

Jesus Returns!

End Times (Part 6)

Mark 13:24-27 (Mt.24:26-31, Lk.21:25-28) 10/9/2021

Who are the powers of the heavens? And why are they singled out as those who will be shaken at the Second Coming?

This message covers the return of Christ, judgment on non-angelic spirit beings and the implications for the nations, and the rapture.

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Harmony

<p>Matthew 24:26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;</p> <p>the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.' 30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.</p>	<p>Mark 13:24 "But in those days, following that tribulation, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;</p> <p>25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'</p> <p>26 "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.</p>	<p>Luke 21:25 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.</p> <p>28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."</p>
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Mark 13:24 "But in those days, following that tribulation, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'

26 "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Introduction

If Captain Kirk gave the order right now and had you teleported from where you're sitting into the driver's seat of a car driving on a highway, what would be the most important information you would need? You might want to know the speed limit, how much gas you have, traffic laws, maybe the weather forecast. But none of that is most important, the most important question is, "Where am I going? What's the destination?" If you don't know that, nothing else really matters.

There was a systematic theology that came out in 2013 by Michael Bird that has an interesting table of contents. Every other systematic theology starts out with the doctrine of God in ch.1, and the last chapter is eschatology (the end times). But Bird's theology starts with the doctrine of God like everyone else, but then he puts eschatology in ch.2. His reasoning is, if you don't know where it's all going—what the final destination and purpose of everything is, then you won't understand anything else properly. I think he's on to something.

Sometimes we lose focus in the Christian life because we lose sight of the destination. We go to church and learn all about the traffic laws and how we should allow other drivers to merge in front of us and what to do about a spiritual flat tire and how to drive in snow. We get all that down pat, but we forget why we're even driving.

If human history has no destination—if it's just generations coming and going with all their ups and downs—if that's all there is to life on earth, then human history is a tragic, sordid, meaningless mess. The human race has significance mainly because of where it's going.

And if you're intimidated by studying the end times because it's so complicated, you'll love today's passage because Jesus is going to boil it down to the most essential core. The Olivet Discourse in Mark 13 is basically the entire book of Revelation distilled down to 33 verses. And of those 33, the first 19 are the preliminaries, and the last 10 are about our preparation and readiness. So the actual events of the end times are crammed into just 4 verses in the middle, and those are the verses we're going to look at today. If you want to know where to begin in building the superstructure of your beliefs about the end times, these 4 verses are the foundation.

There are three parts to this paragraph: the coming of Christ in glory, the negative results (judgment of the wicked), and the positive results (salvation of the righteous). And as Mark loves to do, he puts the most important part in the middle. So he puts the judgment part first, the salvation part last, and the glorious, spectacular return of the Lord Jesus Christ featured as the centerpiece.

Christ's Return

So let's start with that centerpiece—v.26.

26 "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

That language all comes out of Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:13 In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Some take this as a reference to Jesus' ascension in Acts 1¹, but that doesn't work because he's very clear this happens after the great tribulation.²

Mark 13:24 "But in those days,³ following that tribulation, " 'the sun will be darkened ... 26 At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."

The description in Daniel 7 is one of a final, glorious, uncontested rule of the Son of man that will begin when Jesus returns in the clouds after the great tribulation.

Men Will See

Others have said this verse was fulfilled in a metaphorical way in 70 A.D. Jesus came in the clouds—not literally, but in the form of judgment. But I don't think that works either because the main emphasis here is on the fact that people will see Jesus.

26 At that time men will see the Son of Man coming.

And the seeing part is emphasized. This is the word order in the Greek: "And then he will be seen, the son of man coming in clouds with power great and glory."

Matthew 24:27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

We've seen Mark use the word "see" in two ways: either literal, physical seeing, or spiritual insight and understanding. Did the Jews in Jerusalem understand that the slaughter at the hands of the Romans was Jesus coming to them? Not that we have any record of.

And in Acts 1, when Jesus ascended physically into real, literal clouds and the disciples watched it happen with their physical eyes, they were told Jesus would return the same way.

Acts 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

It's not going to be in a highly symbolic, non-physical, invisible, return that doesn't involve any actual clouds. He left physically and visibly and he will return physically and visibly.

And in Revelation, John uses Jesus' language here, from the Olivet Discourse, and speaks of it as a future event.⁴

Revelation 1:7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.

Everyone will see it⁵—especially his enemies. That's the emphasis.

¹ The argument is that since the Son of man approaches the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, the "coming" can't be a coming to earth but rather a coming to the Father for coronation and enthronement. They say that happened in Acts 1, when Jesus ascended to heaven, and right after that, in Acts 2, you have men from every language arriving in Jerusalem and worshipping Jesus. However, while it's true that the Son of man approaches the Ancient of days in Daniel 7, that's not the only thing he does. The main point of the Daniel 7 vision is that all men worship the Son of man in what sounds like an uncontested reign. That did not happen in Acts 2, nor has it happened since. The great majority of people do not worship Jesus.

² Even if you take the 70 A.D. view of the great tribulation, the ascension still doesn't work because that happened way before 70 A.D.

³ NICNT: "In those days" is a stereotyped expression in the OT that came to acquire distinctly eschatological associations from the contexts in which it occurs (e.g. Jer_3:16, Jer_3:18; Jer_31:29; Jer_33:15 f; Joe_2:28 [M.T. 3:1]; Zec_8:23)."

⁴ I think most scholars are correct in dating Revelation long after 70 A.D. (based on very strong external evidence), and so I believe this is still future.

⁵ That stands out because it comes immediately after the whole world is plunged into darkness by the sun and moon going dark. There will be abject darkness, and then the Son of man will be *seen*!

Revelation 1:7 ... every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

Jesus is going to repeat these same words again in the next chapter at Jesus' trial.

Mark 14:61 Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest will see it. All those who rejected Christ will see it, and they will understand who it is, and they will immediately regret their decision to reject Jesus Christ.

The Cosmic Shakeup

But it will be a very dark day for those people. That's the point of vv.24-25. Let's look at the negative results of the Second Coming.

24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.'"

That's common OT language for the gloom that goes along with God's judgment. It's not physical darkness; it's the kind of darkness we mean when we say things like, "That was a really dark movie." Or, "When I lost my loved one—those were the darkest days of my life"—that kind of darkness.

Amos 5:18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.

And he goes on to explain what he means by dark.

19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. 20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?⁶

When he says the sun and moon will be darkened, he's saying it will be a day of gloom, despair, evil, confusion, danger, destruction, catastrophe, terror, punishment, and death. The darkest day ever.

Cosmic Judgment

Then he goes on.

25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Some interpreters take that as a reference to political authorities, but I couldn't find any clear examples where the sun, moon, and stars represent political leaders. Jesus is talking about powers in the *heavens*, not on earth.

⁶ Another example is in Isaiah 13.

Isaiah 13:6 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 7 Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. 8 Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. 9 See, the day of the LORD is coming-- a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.

Isaiah 13:10 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

11 I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ...13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

Powers

The NIV translates the last phrase “heavenly bodies” but the literal translation is “the powers of the heavens,” and it should be translated that way because that’s a common phrase in Scripture used to refer to powerful spirit beings. Not angels. There is a tendency for people to cram all spiritual beings under the category of angels and demons. But the Bible tells us of other beings that are distinguished from angels and who play an important role in human history. And the one that’s mentioned most often are these beings—the powers of the heavens. That exact phrase Jesus uses here appears numerous times in the OT (Greek translation).

