Tribulation Past or Future? Two Evangelicals Debate the Question* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

¹¹⁶See Reiter et.al, *The Rapture* 169-232.

¹¹⁷Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope* 21-69; Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* 190-92..

¹¹⁸Payne, *Imminent Appearing*.

¹¹⁹Ice, “Introduction,” *The Great Tribulation* 7.

¹²⁰Gundry, *The Church*.

been held. The view suffers in its understanding of wrath during the entire tribulation period as evident in the views above. These views also blur the distinction between Israel and the church and make the rapture and second coming into one event, despite their dissimilarities in Scripture. Again, the imminency of the Lord's return is lost.

Conclusion

The Scriptures are clear about Jesus' coming, once in a manger and once in two phases, i.e., at the rapture and at the second coming. Though this view is strong and cogent today, it has suffered from the lack of development and clear articulation as have other doctrines in history. It is under attack from those who choose not to see future prophecies fulfilled in the same way that all past prophecies have been fulfilled. It is also under attack from those who use history to drive interpretation and those with different hermeneutical or interpretive pre-commitments when they approach Bible prophecy. Finally, it is worthy of deeper study, clearer argumentation, and fervent protection. May this series of articles strengthen, protect, and proclaim the marvelous truth of the imminent return of Christ to rapture his church before the 70th week of Daniel begins.

INTERPRETIVE FLAWS IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

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The Olivet Discourse as the ultimate exposition of events related to the future of Israel has been a proving ground where incorrect rapture systems have gone astray. A survey of the Discourse starts with the backdrop of a scathing rebuke and proceeds to note the stunned disciples, the doomed temple, the timing question, the unexpected delay, the great tribulation, the second coming, and the application. The first of three erring rapture systems, posttribulationism, understands the Discourse to focus on the church, but the larger context and the immediate context demonstrate conclusively that Israel is the main focus. The pre-wrath system is the second erring interpretation when it misconstrues Matt 24:22 and its mention of the shortening of the great tribulation. The third erring system is preterism with its teaching that the Discourse was in the main fulfilled in events around A.D. 70. Preterism falters hermeneutically in its non-literal interpretation of the prophecy. Pretribulationism responds to the hermeneutical fallacies by interpreting “this generation” in Matt 24:34 to refer to the generation alive when events of the great tribulation take place. Consistent pretribulationism understands “one taken, one left” and “the fig tree” to refer to events pertaining to the second coming, not the rapture of the church.

* * * * *

At first glance, it might seem strange to focus on the Olivet Discourse in a series on the rapture since the rapture is not found in this passage. Why pick this particular passage that does not discuss the rapture when there are many more that do not, as well as several that do? The answer is at least threefold.

First, the Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24–25 and parallel passages in Mark and Luke is of vital importance because of who the author is. This is the Lord’s ultimate exposition of future events during His time on earth.¹ Second, the Olivet Discourse gives an outline of the future of Israel—a people at the center of

¹Of course, the book of Revelation is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” as well (Rev. 1:1).

much of biblical eschatology. Third, from a negative side, the Olivet Discourse is important because all incorrect rapture systems go astray in this passage. The Olivet Discourse is thus a monumental passage for the doctrine of eschatology.

It is impossible, of course, to give a detailed exposition of these two chapters in a brief essay, so the essay's objectives are somewhat limited.² The procedure will be twofold. First will come a survey of the Olivet Discourse in order to grasp the Lord's flow of thought in the Discourse. Of course, the survey must assume an eschatological viewpoint, which is pretribulational premillennialism. Second, with the survey as a backdrop, the article will consider the interpretive flaws in three other eschatological systems.³ The goal is not to refute any one of these systems in detail, but to point out some of the defects in interpreting the Olivet Discourse. In addition, the study will attempt to demonstrate the benefits of a consistent pretribulational understanding of the Olivet Discourse.

THE SURVEY

The Scathing Rebuke—Matthew 23

The Lord's exposition of the future is given on the Mount of Olives near the end of His ministry on earth. In the immediately preceding context, He fiercely rebukes the unbelief found in that generation of Israelites, especially the hypocrisy imbedded in their religious leaders. He concludes His denunciation of them with a curse on the Jerusalem temple, the center of first-century Judaism: "See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Matt 23:38-39, NKJV).

The Stunned Disciples—Matt 24:1

The disciples were clearly taken back by such a condemnation of the temple. In the first place, the temple was in many ways the patriotic symbol that evidenced the solidarity of Israel. Moreover, the Lord's statement no doubt reminded them of Yahweh's warning immediately before Solomon's temple was

²Other pretribulational studies of the various rapture systems' approach to the Olivet Discourse include Stanley D. Toussaint, "Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?" in *The Return*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 121-36; and Bruce A. Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25?" *BSac* 138 (April-June 1981):158-72. Toussaint's study interacts especially with the pre-wrath view. Ware's study focuses especially on the posttribulationism of Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). For a full-length study of the Olivet Discourse, see John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999). Also, an excellent series of essays on the Olivet Discourse is presented in *Israel My Glory* 52/2 (April/May 1994). Authors include Will Varner, Mark Robinson, Elwood McQuaid, Fred Harftman, Renald Showers, and David M. Levy.

³Another way to approach the Olivet Discourse is to compare futurism, preterism, traditional preterist-futurism, and revised preterist-futurism. See David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments," *Grace Theological Journal* 10/1 (1989):3-27.

destroyed by the Babylonians. Concerning that temple, Jeremiah records Yahweh as saying, “I swear by Myself . . . that this house shall become a desolation” (Jer 22:5, NKJV).

So, in their nervous confusion, the disciples point out the magnificence of the temple (Matt 24:1)—and Herod’s temple was a glorious building indeed. It was constructed of huge white marble stones plated with gold. Some of the stones, in fact, weighed as much as 100 tons, and shined so brightly in the sun that people could hardly look at them. The rabbis insisted, “He who has not seen Herod’s Temple has not seen a beautiful building.” So the disciples could hardly believe their ears. “Did we hear you correctly, Lord? Will this marvelous temple be made desolate?”

The Doomed Temple—Matt 24:2

The Lord’s answer was unequivocal. “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (24:2, NKJV). And so it was some 40 years later, the Roman legions, led by the emperor’s son, Titus, destroyed the temple and the city. According to Josephus, the city was ruined to such an extent that one could hardly tell that the area had been previously inhabited.

The Timing Questions—Matt 24:3

The disciples, however, knew nothing about the events of A.D. 70. What they heard from Jesus was not at all what they had expected when the Messiah came. So, when they arrived on the Mount of Olives, they asked Him three questions about the future of Israel—specifically about the relationship of the destruction of the temple to the second coming and future Kingdom. Matthew records, “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (24:3, NKJV). The rest of the teaching in Matthew 24–25, as well as the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21, is devoted to Jesus’ answers to these questions.

The Unexpected Delay—Matt 24:4-14

The Lord first explains that, in contrast to what the disciples had thought, His Kingdom on earth would not begin immediately. The great Messianic Kingdom promised by the OT prophets was to be delayed, and instead there would be a period characterized by false Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, false religions, secularism, as well as the preaching of the gospel. Such events would typify the era from the time of the Lord’s prophecy up to the middle of the seven-year tribulation.

The Great Tribulation—Matt 24:15-22

But the last half of the tribulation would be even more horrendous. According to Christ, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been

since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be"⁴ (24:21, NKJV). In this great tribulation, the Lord judges the earth and the unbelieving peoples of the earth, and prepares the nation of Israel spiritually for His second coming and His setting up of the Kingdom

The Second Coming—Matt 24:23-31

Concerning His second coming, Christ explains,

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (24:29-30, NKJV).

These verses do not describe the rapture of the church, but the glorious coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation to establish His Kingdom.⁵

The Application—Matt 24:32-25:46

The description of the second coming of Christ to earth is followed by a series of parables and illustrations emphasizing the need to be prepared, alert, and serving the Lord in anticipation of His coming. David Turner points out, "Jesus spent only half as much time on the bare facts of the future as he did on the implications of those facts."⁶ Chapter 25 explains that at the coming of Christ, there will be a judgment on believing Israel as well as on the Gentile nations of the world. As a result of these judgments, believing Jews (the wise virgins) and believing Gentiles (the sheep) will "inherit the kingdom prepared . . . from the foundation of the world" (25:34, NKJV).⁷ Unbelieving Jews (the foolish virgins) and unbelieving Gentiles (the goats) "will go away into everlasting punishment" (25:46, NKJV).

⁴Some 60 years later, the Apostle John who was present to hear the Olivet Discourse from his Lord was given the details of this future horrible time on earth (Rev. 4–18).

⁵For the differences between the rapture and the second coming, see Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 179-81. Benware also has a helpful critique of the pre-wrath view (221-41).

⁶Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41" 27.

⁷For an excellent study of the Sheep and Goats judgment, see Eugene W. Pond's three-part series: "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats," *BSac* 159 (April-June 2002):201-20; "Who Are the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46?," *BSac* 159 (July-September, 2002):288-301; and "Who Are 'the Least of My Brethren'?", forthcoming in *BSac* 159 (October-December, 2002).

THE SYSTEMS

The preceding survey provides a backdrop for evaluating other rapture systems, specifically, posttribulationism, pre-wrath, and preterism. Then the essay will briefly evaluate two passages that are problems for some pretribulationists.

Posttribulationism

Posttribulationism is the view that the church will be raptured at the end of the seven-year tribulation period. It is held in various forms by some premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists, though attention will focus primarily on premillennial posttribulationism. Often posttribulationists claim to be the traditional view of the church, using the term, “historic premillennialism.” This, however, is doubtful.⁸ The most common contemporary form of posttribulationism that views the tribulation as a future seven-year period is no more “historic” than contemporary pretribulationism.⁹

Discourse Focus

In explaining the Olivet Discourse, posttribulationists teach that Jesus describes the tribulation up through Matt 24:29, and that a posttribulational rapture is depicted in verses 30-31. This is in contrast to pretribulationists who believe Christ presents the second coming here without a reference to a rapture. According to posttribulationists, the rapture is described again in 24:40-42, where the Lord speaks of two men in the field, with the one taken and the other left; and two women at the mill, with one taken and the other left. Since the descriptions there follow the tribulation discussion, posttribulationists insist that this passage must describe a posttribulational rapture.

In order for the posttribulational view to find support in the Olivet Discourse, posttribulationists need to demonstrate that Jesus is explaining the future of the church, not the future of Israel. Otherwise, the Discourse could give no

⁸It is difficult to classify the rapture systems of most of the early church fathers. Some of the early fathers who were posttribulational seem to be intra-tribulationists. They believed that they were in the tribulation already, that the tribulation was of indeterminate length (not 7 years), and that Christ would rapture the church at the end of the tribulation. Thus, for them, the rapture was imminent. In the twentieth century, J. Barton Payne was the main, and almost only evangelical writer, who held to this form of “historic premillennialism.” See J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearance of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962). For a helpful study of different kinds of posttribulationism, see John Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

⁹For a defense of the type of posttribulationism held by most posttribulationists today, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1956). For a defense of the historic nature of pretribulationism, see Larry V. Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *The Return*, 75-93. In the same book, see Timothy Demy and Thomas Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation” 55-73. Also see Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,” *BSac* 159 (July-September, 2002):349-62.

information about the rapture. Thus, posttribulationists argue that the disciples in this passage represent the church, not believing Israel. As posttribulationist Douglas Moo says, “Thus, the crucial question becomes: Whom do the disciples represent in this passage—Israel or the church?”¹⁰ Two evenings later, when the Lord’s Supper was instituted, they represent the church. So, why not here, asks posttribulationist J. Barton Payne. “If they represented the church in Matthew 26 on Thursday, no arbitrary exegesis can make them represent anything else in Matthew 24 on Tuesday.”¹¹ “No one doubts,” writes Moo, “that the disciples in most contexts of the gospels stand for Christians of all ages—or else why do we take Jesus’ teaching as our own instruction? Only if the context clearly necessitates a restriction should any narrowing of the audience be suggested.”¹²

Moreover, say the posttribulationists, since the church is mentioned in Matthew 16:18 and 18:15-18, the bulk of Christ’s teaching in the gospels is directly applicable to the church. Robert Gundry writes,

Pretribulationists further argue that the context of the Olivet Discourse stamps it unmistakably with a Jewish impress. But we must take care not to miss the import of the context by drawing a false deduction in dislodging the discourse from churchly teaching. Rather, the context indicates that the Jewish nation has passed into a state of divine disfavor because of their rejection of Jesus the Messiah. Since Jesus speaks from that standpoint, we might think it better logic to conclude that the discourse relates to the present dispensation characterized by Israel’s setting aside.¹³

Thus, the argument seems to unfold as follows:

1. The church is responsible for Jesus’ teaching.
2. The disciples were the original recipients of Jesus’ teaching.
3. Therefore, the disciples represent the church.
4. The nation of Israel has been set aside.
5. Therefore, the passage is explaining the rapture of the church.

Fatal Flaw: Contextual Subterfuge

Pretribulationists, however, point out that posttribulationists have missed

¹⁰Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in *The Rapture, Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 192. This is a helpful book detailing the different views of the three rapture systems. Authors include Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo, and Richard R. Reiter. For an interesting evaluation of the debate between pretribulationist Paul Feinberg and posttribulationist Douglas Moo, see John S. Feinberg, “Arguing for the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How?,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 187-210.

¹¹Payne, *The Imminent Appearance of Christ* 55.

¹²Moo, “Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position” 192.

¹³Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 131.

the point of the debate.¹⁴ The issue is not about to whom the discourse is applicable. Of course, this passage, like all of Scripture, is applicable to the church. Matthew expected, no doubt, that his book would be used as a teaching manual for the church (Mat. 28:19-20). All Christians living in the present dispensation should find great teaching and helpful information in this passage for their own lives. The issue, however, is, What is Jesus talking about? Or more specifically, About whom is Jesus teaching? And the answer to this question found in the context of the passage is believing Israel.

The Larger Context: The Book of Matthew. It is impossible to ignore the Jewish flavor of the content of Matthew. In Leon Morris' words, "There is a 'Jewishness' about this Gospel."¹⁵ OT theology saturates the apologetic of the book. First, Matthew proves that Christ was the rightful heir to the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants (1:1). Only Jesus could be the Messiah. Second, Matthew wrote to present Christ as King of Israel in exact fulfillment of OT prophecies. Third, Matthew wanted to describe Christ's presentation of the Messianic Kingdom in fulfillment of the OT prophets. His presentation was supported by Jesus' sinless life, miracles, and divine message. As Tasker says, "The apologetic aim of the evangelist can be summed up in the sentence 'Jesus is the Messiah, and in Him Jewish prophecy is fulfilled.'"¹⁶

Of course, Matthew also wrote to show why Christ introduced the church. It was because the Jews of that generation, following their religious leaders, rejected their Messiah. Therefore, Matthew explains how Christ introduced the concept of a new entity: "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). Thus, in the end, the gospel of Christ is to be taken to the whole world. But the entire book is a study of the presentation of the Kingdom to the nation of Israel and Israel's refusal to accept it. If there is one theme for the book, it would be found in Matthew 21:5: "Behold your King is coming to you." So, though the Olivet Discourse, as well as the whole book of Matthew, is *for* the church, it is *about* the Messiah, His presentation of His Kingdom to Israel, Israel's rejection of His Kingdom and upcoming judgment, Christ's second coming, and the future Messianic Kingdom. It is apparent that Henry Thiessen was correct when he wrote, "Matthew wrote to encourage and confirm the persecuted Jewish Christians in their faith, to confute their opponents, and to prove to both that the Gospel was not a contradiction of the teaching of the Old Testament, but rather a fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and to

¹⁴David Turner, however, apparently a pretribulationist, agrees with the posttribulationists at this point. See "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41" 5-7.

¹⁵Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 115. Morris balances this statement, "Matthew's 'Jewishness' should not be stressed to the exclusion of another feature of this Gospel, its universalism (8:11-12; 12:21; 21:43; 28:16-20)" (ibid.).

¹⁶R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 18.

David.”¹⁷

The Immediate Context: The Disciples' Question. But even more significant is the immediate context. The whole Olivet Discourse is based on three questions asked by Jesus' disciples. So an investigation of the questions the disciples asked tells whether Christ is describing the future of the church or of Israel.

As noted in the survey above, the setting for the Olivet Discourse is the disciples' consternation over the Lord's denunciation of the Jerusalem temple. Thus they pointed to the magnificence of the temple buildings (24:1). But Jesus replied that all would be destroyed (24:2). The disciples then asked three questions, clearly about the future of Israel (24:3):

1. When will the temple be destroyed?
2. What will be the sign of the second coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the present age and beginning of the Kingdom age?

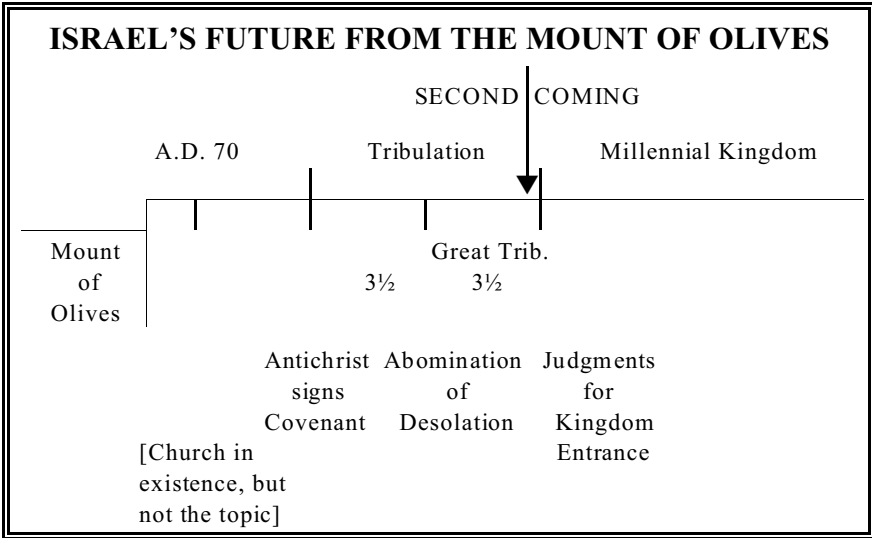
According to OT theology, these three events—the destruction of the temple, the coming of Messiah, and the beginning of the Kingdom age—went together. In the end times an attack on Jerusalem and the temple would come; Christ would return and fight for Israel; the current age would end and the Messianic Kingdom would be initiated (Zech 14:1-11). Of course, the disciples did not know that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed more than once in the future. So, when Christ said that the temple would be destroyed, they thought that the other two events would follow.

But the point is that the disciples were not asking anything about the church or the rapture. They knew next to nothing about either one. They knew only about Israel, the temple, Jerusalem, the coming of the Messiah to earth, and the Kingdom.

Thus the issue as to whom the disciples represent is contrived by posttribulationists. Actually, the disciples could represent the church on some occasions and Israel on other occasions.¹⁸ But this is a false issue here. The issue here is the immediate context. What did the disciples ask about? And the answer is, they asked about the main events prophesied in the OT for the future of Israel. And Christ answered those questions in His Discourse. Consistent pretribulationists are correct in teaching that the rapture is not found in Matthew 24–25.

¹⁷Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943) 137.

¹⁸For example, they represent Israel in the commission given by Christ in Matthew 10; and they represent the church in the commission given by Christ in Matt 28:19-20.



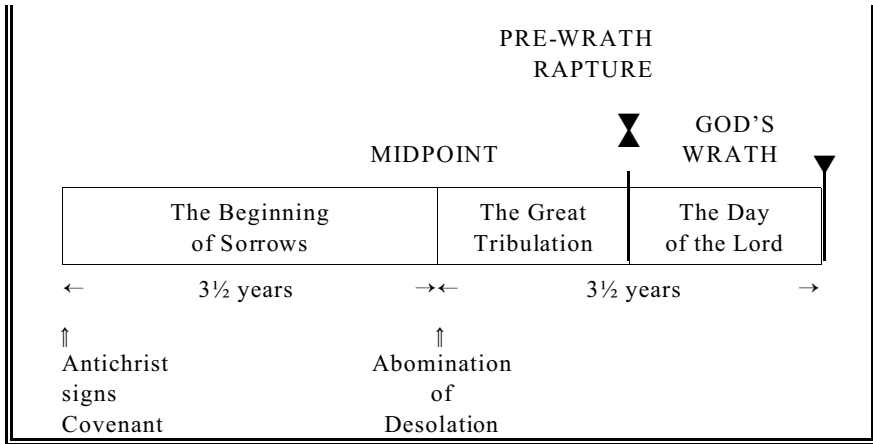
Pre-wrath

The pre-wrath rapture is a system devised recently by Marvin Rosenthal and Robert Van Kampen.¹⁹ According to this view, the rapture takes place about three-fourths of the way through the seven-year tribulation, though these authors insist that we should not call the entire time period the “tribulation.” The tribulation in this view is only the first three and one-half years of Daniel’s seventieth week. God’s wrath is actually not poured out on the earth until about the last one-fourth of the seven-year period. The troubles on the earth in the first three-fourths of this period are not God’s wrath, according to the pre-wrath view, but are brought about by Satan and man himself.²⁰ Since God does not pour out His wrath until after the rapture, the system is known as “pre-wrath.”

PRE-WRATH RAPTURE
Daniel’s 70th Week

¹⁹See Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Sign* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1992); and Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1997).

²⁰This means that the earthquakes described in Matthew 24:7 (which Rosenthal thinks will occur in the first half of the seven-year era) are the result of the power of Satan or man. Toussaint observes, “Interestingly, Rosenthal never explains how the earthquakes in Matthew 24:7 are triggered by humans!” (Toussaint, “Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?” 133).



[Source of chart: Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990) 61.]

Discourse Focus

The pre-wrath system looks to Matt 24:22 for support. “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (NKJV). Rosenthal explains,

To sum up, then, God will cut the Great Tribulation short; that is bring it to a conclusion before the seventieth week is concluded. The Great Tribulation will be followed by cosmic disturbance, which will indicate that the Day of the Lord is about to commence. At that time God’s glory will be manifested. . . . First, the Rapture of the church will occur; that will then be followed by the Lord’s judgment of the wicked as He begins His physical return to earth.²¹

Fatal Flaw: Exegetical Short-sightedness

There are several problems with the pre-wrath understanding of this section of the Olivet Discourse. First, as shown above, this passage does not deal with the rapture of the church at all. It is a discussion of the future of Israel from the viewpoint of believing Jews.

Second, “shortened” does not teach what Rosenthal says it does. “Shortened” (ἐκολοβώθησαν, *ekolobōthēsan*), 3rd person plural, aorist, indicative passive, from κολοβώ (kolobōō), is correctly translated “shortened.” But the real question asks, From what to what is the tribulation is shortened? First, it is shorter than what Satan’s forces—the Antichrist and his associates—want. Gerhard Delling writes, “That is, He has made it shorter than it would normally have been in terms

²¹Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990) 112-13.

of the purpose and power of the oppressors.”²² It is also shorter than what the wicked world deserves. If God were to pour out perfect judgment, no one would survive. But God is merciful and thus limits the great tribulation to only 1260 days. It will not go on indefinitely. Paul Benware writes,

So Jesus is teaching that the decree of God, made in eternity past, had already determined that the Great Tribulation would be just three and a half years and not some longer period of time. This interpretation is verified by noting what the Scriptures say about the length of the Great Tribulation.²³

Another flaw in the pre-wrath interpretation of Matthew 24:22 is its logical failure to explain properly the reason that the great tribulation is shortened. The reason given is that if it were not, no flesh would be saved. The point of the Scripture is that when the great tribulation is over, something easier and better comes on the scene. In the pre-wrath scheme, however, something more horrible occurs—the Day of the Lord. If no flesh would have survived a continuation of the great tribulation through the full forty-two months, surely no flesh would survive if the great tribulation were to be cut short and followed by the awesome Day of the Lord.

Moreover, Matthew 24:21 says that the great tribulation will be the worst time ever. So, how can it be replaced by the Day of the Lord which is more horrible in that it consists in God’s wrath on the world? In fact, the great tribulation (Matt 24:21) and the Day of the Lord (Dan 12:1; Jer 30:7) are both said to be the worst time ever, so they must be the same time period or at least overlap one another. How much better is the pretribulational interpretation of Matthew 24:22 which says that when the great tribulation concludes at the end of 1,260 days, Christ returns, judgment on the earth ceases, and the millennial Kingdom begins!²⁴

Preterism

Preterism teaches that though the information in the Lord’s lecture on the future of Israel was prophetic when He gave it, the prophecy has already been fulfilled. There are at least three kinds of preterism. Thomas Ice writes,

Mild preterism holds that the Tribulation was fulfilled within the first three hundred years of Christianity. . . . Moderate preterism . . . sees the Tribulation and the bulk of prophecy as fulfilled in events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70;

²²Gerhard Delling, “κολοβόω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 823-24.

²³Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* 230.

²⁴For critiques of the pre-wrath rapture system, see Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, Pa.: BF Press, 1991); Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), especially 93-151; Toussaint, “Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?” 133-35.

but they still hold to a future Second Coming, a physical resurrection of the dead, an end to temporary history, and the establishing of the consummate new heaven and new earth. Extreme or consistent (as they like to call themselves) preterism believes that the Second Coming, and thus the resurrection of believers, is all past. For all practical purposes all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, and we are beyond the millennium and even now in the new heaven and the new earth.²⁵

Extreme preterists, such as John Noë, claim to be evangelical and believe in the inerrancy of Scripture.²⁶ But to maintain the view that essentially all of prophecy has been fulfilled requires fanciful interpretation of key Scriptures. What about 2 Pet 3:10? “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (NASB). Has this already occurred? Noë says that this is talking about the conversion experience. “Individually, we become a ‘new heaven’ when God comes to dwell inside us, in our spirit. . . . The ‘new heaven’ is the new spirit God gives a person at salvation (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:6).”²⁷ He continues, “That means that our former earth consists of our unregenerated physical bodies, and our minds and emotions. This is what the Bible calls our ‘flesh.’”²⁸ Pretribulationist Thomas Ice says, “Both Dr. Gentry [a moderate preterist] and I believe that such a position is heretical, for it denies a bodily resurrection of believers and a future second coming of Christ.”²⁹

Discourse Focus

Where do preterists get the idea that prophetic events are already past? In Matthew 24, preterism emphasizes verse 34: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (NKJV). Preterism argues that “this generation” means the generation that was alive when Jesus was on earth, and so everything recorded in the Olivet Discourse took place by around A.D. 70.

²⁵Thomas Ice, “Introduction” to *The Great Tribulation, Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 7. In this book, two evangelicals debate the rapture question, Thomas Ice representing the pretribulationist view, and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., representing a moderate preterism view.

²⁶See John Noë, *Beyond the End Times* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 1999); and Noë, *Shattering the “Left Behind” Delusion* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 2000).

²⁷Noë, *Beyond End Times* 253-54.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 255.

²⁹Ice, *The Great Tribulation, Past or Future?* 7.

Fatal Flaw: Hermeneutical Compromise

But once preterists have argued this point, they are in trouble because there are several events in Matthew 24 that clearly have not happened. Thus they are forced to spiritualize those events. All forms of preterism, some more than others, have to rely on figurative interpretation. John Noë, for example, defends non-literal interpretation of prophecy as follows: “The popular stream of endsayers has assumed that the Bible’s apocalyptic language must be interpreted literally and physically, and that since no one has witnessed a cataclysmic, earth-ending event of this nature, its time must lie in the future.”³⁰ The result of the compromise of the hermeneutical integrity thus results in bizarre interpretations such as noted above of 2 Pet 3:10.

Preterists take much of the Olivet Discourse figuratively. Matt 24:27 reads, “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (NKJV). Actually, the passage is teaching that Christ’s coming will not be local only, but public and grandiose. But moderate preterist Gentry says that the lightning is a picture of “the Roman armies marching toward Jerusalem from an easterly direction.”³¹

In verse 30 of Matthew 24, the Lord teaches that at the second coming, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (NKJV). But Gentry insists that “this is not a physical, visible coming, but a judgment coming upon Jerusalem. They ‘see’ it in the sense that we ‘see’ how a math problem works: with the ‘eye of understanding’ rather than the organ of vision.”³² In this figurative sense, the prophetic events of the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans captured and destroyed Jerusalem.

Pretribulation Response

Besides the obvious disagreement with preterists over hermeneutical method, many pretribulationists believe that the preterists’ interpretation of “this generation” (24:34) is askew. Preterists argue that this means that the generation that was alive at the time that Christ presented this discourse must remain until everything in the discourse was fulfilled.³³ For the extreme preterist, this means that the second coming occurred while that generation was alive. Noë insists, “Make no mistake about it, A.D. 70 was the Lord’s promised and personal return!”³⁴

None of the OT prophets’ predictions of the coming of the Messiah in

³⁰Ibid., 51.

³¹Gentry, *The Great Tribulation, Past or Future?* 54.

³²Ibid., 60.

³³Not all pretribulationists disagree with the preterist interpretation of “this generation.” See Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41” 22-26.

³⁴Noë, *Beyond End Times* 196. Noë asks, “But where does Scripture say that Jesus’ return must be ‘visible’?” (198). Such a question makes sense only if one allegorizes away such Scriptures as Acts 1:9-11 and Matt 24:23-31.

power and glory (Zechariah 12–14), however, harmonizes with the events of A.D. 70. The OT prophets taught that when the armies surrounded Jerusalem, the Messiah would come and fight for Israel. Israel, at the second coming, will be victorious. But in A. D. 70, Israel was defeated and devastated, and the times of the Gentiles was ushered in. Something is therefore awry with the extreme preterists' interpretation of "this generation."

What does it mean, therefore, that "this generation" would not pass away until all these things take place (24:34)? Some pretribulationists have suggested that "generation" in this passage means "race," or "nation," or "family." Thus the Lord would be saying that the nation of Israel would not pass away until all of the things spoken of in the Olivet Discourse are fulfilled. Though this is a true statement, this interpretation is based on an unusual meaning for "generation" (*γενεά*, *genea*). Moreover, the "until" is a problem, for it would imply that the nation of Israel *would* pass away after the second coming, and Scripture certainly does not teach this.

Some good Bible teachers have argued that "this generation" is used in a negative sense, a pejorative sense, meaning "wicked generation."³⁵ This interpretation is based on the way "generation" is often used throughout the Gospels—the wicked generation that refused the Kingship to Christ. According to this view, Christ, in effect, is setting the record straight with His disciples who believed in the immediate arrival of the Kingdom inhabited only by the righteous. Instead, says Christ, the wicked will be here until after the tribulation and second coming. In addition, Jesus may be making the point that the wicked will receive the judgments of the tribulation.

This view may be correct. It is certainly true that the wicked will be on earth until after the tribulation and second coming. Its weakness is that it is questionable that "this generation" is used enough in a pejorative sense to become a technical term for wicked people.

The best interpretation of "this generation" is that the generation who sees the events of the great tribulation will not pass away before the second coming occurs. The disciples had asked for a sign of the second coming (24:3). Jesus replies that the sign of the second coming will be the events of the great tribulation. Therefore, the generation that sees the events of the tribulation will know that the second coming is drawing near. Darrell Bock explains, "[O]nce the beginning of the end arrives with the cosmic signs . . . , the Son of Man will return before *that* generation passes away. . . . It is arguing that the end will occur within one generation; the same group that sees the start of the end will see its end."³⁶

Thus, preterism's claim that the generation alive at the time of Christ had to be alive when all of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled is not legitimate. Preterism thus fails in this passage of Scripture because of its figurative hermeneutics and

³⁵See Neil D. Nelson, Jr., "'This Generation' in Matt. 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *JETS* 38/3 (September 1996):369-85.

³⁶Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 343-44 (emphasis in the original).

wrong interpretation of “this generation.”³⁷

Pretribulationism

Pretribulationism is the eschatological system within premillennialism that teaches that Jesus Christ will rapture away His church before the future seven-year tribulation begins. It is one of the most delightful and encouraging doctrines in all of Scripture. Its blessing resides primarily in the fact that believers may see their Lord and Savior in the next moment.

There is no doubt, of course, that there are some within pretribulationism who tend to be reckless and superficial with Scripture. Who can forget sermons, pamphlets, and booklets such as “88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988”? But thoughtful, biblical pretribulationism is still the most accurate harmonization of prophetic events—and specifically of the Olivet Discourse.

“One Taken, One Left”

Some pretribulationists are less consistent with their system than are others. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear pretribulationists preach prophetic sermons about the rapture from Matthew 24:40-42: “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (NKJV). It sounds like a possible rapture passage, but is it?

