

Yes. We will.

A POSTTRIBULATION HANDBOOK

Bob Faulkner

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DEDICATION

To the great majority of Christians
who still believe that “after” means “after.”

CONTENTS

1. Introductory, 5
2. Definitions, 14
3. History, 19
4. Two Serious Scriptures, 58
5. Pre-Trib Topics, 72
6. John F. Walvoord, a Response, 136
7. Dave Hunt's "Distinctions", 164
8. Tim LaHaye's Movies, a Review, 179
9. Bits & Pieces, 188
10. Two Testimonies, 200
11. Summary Statements, 203

Yes. We Will.

Introductory

Well, I found it! Pretribulation rapture in the Bible!

Wait, wait! Don't throw this book down. You didn't pick it up by mistake. Let me explain!

2 Thessalonians 2, right? It's clear that the Tribulation (which we will talk about in *much detail* later) had not come to the earth yet in Paul's day. I'm sure the church at Thessalonica knew that. But someone was spreading around the story that Jesus had already come and taken His people away! A *pretribulation error* long before Darby and company popularized it, and it got into the Bible footnotes of English-speaking people all over the world.

Paul corrects it right away! I paraphrase.

"No, no, our gathering together to Jesus, and His coming, will not happen until several other things happen. Relax. You've been lied to!"

That's what Paul said. I say it too. Folks,

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord... His truth is marching on..."

But the truth of Jesus' coming has been diluted by those who now see two comings, and who have caused this whole issue to be a matter of debate instead of rejoicing and hope.

So here is another voice to add to the confusion? Hopefully not. My desire is to be one of the many voices bringing God's people back to the Scriptures on this issue. Let the Word speak for Itself... it's been incredibly clear and satisfying for all these years.

August 1, 2018. **Off to war again.**

So many issues. So little time. So many errors floating around pretending to be truths. But no surprise. Jesus and the others warned us, didn't they?

My file box is expanding too rapidly. I need to start writing. The Scriptures and logic and history and tradition all support a coming of the Lord just as He stated it to His disciples, "*after the tribulation of those days.*" All of this is amassing inside of me to the point where I must speak or burst. The case that needs to be argued before the Christian Church is so solid and true that it cries out to be heard!

I shall proceed a little at a time. This shall not be some scholarly work in the tradition of Walvoord and MacArthur and other bright men among us. It will be a simple recording of facts I have gleaned here and there. Apostolic words. Words from the church and from the Lord. Words that come out of a sense of the obvious from my own cranium.

The arguments shall not necessarily be in a sequential order, though I will try to stick to a topic once it has been assigned.

My heart is heavy to think that the most brilliant stars in the church sky have espoused, and continue to enunciate, a teaching that did not shine with any splendor before the 1830's. How can so many great Bible teachers not "get it"? Where did this new teaching originate?

That's the kind of thing I will deal with, hopefully with necessary humility, in the pages to come.

“Don’t confuse me with the facts.”

We’ve heard that one a lot. I think it never had a better application than in the case before us.

Many are depending on a footnote in a Scofield Reference Bible for their eschatology. An explanation from a respected Bible scholar. A “word” received in a Pentecostal church many decades ago in another country. The reputation of John Darby. A movie they saw that showed the rapture taking place before the trouble hit the planet. Their sainted mother or father. A popular theologian that even the young people love. The way they were taught from childhood.

But let me, just an ordinary believer, sit with them a while. Open the Scriptures that tell such plain truth about His coming. And a wall as strong as the one that was in Berlin, as long as the one in China, will miraculously grow between me and my hearer. Communications will stop. Angry responses will take their place. “I’ve always believed this! Don’t try to take this away from me.”

God is no respecter of persons. If I study His Word I will know the truth. Without Bible College. Without long years of preaching experience. Without a title. The facts here are so simple, so plain.

We need the church. But sometimes our individual church or pastor can get it wrong. It happens. I must take responsibility myself to check this out. Walk with God a while. Read. Talk it over with others. Pray. Listen carefully.

And if the facts confuse for a while, that’s OK. Truth will drive out error before it’s all over. And I’ll be so happy I discovered it!

Yes. We Will.

This is my simple but sad affirmation that yes, we – the true church of Jesus Christ – will indeed have to go through earth’s worst times, aka the Great Tribulation.

Not all of the church, of course. God’s people die and are immediately with the Lord, every day. Most of the church will have already passed into eternity before these last years come upon us. But the ones alive at that time will enter in and be given extraordinary grace. Then a huge number of them will be slaughtered.

The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this, the judgment.” The judgment comes at the Day of the Lord. And that day comes at the resurrection. And that day comes at the Last Trumpet sound. When Jesus returns.