The Divine Council

The powers of the heavens are a group of spiritual beings who formed a kind of divine council that surrounded God’s throne.

2 Chronicles 18:18 ... I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the powers of the heavens standing on his right and on his left.

That’s not talking about stars. It’s a large council of awesome spiritual beings gathered around the throne of God. Some of those powers rebelled against God and became evil and enticed people to worship them.

2 Kings 17:16 ... They bowed down to all the powers of the heavens. (exactly the same phrase that Jesus used)

We see it again in ch.21 a couple more times in ch.23—they worshipped the powers of the heavens.⁷ In Daniel 4, when Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses, he said:

Daniel 4:35 ... [The Most High] does as he pleases with the powers of heaven.

In Daniel 8:10 the little horn figure does battle with the powers of the heavens and throws some of them down to earth.

These seem to be the same beings that are referred to several times as “the sons of God”—the ones who shouted for joy when God created the earth (Job 38:7). In Job 1:6 the sons of God are gathered before God and present themselves. They’re also referred to as the heavenly hosts or armies.

1 Kings 22:19 ... I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

And the hosts of the heavens were associated with the sun, moon, and stars.

Deuteronomy 4:19 And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars-- all the hosts of the heavens-- do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping what the LORD your God has apportioned to all the peoples under heaven.

The heavenly host, the sons of God, the powers of the heavens—those are the creatures Jesus is referring to when he says the stars will fall and the powers of the heavens will be shaken when he comes in glory.

⁷ 2 Kings 21:3 ... [Manasseh] bowed down to all the powers of the heavens ... 5 he built altars to all the powers of the heavens.

2 Kings 23:4 [Josiah] ordered Hilkiah ... to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for ... the powers of the heavens. 5 He did away with the pagan priests appointed ... to burn incense ... to the powers of the heavens.

Their Authority

Now let me show you why that's so important. Did you notice a moment ago when I read Deuteronomy 4:19 the language about how God apportioned the hosts of the heavens to the nations?

Deuteronomy 4:19 ... do not be enticed into ... worshiping what the LORD your God has apportioned to all the peoples under heaven.

When mankind rebelled against God, he confused languages and divided mankind into separate nations, and then divided up those nations under the jurisdiction of the powers of the heavens. So he said to one, "You get Egypt, you get Babylon, you get Assyria, you get the Philistines," etc. But he took Israel for himself.

Deuteronomy 32:8 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. 9 But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

So the sons of God (the powers of the heavens) were each given authority over a nation. They were not to be worshipped, but God did grant them authority over the nations just as God grants human leaders authority over nations.

I think we see an example of this in Daniel 10, where God sends an angel to bring Daniel a message, but the angel shows up 3 weeks late.

Daniel 10:12 ... your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

This angel is described earlier in the chapter, and it's the most awesome description of an angel I can think of in Scripture. He's definitely no slouch, and yet he can't get past this ruler of Persia. And there's another one ruling over Greece in the same chapter.

Daniel 10:20 "... Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come."

The Powers Orchestrate Evil

Those powers play a much bigger role than most people realize in the evil that human rulers carry out. There is an entire Psalm (Psalm 82) devoted to announcing God's judgment on the sons of God for all the injustices they are responsible for.

Psalm 82:1 God presides in the great assembly (the divine council); he gives judgment among the gods.

Then when he lists the things they are being judged for, it's all stuff the human rulers under them carried out.

2 "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Selah 3 Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless....

So when the human king of Persia carried out injustice on the people, he did that under the influence of the prince of Persia—the power who was over Persia. There is more to the evil in this world than what we can see. There are powerful, unseen, evil powers orchestrating the evil that countries do. You know how sometimes you hear about an example of such extreme evil, it seems to go beyond just normal human depravity? I recently heard Jesse Kelly talking about abortion, and he was making the point about how he could understand someone not being pro-life if they weren't fully convinced a

human baby is fully human in the early stages. He said, “I would strongly disagree, but I could at least understand it. But doesn’t it kind of creep you out the glee that people on the left now have about abortion? It’s just creepy.”

It is creepy. In 2019 Governor Cuomo signed the New York Reproductive Health Act—one of the most gruesome abortion laws ever passed. It legalized abortion right up to the moment of birth for any reason. It removed the requirement that a licensed physician had to do the abortion. It removed all criminal charges for charges for unwanted abortions. So now there can no longer be a prosecution for a coerced abortion, or an intentional attack targeting an unborn child. Even if the woman wants the child, you can’t be prosecuted for killing her child. And in the case of a “botched” abortion, where the baby survives, this law allows them to just leave the baby alone on the table to starve to death or die of its injuries.

There’s a photograph of Cuomo signing that bill with several others around him. And you’ve never seen bigger smiles—you can see teeth and gums; they are beside themselves with glee. And then they lit up the One World Trade Center building and the Empire State building with pink lights. The whole city celebrated like it was Christmas. Hurray! Now we can kill our children—light up the city!

I don’t think that’s just ordinary human depravity on its own. I saw an article just today about the ways the Chinese government has been torturing Christian women, and it got so gruesome I couldn’t even keep reading. There are ugly, gruesome, vile spirits that have been allotted to the United States of America and China and other nations that are driving things that.

Disarmament

So, back to Psalm 82, God warns the sons of God who are doing all that stuff that he is going to judge them someday.

Psalm 82:6 "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' 7 But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler." 8 Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

God gave the nations as an allotment to the sons of God, but they rebelled, so the time will come when God will judge them, depose them, strip away their authority, and take back the nations (not just Israel but all the nations) as his own inheritance. That judgment began on the cross. Paul speaks of the powers of the heavens numerous times, but he just calls them “powers.”

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

When Jesus died on the cross and rose again, he stripped away their authority so they no longer have the power they used to have.

In OT times, Gentiles were welcome to come to Israel and worship the true God. But how many gatherings of believers were there in countries outside of Israel? You don’t read about people worshipping Yahweh outside of Israel much at all in the OT. That’s because those nations were under the domination of the powers of the heavens. But what happened after Jesus defeated those powers when he died on the cross? Jesus gave them notice: “My people are going to invade your territory.”

Which countries?

“Every last one of them.”

And what happened? Christians are everywhere now. Every country in the world. And not just one or two believers. Churches, gatherings, thousands—millions. Even countries where it’s illegal, where they kill people for being Christians. What happens? The church explodes and there are millions more Christians, and the powers of the heavens can’t prevent it.

Now that’s not to say they are powerless. Far from it. We still have to do battle with the powers of the heavens even today.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.⁸

We have to fight these powers. Why? When Jesus triumphed over them at the cross, why didn't he finish them off? He didn't finish them off because he wanted us to be involved in the process of defeating them. Remember, the reason we exist is to reign with Christ. That's the whole point of the creation of the world—to bring about a situation where redeemed humanity reigns with Christ. And that has already begun. So part of our duty in reigning with him now involves taking the nations back from the powers of the heavens. We are the invaders who go right into the heart of these territories that the powers used to have an iron grip on and establish stronghold after stronghold of Christ's kingdom deep inside their territories. That's what we're doing here tonight, thousands of miles from Israel, sitting here in this room demolishing their strongholds and fortifying Christ's kingdom in Colorado of all places.