Though there is no single pretribulational interpretation of these verses, the more consistent pretribulationists teach that the church and the rapture are not in the Olivet Discourse at all. Though the one “taken” from the field and the mill sounds like a reference to the rapture, it is not. The point of Matt 24:40-42 is not to teach the imminency of the rapture. These verses teach the division of humanity at the second coming of Christ to earth, with part of the world’s population being “taken” into judgment. So, as described by Matthew, the person who is “taken” is an unbeliever at the end of the tribulation who is “taken” to be judged.

Three reasons show why this understanding is correct. First, the word for “taken” (παραλαμβάνω, *paralambanō*) is not a technical word at all, and is used of being taken into both good and bad judgment. Here, as in Matt 4:5, 8 where the devil “takes” Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple and the exceedingly high mountain to be tempted, “taken” has a bad implication (cf. John 19:16).

Second, the immediately preceding verses (37-39) describe a taking into judgment as illustrated by the judgment of the flood. The wicked of Noah’s day, though they might have expected some type of flood judgment while watching Noah build an ark, missed the signs, and “did not know until the flood came and *took* them all away. . . .” And then the Lord adds, “so also will the coming of the Son of Man

³⁷For an analysis of a moderate preterist’s explanation of Matthew 24:3, see Mike Stallard, “A Review of R. C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus: An Analysis of Moderate Preterism*, Part I,” *The Conservative Journal* 6/17 (March 2002):45-71.

be” (24:39, NKJV). Just as the Noahic flood came and took away the unsuspecting and unprepared wicked, the judgments at the time of the second coming will come and take away the unsuspecting and unprepared wicked.

Third, when Christ gives this illustration in Luke 17:34-37, the disciples ask, “Where will they be taken?” And the Lord answers, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles [i.e., vultures] will be gathered together” (17:37, NKJV). This is not a pretty picture—surely an image of judgment. It is also noteworthy that preceding this illustration in Luke 17 is another illustration of judgment—this time God’s judgment on Sodom. In other words, the taking from the field and the mill is always found in the midst of a judgment context.

So, these verses do not describe the rapture, but a taking into judgment at the conclusion of the tribulation period. The ones left are allowed to enter the millennial Kingdom.

The Fig Tree

Several Bible students, including some pretribulationists, believe they have discovered hints about the time of the rapture in the parable of the fig tree:

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place (Matt 24:32-34, NKJV).

Whom does the fig tree represent? Some believe that it is Israel. Thus, when Israel became a nation in 1948, the timetable for a generation began, and the tribulation and second-coming events must take place before that generation died out. Counting back seven years from the end of the tribulation and the second coming means that the rapture would have occurred at least seven years before that generation passed away. So if one could know for sure how long a generation is, he could know about when the rapture would take place.

The fig tree, however, does not illustrate Israel becoming a nation in 1948. The fig tree is simply an illustration from nature. The disciples ask, What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? And the answer is, the events of the great tribulation. This is illustrated by the cycle of a tree. When leaves appear on a tree, that is a sign that summer is near. Similarly, when the events of the great tribulation unfold, believers can know the second coming is near.

There are two evidences for this interpretation. First, when Jesus makes His point from the fig tree illustration, He says, “When you see *all these things*, know that it is near—at the doors!” (33). The Lord is not talking about a single event such as Israel becoming a nation in 1948. He speaks of all of the events of the tribulation being signs of the second coming.

Second, in the parallel passage in Luke, Luke records Jesus adding the phrase, “and all the trees” (Luke 21:19). If the fig tree blossoming were a reference to the founding of Israel, what would the blossoming of the other trees illustrate? The parable understood in this way does not make sense.

Again, the best understanding of the illustration is that the Lord is simply giving an illustration from nature. MacArthur writes, “The point of the parable is utterly uncomplicated; even a child can tell by looking at a fig tree that summer is near. Likewise, the generation that sees all these signs come to pass will know with certainty that Christ’s return is near.”³⁸

CONCLUSION

The Olivet Discourse is a majestic passage of Scripture in which the Lord explains the future of Israel from the perspective of believing Israel. Unfortunately, most rapture systems go astray in their interpretation of the Lord’s message. Posttribulationism attempts to find the church and the rapture in this passage of Scripture by insisting that the disciples must represent the church. But the correct interpretation of this passage is not settled by whom the disciples represent. It is settled by the disciples’ questions. Do they ask about the future of the church or the future of Israel? Clearly they ask about the future of Israel in relationship to her temple, Messiah, and Kingdom. Thus, the posttribulation rapture is not to be found in the Olivet Discourse.

The pre-wrath rapture view insists that Jesus’ words about the shortening of the tribulation mean that the second half of the tribulation will be shortened, and the rapture will occur before God’s wrath is poured out in the Day of the Lord about three-fourths of the way through the seven-year period. But it is illogical to think of the tribulation being shortened, only to be replaced by something worse. Moreover, “shortened” means that the tribulation is limited to a specific time, shorter than what the powers of evil desire or what the wicked world deserves. It will not go on indefinitely.

Preterists believe that the prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in A.D. 70—the more extreme preterists even insisting that the second coming and other end-time events occurred then. But this is based on figurative interpretation and an incorrect understanding of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34.

Some pretribulationists (and others) have found the rapture in Matt 24:40-42, and a hint about the time of the rapture by interpreting the fig tree (24:32-34) as a prophecy of the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. However, the one taken and the one left in the illustrations in 24:40-42 point to the separation of humanity into two classes at the end of the tribulation. Unbelievers will be “taken” into judgment and believers will be left to enter the millennial Kingdom. It is not a passage about the rapture. And the fig tree is not about Israel, but illustrates how the events of the great tribulation will be signs of the soon arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur says, “Jesus’ answers by no means erased all the mystery from those [disciples’] questions. The interpretation of the Olivet Discourse is no

³⁸MacArthur, *Second Coming* 134.

easy undertaking.”³⁹ This is certainly true. No doubt most Bible-believing Christians, whatever their eschatological systems, are doing their best to understand the Lord’s instruction here. It is our contention, however, that a consistent contextual and literal interpretation of the Olivet Discourse as represented by pretribulationism most accurately mines the riches of this marvelous passage of Scripture.

³⁹Ibid., 77.

IMMINENCE IN THE NT, ESPECIALLY PAUL'S THESSALONIAN EPISTLES

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Fathers in the ancient church dealt frequently with the doctrine of imminence, sometimes viewing God's future wrath against rebels as imminent and sometimes viewing the future coming of Christ as imminent. The NT furnishes good reason for the fathers to view both aspects of the future as imminent, beginning with the teachings of Christ who laid the foundation for the teaching of imminency though His use of parabolic expressions of a master standing at the door and knocking and of an unexpected coming of a thief and His use of the futuristic tense of ἔρχομαι (erchomai). In company with other NT writers, Paul emphasized the imminence of both future wrath and the return of Christ in His two epistles to the Thessalonians. He did this in several parts of the epistles—in discussing the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5, in describing the "catching away" in 1 Thessalonians 4, in 1 Thess 1:9-10 and 2:16, and in 2 Thess 1:9-10 and 2:1-3. A study of the two epistles and a survey the rest of the NT indicates that the church fathers were right: the rapture of the church and the beginning of the day of the Lord could come at any moment.

* * * * *

The testimony of the ancient fathers is mixed, sometimes speaking of the imminence of Christ's return and other times of the imminence of the future time of wrath. Clement speaks of the former as imminent:

Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, "Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;" and, "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look."¹

Ignatius speaks of the latter as imminent:

¹The First Epistle of Clement 23.

The last times are come upon us. Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit, and fear the long-suffering of God, that it tend not to our condemnation. For let us either stand in awe of the wrath to come, or show regard for the grace which is at present displayed—one of two things.²

Irenaeus speaks of both as imminent:

And therefore, when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be."³

Why this apparent ambivalence among early Christian leaders who were following the teachings of the same NT as present-day Bible students? The following discussion proposes that there is good reason for their teachings that both the return of Christ for His church and the return of Christ to inflict wrath and tribulation on the world are imminent.

An earlier article on the book of Revelation substantiates this dual imminence.⁴ The present essay will focus attention on Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonian church, but it first must probe the question of who originated the NT teaching on imminence. Imminence of these two future happenings interweaves itself into NT teaching from beginning to end, raising the strong probability that the origin of the teaching was none other than Jesus Himself. Thus the first area to explore briefly will be some of Jesus' teachings on the subject. Then the study can concentrate its attention on Paul's Thessalonian epistles.

Jesus' Emphasis on Imminence

The Olivet Discourse and Earlier

In Luke 12:35-48, as part of His Later Judean Ministry just over three months before delivering His Olivet Discourse, Jesus instructed His disciples about the need of being ready for His return:

Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning. And be like men awaiting their master when he departs from the wedding feast, that when he comes and knocks, they may immediately open for him. . . . And know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. And you too, be prepared, because at the hour when you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming. . . . Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom the lord will appoint over his service, for a measuring of rations in season. Blessed is that slave whom, when

²Ignatius *Ephesians* 11, shorter version.

³Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.29.1.

⁴Robert L. Thomas, "The 'Comings' of Christ in Revelation 2-3," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 7/2 (Fall 1996):153-81.

he comes, his master will find doing thus. I say truly to you that he will appoint him over all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, "My Lord delays to come, and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the Lord of that slave will come in a day when he does not expect and in an hour which he does not know and cut him in pieces and assign him a place with unbelievers. . . ."⁵

These two parables contain two pictorial expressions that became a vital part of Christian thinking throughout the first-century church.⁶ The first is that of the master standing at the door and knocking (Luke 12:36), and the second is that of the unexpected coming of a thief (Luke 12:39). The design of both figures is to teach the imminence of Christ's return. In both parables of Luke 12:35-48, the unexpected coming brings blessing to the followers who are prepared, but in the latter parable that coming brings punishment to those who are unprepared.

Jesus also laid groundwork for His Olivet Discourse less than three months before that sermon when He used the coming of the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom in Lot's day as examples of His imminent return (Luke 17:22-37). This lesson came during the period of His ministry in and around Perea.

Then on Tuesday of His last week on earth, Jesus taught similar lessons regarding His return. The signs given in Matt 24:4-28 are within Daniel's seventieth week and indicate the nearness of Jesus' return to earth as described in Matt 24:29-31.⁷ These signals of nearness differ from the parables of Luke 12:35-48, which contained no signs of nearness. If signs must occur before His coming, His coming is not imminent. Neither are there signs given in Luke 17:26-37, where Jesus with several similar comparisons predicts the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God.

But in Matt 24:36 Jesus turns the page to speak of the absence of any sign that might signal the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week.⁸ His words were, "But

⁵Translations in this essay are those of the author.

⁶Marshall notes the recurrence of the picture of the master standing outside the door and knocking in Rev 3:20, and the recurrence of the metaphor of the thief in 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15 (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978] 536, 538; with regard to the thief metaphor, cf. also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed., Moisés Silva. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996] 1171, and Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 of NAC [Nashville: Broadman, 1992] 360).

⁷Davies and Allison correctly see "all these things" in vv. 33 and 34 as embracing "all the signs and events leading up to the parousia" (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997] 366, cf. also 367). Hagner agrees that the expression covers "everything spoken of in vv. 4-28" (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B of Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker [Dallas: Word, 1995] 715). Cf. also D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EBCT*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:507.

⁸Davies and Allison take 24:36 as the heading for the section on "eschatological vigilance" (24:36-25:30) rather than linking it with material that has gone before in the Discourse, and see the entire section as teaching that "one must be ever prepared for what may come at any time" (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew* 374, cf. also 374 n. 1). The *δέ* (*de*) that begins v. 36 must be transitional, because the

concerning that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only.” His use of “day and hour” encompass a broader span than just a 24-hour day or a 60-minute hour.⁹ As is true throughout Matthew (cf. Matt 7:22; 10:19; 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; 26:45), the two time-designations cover a broad period of time. Jesus is saying that no one has the faintest idea about when—in the broadest sense of the term “when”—the Son of Man will return. Here He indicates the complete unexpectedness of what will overtake the world at the time of His second advent.¹⁰ He changes the subject from the signs that indicate the nearness of His coming to establish the kingdom in 24:32-35 to speak of events which will have no signals to indicate that the advent is “at the door.”¹¹ In other words, 24:36 speaks of a different arrival from the arrival signaled by “all these things,” twice referred to in connection with the parable of the fig tree in 24:32-34.¹² After 24:36 Jesus looks at the events of Daniel’s seventieth week as a whole and how the beginning of that week will catch everyone by surprise, with no indication that it is “at the door.”¹³

thirty-sixth verse changes from the discussion of signs preceding the coming to emphasize that no signs will precede the *parousia*. Περὶ δὲ (*Peri de*, 24:36) is a frequent NT device for introducing a change from one phase of a subject to another phase of the same subject or from one subject to another subject (cf. Matt 22:31; Mark 12:26; 13:32; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess 4:9, 13; 5:1). The verse introduces an aspect of the coming different from the one pointed to in Matt 24:29-31. The verb depicting the coming in 24:30 is *erchomenon*, but the noun designating the “coming” in 24:37 is *parousia*, a term that easily covers a wider span.

⁹Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 22:365.

¹⁰Hagner correctly understands “that day and hour” to mean that setting a time for the *parousia* is “beyond human determination altogether, and not just partially, e.g., so that, say, the month or year *could be known* . . .” (*Matthew 14–28* 716).

¹¹Davies and Allison illustrate the unity of the section begun at v. 36 by citing the repetition of key phrases (e.g., “you do not know” [24:42], “you do not expect” [24:44], “he does not know” [24:50], “you know neither the day nor the hour” [25:13]) and key words (e.g., “know,” “day[s],” “hour,” “come[s],” “Son of man,” “watch”) that are repeated throughout (Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew* 377).

¹²As A. B. Bruce puts it, “[I]t looks like Jesus correcting Himself . . .” in v. 36 (“The Gospels According to Matthew, Mark and Luke,” *EGT*, W. Robertson Nicoll [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.] 1:296).

¹³Davies and Allison understand “that day” in 24:36 to refer to the OT day of the Lord, spoken of in the NT as the *parousia*, and, because of a difference in perspective, explain the timing uncertainty of v. 36 not as contradicting the certainty of v. 34 but as interpreting it (Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 378; cf. also Blomberg, *Matthew* 22:365, who cites Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36 in support of this being a reference to the day of the Lord). They understand “this generation” of v. 34 to refer to Jesus’ contemporaries rather than seeing it as a qualitative expression as this writer takes it to be (cf. Robert L. Thomas, “The Place of Imminence in Recent Eschatological Systems,” in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 201-4). For further delineation of the qualitative view of “this generation,” see Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand

Jesus illustrated the complete unexpectedness of the series of events of that week by noting the parallel of His coming to inflict wrath on the world with the way God caught the world by surprise with the flood in Noah's day (24:37-39). The victims did not know about it until the flood happened. That will be the case when the Son of Man returns. The world will not know until the period is under way. They will have no warnings such as those alluded to in the parable of the fig tree.

He continued His emphasis on the imminence of that return by describing two workers in the field and two female grinders at the mill (24:40-41). In each case, one will be taken in judgment as were those outside of Noah's family, and the other will be left as were the members of Noah's family. The picture is that of complete surprise. No one in Noah's day had the faintest idea that a series of cataclysms was about to begin. On that basis, Jesus commanded the disciples to watch, because neither they nor anyone else knew at what period of history their Lord would come to inflict judgment on disobedient Israel (24:42).

At that point Jesus gave the men five parables to enforce His teaching of imminence. The first is in the Gospel of Mark and the last four in the Gospel of Matthew. The Markan parable tells of a man who left home for a journey and gave his slaves tasks to accomplish while he was gone. He gave special instructions to the doorkeeper—note the implication that the master would return to the door—to remain on the alert, because they had no idea when the master of the house would return (Mark 13:33-37). This parable contains nothing to indicate the master would return within a given time-span as the parable of the fig tree would require, so the slaves were to remain on the alert into the indefinite future.

Matthew's first parable, the second in this series by the Lord, tells of the master of a house who did not know during what watch of the night the thief would come (Matt 24:43-44). Though not stated explicitly, it is implicit that the master did not know on what given night the thief would come or whether he would come at all. As a result, the thief broke into his house because he was not watching. In light of that comparison, the Lord tells His disciples to be prepared because the Son of Man will come at an hour they do not expect. This marks the Lord's second use of the figure of the unexpected coming of a thief. The parable places no limit on the time frame during which the thief had to come, and so again the pattern of the parable of the fig tree is not applicable.

Matthew's second parable in this series describes the faithful and wise slave and the wicked slave (24:45-51). Their master will richly reward the slave whom he finds fulfilling his responsibilities when he returns, but will punish severely that wicked slave who uses the delay in his master's return to abuse the authority given to him. "The master of that slave will come on a day when he [the slave] does not expect and at an hour that he does not know" (24:50). That slave can anticipate an eternity of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable fixes no maximum amount of time for the master's absence as would be implied if this were speaking of the

same coming as the parable of the fig tree.

The fourth parable in the series, the third in Matthew's Gospel, speaks of ten virgins, five of whom were foolish and five wise (25:1-13). When the bridegroom came unexpectedly in the middle of the night, the foolish virgins had no oil for their lamps. By the time they purchased oil, it was too late, and they found themselves locked out of the wedding feast where the wise virgins had been admitted. Neither group knew a fixed period within which the groom would return, but one group was ready, the other was not. The lesson: "Watch therefore, because you do not know the day or the hour" (25:13).

The fifth and last parable in the series comes in Matt 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. Prior to leaving on a journey, the master gave one slave five talents, another two talents, and a third slave one talent. The one with five talents gained five more, and the one with two gained two more. Upon the master's return, they received his commendation with a promise of being given more responsibility. The slave with one talent buried his talent and received the master's rebuke for not investing it to gain more. That slave's destiny was outer darkness. The lesson of this parable is that of serving the Lord responsibly while awaiting His return. Readiness for His return also entails responsible action while He is away, not for a limited time, but for a time of unstipulated length.

In the two illustrations of Noah's day and the sowers and grinders and in the first four parables, the incontrovertible lesson Jesus teaches is that of the imminence of His return to judge, and therefore, the need for watchfulness and readiness for that return whenever it should occur. It is no wonder that the early church and the church throughout the ages has considered events surrounding the Lord's return as imminent. He will return to begin the series of events that will mark Daniel's seventieth week, with no prior signals to herald His return. Since nothing remains to occur before His *parousia*, that *parousia* is imminent.

Chart 1 on page 197 summarizes the above discussion.

The Upper Room Discourse

On the Mount of Olives, the dominant theme on Tuesday of Passion Week was Jesus' return to judge the nation Israel, as He spoke to the disciples. On Thursday of that week His Discourse in the Upper Room spoke to them in an entirely different role. On Tuesday they represented national Israel. On Thursday, however, He addressed them as representatives of a new body to be formed about fifty days later, that body being the church. Here He injected His imminent return in a more subtle fashion, but He nevertheless made the point. In John 14:3 He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, you may be also." Imminence is part of the verb form "I will come," the Greek word *ἔρχομαι* (*erchomai*). Used in 14:3 in parallel with the future indicative *παραλήμψομαι* (*paralēmpsomai*), which means "I will receive," the present tense *erchomai* is clearly a futuristic use of the present tense, a use of

Chart 1—Imminence Versus Nonimminence

<p style="text-align: center;">Nonimminent</p> <p>Coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of the sky (Mt 24:29-31; Mk 13:24-27; Lk 21:25-27) [a single judgment]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Imminent</p> <p>Parousia of the Son of Man to impose wrath (Mt 24:37, 44) [beginning of a series of judgments]</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Signs of Nearness: “These things” and “all these things” (Mt 24:33-34; Mk 13:29-30; Lk 21:31-32)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Signs of Nearness: “No one knows about that day and hour” (Mt 24:36, 42; 25:13; Mk 13:32)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">“Beginning of Sorrows” Signs (Mt 24:4-14; Mk 13:5-13; Lk 21:8-19)</p> <p>Many coming in Christ’s name (Mt 24:5; Mk 13:6; Lk 21:8)</p> <p>Wars and rumors of wars (Mt 24:6; Mk 13:7; Lk 21:9)</p> <p>Nation against nation (Mt 24:7a; Mk 13:8a; Lk 21:10)</p> <p>Famines and earthquakes (Mt 24:7b; Mk 13:8b; Lk 21:11a)</p> <p>Persecution and martyrdom (Mt 24:9; Mk 13:9; Lk 21:12)</p> <p>Apostasy and dissension (Mt 24:10; Mk 13:12; Lk 21:16)</p> <p>False prophets (Mt 24:11)</p> <p>Increase of lawlessness (24:12)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Great Tribulation” Signs (Mt 24:15-28; Mk 13:14-23)</p> <p>Abomination of desolation (Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14)</p> <p>Flight to the mountains (Mt 24:16-18; Mk 13:14b-16)</p> <p>Great tribulation (Mt 24:21; Mk 13:19)</p> <p>False christs and false prophets (Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[No signs]</p>

that tense that strongly implies imminence.¹⁴ The sense is, "I am on my way and may arrive at any moment."

This is a coming for deliverance of the faithful, however, not a coming for judgment. He will retrieve the faithful and take them back to the Father's house with Himself (John 14:2-3).¹⁵ There they will remain with Him until He returns to the earth to establish His earthly kingdom for a thousand years.

The conclusion must be therefore that Jesus was the one who initiated the teaching of the imminence of His return both to judge the world and to deliver the faithful. As we proceed, we will see how that teaching caught on with the first-century NT church. Subsequent books of the NT indicate that two figures used by Him to portray that imminence caught the attention and remained in the memories of early Christians. One figure was the surprise arrival of a thief and the other was the picture of a master standing at the door ready to enter at any moment.

Summary of Jesus' Teaching on Imminence

Jesus' emphasis on imminence carries at least four connotations for living individuals of each generation:

- People cannot reckon that a certain amount of time will pass before a predicted event will occur, and therefore must be prepared at all times for that occurrence.¹⁶
- No other prophecy in the Bible remains to be fulfilled before the imminent event occurs. Therefore, if two prophesied events are imminent, neither can precede the other.
- Setting a date when an imminent event will occur is impossible. Date-setting directly contradicts the concept of imminency because it posits a certain amount of time before the event, thereby nullifying its imminence.¹⁷
- Imminence means that the date of a predicted event may not be limited to a certain period of time, such as approximately forty years between Christ's crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem or approximately seven years of Daniel's seventieth week. The time span within which an imminent event will

¹⁴Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *BSac* 158 (April-June 2001):139-142.

¹⁵Brown's words regarding John 14:2-3 are, "These verses are best understood as a reference to a parousia in which Jesus would return soon after his death to lead his disciples triumphantly to heaven" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John [xiii-xxi]*, vol. 29A of AB [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970] 626). Yet Brown concludes that the verses had to be reinterpreted when the early church realized that the *parousia* had not occurred soon after the death of Jesus and when the disciples began to die.

¹⁶Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 201.

¹⁷Ibid.

occur is completely undefined and unlimited.

Chart 2 on page 200 summarizes Jesus' emphasis on His imminent coming both to judge the unrepentant and to deliver the faithful.

Emphasis on Imminence by NT Writers Other Than Paul

Other NT writers show the effect of Jesus' teachings on imminence. In the late forties of the first century A.D., James in his epistle wrote to Jewish believers in the Diaspora (i.e., the dispersion) about dual imminence. The imminence of coming judgment on oppressors of the poor (James 5:1-6) and the imminence of Christ's coming as an incentive for longsuffering of the faithful (James 5:7-11). He has Christ standing at the door, ready to enter and rectify past injustices (5:9). That was one of the figures introduced by Jesus in Luke 12:36 and in His Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:34).

In the late sixties Peter wrote to believers in what is now north-central Asia Minor about the imminent arrival of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:10). Using a later part of that day to represent the day as a whole, he spoke of the day's coming as a thief, both to encourage mockers to repent and to help the faithful to persevere. That was the second figure used by Jesus in Luke 12:39 and on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:43).

In the last decade of the first century, John wrote to seven churches in first-century Asia to persuade the unrepentant to repent and the faithful to hold fast (Revelation 2-3).¹⁸ One of the figures he used to exhort the churches to watchfulness in light of Christ's coming was that of a thief (Rev. 3:3; 16:15; cf. Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39). Another was the figure of His standing at the door and knocking (Rev 3:20; cf. Mark 13:34; Luke 12:36). See Chart 3 on page 201 for a chronological summary of these passages on imminence.

¹⁸See Thomas, "'Comings' of Christ" 153-81, for a fuller discussion of dual imminence in that portion of John's writings.

Chart 2—An Imminent Coming with Two Purposes

<u>Coming</u>	Direct Statement: No one knows when	Mt 24:36	Mt 24:44	Mt 25:13		
	Parable: Master at the Door	Lk 12:36	Mk 13:34			
	Parable: House-breaking Thief	Lk 12:39	Mt 24:43			
<u>for</u>	Other Parables	Household Slave: Lk 12:42-48	Faithful vs. Wicked Slave: Mt 24:45-51	Ten Virgins: Mt 25:1-13	Talents: Mt 25:14-30	
	Days of Noah	Lk 17:26-27	Mt 24:38-39			
	Days of Lot	Lk 17:28-29				
	<u>Judgment</u>	Example: Two Men in One Bed	Lk 17:34			
		Example: Two Women Grinding	Lk 17:35	Mt 24:41		
		Example: Two Men in the Field	Mt 24:40			
	<u>Coming for Deliverance</u>	Direct Statement: Futuristic Present Tense of <i>erchomai</i> , "I will come," Jn 14:2-3				

Chart 3—NT Teachers of Imminence

	Coming Wrath	Coming Deliverance
Jesus, A.D. 29-30	As a Thief, The Master at the Door: Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 12	Jn 14:2-3
James, late A.D. 40s	Jas 5:1-6	The Judge at the Door: Jas 5:7-11
Paul, A.D. 51	As a Thief: 1 Thess 5:1-11; also 2 Thess 1:7-9	1 Thess 1:10; 4:13-18; 2 Thess 1:10; 2:1-3
Peter, A.D. 67	As a Thief: 2 Pet 3:10	2 Pet 3:3-9, 11-15
John, A.D. 95	As a Thief: Rev 3:3; 16:15; also Rev 2:5, 16	The Judge at the Door: Rev. 3:20; also Rev 2:25; 3:11

The task of this present essay is to examine the writings of a fourth NT writer, Paul, and to see what he taught about the imminence of Christ's return and the day of the Lord, especially in his Thessalonian epistles.

Paul's Emphasis on Imminence in 1 Thessalonians

The Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5

Paul very clearly teaches the imminence of the wrathful phase of the day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:2-3: "For you yourselves (i.e., the Thessalonian readers) know with exactness that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. When they say, 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as birth pains to a woman with child, and they shall in no way escape." The apostle offers further evidence of the widespread impact of Jesus' use of the thief figure to express imminence. He reflects the negative impact of the day of the Lord in speaking of the destruction that will beset earth's inhabitants when it arrives. By comparing the period to the birth pains of a pregnant woman, he shows his awareness that the OT and Jesus Himself used that comparison to depict the period just before Jesus' personal reappearance on earth (Isa 13:8; 26:17-19; 66:7ff.; Jer 30:7-8; Micah 4:9-10; Matt 24:8).

Later in the same paragraph, in discussing the exemption of believers from the horrors of this period, Paul gives indication that the day is a period of wrath: "Because God has not appointed us to wrath, but to the possession of salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:9).¹⁹ This first phase of the day of the Lord will witness the outpouring of God's wrath against a rebellious world. Believers will be delivered from that period.

Regarding 1 Thess 5:2 Hiebert writes, "As a prophetic period, the Day of the Lord is inaugurated with the rapture of the church as described in 4:13-18, covers the time of the Great Tribulation, and involves His return to earth and the establishment of His messianic reign. In this passage Paul is dealing only with the judgment aspect of that day."²⁰ As for the figure of the coming of a thief, Hiebert continues, "The comparison lies in the suddenness and unexpectedness of both events. The thief comes suddenly and at a time that cannot be predetermined; so the Day of the Lord will come suddenly when people are not expecting it."²¹ Such is the imminence which Jesus described when He taught His disciples that no one knows the day or the hour when God will begin to vent His wrath against the world. The apostle reminds his readers of what they know with exactness: that specific information regarding the date for the beginning of the day of the Lord is unavailable to human beings. No prior signal will occur to alert people to the proximity of the day just as no warning comes before a house-breaking thief enters. Unexpectedness of the event forces people to remain in a constant state of readiness.

The Catching Away in 1 Thessalonians 4

The imminence of the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5 is obvious, but what is the nature of expectation related to the coming of the Lord to catch away His saints in 1 Thessalonians 4. The *περὶ δέ* (*peri de*, "now concerning") that begins chapter 5 turns to a new aspect of the same subject discussed at the end of chapter 4.²² The connective phrase marks a shift in thought, but a shift that is not without a connection to the foregoing. First Thessalonians 5:1 speaks of "the times and the seasons." What other times and seasons could these be but the ones pertaining to the catching away of those in Christ about which Paul has just written (cf. Acts 1:7).²³ Obviously, both the previous and the following contexts relate to the *parousia* ("coming") of Christ.

The Thessalonian readers had an accurate awareness of the unexpectedness of the arrival of the day of the Lord (5:1-2), having received prior instruction from the apostle based on the teachings of Jesus, but they were ignorant of and therefore

¹⁹Brindle, "Imminence of the Rapture" 144-46.

²⁰D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 227.

²¹Ibid.

²²Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, vol 32B of AB, eds. William Foxwell Albright, and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 288; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 177; Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 11:280.

²³Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians* 288-89.

perplexed about what would happen to the dead in Christ at the time of Christ's return. Before beginning his review of the imminence of the day of the Lord in 5:1-11, Paul has already in 4:13-18 clarified for them that the dead in Christ will have an equal and even a prior part in the events surrounding Christ's return. That the catching away of those in Christ is temporally connected with the day of the Lord is the natural understanding of the sequence from 1 Thessalonians 4 to 1 Thessalonians 5, a connection that receives verification in 2 Thess 1:9-10, as will be pointed out below in this essay.

Is that coming for those in Christ imminent also? The answer to that question is yes and is based on several indicators. One is the writer's use of the first person plural in 4:15, 17: "we who live and who remain until the coming of the Lord" are the ones who will be caught away. Paul uses the first person plural, because he was personally looking for the Lord's return during his lifetime. This was not a "pious pretense perpetrated for the good of the church. He sincerely lived and labored in anticipation of the day, but he did not know when it would come."²⁴ He was setting an example of expectancy for the church of all ages.²⁵

Proper Christian anticipation includes the imminent return of Christ. His coming will be sudden and unexpected, an any-moment possibility. This means that no divinely revealed prophecies remain to be fulfilled before that event. Without setting a deadline, Paul hoped that it would transpire in his own life time. Entertaining the possibility of his own death (2 Tim. 4:6-8) and not desiring to contravene Christ's teaching about delay (Matt. 24:48; 25:5; Luke 19:11-27), Paul, along with all primitive Christianity, reckoned on the prospect of remaining alive till Christ returned (Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 7:26, 29; 10:11; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 4:5). A personal hope of this type characterized him throughout his days (2 Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:11-13).²⁶

Had Paul thought that the beginning of the day of the Lord would precede the return of Christ for His church, he could not have expected Christ's return at any moment. He would have known that the imminent beginning of the day of the Lord had not yet occurred, and hence that the catching up of those in Christ was not an any-moment possibility. On the contrary, he knew that both happenings could occur at any moment.

Another indicator of the imminence of Christ's coming for those in Christ lies in the nature of Paul's description in 1 Thess 4:16-17. The dead in Christ will be the main participants in the first act of the Lord's return as they are resurrected before anything else happens. Then living Christians will suddenly be snatched away, presumably taking on their resurrection bodies without experiencing death. Since other evidence points to "the word of the Lord" (1 Thess 4:15) as a special

²⁴Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* 210.

²⁵J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (reprint of 1895 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 67.

²⁶Thomas, "1 Thessalonians" 278.

revelation through which Paul learned these new details regarding the event, and since 1 Cor 15:51-53 calls similar information a “mystery,” also language for a special revelation, Paul spoke of the same event about four years later in the Corinthian passage: “Behold, I speak a mystery to you: all of us will not sleep, but we all will be changed, in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on imperishability and this mortal must put on immortality.” That additional detail reveals that the whole process will be a momentary happening, not an extended process. Before anyone knows what is happening, it will be over. That again speaks of imminence because Paul again uses the first person plural in Corinthians. He anticipated the possibility that the parousia would come during his lifetime.²⁷ Something that comes and goes that quickly is surely beyond human ability to pinpoint.