I’ll be more specific about all this, but for now just the general proclamation, Yes. We will. Whoever told me otherwise would have left me woefully unprepared for what is coming, should it be soon.

And soon it might be. The only *condition* expected before the Great Tribulation is the Great Apostasy. Falling away. Some say we are already there, and have been for centuries. Some see an even worse falling from revealed Truth.

More about that later, too.

I’m not alone.

This was news to me! And good news. I don’t have to walk this road alone, after all. Though it feels lonely at times.

Hear ye! An incredible piece of information. The pretribulation

rapture is a *minority view*. I said it right. Now, historically, that announcement is a no-brainer. But I'm talking about the present population of all that is called *church*.

C. T. Steinle quotes Pew Research figures in stating that only about 25% (tops) of the church believes in a pretrib rapture. And by far the majority of these people live in the United States, and English-speaking countries.

Meaning – *gulp* – we (the English-speaking) started this trend. Or at least promoted it to its present expansion. Escaping trouble is surely a western church thing. And now we have affected much of the world with our escapist tendencies.

You may want to read Steinle's book: *Why most Christians Believe in a Post Tribulation Rapture*.

Or you can go online, as I did, and check out articles, books, and videos by Rick Walls, George Ladd, William Lane Craig, Robert Morris, Walter Veith, David Pawson, Alex Jones, Steve Anderson, Kent Hovind, Zac Poonen, Irwin Baxter, Dave Robbins, Mike Shreve, Sam Adams, the Berean Christian Bible Study Resources, Dave McPherson, Brian Schwertley, Tim Warner, Harry Bethel, Bob Mitchell, Scott Wheeler, Frank Dobrowski, Elwood Trost, Roy Anderberg...

Oh yes, there are quite a few. More, for sure. I list them in no particular order, with no titles or achievements attached to their names. Just men in search of truth. I'll quote from some of them later. Most of them had a part in confirming the truth I found.

But wait! There's more!

I can't believe it. I just found an *entire website* devoted to tracking down pastors and churches, right here in the U S of A, that believe

in the post-tribulation rapture. It's at www.posttribpeople.com from which I copy:

Post-Tribulation Directory
This is a directory of Post-tribulation people,
churches, and ministries.
****At this time, we have 189 listings from 12**
countries**

I mean I'm *really* not alone. So now, your job is to figure out how rational, ordinary, Bible-believing Christians in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, could dare to accept the position I will present, a *posttribulation* rapture. Right?

By the way, I can correct that listings number above. I just signed up, so there were 190 as of August 2, 2018.

Anyway, the Christian Church has a major disagreement here. We've had them all through our history. Some are more important than others. How important is this one?

People who believe in the pretribulation rapture tend to ignore the warnings of Matthew 24 and Revelation. They tend not to worry about antichrist or the mark of the Beast. After all, they won't be here. But what if antichrist's methods of enslavement are already here and being used? And what if they think that they can avoid all forms of trouble, since their loving "Daddy-God" would never allow them to experience it? What then? That's the problem of this particular disagreement. Pretty serious stuff. I want to get it right.

Don't be deceived!

That's pretty straightforward, right? The two passages that speak most clearly about the timing of the rapture, both are introduced by

the same warning.

Matthew 24 is probably the most obvious Scripture in its declaration. It's a talk initiated by the disciples. They were suddenly curious about the end times. Jesus does not rebuke them for their questions, or say they aren't all that important, or make them feel guilty for asking for signs. On the contrary, he gives a very specific answer.

But before all that, in 24:4b, He says, "Take heed that no one deceive you."

What? Someone is going to try to deceive me about the end times? Someone evil is that concerned about this doctrine of Jesus' coming that he would try to get Christians off track? Yes!

Paul was just as adamant in that other no-doubt word about the rapture. The Thessalonian church had already suffered from the deceiver and he had to calm them down. They thought the rapture could come at any minute, and that they had just missed it! That was the teaching someone was circulating. Paul has to say, before he starts his fuller explanation, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3a, "Let no one deceive you *by any means*."

What? There will be more than one way to be deceived? Like, by a letter, or a book, or a video, or a movie, or a "word" in church, or a scholar? Yes!

The warning then is real and necessary: Don't be deceived. By *any means*.

Why do I have to eat this stuff?

Parents hear it all the time. Preachers too, probably. Why do we have to study this subject? I think I have already touched on the

answer to some degree. We don't want to wind up like the poor Thessalonians, fearing for their life that the rapture theory going around the church was true: Jesus had already come, and they had been left behind!

The integrity of Scripture is at stake. Does the Bible mean what it says, say what it means? Or is there a Gnostic-like "secret" understanding that can only be comprehended by those "in the know"? For you see, *there is no passage* that states that, first, there is a catching away, and, second, there is a time of tribulation on the earth. Nowhere.

But so many folks just "know."