Our fight with those powers is fierce—so fierce that the writers of the NT have to repeatedly remind us that Jesus is greater than those powers.

1 Peter 3:22 [Jesus] has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.⁹

We're not intimidated by those powers, but we must take them seriously and never let up in our war against them.

Final Victory Over the Powers

I give you all that background so you can get a feel for what an awesome statement it is here in v.25 when it says, **“The powers of the heavens will be shaken.”**¹⁰ At the Second Coming, the powers

⁸ They are also mentioned in Romans 8.

Romans 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor powers ...39 will be able to separate us from the love of God.

⁹ When Paul wrote things like this, even the pagans of his time would have understood what he was talking about. Here is a quotation from Plato on the subject: “In the days of old the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment. There was no quarrelling; for you cannot rightly suppose that the gods did not know what was proper for each of them to have, or, knowing this, that they would seek to procure for themselves by contention that which more properly belonged to others. They all of them by just apportionment obtained what they wanted, and peopled their own districts; and when they had peopled them they tended us, their nurselings and possessions, as shepherds tend their flocks, excepting only that they did not use blows or bodily force, as shepherds do, but governed us like pilots from the stern of the vessel, which is an easy way of guiding animals, holding our souls by the rudder of persuasion according to their own pleasure;-thus did they guide all mortal creatures. Now different gods had their allotments in different places which they set in order. – from Critias (<https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plato/critias.htm>).

Pagans of Paul's time would have understood Paul was saying Jesus has reclaimed authority over all nations, and so it's okay for them to turn their back on the gods they had always served.

¹⁰ The term “shaken” was frequently used in writings of Jesus' day in contexts of the end of the world. WBC: σαλευθήσονται, “will be shaken,” is not found in the OT passages cited above from the LXX, but this verb does occur in passages that describe fearful theophany (Beasley-Murray, Last Days, 424). The picture of heaven and earth shaken by God's appearance (cf. Judg 5:5; Amos 9:5; Mic 1:4; Hab 3:6; Nah 1:5; Pss 18:7; 114:7; Job 9:6) only heightens the drama envisioned here. Beasley-Murray (Last Days, 424–25) argues that it is the theophany that causes the sun to grow dark and the moon to fail to give its light. According to the Testament of Moses, when the kingdom of God appears (T. Mos. 10:1), “the earth will tremble, even to its ends shall it be shaken, and the high mountains will be made low. Yes, they will be shaken ... the sun will not give light, and in darkness the horns of the moon will flee” (T. Mos. 10:4–5). Similarly, in the Sibylline Oracles we find, “I will tell you a very clear sign, so that you may know when the end of all things comes to pass on earth ... upon the earth all the light of the sun is eclipsed in the middle from heaven, and the rays of the moon appear and return to the earth” (Sib. Or. 3:796–803; cf. T. Levi 4:1: “when the sun is extinguished”; 1 Enoch 57:2: “the holy ones in heaven took notice of it and the

of the heavens who have rebelled will meet their final doom. And it's important to know that. God promised it numerous times in the OT, and Jesus really wants us to understand that it's going to happen. This incredibly brief description of what will happen in the end times (all of the end times condensed down to 4 verses)—two of those verses are about the punishment of the powers of the heavens.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.... 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed every dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

When Jesus comes back, he is going to drop the hammer on the powers of the heavens, and they will pay the price for their role in the NYC Reproductive Health Act, and human trafficking, child abuse, wife beating, rape, torture in China—all of it. That's not to excuse the people involved. They will be punished too. All guilty parties will be punished. Recently I heard one guy who was asked about his eschatology and his answer was very simple: "No one gets away with anything." Not very comprehensive, but correct as far as it goes. No one, human or spirit, will get away with anything. At his return, Jesus is going to give the powers of the heavens a brutal thrashing. And we'll be able to tell that it's happening.

Signs in the Sky

There is a connection between the powers of the heavens and what we see when we look up to the sky. So when they are punished, we'll be able to see signs that it's happening. Luke 21:25 There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.¹¹

Who knows what that might involve? In the past, God has been known to make the sun stand still—or even go backwards. Maybe he'll do something with the atmosphere so everything looks all crazy. Maybe massive meteor showers. Maybe he'll do something with the rotation of the earth—who knows? In Zechariah 14 it says on that day **"there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime-- a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light."** (Zechariah 14:6-7) It will all be jumbled. The sun, moon, and stars are the most steady, stable, reliable realities in our physical existence. Shake those things up, and everything in life is upside down. And that's what will happen when Jesus judges the powers.

But

I think this is why v.24 begins with the word, "but."¹² In the previous verses Jesus warned us not to fall for the signs and wonders of the false prophets who tell us to come and see the Christ somewhere. Jesus says, "But (in contrast to that) the real sign will be visible in the sky for everyone to see. There will be cosmic evidence of the judgment of the powers of the heavens.

So what will the Second Coming be like? On the negative side, darkness will descend, the powers will be thrashed, and that thrashing will visibly shake the heavens. Unbelievers will see that and be full of anguish and confusion. But for us, it's going to be a very different story.

pillars of the earth were shaken")

¹¹ Some interpreters say that the idea of the sun and moon going dark and stars falling from the sky is common OT imagery for judgment. That's true of the darkness part, but I don't know of any OT verse that speaks of the stars falling from the sky. That's unique to the very end when the heavens themselves will be shaken up. One verse comes close. Isaiah 34:4 speaks of the host of heaven withering, but neither the word "star" nor the word "fall" appear in the Hebrew. That verse is similar to Mark 13:25, but it's questionable whether that can be used to support a non-literal interpretation. It's more likely that Isaiah 34:4 is speaking of the ultimate, end-times judgment when the powers of the heavens will be judged along with the nations.

¹² Greek *alla*, the strong adversative.

The Ingathering

27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

That's the positive effect of the Second Coming.

The preterist take on this verse is that it's a reference to missions. The word "angel" can sometimes refer to a human messenger, so the idea is that Jesus will send out his disciples as messengers to gather in new converts that God has chosen. It's true that that's happening, but I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about here because of the words, "angels" and "elect."

The Elect

Jesus, and the writers of the New Testament, used the word "elect" to refer to people who are already believers, not future believers. For example, back in v.22 Jesus said the false prophets will try to deceive the elect. They wouldn't have any way of identifying people God has chosen to be believers in the future. And those people are already deceived anyway. People who are lost now, but who will believe in the future are not called "the elect" in Scripture. The book of 1 Peter, for example, is addressed to the elect—people who are currently believing. So the most natural way to take this is that Jesus will gather people who are already saved.

Angels

And it would also be an unusual use of the word "angels." Jesus uses that word a lot in Mark, and he never uses it to refer to human messengers.¹³ He always means angels.

Angels at the Second Coming

And previously in Mark, Jesus has already talked about the presence of angels at the Second Coming.

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

So that image of Jesus arriving in glory with angels has already been planted in the readers' minds. And that's the sort of thing the disciples have in mind when they ask their question, "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?"

I don't know of any references to angels being involved in evangelism, but there are lots of references to their involvement in the Second Coming.