How have various systems with no room for imminence handled this biblical teaching? One approach to explaining this teaching is that of Gundry who defines imminence as follows: “By common consent imminence means that so far as we know no predicted event will *necessarily* precede the coming of Christ.”²⁸ His definition would be correct if he had omitted “so far as we know” and “*necessarily*” from that sentence. The statement would then correctly read, “By common consent imminence means that no predicted event will precede the coming of Christ.” Gundry’s additions render his definition of imminence totally inaccurate. He continues, “The concept [of imminence] incorporates three essential elements: suddenness, unexpectedness or incalculability, and a possibility of occurrence at any moment. . . . Imminence would only raise the possibility of pretribulationism on a sliding scale with mid- and posttribulationism.”²⁹ “Suddenness,” “unexpectedness,” and “incalculability” are accurate as is “a possibility of occurrence at any moment,” but raising “the possibility of pretribulationism on a sliding scale with mid- and posttribulationism” is unfortunately distorted. If Christ’s coming is only a *possibility* before the tribulation, the tribulation could begin before the rapture and the biblical teaching of an imminent coming has disappeared. If only a possibility, a person who does not prepare for Christ’s return has an incentive to be prepared radically reduced or even eliminated. He still has a calculated chance of coming through unscathed after God’s wrath begins. Jesus and the other NT writers offered no such prospect for the unrepentant, however.

Another attempt at explaining away imminence is that of Carson who writes the following regarding imminence, “. . . ‘[T]he imminent return of Christ’ then means Christ may return at any time. But the evangelical writers who use the word

²⁷Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 800.

²⁸Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 29 [emphasis in the original].

²⁹Ibid.

divide on whether 'imminent' in the sense of 'at any time' should be pressed to mean 'at any second' or something looser such as 'at any period' or 'in any generation.'"³⁰ Carson's suggestion of a "looser" meaning of imminence removes the primary force of the word. Trying to understand what he and other representatives of this "not imminent but imminent" group mean by imminence or expectation is extremely difficult. It is almost like trying to adjudicate a "doublespeak" contest. Carson says, "Yet the terms 'imminent' and imminency' retain theological usefulness if they focus attention on the eager expectancy of the Lord's return characteristic of many NT passages, a return that could take place soon, i.e., within a fairly brief period of time, without specifying that the period must be one second or less."³¹ Like Gundry, Carson wavers on the meaning of imminent. If imminence means only that Jesus may return at any period or in any generation, it does not match up with the NT teaching on the subject. Such a looser connotation of the word "imminent" loses contact with what Christ taught and what the rest of the NT writers insisted was the proper Christian outlook.

Erickson approaches imminence in another evasive way: "It is one thing to say we do not know when an event will occur; it is another thing to say that we know of no times when it will not occur. If on a time scale we have points 1 to 1,000, we may know that Christ will not come at points 46 and 79, but not know at just what point He will come. The instructions about watchfulness do not mean that Christ may come at any time."³² Erickson's reasoning is difficult to follow. Christ never designated points at which He would not return. He could have come at points 46 and 79, contrary to Erickson's assertion. He could come at any point between 1 and 1,000. The fact that He has not yet come does not erase the ongoing possibility that He can come at any moment.

Witherington's wording for questioning imminence is different: "In short, one cannot conclude that 1 Thessalonians 4:15 clearly means that Paul thought the Lord would definitely return during his lifetime. Possible imminence had to be conjured with, but certain imminence is not affirmed here."³³ From a practical standpoint, possible imminence is tantamount to certain imminence. How Witherington can distinguish between the two defies explanation. Certain imminence means Christ could come at any moment; possible imminence, unless one offers an alternative of impossible imminence to go with it, also means that Christ could return at any moment. The "impossible-imminence" alternative directly contradicts the possible-imminence teaching and is therefore impossible.

Beker represents an unbiased approach to the text when he clarifies Paul's

³⁰D. A. Carson, "Matthew" 490.

³¹Ibid. Carson's reference to "one second or less" vividly recalls 1 Cor 15:52 where Paul prophesies that Christ's coming will be "in a moment [or flash], in the twinkling of an eye."

³²Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 181.

³³Ben Witherington III, "Transcending Imminence: The Gordian Knot of Pauline Eschatology," *Eschatology in the Bible & Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997) 174.

attitude more accurately than those who cannot fit imminence into their eschatological systems:

Thus delay of the parousia is not a theological concern for Paul. It is not an embarrassment for him; it does not compel him to shift the center of his attention from apocalyptic imminence to a form of "realized eschatology," that is to a conviction of the full presence of the kingdom of God in our present history. It is of the essence of his faith in Christ that adjustments in his expectations can occur without a surrender of these expectations (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:15-51; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil. 2:21-24). Indeed, the hope in God's imminent rule through Christ remains the constant in his letters from beginning to end. . . .³⁴

All the "nonimminence" advocates, who must place Christ's coming for those in Christ at the end of Daniel's seventieth week, must speak of the unexpectedness of His advent within a limited period of time, because all would agree that events of the tribulation period will be recognizable. Once that period has begun, His coming has to occur within a specified number of years. If that is their meaning, Christ's warnings to watch for His coming are meaningless until Daniel's seventieth week arrives. The church need not watch as He commanded. And when that prophetic week arrives, imminence will no longer prevail because His coming will not be totally unexpected. It will have specified events to signal at least approximately, if not exactly, how far away it is.

Saying the NT teaching of imminence has become garbled in the systems of pre-wrath rapturism and posttribulationism is not an overstatement. According to different advocates, it may mean at any moment within the last half of the seventieth week, at any moment after the seventieth week, during any period rather than at any moment, at an unexpected moment with some exceptions, possibly at any moment but not certainly at any moment, or as many other meanings as nonimminence advocates may conjure up.

Other Indications of Imminence in 1 Thessalonians

In 1 Thess 1:9-10 Paul speaks of his readers' turning to God from idols for two purposes: to serve the living and true God and to await His Son from heaven. The second purpose strikes a note that he continually sounded through his preaching in the city—the kingship of Christ (Acts 17:7)—and throughout both Thessalonian epistles—the return of Christ (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:2, 23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8). Primitive Christianity believed that the resurrected and ascended Christ would return to establish His kingdom (cf. 1 Thess 2:12) and that His return was near.³⁵ In 1:10 Paul speaks of Jesus as delivering *us* from the coming wrath when He returns from heaven, thereby including himself and his first-century readers among those to be

³⁴J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 49.

³⁵Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, HNTC (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) 83; and Brindle, "Imminence of the Rapture" 142-44.

rescued from that future wrath. In this subtle way he again included himself, modeling the proper Christian outlook in expecting the return of Jesus at any moment.

In 1:10 he also speaks of the wrath as “coming” and uses the present participle ἐρχομένης (*erchomenēs*) to qualify the wrath. Though the kind of action—*aktionsart* or aspect—of articular participles is not necessarily stressed in NT Greek, the frequent use of the present tense of this verb in a futuristic sense to speak of the imminence of end events probably portrays the imminence of the wrath which is already on its way and hence could arrive at any moment.³⁶

Another statement of Paul in 1 Thessalonians that is best explained through imminence is 1 Thess 2:16b: “Now the wrath has come upon them fully.” These words climax a paragraph in which Paul is uncharacteristically condemning his fellow-Jews for their part in the crucifixion of Christ and persecuting the prophets and Paul along with his fellow missionaries. Earlier in v. 16 he speaks of their forbidding the evangelizing of the Gentiles as an aspect of reaching the limit in sinning against God (2:16a).

The wrath for which the Jewish people as well as the rest of the world are destined is the eschatological wrath spoken of in 1 Thess 1:10 and 5:9, a well-known and expected period just before the Messiah inaugurates His Kingdom. This pronouncement of the arrival of the wrath brings Paul's excursus against the Jews to its logical climax.

Surprisingly, however, Paul does not use a future tense, “will come,” to speak of the wrath. He uses a past tense, “has come.” The Greek expression is ἔφθασεν ἐπί (*ephthasen epi*, “has come upon”), the same combination used by Jesus in Matt 12:28 and Luke 11:20 to speak of the arrival of the kingdom. “The kingdom of God has come upon you” were the Lord's words to His listeners. The unique force of the verb and preposition in that situation connoted “arrival upon the threshold of fulfilment and accessible experience, *not* the entrance into that experience.”³⁷ The connotation in 1 Thess 2:16 is the same with regard to the wrath. Just as the kingdom reached the covenant people at Christ's first advent without their enjoying “the experience ensuing upon the initial contact,”³⁸ so the wrath that will precede that kingdom has already come without the Jews' full experience of it. It is at the threshold. All prerequisites for unleashing this future torrent have been met. God has set conditions in readiness through the first coming and the rejection of the Messiah by His people. A time of trouble awaits Israel just as it does the rest of the world, and the breaking forth of this time is portrayed as an “imminent condemnation” by the combination *ephthasen epi*.³⁹ Such a potential presence of the wrath

³⁶James Everett Frame, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 89. In this connection, see the present tense *erchetai* in 1 Thess 5:2.

³⁷K. W. Clark, “Realized Eschatology,” *JBL* 59 (September 1940):379.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*, 380.

accords with the epistle's emphasis on an imminent breaking forth of end-time events, one of which is the time of Israel's trouble just before the Messiah's return.⁴⁰

Dual imminence prevails elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians, not just in chapters 4 and 5. Paul allowed no time between Christ's coming to catch away the church to Himself and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth prophetic week, which coincides with the opening phase of the day of the Lord.

The dual-imminence teaching results from exegetical evidence found in a number of NT passages. Various theological objections may be and have been lodged against such a position. Some may question how the signing of the treaty between "the prince who is to come" and Israel to begin Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:26-27) can coincide with the rapture of the church. Such a theological question has several possible answers. That prince may arise to power before the rapture of the church, setting the stage for the signing, or the signing of the covenant with Israel may not occur at the very first moment the seventieth week begins. Daniel 9 does not seem to require that precise timing. One could propose various scenarios to answer the theological difficulty that dual imminence allegedly poses. Exegetical evidence must take precedence over theological considerations, however, even though specific answers to theological questions that exegetical decisions raise may not be immediately obvious.⁴¹

⁴⁰Best, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* 120-21.

⁴¹Walvoord proposes a period between the rapture of the church and the seventieth week, during which ten nations must unite. He writes, "The ten-nation kingdom must be formed in the final seven years before the Second Coming" (John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990] 485; cf. *ibid.*, 487). His diagram of the day of the Lord on 485 clarifies what he apparently intends by this statement: the day of the Lord begins simultaneously with the rapture, but includes an undefined period after the rapture and before Daniel's seventieth week during which the forming of the ten-nation kingdom will occur. See also his statement, "The time period [i.e., the day of the Lord] begins at the rapture, but major events do not come immediately. However, if the DOL has progressed very far, there will be unmistakable signs that they are in the DOL" (*ibid.*, 492).

Showers also proposes such an interval between the rapture and the beginning of the seventieth week, during which will occur the regathering of Israel, the emergence of a great world ruler, rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and a covenant of peace with Israel (Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come!* [Bellmawr, N.J.: The Friends of Israel, 1995] 61). But he differs from Walvoord when he sees the day of the Lord and the seventieth week beginning simultaneously (*ibid.*, 63), but he has the rapture occurring at an earlier time because he does not see it as part of the day of the Lord (*ibid.*, 59).

Ryrie's opinion is that the Scriptures are noncommittal regarding the issue of whether or not there is a time gap between the rapture and the seventieth week: "Though I believe that the Rapture precedes the beginning of the Tribulation, actually nothing is said in the Scriptures as to whether or not some time (or how much time) may elapse between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986] 465).

In his comments on Rev 3:10, Jeffrey L. Townsend concurs with the position of this essay regarding the imminence of the rapture and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week when he writes, "Both the coming of the hour [of testing] and the coming of the Lord are imminent. . . . There will be preservation outside the imminent hour of testing for the Philadelphian church when the Lord comes" ("The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy [Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995] 377).

Paul's Continuing Support of Imminence in 2 Thessalonians

A major objection to Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians has been the epistle's eschatological perspective that is supposedly different from what 1 Thessalonians teaches. The theory advanced is that 2 Thessalonians upholds a Christian approach to the doctrine of last things that arose after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁴² The principal difference cited is the signs that 2 Thessalonians locates before the arrival of the day of the Lord. That contrasts with the indication in 1 Thessalonians that the day could come at any moment, without any prophesied event(s) to precede it. This proposed difference in teaching offered as a challenge of the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians calls to mind 2 Thess 2:1-3.

Imminence of Our Gathering Together and the Day of the Lord (2:1-3)

Since Paul's first epistle, the persecuted Thessalonian church had been beset with false teaching that the day of the Lord had already begun and the persecutions and afflictions the church was experiencing (1:4) were the initial phase of that day, coinciding with the pains of a "woman with child" spoken of in the first epistle (5:3). They should not have had such an impression if Paul had taught them that Christ's return for those in Christ would be a single event, an event at the beginning of the day of the Lord.

Posttribulationists are at a loss to explain how the first-century readers could have thought themselves to be already in the day of the Lord if that day occurred simultaneously with the coming of Christ for the church. That leaves no time for persecution during the day of the Lord. In the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians (1:5-10), Paul had just spoken of how God would afflict the unrighteous and reward the faithful in the day of the Lord. The readers knew that the opening period of that day would be tribulation to the ungodly and also a day of persecution for the saints, so the false teaching had led them to believe that they were already in that period.

To correct this error, Paul pointed first to "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him" (2:1). "Our gathering together to Him" defines which aspect of Jesus' coming the writer has in mind and reminds readers of the great event described in 1 Thess 4:14-17, the gathering of those in Christ to meet Him in the air en route to be with the Father in heaven. He wanted to emphasize that the day of the Lord cannot begin on earth before the saints are in heaven with the Father. Since Christ's reappearance to take the saints to heaven had not yet occurred, the day of the Lord could not yet have begun. Therefore, the apostle asks them not to be shaken or troubled by the false message they had received (2:2a). The gathering together had not yet occurred; hence the day of the

⁴²Willi Marxen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. G. Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 42; Reginald H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1966) 57; Norman Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 120.

Lord had not yet begun.

Paul even specifies what the false teaching consists of. It was proposing that “the day of the Lord is present” (2:2b). The rendering of the verb ἐνέστηκεν (*enestēken*) in 2:2b as “is present” rather than as “has come” or “will come” is very important, because that is the key to interpreting the difficult verse immediately following. English versions have, for the most part, consistently mistranslated this verb. Those with erroneous renderings include the KJV, the RSV, the NASB, the NASBU, the ESV, the NIV, the ASV, the ICB, and the NKJV. Only three versions consulted render the verb correctly. Darby renders, “the day of the Lord is present,” Weymouth has, “the day of the Lord is now here,” and the NRSV gives, “the day of the Lord is already here.” Either of these captures the intensive force of the perfect tense *enestēken*. That the perfect tense of ἐνίστημι (*enistēmi*) means “is present” cannot be doubted seriously in light of its usage elsewhere in the NT (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22; 7:26; Gal 1:4; Heb 9:9).⁴³

With the nature of the false teaching clearly in mind, as the next step Paul urges, “Do not let anyone deceive you in any way” (2:3a), and then furnishes a reason for knowing that the day of the Lord is not present. The difficulty is Paul’s assumption of an apodosis to accompany the protasis, “unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2:3b). As is customary in language usage, Paul chose not to repeat the verb that constitutes the apodosis of the conditional sentence, thus requiring readers to substitute the parallel antecedent verb to fill in the blank.⁴⁴ That verb in this instance is, of course, the *enestēken* from verse 2. The sense of 2:3b thus becomes, “The day of the Lord is not present unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” Unfortunately, no English versions consulted render the suppressed apodosis correctly in this verse. Most give the supplied verb a future sense, such as, “The day of the Lord will not come,” a change that detracts from the point Paul makes. The issue involved in his correction of the false information to which the readers had been exposed is not the future coming of the day of the Lord; it is rather the current presence or non-presence of that day at the time he writes and they read his words.

Another vital issue to settle in 2:3 relates to the adverb πρῶτον (*prōton*, “first”) in the first half of the protasis. Two meanings are possible. It can mean that the coming of the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness precede the day of the Lord, or it can mean that the coming of the apostasy precedes the

⁴³F. F. Bruce, “1 & 2 Thessalonians,” in vol. 45 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1982) 165; D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, in vol. 33 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 227-28.

⁴⁴Cf. Peter Cotterell & Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989) 24, for this principle as practiced in all languages. For another Pauline example of such an insertion, see Eph 5:21-22.

revelation of the man of lawlessness, both being within the day of the Lord.⁴⁵ Posed in grammatical terms, does the “first” compare the total protasis with the apodosis or does it compare the first half of the protasis with the last half of the protasis?

Typically, pre-wrath rapturists and posttribulational rapturists opt for the former possibility, i.e., that the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness precede the day of the Lord. They base this on the mistranslation of the text in various English versions. Robert Gundry illustrates this mistake and has entitled one of his recent books *First the Antichrist: Why Christ Won't Come Before the Antichrist Does*.⁴⁶ He writes, “. . . Paul says not only that ‘the Day of the Lord’ won't arrive unless that evil figure ‘is revealed’ but also that ‘the rebellion’ which he will lead against all divinity except his own (claimed falsely, of course) ‘comes first’ (2 Thess. 2:1-4).”⁴⁷ Erickson joins Gundry in using this support for his posttribulational stance when he writes, “Paul also stated about A.D. 50 that the day of the Lord could not come (II Thess. 2:2) until the Antichrist and a major apostasy had come (v. 3).”⁴⁸ That interpretation is oblivious to the lexical and syntactical requirements of the Greek text, however, and a brief survey of grammatically parallel passages shows its inadequacy also.

A close parallel to the set of criteria in 2 Thess 2:3b occurs in John 7:51 where there occur (1) present action in the apodosis, (2) a compound protasis introduced by ἔάν μῆ (*ean mē*, “unless”) with the action of both aorist subjunctive verbs included in the action of the apodosis, and (3) *prōton* in the former member of the compound protasis. John 7:51 reads thus: “Our law does not judge the man unless it hears from him first and knows what he is doing, does it?” The judicial process (present indicative of κρίνει, *krinei*, “it judges”) is not carried out without two parts, hearing from the defendant first and gaining a knowledge of what he is doing. Clearly in this instance, hearing from the defendant does not precede the judicial process; it is part of it. But it does precede a knowledge of what the man does. Here the *prōton* indicates that the first half of the compound protasis is prior to the last half.

Another verse relevant to this set of criteria is Mark 3:27: “No one can enter the house of the strong man to plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man and then he will plunder his house.” Here the apodosis is present indicative followed by *ean mē* and a compound apodosis with verbs in the aorist subjunctive and future indicative—the future indicative being somewhat interchangeable with the aorist subjunctive. Because of the τότε (*tote*, “then”) in the last half of the protasis, the *prōton* clearly evidences the occurrence of the first half of the protasis

⁴⁵Martin (*1, 2 Thessalonians* 232) notes, “Its [i.e., the adverb *prōton*] placement in the sentence slightly favors the understanding that the apostasy comes ‘first’ and then the lawless one is revealed.” For unstated reasons, he chooses the other option, however.

⁴⁶(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). See also Erickson, *Basic Guide to Eschatology* 175.

⁴⁷Gundry, *First the Antichrist* 20.

⁴⁸Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* 175.

before the last half, i.e., the binding of the strong man prior to the plundering of his house. It does not indicate that the whole protasis is prior to the apodosis, i.e., the binding of the strong man and the plundering of his house prior to entering the house. In other words, it indicates that the binding precedes the plundering, but not the entering, and the entering includes both the binding and the plundering.

Application of these data to 2 Thess 2:3 results in the following: “The day of the Lord is not present unless first in sequence within that day the apostasy comes, and following the apostasy’s beginning, the revealing of the man of lawlessness occurs.” Rather than the two events preceding the day of the Lord as has so often been suggested, these are happenings that comprise conspicuous stages within that day after it has begun. By observing the non-occurrence of these, the Thessalonian readers could rest assured that the day whose leading events will be so characterized was not yet present.

Assigning these criteria to 2 Thess 2:3 frees Paul from the accusation of contradicting himself. In 1 Thess 5:2 he wrote that the day of the Lord will come as a thief. If that day has precursors as 2 Thess 2:3 is often alleged to teach, it could hardly come as a thief. Thieves come without advance notice or precursors. Neither does the day of the Lord have any prior signals before it arrives.⁴⁹ Paul does not contradict that meaning in 2 Thess 2:3. He still clings to the imminence of the wrathful phase of the day of the Lord.

Alienation Coinciding with Glorification (2 Thess 1:9-10)

In 2 Thess 1:3-5a Paul offers thanks to God for the perseverance of his Thessalonian readers as they face severe persecution because of their stand for Christ. He considers this a sign of their healthy spiritual development. Then in vv. 5b-10 he turns to discuss the righteous judgment of God that will include a payback to their persecutors and a reward for faithful believers. That judgment by God will impose “tribulation on those who afflict you” (1:6)—an extended period—and “rest to you who are afflicted” (1:7a)—a momentary happening. Both the tribulation’s beginning and the rest will come in conjunction with “the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven” (1:7b).

Further description of the judgment includes the payment of the penalty of eternal separation from the presence of God (1:9) “when He comes to be glorified in [the midst of] His saints and to be marveled at among all those who believe” (1:10a). The penalty’s beginning and the reward phases of His return are simultaneous as indicated by the ὅταν (*hotan*, “when”) that begins 1:10.⁵⁰ The last four

⁴⁹To this effect J. Christiaan Beker writes, “Paul emphasizes the unexpected, the suddenness and surprising character of the final theophany (1 Thess 5:2-10)” (*Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel* 48).

⁵⁰The only way that both the beginning of the penalty phase and the reward phase of the revelation can be imminent and still parts of the day of the Lord is for them to be simultaneous. If the reward phase were to come later in the day of the Lord, prophesied events would precede it, thereby removing it from the category of imminency. If it were to precede the day of the Lord, the beginning of the day of the Lord would no longer be imminent as Paul so specifically writes that it will be in 1 Thess 5:2.

words of v. 10 fix both as occurring “in that day” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, *en tē hēmerā ekeinē*). “That day” is a frequent technical designation for the day of the Lord in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Isa 2:11, 17, 20; 4:2; Joel 3:18; Mark 13:32; 14:25; Luke 21:34; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8). Paul has referred to the penalty phase of the day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:2-3, 9 as a period of wrath, a period whose beginning will come as a thief in the night. He will refer to the day of the Lord again in 2 Thess 2:2. Thus when he uses “that day” in the eschatological framework of 2 Thess 1:10, the context indicates conclusively that the expression refers to the day of the Lord. “That day” is a period that will be climaxed with the personal return of Christ to judge the offenders (2 Thess 1:7-8). But 2 Thess 1:10 also connects Christ's return to be glorified among believers with “that day,” i.e., the day of the Lord. This is an event that will occur at the very beginning of the day of wrath. It is the same event referred to in 1 Thess 4:17 as a “catching away,” in 2 Thess 1:7a as “rest,” and in 2 Thess 2:1 as “our gathering together to Him.” Here is a specific tie-in between the rapture of the church and the beginning of the day of the Lord. They are simultaneous. Both are imminent. This is the moment of reward for those who have faithfully persevered in all their trials and persecutions (cf. 2 Thess 1:4).

The connection between the rapture and the day of the Lord in 2 Thess 1:9-10 reinforces the conclusion that the same connection exists between 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 5:1-11. The rapture and the beginning of that day will be simultaneous, and both could come at any moment.

Summary of Paul's Teaching on Imminence

See Chart 4 on page 214 for a summary of Paul's emphasis on imminence in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

The Pervasiveness of Imminence Teaching

The ancient fathers were right. The teaching of imminence pervades the NT in connection both with Christ's return for the church and with His return to initiate the wrathful phase of the day of the Lord. Jesus Himself initiated the NT teaching on imminence with such parabolic figures as the coming of a thief and the master at the door. Various NT writers picked up on these figures and used them to teach imminence also. Paul was one of them, particularly in his Thessalonian epistles where he continued Jesus' emphasis on the imminence of His return to deliver the saints and to begin the earthly phase of God's wrath against a disobedient world.

If both the rapture of the church and the beginning of the day of the Lord are occurrences that could come at any moment, the timing of the rapture is not open for debate. The only way that both events could be imminent is for them to be simultaneous. If one preceded the other even by a brief moment, the other would not be imminent because of the sign provided by the earlier happening. This fact constitutes strong biblical support for the pretribulational rapture.

Imminence serves as an encouragement for the saints to persevere in godly living and as a warning to others to repent before becoming victims of the wrath of a righteous God. May we shape our lives and our teaching to perpetuate these strong biblical emphases.

**Chart 4—Paul’s Teaching of Imminence
in 1 and 2 Thessalonians**

	Coming Wrath	Coming Deliverance
1 Thess 1:10	“the coming wrath” (a hint of imminence in the present participle <i>erchomenēs</i>)	“to await His Son from heaven, . . . Jesus who delivers us” (a hint of imminence in the concept of awaiting)
1 Thess 2:16	“the wrath has come upon them fully” (wrath is imminent, at the threshold)	
1 Thess 4:13–5:11	“the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (5:2; imminence of the wrath spoken of in 5:9)	“We who live and remain will be caught up with them in the clouds for a meeting with the Lord in the air” (4:17; expectation associated with imminence of deliverance from imminent wrath, promised in 5:9)
2 Thess 1:6-10	“tribulation” (1:6), “vengeance” (1:8), “eternal destruction” (1:9; imminence of “that day” in 1:10)	“rest” (1:7), “when He comes to be glorified at among His saints and marveled at among those who believe . . . in that day” (1:10; imminence of “that day” in 1 Thess 5:2)
2 Thess 2:1-3		“the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (2:1; “the day of the Lord is not present” unless the apostasy occurs as a part of that day, followed by the revelation of the man of lawlessness, 2:3)

THE RAPTURE AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The relevance of the book of Revelation to the issue of the timing of the rapture is unquestioned. Assumptions common to many who participate in discussing the issue include the authorship of the book by John the apostle, the date of its writing in the last decade of the first century A.D., and the book's prophetic nature in continuation of OT prophecies related to national Israel. Ten proposed references to the rapture in Revelation include Rev 3:10-11; 4:1-2; 4:4 and 5:9-10; 6:2; 7:9-17; 11:3-12; 11:15-19; 12:5; 14:14-16; and 20:4. An evaluation of these ten leads to Rev 3:10-11 as the only passage in Revelation to speak of the rapture. Rightly understood, that passage implicitly supports a pretribulation rapture of the church. That understanding of the passage fits well into the context of the message to the church at Philadelphia.

* * * * *

“As the major book of prophecy in the NT, Revelation has great pertinence to discussion of the rapture.”¹ Participants in the discussion concerning the timing of the rapture would concur with this statement. Proponents of a pretribulation, midtribulation, pre-wrath, and posttribulation rapture all seek support for their positions in the book of Revelation.² Many suggestions as to where Revelation

¹Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 64.

²Many books dealing with the rapture include sections specifically discussing the book of Revelation. Examples include the following: [Pretribulation] Allen Beechick, *The Pre-tribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Books, 1980) 161-89; Russell L. Penney, “The Rapture of the Church and the Book of Revelation,” *A Bible Handbook to Revelation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 187-96; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 253-68; [Midtribulation] James O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963) 2:424-538; [Pre-wrath] Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990) 179-86; [Posttribulation] Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 64-88; Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” *The*

explicitly or implicitly refers to the rapture of the church have been forthcoming. The present article purposes to survey the proposals about where Revelation refers to the event and to ascertain which proposal best accords with the data discovered in the book.

Michael Svigel states, "One must ask *where* the Rapture is found in the Revelation before one asks the question of *when* the Rapture is said to take place, if, indeed, the timing of the event is even asserted by the context."³ This article will first state the assumptions concerning the book of Revelation held by almost all evangelical participants in the rapture discussion. The debate about the where and the when of the rapture should not obscure the agreement on many essential issues concerning the book among the disputants. They acknowledge most of these common assumptions as the basis on which the question of the rapture is argued. Second, the greater part of the following discussion will concentrate on ten passages in Revelation that have been proposed as references to the event. Each proposal will be presented and evaluated.⁴ The evaluations will lead to the conclusion that the rapture is implied in Rev 3:10-11. Therefore, third, a brief exposition of Rev 3:7-13 will describe how the understanding of future events by the author of Revelation corresponds to that of the apostle Paul and is consistent with a pretribulationrapture view.

Common Assumptions concerning the Book of Revelation

Only a limited number of biblical commentators mention the issue of the rapture and the book of Revelation. Bigger issues claim the attention of most writers on the book. Among evangelical authors who do discuss the rapture's relationship to Revelation, widespread agreement prevails among many on three assumptions concerning introductory and interpretive issues.

The Author of the Book

Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 196-205; Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975) 73-94.

³Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation," *Trinity Journal* 22NS (2001):24.

⁴Each of the ten proposals merits a separate article; however, the scope of the present study limits this article to cursory treatments. For further insights, the reader is directed to three recently published exegetical commentaries on Revelation: David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1997); David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B of Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C of Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995). A fourth work, Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, in *The Baker Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), was unavailable at the time of writing.

The first common assumption is that the author is John. He refers to himself as “John” four times in the book (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This has been understood in accordance with the testimony of the early church fathers as a reference to John the apostle.⁵ Two implications emerge from this view of authorship. First, John was present with the other apostles when Jesus gave His Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matt 24:1–25:46. He was also a part of the apostolic group whom Jesus taught “the things concerning the kingdom of God”⁶ (Acts 1:3). Therefore, the framework of the author’s understanding of future events goes back to Jesus Himself.⁷ John’s eschatological framework received from Christ included:

1. Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah delayed the establishment of the messianic Kingdom and resulted in the desolation of Israel’s temple (Matt 23:37-38; 24:2).
2. During the present age, Jesus will build His church. (Matt 16:16-19; Acts 1:6-8).
3. Jesus will personally come again to take His disciples to the dwelling places He is preparing for them in heaven (John 14:2-3). This return for His disciples is imminent (1 John 3:2).
4. The second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth will be preceded by a period of tribulation for Israel and the nations (Matt 24:3-28) which will culminate in Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as Messiah (Matt 23:39).
5. Jesus will return to the earth to establish His messianic Kingdom, which will include righteous Israelites and Gentiles (Matt 24:29–25:46).

Second, John writes of the second coming of Jesus Christ in other NT books (John 14:1-3; 1 John 2:28; 3:2). In John 14:2, the apostle records Jesus’ words concerning His Father’s house to which He was going to prepare a place for His disciples. The Father’s house must refer to heaven because Jesus ascended into heaven, having been exalted to the right hand of God after His earthly life (Acts 2:33-34). John 14:3 states Jesus’ promise to His disciples, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there

⁵D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris present the early Christian testimony and the contemporary discussion concerning the authorship of Revelation (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 468-72). They conclude, “We are thus inclined to accept the testimony of those who were in a position to know about these matters, and we attribute both books [the Fourth Gospel and Revelation] to John the apostle, ‘the beloved disciple’” (ibid., 472). Everett F. Harrison reaches a similar conclusion (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 467-72).

⁶Scripture references in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1971 edition.

⁷A previous article in this issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* by Robert L. Thomas, “Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul’s Thessalonian Epistles,” reaches a similar conclusion that the origin of the NT writers’ eschatological understanding, especially concerning imminence, “was none other than Jesus Himself” (*TMSJ* 13/2 [Fall 2002]:192-99).

you may be also.” The return of Christ for His disciples would result in the disciples being with Jesus in heaven.⁸ John implies that this coming again of Jesus, the Son of the Father, for His little children is an imminent event (1 John 2:28) and that the hope of being like Jesus when believers see Him is a purifying hope (1 John 3:2-3).

The Date of the Book

There is also a common assumption regarding the date of writing. A few evangelical scholars would put the book of Revelation early during the time of the Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68) in the mid to late 60s. But following the testimony of the early church, most would date its appearance during the reign of the emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) in the last decade of the first century, between ca. A.D. 90-95.⁹ When John states, “I . . . was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9), Domitian’s persecution against the church caused this exile, according to the early church fathers.

This dating negates the preterist position. Kenneth Gentry, Jr., argues for the preterist viewpoint. He writes,

“Preterism” holds that the bulk of John’s prophecies occur in the *first century*, soon after his writing of them. Though the prophecies were in the future when John wrote and when his original audience read them, they are now in *our* past. . . . The preterist view does understand Revelation’s prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole.¹⁰

For Gentry, Revelation is prophetic, speaking about the future from the time of John and his audience until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Most of the events referred to in the book were fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. To posit this, he has to argue that the book was written before A.D. 70.¹¹ But if the book was written in A.D. 90-95, his view is wrong.