For those who understand the issue but simply don't care, we say with Agur in Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God is pure." No, this isn't equal to the doctrines about who Jesus is. This isn't like the salvation teachings. Granted. But surely studying this is more important than watching a ball game? Going to a rock concert? Eating that fifth meal of the day? Surely the man of God hungers for every possible truth of God?

Doesn't he?

Ignorance of the timing of things is serious. I can only imagine the plight of those who fed on Hollywood-style rapture dramas, when they see antichrist rising before them, and Jesus has not yet returned! Panic. Expecting years of bliss with Jesus in heaven, the horrors of an antichrist world rise before them. They will reflect bitterly that some very godly-sounding men led them astray.

And no Apostle Paul to set it all straight again.

Definitions

So what's a "rapture", anyway?

I remember when that word was only used in love songs. In Christian contexts, it meant ecstasy or passion. Or, being carried away emotionally by an ecstatic experience.

There's the connection. The being "carried away" thing. Only, in modern church thought, it's when the *body* is carried away into the heavens with Jesus.

No one who knows his Bible is fighting against that! We'll be caught up and carried away, for certain! Jesus will come, and we'll go up to meet Him in the air. All agreed. And that is the "rapture."

Question is, when?

All this fuss over the "when"? Yes, that's the hard truth. Timing is everything.

Used to be, the church considered the coming of the Lord as one huge event at the end of history, at the end of world's greatest troubles. It was the Day of the Lord, Judgment Day. I remember.

But nearly two hundred years ago, something else crept in. The teaching spread that in fact Jesus was going to come years before that final event, in a separate appearance that was called then "the rapture." By giving this event a separate name, Christians began mentally to separate the rapture from the ultimate "second coming."

Those who believe Jesus will come two more times are the "pretribulation rapturists." Those who believe He is coming only one more time are known as "posttribulation rapturists."

There are other camps, but no need to talk of them now.

Where is “rapture” in the Bible?

Can't find “rapture” in any modern translation of the Bible. It's a concept. Like the Trinity. Except that *Trinity* sums up a very basic Biblical teaching of a Three-Persons-In-One God. No hidden concept, though truly a mystery.

“Rapture”, as it is being used today, describes a *new doctrine* that has taken the western church by storm. But in fairness, there is a Greek word that matches the idea of “catching away”. *Harpazo*.

Harpazo is used several times in Scripture.

Mathew 13:19. The enemy “snatches” what of God's Word is sown in men's hearts.

John 10:12. The wolf “catches” sheep and scatters them.

Acts 8:39. The Spirit of the Lord “caught away” Philip.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Paul is “caught up” to Paradise.

1 Thessalonians 4:17. The “catching up” of believers to be with the Lord.

Revelation 12:5. A Child is “caught up” to God.

Catching up is all over Scripture. Enoch, Elijah, Jesus. It's a good important idea. But it's been hijacked by the pretribulation folks to mean a separate event from the coming of the Lord. That has caused untold problems among us! And may cause more...

Tribulation? What's that about?

That word is a lot more visible. I found twenty-seven listings (singular and plural) in Strong's Concordance. Nineteen of them just mean “trouble.” (A few are even *translated* “trouble” in the KJV.)

Every Christian of every age goes through trouble. Again, a point of agreement among us.

But four passages speak of an unprecedented *trouble*, or *Tribulation*, capitalized by scholars of this subject, to identify a time in history described by Jesus and Daniel in alarming terms.

Here is Daniel, (and the word here is translated “trouble”, but it is the same event as Jesus will mention). At the very end of history, (12:1) “... *there shall be a **time of trouble** such as never was since there was a nation...*”

And here is Jesus, speaking of the same time in Matthew and Mark: “... *then there will be **great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be.*”

That’s the “Great Tribulation,” though it is never referred to as a proper noun in Scripture.

So, some of us believe Jesus is coming *pre* and some *post* in reference to this time of trouble. Hence, *pretribulation* and *posttribulation*.

And what is “Jacob’s Trouble”?

The reference is to Jeremiah 30:7. This should sound familiar:

*“Alas! For that day is **great, so that none is like it**. And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.”*

Trouble. Tribulation. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel. Here is a time when Jacob/Israel will suffer trouble immensely, prior to that nation’s final establishment with their Messiah.

Some of that suffering is explained in code language in Revelation 12. Satan’s full wrath is aimed at Israel, but God protects His nation

after a while, and the church becomes Satan's target at that time.

When Jesus was talking of Jacob's trouble in Matthew 24, He told the Jews that would be in Judea in that awful day, to run for it. That's not a directive for all men everywhere. But the Jews are to run. Eventually they will find a place of protection.

Not all of the details are clear. Yes, there was a trial run of this moment in history back in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, the Jews ran, and yes, were even protected. But Jesus says that the final Jewish persecution will be followed immediately by His return.