Matthew 13:49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Missionaries don't weed out unbelievers and throw them into hell.¹⁴

¹³ This is true in the other gospels as well. The only exception is Luke 7:27, where Jesus quotes an Old Testament passage that speaks of a human messenger.

¹⁴ In fact, that's the whole point of the parable Jesus was telling—that it's *not* our job to sort out the wheat from the tares. Matthew 13:28 ... "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull [the weeds] up?' 29 " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " Then he goes on to explain that the ones who do that will be angels, not people.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 ... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (Then he goes on to describe judgment day.)"

The angels are major players in the Second Coming.

So the most natural way to take this is just the way it sounds—Jesus will come in power and glory, riding on the clouds, and he will send out angels to gather all believers to Christ.

Entourage

When Jesus comes, one of the things that will make that coming so glorious will be his entourage. That's why he always mentions the angels when he talks about his return.¹⁵

He'll be surrounded by all his angels—can you imagine what an awesome sight that will be? When angels appear to men, just one angel is usually enough to put a man flat on his back with awe and fear. Imagine seeing all the angels in their most glorious form—I'm sure they'll be in their dress whites for that occasion. Nothing will be veiled.

And not just angels, but also glorified saints. We'll all be gathered to him. When I look at how the NT authors took Jesus' words, it seems most likely to me that this a reference to the rapture. And in Matthew's account, he says it will happen in response to a trumpet blast.

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

This is another problem I have with the idea that this is talking people doing evangelism. The fact that it's connected to a trumpet call makes it sound to me like a onetime event, not a process that goes on for thousands of years of mission work.

Also, if you look for how the NT writers took Jesus' words here about the elect being gathered, you find Paul teaches about it in 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Concerning the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him (that's the noun form of the same word for gather Jesus used), we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

So Paul puts the gathering in the future. It can't refer to the Day of Pentecost or missions in general, because both of those had already happened prior to Paul writing this letter. He was looking forward to a gathering of God's people that had not yet occurred, and his whole point was to urge them not to be deceived into thinking it had already occurred.

The Rapture

And in 1 Thessalonians, he describes the end-times gathering of all the elect in some detail.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet

¹⁵ In Matthew 25, he begins by saying, "Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (v.31). Then he goes on with a long explanation of judgment day, and in the entire section, he never mentions the angels again. They play no role whatsoever in that passage except in the first verse where Jesus is describing how glorious his coming will be.

the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

I love the doctrine of the rapture. To me, the rapture sounds like the funest aspect of the whole Second Coming. Jesus will come in the clouds, and all believers from the past will be raised from the dead in glorified bodies and will go up and meet Jesus in the air.

Ends of the Earth to the Ends of the Heavens

No one will be left out.

27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

That's such a sweeping phrase. This is the only place in the Bible where you see it. Other places talk about from one end of the earth to the other, or from one end of the heavens to the other, but here Jesus presses both ideas into one phrase—from one end of the earth to the other end of the heavens. He's forming the most extreme statement possible to describe every nook and cranny of the entire creation.

All dead believers will be raised, and then those who haven't died who are believers will also rise up into the air with them. If you're alive at that time, you will instantly receive your glorified body as you're being raptured.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—

Not everyone will die be raised from the dead, but we will all get a glorified body.

⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (there's the trumpet again) For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

And do you know what will cause that transformation in us? Seeing Christ's glory.

1 John 3:2 ... when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

When the powers of the heavens see that glory, it will destroy them. When we see it, we'll be transformed into his image.

Meeting

In the Thessalonians passage, where it says we will "meet" Jesus in the air, that word "meet" is a very specific term. It was used of people in a town who would go out to meet an approaching dignitary. As he approached, they would go out and meet him in large numbers and escort him into the town so that when he entered the town, he'd have a massive entourage.¹⁶ That's the word he uses here. Sometimes people wonder why we would be raptured up to meet Jesus in the air only to come right back down with him. This is why.

We're going to be glorified. We're going to be awesome beings. And there will be millions of us—millions and millions and millions, along with the millions of glorious angels.

The splendor will be so overwhelming, that's all it will take to destroy the Antichrist.

¹⁶ This word is only used two other times in Scripture.

Matthew 25:6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

Acts 28:15 The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

The Antichrist will be more powerful even than the powers of the heavens, and he will think he's powerful enough to defeat Christ, but when Jesus comes in his glory, just the brightness of it will be all it will take to turn him into a grease spot on the ground.

And it won't just be what they see—also what they hear.

Revelation 19:6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

If you've ever been in a football stadium after a big touchdown, you know the how loud just 60 or 70 thousand people can be. That's nothing compared to these millions shouting in unison (and who knows what kind of sound our glorified bodies might be capable of).

Of all the various theories about the rapture, the one that's easiest to disprove is the silent, secret rapture idea. It won't be silent. It will be the loudest event that has ever taken place in the history of the world. It will begin with a loud trumpet blast and the shout of the archangel, and then we join in, and all the other angels—no wonder the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Imagine what it will be like to be part of that! You'll look and see an ocean of saints and angels, larger than any crowd you've ever seen, and then you get another perspective and realize that's just the front row. And when the shouts go up, and the songs of praise, and the laughter and celebration, all centered on the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in his full power and glory—that is the destination of the highway of history. That's why the world exists, it's where we're all going, it the point of everything.

Conclusion: "After"

Let me close by going back to the beginning. Remember when all this will happen. 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation It's nice to know there is an "after" tribulation, right? You and I have known nothing but a life of tribulation, but tribulation doesn't get the final word. It would get the final word if all we had were the natural world. Just look at history, and look at where we are now. Look at the murder rate—exploding. Human trafficking. War, chaos, crime, people killing their own children by the millions. If you just draw a line on the graph of human history, no matter how far out you extend the line, you never get to a point you could describe as "after" tribulation. If anything, it only gets worse.

The human race, on its own, is clearly a lost cause. Every generation thinks it will be the exception. People really thought the human race had turned a corner during the Enlightenment. Mankind had finally become enlightened, and now we had enough understanding to finally rise above the cesspool of human history. But it's funny—if you look up the Enlightenment in a history book, you'll see a start date and an end date. How did it end? The French Revolution. The French Revolution happened, and everyone said, "Yeah, I guess we're not so enlightened after all." Right after that was WW1, and not long after that was WW2. And we've had constant wars ever since.

Human nature is incapable of reforming itself. Human nature, apart from divine intervention, does not change. From a natural point of view, there never could be an "after" tribulation. But here Jesus utters this wonderful word, "after." There will be an "after" tribulation because human history is going somewhere. And that destination is our great hope.

Luke 21:27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Summary

Jesus will return on the clouds with power and glory, and everyone will see it (especially his enemies). It will be the darkest day ever for his enemies and the powers of the heavens (powerful spirit beings who had jurisdiction over the nations prior to the cross) will be shaken. And that judgment will be visible from earth. But for believers, it will be a wonderful day. We'll be gathered to him in the rapture and will be part of his glorious appearing as a massive entourage.