Further, the later date assumes that the author and the original readers knew about Paul’s letters. Approximately thirty years earlier, the apostle Peter had written to churches in northern Asia Minor that the apostle Paul had written “some things hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16). This shows that the apostle Paul’s writings had extended beyond the churches addressed and that they were becoming known throughout the NT church, particularly the churches in Asia Minor. Included in the

⁸Richard L. Mayhue notes, “The phrase ‘wherever I am,’ while implying continued presence in general, here means presence in heaven in particular. . . . In John 14:3, ‘where I am’ must mean ‘in heaven’ or the intent of 14:1-3 would be wasted and worthless” (*Snatched Before the Storm!* [Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1980] 13).

⁹Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* 473-76; Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* 472-75.

¹⁰Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Preterist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 37-38.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 45-46.

Pauline corpus was the teaching concerning the rapture, particularly in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:35-58. Therefore, it is reasonable that John and his audience already accepted three very vital truths concerning the future rapture. First, the future coming of Christ for the church will include the bodily resurrection of the dead in Christ and the bodily transformation of those Christians still living. Paul made it clear that “the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16b-17). This will be an instantaneous change for those who are alive when Christ returns, as explained in 1 Cor 15:52-53, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. . . . For this perishable must put on the imperishable.” Second, this “catching up,” the rapture of the church, will result in Christians always being with the Lord from that point on. Third, and most important, the rapture of the church will be a distinct event or a distinct phase of the second coming of Christ. John’s audience in Revelation recognized that this distinct event or distinct phase, the rapture of the church, will precede the actual coming of Jesus Christ physically to this earth to establish His millennial Kingdom. By how much time it will precede that actual coming depends on whether the catching up will be pre-wrath, pre-, mid-, or posttribunational.

The Prophetic Nature of the Book

The third common assumption about the book of Revelation is that it is a prophetic writing. John claimed to be a prophet. Revelation 22:9 states, “I am a fellow-servant of you and of your brethren the prophets.” John is a NT counterpart of the OT prophets and he refers to his writing as prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). The book claims to be a word of prophecy from God the Father through Jesus Christ to His bondservant John for the church (1:1). The original audience was the seven churches of Asia Minor (1:4, 11, 20). But many writers assume that the writing was recorded for the churches, not only of that time era, but also as Scripture for the church of Jesus Christ in the church age. The prophecy of Revelation is in continuity with the OT prophets,¹² looking forward to God’s ultimate design for His creation. The OT prophets also looked ahead at what the destiny was for God’s creation, a destiny which many accept to be particularly the future repentance of the nation of Israel (Hos 14:1-8; Zech 12:10-14), the coming of the Messiah (Zech 14:3-4), the restoration of Israel to their land (Ezek 37:24-28), and the establishment of the prophetic kingdom (Isa 9:6-7). The OT prophets also dealt with how Gentile nations fit into the program God had for Israel’s future (Isa 2:2-4). John is in continuity with those OT prophets. This is the background against which John gives his word of prophecy.

¹²Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 76-99, discusses the use of the OT in the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse contains more OT references than any other NT book. Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are the OT books most used with Daniel as the most influential. Beale quotes with the approval the evaluation of I. Fransen, “The familiarity with the Old Testament, with the spirit which lives in the Old Testament, is the most essential condition for a fruitful reading of the Apocalypse” (97).

Almost all believe that a futuristic perspective is the key to interpreting Revelation because it is a prophetic book. Many view all the visions recorded in 4:1–22:5 as referring to events that are still in the future. This viewpoint is in contrast to the preterist, historicist, and idealist viewpoints.¹³

Further, the premillennial perspective holds the coming of Christ to the earth to precede the establishment of the millennial Kingdom. This premillennial position is in contrast to the amillennial and postmillennial positions. Amillennialist Anthony Hoekema incorporates the rapture as one element in the posttribulation return of Christ. He writes,

We conclude therefore that there is no Scriptural basis for the two-phase Second Coming taught by pretribulationists. The Second Coming of Christ must be thought of as a single event, which occurs after the great tribulation. When Christ returns, there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. After the resurrection, believers who are then still alive shall be transformed and glorified (I Cor. 15:51-52). The “rapture” of all believers then takes place. Believers who have been raised, together with living believers who have been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4:16-17). After this meeting in the air, the raptured church continues to be with Christ as he completes his descent to earth.¹⁴

In a similar fashion, postmillennialist Keith Mathison locates the bodily resurrection of all believers at the second coming of Christ, which will occur after the millennium.¹⁵ John Walvoord is correct when he observes, “In general, discussion of the rapture of the church continues to be limited to those holding the premillennial interpretation, with liberal interpreters and amillennarians largely ignoring the subject.”¹⁶

¹³These four interpretive approaches to Revelation are succinctly described in John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* ([Nashville: Word, 1997] 1990). “The *preterist* approach interprets Revelation as a description of first century events in the Roman Empire. . . . The *historicist* approach views Revelation as a panoramic view of church history from apostolic times to the present. . . . The *idealist* approach interprets Revelation as a timeless depiction of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. . . . The *futurist* approach insists that the events of chaps. 6–22 are yet future, and that those chapters literally and symbolically depict actual people and events yet to appear on the world scene.” An exposition of preterism is presented by Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* 37-92. In the same volume appears Sam Hamstra, Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation” 95-131.

¹⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 170-71.

¹⁵Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999) 223-33.

¹⁶Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Expanded Edition* 7.

The Proposed “Rapture” Passages in Revelation

Some commentators on Revelation aver that the rapture is a Pauline teaching that is not to be expected in John’s Apocalypse. For example, Robert Mounce opines, “It should be noted, however, that the very discussion of a ‘rapture of the church’ lies outside John’s frame of reference. He knows nothing of such a ‘rapture.’”¹⁷ However, it has been shown above that John and his audience would have known of Paul’s teaching and would have been expected to incorporate it into their understanding of future events. Svigel’s conclusion on this issue is to be noted:

However, if we comprehend the book as being John’s accurate reporting of revelatory visions from heaven, the issue of whether or not John was aware of the doctrine of the Rapture is insignificant. While acknowledging the divine prerogative to the contrary, one cannot help but expect God to reveal something of the Rapture in his last great apocalyptic message to the Church. In sum, one cannot excise the Rapture from the Apocalypse simply because it is a Pauline and not a Johannine doctrine if the book is a presentation of revelatory visions from heaven. The issue then is not whether it is Pauline or Johannine, but whether it is true.¹⁸

The rapture can be expected either explicitly or implicitly in Revelation. Therefore, this section will state and evaluate the different proposals about where in the book it is found.

Revelation 3:10-11

The most important and most widely discussed of the proposed passages where the rapture is referred to in the book is Rev 3:10-11: “‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I will also keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.’” David Winfrey writes, “If there is a ‘proof text’ for the pretribulation position, it is Rev 3:10.”¹⁹

The Proposal. J. Dwight Pentecost articulates the pretribulation understanding of this passage:

¹⁷Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 119.

¹⁸Svigel, “The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation” 25.

¹⁹David G. Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept ‘Out of’ or ‘Through’?” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):5.

"I will keep thee from the hour of temptation." John uses the word *ἔρεω*.²⁰ Thayer says that when this verb is used with *en* it means "to cause one to persevere or stand firm in a thing"; while when it is used with *ek* it means "by guarding to cause one to escape in safety out of."²¹ Since *ek* is used here it would indicate that John is promising a removal from the sphere of testing, not a preservation through it. This is further substantiated by the use of the words "the hour." God is not only guarding from the trials but from the very hour itself when these trials will come on those earth dwellers.²²

Gerald Stanton derives four facts from Rev 3:10. First, this promise applies not only to one local assembly existing in the days of the apostle John but to the entire church of Jesus Christ. The constant refrain in all seven messages from Christ to these churches is "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Second, the trial which is coming is not local, but is "about to come upon the whole world." The persecutions of the past were usually limited to one country or area. This trial must refer to the tribulation to come when all the world will be "amazed and follow after the beast" (13:3), and all who worship him will come under the wrath of God (13:8; 14:9-11). Third, "those who dwell on the earth" is not a suitable description for the members of the church (cf. Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13). Fourth, the grammar of *τηρέω ἐκ* (*ἔρεω ek*), though not conclusive, favors 'removal from' the hour of trial.²³ Stanton concludes,

In the words "I come quickly" [3:11] may be seen the rapture, and the reference to "thy crown" [3:11] suggests the Bema seat judgment to follow. "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." Here, then, is a promise which clearly indicates the pretribulation rapture of the Church.²⁴

Evaluation. As would be expected, those who do not subscribe to the pretribulation position have taken issue with this understanding of 3:10-11. The earliest challenge was represented in the writings of Alexander Reese and George Ladd. While they accept the position that 3:10 is applicable to the church and the hour of testing is a portion of the tribulation period, they argue that *ἔρεω ek* is better

²⁰John uses the verb *τηρέω* (*ἔρεω*, "to keep") twice in 3:10. He first uses the aorist active indicative *ἐτήρησας* (*eṭērēsas*, "you kept," cf. 3:8). Secondly, he uses the future active indicative *τηρήσω* (*tērēō*, "I will keep"). The preposition *ἐκ* (*ek*, "from, out of, away from") follows the second usage of the verb.

²¹Pentecost cites Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (New York: American Book, 1889) 622.

²²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1958) 216.

²³Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, Fla.: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1991) 46-50.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 50.

understood as ‘deliverance through’ rather than ‘kept from’ in this verse.²⁵ Both refer to John 17:15 and Gal 1:4 in support of their understanding of *tēreō ek* in Rev 3:10. Ladd argues succinctly:

This language, however, neither asserts nor demands the idea of the bodily removal from the midst of the coming trial. This is proven by the fact that precisely the same words are used by our Lord in His prayer that God would keep His disciples “out of the evil” (*tēreōs ek tou ponērou*, Jn. 17:15). In our Lord’s prayer, there is no idea of bodily removal of the disciples from the evil world but of preservation from the power of evil even when they are in its very presence. A similar thought occurs in Galatians 1:4, where we read that Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from (literally, “out of,” *ek*) this present evil age. This does not refer to a physical removal from the age but to a deliverance from its power. “This age” will not pass away until the return of Christ.²⁶

Reese also adds Heb 5:7 in his presentation:

The same lesson is taught in a remarkable passage in Heb. v., where we read that our Lord, in Gethsamane, “had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from (*ek*, out of) death, and was heard in that he feared” (v.7). Here is a case where we know that the Lord suffered and passed through death, and yet was saved out of it. Anything more decisive than this passage could not be wished for.²⁷

Pretribulationists have countered these assertions by pointing out the John 17:15, Gal 1:4, and Heb 5:7 are not directly analogous to Rev 3:10. Walvoord declares, “The thought of the Greek is to ‘keep from,’ not ‘keep in.’ The promise was to be kept from ‘the hour’ of trial, not just the trials in the hour.”²⁸

The pretribulationist position concerning 3:10-11 has also been discounted by some who declare that the promise was given for the Philadelphian church only. J. Barton Payne represents this position. According to Payne, most of the prophecies concerning tribulation in Revelation have already been fulfilled and the coming of Christ is imminent. The church at Philadelphia no longer exists, so the promise has

²⁵Reese states “[M]any of the most competent Greek scholars unhesitatingly maintain that the use in Rev. iii. 10 of the preposition *ek* from *out of the midst of*—not merely *out of*—is precisely the consideration that demands the very opposite conclusion to that which pre-tribs wish. According to these scholars the Greek means that Christ promised the Angel at Philadelphia preservation throughout the hour of tribulation” (*The Approaching Advent of Christ* 201). George E. Ladd writes, “[T]he promise of Revelation 3:10 of being kept *ek* the hour of trial need not be a promise of a removal from the very physical presence of tribulation. It is a promise of preservation and deliverance in and through it” (*The Blessed Hope* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 85-86).

²⁶Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* 85. The same argument is presented by Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* 203-4.

²⁷Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* 204-5.

²⁸Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* 66.

to refer to a historical trial endured by the Philadelphian church when Christ kept them from harm.²⁹ However, the recurring refrain “what the Spirit says to the churches” does expand the application of what Christ said specifically to the other seven churches of Asia and to the other churches who would hear the book of Revelation read.³⁰

The latest and most vigorous posttribulational discussion on 3:10 is that of Gundry who devotes almost seven pages to this passage.³¹ He argues that *tēreō* here means “to keep, by guarding to cause one to escape in safety out of” and that *ek* means to “emerge from out of.” Putting the terms together, he states, “[W]e properly understand *τηρέω ἐκ* (*tēreō ek*) as protection issuing in emission.”³² Further, he argues from the usage of the term “hour” in the Gospels (Matt 26:45; Mark 14:35, 41; John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) that the emphasis falls on the experience within the time, rather than on the period of time as such. “Stress does not lie on the period *per se*, but upon the prominent characteristics of the period.”³³ Gundry concludes that the church will be guarded and preserved during God’s testing of earth-dwellers during the tribulation, emerging from out of it in the parousia at the close of the hour of testing, the events clustered around Armageddon.³⁴

Gundry’s discussion of Rev 3:10 has produced a number of pretribulational responses.³⁵ Jeffrey Townsend surveys the use of *ek* in classical literature, the LXX, Josephus, and the NT and concludes, in contrast to Gundry, “However, sufficient evidence exists throughout the history of the meaning and usage of *ἐκ* (*ek*) to indicate that this preposition may also denote *a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object.*”³⁶

²⁹J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 78-79. Aune concurs, stating, “Unfortunately, both sides of the debate have ignored the fact that the promise made here pertains to Philadelphian Christians *only* and cannot be generalized to include Christians in other churches of Asia, much less all Christians in all places and times” (*Revelation 1–5* 240).

³⁰Thomas remarks, “By means of this call the message to a single congregation is extended to all the churches of Asia and through them, as representatives, to the church throughout the world” (*Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* 150).

³¹Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 54-61.

³²*Ibid.*, 55-59 [transliteration added].

³³*Ibid.*, 59-60.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 60-61.

³⁵The most significant responses to Gundry on Revelation 3:10 are: Thomas R. Edgar, “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):19-49; John A. Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationalism* (Winona Lake, IN.: BMH Books, 1980) 26-30; Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980):252-66, reprinted in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 367-79; Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept ‘Out’ of ‘Through’?” 3-18.

³⁶Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10” 253-59 [transliteration added].

When used with *ἡρεῶ*, “Revelation 3:10 may then be paraphrased, ‘Because you have held fast the word which tells of My perseverance, I also will preserve you in a position outside the hour of testing. . . .’”³⁷ Townsend also counters Gundry’s contention concerning the meaning of ‘the hour.’ He writes:

The preservation promised the Philadelphians is in relation to *a specific period of time*. This is indicated by the inclusion of τῆς [*tēs*, “the”] as an article of previous reference. Jesus is speaking of *the* well-known hour of testing which is a reference to the expected time of trouble, the tribulation period, before the return of Messiah (Deut. 4:26-32; Isa. 13:6-13; 17:4-11; Jer. 30:4-11; Ezek. 20:33-38; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; Zech. 14:1-4; Matt. 24:9-31). This period is graphically portrayed in Revelation 6–18 (cf. “the great tribulation,” 7:14; and “the hour of His judgment,” 14:7).³⁸

Townsend concludes that although 3:10 describes the result of the rapture and not the rapture itself, the promise to the church to be kept in a position outside of the tribulation establishes the pretribulational rapture as the most logical deduction from this verse.³⁹

John Sproule also interacts with Gundry’s arguments concerning Rev 3:10. He has pertinent observations concerning Gundry’s view of the church’s preservation in the tribulation:

[I]f Gundry’s view of Revelation 3:10 is correct, then one is left with the colossal problem of reconciling the fact that multitudes of believers will die under the fierce persecution of the Antichrist during the Tribulation and yet God supposedly will preserve His people *physically* through the Tribulation. . . . Gundry tries to alleviate the problem of so many believers perishing during the Tribulation by strongly suggesting that the “hour of testing” referred to in Revelation 3:10 occurs as the “last crisis at the close of the Tribulation” (pp. 48, 61) and that it will affect only wicked *earth-dwellers* at that time since the church will be removed by rapture (τῆρησω ἐκ [*tērēsō ek*]) just prior to this moment (sometime during the initial stage of the bowl judgments). This only compounds his problem, if he sticks by his definition of ἐκ [*ek*]. Since he insists that ἐκ [*ek*] in Revelation 3:10 must be “out from within,” then, for the promise to the church in Revelation 3:10 to hold true, the church will *have* to be *within* that “hour of testing” (*divine* wrath, according to Gundry) before they can be rescued “out from within” it.⁴⁰

Winfrey’s objective is to compare Rev 3:10 with John 17:15, the two NT passages that use the phrase *ἡρεῶ ek*, and to demonstrate that it implies previous

³⁷Ibid., 259.

³⁸Ibid., 259-60. Posttribulationist George Ladd concurs: “Here is a distinct eschatological reference to the ‘messianic woes’ which are to precede the return of the Lord. . . . This period is referred to elsewhere in the Bible in Dan. 12:2; Mark 13:14 and parallels; II Thess. 2:1-12” (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972] 62).

³⁹Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10” 262-63.

⁴⁰Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* 29-30 [transliteration added].

existence outside the specified sphere in both passages. John 17:15 reads, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." Winfrey compares John 17:15 with John 17:11b-12a. In the latter verses, Jesus asks the Father, "Keep them [the disciples] in Thy name" and affirms "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me." There is a parallelism between "in Thy name" (17:11) and "from the evil one" (17:15). These two expressions describe spheres of power which are mutually exclusive. The disciples are in the Father's power even though they remain in the world, which is under Satan's power. Though the disciples are in the world, Jesus prays that they would be preserved in their saved lives and be kept from experiencing eternal perdition (cf. 17:12b). "Keep from the evil one" implies the disciples belong to the Father through their relationship with Jesus and will be preserved from the fate of Judas. Winfrey concludes, "This phrase [*ἵκερὸ ἐκ*] must mean preservation *outside* the evil one's power in John 17:15 and preservation *outside* the hour of temptation in Rev 3:10."⁴¹

Thomas Edgar interacts with Gundry's definition of *τηρέω* (*ἵκερὸ*) and his contention the preposition *ἀπό* (*apo*, "from, away from, out of") would be more appropriate for a pretribulational view of Rev 3:10. Edgar observes that Gundry has committed the grammatical impossibility of separating the verb and the prepositions into two separate acts. Gundry claims that the verb means "protection *within* a sphere of danger" and the preposition means "emergence *from* within." In this way, Gundry arrives at his conclusion that *ἵκερὸ ἐκ* refers to protection through most of the Tribulation with emission near the end of the Tribulation. But this gives the impossible meaning of "I will keep you in out." However, the verb and its accompanying prepositional phrase are to be viewed as one action. The verb simply means "to keep or guard" with the preposition indicating the direction, location, or sphere of the keeping. In 3:10, *ἵκερὸ ἐκ* simply means "keep from."⁴² Additionally, Edgar analyzes the preposition *ἐκ*. Of its 923 NT uses, the primary stress of the preposition is "away from" or "from." Even though this usage overlaps *apo*, John prefers *ek* in his writings over *apo*. Thus, *ek* is the preposition the reader would expect John to use in 3:10 to express "I will keep you away from the hour of trial."⁴³

In conclusion, pretribulational writers have presented both a sound argument that their understanding of Rev 3:10-11 is the most probable and enough rebuttal arguments to opposing writers to give a high probability that a pretribulational rapture is implied by John.⁴⁴ However, although John affirms the *what*—the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ, he does not explicitly state the *how*—through the event of the rapture. Thus, if there is

⁴¹Winfrey, "The Great Tribulation: Kept 'Out of' or 'Through'?" 5-10.

⁴²Edgar, "Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10" 22-26.

⁴³Ibid., 26-46.

⁴⁴An excellent presentation of the pretribulational exegesis of Revelation 3:10-11 is found in Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 283-91.

another clear passage in the book of Revelation that speaks of the event of the rapture, it might call into question the *when* of the rapture that seems to be implied in 3:10-11. Therefore, before returning to see if near and far context support the pretribulational understanding of these verses, a survey of other proposed “rapture” passages continues.

Revelation 4:1-2

Some pretribulationalists argue that Revelation 4:1-2 refers to the event of the rapture. The biblical text states, “After these things I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’ Immediately I was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.”

The Proposal. The first use of “after these things” refers to this event as being after the church age. The mention of heaven, a voice, and a trumpet (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18) with the command to “come up here [to heaven]” and John’s entrance into heaven points to this event being the rapture.⁴⁵ Thus the rapture is between the end of the church age and the beginning of the tribulation.⁴⁶

Evaluation. The evidence points to this being a statement of John’s personal experience in the first century and not the church’s future experience. The expression “after these things” marks the beginning of a new vision for John (cf. 7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).⁴⁷ According to 1:10, the first voice like a trumpet that John heard was the voice of Jesus Himself (1:12-16); therefore, the voice referred to here is that of Jesus, not that of the archangel at the rapture. John is summoned by Jesus to heaven to receive revelation of future events. This occurs “in the spirit”; John is transported spiritually to heaven while his body remains on Patmos.⁴⁸ Tenney cogently observes, “There is no convincing reason why the seer’s being ‘in the Spirit’ and being called to heaven typifies the rapture of the church any more than his being taken into the wilderness to view Babylon [17:3] indicates that the church

⁴⁵J. A. Seiss writes, “That door opened in heaven is the door of ascension of the saints. That trumpet voice is the same which Paul describes as recalling the sleepers in Jesus. . . . And that ‘COME UP HITHER’ is for everyone in John’s estate” (*The Apocalypse* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950] 96).

⁴⁶John F. Walvoord states, “Though there is no authority for connecting the rapture with this expression [‘come up hither’], there does seem to be a typical representation of the order of events, namely, the church age first, then the rapture, then the church in heaven” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1966] 103).

⁴⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* 333.

⁴⁸See Thomas (*ibid.*) for a thorough exegesis of 4:1-2 (333-41); he specifically counters those who refer these verses to the rapture (336-37).

is there in exile.”⁴⁹

Revelation 4:4; 5:9-10

Revelation 4:4 gives the first mention of the twenty-four elders: “And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns upon their heads.” These elders are also mentioned in 4:10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; and 19:4. Many pretribulation writers have argued that their presence in heaven during the tribulation is proof that the rapture has already taken place.⁵⁰

The Proposal. “The twenty-four elders represent the saints of this age, the church, resurrected and translated into the heavenlies.”⁵¹ Beechick presents a four-step argument on why the twenty-four elders prove a pretribulation rapture. First, the elders must be men because in the Bible only men are elders, sit on thrones (except for God and Satan), wear white raiment, and wear the crowns of victory. Second, the elders are wearing the crowns of victory on their heads. Third, the time for men to receive these crowns is at the coming of Christ, not before (2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4). Fourth, if men’s crowns are received at the second coming of Christ [points one to three above] and if these twenty-four elders are men wearing crowns, then there must have been a coming of Christ previous to this. If all these points are correct, the rapture must be pretribulation.⁵²

Evaluation. Three problems arise with the proposal that the mention of the elders proves the pretribulation rapture. First, many have attempted to identify the twenty-four elders of Revelation, but no solution has found complete acceptance.⁵³

⁴⁹Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 141.

⁵⁰Charles Caldwell Ryrie states, “Most other premillennial writers understand them to be twenty-four redeemed human beings around the throne who, though individuals, represent all the redeemed. . . . By either interpretation [they represent Israel and the church saints or the church saints alone] the church is included and is thus in heaven before the tribulation begins” (*Revelation*. Everyman’s Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1968] 35-36).

⁵¹Pentecost, *Things to Come* 255. Pentecost articulates seven reasons why these elders represent the church (253-58): 1. the number twenty-four represents the entire priesthood (1 Chron 24:1-4, 19), and the church is the only body that could fulfill the priestly function before the tribulation because OT and tribulation saints must wait until the millennium for the realization of their priestly function; 2. the elders sit on thrones and the church has been promised this position (Matt 19:28; Rev 3:21); 3. their white raiment suggests the imputed righteousness of the believer (Rev 3:4-5); 4. the victor’s crowns (*stephanos*) assume that the elders have known conflict, sin, pardon, and victory; 5. their worship of God because of His acts of creation (Rev 4:11), redemption (Rev 5:9), judgment (Rev 19:2), and reigning (Rev 11:17) suggest the elders represent the church; 6. the elders have an intimate knowledge of the program of God (Rev 5:5; 7:13-14; cf. John 15:15); 7. they are associated with Christ in a priestly ministry (Rev 5:8).

⁵²Beechick, *The Pretribulation Rapture* 174-77.

⁵³See Aune, *Revelation 1-5* 287-92; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 322-26; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 344-49.

Good reasons exist to demonstrate that the elders are a special class of angels rather than men. The elders are always grouped with angels in Revelation; in 7:14 one of the elders even functions as an agent of revelation as angels do throughout the book (cf. 1:1; 17:3; 22:6). Also, white apparel is a characteristic of angels (cf. Matt 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). Further, the crown (στέφανος, *stephanos*) had a variety of uses in the ancient world besides being a victor's crown.⁵⁴

Second, many of the commentators who argue that the elders are men see them as representative of both Israel and the church.⁵⁵ If OT saints are not resurrected until the end of the tribulation period (Dan 12:1-2), then NT saints may be resurrected at that time also. The elders represent non-resurrected believers already in the presence of God according to this viewpoint. Third, even if the elders represent the church alone, the text does not specifically mention the rapture as the means of their heavenly arrival. Again, they may only represent non-resurrected Christians who have died and are then in the presence of God. In short, the mention of the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation does not prove the pretribulation rapture.

Revelation 6:2

A final proposal from a pretribulationist author concerns Revelation 6:2, "And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer."

The Proposal. Zane Hodges argues that the rider on the white horse in 6:2 is the same individual as the rider on a white horse in 19:11-16, Jesus Christ. He proposes that 6:2 is a description of Christ's coming for His church:

Yet another illuminating point, however, is to be gleaned from the aura of mystery which surrounds the first horseman of Revelation 6, but which is dispelled in resplendent glory in Revelation 19. It is this: in Revelation 6, the rider issues forth before any of the judgments of the tribulation are presented, whereas in Revelation 19 the rider issues forth after all these judgments have been recorded. Precisely so, the triumphant Christ will ride forth prior to the great tribulation as well as after it. And thus there is suggested in Revelation 6 that initial aspect of the second advent known as the rapture of the church. Indeed, it cannot be doubted that one of the great triumphs of the Lord Jesus will be the moment when His bride—whom He desires ultimately to display to a wondering world—is snatched from a hostile earth and, victorious over her every enemy, is caught up to meet Him in the air. In this light, additional significance attaches to the fact that the rider of Revelation goes forth "conquering." The rapture then would be the very first

⁵⁴Pretribulationist Thomas (*Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*) argues for the angelic viewpoint (348-49).

⁵⁵Simon J. Kistemaker writes, "The traditional interpretation of the twenty-four elders is that this number is the total of twelve times two, namely, twelve Old Testament patriarchs and twelve New Testament apostles, the representatives of those redeemed by Christ" (*Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 187).

of the many triumphs which this horseman sets out to achieve.⁵⁶

Evaluation. There have been many proposals as to who the rider on the white horse in 6:2 is.⁵⁷ The main reason some have argued for Christ is the fact that this anonymous horseman rides a white horse which is specifically what Christ rides at His return to the earth in 19:11. However, there are distinct contrasts between the two horsemen. The first horseman is anonymous, but the second is called “Faithful and True”; the first has a crown (στέφανος, *stephanos*), but the second has many diadems (διαδήματα, *diadēmata*) (19:12); the first comes alone, but the second is accompanied by the armies of heaven (19:14); the first carries a bow, but the second has a sharp sword (19:15); and the first is followed by war, famine, and death, but the second defeats His enemies and ushers in the millennium (19:17–20:6). Further, a distinct parallelism exists between the four horsemen of Rev 6:2-8 and the future conditions predicted by Christ in Matt 24:5-11; Mark 13:6-8; and Luke 21:8-11, as the chart below illustrates:⁵⁸

<i>Conditions</i>	Revelation 6	Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
False Messiahs	2	5, 11	6	8
Wars	4	6-7	7	9
Famines	5-6, 8	7	8	10
Pestilences	8			11

As one can observe, the first horseman of Revelation parallels the false messiahs predicted by Jesus Christ. Thus the first horseman must represent the Antichrist or a movement that he will lead. Revelation 6:2 is not a description of the rapture.

Revelation 7:9-17

Pre-wrath advocates propose that Rev 7:9-10a— “After these things, I looked, and a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice . . .”—speaks of those raptured by Christ. Those advocates divide Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:27) into three periods: the first three and a half years are “The Beginning of Sorrows” (cf. Matt 24:8), followed by “The Great Tribulation” which occurs after “The Abomination of Desolation” (cf. Matt 24:14, 21), which is less than three and a half years because it is cut short (cf. Matt 24:22),

⁵⁶Zane C. Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (1962):330.

⁵⁷Aune, *Revelation 6-16* 393-95; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 375-78; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 419-24; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The First Horseman of Revelation 6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996):212-26.

⁵⁸The chart is based on John McLean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Ice and Demy 326.

followed by the pouring out of God's wrath in "The Day of the Lord" at the end of the final three and a half years.⁵⁹

The Proposal. They place the rapture of the church between "The Great Tribulation" and "The Day of the Lord," thus locating it before the pouring out of God's wrath, a pre-wrath rapture. They argue that the great multitude described in Rev 7:9-17 is the raptured church.⁶⁰ Rosenthal cites four reasons why the great multitude of Revelation 7 is a different group from the faithful martyrs seen in heaven in Revelation 6 as having been slain by the Antichrist. First, they are too numerous and international to have become believers during the relatively short period of Daniel's seventieth week. Second, the martyrs are souls under the altar asking God to avenge their blood (6:9-10); in contrast, the multitude is praising God for salvation (7:10). Third, the martyrs are described as "souls," whereas the multitude is seen as "clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands" (7:9). The martyrs are *souls*—the multitude has *bodies*. Fourth, in Revelation 6 John recognizes the martyrs, but in Revelation 7 he does not recognize who the multitude is, showing they are a different group.⁶¹ He concludes, "This great multitude, innumerable, universal, and suddenly appearing in heaven with white robes (purified) and palm branches (triumphant), is the raptured church."⁶²

Evaluation. The interpretation of the great multitude has been varied, but 7:14 clearly states that these believers came out of "the great tribulation."⁶³ They do not represent all the believers of the church age. Renald Showers shows that there are two problems with equating the great multitude with the raptured church:

1. One of the twenty-four elders indicated that the people who make up the great multitude come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:13-14). This means that all the people who make up the great multitude will be on earth during the Great Tribulation, making it a partial rapture of the church. . . . By contrast, the Bible indicates that all church saints will be raptured together as one body at the same time (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
2. The Greek present tense of the main verb in the elder's statement indicates that the

⁵⁹Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* 103-13.

⁶⁰Ibid. 179-86; Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1993) 305-18.

⁶¹Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* 183-84.

⁶²Ibid., 184-85.

⁶³Beale equates the great multitude of 7:9-17 with the 144,000 of 7:1-8 and as the same group referred to in 5:9, the innumerable true Israelite descendants of Abraham (*The Book of Revelation* 426-31). Aune distinguishes the great multitude and the 144,000, though the larger group probably includes the smaller group, and argues that the multitude are Christians who suffer martyrdom during the eschatological tribulation (*Revelation 6-16* 466-67, 480). Thomas also distinguishes the two groups of Revelation 7, but concludes that the multitude is tribulation saints who die either natural or violent deaths (*Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 484-85).

people who make up the great multitude do not come out of the Great Tribulation at the same time, but one by one, continuously, throughout the course of the Great Tribulation, apparently through death. This again contrasts with the manner in which the church will be raptured from the earth.⁶⁴

Revelation 11:3-12

Some midtribulationists have argued that Rev 11:11-12 describes the rapture. In recounting the activities of the two witnesses, John writes, “And after the three days and a half the breath of God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them.”

The Proposal. The two witnesses introduced in 11:3 are identified as representing the church.⁶⁵ Thus, the experience of the witnesses in Revelation is symbolic of the church. The church will testify to Christ, suffer persecution and supposed defeat, only to be resurrected from the dead when a voice from heaven will call and she will go up in the cloud.⁶⁶ The terms “dead,” “voice,” and “cloud” parallel 1 Thess 4:16-17, and thus refer to the rapture.