History will repeat itself. Almost.

One more Tribulation passage we don't want to leave out. It will come in handy later. Revelation 7:14. John is in heaven. He sees the elect of Israel sealed. Then he sees an innumerable company of saved Gentiles before the same Throne of God. Who are they? The text is clear: They have just come out of the *Great Tribulation!* Raptured? Oh no! Martyred! Conquered by antichrist but sent right to the arms of Jesus! Going to heaven, but via the Tribulation!

I mentioned history. Let's look now at pretribulation history through the centuries... such as it is, and it isn't, much.

Yes. We Will.

History

A matter of history.

References in history are not the best way to solve theological questions. Shortly after the apostles, even the renowned “church fathers” started making mistakes, changing a little of this or that. *Cults* will even refer to church fathers for their doctrinal side-paths. There is no perfect source of truth outside the Scriptures.

So, an appeal to history is helpful but not decisive.

What does history teach about a “pretribulation rapture”? Precious little. Which in itself doesn’t prove a lot. Maybe people believed it, but didn’t write about it. Maybe works were lost.

But, granting as favorable an approach as we can to history, I gotta say, silence is pretty eloquent at times.

A fourth century deacon-turned-hermit, Ephraem, seems to be the only voice from the days of the apostles until the 18th century, that is in favor of this teaching.

Wow. How many documents were written by believers during that time? And not one hint of pretribulation coming? No word “rapture” in the Christian dialogue? This thought is contested, and I will produce that evidence. But to my thinking, only Ephraem had such an idea, and that was a little sketchy.

So many other streams of thought made it down the centuries. Creeds. Councils. Statements of all kinds. But no pretrib? Why was no one talking about it, at least seemingly?

Could it be, just *could it be*, that the doctrine was not accepted, taught, believed, discussed by the huge majority of the Christian Church, *because it had, and has, no basis in Holy Scripture?*

Pseudo-Ephraem?

Ephraem (or *Ephrem*) was a Syriac Christian deacon, theologian, later a hermit monk, who lived through most of the fourth century. He is loved in the Syrian Orthodox Church, and honored by Eastern Orthodoxy. He was even declared a “doctor” by the Roman Catholic Church in 1920.

He was a prolific writer. Unfortunately, the quote I am about to share may not be from him. It could be from “Pseudo” Ephraem, a man claiming to be whom he was not.

What? Yes, sadly, names of famous men like Ephraem were often used by less than honest writers to build their own reputation. That is, they wrote a work, and assigned a famous man’s name to it. In this case, the unknown author perhaps decided to use Ephraem’s name. “Perhaps” because we really don’t know...

It could be that this document reflected the *views* of Ephraem. Maybe not. Maybe just the views of the author. In which case, they are less than honorable for our purposes.

The important thing seems to be that those who search high and low for proof of pretribulation thinking finally found something, by this Catholic “doctor” ... or his wanna be.

Here is the quote from Pseudo-Ephraem’s sermon entitled *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*:

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

Wow. Wonder what else Ephraem believed?

Just how “orthodox” was this “Ephraem”?

I mean orthodox in the sense that he was correct doctrinally. I got curious, and decided to read the author’s entire sermon. Easily available online.

Most of it is just “Ephraem’s” paraphrasing of end-time Scripture. I found myself in agreement with, say 75% of the message. Not original stuff, but very passionate, to be sure.

But there were some problems. Right off the bat, Mr. Ephraem, or whatever his name was, says, *“Believe the Holy Spirit who speaks in us.”* “Us” being the royal usage of that word, meaning, “me.” *Believe me that the Spirit is speaking in me.*

Well, when you are quoting Scripture, the Spirit is speaking in you. But beyond that, those little add-ons of your own, here is where the false teachers thrive. 75%, 90%, or more, correct, then the big question mark. The words of the teacher and not the Lord.

Here was the first one: *“... the end of the world is near...”* He states it as a fact, then tries to prove his point by signs he is seeing: Evil deeds by a number of important people, wars with the Persians, and *“When the Roman Empire begins to be consumed by the sword, the coming of the evil one [antichrist] is at hand...”*

He then pleads with his people to *“reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion which overwhelms all the world.”*

He adds, kicking it up a notch from the apostle John, *“It is the **very** last time.”*

He was wrong. Dead wrong. Why should I trust his eschatology?

Ephraem and pretribulation theology.

He definitely believed in a gathering of the saints before the Tribulation, and it seems, in context, that he would have been comfortable with the modern theory.

However, he quotes neither Jesus or Paul in his confident affirmation. He just states it, and moves on.