Appendix: The Posttribulational Rapture

I believe the rapture will follow the tribulation. Since the Second Coming and the rapture are described together in Scripture without any statement about an intervening time gap, it is natural to assume both to be posttribulational. If the rapture were pretribulational we would expect to see some clear indication to that effect in the passages that teach about the rapture. I find no such statements in Jn.14:3, 1 Co.15:51,52 or 1 Thes.4:13-18. In fact, I find the opposite. References to the last trumpet (1 Co.15:52, 1 Thes.4:16) call to mind the posttribulational coming of Christ (Mt.24:31), as do other similarities between the rapture passages and the Olivet Discourse (a heavenly event with angels, clouds, the gathering of God's people, etc. See also Isa.27:12,13, which must also be posttribulational). Given the fact that the rapture and the Second Coming seem to be spoken of as happening together, the burden of proof is upon those who would suggest a time gap. I have not found the arguments for a pretribulational rapture compelling (see below for my responses to 50 pre-trib arguments).

1. The warnings to the churches

I believe the letters to the churches in Rev.2,3 imply that the Church will experience the tribulation described later in the book. While the comments to each church vary, one constant in all seven letters is the fact that the promises regarding eternal life are extended only to those who “**overcome**” (2:7,11,17,26, 3:5,12,21). Later, the martyrs are described as those who “**overcame**” (12:11, 15:2). Finally, in the description of the New Jerusalem, the Lord restates the fact that it is the one **who overcomes** who will inherit it (Rev.21:7). At the end of the Apocalypse, after many chapters about the Tribulation, the Lord points out that this information is directed not to some other category of tribulation saints, but to the Church (Rev.22:16).

2. The warnings to the disciples

According to the pre-trib view the many warnings regarding the Tribulation do not apply directly to us. They apply, rather, to the “Tribulation saints” who will be on earth during the Tribulation after the Church is raptured. These warnings are prolific in the New Testament and are quite emphatic. In each of Jesus' major discourses directed to believers (with the exception of the Sermon on the Mount), the Lord devotes a substantial percentage of the discourse to warnings regarding the Tribulation, and calls for perseverance to the end.¹⁷ The purpose of these warnings about the Tribulation is to exhort believers to be prepared so they do not go astray (Jn.16:1).

When Jesus speaks so earnestly and so often and so passionately about a warning, we should be very cautious about any doctrine that would dismiss those warnings as non-applicable to us unless something in Jesus' words would indicate they are not for believers in general. But just the opposite is true. Jesus speaks regarding the coming Tribulation in Lk.17:22-18:8, a lesson that applies to the *disciples* (18:1) and is a teaching regarding the perseverance of believers through the difficult period preceding the Second Coming (17:30, 18:6-8).

3. The chronology in the Epistles

¹⁷ the commissioning of the twelve in Mt.10:17-36, the Olivet Discourse in Mt.24:1-25:46, The Upper Room Discourse in Jn.15-17

Paul told the Thessalonians that deliverance from their opponents would come on the day **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels** (2 Thes.1:7), and that **our being gathered to him** will not take place **until the man of lawlessness is revealed** (2 Thes.2:3). The Day of the Lord will not surprise believers and overtake them like a thief - not because they will have already been raptured, but because they will be alert (1 Thes.5:4-6).

4. The nature of our “meeting” Him

In 1 Thes.4:17 we learn that at the rapture we **will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. The word translated “**meet**” (ἀπάντησις) is a technical term that refers to the ancient custom in which people from a town would go out to “meet” an approaching dignitary for the purpose of accompanying him back to the town they had just come from.¹⁸ While the word does not have to always mean this, it is the normal use, and it is consistent with the only other times the term is used in Scripture (Mt.25:6, Acts 28:15).

5. Jesus placed the rapture after the Tribulation

Finally, I believe the most natural way to interpret Mt.24:31-42 (particularly v.31) is as a reference to the rapture. Verse 39 refers to those taken away (αἶρω) by the flood. The idea of this term is to pick up and carry away. The term, “**taken**” in vv.40,41 however (παραλαμβάνω), is more naturally translated, “to take with” than “to bring along.” The term “**left**” often means “to be left behind.” I believe v.31 and vv.41,42 both refer to the rapture.

What about imminence?

Even though I believe the revelation of the Antichrist will precede the rapture, I still hold to the importance of the doctrine of imminence. The fact that Christ will come *soon* is a theme that is repeated in the NT, and we are to look to that event with an eager expectation (Ro.13:12, 1 Co.1:7,8, Php.3:20, Tit.2:13, Jas.5:8-9, 1 Jn.2:18, Rev.22:7,12,18,20). While these passages refer to His coming as “**almost here,**” “**near,**” and “**soon;**” and to this time as the “**last hour,**” there is no passage I am aware of that indicates that His coming can be *any second*. The Rapture (and Second Coming) is impending and could happen soon. I think it is going too far, however, to say that “near” must mean “any split-second.” In fact, Scripture speaks of clearly *posttribulational* events as being “**near**” and “**about to begin**” (1 Pe.4:7, 5,17).

As convinced as I am that the rapture will follow the Tribulation, I also believe that the primary point of the Olivet Discourse is that since apocalyptic prophecy is not intended to give us exact precision in setting times and dates, every believer of every age at every moment must be prepared for Christ’s return.

¹⁸ TDNT v.1 p.380, NIDNTT v.1 p.325

Response to Arguments for a Pre-Trib Rapture of the Church

These arguments for a pretribulation rapture were given to me by someone who said they came from John Walvoord. **The 50 arguments presented to me in this paper are in this font**, and my responses are in this font. I did not respond to arguments against the mid-trib view, as I agree with those arguments.

1. The early church believed in the imminence of the Lord's return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism.

It's true that they looked for an imminent return, and rightfully so. The NT says that His coming is "near" (Jas.5:8).

However 1Pe.4:7 says The end of all things is near. Obviously the end of all things would have to be after the Tribulation. So the biblical definition of imminent (near) doesn't mean "any moment" – it can refer to something that is after the Tribulation.

2. The detailed development of pretribulation truth during the past few centuries does not prove that the doctrine is new or novel. Its development is similar to that of other major doctrines in the history of the church.

I do not argue against pretribulationism based on its recent development.

Hermeneutics

3. Pretribulationism is the only view, which allows literal interpretation of all Old and New Testament passages on the great tribulation.

No view of the rapture can or should interpret figurative passages as literal.

4. Only pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs.

This is incorrect. The promises made to ethnic Israel will be fulfilled in the Kingdom period regardless of the timing of the rapture. Whatever distinctions are made in Revelation between Israel and the Gentile Tribulation saints in the pre-trib. view can also be true of the distinctions between Israel and the Church in the post-trib view.

Nature of the Tribulation

5. Pretribulationism maintains the Scriptural distinction between the great tribulation and tribulation in general which preceded it. II Timothy 3

So does Post-trib.

6. The great tribulation is properly interpreted by pretribulationists as a time of preparation for Israel's restoration (Deuteronomy 4:29,30; Jeremiah 30:4-11). It is not the purpose of the tribulation to prepare the church for glory.

The post-trib view does not deny that God will use suffering to bring Israel to repentance. There is no passage that indicates the Church will be preserved from trouble (in fact, just the opposite). The

Tribulation will be a time of testing. In Rev.3:10 it is called **the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.**

Is it not possible that God could accomplish both purposes (restoration of Israel and testing of everyone) imultaneously? Neither Dt.4:29,30 nor Jer.30:4-11 say anything that would exclude God from accomplishing another purpose at the same time. The first statement in point 6 does not exclude a post-trib rapture, and the second statement is without foundation or support.