Evaluation. The central issue with the two witnesses is whether they are two specific individuals or symbolic of a group.⁶⁷ The best interpretation views them as two individuals, because their activities mirror those of Elijah (“power to shut up the sky” [11:6; cf. 1 Kgs 17:1]) and Moses (“power to turn the water into blood and to smite the earth with every plague” [11:6; cf. Exod 7:14-21; 9:14; 11:10]), and because they are verbally linked with Joshua and Zerubbabel (11:4; cf. Zech 4:2, 3, 11-14). Therefore they do not symbolically represent the church. Further, their ascension into heaven (11:12) is modeled on ascensions of Elijah (2

⁶⁴Renald E. Showers, “The Prewrath Rapture,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996) 357. See also Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 139-51.

⁶⁵Mounce remarks, “It is more likely, however, that they are not two individuals but a symbol of the witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age” (*The Book of Revelation* 217).

⁶⁶Mounce states, “The triumph of the witnesses is no secret rapture; it is openly visible to all (cf. Matt. 24:27; 1 Thess. 4:17)” (*ibid.*, 223). Buswell views the two witnesses as individuals. However, he sees their midtribulation rapture occurring at the same time as that of the church. He writes, “It is my opinion that in the coming to life and Rapture of the two witness (Rev. 11:11ff.) we have an exact synchronization of events. The two witnesses are caught up into heaven ‘in the cloud’ at the same moment that the elect of God are caught up together in clouds to the meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)” (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* 2:456).

⁶⁷Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 610-11, 631-32) and Beale (*The Book of Revelation* 572-75) interpret the two witnesses as representative of the whole community of faith, the witnessing church of the last days. However, Thomas (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 86-89) avers that they are two individuals, probably Moses and Elijah.

Kgs 2:11) and Jesus (Acts 1:9) when eyewitnesses saw them go up into a cloud. By contrast, the rapture of believers will apparently happen instantaneously, not gradually as here (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52).

Revelation 11:15-19

Some, especially midtribulationists, suppose the rapture to coincide with the sound of the last trumpet spoken of in Rev 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.’”

The Proposal. Buswell argues for the blowing of the trumpet of Revelation 11:15 as heralding the rapture:

- (1) The seventh trumpet announces the time of rewards for the righteous dead (Revelation 11:18).
- (2) The time of the rewards for the righteous dead is “at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). . . .
- (3) The resurrection of the righteous takes place at the same moment, “twinkling of an eye,” at which the saints who are alive when Christ comes again will be changed and made immortal (I Corinthians 15:52).
- (4) This same moment is predicted as occurring “at the last trumpet” (I Corinthians 15:52).
- (5) The moment of the resurrection of the righteous, of rewards for the righteous dead, of the change to immortality of the living saints, of the last trumpet is the moment of the rapture of the saints who will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).⁶⁸

Evaluation. The majority of commentators do not correlate the seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15 with 1 Cor 15:52.⁶⁹ The last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15 is the final summons to the church. As such it correlates to the trumpet of God at the rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:16). In contrast, the trumpet in Revelation 11 is the seventh sounded by an angel as the last of seven judgments for which the angels blow trumpets. It is referred to by John as the third “woe” (11:14), the final judgments of God which will lead to establishment of Christ’s kingdom (11:15b-18). This trumpet in Revelation is a harbinger of God’s final wrath upon the world, not a summons to God’s resurrection blessing for His church as in 1 Corinthians. Further, neither of these trumpets is the last one, only the last in a given series, because another trumpet will sound at the second coming of Christ to regather Israel (Matt 24:31; cf. Isa 27:13). Thus the trumpet of Rev 11:15 is not the herald of the

⁶⁸Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* 2:458-59.

⁶⁹Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 637-38) and Beale (*The Book of Revelation* 611) do not mention 1 Cor 15:52 in their discussions of the last trumpet in Rev 11:15. Thomas specifically notes that they are not the same (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 104).

church's rapture.⁷⁰

Revelation 12:5

Svigel, who offers no conclusion as to when the rapture will take place, argues that the only explicit reference to the rapture of the church in the book of Revelation is 12:5.⁷¹ The verse states, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne."

The Proposal. On the basis of genre, context, and lexical analysis, Svigel presents his case for identifying the rapture with the catching up of the male child in 12:5. The genre of the book of Revelation is "apocalyptic/prophetic" which communicates its message through images, referents, and allusions that the interpreter must identify.⁷² The three symbolic personages of Rev 12:1-6 are the woman who symbolizes the true Israel of faith of the OT and NT, the dragon who symbolizes both the world system throughout history and the ruler of that system, Satan, and the male child who symbolizes Jesus Christ and His corporate body, the church (based on the allusion to Isa 66:7-8).⁷³ Lexical analysis demonstrates that ἀρπάζω (*harpazō*, "snatch away") is used thirty-nine times in the LXX and fourteen times in the NT, always with the idea of sudden, unexpected removal. It is the verb used by Paul in 1 Thess 4:17 for the rapture of the church. The verb occurs only in Rev in 12:5. In the NT it never refers to the ascension of Christ.⁷⁴ Svigel concludes, "The 'snatching up' of the male child, then, would be equated with the catching up of the church described in 1 Thess. 4:17."⁷⁵

Evaluation. Svigel himself observes that commentators on Revelation have either overlooked or rejected this interpretation of 12:5.⁷⁶ The traditional interpretation of the male child throughout the history of the church has been messianic, it refers to Jesus Christ. John clearly states that the woman's son, a male, is about to fulfill the messianic promise of Ps 2:8-9. Within the context of the book of Revelation, this can refer only to Jesus Christ (cf. 19:15). The "snatching away" of 12:5 refers to the ascension of Christ into heaven where He escaped Satan's

⁷⁰For a more extensive discussion on identity of the trumpets in 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 11, see Pentecost, *Things to Come* 188-92, and Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* 192-98.

⁷¹Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation" 53-74.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 56-67.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 62-65.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 53. Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 687-90), with reservations; Beale, (*The Book of Revelation* 639-42); and Thomas (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 125-26) assert that the male child is Jesus Christ.

hostility until the time He will return to the earth to establish God's Kingdom. Thus 12:5 is not a statement of the rapture of the church.

Revelation 14:14-16

Midtribulationist Gleason Archer, Jr., and posttribulationist Rober Gundry identify Rev 14:14-16 as the passage in the book most likely to refer to the rapture.⁷⁷ The biblical text reads, "And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped." This precedes a second gathering of the earth described in 14:17-20 which is clearly identified with the wrath of God (14:19). This second harvest is clearly one of judgment.

The Proposal.

Gundry clearly states the argument:

In 14:14-20 two harvests are reaped, the first by one like a son of man on whose head rests a golden crown, the second by an angel who casts his harvest into the winepress of God's wrath. The first harvest (vv. 14-16) is best taken as symbolic of the rapture. For the phrase "one like a son of man" identifies both the reaper of the first harvest and, in John's first vision, Christ Himself (1:13; cf. John 5:27). Immediately we think of "the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky" (Matt. 24:30) and Paul's comparison of the resurrection and translation of Christians to a harvest (1 Corinthians 15:13, 35ff.). The "white cloud" on which sits the reaper in John's vision corresponds to the clouds associated with the Parousia in Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:9-11; and 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The special dignity indicated by the golden crown also points to the Lord.⁷⁸

Evaluation. The identification of the reaper of 14:14-16 as Christ is correct (cf. Dan 7:13; Rev 1:13).⁷⁹ However, based on clear OT allusions, the reaping must be one of judgment (Isa 17:5; 18:4-5; 24:13; Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13; Mic 4:12-13).⁸⁰ The first harvest (Rev 14:14-16) gives the general view of Christ's judgment of the earth, while the second harvest (Rev 14:17-20) concentrates particularly on that part of humanity thrown into the great winepress of God's wrath. Because Rev 14:14-16 gives a picture of Christ's judgment, it is not symbolic of the

⁷⁷Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "The Case for the Mid-seven tieth-week Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation* 142-43; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 83-84.

⁷⁸Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 83-84.

⁷⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 770-72; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 218. Aune argues that "one like a son of man" is an angel (*Revelation 6-16* 800-801).

⁸⁰Aune, *Revelation 6-16* 801-3, 839-45; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 772-73; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 219-21.

rapture.

Revelation 20:4

The final passage in the book of Revelation where the rapture is believed to be found is 20:4, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” According to most posttribulationists, this verse includes the rapture.

The Proposal. In 20:4 John describes the “first resurrection” (20:5). Several reasons demonstrate that this resurrection will include all believers. First, verse 4 mentions at least two groups of believers. One group includes the believers who sit on thrones judging; the other group includes the “tribulation” saints who were martyred and did not worship the beast. Second, these believers who will be resurrected “will be priests to God and of Christ and will reign with Him” (20:6). Revelation 5:9-10 refers to these priests as coming from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Thus the church must be included in this group. Third, John describes only two resurrections in 20:5. The “first resurrection” must have temporal force since it is contrasted with a “second.” There can be no resurrection before this first one in 20:4. These two resurrections must include all the dead, with believers participating in the first. Fourth, John would be expected to include the resurrection of believers in his portrait of the end times. “For these reasons, it is probable that Revelation 20:4 depicts the resurrection of *all* the righteous dead—including church saints. Since the Rapture occurs at the same time as this resurrection, and the first resurrection is clearly posttribulationist, the Rapture must be considered posttribulationist.”⁸¹

Evaluation. Three problems arise when Rev 20:4 is viewed as depicting the rapture. First, although John speaks in this verse of resurrection, “they came to life,” he does not mention the rapture, the “snatching away” of church saints. The posttribulationist can only argue the probability of the rapture in 20:4 based upon his understanding of other biblical texts. Second, beginning in 19:11, John narrates an apparent sequence of events associated with the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth and its effects. These progressive scenes in this sequence are marked off by the statement of John “I saw” (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12). Based on 1 Thess 4:13-18, the posttribulationist expectation would be that the rapture would be simultaneous with the return of Christ as recorded in 19:11-16. If the rapture is

⁸¹Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position” 200-201. See the similar interpretation in Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* 263-68), but without the specific mention of the rapture of the church.

associated with 20:4, it will occur after the second coming of Christ to the earth.⁸² Third, the identity of the saints sitting on the thrones and judging in 20:4a has been a point of discussion among commentators on the book.⁸³ They are definitely a different group from the tribulation saints who will be resurrected in 20:4b. Within the immediate context the other group associated with Christ is “the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” who will follow Christ to earth on white horses (Rev 19:14).⁸⁴ These saints must have been resurrected by rapture before the events of 20:4. Thus the “first resurrection” must come in phases, and is not associated with the events recorded in 20:4 only.

Conclusion

An evaluation of the different proposals set forth concerning where the rapture is referred to in the book of Revelation has led to the conclusion that there is no explicit mention of the rapture in the book, at least not in the Pauline terminology (*harpazō*, 1 Thess. 4:17). The most probable passage referring to the rapture is Rev 3:10-11, which is Jesus’ affirmation through John that the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ. A brief exposition of Rev 3:7-13 is in order to see if the eschatological scheme of John corresponds to that of the apostle Paul.

An Exposition of Rev 3:7-13

These verses comprise the sixth of seven messages communicated by Jesus Christ to select churches in the Roman province of Asia, the churches that were the immediate addressees of the book of Revelation. Christ’s message here gives assurances based on certain eschatological realities.⁸⁵

The Address of Jesus Christ (3:7a)

The message is addressed by Jesus Christ to the human messenger of the local church in the city of Philadelphia. It is the responsibility of this messenger, in some way controlled by Christ (cf. 1:20), to communicate accurately what Christ had led the apostle John to write. The messenger is possibly the reader of the contents of the book to the congregation (cf. 1:3).

⁸²Walvoord remarks, “One of the most damaging portions of Scripture on the posttribulation Rapture is the fact that the resurrection in Revelation 20:4-5 occurs, not at the time of the second coming of Christ, but probably some days thereafter” (*The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* 267).

⁸³Aune, *Revelation 17-22* 1084-85; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 413-14.

⁸⁴Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 414; Svigel, “The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation” 51-53.

⁸⁵Because of the limited scope of this article, only the interpretive conclusions reached by the author will be presented here. For the exegetical foundation of these conclusions, consult Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 269-94.

The Attributes of Jesus Christ (3:7b)

Jesus begins, as in each of the seven messages, by affirming characteristics about Himself which are especially pertinent to the particular church being addressed. To the Philadelphian church He declares four attributes that belong to Him. First, He is the holy one, the uniquely set apart one who is deity. He is truly Israel's God, even though the Jews of Philadelphia rejected His messianic claims (cf. 3:9). Second, He is the true One. As deity, His words are completely reliable. What He assures the church will certainly come to pass. Third, He has the key of David. Christ is the One who will exercise authority over the Davidic Kingdom when it is established on the earth in the future (cf. Isa 22:22). Fourth, He is the One who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens. He has the authority and power to admit or exclude from David's future kingdom. Jesus alone will determine who enters the future millennial Kingdom.

The Appraisal of Jesus Christ (3:8a, c)

Jesus knows the deeds of the church. He is aware that the church has limited influence in the city because of their numerical smallness. However, in the past, the church had been faithful to proclaim the gospel and to affirm that Jesus is the Messiah, even in the face of outward Jewish antagonism.

The Assurances of Jesus Christ (3:8b, 9-12)

Because of the past faithfulness of the Philadelphian church, and in anticipation of their future faithfulness, Jesus gives eschatological assurances to these believers.

The Certain Entrance into the Davidic Kingdom (3:8b). The One who has authority over David's Kingdom assures the church that He has put an open door before them that no one, including their Jewish opponents, can shut. Jesus, and not the Jews, determines that they will enter the future millennial Kingdom, and the Philadelphian believers will certainly enter (cf. 19:14; 20:4a). Paul also anticipates Christ's future authority over an earthly kingdom (1 Cor 15:25) in which Christian believers will participate (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5).

The Present Conversion of Some Jews to Jesus Christ (3:9a). Even though the Jews who make up the synagogue at Philadelphia claim to be God's people, in reality they are lying because they are doing the deeds inspired by Satan. Nevertheless, some of the presently unbelieving and antagonistic Jews in the near future will be converted to follow Jesus as Messiah because of the faithful presentation of the gospel. Paul also speaks of the faithful remnant of Jewish believers during this age (Rom 11:5)

The Future Conversion of All Israel to Jesus Christ (3:9b). Ultimately, in the future Kingdom, repentant Israel will worship Jesus as the Messiah. Though the Jews presently scoff at the claim that Christ loves the church, that attitude will change when Israel repents. Paul too looked forward to the future salvation of Israel

(Rom 11:26).

The Future Keeping of Christians from the ‘Tribulation’ Period (3:10).

Because the church had in the past exhibited the same kind of endurance on behalf of the truth of God that Christ displayed while on earth, Christ promised to keep them out of the time when God would put earth dwellers to the test, a test to reveal their unrepentant hearts (9:20-21). This time of testing is about to happen at any moment and will engulf the whole world. Paul also encourages believers with the assurance that they would not experience the coming wrath of God (1 Thess 1:10, 5:9).

The Imminent Future Return of Jesus Christ (3:11). The event that would keep the church out of the hour of testing is the return of Christ for His church. Christ could return suddenly and unexpectedly (cf. 22:7, 12, 20). The near return of Christ means the believers need to continue to be steadfast in their devotion to Christ until He returns. Their steadfastness will assure them of their reward of life (2:10) when He returns for them. Paul reveals that the coming of Christ for His church will take place at the rapture (1 Thess 4:17).

The Future Reward for the Christians (3:12). These Philadelphian Christians should look forward to an eternally secure relationship with God and a secure identity with God, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ. These assurances will be realized in the eternal state (21:1–22:5). Paul can also speak of a future delivering up of Christ’s Kingdom to the Father and the resultant eternal state (1 Cor 15:24).

The Admonition of Jesus Christ (3:13)

What the Spirit says to the church at Philadelphia is applicable to every church throughout the church age.

Therefore, a correlation exists between the eschatologies of Paul and John. Both write of the present conversion of a Jewish remnant to Christ, the future deliverance of the church from the tribulation period by the return of Christ for His church, the future salvation of ethnic Israel, the participation of the church in the millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the ultimate reward for Christians in the eternal state. In Rev 3:10-11, John reveals an eschatological *what*—the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ for His church. In 1 Thess 4:13-18, Paul reveals the *how*—through such an event as the rapture. Correlating John and Paul gives the *when*—the rapture of the church will be before the tribulation.

WHY A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE?

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This article raises four key questions: (1) What does “rapture” mean?; (2) Will there be an eschatological “rapture”?; (3) Will the “rapture” be partial or full?; and (4) Will the “rapture” be pre, mid, or post in a time relationship to Daniel’s seventieth week? In answering the fourth question concerning the time of the rapture, seven major lines of reasoning produce the conclusion that a pretribulational rapture best fits the biblical evidence and raises the fewest difficulties. By way of conclusion, the article answers thirteen of the toughest objections to pretribulationism.

For over thirty years I have studied the Scriptures in a sincere attempt to formulate a satisfying biblical answer to the question, “Why should I believe in a pretribulational rapture?” In the process of research, reflection, and finally writing, I have attempted to eliminate the kinds of simplistic or twisted approaches and illogical thought patterns that might bring serious doubts on a conclusion, if not even directly invalidate the results.

Every rapture position has its overzealous defenders who have employed unacceptable reasoning or flawed methodology to prove the point. Some of the less-than-satisfactory approaches that I have observed in the rapture debate include:

1. Putting non-biblical, historical documents on an equal par with Scripture to gain a greater sense of authority for one’s conclusion or even to refute a biblical presentation.
2. Reading current events into the Scripture to prove one’s point.
3. Inserting one’s predetermined position, without first proving it, into a Scripture passage to gain apparent biblical support.
4. Attacking the character of one who holds a particular view in order to discredit the view.
5. Accusing an advocate of an opposing view of holding certain unacceptable

interpretations or beliefs, when in fact he does not, in order to demonstrate falsely his apparent poor scholarship.

6. Employing selective data to make one's point, when full disclosure would have actually weakened the conclusion.
7. Drawing unwarranted and erroneous implications from the Greek NT text that are used to override the more obvious and determinative conclusions derived from the passage's context.

The following four questions will be raised and answered in this attempt to present a convincing response to the ultimate question at hand, "Why a pretribulation rapture?"

1. What does "rapture" mean?
2. Will there be an eschatological "rapture"?
3. Will the "rapture" be partial or full?
4. Will the "rapture" be pre, mid, or post in a time relationship to Daniel's seventieth week?

The scope of this article does not allow for discussing the chief deficiencies of other positions. This task I leave to other writers for the time being. However, the central purpose of this discussion is to describe the superiority of pretribulationism as taught in major eschatological texts such as Matthew 24–25; 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15; and Revelation 3, 6–18. It will not be the weight of any one reason that makes pretribulationism so compelling, but rather the combined force of all the lines of reasoning.

What Does "Rapture" Mean?

The English noun/verb "rapture" comes from the Latin noun *raptura*/verb *rapiō* which refers to the Greek word ἁρπαζῶ (*harpaζō*) that is used 14 times in the NT. The basic idea of the word is "to remove suddenly or snatch away." It is used by the NT in reference to stealing/plundering (Matt 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 10:12, 28, 29) and removing (John 6:15; Acts 8:39; 23:10; Jude 23).

There is a third use, which focuses on being caught up to heaven. It is used of Paul's third heaven experience (2 Cor 12:2, 4) and Christ's ascension to heaven (Rev 12:5). Obviously, *harpaζō* is the perfect word to describe God suddenly taking up the church from earth to heaven as the first part of Christ's second coming. However, the term itself contains no hint of the rapture's time in relationship to Daniel's seventieth week.

Will There Be an Eschatological "Rapture"?

First Thess 4:16-17 unquestionably refers to a rapture that is eschatological in nature. Here, *harpaζō* is translated "caught up" (NASB).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Without employing *harpazō*, but by using similar contextual language, 1 Cor 15:51-52 refers to the same eschatological event as 1 Thess 4:16-17.

Behold, I tell 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 trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Thus, it can be assuredly concluded that Scripture points to the fact of an eschatological rapture, even though neither of these foundational texts contains an explicit time indicator.

Will the “Rapture” Be Partial or Full?

Some have suggested that the rapture spoken of in 1 Thess 4:16-17 and 1 Cor 15:51-52 will only be a partial rapture, not a rapture of all who believe. They reason that participation in the rapture is not based upon one’s true salvation but rather is conditional, based upon one’s deserving conduct.

This theory rests on NT passages that stress obedient watching and waiting, e.g., Matt 25:1-13; 1 Thess 5:4-8; Heb 9:28. The result would be that only part of the church is raptured and those who are not raptured would endure through a portion of or through the entire seventieth week of Daniel. However, these biblical texts which supposedly teach a partial rapture are better understood as differentiating between true believers who are raptured and merely professing ones who remain behind. Texts that refer to the final aspect of Christ’s second coming are often used mistakenly to support the partial-rapture theory.

The partial rapture theory not only fails to be convincing because of a conclusion that the context of allegedly supporting passages will not support, but it also fails to be compelling for numerous other reasons. First, 1 Cor 15:51 says that “all” will be changed. Second, a partial rapture would logically demand a parallel partial resurrection, which is nowhere taught in Scripture. Third, a partial rapture would minimize and possibly eliminate the need for the judgment seat of Christ, because judgment would have already taken place by virtue of a “partial” rapture. Fourth, it creates a purgatory of sorts on earth for those believers left behind. Fifth, a partial rapture is nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture. Therefore, it is concluded that the rapture will be full and complete, not just partial.

Will the “Rapture” Be Pre, Mid, or Post in a Time Relationship to Daniel’s Seventieth Week?

The following seven evidences point to a pretribulational rapture. In this

writer's opinion, they create a far more compelling case than the reasoning given for any other time of the rapture.

The Church Is Not Mentioned in Revelation 6–18 as Being on Earth

The common NT term for “church” (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*) is used nineteen times in Revelation 1–3, a section that deals with the historical church of the first century toward the end of the apostle John's life (ca. A.D. 95). However, “church” is then used only once more in the twenty-two chapter book and that at the very end (22:16) when John returns to addressing the first-century church. Most interesting is the fact that nowhere during the period of Daniel's seventieth week is the term for “church” used for believers on earth (cf. Rev. 4–19).

It is remarkable and totally unexpected that John would shift from detailed instructions for the church to absolute silence about the church in the subsequent 13 chapters if, in fact, the church continued into the tribulation. If the church will experience the tribulation of Daniel's seventieth week, then surely the most detailed study of tribulation events would include an account of the church's role. But it does not! The only timing of the rapture that would account for this frequent mention of “church” in Revelation 1–3 and total absence of the “church” on earth until Revelation 22:16 is a pretribulation rapture which will relocate the church from earth to heaven prior to Daniel's seventieth week.

Looking at this observation from another perspective, it is also true that nowhere in Scripture is it taught that the church and Israel would coexist as the centers for God's redemptive message and yet remain mutually exclusive.

Today, the church universal is God's human channel of redemptive truth. Revelation gives certain indications that the Jewish remnant will be God's human instrument during Daniel's seventieth week. The unbiased reader would certainly be impressed by the abrupt shift from the “church” in Revelation 2–3, to the 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes in Revelation 7 and 14. He would certainly ask, “Why?”

Further, because Revelation 12 is a mini-synopsis of the entire tribulation period and because the woman who gave birth to the male child (Rev 12:1-13) is Israel, then logically and topically the Tribulation period focuses on the nation of Israel and not the church. How could this be? Because a pretribulation rapture has removed the “church” from the earth prior to Daniel's seventieth week.

The Rapture Is Rendered Inconsequential if It Is Posttribulation

First, if God miraculously preserves the church through the tribulation, why have a rapture? If it is to avoid the wrath of God at Armageddon, then why would God not continue to protect the saints on earth (as is postulated by posttribulationism) just as He protected Israel (see Exod 8:22; 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7) from His wrath poured out upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Further, if the purpose of the rapture is for living saints to avoid Armageddon, why also resurrect the saints who are already immune at the same time?

Second, if the rapture will take place in connection with the Lord's posttribulation coming, the subsequent separation of the sheep from the goats (see

Matt. 25:31ff.) will be redundant. Separation will have taken place in the very act of translation.

Third, if all tribulation believers are raptured and glorified just prior to the inauguration of the millennial Kingdom, who then will populate and propagate the Kingdom? The Scriptures indicate that the living unbelievers will be judged at the end of the tribulation and removed from the earth (see Matt 13:41-42; 25:41). Yet, they also teach that children will be born to believers during the millennium and that these children will be capable of sin (see Isa 65:20; Rev 20:7-10). This will not be possible if all believers on earth have been glorified through a posttribulational rapture.

Fourth, the posttribulational paradigm of the church being raptured and then immediately brought back to earth leaves no time for the Bema, i.e., the Judgment Seat of Christ to occur (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10), nor for the Marriage Supper (Rev 19:6-10). Thus, it can be concluded that a posttribulational time of the rapture makes no logical sense, is incongruous with the sheep-goat nation judgment, and, in fact, eliminates two critical end-time events. A pretribulational rapture avoids all of these insurmountable difficulties.

The Epistles Contain No Preparatory Warnings of an Impending Tribulation for Church-Age Believers

God's instructions to the church through the epistles contain a variety of warnings, but never do they warn believers to prepare for entering and enduring the tribulation of Daniel's seventieth week.

They warn vigorously about coming error and false prophets (see Acts 20:29-30; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3; Jude 4). They warn against ungodly living (see Eph 4:25-5:7; 1 Thess 4:3-8; Heb 12:1). They even admonish believers to endure in the midst of present tribulation (see 1 Thess 2:13-14; 2 Thess 1:4; all of 1 Peter). However, there is absolute silence on preparing the church for any kind of tribulation like that found in Revelation 6-18.

It is incongruous, then, that the Scriptures would be silent about such a traumatic change for the church. If any time of the rapture other than pretribulational were true, one would expect the epistles to teach the fact of the church in the tribulation, the purpose of the church in the tribulation, and the conduct of the church in the tribulation. However, there is no teaching whatsoever. Only a pretribulational rapture satisfactorily explains such obvious silence.

First Thess 4:13-18 Demands a Pretribulational Rapture

For discussion's sake, suppose hypothetically that some other rapture timing besides pretribulational is true. What would one expect to find in 1 Thessalonians 4? How does this compare with what is actually observed?

First, one would expect the Thessalonians to be joyous over the fact that loved ones are home with the Lord and will not have to endure the horrors of the tribulation. But the Thessalonians are actually grieving because they fear their loved ones have missed the rapture. Only a pretribulational rapture accounts for this grief.

Second, one would expect the Thessalonians to be grieving over their own impending trial rather than grieving over loved ones. Furthermore, they would be inquisitive about their own future doom. But the Thessalonians have no fears or questions about the coming tribulation.

Third, one would expect Paul, even in the absence of interest or questions by the Thessalonians, to have provided instructions and exhortation for such a supreme test, which would make their present tribulation seem microscopic in comparison. But not one indication of any impending tribulation of this kind appears in the text.

First Thessalonians 4 fits only the model of a pretribulational rapture. It is incompatible with any other time for the rapture.

John 14:1-3 Parallels 1 Thess 4:13-18

John 14:1-3 refers to Christ's coming again. It is not a promise to all believers that they shall go to Him at death. It does refer to the rapture of the church. Note the close parallel between the promises of John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess 4:13-18. First, the promise of a presence with Christ: ". . . that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3) and ". . . thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). Second, the promise of comfort: "Let not your heart be troubled . . ." (John 14:1) and "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:18).

Jesus instructed the disciples that He was going to His Father's house (heaven) to prepare a place for them. He promised them that He would return and receive them so that they could be with Him wherever He was.

The phrase "wherever I am," while implying continued presence in general, here means presence in heaven in particular. The Lord told the Pharisees in John 7:34, "Where I am you cannot come." He was not talking about His then-present abode on earth but rather His resurrected presence at the right hand of the Father. In John 14:3 "where I am" must mean "in heaven" or the intent of 14:1-3 would be wasted and worthless.

A posttribulational rapture demands that the saints meet Christ in the air and immediately descend to earth without experiencing what the Lord promised in John 14. Since John 14 refers to the rapture, only a pretribulational rapture satisfies the language of John 14:1-3 and allows raptured saints to dwell for a meaningful time with Christ in His Father's house.

The Nature of Events at Christ's Posttribulational Coming Differs from That of the Rapture

If one compares what happens at the rapture in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-58 with what happens in the final events of Christ's second coming in Matthew 24-25, at least eight significant contrasts or differences are observable. These differences demand that the rapture occur at a time significantly different from that of the final event of Christ's second coming.

1. At the rapture, Christ comes in the air and returns to heaven (1 Thess 4:17),

but at the final event of the second coming, Christ comes to the earth to dwell and reign (Matt 25:31-32).

2. At the rapture, Christ gathers His own (1 Thess 4:16-17), but at the final event of the second coming, angels gather the elect (Matt 24:31).
3. At the rapture, Christ comes to reward (1 Thess 4:17), but at the final event of the second coming, Christ comes to judge (Matt 25:31-46).
4. At the rapture, resurrection is prominent (1 Thess 4:15-16), but at the final event of the second coming, resurrection is not mentioned.
5. At the rapture, believers depart the earth (1 Thess 4:15-17), but at the final event of the second coming, unbelievers are taken away from the earth (Matt 24:37-41).
6. At the rapture, unbelievers remain on earth, but at the final event of the second coming, believers remain on earth (Matt 25:34).
7. At the rapture, there is no mention of establishing Christ's Kingdom on earth, but at the final event of the second coming, Christ has come to set up His Kingdom on earth (Matt 25:31, 34).
8. At the rapture, believers will receive glorified bodies (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-57), but at the final event of the second coming, no one will receive glorified bodies.

Additionally, several of Christ's parables in Matthew 13 confirm differences between the rapture and the final event of Christ's second coming.

1. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the tares (unbelievers) are taken out from among the wheat (believers) at the climax of the second coming (Matt 13:30, 40), but believers are removed from among unbelievers at the rapture (1 Thess 4:15-17).
2. In the parable of the dragnet, the bad fish (unbelievers) are taken out from among the good fish (believers) at the culmination of Christ's second coming (Matt 13:48-50), but believers are removed from among unbelievers at the rapture (1 Thess 4:15-17).

Finally, the rapture is unmentioned in either of the most detailed second-coming texts—Matthew 24 and Revelation 19. This is to be expected in light of the observations above, because the pretribulational rapture will have occurred seven years earlier.

Rev 3:10 Promises That the Church Will Be Removed Prior to Daniel's Seventieth Week

The issue here is whether the phrase “keep you from the hour of testing” means “a continuing safe state outside of” or “safe emergence from within.”

The Meaning of Ἐκ (Ek)

The Greek preposition *ek* has the basic idea of emergence, but this is not true in every context. Two notable exceptions to the basic idea are 2 Cor 1:10 and 1 Thess 1:10. In the Corinthian passage, Paul rehearses his rescue from death by God. Now Paul did not emerge from a state of death but rather was rescued from that potential danger.

Even more convincing is 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Here Paul states that Jesus is rescuing believers out of the wrath to come. The idea is not emergence out of wrath, but rather protection from entrance into wrath.

Therefore, *ek* can be understood to mean either “a continuing state outside of” or “emergence from within.” Thus no rapture position can be dogmatic at this point. At best, all positions remain possible.

The Meaning of Τηρέω Ἐκ (Tēreō Ek)

It has been argued that if John had meant “to keep from,” he would have used *τηρέω ἀπό* (*tēreō apo*, cf. James 1:27). But it is more than equally true that if John had meant “protection within,” he would have used *tēreō* with *ἐν* (*en*), *εἰς* (*eis*), or *διὰ* (*dia*). The greater burden of proof lies with the mid- and post-tribulational positions since their solution of immunity within does not explain the use of *ek*.

First, *ek* is much closer to *apo* in meaning than it is to *en*, *eis*, or *dia*. The two frequently overlap, and in modern Greek *apo* is absorbing *ek*. When combined with *tēreō*, *ek* much more closely approximates *apo* than it does *en*, *eis* or *dia*.

Second, the phrase *tēreō en* is used three times in the NT (see Acts 12:5; 1 Pet 1:4; Jude 21). In each instance, it implies previous existence within with a view to continuation within. Now, if *tēreō en* means continued existence within, what does *tēreō ek* mean? Since they are anything but synonymous, it quite logically means to maintain an existence outside.

Tēreō Ek in John 17:15

John 17:15 is the only other passage in the NT where *tēreō ek* occurs. This word combination does not occur in the Septuagint. It is assumed that whatever the phrase means here, it also means the same in Rev 3:10.