But before he moves on, he appeals to human reasoning, showing he has not received this idea as a revelation from God. Note his logic:

The reason the saints will be gathered is so that they will not see *“the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.”*

That is purely his idea. Ephraem’s. Worse yet, it may have been Pseudo-Ephraem’s, a teacher “out there” who was trying to peddle a new idea to the church, using Ephraem’s fame to boost his acceptance.

But someone in those early centuries did indeed buy into a theory that sounds much like the current one: Surely, they say, the Father would not allow His people to suffer the wrath of God. Surely the Bride of Jesus would not be allowed to suffer so.

They forget the promises of God about persecution. They forget the prophecies indicating that antichrist will indeed overcome the people of God. They forget, it seems, that martyrdom sends a man to God, not to wrath. They forget that wrath is already being poured out. They forget that Noah and Lot stayed on the planet when wrath fell all around them.

Enough with Ephraem. The only pretrib voice in church history until the 18th century! And not so strong a voice.

Morgan Edwards, b. 1722!

Yes, that's the next pretrib voice alright, about 1400 years after the first one we found.

(I know, the pretrib people claim that the apostles were first, but that's the very point we will disprove, I believe, as this work continues. We'll look at a couple "church fathers" that are quoted in this vein, too, but with little help in our cause.)

Mr. Edwards is quite a case. Born in Wales, 1722, emigrated to the American colonies, 1761. Became the pastor of the Baptist church in Philadelphia, and co-founder of what became Brown University.

But before all that, Mr. Edwards was a college student at Bristol College in Bristol, England. At the ripe old age of 22, a senior, he was asked by his teacher to come up with an explanation of the Millennium. He did that. 1744. *Over forty years later* his essay became a published booklet, with some minor corrections and additions.

It is that document which pretribulationists quote from when showing us that, indeed, there were people subscribing to the pretrib theory before John Darby came along and put the doctrine on the map.

Now, I went to college a long time ago. I've looked at some of my old papers. Not so great. Not bad for a young guy, but still not so great.

And this is the "proof" being held up before us, the work of a senior in college, trying for the first time (for him) to put in order his eschatology. Some of it was right on. Some of it was, well, right off.

It was named: *"Two Academic Exercises on Subjects Bearing the*

Following Titles: Millennium and Last-Novelties.”

I copied out the booklet, and found some interesting information.

Morgan’s “Two Academic Exercises...”

One fascinating item from Morgan’s work is the Scripture he uses to introduce it all: Acts 17:19, 20.

“...May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears...”

Incredible. He quotes the words of the pagan philosophers who questioned Paul about his teachings. He is letting us know that he is indeed introducing things not familiar to the people of his day, namely, a literal interpretation of the end time passages. All well and good, but again we must remember that he is a novice, and his subject a novelty, at least to himself.

Towards the end of his work he says that he “wonders” still about a lot of issues. Then, partly in jest, he adds, “and I wonder, sir [his teacher], if your patience were not exhausted with the length, *and perhaps, nonsense, of my sermons.*” (Emphasis mine)

Oh great, he is aware that some of what he writes will be considered *nonsensical* to the world of Biblical scholarship of his day. Indeed.

His teacher replies, *“... if you used lightness, you are to blame. But as I hope you are always in earnest when you study the things of God, I have to assure you that the novelty [there’s that word again!] and ingenuity [Morgan put together a system that seemed to fit together] of your attempt have entertained me not a little. And when you are more master of time than at present, I advise you to study your subject closely, and you will see cause to alter some parts*

of your plan, and correct the error of others...”

Indeed! But did he ever change his “plan”? Doesn’t seem so. And we are still dealing with the needed corrections to this day.

Mr. Morgan’s “Plan”.

So the booklet I have before me is one college student’s attempt to put together all the end-time study of Scripture. This is not a scholarly work. Some of his ideas are proved, some not. There is contradiction. Error. Truth. His own teacher says he is in error, and questions his seriousness. But the document remains. Here are some items of the Morgan plan of eschatology.

Morgan mixed *historicism* with *futurism*. That is, he believed that some of the things we call future prophecy in Scripture, were already past or at that time being fulfilled. He believed that the Tribulation *had already begun*, centuries before! He believed it would last, not 1,260 days, but 1,260 years!

So how was he pretrib? The Tribulation had obviously begun, with no rapture!

He believed that popery in general was/is the antichrist. He believed the Ottoman Empire, already four hundred years old, was the beast.

No, he was not pretribulation. But! He believed that the saints will be raised three and one-half years before the *Millennium*. Why? To be judged. He quotes Peter’s “judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17) as proof.

The Devil will follow the saints to heaven, says Edwards, and begin to accuse them. He will then be cast down, starting the worst of the Tribulation on earth. I quote:

“Another event previous to the Millennium will be the appearing of the Son of Man in the clouds, coming to raise the dead saints and change the living, and to catch them up to Himself, and then withdraw with them...”