7. None of the Old Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church. (Deuteronomy 4:29,30; Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1,2)

None of the Old Testament passages about the first coming of Christ mention the Church either. The Church was a mystery in Old Testament times.

Besides, that argument from silence does not prove anything. If it did, how would the pre-tribulationist explain the fact that the term “Israel” never appears in the entire Olivet Discourse (Mt.24,25) – Jesus’ explanation of the end times, and the only place in the Bible where the term Great Tribulation appears? Does this prove that Israel will not be in the Tribulation or the Kingdom?

8. None of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church. (Matthew 24:15-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10; 5:4-9; Revelation 4-19)

Revelation 4-19 mentions the saints repeatedly. Throughout the NT, “**the saints**” *always* refers to the Church. We see the saints 15 times in Revelation after chapter 3 – in almost every chapter. There is no textual reason for assuming these saints are any different from the saints referred to everywhere else in the NT. That assumption is made purely for the purpose of conforming the book of Revelation to fit a certain theological system.

It is possible to refer to the Church without using the word “church,” just as it is possible to refer to Israel without using the term “Israel” (the term “Israel” never appears in chapter 20, which describes the Millennial Kingdom – does that mean there are no Jews in the Kingdom?)

So even if the word “church” never appeared after chapter three, it would not be evidence that the Church had been raptured. The actual term, however, *does* appear after chapter three. If we want to know to whom the book of Revelation is directed, the Lord Himself tells us: Rev.22:16 **I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.**

So the churches are sent letters warning them to be **overcomers** (a warning repeated to every one of the seven churches - 2:7,11,17,26, 3:5,12,21), then the book goes on to define the **overcomers** as those who are faithful through the coming tribulation (12:11, 15:2). Finally, in the description of the New Jerusalem, the Lord restates the fact that it is the one **who overcomes** who will inherit it (Rev.21:7-8). If you received a letter like that, wouldn’t you assume He is talking to you?

- 9. In contrast to midtribulationism, the pretribulationist view provides an adequate explanation for the beginning of the great tribulation in Revelation 6. Midtribulationism is refuted by the plain teaching of Scripture that the great Tribulation begins long before the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11.**

10. The proper distinction is maintained between the prophetic trumpets of Scripture by pretribulationism. There is no proper ground for the pivotal argument of midtribulationism that the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trumpet in that there is no established connection between the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, the last trumpet of I Corinthians 15:52, and the trumpet of Matthew

24:31. They are three distinct events.

There are numerous references to trumpets in prophetic passages. In the Pre-trib scheme, the very first one is the one mentioned in 1 Co.15:52, which even Walvoord admits refers to the rapture. But that very passage calls it the *last trumpet*. Jesus clearly taught that His Second Coming would be heralded by a **loud trumpet call** (Mt.24:31). Later, when writing about the end times, Paul refers to *the last trumpet*. Since it has the definite article (the), it refers to *the* trumpet that is associated with the end times. This, combined with the fact that it is the *last* trumpet would most certainly call to mind Jesus' words. The most natural interpretation is to take this as the reference to what Jesus was talking about in His definitive sermon on the subject.

11. The unity of Daniel's seventieth week is maintained by pretribulationists. By contrast, midtribulationism destroys the unity of Daniel's seventieth week and confuses Israel's program with that of the church.

The Nature of the Church

12. The translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the second coming of Christ after the tribulation.

This argument is circular in that it assumes its conclusion. It is assumed by pretribulationists that any passage that refers to the rapture cannot be talking about the Second Coming, and any passage that is talking about the Second Coming cannot be talking about the rapture. Then it is asserted that no passage talks about both together.

The truth is, every passage that talks about the rapture connects it with the second coming.

1Th.4:13-5:1

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord (The most natural reading of the phrase **the coming of the Lord** is to understand it as a reference to the Second Coming. Certainly if Paul wanted us to think of something other than the Second Coming he could have used some other phrase besides **the coming of the Lord**. The only reason that phrase wouldn't be taken to refer to the Second Coming is because of a theological bias.) **will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God,** (same language of Mt.24, where the Second Coming is in view) **and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**

(What foundation is there for making v.17 suddenly refer to 7 years earlier?)

1Co 15:50-54

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (Jesus talked about that final day when He appears at His second coming being announced with a trumpet. If this trumpet is 7 years prior, in what sense could it be the last trumpet?) **For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable...**

So the most natural interpretation is to take the rapture and second coming as a single event that all occurs at the same time.

Is it possible that there is a hidden 7 year gap in the middle that we can't see because of the telescoping of the prophecies? I do not believe there can be a 7 year gap for the following reasons:

1. When something is hidden, it's truly hidden. If this were a hidden gap, no one would know about it. Truths that were hidden in the OT were not known by anyone until they were clearly revealed in the NT. At any given time, a truth is either revealed or it is hidden.

2. In 2 Thes.1:7 Paul told the Thessalonians that their deliverance from their opponents would come on the day **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels**. The Thessalonians were part of the Church, and their deliverance was to come not seven years prior to the Second Coming, but at the Second Coming.
3. 2 Thes.2:3 **our being gathered to him** will not take place **until the man of lawlessness is revealed**. This rules out an any-moment rapture before the man of lawlessness is revealed.
4. (most important – and the reason why I now believe this is a doctrine worth debating) The Church is repeatedly warned to persevere through the Tribulation. The Lord Jesus gave us many, very strongly worded warnings urging us to be prepared for the Tribulation. We should be very slow to develop any doctrine that would cause us to disregard all of them and say, "That doesn't apply to me." If Jesus considered the warnings that important, the consequences for the pretribulationist who disregards them will be dire if the warnings are indeed intended for the Church. Perhaps this is why Jesus said when the trouble comes, **the love of most will grow cold** (Mt.24:12). They will be unprepared for the suffering.

In *each* of Jesus' major discourses directed at believers (with the exception of the Sermon on the Mount), the Lord devotes a substantial percentage of the discourse to warnings regarding the Tribulation, and calls for perseverance to the end (the commissioning of the twelve in Mt.10:17-36, the Olivet Discourse in Mt.24:1-25:46, The Upper Room Discourse in Jn.15-17). The purpose of these warnings about the Tribulation is to warn believers to be prepared so they do not go astray (Jn.16:1).

Jesus did the same thing in smaller discourses as well. In Lk.17:22-18:8 Jesus talks about the Tribulation. This is clearly a lesson that applies to the disciples (18:1) and is a teaching regarding the perseverance of believers through the difficult period preceding the Second Coming (17:30, 18:6-8).

13. The church is not appointed to wrath (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10; 5:9). The Church therefore cannot enter "the great day of their wrath" (Revelation 6:17).

The believers in Rev. are never the object of God's wrath. In fact, they will be kept from God's wrath (18:4). Every believer, including Tribulation saints, is saved from God's wrath (Ro.5:9,3:25). If the only way to be delivered from God's wrath is to not be present on the earth, then how do we explain the Tribulation saints being present on the earth at the Tribulation and still being saved from God's wrath?

Rev.3:10 says **Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.**

We know from the similar uses of the terms in the NT that the phrase **keep you from** means "preserve while in the sphere of."