If *tēreō ek* means “previous existence within,” it contradicts 1 John 5:19 which states that believers are of God and unbelievers are in the evil one. Now if 1 John 5:19 implies that believers are not in the power of the evil one, John 17:15 could not possibly imply that they are in the power of Satan and needing protection. John 17:15 records the Lord’s petition to keep them outside of the evil one.

Since John 17:15 means to keep outside of the evil one, the parallel thought in Rev 3:10 is to keep the church outside of the hour of testing. Therefore, only a pretribulational rapture would fulfill the promise.

The Martyrs in Rev 6:9-11 and 7:14

If Rev 3:10 means immunity or protection within as other positions insist, several contradictions result. First, if protection in Rev 3:10 is limited to protection from God’s wrath only and not Satan’s wrath also, then Rev 3:10 denies the Lord’s request in John 17:15.

Second, if it is argued that Rev 3:10 means total immunity, then of what worth is the promise in light of Rev 6:9-11 and 7:14 where martyrs abound? The wholesale martyrdom of saints during the tribulation demands that the promise to the Philadelphian church be interpreted as “keeping out of” the hour of testing, not “keeping within.”

Summary

1. *Ek* can mean “emergence from within,” or it can mean “a continued state outside.”
2. *Tēreō en* is used in Acts 12:5, 1 Pet 1:4, and Jude 21, and implies “previous and continued existence within.” Therefore *tēreō ek* logically must be understood as “continued existence outside.”
3. If the immunity of saints to wrath through the tribulation was intended to teach a posttribulational rapture, then John would have used *tēreō en, eis,* or *dia* in Rev 3:10.
4. Consistent with the previous observation, *tēreō ek* meaning “to keep within” in John 17:15 would contradict 1 John 5:19 if, in fact, it implied “previous existence within.”
5. If *tēreō ek* in Rev 3:10 implies “previous existence within,” it contradicts the prayer in John 17:15 in limiting immunity to God’s wrath. Or its alleged promise of total immunity is rendered null and void by the slaughter of saints in Rev 6:9-11 and 7:14.
6. Only the interpretation of *tēreō ek* in Rev 3:10 which understands that the Philadelphian church will not enter the tribulation, that is, they will be kept out or guarded from entering, satisfies a consistent exegesis of the phrase. This finding is in perfect harmony only with a pretribulational understanding of the rapture.

Answers to Difficult Questions

1. *Since the phrase “to meet the Lord” in 1 Thess 4:17 (ἀπαντᾷω [apantaō] and ἀπάντησις [apantēsis]) can refer to a friendly city going out to meet the visiting king and escorting him back to the city, does not this phrase point decidedly to a posttribulational rapture?*

First, this Greek verb/noun can refer to either meeting within a city (Mark 14:13; Luke 17:12) or going out of the city to meet and return back (Matt 25:6; Acts

28:15). So the use of this particular word is not at all decisive. Second, remember that Christ is coming to a hostile people in general who will eventually fight against him at Armageddon. So, the pretribulation rapture best pictures the king rescuing, by a rapture, His faithful followers who are trapped in a hostile world and who will later accompany Him when He returns to conquer His enemies and set up His Kingdom (cf. Rev 19:11-16).

2. *Why does Paul write in 1 Thess 5:6 for believers to be alert to “the day of the Lord” if according to pretribulationism they would not be in it?*

Paul exhorts believers in 1 Thess 5:6 to be alert and living godly in a DOL context just as Peter does in 2 Pet 3:14-15 where the DOL experience is clearly at the end of the millennium when the old heavens and earth will be destroyed and replaced with the new. In both cases, they are exhortations to present godly living for true believers in the light of God’s future judgment on unbelievers. These texts really are not determining factors for any positions on the time of the rapture.

3. *Does not Matt 24:37-42, where people are taken out of the world, teach a posttribulation rapture?*

In fact, Matt 24:37-42 teaches just the opposite. First, the historical illustration of Noah (vv. 37-39) teaches that Noah and his family were left alive while the whole world was taken away in death and judgment. This is exactly the sequence to be expected at Christ’s second coming as taught in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt 13:24-43), the parable of the dragnet (Matt 13:47-50), and the sheep-goat nation judgment (Matt 25:31-46). In all of these cases, at the final event in Christ’s second coming, unbelievers are taken away in judgment and righteous believers remain. No, this passage does not teach about the rapture.

4. *Does not a pretribulation rapture result in two second comings of Christ while Scripture teaches only one second coming?*

Not at all. No matter what rapture position one holds, Christ’s second coming is one event which occurs in two parts—Christ coming in the air to rapture the church and Christ coming to earth to conquer, judge, and set up His kingdom.

5. *When Jeremiah writes (30:7), “And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it,” is this not the same kind of language used in Rev 3:10 (kept from) and would not Rev 3:10 then point to a posttribulation rapture?*

The Septuagint (37:7, LXX reference) translates the Hebrew text of Jeremiah

(30:7, Hebrew and English reference) with the verb and preposition combination σῶζω ἀπό (*sōzō apo*) in regard to Israel. They will actually be saved through the judgment and emerge out of it as the people of God over whom Christ will reign as promised to David (2 Sam 7:8-17) and prophesied by Ezekiel (37:11-28). Because *sōzō apo* means “protected in the midst of,” this has no bearing on the meaning of a different verb and preposition used in Rev 3:10 (*ἔρεε ek*). See the earlier discussion on the actual verb/preposition combination in Rev 3:10. Finally, there is no necessary equation of the outcome to Israel and God’s plan for the church.

6. *If pretribulationism is true, why is there no mention of the “church” in heaven in Revelation 4–19?*

It is true that the word for “church” (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*) is not used of the church in heaven in Revelation 4–19. However, that does not mean the church is invisible. There are at least two distinct appearances of the church in heaven. First, the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4–5 symbolize the church. Second, the phrase “you saints and apostles and prophets” in Rev 18:20 refers clearly to the church in heaven. So, what rapture scenario best accounts for the church being in heaven in these texts at this time? A pretribulational rapture.

7. *Why is Revelation addressed to the church, if the church will not experience the tribulation of Revelation 6–19 due to a pretribulational rapture?*

God frequently warned Israel in the OT of impending judgment, even though the generation who received the prophecy would not experience it. As mentioned in the previous answer to Question 2, both Paul (1 Thess 5:6) and Peter (2 Pet 3:14-15) used a future judgment, which the people to whom they wrote would not experience, to exhort God’s people to present godly living. The exact same pattern was followed by John in Revelation. The church was alerted to God’s future judgment of sin on earth as a basis for the church to teach pure doctrine and live holy lives (Revelation 2–3).

8. *If the Day of the Lord occurs at the end of Daniel’s seventieth week, does not the chronological sequence of 1 Thessalonian 4 and 1 Thessalonian 5 teach a posttribulational rapture?*

First, regardless of whether the DOL begins at the beginning or the end of Daniel’s seventieth week, this point does not necessarily determine the time of the rapture. Second, the grammar of 1 Thess 5:1 argues against a close chronological sequence with 1 Thess 4:13-18 by the use of περὶ δέ (*peri de*, 18 times in the NT). In all but four cases an obvious change in time or topic is implied (see Matt 22:31; 24:36; Mark 12:26; 13:32). This prepositional phrase is used by Paul eight times. Every other Pauline use indicates a change in topic. Therefore, it is expected that Paul’s use of *peri de* in 1 Thess 5:1 also indicates

a change in topic and time. This is consistent with his earlier use of *peri de* in this epistle (cf. 4:9).

In 1 Thess 4:13-18, Paul has answered the question concerning the experience of dead loved ones when the rapture comes. But in 5:1 and the following verses, Paul shifts to the day of the Lord and the subsequent judgment upon unbelievers. This is a totally different topic than the rapture and an event that will occur at a different time than the rapture. If 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 is to be taken as one unit of thought, as some have suggested, then Paul's use of *peri de* means nothing. However, if *peri de* is to be explained, it is best interpreted as a major shift in thought within the broad topic of eschatology; only a pretribulational rapture would account for this.

9. *Is there any relationship between the rapture trumpet of 1 Thess 4:17/1 Cor 15:52 and the trumpet of Joel 2:1, or the trumpet of Matthew 24:31, or the trumpet of Revelation 11:15? If so, does this not contradict a pretribulational rapture?*

A careful study of the almost one hundred uses of "trumpet/trumpets" in the OT will quickly advise the student of Scripture not to equate the trumpets in any two texts hastily, without a great deal of corroborating contextual evidence. For example, there is the trumpet used for warning (Jer 6:1), the trumpet used for worship/praise (2 Chr 20:28; Pss 81:3; 150:3; Isa 27:3), the trumpet used for victory (1 Sam 13:3), the trumpet used for recall (2 Sam 2:28; 18:16), the trumpet used for rejoicing (2 Sam 6:15), the trumpet used for announcements (2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 1:34; 2 Kgs 9:13), and the trumpet for dispersement (2 Sam 20:22) to name a few.

After looking at the texts in question, it appears that each trumpet is used for a purpose that is unique and different from the other three. The trumpet of Joel 2:1 is a trumpet of warning that the DOL is near (cf. Jer 6:1). The trumpet of 1 Thess 4:17/1 Cor 15:52 is a trumpet which announces the approaching king (cf. Ps 47:5) so that people may go out to greet Him. The trumpet of Matt 24:31 is a trumpet call to assembly (cf. Exod 19:16; Neh 4:20; Joel 2:15). The trumpet of Rev 11:15 is the seventh in a series of seven and is a trumpet that announces victory (cf. 1 Sam 13:3). There is no compelling reason to equate the rapture trumpet with any of these other three trumpets. Therefore, these texts cannot be used to determine the time of the rapture.

10. *Does not the promise of deliverance for church saints in 2 Thess 1:6-10, at the time when Jesus returns with His angels to judge the world, point to a later rapture time than pretribulational?*

Paul is not writing a detailed, chronological, or even precise prophetic treatise here, but rather is wanting to give the Thessalonians hope that, in the end, God's righteousness will prevail. Like OT prophets (cf. Isa 61:1-2; 2 Pet 1:10-11) Paul has compressed the details so that the range of time is not apparent, nor are all

of the details. The apostle is plainly assuring the Thessalonians that there will certainly be a coming day of retribution for their persecutors. This text really has no bearing on determining the time of the rapture.

11. Does not Rev 14:14 teach a midtribulational rapture?

While the language certainly refers to Christ, the context is of judgment, similar to Rev 19:11-16. The context of the rapture is one of blessing for the saints. Earlier in this article, eight major differences/contrasts between the rapture and the last event of Christ's second coming were discussed. No, Revelation 14:14 does not refer to a midtribulational rapture.

12. Is not a midtribulational view actually a pretribulational view since the "great tribulation" (Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14) does not begin until the middle of Daniel's seventieth week?

To say that real "tribulation" does not begin until the midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week is to make an arbitrary delineation, not to mention contradicting the testimony of at least the first four seals of Rev 6:1-8, which picture the tribulation on earth that will be triggered by Christ from heaven. These seals are described as "birthpangs" and "tribulation" in Matt 24:8-9. Though the ultimate intensity of tribulation will come in the final half of Daniel's seventieth week, the entire period is marked by tribulation. Thus, the only true pretribulational position is the one that places the rapture prior to Daniel's seventieth week.

13. If the church partakes of the first resurrection and if the first resurrection is described in Revelation 20:4, does this not point to a posttribulational resurrection/rapture?

The use of the phrase "first resurrection" in Rev 20:5-6 refers specifically to the posttribulational resurrection of those who will believe in Christ during Daniel's seventieth week, as made clear by the language of Rev 20:4. However, nothing in this phrase limits the "first resurrection" only to this group of people or to this time. The "first resurrection," which is contrasted with the "second death" (Rev 20:6, 14; 21:8)—i.e., the resurrection of all unbelievers—is made up of several additional categories of people who will be resurrected at various times. These include: (1) Christ the first fruits (1 Cor 15:23), (2) church saints (1 Cor 15:23, 50-58) at the rapture, and (3) OT saints (Ezek 37:12-14; Dan 12:2) at the end of Daniel's seventieth week. Therefore, this text does not point to a posttribulational resurrection/rapture.

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The subjects of eschatology in general and various positions on the rapture in particular have generated an enormous body of literature in the last century. This bibliography represents the collected research of contributors to this issue of *TMSJ* as well as additional sources not cited in the articles. To affirm pretribulationism, a response to points raised by other positions is necessary. As a general rule, writings related to the return of Christ to the earth and the millennium have not been included unless they deal with the timing of the rapture also. This bibliography is not exhaustive, but rather suggestive for those wishing to do additional study.

The bibliography's six major categories are (1) General and Introductory Works, (2) Biblical Commentaries, (3) Works on Posttribulationism, (4) Works on Midtribulationism, (5) Works on Pre-Wrath Raptureism, and (6) Works on Pretribulationism. Each section contains monographs, multi-author works, journal articles, and unpublished material, all listed by author.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ronald B. Allen. *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human*. Revised and expanded. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000. 217 pp. \$12.99 [paper]. Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

The first edition of this book appeared in 1984 from Multnomah Press as part of its “Critical Concerns” series. Calling it a revised and expanded edition is certainly inaccurate since it is very difficult to find any noticeable change or upgrade or revision. All chapter headings and sub-headings remain the same as before except for two which were dropped, but with their content just becoming part of the material under the previous subheading. With more than a random check being done, it became increasingly obvious that the content of the book as a whole remains unchanged—the first edition was reviewed by this reviewer [*Grace Theological Journal* 7/1 (1986):135-36] and was practically read again, this time parallel with the second edition.

With a good turn of phrase, a pleasant style of writing, liberal use of anecdotes and illustrations, Allen does hold the reader’s attention, evoking murmurs of agreement with his observations and conclusions, and sometimes a rueful shake of the head or a questioning moue. Strikingly obvious was the fact that the questions asked about and the descriptions given of the contemporary world remain the same for both editions.

One realizes fairly soon after reading the book that it probably would not be read a second time since it is neither a study book, nor a commentary on selected passages of Scripture, nor a detailed presentation on the doctrine of man, nor a focused treatment of moral and ethical dilemmas, nor an in-depth analysis of worldly, ungodly, and secular-humanist elements and ideals harmful to present-day churches and Christian schools. Nor is it a discourse on what the author refers to as ‘biblical humanism.’ However, a blending of snatches of all of these makes it a *primer* on thinking about the badness of man and the goodness he can still show morally, culturally, and socially. The biblical emphasis and evidence on man’s depravity is clearly acknowledged and is not lessened or redefined by pointing to the good humanity can do and has done. Never does Allen suggest that this element of good could possibly win God’s favor. The portrayal of man as a noble savage well underscores why the question “What is man?” validly resurfaces in every generation. Years have come and gone yet the question still begs a philosophical and, even more so, a biblical response. That is what Allen begins to deal with. As a primer, then,

it does pique the reader's interest to pursue some issues in more depth.

The wide variety of anecdotes also provides the reader with interesting "trivial-pursuit" type tid-bits of information at which he might remark, "Hey! I didn't know that!" For example, the designer of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge intended it to glorify the Lord (69). Further, insight into where the author stands on different issues surfaces here and there in a comment or two, e.g., he obviously does not endorse today's unfortunate emphasis on self-esteem (88), but he does appear unfortunately to endorse progressive creationism (38). However, he does commend a positive attitude toward science (163). On the other hand, he evaluates 'scientific creationism' as being oxymoronic because one cannot teach creation without giving attention to the Creator (37). He also delivers a caution against prematurely settling the issue of Bible and science (38). Agreed, in part; but the theologian must assert that scientific theories on origins just cannot be allowed to override the straightforward presentation of creation in the biblical text as though somehow the scientific theory and its extrapolation backwards could hermeneutically inform and stretch that text.

Evangelicals are correctly cautioned from responding unwisely to things going on in the world around them—circumstances and actions to which they have a valid right to respond. Lack of having all the facts before reporting and upbraiding something constitutes lack of wisdom (cf. 39-42). This aspect of wisdom the author returns to later in the book with propositions that tantalize the reader to reflect thereupon, e.g., "We were created by God to be wise" (139), or "Let us be truly human in God's wisdom" (152). Other observations are just as thought-provoking, demanding some reaction from the reader, e.g., "It is precisely because of the high value that Yahweh places in man—who, though fallen, still bears his image—that God himself became man in Christ" (97). Or "When a person comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, he not only has life forever, but is now more man than ever" (101). Or in the book's final paragraph, "Let us therefore luxuriate in our humanity" (180), and in closure, "Only then will we be able to praise God for the majesty that man is" (180). Keep in mind when responding that Allen had previously well underscored both the creatureliness and fallenness of man and had also rhetorically asked, "Does our doctrine of the fallenness of man mean that we are not to be concerned with the ailing and the hurting of the world?" (157). He had also remarked, "The marvel of being man is that man may give praise to God" (179). One could wish for Colossians 3:1-5 and Mark 8:34-38 to have been included to enhance discussion on man being of heavenly use in his world and to stress the need for man to say goodbye to self as part of his self-awareness as one who follows Christ Jesus the Lord. But choice of texts on which to base his thoughts belongs to the author and could always be amended and extended by another.

Despite remarking that it would probably not be read a second time, it is possible that one may refer back to this book not necessarily for doctrinal comment and definition but in order to extract certain stories and illustrations as color for his own sermons.

Randall Balmer. *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2002. viii + 654 pp. \$27.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

The evangelical movement has, in recent years, struggled with its identity, to the point that the theme of the 2002 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society was “Evangelical Boundaries.” Even the most recent edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* notes, “The very nature of evangelicalism never was a unified movement but a collection of emphases based on a common core of belief—a core that itself is now under discussion” (*Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 409).

Seeking to detail those various “emphases” the author of *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* admits to a “quixotic venture” in which he attempts to “provide a sense of both the history and the extraordinary breadth of this popular movement” (vii). And while parts of his effort are admirable, on the whole his work is a disappointing muddle that confuses rather than clarifies the nature of evangelicalism.

Properly speaking the muddle begins with the title. The work is not properly an “encyclopedia” as the author admits when acknowledging that he alone is responsible for all of the articles (although he discloses receiving assistance from several individuals). Nor is it “encyclopedic” in nature; the articles often reflect outdated or incorrect information and the bibliographic well from which the articles draw is very limited.

The problems with this work range from typographical to methodological, but clearly the underlying problem is the author’s inability to define accurately the evangelical movement. More articles relate to American fundamentalism than to evangelicalism. Though the two are related, they are not identical movements.

In terms of layout the book lacks both indexes and useful bibliographies. Articles often have no bibliographic support, and others have only a single reference. The proofreading and editing are also problematic. Charles H. Spurgeon’s name is rendered “Surgeon” (177) and Alva J. McClain is rendered “McLain” (249). Some articles reflect incomplete or outdated information, such as the entry for the *Evangelical Theological Society* (201-2) in which the quotation of the doctrinal statement omits the affirmation of the Trinity added several years ago. When references are cited, they are usually dated; for instance, the entry for Grace Theological Seminary (249) cites the catalogue for 1995. The entry for Jack Hayford (274) makes no mention of the creation of a seminary under his leadership, although this occurred over five years ago. In fact, except for repeated references to another book by the author (*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 2000), only a few bibliographic references are dated after 1995. Theological omissions also occur. In the entry for T. D. Jakes (300), his anti-trinitarianism and other non-evangelical theology are unmentioned.

Beyond these issues, some of the entry selections almost defy explanation. For example, there is an entry for Trent Dilfer (176) containing a nice recitation of his career in the National Football League along with a rather innocuous quotation related to Christianity. Interestingly enough, the entry for Dilfer has more space than that for the Second Coming of Christ (515). The entry on the Overhead Projector (432) is one of the more odd inclusions of this work. Lengthy entries are reserved for several Christian rock bands such as Third Day (576), Stryper (558), Newsboys (408-9), and Jars of Clay (301-2).

This work cannot be recommended as reference for evangelicalism. It is an eclectic and non-cohesive collection of one author's idiosyncratic caricature of evangelicalism, poorly crafted and even more poorly executed.

Meir Ben-Dov. *Historical Atlas of Jerusalem*. New York: Continuum, 2002. xvi + 400 pp. \$50.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

This volume is the English-language edition of a work originally published in Hebrew (Jerusalem: Carta, The Israel Map and Publishing Company, 2000) by the author. Meir Ben-Dov is one of the leading Israeli archaeologists and key advisor to the various ongoing excavations in Jerusalem.

The work blends a thematic and chronological approach to the history of the city of Jerusalem. It details the larger geographic setting of the city, in Israel and the even larger Fertile Crescent, along with the geographic and environmental features. Then comes the history of Jerusalem from the Canaanite period to the modern era. This volume is richly (perhaps sometimes too richly) illustrated with photographs, maps, and drawings (all black and white).

The strength of the text is the general survey of material. The author excels at detailing the religious history of Jerusalem and the role the geographic location in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Also receiving excellent coverage is the role of the European powers, beginning with the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte and ending with General Edmund Allenby and the British and their efforts to gain control of the city and the surrounding region. This work is not without its weaknesses, however. Though Ben-Dov ably defends his maximalist view of the boundaries of Jerusalem after Nehemiah's rebuilding (85-88) vis-à-vis the minimalist view of Michael Avi-Yonah and the intermediate view of Raphael Grafman, he entirely ignores the discussion of various theories related to the location of the Temple and the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount. Given the author's discussion of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian interest in the city, a brief discussion of prophetic views as to the future of Jerusalem would also have been useful.

The flaws in this book are minor, and for the beginning student or those interested in a survey of the history of Jerusalem and an introduction to the basic

historical and cultural geography of the city, this book is recommended.

Craig C. Broyles, ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 272 pp. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Interpreting the Old Testament is a collection of essays on the topic of OT interpretation edited by Craig C. Broyles (associate professor, Trinity Western University), who also contributed two of the essays: "Interpreting the Old Testament" (13-62) and "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon" (157-75). The first of the two establishes the tone for the volume. Broyles claims that all the essays "focus on 'how to'" (20). Throughout the essay he illustrates each step of exegesis by an application to Isaiah 41:21-29. Broyles emphasizes that the issue in exegesis is the divine intent of the text (25). In view of the divine author of Scripture, meditation must "inform each step of exegesis, whereby we prayerfully and respectfully consult the author for each question we pose" (27). Overall, this reviewer found Broyles' approach sensitive to the inspired nature of the biblical text and to the delicate task of the exegete. In response to an increasing application of literary analysis in exegesis, he warns that "we must be extremely cautious that we not apply modern expectations about literary conventions to ancient texts" (56). Unfortunately, his view of the canonization and editing of the OT text lacks clarity (46). As a result, his essay appears to contain contradictions (51, 55 n. 36).

In "Language and Text of the Old Testament" (63-83), David W. Baker (professor of OT and Semitic languages, Ashland Theological Seminary) fails to include the Samaritan Pentateuch in his list of relevant sources to the OT text (69). In addition, he seems to place more confidence in the textual decisions of the editors of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* than they deserve (70). In his treatments of Gen 4:8 and 7:6 he could have shown a greater sensitivity to the translation philosophy of the LXX in the former (72) and to Hebrew idiom in the case of the latter (73). Absent from his discussion of Amos 9:12 is the possibility that the theological views of the LXX translators may have affected their treatment of "Edom" in that passage (79). Baker's unsupported opinion concerning the old crux in Isa 7:14 (82) ignores the significant linguistic and contextual evidence marshalled by such Isaianic scholars as Edward J. Young, Charles Lee Feinberg, and Alec Motyer, as well as the insightful studies published by Walter Kaiser, J. Barton Payne, and Hobart Freeman. In spite of these disappointments, the essay has much to commend it as an introduction to the subject of OT textual criticism.

Paul Edward Hughes (assistant professor, Trinity Western University) provides an excellent historical description of the development of the various methods for the critical study of the Scriptures ("Compositional History: Source, Form, and Redaction Criticism," 221-44). He correctly identifies the conservative

concept that “the biblical interpreter is a neutral observer whose aim is to cull objective data through use of the historical-grammatical method” (222). However, he promptly distances himself from that perspective by first stating that such an approach works better for NT studies. Then he declares that “although meaning can be derived from the historical-grammatical recovery of an author’s intention, if and where possible, to say that this hermeneutical approach is the sole means of obtaining interpretive results remains too narrow” (223). Indeed, Hughes adheres to the questionable opinion that the text of Scripture itself indicates that there is “a broader set of meanings that function beyond the intention of the author” (223). Interestingly, he describes postmodern critics as “more humble in relation to knowledge, suspicious of power structures that they see behind texts and their consented readings, and realistic about the subjective role of the reader in the interpretive act” (225). He certainly does not have the same evaluation of postmodernism as William Dever (see the review of Dever’s book, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* in this issue).

One of the most valuable essays in this collection is that contributed by Richard S. Hess (reader in OT, Roehampton Institute, London, England; “Ancient Near Eastern Studies,” 201-20). Not only does he deal with the important matter of interpreting the historical materials (202-8), he provides an invaluable annotated listing of both general and specialized sources for research (208-20). Librarians will find the latter a helpful acquisitions guide.

Authors from a variety of academic and church backgrounds wrote the volume’s essays. The remainder of the essays include “Reading the Old Testament as Literature” (85-123) by V. Philips Long (professor of OT, Covenant Theological Seminary), “Old Testament History and Sociology” (125-55) by John Bimson (director of studies, OT Faculty, Trinity College, Bristol, England), “The History of Religion, Biblical Theology, and Exegesis” (177-99) by Elmer A. Martens (professor emeritus of OT, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary), and “Theology and the Old Testament” (245-64) by Jonathan R. Wilson (associate professor of Religious Studies, Westmont College).

Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds. *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. 395 pp. (paper), \$29.99. Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian

This book is the collection of a series of papers presented at the annual meeting of the Near East Archaeological Society in 1995. The subject that year was “Syro-Mesopotamia and the Bible.” The Near East Archaeological Society is an association of evangelicals whose members must affirm the twofold doctrinal statement:

- I believe that the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of

God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.

- I believe in the unique Divine inspiration, integrity, and authority of the Bible.

The society is primarily concerned with the archaeological exploration and study of the lands of the Bible and holds its annual meeting in conjunction with the Evangelical Theological Society.

The book consists of 14 essays on themes of ancient Mesopotamian history and archaeology. The articles are not designed to be introductory, but require a level of familiarity with introductory literature and issues involved. The work contains an introduction in which the purpose of the work is detailed as “a description of certain aspects of that [Mesopotamian] civilization that may (or may not) help the reader place the Bible in its greater ancient Near Eastern context” (8). The editors anticipate questions as to the inclusion of material related to Ugarit, Alalakh, and Elba with the notation that, “in this book we will take a very loose definition of Mesopotamia as encompassing some regions of Syria immediately west of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley that were obviously connected culturally to traditional Mesopotamia” (ibid.). A helpful nine-page listing of abbreviations as well as a Scripture and name index are included. Each article contains a significant bibliography at the end. Two minor criticisms are the lack of a subject index and the lack of maps, charts, or other illustrations. The latter would have been very helpful in several of the articles in which even those with a good working knowledge of the people and places would have been well served by a visual anchor.

In terms of content, two significant articles deal with the identity and rule of several Assyrian kings, particularly Sargon, Pul, and Tiglath-Pileser by Steven W. Holloway (68-87) and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (288-329). One article, by Edwin Yamauchi on the “Eastern Jewish Diaspora” (356-77), is especially significant, as it relates to the issue of the continuation of the Jewish racial identity in the face of forced exile and often forced assimilation. Another significant article is that of an editor, Mark W. Chavalas, on the subject of “Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century of Tension” (21-67), in which he details the care that must be taken in seeing (or creating) parallels between biblical texts and various texts discovered in Syro-Mesopotamia (e.g., Mari, Nuzi, Ebla). David C. Deuel, former associate professor of OT at The Master’s Seminary, contributed an article on his area of expertise related to the role and status of royal messengers in the Ancient Near East. Another article, that of Richard E. Averbeck on Sumer and the Bible (88-125), is significant, particularly as it relates to the parallels between the construction of the Solomonic Temple and temples in the Sumerian culture.

All of the articles represent the best in evangelical scholarship in archaeology, Ancient Near East history and civilization, and their proper relationship to biblical studies. This work is highly recommended.

Mal Couch, ed. *A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999. 455 pp. \$25.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

In his Foreword to this volume, general editor Mal Couch recounts his own pilgrimage with the book of Acts. For many years, he resolved to avoid teaching from the book because of the complicated nature of the narrative. However, as his concern arose over the confusion he saw in the contemporary church, he was drawn to reread and study Acts. He has now come to realize that “[e]ven though Acts is a transitional narration, the lessons for today are innumerable for our generation of Bible teachers, missionaries, and pastors” (7). To help others renew a revitalized sense of mission and urgency, Couch has compiled this theology and survey of Acts. Contributors to this work in addition to himself include Paul Benware, Thomas Figart, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Robert Lightner, Steven McAvoy, Russell Penney, and Randall Price.

Parts 1 and 2 of the handbook introduce the reader to the theology of Acts (11-176). Part 1 begins with a chapter on the introductory issues of Acts. Then follow six chapters that discuss the church, Jesus Christ, Prophecy, Demonology, Paul, and the Temple in the book of Acts. Part 2 includes two chapters on the theology and work of the Holy Spirit in Acts. The survey of Acts is a verse-by-verse background guide to the book which comprises Part 3 (177-399). Each chapter of Acts is introduced with a synopsis of its contents, followed by comments on significant people, places, and events in the chapter. The Appendixes of the volume contain a three-page timeline of the events recorded in Acts, followed by three short essays discussing the laying on of hands in the OT and the Gospels, the sign gifts, and progressive dispensationalism and the book of Acts (401-23). Endnotes for each chapter of the handbook appear after the appendixes, with the two chapters of Part 2 [noted as chapters 1 and 2 in the Table of Contents and the body of the text] listed as chapters 8 and 9 (425-55).

The editor has compiled a very valuable introduction to the theology of the book of Acts. The discussion of the theology is based on what Couch views as the main purpose of Acts, “to record history and not develop doctrine” (18). As a theological historical narrative, one can discern at least seven transitions in the book of Acts: from the Gospel to the Epistles, from synagogue to church, from Israel to the church, from Jesus being present to the Holy Spirit being present, from the Spirit being with believers to the Spirit being in believers, from Jews to Gentiles, and from law to grace (18-20). These are what the editor labels “Dispensational Transitions of Acts” upon which are developed the “Dispensational Purposes of Acts” (24-25). These purposes have five categories in the book of Acts. The historical purpose traces the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church while recording Israel’s rejection of the resurrected Jesus during the first thirty years of church history. The theological purpose authenticates the new faith as a work of the Holy Spirit. The apologetic purpose proves that the new movement was well received by civil

government officials. The eschatological purpose develops the mystery of the Kingdom program. The national purpose describes the place of Israel in the plan of God.

This dispensationalist understanding of the purposes of Acts serves as the foundation for the understanding of the specific topics addressed in the remainder of Part 1 and Part 2 of the handbook. The most important subject addressed in this volume is the new work of the Holy Spirit in the dispensation of the church. Crouch states, "When a new dispensation is begun, or a new economy of God's rule initiated, unusual transitional events may occur that are common to neither dispensation" (121). Thus, the ministry of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts has both aspects of continuity and discontinuity with the OT. Most important, unrepeatable works of the Holy Spirit unique to the beginning of the church age also occur. These include the outpouring of the Spirit, "signs and wonders," and the gift of tongues. The handbook contains an excellent discussion of the dispensational understanding of Holy Spirit's ministry in the book of Acts.

Part 3 of the handbook is not as valuable to the reader. Most of the background comments have been gleaned from standard evangelical commentaries on Acts. The reader would be better served reading firsthand such works as F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT); Richard Longenecker, "Acts" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, volume 9; and John Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary). A better exposition of the dispensational understanding of Acts is available in Stanley Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Reading Toussaint after Parts 1 and 2 of the handbook would be very profitable for the expositor of Acts.

The overall impact of this volume is marred by the number of errors uncorrected in the editorial process. The following are a few examples of many that could be recounted. Peter, instead of Paul, is said to have quoted Hab 1:5 in Acts 13:40-41 (90). Iconium is omitted from the locations Paul visited on his first missionary journey (105). Jerusalem, rather than Rome, is stated to be the place Paul was under house arrest (107). Information concerning Philip, one of the seven, is used in explaining what Philip the apostle did (191). Three thousand, not five thousand, were added to the church on the Day of Pentecost (203). Philip, instead of Stephen, is said to have been preaching to the Hellenistic synagogue in Jerusalem (251). Paul is stated to have spent a year and a half in Ephesus when in fact it was about three years (352).