Morgan: “Appearing” vs “Coming”.

Morgan surely does sound like the modern adherents of the pretribulation rapture theory, but remember, in Morgan’s mind, the *Tribulation was already in progress in 1744.*

Now he makes the famous distinction between the *appearing* and the *coming* of our Lord:

“The signs of Christ’s appearing in the clouds [today known as the rapture] will be extraordinary wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines... otherwise they would be no signs at all, because such things had been before.”

This is a random selection of Matthew 24 “signs” attached to an appearing that is not even mentioned in Matthew 24!

Then, *“the signs of His coming in the heavens will be the trump of God, vapor and smoke, which will darken the sun and moon...”*

This is directly from the end of Matthew 24, a valid interpretation. To mix it with the former guesswork is unfortunate and evidence of inexperience in the Scriptures.

“The last event, and the event that will usher in the Millennium, will be the coming of Christ from Paradise to earth with all the saints he had taken thither about three and one-half years before.”

Morgan tries to put every detail he can find into some semblance of order. He doesn’t fail completely, but he does fail. Three stages -

appearing in the clouds, coming in the heavens, and coming from Paradise – are all one event, Biblically, and those who have torn that event apart have also torn the church apart.

No, Mr. Morgan proves nothing. Where can we go now?

Did we forget someone?

Trying to be fair here. Gotta go back to the church fathers. I mean, not really, but there's some talk about a man or two we jumped over. Better take a closer look. In the late first century or early second, a writing called *The Shepherd of Hermas* came out. It was a series of visions, commandments, parables, was well-received by the church, and was even thought to be canonical material early on.

But there was question about the view of "adoptionism" seemingly espoused in the book. That doctrine stated that Jesus was a mortal man at first, in huge opposition to the Eternal Son of John 1. For this and other reasons, the book went out of favor over the years.

But not before the "Shepherd" gave voice to another possibly errant teaching: a pure life will keep one from the Great Tribulation. Here is the *Hermas* quote in question:

"... you have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go therefore and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly."

Hmmm. Shades of Revelation 3:10, Jesus to the Philadelphian

Church: *“Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”*

Both of those quotes demand some explanation.

Endurance = Escape?

The quote from *Hermas* above describes an event already past. Perhaps a series of persecutions from the Emperor(s) of Rome? Someone had already escaped. That doesn't mean raptured out of the planet, obviously. They had endured, overcome. They were not defeated by “the beast.”

So the writer says, keep doing what you are doing, and you will keep getting what you've been getting. Grace will always be sufficient for you. You will overcome. Jesus endured and overcame. All the early church – and present church – martyrs endured and overcame. He is not promising the absence of trouble, but the Presence of God. To promise anything else is to run counter to Scriptures that predict severe persecutions for believers, and demand the picking up of the cross, following Jesus to the death.

As for the Philadelphia church, that congregation was indeed kept from the Great Tribulation, which has not occurred even yet! Or, if the “hour of trial” spoken of was an event in the life of the early church, we assume that somehow Philadelphia was protected from it, or given grace to endure it. An alternate understanding is that Philadelphia had already passed their test, and would not have to pass another one, God shielding them from the coming onslaught.

No matter how we look at either of the above quotations, being caught up into the heavens with Jesus to escape all trouble on earth is not what is being talked about. Not then. Not now. We will be

spared the wrath of God, but there is no general promise to all God's people that they will not have to be anywhere on earth when the Great Tribulation begins.

Jesus promised, *"In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world!"* You will, too.

Was Irenaeus into the pretribulation rapture?

This dear man of God lived from 130-202 A. He was a staunch defender of the faith. In his treatise *Against Heresies* 5:29, he states,

"...when in the end the church shall be suddenly caught up from this [evil world] it is said, 'there shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.' For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption."

Irenaeus' word is from Jesus and Paul. It can be interpreted two ways: 1. In the end of time, a huge tribulation will come, and the church will [then afterwards] be caught up. Or 2. In the end of time the church will be caught up and then the huge tribulation will come.

Two ways, that is, if you leave out the final part: *the last contest!* What kind of contest will there be if the saints are caught up to glory before the Tribulation even begins, to test them?

The Great Tribulation is the last contest of the righteous! Then they will receive the crown of life and be incorruptible. Many saints will be slaughtered during this time! *Where did the escape idea come from?*

Oh yes. In the same book, Irenaeus says that the evil rulers in that

day *“shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the Beast, and put the church to flight!”*

Did you mean to say “Tribulation Saints” will be put to flight, brother Irenaeus? No, he said “Church.” The church will be in the Tribulation, but not all and not long. One by one antichrist will overcome them. (Revelation 13:7).

Anyone else to testify?