Jn.17:15 **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one.** (the only other use of the identical phrase) Here Jesus clearly teaches the doctrine of preservation *without physical removal*, and He uses this very same phrase to do it.

Ac 15:29 **You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to keep yourself from these things.**

Things like sexual immorality will always be a threat, and you can't totally remove yourself from the *presence* of it. However it is possible to keep yourself from it even while the temptation is present in your midst.

As for the argument that they are delivered from the *time period* itself, which can only mean removal - Jn 12:27 says "**Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? `Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.** That is not a reference to a time period but to the suffering that would take place in that time period.

14. The church will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord (I Thessalonians 5:1-9) which includes the tribulation.

The Day of the Lord will not surprise believers and overtake them like a thief, *not because they will be absent*, but because they will be alert (1 Thes.5:4-6).

15. The possibility of a believer escaping the tribulation is mentioned in Luke 21:36.

Again, even the Tribulations saints can escape the tribulation. Escaping the tribulation means enduring it without turning away from the faith.

16. The church of Philadelphia was promised deliverance from "the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

See the answer in #13.

17. It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgment is inflicted upon the world as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. (II Peter 2:6-9)

The greatest act of God's deliverance in the OT was the deliverance from Egypt, where the Israelites, while delivered from the judgments, were present at the time, and were inconvenienced by them to say the least.

18. At the time of the translation of the church, all believers go to the Father's house in heaven (John 14:3), and do not immediately return to the earth after meeting Christ in the air as posttribulationists teach.

John 14:3 does not say that we immediately go to heaven right at the time of the rapture, nor does it say that there is no return to earth. Obviously, not every prophecy mentions every detail of what happens. For example, Jn.14:3 doesn't mention the resurrection either, but we do not conclude from that that there is no resurrection.

19. Pretribulationism does not divide the body of Christ at the rapture on a works principle. The teaching of

a partial rapture is based on the false doctrine that the translation of the church is a reward for good works. It is rather a climatic aspect of salvation by grace.

20. The Scriptures clearly teach that all not part, of the church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the Church (I Corinthians 15:51,52; I Thessalonians 4:17).

21. As opposed to a view of a partial rapture, pretribulationism is founded on the definite teaching of Scripture that the death of Christ frees from all condemnation. (Romans 8:1)

22. The godly remnant of the tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the church as maintained by the posttribulationists.

Actually, they are pictured as the Church. The term used to describe them (*saints*) only refers to the Church in the rest of the NT.

23. The pretribulationist view as opposed to posttribulationism does not confuse general terms like *elect* and *saints* which apply to the saved of all ages with specific terms like *Church* and those *in Christ* which refer to believers of this age only.

The term *elect* is used of the Church specifically and not believers of other ages in 2 Ti.2:10, Tit.1:1 and 1 Pe.1:1.

The term *saints* is used of the Church specifically and not believers of other ages in Rom. 1:7, Rom. 8:27, Rom. 12:13, Rom. 15:25, Rom. 15:26, Rom. 15:31, Rom. 16:2, Rom. 16:15, 1 Co. 1:2, 1 Co. 6:1, 1 Co. 6:2, 1 Co. 14:33, 1 Co. 16:1, 1 Co. 16:15, 2 Co. 1:1, 2 Co. 8:4, 2 Co. 9:1, 2 Co. 9:12, 2 Co. 13:12, Eph. 1:1, Eph. 1:15, Eph. 1:18, Eph. 2:19, Eph. 3:8, Eph. 3:18, Eph. 4:12, Eph. 5:3, Eph. 6:18, Phil. 1:1, Phil. 4:21, Phil. 4:22, Col. 1:2, Col. 1:4, Col. 1:12, Col. 1:26, 1 Thess. 3:13, 2 Thess. 1:10, 1 Tim. 5:10, Phlm. 1:5, Phlm. 1:7, Heb. 6:10, Heb. 13:24, Jude 1:3, Rev. 5:8, Rev. 5:9, Rev. 8:3, Rev. 8:4, Rev. 11:18, Rev. 13:7 and Rev. 13:10.

One example is Col.1:26

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Here the *saints* are distinguished from the believers of the OT era.

Doctrine of Imminence

24. The pretribulationist interpretation is the only view which teaches that the coming of Christ is actually imminent.

The word “imminent” is not used in the Bible. The words that are used in the Bible describe an imminency that includes events that everyone agrees take place after the Tribulation (see answer # 1).

25. The exhortation to be comforted by the coming of the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:18) is significant only in the pretribulationist view, and is especially contradicted by posttribulationism.

This argument assumes that we cannot be comforted if suffering will come before deliverance. Such an idea is flatly contradicted by Scripture (2 Co.1:3-7). The Second Coming is the reason we can even rejoice in suffering (1 Pe.1:6 See also Ro.5:3, Col.1:24 and 1 Pe.4:13, all of which speak of rejoicing in suffering).

26. The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” of Christ is His own (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.

Jesus commanded us to look for signs (Mt.24:32). The idea that we can only watch for one or the other is a false dichotomy. We see the signs, they give us hope, then we see His coming.

27. The exhortation to purify ourselves in view of the Lord's return has most significance if His coming is imminent (I John 3:2,3).

Our job is not to determine how an exhortation may seem to have more significance. Rather we should obey all exhortations – both those that call for purification and those that call for preparation for the Tribulation.

28. The church is uniformly exhorted to look for the coming of the Lord, while believers in the tribulation are directed to look for signs.

The Church is directed to look for signs in Mt.24.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

29. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer of evil cannot be taken out of the world unless the church, which the Spirit indwells, is translated at the same time. The tribulation cannot begin until this restraint is lifted.

The Holy Spirit cannot be taken out of the world period. He is omnipresent. There is no reason to assume 2 Thes.2:7 is talking about the Holy Spirit, and the view that it is is highly questionable.

If the Holy Spirit wanted to stop restraining evil in the world, is He not capable of doing so without leaving the world completely? And if the Holy Spirit is not present in the Tribulation, how is it that the Tribulation Saints are saints (holy ones)? According to Romans 8:9, everyone who belongs to Christ has the Holy Spirit within them. All of the ministries of the Holy Spirit described in the NT we observe taking place in the Tribulation.

30. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer must be taken out of the world before “the lawless one,” who dominates the tribulation period, can be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8).

See answer # 29.

31. If the expression, “except the falling away come first,” be translated literally, “except the departure come first,” it would plainly show the necessity of the rapture taking place before the beginning of the tribulation.

The word, “falling away” (APOSTASIA) means *apostasy, rebellion, falling away*. The most natural meaning of this verse is that that day will not come until either the rebellion of the antichrist occurs, or the great Apostasy occurs. To suggest that the Holy Spirit will be removed from the world, and then to refer to that removal as an apostasy is highly questionable.

Necessity of an Interval Between the Rapture and the Second Coming

32. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, all believers of this age must appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with the second coming of Christ to the earth.

Actually, it is (Mt.25:32), however even if it were not – that would not prove a gap between the rapture and Second Coming.

33. If the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:1-5:14 are representative of the church as many expositors believe, it would necessitate the rapture and reward of the church before the Tribulation.

The word “elder” is often used to refer to leaders or rulers. Since the context points in that direction (seated on thrones with crowns), and they are distinguished from human in Revelation, and since Scripture

routinely speaks of spiritual beings who are rulers in the heavenly realms (Col 1:16, Eph 3:10, 1 Pet 3:22) there is no reason to assume they are men.