A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles is a good introduction to the dispensational understanding of the book. The volume meets a definite need in the contemporary discussion of the theology of Acts. This reviewer would hope that the editor and publisher would make the needed corrections in further printings to ensure that the impact of this handbook would not be defused by its factual errors.

Jimmy H. Davis and Harry L. Poe. *Designer Universe: Intelligent Design and the Existence of God*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2002. 252 pp. \$10.39 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

Two professors at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, teamed up again to write this sequel to their first offering, *Science and Faith: An Evangelical Dialogue*. Their reading constituency, they noted, would most probably be Christians with an interest in “the relationship of modern science to their biblical faith” (xv). This statement, unfortunately, highlights what is true: those committed to evolution or theistic evolution rarely break the covers of a book on creation and design. Maybe it is expecting too much to hope that some would read this book and be stirred to re-think their worldview on origins.

Criteria, not made clear to the reader, was obviously exercised by the authors as they sought to cover concisely and in survey fashion quite a broad scope of writers on worldviews and the concept of design and purpose down through the ages. The treatment ends up being quite uneven. Readers will obviously differ on what they would like to have seen included, as they skim across material from Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Calvin, Pascal, Tennant, Butler, Paley, Descartes, Hume, Locke, and Aquinas, to name just a few—and that’s omitting mention made of modern-day researchers and writers. The constraints of surveying the material undoubtedly led to more detailed definition and categorization being bypassed. Endnotes are at a minimum, and that may prove to be the weakness of the book in that the reader could very well look for cross-references to other more detailed treatments and not find any pertinent information. The content assumes that the reader is at least aware of the philosophers being referred to and of the scientific theories mentioned. Regular insertion of short paragraphs headed “Observations” provides summaries of what has been presented and points to what is yet to come, or poses appropriate questions arising from what has been discussed.

Given the intense debate today on the age of the earth and on the reality of creation *ex nihilo* and on no pre-existing elements or matter, some cross-referencing to literature on this subject is decidedly preferable. Unfortunately, the reader’s attention is not directed to legitimate resources which critically accept an ‘old-earth’ theory. In fact, one short statement on Michael Behe not being a ‘young-earth’ proponent is suddenly introduced without any further response or explanation (200). It leaves the impression that being in such a category is not the thing to be. Why so? The matter of the age of the earth is not a settled issue in evangelicalism and deserves some response even if it be only a footnoted cross-reference to relevant material thereon. It is disappointing when excellent material authored by reputable scholars on a ‘young earth’ is overlooked. The Big Bang Theory, to be sure, has to be mentioned when dealing with origins and the question of time in relation to the beginning, especially when the origin of matter is not included in the explanation for the beginning of the universe (39), but it should not be left without some critique. Pointing to Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* and his challenging question

“What place, then, for a Creator?” if the universe is completely self-contained, having neither beginning nor end, and just simply is, effectively demonstrates that evidence of design and purpose does not convince of the reality and immanence of God.

The fine-tuning of the universe, the uncommon, rare, state of the earth, intelligent design, irreducible complexity, information systems, and interdependence of living organisms all receive due attention in chapters 3-6. Reading of hadrons, leptons, and elemental bosons, of DNA and RNA, of string theory, and of an extra-dimensional universe will alert one to just how much he may have forgotten from past courses and of how much he has yet to learn! Again the point is made that scientists will not necessarily be coerced into acknowledging a Designer just because there appears to be design (109, 114, 194). Knowing the Designer perhaps comes first and means that the researcher and observer finds design and is also awed and amazed at the beauty of His handiwork (see Chapter 7, “Awe and Wonder”).

Some of the headings in the outline are humorous and bring forth a brief smile or moue. “Locke and the Key to Design,” or “Religion Boyles Down to Design, or “The Butler Did It,” or “Marshall Newton Tames the Wild, Wild Universe,” or “Where’s the Beef?” may have some mnemonic value.

This reviewer did find the book stimulating his desire to turn again to the bookshelves and to pluck off a couple of volumes for a re-read, namely Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, John Byl’s *God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space and the Universe*, and Stuart Burgess’ *Hallmarks of Design: Evidence of Design in the Natural World*.

Editorial laxity may be evidenced in that page numbers for Chapter 2 are cited differently on the page than for other chapters, and that Figure 6.3 is placed at the bottom of the page before it is introduced and referenced two pages later (169, 171).

Davis and Poe’s book could be profitably used if it is meshed with additional reading assigned by and extra notes supplied by the instructor.

William G. Dever. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. xiii + 313 pp. \$25.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

When a scholar, who openly declares his own secular humanism (x) and who denies biblical inerrancy (21, 62-63) and supernaturalism (46), raises an alarm over the infiltration of the Society of Biblical Literature by radical revisionists (7; “new nihilists,” 23) and deplores the deconstructionist tendencies of so-called literary criticism in the field of biblical studies (10-19), it is certainly high time that inerrantists wake up and remove their rose-colored glasses. In addition, one must

remember that the author of this volume has been an open opponent of “biblical archaeology” for a quarter century (33). Dever associates the subject matter of his book with current issues in Jesus studies when he declares, “the malaise in the scholarly pursuit of ‘the historical Jesus’ parallels almost exactly the current crisis in the search for ‘the historical Israel.’ The same methodological issues are involved” (3). However, he does not reveal the parallels nor does he return to the topic again.

In an insightful summary of postmodernism (25), the author demonstrates that it is the latest contributor to the current historiographical crisis. As much as many evangelicals (including this reviewer) become nauseated with the overabundance of presentations, books, and essays on postmodernism, it is an enemy of biblical faith whose strategies conservatives must understand if they are to avoid its leavening influence. What is more sickening than the proliferation of essays on postmodernism is the inroads it has made even in the most evangelical of pulpits and podiums.

The author’s main concern is with the neglect of archaeology and the way that its examination of the biblical world has been treated as irrelevant by the revisionists (26). Dever explains that the demise of history and historical exegesis is connected with the neglect of archaeology in institutions for biblical studies. He identifies Philip R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson, Niels Peter Lemche, Keith W. Whitelam, and Israel Finkelstein (who is less radical than the previous four) as the key proponents of revisionism (27, 28-44). The insidious nature of revisionists is best seen in their avoidance of terms like “deconstruction” and “new literary criticism,” or their denial that these terms describe their position. Seminary deans ought to keep in mind Dever’s sage observation: “I think that it is always instructive to pay more attention to what people actually do, than to what they say or think they are doing” (27). One may deny having any part in harmful aspects of literary criticism, but what have they been writing and teaching?

Granted, Dever sometimes may be an alarmist (by his own admission, 38), and he has written a clearly pejorative description of revisionists while claiming that he does not employ “revisionist” in “a necessarily pejorative sense” (47-48 n. 47). However, all faults aside, his warning is valid and solidly demonstrated.

In all honesty, however, the same standards must be applied to Dever’s volume. In some ways his discourse amounts to “the pot calling the kettle black.” What difference is there between the neo-nihilist’s denial of biblical historicity and Dever’s insistence that the biblical accounts concerning the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, and the Israelite conquest of Canaan are nothing more than “‘historicized fiction’ at best” (62-63; cf. 97-98, 121)? He denies any historical value to Ruth, Esther, Job, and Daniel since he has determined that they are merely “historical novellae with contrived ‘real-life settings’” (99). Indeed, though the author criticizes the revisionists for treating the Hebrew Bible as “‘pious fiction,’ in effect a literary hoax” (102), he is not far removed from that position himself. He sees the greatest historical value in 1 and 2 Kings (101) and Judges (122-23).

At what point will critics allow the text to stand as an independent historical witness produced by accurate ancient historians? Current revisionists and self-acclaimed historians (Dever included) manifest academic hubris and provincialism when they present themselves as more objective, more sophisticated, and far more accurate than the ancient biblical writers. What difference is there between the elite intellectuals whom Dever claims wrote the Bible (105) and “scholars” like Dever and Thompson? The writers of Scripture lived the very history Dever and the revisionists are attempting to rewrite on the basis of their self-proclaimed superior knowledge (what Dever himself calls “a curious conceit,” 265).

Dever laments that there has been no dialogue between biblical studies and archaeology (80). That would be like expecting the medical profession (here being compared to biblical studies) to dialogue with religious groups denying the reality of disease or of bodily existence (modern humanistic archaeology). Of what use would such dialogue be? To put it in biblical terms, “what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor 6:15, NASB). When both biblical theology and biblical archaeology have been derided, demonized, and discarded unilaterally (83), where is there any room for dialogue? Obviously, the author is calling for dialogue among fellow secular humanists, the new elite, the new self-proclaimed authorities (no man of faith is a “scholar” according to Dever, 98 n. 1), claiming greater wisdom than God Himself (whom such humanists have conveniently fictionalized as a mere figment of ignorant human imagination). Ironically, the author himself recognizes that his attitude does not foster dialogue (88).

The symbiosis model of an indigenous origin of Israelites in the 13th–12th centuries B.C. in the central region north of Jerusalem is the current archeological fad (110-19). It ignores two factors: (1) Evidence for the 13th–12th centuries does not prove an absence of an Israelite presence in the 15th–14th centuries. (2) According to the biblical record, the invading Israelites were not to destroy everything in their path, but, to the contrary, were to take over and utilize existing residential structures, cisterns, presses (olive and wine), cisterns, and vineyards (Deut 6:10-12; 19:1)—and that is what the Hebrew Bible records that they did (Josh 24:13).

Speaking of the Merneptah stele, Dever announces that “one unimpeachable witness in the court of history is sufficient” (118). What about allowing Scripture to be that witness? Robert Dick Wilson ably defended the *a priori* nature of biblical evidence in his classic work, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Moody, 1959 reprint). By elevating the evidence of an Egyptian pharaoh over the evidence of Scripture, Dever betrays his prejudice. Sadly, he recognizes the problem in others, but does not see it in himself. Later in the book he asks, “How is it that the biblical texts are always approached with postmodernism’s typical ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ but the nonbiblical texts are taken at face value? It seems to be that the Bible is automatically held guilty unless proven innocent” (128).

In Chapter 4 (“Getting at the ‘History behind the History’: What Convergences between Texts and Artifacts Tell Us about Israelite Origins and the

Rise of the State,” 97-157) the author presents a masterful defense of the historical accuracy of biblical descriptions of the Solomonic era. Throughout Chapters 4 and 5 Dever illuminates his discussions with archaeological evidence punctuated by maps, drawings, and photos. He demonstrates that the archaeological evidence confirms the city gates (131-38), the administrative districts (138-44), and the architecture of the Temple (144-57) in the Solomonic era. Dever argues that it strains credulity to claim (as the revisionists do) that writers in the Hellenistic period would be capable of inventing such a detailed record of the 10th–9th centuries B.C. (137, 157; esp. 275-77).

Chapter 5 (“Daily Life in Israel in the Time of the Divided Monarchy,” 159-243) discusses a number of historical issues including the synchronism of biblical king lists (160-67) and the Assyrian invasion in the days of Sennacherib and Hezekiah (167-72). In the latter, Dever fails to mention Isaiah’s detailed lists of cities affected by the Assyrian campaigns (e.g., 10:28-32 with 12 towns). His main emphases are on the folk religion that existed during the divided monarchy (173-98), fortifications (198-202), the presence of literacy in ancient Israel (202-21), and commerce (221-30). Rounding out the chapter are brief discussions of pottery (230-34), art (especially as related to seals and ivories, 234-39), and secondary royal residences (239-45).

At times Dever seems to contradict himself. In the discussion of folk religion, for example, he repeatedly harps on how the Bible “almost totally ignores” (173) the existence of folk religion together with its various artifacts (like the “mold-made terra-cotta female figurines,” 193; or, the small altars, 188-90). In the matter of the small altars, he again largely ignores passages like Isa 27:9. However, he states that the biblical writers knew what they were talking about: “the religious situation about which they complained was real, not invented by them as a foil for their revisionist message” (195). Even at that, Dever still leaves the reader with the impression that he would be suspicious of and question the truth of any religious literature that is devoted only to that religion. That seems a bit simplistic and unrealistic. The Bible does present only one religion as true. That does not mean, however, that the Bible is inaccurate in its description of that religion or culture just because it does not describe any opposing cults in great detail.

Contrary to Dever’s antipathy to the historical authenticity of writing in texts like Deut 6:6-9 and Exod 17:14 (he deems them “anachronistic,” 204), there is far more evidence of alphabetic writing centuries before the divided monarchy than he admits. For example, the 16th–14th century graffiti at Serabit el-Khadem cannot be omitted from the discussion of early literacy. If these informal inscriptions were actually left behind by Semitic slaves to the Egyptians, it would demonstrate that the common people (about whom Dever is normally very concerned, cf. 105, 173-74) were literate even down to the lowest classes. Interestingly, championing the common folk is a charge Dever makes against the revisionists (262). Inscriptions like those at Serabit el-Khadem should also be evaluated with regard to the Mosaic references to writing. When the revisionists dismiss evidence in this fashion, Dever

asks, “What can one say when scholars resort to such desperate measures to deny or to suppress evidence that may threaten their cherished theories?” (208-9).

In the final chapter (245-94) Dever revisits some of the issues he had introduced in the beginning of the volume. He summarizes the relationship of postmodernism and deconstructionism to the revisionists and the impact it is having on biblical studies (245-66). While bringing his conclusions to bear upon the biblical record and its historicity as revealed through archaeology (267-74), Dever provides a very clear definition of what archaeology cannot do and what it can do (269; cf. 282). Next, he wrestles with the issues of secular history, theology, faith, and hermeneutics (281-90). Lastly, the author presents a brief essay on the impact of the Bible on Western tradition (290-93) and offers a final defense of his own secular humanism (293-94).

His answers to the questions within the book’s title are forthright: “They knew a lot; and they knew it early, based on older and genuinely historical accounts, both oral and written” (273). Among his many parting shots at revisionists, the author notes that they have not really addressed a key problem to their view—that of the Septuagint, a translation prior to the second century B.C. of the revisionists’ yet nonexistent Hebrew Bible (274).

Putting criticism of Dever’s own anti-biblicism aside, and granting that he is at times supportive of the Hebrew Bible in his own humanistic way, no serious student of the Hebrew Bible should ignore this volume. Every evangelical should read it and understand that we are in a battle for the Bible as the Word of God, inerrant and authoritative for doctrine and practice. Dever’s warnings make it crystal clear that it is time for evangelicals to re-evaluate ecclesiastical and academic leaders (pastors and teachers alike) who are enamored with the Society of Biblical Literature and attracted to secular humanism, liberal literary criticism, deconstructionism, and minimalism.

This volume proves that every evangelical seminary’s curriculum should include the requirement that all graduates not only be steeped in the biblical languages (3), but well-acquainted with the following archaeological finds that provide clear testimony to the authenticity and historicity of the biblical text: the Tel Dan inscription (29, 128-29, 166-67), Hezekiah’s tunnel inscription (30, 94), the Mesha stele (32), the Ekron inscription (39), Merneptah’s stele (42, 94, 118), and the ‘Izbet Sartah abecedary (114, 116). To neglect these things is to strip the biblical scholar of the weapons necessary to vanquish the revisionist approach to the Scriptures and to respond to Dever’s own form of deconstructionism.

Stanley A. Ellisen. *Parables in the Eye of the Storm: Christ’s Responses in the Face of Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001. 272 pp. \$10.39 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The late, long-time professor of biblical literature at Western Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, finished this clear work after retiring. It stems from a 1960s doctoral dissertation, "The Hermeneutics of the Parables," at Dallas Theological Seminary, plus a teaching career of learning and crafting.

Ellisen sees a grasp of Jesus' parables, one-third of His teaching, as the key to being properly impacted by His words. He views parables in the context of opposition. His writing is lucid, careful in word artistry, and colorful as well as scholarly. Ellisen felt that since Jesus was never boring, he should not be. He weighs every statement to reveal the need provoking each story, main factors in a situation, the chief idea, supports for the interpretation, and how principles from each parable apply cogently today.

Among discussions is the messianic Kingdom (Chapter 2), a theme Ellisen keeps foremost, plus exegetical guidelines for interpretation (Chapter 4). Other chapters discuss hints of disaster in early parables, mysteries of the Kingdom, and stories on entering the Kingdom, servanthood, human duty and God's concern, preparing for the Kingdom, future rewards, and rejection/loss. An epilog summarizes the book's highlights.

The hermeneutics discussion discourages allegorizing, foreign moral generalizations, redaction criticism, and destructive denials by The Jesus Seminar about words being from Jesus. Five steps capture each parable's main message: identify the problem that provoked Jesus to cast a lesson in a parable, find the key idea, coordinate details with this key, clarify and defend the chief point, and apply relevantly what Jesus aimed to spotlight.

As this reviewer understands Ellisen's idea of the Matthew 13 mysteries, Ellisen sees the mysteries as relating not to the OT but to a new kingdom phase until Jesus comes to fulfill the OT expectation. However, it appears better to relate parabolic points of Matthew 13 to the same anticipated OT Kingdom, these giving facets pertinent to that Kingdom expectation after Israel's rejection and in the interadvent age before the Kingdom comes. For example, despite wide Israelite rejection, the forecast kingdom will succeed in that various reactions to its message will relate to whether people will enter it or not when it comes (soils, wheat and tares). Also in view is a present-age development of interests related to the future Kingdom so that at its second-advent coming many will have qualified to enter it (mustard seed, leaven), the Kingdom's value (treasure, pearl), separation of saved and unsaved when the Kingdom arrives (tares, dragnet), and giving the message pertaining to the kingdom to prepare people for it (Householder).

Ellisen argues that the OT predicted a kingdom on earth to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 7). He adds that Jesus speaks about a kingdom with spiritual values but on earth. "The notion of a spiritual kingdom in human hearts without these outward dimensions was foreign to the thinking of the prophets, as well as to John" (as in Matt 3:3). John expected the Messiah to reestablish an empire in place of David's, so did Luke's Gospel in 1:32-33 and Matthew's Gospel (33). The Kingdom Jesus referred to was rejected by many Israelites, and He will

set it up at His future advent, restoring Israel and reigning righteously. “Mysteries” in Matthew 13, in view of national rejection of the Messiah, refer to facets Jesus will effect in His Kingdom plans, using the present age before He fulfills the covenant plan to Israel. At the same time, He blesses the receptive of other nations also. Jesus pursues a course in which aspects that the OT had not stipulated (“mysteries”) must occur before Israel’s national fulfillment. In these, Jesus opens up “His broader purposes of world redemption” (38), part of God’s intent via international aspects of the covenant with Abraham.

Chapter 3 defines a parable (43) and distinguishes between valid biblical allegory and parable. It gives reasons why human allegorical interpretations are wrong; they read foreign ideas into Scripture and differ from valid biblical allegory. Ellisen notes the advantages of parables to convey truths: the stories’ universal appeal, the potency of provocative analogies, simplicity, and stimulating hearers’ objective judgment.

The book appears to be the best yet among premillennial works in articulating crystal-clear summaries of most parables and defending these by interpretive principles. Ellisen makes vivid use of customs to elucidate parables, and pinpoints relevant issues in well-organized paragraphs headed by bold captions. The sower and soils (Matthew 13 and parallels) has rocky soil refer to “superficial, party-going fans” who loved Jesus’ miracles but “deserted Him when the party was over.” Jesus depicts via rocky and thorny areas those who are not truly saved. Leaven does not depict evil, but a positive idea: despite rejection of Jesus up through Matthew 12, Kingdom interests will prosper as God uses an interadvent era by the dynamic of the Holy Spirit working within human lives (John 14:16-17; 102), corresponding to yeast spreading in dough. Treasure and pearl depict a kingdom of such worth that no sacrifice or effort is too great in light of it. The friend at midnight (Luke 11) does not urge persistence in prayer per se, but the giving of the neighbor inside to show goodness (and God as the loving Father doing this much more, vv. 11-12). Yet God’s character encourages persistent, confident praying.

Endnotes for chapters reflect wide research in relevant literature of various viewpoints. The last two pages index discussions of thirty-nine parables. Only a high rating does justice to this book for teachers, students, church leaders, and Christians in general. It is very readable, relevantly stirring, and has many sound perceptions on issues.

Norman L. Geisler, H. Wayne House, and Max Herrera. *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001. 336 pp. \$12.79 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Two well-known evangelicals and a graduate student (Herrera) at Southern

Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina, team for this volume. They reason that “openness of God” advocates have departed from orthodoxy. But more than this, they attempt to show in detail, in eleven well-organized chapters, that the God of traditional Christian belief does know all things ahead of time and does not change His purposes or need to learn anything when it happens.

The book’s positive thrust relates what God’s attributes mean, why believers can live confidently, and why it is vital to fight the battle against theories that represent God as far less than He is. The book begins with a section about neotheistic concepts of God by writers such as Gregory Boyd. Other chapters cover God’s omniscience, eternity, immutability, simplicity, impassibility, relativity to sovereignty, dangers of neotheism, and the issue of whether neotheism is orthodox. Their decision is that neotheism is not orthodox. Appendix One reviews what church confessions taught; Appendix Two deals with whether neotheism accords with theological tradition (they say it does not); Appendix Three responds to Clark Pinnock’s book, *Most Moved Mover*, issued when *The Battle for God* was well along. Ending the work is a six-and-a-half-page bibliography, then a subject index.

The chapters offer positive biblical support for the aspects of God that are their focus, pertinent beliefs of early fathers, and later statements by leaders such as the Reformers. They observe neotheist arguments from Bible texts and respond to these. Such a gradual covering of so many issues and passages thoroughly stimulates the serious reader with its overall impact of varied reasoning. At the same time, users will find the book quite readable.

Key examples surface, such as Isaiah 38 and Jer 26:19 regarding whether God changes when He tells Hezekiah he is to die and then answers the king’s petition with fifteen more years to live. Did God in His plan face a new detail and change to deal with it? The authors contend that God, without changing His eternal decision about the length of Hezekiah’s life, did interact with him truthfully and from his standpoint grant him more years beyond that illness. They reason that God could not promise fifteen years if He did not know and control the future. They also cite biblical texts about God’s purpose being steadfast (e.g., Job 42:2; Pss 135:6; 125). When Abraham obeyed God (Gen 22:12) and God said, “Now I know that you fear me,” He did not learn something new. (1) He already knew the faith was real, yet tested him to show the reality; (2) if God knew the faith was real and was trying to gauge it, He did not even know the present sufficiency, and this would limit God more than free theists propose; (3) “Know” can mean such things as “confirm” His knowledge, know in a special sense even what one knows in another sense, as God has eternal knowledge.

The authors consider the following ideas of Pinnock to be unorthodox: that God has a body (320), that Scripture errs as in prophecies that were wrong or went unfulfilled (321), and that Jesus made a mistake in saying no stone would be left on another (Matt 24:2), yet some were (321-22).

The bibliography is lengthy, but does not cite some of the other best answers to “openness” theories. One can check Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*:

The Diminished God of Open Theism (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce Ware, editors, *Still Sovereign* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995; chapters by various authors); and John Frame, *No Other God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001). The last work came out too late to be consulted in *The Battle for God*. Among good articles defending the traditional view are: the series in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12/2 (Fall 2001); John MacArthur, "Open Theism's Attack on the Atonement," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12/1 (Spring 2001):3-13; and Mike Stallard, "The Open View of God: Does He Change?," *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* 5/2 (Fall 2001):5-25.

What is the value of *The Battle for God*? It is a very useful compendium of neotheist claims that diminish God, with direct answers on a great number of aspects involved in the debate. It is well worth reading and absorbing.

Hank Hanegraaff. *The Prayer of Jesus*. Nashville: W Publishing Group [Thomas Nelson], 2001. 100 pp. \$7.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

An excellent evangelical writer wrote this in the small format patterned after Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez*. The sub-title is "Secrets of Intimacy with God."

Strong points abound in the light, popular style that makes the book eminently readable and a quick study. Illustrations are clear. The book makes points that Scripture confirms. For example, it perceives a refreshing relationship between the use of God's Word and prayer as helpful to the person in his own holiness, in getting answers, and gaining reward. Most comments on the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (Matt 6:9-13) give relevant, rich lessons. The book is correct about prayer not being a way to pressure God, but a means to conform believers to His will and learn dependence on Him (28). Chapter 8 on the whole armor (Eph 6:10-17) is profitable: when Christians pray "lead us not into temptation . . .," they should put on the armor in sync with the Lord (76). Worthwhile principles end the book. Examples of these include seeing prayer mainly as producing a relationship with God, confessing sins daily, getting into God's Word, discovering one's secret place, and prioritizing communion with God.

Debatable points appear. Though the author faults Wilkinson's book for its many illustrations, he spends much time on one illustration after the other. Readers learn about Tiger Woods, Joni, and others. In-depth comments on Scripture are sometimes sacrificed. Some comments raise questions. An example is the idea that Jesus could have prayed the so-called "Lord's prayer," the one He taught His disciples, including the words, "forgive us. . . ." Hanegraaff reasons that Jesus could ask to be forgiven because He took others' sins and needed forgiveness for these though He Himself was sinless (32-33). Such logic is a flawed attempt to justify

calling the prayer “the Lord’s prayer.” A better approach is that Jesus provided a prayer for disciples to pray. The true Lord’s prayer is in John 17. In Matthew 6 Jesus said, “When you pray, say. . . .” He did not say “pray as I do when I say. . . .” However, it is true that other details in the disciples’ prayer of Matthew 6 are parts of Jesus’ prayer life.

The broader context of Matthew 5–7 deals with those who will do God’s and Jesus’ will. Jesus is often speaking to “you,” His audience (5:14, 15, 21, 22, 25, 27-30, 31-32, 34-37, 38-42, 43-48; 6:1-4; and many other times). In Matthew 6, Jesus says, “And when you pray . . . I say to you . . . But you, when you pray, . . . when you have shut your door, pray to your Father . . . your Father knows the things you have need of . . . In this manner, therefore, pray. . . .” The context right after the prayer is also of note: “For if you forgive . . . your heavenly Father will also forgive you . . .” (6:14-15). In Luke 11:2-4, Jesus teaches the same essential way to pray when a disciple asks, “Lord, teach us to pray . . . ,” and here too Jesus says, “When you pray, say. . . .” The context that follows in Luke 11:5-13 focuses on the disciples as the ones praying in accord with the model.

The book has much to commend it, and will refresh mature teachers as well as be a good brief help to leaders, encouraging others to read, with some cautions. The illustrations will entertain and retain some. But many books on prayer will feed more solidly: Donald A. Carson’s *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, Lehman Strauss’ *Sense and Nonsense about Prayer*, O. Hallesby’s *Prayer*, and works by Andrew Murray, E. M. Bounds, and John MacArthur.

Edward Hindson. *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future*. Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series. Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG/Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2002. xiv + 241 pp. \$17.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Dr. Ed Hindson is currently professor of religion, dean of the Institute of Biblical Studies, and assistant to the chancellor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. His accomplishments in ministry and academia are many, including being a translator for the *New King James Version* (Thomas Nelson, 1982) and being an executive board member of the Pre-Trib Research Center. Among his books, my favorite has been *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Baker, 1971).

The Book of Revelation was previously published as *Approaching Armageddon* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1997). It is a well-written commentary suitable for use as a textbook in Sunday schools, Bible institutes, and Bible colleges. The author takes a clear premillennial and pretribulational position, based on a futurist interpretation of Revelation. Most matters of interpretation are consistent with a majority of commentators within that camp. Rather than listing the many points of agreement, this review will mention some of the areas of weakness and

matters of disagreement.

In his identification of the 24 elders in Revelation 4, Hindson fails to mention the possibility that they could be spirit beings equivalent to the “thrones” mentioned in Col 1:16 (58-59). He identifies the four living creatures as seraphim rather than as cherubim, even though he observes that their “description is taken from Ezekiel 1:10, where the prophet also saw these creatures of God” (59). According to Ezek 10:14-15, however, those creatures are specifically identified as cherubim. In the cry of the four living creatures (“Holy, holy, holy,” Rev 4:8) Hindson sees an indication of the Trinity (59) rather than an emphatic Semitic triplet. What kind of threefold existence would he find in triplets like “a ruin, a ruin, a ruin” (Ezek 21:27) or “land, land, land” (Jer 22:29)? In John’s list of those unable to open the book in the Father’s hand, those “under the earth” (Rev 5:3) are identified as being demonic, but without any substantiation for that identification (64).

One of the biggest issues concerning the book of Revelation is the matter of the chronological sequence of the three different series of judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls). Hindson seems to take a view that would not be sequential (“we cannot simply slice up the Revelation into strictly sequential events,” 77). He repeatedly reminds the reader that the “order of events is always the big picture first, then the snapshots” (80; cf. 77). The reader will look in vain, however, for a clarification regarding this matter of sequence (cf. 128). Quoting one commentator’s observation that the bowl judgments “can hardly be recapitulation” (169, citing Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Moody, 1995] 247), Hindson seems to indicate a view consistent with a linear progression of the three series of judgments. This reviewer would highly recommend the work of Gary Cohen (*Understanding Revelation* [Moody, 1968]) on this issue—a work listed in the select bibliography but never cited in the text of this volume.

It must be admitted that a number of the descriptions of judgments possess striking similarities to nuclear explosions (97-98, 99, 101). However, it would be well to remember that those judgments could be the work of divine power alone, without the employment of any humanly-devised weaponry. Comparing the judgments to nuclear warfare might be helpful in picturing the nature of the devastation, but should not be employed to identify the mechanism.

The author identifies the “kings of the east” (Rev 16:12) as “an alliance of non-Arab Muslim nations led by Iran and the Muslim republics from the former Soviet Union” (110). However, his interpretation could be an example of what he himself describes as “one of the greatest problems with interpreting biblical prophecy . . . the tendency to view the future through the eyes of the present” (147). Confusion mars the identification of the woman in Revelation 12. Hindson declares that she represents “converted Israel during the Great Tribulation” (139), but also says that the “remnant of her seed” (Rev 12:17) is made up of those who “are converted Jews who have come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah” (139). On the other hand, he states, “Only by viewing the woman as Israel and the ‘rest of her offspring’ as converted Jews of the Great Tribulation does this section make any

sense at all" (140).

Throughout his discussion of Babylon in the book of Revelation, Hindson indicates that it is the city of Rome as well as the European (i.e., "revived Roman") Empire (199-200, 203, 216-18). His strongest argument against identification with a future literal Babylon is that if "we have to wait for Babylon to be rebuilt, there is no doctrine of imminency!" (157). The weakest argument he offers is that it would "overliteralize" the OT prophecies (156).

By identifying Ezekiel 38-39 and Isa 63:1-6 with the "final Battle of Armageddon" (166; cf. 171), the author fails to distinguish between the battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel and the three separate battles (Valley of Jehoshaphat, Edom, and the plain of Megiddo) involved in the campaign that could be referred to as Armageddon (the concluding battle). Indeed, Hindson himself concludes that Armageddon "is probably best viewed as a *war* that destroys most of the earth, as well as a final *battle* focused in the Middle East" (166-67, emphasis original). Some would place the battle of Ezekiel 38-39 in the middle of the tribulation period. The campaign of Armageddon could be identified as consisting of three separate battles (all characterized in Scripture as being like the treading of a winepress) beginning with the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12-14), the valley created by the dividing of the Mount of Olives at Christ's return (Zech 14:4-5). The second battle will take place near Bozrah where Christ will stain His garments with blood when the restored Israelites fail to follow His orders to capture the territory of Edom (Isa 63:1-6; cf. Obad 15-21). The final battle is in the valley of Jezreel near Megiddo and gives its name to the campaign (Rev 16:16; 19:11-18). This three-battle scenario is implied by Hindson's explanation that the 200-mile river of blood (Rev 14:20) is equivalent to the distance between Bozrah and Megiddo (159).

Rather than translating the Greek *gegonen* in Revelation 16:17 and 21:6 as "It is done" and characterizing it as a sense of finality (171, 215), this reviewer would suggest the sense of fulfillment ("It has come to pass") as more appropriate to the employment of the Greek verb. Hindson's statement that "the second temple" was destroyed "by the Romans in A.D. 70" (217) errs in not including the temple built by Zerubbabel (Hag 1:12-2:3).

The Book of Revelation is an introductory commentary on the book of Revelation. It contains many charts and tables and concludes each chapter with a series of questions for review (an improvement over the fill-in-the-blank exercises in the 1997 edition). Endnotes are employed rather than footnotes, making the text itself quite readable, but this reviewer personally finds endnotes unnecessarily disruptive and frustrating because of the need to constantly flip back and forth from the context to the back of the book and back again. Since the running heads on each page fail to identify the chapter, the reader sometimes must try to find the beginning of the chapter to be certain where he is reading in order to access the right set of endnotes. The absence of any kind of indexes forces the reader to thumb through page after page looking for that particularly noteworthy item that he knows is there somewhere but has no other aid to find it.