Brother Cyprian speaks out.

Bishop of Carthage. Third century. He wants to weigh in on this Tribulation thing too.

“We who see that terrible things have begun, and know that still more terrible things are imminent may regard it as the greatest advantage to depart from it as quickly as possible. Do you not give thanks... that by an early departure you are taken away and delivered from the shipwrecks and disasters that are imminent? Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us home, and sets us free from the snares of the world and restores us to Paradise and the Kingdom.”

So if you see trouble coming, says Cyprian, get out of town!

Likewise, great trouble is coming to the earth. Don't be sad, but be happy, to foresee that you will be taken out of here, to Paradise, snatched out of this evil world.

There are two ways to get to Paradise. Resurrection when Jesus comes, but, more likely, death [by martyrdom, in this context] now.

All the true believers of Cyprian's day, and of Irenaeus' day, and the apostles' day - all of them – got to Paradise in the present mode,

dying. Why must we think that Cyprian was talking about anything else?

The church fathers have spoken. Their witness in favor of an escape from tribulation by a catching away to glory, seems very weak to me.

But there were other voices in the early church.

What do the early creeds say about the rapture?

In short, nothing, at least not as that word [rapture] is being defined today. But here's what they said about Jesus' coming:

1. Apostles' Creed, 2nd or 3rd century.

"He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

2. Nicene Creed, 4th century.

"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead..."

3. Athanasian Creed, 5th or 6th century.

Same as apostles', above, plus:

"... at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies... and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into everlasting life, and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire..."

This creed declares that the resurrection is at the coming of Jesus, the second coming.

But the creeds, you say, only spoke of things *essential* to our faith. Yes, for the most part. But there are little details like the name of Pontius Pilate, that we could have done without and still be saved...

Could it be the creeds are silent about a “coming before the coming” of Jesus, because *there was no such teaching* in the early church? Couldn’t it possibly be?

The Protestant Confessions.

Spent the last couple of days reading the end-time portions of confessions, or doctrinal statements, of the Protestant Reformers and later statements by denominations. Most telling was the change in those pronouncements of churches that were formed over the last two hundred years. Let me share what I found.

Augsburg. Martin Luther. 1530.

“At the consummation of the world, Christ will appear for judgment, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end.”

Hmmm. No rapture there. End of the world. Jesus appears. Resurrection. Judgment. That works. That’s Bible. Let’s move ahead a few years.

Belgic Confession. 1561.

I must paraphrase and condense, due to the length of the quote.

“The time of the coming of Jesus is unknown. It will be with glory and majesty. He will judge the living and dead. World destroyed. All people of all time will come before Him for judgment. Summoned by

archangel and sound of God's trumpet. All who died will be raised. Living will be caught up. Punishments to the evil, rewards to the good."

Yes. One day when resurrection and judgment come. Now, they missed the second resurrection after the Millennium. Probably because they were amillennial. (No one is claiming perfection for these statements. Just looking for that pretrib rapture. Haven't found it yet.)

The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, Question 52....

"Q. How does Christ's return 'to judge the living and the dead' comfort you?

"A. In all distress and persecution, with uplifted head, I confidently await the very judge who has already offered himself to the judgment of God in my place and removed the whole curse from me. Christ will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but will take me and all his chosen ones to himself into the joy and glory of heaven."

A pattern here. Jesus comes, resurrects, judges. All at the same time.

The thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, 1563, same in 1801 revision.

"He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He returns to judge all men at the last day."

What a splendid opportunity to talk of an interruption to His sitting seven years before His return. But silence here...

Well, the Lutherans have spoken, and the Anglicans. Let's move into

the next century and see if the Reformers in England have discovered the “rapture” theory and placed it in their famous Westminster Confession. Once more I abbreviate...

The Westminster Confession, 1646.

There is a day of judgment coming. God will judge the world through Jesus. All angels and people of all time will be present. The dead shall be raised, both the just and the unjust. That day will be unknown, to keep His people from carnality.

The London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689.

The wording here is remarkably like other great confessions. In short, a particular day is coming. Judgment of men and of angels. This day is for the express purpose of rewarding His elect, and giving justice to evil men. God’s people into His Presence will go. The evil into torment. God keeps the actual day secret so His people will shake off fleshly security and always be watchful.

Much like Westminster. And both, you will notice, speak of imminence, a concept we will examine later, with this head’s up now: Matthew 24, speaking, all agree, about His “final” return, speaks also of imminence...

So the centuries fly by. Whether giving short definitions of faith, or detailed descriptions of church dogma, nowhere is the church binding on its people a teaching regarding a two-phase coming of the Lord. Nowhere. Those who claim to find such things even in the Scriptures must allow that they ought to have been mentioned in some official church document somewhere, right?

Not so.