34. The coming of Christ for His bride must take place before the Second Coming to the earth for the wedding feast (Rev. 19:7-10).

Both the Pre and Post Tribulational views hold that the rapture precedes the Second Coming. But nothing in Rev.19 requires that it be 7 years prior. Why could it not be immediately prior?

35. Tribulation saints are not translated at the second coming of Christ but carry on ordinary occupations such as farming and building houses, and they will bear children (Isa. 65:20-25). This would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the Second Coming to the earth, as posttribulationists teach.

Nothing in Isa.65 identifies the people as tribulation saints or as being connected with the Tribulation at all. Furthermore, there is good reason to believe that in the eternal state, on the new earth, there will be farms, houses, etc.

36. The judgment of the Gentiles following the Second Coming (Matt. 25:31-46) indicates that both saved and unsaved are still in their natural bodies. This would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the Second Coming.

The text says nothing about natural bodies. It simply describes the separation of the wicked and the righteous like the separation of sheep and goats.

37. If the translation took place in connection with the Second Coming to the earth, there would be no need of separating the sheep from the goats at a subsequent judgment, but the separation would have taken place in the very act of the translation of the believers before Christ actually sets up His throne on earth (Matt. 25:31).

It is possible that there could be a number of aspects to the separation. In fact, there is already a separation even in this age, as the Church is holy and set apart. It could also be that the Judgment will take place at the same time as the rapture.

38. The judgment of Israel (Ezek. 20:34-38), which occurs subsequent to the Second Coming, indicates the necessity of regathering Israel. The separation of the saved from the unsaved in this judgment obviously takes place sometime after the Second Coming and would be unnecessary if the saved had previously been separated from the unsaved by translation.

It is not obvious that this must take place sometime after the Second Coming. All the passage says is that Israel will be gathered and judged. This is consistent with the idea that Judgment Day will take place at the time of the Rapture and Second Coming.

Contrast Between the Rapture and the Second Coming

39. At the time of the Rapture the saints meet Christ in the air, while at the Second Coming Christ returns to the Mount of Olives to meet the saints on earth.

The description of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives in Zech.14:4 is a description of His judgment on unbelievers, not his coming for Saints.

40. At the time of the Rapture the Mount of Olives is unchanged, while at the

Second Coming it divides and a valley is formed to the east of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4-5).

No passage that speaks of the Rapture states that the Mount of Olives will be unchanged.

41. At the Rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the second coming of Christ to the earth.

This is a circular argument – assuming the very conclusion he is attempting to prove. I would suggest that the descriptions of the Rapture are descriptions of saints being translated in connection with the Second Coming. This is said to take place at the “last trumpet” (1 Cor.15:52) and our being taken up to meet the Lord in the air is spoken of in the context of the Day of the Lord when He returns in judgment (1 Thes.4:17-5:3).

42. At the Rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the Second Coming to the earth the saints remain in the earth without translation.

This is incorrect. At the Rapture the saints do not go to heaven; rather they go up to meet the Lord in the air and accompany Him the rest of the way to earth. This is the normal meaning of the Greek word translated “meet” – to go out and meet an approaching dignitary or VIP in order to accompany him into the city as he approaches. The word appears 3 times in the NT (Mt.25:6, Acts 28:15, 1 Thes.4:17)

43. At the time of the Rapture the world is unjudged and continues in sin, while at the Second Coming the world is judged and righteousness is established on the earth.

No passage that speaks of the rapture indicates the world is unjudged and continuing in sin. In fact, quite the opposite (1 Thes.4:17-5:3)

44. The translation of the church is pictured as a deliverance before the day of wrath, while the Second Coming is followed by the deliverance of those who have believed in Christ during the Tribulation.

The Rapture is not described as a deliverance before the day of wrath. Saints are exempted from God’s wrath on earth during the Tribulation, but they are subjected to persecution from men. (See answer to #13)

45. The Rapture is described as imminent, while the Second Coming is preceded by definite signs.

The Second Coming is also spoken of as imminent (Mt.25:1-13).

46. The translation of living believers is truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the second coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments.

Agreed, but this is not contradicted by Posttribulationism. That there are aspects of the Second Coming that are revealed only in the NT is obvious (for example, the fact that it will be *Jesus* who will return is also only revealed in the NT).

47. The rapture concerns only the saved, while the second coming deals with both saved and unsaved.

Agreed, but this is not contradicted by posttribulationism either. Everyone agrees that there are some aspects of the Second Coming that apply to believers, and others that apply to unbelievers (the idea that the Second Coming will be a deliverance applies only to believers, and that it is a time of wrath applies only to unbelievers)

48. At the rapture Satan is not bound, while at the second coming Satan is bound and sent into the abyss.

There is no verse that suggests that Satan will not be bound after the rapture. He will.

49. No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the church and the rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the second coming.

Correct. But this is not an argument against pretribulationism, because there is no passage of Scripture that says no unfulfilled prophecy remains before we will be with the Lord.

50. No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the second coming in either Testament ever mentions translation of living saints at the same time.

Incorrect. 1 Co.15, the most comprehensive passage in the entire Bible dealing with the resurrection of believers, after 50 verses about the resurrection of believers, says **Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

51. Another Pre-trib argument offered by Gleason Archer regarding the Post-trib view that we meet the Lord in the air and immediately accompany Him to earth: "This yo-yo procedure of popping up down presents a very great difficulty...these upward-bobbing saints will only impede the momentum of His earthward charge..."

In 1 Thes.4:17 we learn that at the rapture we **will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** The word translated "meet" (APANTASIN) is a technical term that refers to the ancient custom in which people from a town would go out to "meet" an approaching dignitary for the purpose of accompanying him back to the town they had just come from.¹⁹ While the word does not have to always mean this, it is the normal use, and it is consistent with the only other times the term is used in Scripture (Mt.25:6, Acts 28:15).

Mt.25:5,6 **"The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and [the virgins] became drowsy and fell asleep. 6" At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"**

And the virgins said, "Why bother? We will just be coming right back into the city anyway."

Ac 28:14-16 **...And so we came to Rome. 15The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. 16When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself...**

If the Bible clearly says that we will go out to meet the Lord in the air, and then have the privilege of accompanying Him the rest of the way to the Earth, are we going to reject that because it seems like a waste of our time or because it will somehow impede the Lord's progress?

There are two approaches to interpreting end times prophecy:

¹⁹ TDNT v.1 p.380, NIDNTT v.1 p.325

1. Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* p.42: “the prophecies can be pieced together to make a coherent picture, even though the pieces are scattered in small bits throughout the Old and New Testaments.”
2. The straightforward approach. Take each passage at face value.

I take the second approach, and I believe it leads to a Post-Trib view.

The blessed hope of the return of the Lord for His church is a precious aspect of faith and expectation. While learned and devout saints have not always agreed as to the content of this hope, the present discussion has attempted to justify this important aspect of truth. May the promise of our Lord “I will come again, and will receive you unto myself,” John 14:3b bring comfort and hope to us in a modern world as it was intended to do for the disciples in the upper room on that dark night before the crucifixion, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Revelation 22:17,20

Amen. And may the Church also heed the many warnings from our Lord about the coming Tribulation.