Recently this reviewer participated in a prophetic conference with the author, who informed him that a number of refinements have been made in the material contained in this volume. The heading for the discussion of the seventh church should be “Laodicea: Putrid Church” (48). Part VI should be identified with Revelation 14–19 instead of “Revelation 14–20” (151). Therefore, the title page that is currently for “Revelation 21–22” (209) should be corrected to “Revelation 20–22” and should be inserted before Chapter 20.

James B. Jordan. *Creation in Six Days. A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 1999. 265 pp. \$12.00 (paper).
Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Jordan directs Biblical Horizons Ministries, Niceville, Florida. In this volume he defends the historic view that in Genesis 1 God created all things in six, normal, twenty-four-hour days. Eight chapters critique views that hold literary features to dictate some meaning other than the chapter’s “plain historical narrative sense” (9). Jordan opposes framework theories of Bruce Waltke and Meredith Kline, John Collins’ “anthropomorphic days” of long but unspecified duration and overlapping periods, and John Sailhamer’s idea that the “earth” in Gen 1:2ff. is only Palestine, not the entire earth. The book does not deal with the “Gap View” of 1:1-2 and the “Age-Day View” of the six days, since other sources deal well with these (22-23).

Careful documentation shows where to find writings of the other scholars. Jordan courteously but vigorously reveals how various views misrepresent a literal understanding of Genesis 1 as necessitating contradictions. He himself holds a literal view, but one that makes better sense, without contradictions. He says that scholars manufacture problems where they are unnecessary (13), as in failing to grasp that God could cause light before He created light-bearing bodies (1:3), as He will in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:23).

Sailhamer’s “Limited Geography” has Gen 1:2ff. speaking only of Canaan. Jordan reasons that Sailhamer has the company of only a few, such as the medieval Jews, Rashi, and Puritan John Lightfoot. A great majority of other Jewish scholars make no mention of limiting the perspective to Palestine (132). Among many things Jordan finds strange is how Sailhamer has “earth” in 1:1 refer to the whole earth but in 1:2ff. has it meaning only Palestine.

Appendixes A–D pursue further what Jordan sees as errant views. Throughout, Jordan thinks that other views’ appeal in “a too-ready acceptance of many of the questionable assumptions of modern science . . . coupled with the pervasiveness of a gnostic, or nonhistorical attitude toward the Christian religion.”

Jordan is provocative in pointing out reasoning that he feels misrepresents details in Genesis 1. He is usually clear, now and then puzzling, but overall can

stimulate serious readers to consider how some are leading evangelicals astray on creation matters. He can stir readers to think carefully about what the text most reasonably says and to believe this. The reviewer finds Jordan's major creation claims to be true to what Scripture itself says and agrees that evangelicals ought to devote careful attention to Genesis 1 and not buy into misleading views that dazzle with the aura of big names.

Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2001. xxiii + 440 pp. \$39.95 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Beautifully illustrated (242 illustrations), well-written, and superbly documented (592 footnotes and 518 bibliographic entries), this volume should be the textbook of choice for college and seminary courses in manners and customs of ancient Israel. Focusing on the Iron Age (1200–586 B.C.; xix, xxiii), King and Stager have produced a very usable and valuable reference work for the practical application of archeological data to a descriptive study of life in ancient Israel.

The major sections of this volume are: "Introduction: The Importance of the Everyday Life" (1-19), "The Israelite House and Household" (21-84), "The Means of Existence" (85-200), "Patrimonial Kingdom" (201-58), "Culture and the Expressive Life" (259-317), and "Religious Institutions" (319-81). The order of the volume is patterned after a "three-tiered patrimonial model of Israelite society" (5) "based on a series of nested households" (4): "house of the father," king as paterfamilias ("house of David," "house of Omri"), and Yahweh as "the supreme patrimonial lord" (5). Using the house of Micah (Judg 17–18) as their foundation, the authors provide an imaginary description of "A Day in Micah's Household" (12-19). "Dress and Adornments" (259-85) offers the reader an excellent example of the detailed description and illustrations marshaled by King and Stager throughout the volume.

Many sound observations are made with regard to the nature of modern archaeological methodology. Archaeologists are paying more attention to evidence that might have been ignored in the past: "Human parasites found in coprolites (fossilized excrement) provide valuable information on disease, diet, and nutrition in antiquity, while also pointing to a low level, by modern standards, of sanitation and hygiene in biblical times" (73). Attention to detailed analysis of biological data provides a better understanding of the anointing of someone's head with oil as in Psalm 23:5. Archaeological finds indicate that this may have been a way to eliminate lice by "smearing the hair with oil; this treatment prevented oxygen from penetrating the head and caused the lice to suffocate" (74).

One of the most surprising observations made by King and Stager relates to a Pre-Pottery Neolithic wild-olive processing site. They explain that the site on the

sea floor at Maritime 'Atlit south of Haifa was "inundated in the mid-sixth millennium, probably by a worldwide flood, after the olives had been processed" (96).

This volume provides up to date information. Many scholars scoffed at biblical descriptions of deepwater shipping in ancient times. Yet, in 1999 a team led by Robert Ballard and Lawrence Stager found two 2,700-year old Phoenician vessels with cargos of amphoras. They had sunk in 400 meters of water some 50 kilometers west of the seaport of Ashkelon 2,700 years ago (179, 185; pictures, 180-81).

As with most reference works in biblical studies, however, *Life in Biblical Israel* must be read and used with care. For example, under the heading of "Children," King and Stager define *na'ar* as "an unmarried male not yet a head of household" (40). Such a definition ignores the use of *na'ar* for Absalom in the account of his demise when he was already a married man with four children (cf. 2 Sam 18:5 with 14:27). In addition, the treatment of Scripture indicates a rejection of biblical inerrancy and a decidedly liberal bent to interpretation. This can be detected in the claim that prostitution was tolerated in Israelite society, but "the biblical writers have ambivalent views about it, and the laws are inconsistent" (52). Likewise, King and Stager state, "The preposterous patriarchal ages are the ideal, certainly not the reality" (58). In an implicit denial of supernatural intervention, the reader is told that the illness of Sennacherib's army (2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:26) "was probably dysentery, a common ailment with soldiers in the field" (69).

By dating Ecclesiastes to 300–200 B.C.E. (40), King and Stager reject Solomonic authorship. They explain Abraham's offering of Isaac as something that was expected with regard to firstborn children (48), ignoring the text's claim that Abraham had received special revelation concerning this sacrifice. Their suggestion that Deut 5:21 "may reflect an advance in Israelite thinking" (49) over Exod 20:17 reflects their documentary leanings. They also believe that Exodus 32 "may have been intended as a subtle attack on Jeroboam I for setting up the bull cult in the northern kingdom" (322-323). This is a clear denial of Mosaic authorship of that passage.

Sometimes the volume lacks adequate evidential support for some of the authors' opinions. One such example is the suggestion that "The *mĕkônôt* [wheeled copper stands for small lavers] of the Jerusalem Temple inspired the vision of Ezekiel 1 and 10, not the *markabôt* designated in later tradition as the throne of God" (343).

In one place "soap" (*bôrît*; Jer 2:22) is termed "an anachronism, since it came into use only in the Hellenistic period (ca. 300 B.C.E.)" (71). However, elsewhere in the volume, the authors explain that "*bôrît* designates a vegetable alkali, not soap in the strict sense" (159). In other words, it appears that it is the English translation that is anachronistic, not the biblical text itself. A clearer explanation would have been helpful to the readers.

Due to the heavy paper utilized in the printing of *Life in Biblical Israel*, the binding has a tendency to split. The reviewer's copy deteriorated rapidly with but

little wear. The publishers would do everyone a favor by improving the binding so that this beautiful volume may be used often without experiencing such a breakdown.

Paul L. Maier. *The New Complete Works of Josephus*. Revised and expanded edition. Trans. by William Whiston. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999. 1,143 pp. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

William Whiston (1667-1752) published his translation of Josephus' works in 1737 and it has been reprinted some 220 times. Its various defects have not severely damaged its continuing serviceability (15-16). Like Josephus' historical contributions themselves, the defects are outweighed by its merits. As Maier points out in his "Introduction," the Loeb Classical Library edition of Josephus with translation by H. St. John Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, and Louis H. Feldman is the best edition available (16). However, it is also expensive, costing about \$200 even when discounted.

This edition of Josephus' works is a cleanly typeset, inexpensive edition with illustrations, charts, maps, and commentary. It also includes an index of the "Texts of the Old Testament Parallel to Josephus' Histories" (1101-6), a "Harmony of the Numbering Systems in the Greek and English Editions of the Works of Flavius Josephus" prepared by Neal Windham (1107-14), a general subject index (1115-42), and an "Index of Photographs, Illustrations, and Maps" (1143). Paul L. Maier has inserted nineteen strategically placed comments that are extremely helpful in understanding Josephus' text and its contributions (59, 79, 95, 119, 188, 200, 264, 295, 322, 345, 370-71, 385, 453, 491, 567, 662-63, 842, 870-71, 908). How valuable is Josephus? Maier responds,

For excavations at Jerusalem, the Herodian fortresses, Jericho, Samaria-Sebaste, Caesarea, Antipatris, Gamala, and elsewhere, Josephus's works are a guide for *where* to dig as well as a standard reference for evaluating the results of the dig—so closely is Josephus's prose confirmed by the hard evidence of archaeology (908).

Josephus' works in this edition include "Jewish Antiquities" (45-661), "The Jewish War or The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem" (665-936), "Against Apion" (937-81), and "An Extract Out of Josephus' Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades" (983-85). Whiston's "The Life of Flavius Josephus" (17-44), seven dissertations (987-1086), "Table of the Jewish Weights and Measures" (1087-92), and "A List of Ancient Testimonies and Records" (1093-99) round out the volume.

Paul L. Maier is the Russell H. Seibert professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University. He was named "Professor of the Year" in 1984 as one of America's twenty-five finest educators. He is translator and editor of *Josephus: The Essential Works* (Kregel, 1994), translator of *Josephus: The Essential Writings*

(Kregel, 1990) and *Eusebius: The Church History* (Kregel, 1999), as well as author of *In the Fullness of Time* (HarperCollins, 1991), *Pontius Pilate* (Kregel, 1996), and *The Flames of Rome* (Kregel, 1991).

For the amateur and scholar alike, all students of the Bible and the history of the ancient Near East will find this edition of Josephus' works a handy tool. As a Bible college student nearly forty years ago, this reviewer purchased his first copy of Whiston's translation of Josephus. The volume was part of a fire sale. It was a smoke-damaged hardback of the 1914 S.S. Scranton edition and has provided many hours of wonderful armchair excursions into the world of the Bible. Now this Kregel edition sits on the shelf alongside it. The next time this reviewer goes to Jericho, and whenever he has the opportunity to visit Gamala, it will go with him.

I. Howard Marshall. *The Pastoral Epistles*. International Critical Commentary. Eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 199. xlii + 869 pp. \$55.96 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This is one of the best exegetical attempts on the two books to Timothy and Titus. For detail on interpretive issues in the Greek, phrase by phrase, and in careful hermeneutical attention to the context and to information from relevant literature, it ranks high, just as Marshall's massive commentary on Luke. The latter is *The Gospel of Luke, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). Marshall also is well-known for other commentaries which, though not as exegetically detailed, contribute a high standard of scholarly perception on many verses (cf. his works on Acts, The Thessalonian Epistles, 1 Peter, and the Epistles of John).

Marshall, much like Cranfield in his 2-vol. work on Romans (also in ICC series), offers much help on views to interpret problem verses, and considerations that lead to grasping the most defensible meaning. He shows wide reading in serious scholarly inquiry and careful explanatory reasoning. For serious teachers or pastors diligent in the text, or students in training, the present work is right at the top among recent detailed contributions. Other massive, helpful works join it (William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000] and Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]). George Knight's outstanding work a bit earlier should be noted (*Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991]).

Though Marshall's effort is a big assist overall, one feature that disappoints this reviewer and many others is his hedging on taking Paul as the author. He finally opts against this with reasoning that appears inadequate (cf. his "Introduction"). He

does faithfully discuss possibilities, cover many bases, and stir thinking. Those who use the commentary will gain solid help in most verses, and much benefit on some, for example, 1 Tim 2:1-2, 15; 3:1-12 (elders, deacons); 4:16; 2 Tim 1:7, 16-18, 2:1-2; 4:7-8; Titus 2:9ff.; 3:5-8.

Marshall capably sifts a vast library of knowledge on issues, does his homework, and furnishes insight while keeping to a lucid, clear style that cuts to the point.

Jonathan L. Reed. *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2001. \$17.00 (paper). xvi + 253 pp. Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus,” has been an ongoing process for more than a century and in recent years has been re-energized by the work and related activities of the “Jesus Seminar”. These endeavors have centered mainly on the Synoptic Gospels and some extra-biblical material (e.g., the Gospel of Thomas). Utilizing various and often contradictory methodologies to examine the texts, the results of these efforts have been massive in terms of a body of literature, including most notably the manufacture of a “gospel” document entitled “Q” or, as the author of this work calls it, “Sayings Source Q.”

This work, by an archaeologist who, while wholeheartedly sympathetic to the endeavor, expresses dissatisfaction over the results of the quest by purely historical-critical methodology. He details his concern and prejudices in the introductory chapter:

For the most part, biblical scholarship has been the domain of literary studies and text-centered. The text of the Bible was the primary object of study, and exegesis the chief goal. This near myopic focus on words, perhaps a remnant of Christian and particularly Protestant theology, rendered archaeology biblical studies’ “handmaiden,” whose role was to assist exegesis or discover new written materials (1).

The author’s concern is that biblical studies have not been adequately informed by the work of archaeology and that discipline’s emphasis on detailing the “material culture” of a given era within a particular geographic region. The goal of this work is to bring archaeological data, particularly from the region of Galilee to bear on the subject of the “historical Jesus,” in an attempt to provide what the author apparently perceives as a lack of factual underpinnings to the foundation of these studies. Related to these studies, he perceptively notes,

With rare exceptions, notably the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi Library well over a generation ago, scholars working on Jesus and Galilee with literary evidence simply introduce new methods or innovative theories to analyze these texts.

The collage of citations is re-shuffled or re-mixed, emphasizing some passages over others, while re-interpreting a few, perhaps in dialogue with other disciplines (214).

The author is a professor of New Testament and Christian origins at the University of LaVerne in California and is the field director of the Sepphoris Acropolis excavations. The overall work is well accomplished in terms of layout and logical progression. Though the author indicated that this work would not be a “collection of archaeological artifacts” (xi), the volume is nonetheless adequately illustrated with diagrams, charts and some photographs. There is also a brief, but adequate subject index. There is a remarkably thorough bibliography (221-46), which is one of the strongest aspects of the work. The bibliography is so large that it might have been helpful for the author to make some categorical subdivisions within it. Also, in light of the author’s discussion of the road system, his insistence that no major roadway went through Capernaum (148-49) and the subsequent discussion of trade and commerce in Galilee, it seems strange that David A. Dorsey’s definitive work, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1991) is not referenced. The book is divided into three main sections: the first part dealing mainly with the cultural geography of Galilee; the second centering on two Galilean cities, Sepphoris and Capernaum; and the third the integration of the author’s archaeological conclusions to “Q” and the “historical Jesus” quest.

In the chapter “Jesus and Sepphoris Revisited,” (100-138), he details the issues related to this interesting, and in terms of secular history, significant city. Sepphoris was a leading city of Galilee, and under Herod Antipas had been the regional capital. Josephus called the city “the ornament of all Galilee” (*Ant.* 18.27). The issue of Sepphoris has always been that, despite Jesus’ extensive ministry in Galilee, this city is never mentioned in the NT. This omission has long perplexed NT scholars who have insisted that the largely Greek-speaking, cosmopolitan center located only a few miles from Nazareth must play a large role in understanding the cultural background of Jesus’ life and ministry. The author notes, “[H]ow Sepphoris affected Galilee, and how this impact is addressed in Jesus’ teachings as recorded by his followers, is the principal concern” (114). However, in this reviewer’s opinion, this quest, like the quest for Q, is ultimately doomed to irrelevance because of the author’s minimalistic approach to the text of Scripture, even beyond the explicit rejection of inspiration and inerrancy.

In the author’s view, the lack of mention (in this case of Sepphoris) in the text is a factual omission, an omission so significant, that the text cannot possibly be understood without being informed by some method of cultural and social reconstruction via the archaeological data. Of course, when the text of Scripture is viewed as just another “source document” and not a thoroughly reliable one at that, such conclusions are to be expected. That the biblical text is not exhaustive in terms of the history and events it covers is certainly without question and even admitted by the biblical writers themselves (John 20:31; 21:25). In the OT era the famous battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.), where Ahab, the well-known king of Israel, led a coalition that

defeated the then-emerging Assyrian Empire, is an example of a famous and politically significant incident that receives no mention at all. But such omissions do not contain material or information that is of primary importance in arriving at a proper exegesis of the text. The same can be said for Jesus and Sepphoris; apparently no ministry or other issue of significance occurred there that the inspired writers were led to include.

In chapter six the author endeavors to give a geographic location of "Q" in terms of its literary center and the influences of the surrounding culture on the writing itself. As an underlying assumption, the author makes an interesting admission when he says,

The first assumption about the nature of Q is that it was a literary document written in Greek. Although the early sayings may well have been first articulated in Semitic, attempts to uncover a written Aramaic *Vorlage* behind Q have failed. Q, therefore, must be located in an area where at least some level of Greek literacy existed (214-15).

The author then moves to postulate a Galilean locale for Q and, in so doing, recasts Jesus from Messiah and Savior to a socio-religious Galilean activist opposed to urbanization and economic policies of Herod Antipas.

In terms of the collection of information with interesting and, in some cases perhaps illuminating parallels, the author has done a service to the scholarly discussion. His comments as to the failure of the purely literary efforts to locate the "historical Jesus" are incisive and in many ways condemnatory of that process. However, he himself is following the same path as those on the Jesus Seminar quest. The Jesus Seminar approaches "simply introduce new methods or innovative theories to analyze these texts" (214). This author, in the blending of social science theories from cultural geography, sociology, and the like with the interpretative process of archaeology, has simply created a "new method or innovative theory" to interpret the archaeological data. This is most clearly seen when he criticizes strict examination of the text in terms of its geographical data: "This strict empirical approach neglects the intricate blending between the literary and symbolic worlds and adds little to an understanding of the community's perspective on the world" (172). His concept of keeping in mind the "distinctions between the 'textual world,' 'symbolic world,' and 'concrete world'" in evaluating the textual and archaeological data is reminiscent of Origen's "Threefold Sense of Scripture," now transposed into the archaeological method.

The author's insight that the literary attempts to find the "historical Jesus" have, for the most part, failed is certainly valid. His solution, however, to further subjugate the text of Scripture under another layer of interpretation from another ancillary discipline is certainly invalid and wholly unsatisfactory. If this book marks a trend to move further away from Scripture to prop up the superstructure of historical criticism, it is a most unwanted trend, and one evangelicals will need to be wary of.

Herman Ridderbos. *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. Trans. by John Vried. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. xiv + 721 pp. \$42.00 (paper). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Herman Ridderbos was for many years professor of New Testament at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Kampen. He was previously known to English-speaking biblical exegetes and expositors through his influential volume *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Eerdmans, 1975). The present work is a translation of Ridderbos' commentary on the Gospel of John, which originally was written and published in Dutch as two volumes in 1987 and 1992.

The author models his approach in the writing of this commentary on that of Rudolf Bultmann in his famous work on John, but with very different exegetical conclusions (xiv). Rather than giving an extensive discussion of introductory issues, Ridderbos plunges immediately into a discussion of the biblical text. "The book aims to present an exposition of the Fourth Gospel *as the Christian Church adopted it*" (xii, emphasis original). Thus the author seeks to present a theological exegesis of the Gospel. The result is a commentary that pays close attention to the literary and grammatical structure of the text.

Before his discussion of the biblical text, Ridderbos gives a 16-page introduction entitled "The Peculiar Character of the Fourth Gospel." Because the text itself does not identify its author beyond "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the commentator concludes "one cannot say that accepting or not accepting the ancient tradition [of the authorship of the apostle John] is essential to an understanding of the unique character of the Fourth Gospel" (2). What is essential is the recognition that whoever the author was, he claimed to be and in fact was an eyewitness to the events he narrates. Thus the text should be accepted as historically reliable, though this is not the essential point on which everything turns. Throughout this commentary, this reliability is assumed rather than argued. Rather, the goal of the biblical author is to declare "the apostolic witness concerning Jesus' historical self-disclosure as the Christ, the Son of God, as the foundation on which that faith [of the church in its Lord] rests" (7). "The question on which the whole of the Fourth Gospel is focused is: Who is Jesus?" (11) Therefore the theological dimension is what gives this Gospel its peculiar character. Finally, it is the witness of the Holy Spirit using the text that engenders belief in the reader. Ridderbos concludes his introduction, "The point at issue is always what Jesus said and did in his self-disclosure on earth, but it is transmitted in its lasting validity with the independence of an apostle who was authorized to speak by Jesus and endowed with the promise of the Spirit" (16).

The commentary on the biblical text is 667 pages (17-683). The majority of material presents the personal interaction of Ridderbos with the text of John, seeking to give the reader an understanding of its meaning. The commentator is an astute observer of the Gospel of John and this is the strength of the work. The author

continually compares and contrasts his interpretation with previous commentators. This is done in footnotes and many small-print excurses which interrupt the commentary proper. The three works that Ridderbos interacts with the most are the non-evangelical exegetical commentaries on John by Bultmann, Raymond Brown, and Rudolf Schnackenburg. Ridderbos consistently upholds the orthodox understanding of the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ in his conclusions. However, he is deficient in his viewpoint that the discourses of Jesus recorded in the text are the composition of the Evangelist. He states concerning John 17, "One must therefore not look for the historical in the specific phraseology of the prayer, as though the Spirit 'brought to' the apostles' 'remembrance' and thus by inspiration conveyed the very words of Jesus" (546-47). While his Christology is sound, his bibliology is weak. The volume ends with three valuable indexes of names, subjects, and Scripture references.

This recent commentary by Ridderbos does not match the comprehensiveness of the volumes by D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC), and Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT), particularly in the historical dimension of historical-grammatical exegesis. Therefore, Carson and Morris should continue to be the resources first consulted by exegetes and expositors of John. However, if one is looking for a bridge from Carson and Morris to contemporary Johannine scholarship, particularly European, he will find this volume by Ridderbos very valuable.

Scott W. Sunquist, ed., and David Wu Chu Sing and John Chew Hiang Chea, associate eds. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xliii + 937 pp. \$79.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian

One does not have to work long in biblical and theological reference before questions related to Christianity in Asia or the Pacific Rim bring frustration. Only a few resources existed in non-English sources and virtually nothing in English. The frustration was even evident in Asian Bible schools and seminaries where, the editors noted, "The Asian story was available, but it was difficult for our students to find. As a result we all inadvertently reinforced the notion that Christianity was a Western imposition on Asia even though we knew this was really not the case" (xxi). Over a period of about 15 years, this present work was conceived and put together by the editors, and the result is an excellent source of information on the history of Christianity in the Asian world.

As with most reference works from Eerdmans, this volume is a model of what a reference work should be. It has a thorough indexing of article entries (over 1,200) and contributors (nearly 500). The articles are generally several paragraphs, with many reaching essay length (e.g., World War II, Korean War, entries for

individual countries). It includes useful bibliographies for all of the entries and an extended preface detailing some of the unique features and challenges of the project. One feature is the articles dealing with Christianity in China. As the editors note, “[T]he sensitive nature of the material from China meant that the writers should work as a team with their articles signed only as ‘China Group’” (xxiv). They also detail their decision on the extent of the geographic region that the volume would cover. They acknowledge that the work does not cover all of Asia. There are, for instance, entries related to Pakistan, but none for Afghanistan. It omits the Pacific Islands, for the most part, and Russia. That decisions related to the scope of the work are “somewhat arbitrary . . . is confirmed by the way in which Asian church history is taught in most seminaries in Asia today” (xxiii). The editors also acknowledge that the spelling, especially of proper names, is occasionally problematic. Often background material is sketchy and contradictory, because the editors were also confronted with the translation into English of articles originally written in over a dozen different languages.

Many notable entries mark this work. For the reader with limited or no background in Asian Christianity, the main entries on individual countries serve as excellent introductions. Though one can understand the pressure under which the “China Group” submitted their work on China, the otherwise excellent article is very sketchy on details from the Cultural Revolution (1966) to the present and should have perhaps been supplemented with additional contributors. It is disappointing that Mao tse-Tung is not even mentioned, nor is the “Red Book” which was the formal replacement of the Bible in the Cultural Revolution and whose writings have eclipsed even Marx and Lenin with those who still embrace Communism.

There are significant entries detailing the work of all of the significant denominations in Asia. The editors are to be commended for the manner in which controversial articles (e.g., the Vietnam War and Imperialism) are handled. The articles reflect a clear, dispassionate, and factual presentation, free from the kind of political correctness and/or rhetoric that has marred some recent reference works. Significant articles include those on Buddhism (98-104), Minjung Theology (552-55), the Nestorian Church (595-98) and Theological Education (838-42).

This is an important volume of immense usefulness for theological students, mission boards, prospective missionaries, and those who teach church history. The long history of Christianity in Asia is well represented and documented in this fine work.

Sam and Bethany Torode. *Open Embrace: A Protestant Couple Rethinks Contraception*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xviii + 123. \$12.00 (paper).
Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The authors are a young couple who seek to critique modern ideas about

sex, marriage, and contraception. As they approached their own wedding day, both became convinced that Natural Family Planning (NFP) represented the ideal approach to the question of the spacing of children. At the outset they avoid saying that other (non-natural) forms of contraception (those processes, devices, or actions that prevent the meeting of the sperm and egg) are intrinsically sinful. Rather, their main point is that those kinds of contraceptive methods are not ideal. They correctly reject out of hand all contraceptive methods that work after conception occurs. They also do not view any sterilization procedure as proper for a Christian.

This little volume is divided into three sections. Bethany writes the first and third part and Sam authors the middle section. The book ends with a listing of various printed materials and websites that make available more information for the interested reader.

The authors utilize various arguments to make their case against birth control. Since humans are made in God's image, they should not regard their spouses merely as sources of personal gratification (19). The "one flesh" pattern of marriage precludes holding back anything from one's spouse, including fertility (25). They contend that lovemaking should always be life-giving, even when it does not generate a new life, and suggest that contraceptives represent a selfish withholding of something important from one's spouse (30). They propose that one cannot make any legitimate "disconnect" between the use of contraceptives and the practice of abortion. The mindset that justifies the former also legitimizes the latter (65-71). They devote several pages to the abortifacient qualities of birth control pills in general (73-83). Finally, since the "universal church" opposed birth control until the 1930s, why do Christians today so warmly accept the use of contraceptives (59-63)?

In place of birth control, the authors suggest that Natural Family Planning provides a better alternative for married couples. By monitoring three different fertility signs (detailed in the book, 45), the couple can make an informed decision of when to have intimate relations. They distinguish this approach from birth control since it involves nothing artificial. They also contend that this method (NFP) represents much more than a way to space one's children (55).

What is one to make of these arguments? On the one hand, this reviewer (as the father of eight children) believes that many Christians all too often approach this issue with a "pagan" mindset. Do believers give enough attention to the biblical value placed on children and carefully examine the motivations behind not having children?

Regardless of that concern, the book under review merits evaluation and critique. The authors of this volume make various statements that do not appear to have exegetical basis. Does the truth of the image of God and the "one flesh" pattern for marriage clearly demonstrate that the use of contraceptives is an act of sinful selfishness? What is the basis for saying that conjugal relations should always be "life-giving"? They have made a valid point that the widespread acceptance of contraceptives (used without thought almost) has created an environment that views children in general as an inconvenience. However, this reviewer does not believe

that attitude requires one to view all contraceptives as sinful. Also, he does not regard as convincing the authors' efforts to distinguish clearly NFP from a method of birth control. To this reviewer, any attempt to affect the timing of the birth of a child represents a form of birth control.

This book provides an interesting approach to an important pastoral issue. The authors clearly communicate their desire to think biblically about children and the great value God places on them. However, in too many cases it appears that their belief about birth control has driven their interpretation of certain passages and theological concepts.

Bruce K. Waltke. *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. viii + 187. \$15.00 (paper). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Bruce Waltke, a well-known OT scholar, has added this volume to numerous books already written on the subject of the will of God. He divides his volume into two sections: God's will: a pagan notion, and God's program of guidance.

He begins the first section by asking, "Is Finding God's Will a Biblical Idea?" After demonstrating that "God's will" in the Bible can refer to His immutable decrees, His pleasures, general providence, as well as His specific choices in perplexing situations, Waltke proposes that believers misunderstand God's will in seeking to "find" it. He suggests that the effort at finding God's will is really a form of divination, i.e., an attempt to penetrate the divine mind in order to get His decision on a certain matter. Although this was common in the pagan world, Waltke points out that the NT gives no explicit command to "find God's will," nor does it give any instructions on how to go about finding His will. Instead of seeking to "find" God's will (as the pagans do), Waltke suggests that believers need to base their following of God on their relationship with Him. The second chapter provides an interesting overview of the tools used over the years to discern the will of God (or gods): casting lots, looking for signs, watching the stars, telling fortunes, and talking with spirits. In the third chapter he overviews six means used by the Lord to reveal His will to mankind: prophets, Urim and Thummim, sacred lot, dreams, signs, and words. He points out that there are no examples of explicitly seeking or finding God's will after Acts 1:24-26. Waltke argues that the Lord does not administer the church in the same manner as He dealt with the nation of Israel. Consequently, NT believers should not use OT patterns for understanding God's will as something normative for their lives.

In the book's second section, Waltke presents six steps in God's program of guidance (one per chapter) that he discusses in order of their priority: read your Bible, develop a heart for God, seek wise counsel, look for God's providence,

discernment, and divine intervention. In the chapter dealing with the first and most important step, Waltke makes this important statement: “God wants you to be a mature man or woman of God—that is His will for your life!” (62). He bemoans the fact that multitudes of Christians turn to the scores of books found in bookstores that deal with the Christian life rather than turning to the Scripture itself. In this regard, he gives his readers four exhortations: learn to interpret the Scriptures, learn to pray as you read Scripture, learn to memorize and meditate on the Scriptures, learn to humbly obey the Scriptures. In order to develop a heart for God, Waltke pleads with his readers to correlate their desires with Scripture. God Himself and His revelation to mankind should serve as the fountainhead for a believer’s desires, which has obvious implications for their decision-making. After one considers God’s Word and submits their desires to that revelation, a believer may need to seek counsel from close associates who are wise. By encouraging a believer to give attention to God’s providence, Waltke wants that person to understand that God is at work in each life circumstance. Along that vein, Waltke exhorts believers to accept that they may not always know why God does what He does and cautions them against putting circumstances above God’s Word. With regard to the issue of discernment, Waltke offers five suggestions: (1) make your decision in light of Scripture; (2) make your decision in light of giftedness; (3) make your decision according to your ability; (4) make your decision according to your circumstances; (5) make your decision according to an overall strategy. Waltke concludes his volume by writing about the possibility of divine intervention. Waltke emphasizes that God does not intervene in response to seeking His will in a perplexing situation. He demonstrates instances where God revealed a great truth (Acts 9—revealing the gospel to Saul), delivered a servant from an intolerable situation (Acts 12—delivering Peter from jail), and even changed the direction of a servant (Acts 10—commanding Peter to eat unclean animals).

Rather than “seeking” or “finding” God’s will, Waltke exhorts believers to follow the guidance of God. He contends that finding answers to the common questions of life (e.g., changing jobs, getting married, going to school, etc.) will require growing close to God. Waltke encourages believers to spend less time wrestling over discerning the details of God’s will and suggests that they carefully listen to God the Spirit as He speaks through His Word and obey what His Word clearly reveals.

This reviewer found the book under consideration helpful on several fronts. It is clearly written and exhorts its readers to give first place to God’s Word in their process of decision-making as well as life in general. Waltke seeks to direct the attention of his readers away from finding or seeking God’s will and toward the important issue of obeying God’s revealed will. He also demonstrates that some of the efforts made at discerning the details of God’s will come close to following the pattern of pagan divination. Whether one agrees with Waltke that a believer need not find or seek God’s will in detail, every believer can benefit from the reminder that God’s children must give careful attention to conforming their lives to God’s

precious Word in their daily lives.