“But Jesus didn’t tell His people so much about it because they

were not going to need it until the end.”

Yet you tell me that a pretribulation rapture is all over the Bible! Why did He talk about it so much then, and then close His mouth about it during all the ages of His church until these last one hundred-fifty to two hundred years?

Why?

Now let's take a look at some more modern statements of faith, from churches born in that last one hundred-fifty to two hundred years.

The Plymouth Brethren and the Bible Churches.

Both of these groups claim some sort of relationship to John Darby, whom we will discuss in detail later. The time frame is early 19th century. The faith statements make it clear that something has happened in Protestant Christianity. Something has changed. And from this point on, though some groups will ignore, and others will be “careful” in their statements, there is an added “rapture” flavor out there for those who track it down.

The Brethren, who come out of Anglicanism with Mr. Darby claim that *“Christ will come again at the Rapture to receive all believers in Jesus to Himself, raising those that are His, or changing them if living,”* and that *“soon after the rapture the Lord will return to the earth in company with His saints to meet the man of sin...”*

No seven years here. Just “soon after.” If the church had left it that way, most of us might have lived with it.

The Independent Bible Churches, who do not give an exact date for their beginning, but who look to Darby and the Dallas Theological Seminary as two big reasons for their existence, have put it more

specifically:

“We believe that the rapture of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel’s seventieth week [read “seven years”] during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven...” Then, “We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will return after the seven-year tribulation. He will return to the earth as He went...”

There it is, finally. Not everyone follows suit, but look at these statements from groups that formed after the Darby-ites:

The Southern Baptist Convention.

This group came together in the mid 1800’s. You’ll notice that, even though the new pretrib theory is growing in prominence, the Baptists try to take a middle course:

“God, in His own time and His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end... Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly... the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness...”

Nothing really new here. No stand is taken pre- or post-.

The Christian Missionary Alliance (A.B. Simpson).

Late 1800’s. They too talk of a resurrection and a judgment and imminence, and they add, “pre-millennial.” But no seven-year appearing in the clouds.

Likewise the Nazarenes in 1907.

Then, the Assemblies of God, 1914. A new twist...

At last it has caught on. Of the sixteen basic truths of this Pentecostal denomination, two are given fully to the coming of Jesus.

First, what they call the “blessed hope”, the coming resurrection at the rapture of the church. Imminent!

But then, in a separate “cardinal doctrine” they say, *“The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints (already covered in number one) ... followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints...”*

Aha. Two phases. Two comings. But how far apart? We’re not told!

So what has happened over the last two hundred years?

What came along to change 1800 years of church history regarding the coming of Christ? Even allowing that all those individual voices I mentioned earlier had come up with a pretribulation rapture [and that is doubtful in most of the quotes I gave], it is clear that the church as a whole wanted no part of it. Creeds, Confessions, Faith Statements, all loudly silent about such a thing. Yet today it is all the rage.

What happened?

The answer to that is lost in some controversy that exists to this day: Was it John Darby? Edward Irving? Margaret Macdonald? Let’s look at Darby:

It is almost certain that Charles Spurgeon was referring to Darby and his “Brethren” when he said in 1867 (in a sermon, *the Mystery of Godliness*):

“...there is a certain troublesome sect abroad nowadays, to whom the one thing needful is a perpetual speculation upon prophecy... they plume themselves upon an expected secret rapture, and I know not what vain imaginings beside...”

The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the theory of evolution as well. And the Mormons. And the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was a revolutionary age in the area of religion. Strong and powerful leaders led many astray from the faith.

But the truth – this truth of a posttribulation rapture we are examining – never changed. The Book silently endured the hammer blows, as it always has. And to this day it remains the same, with believers accepting it still at face value.

John Nelson Darby, main architect of the pretrib rapture?

Mr. Darby was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1826. The next year he left that church, rejecting the whole idea of a state church, and later, a denominational church.

He began establishing fellowship groups to study the Bible. His own study of that book led him to some conclusions that have helped shape church history since then. His most innovative discovery is called *dispensationalism*. He divides history into compartments of time during which God dealt in different ways with people.

I will not go into that study here, except where it intersects this one. Within a short time after the upheaval of leaving the established church and studying on his own and discovering the ages of God's dealing, he came to an unavoidable – to him – conclusion: *The dealings of God with Israel are not the same as His dealings with the church.*

Finding that out, he noticed also that there was a scheduling problem in the Scripture. He had to address it and solve it. His solution was the pretribulation rapture. In his own sentiments, from Timothy Weber in his 1983 book:

"[As for]... the pretribulation rapture... historians are still trying to

determine how or where Darby got it... Possibly, we may have to settle for Darby's own explanation. He claimed that the doctrine virtually jumped out of the pages of Scripture once he accepted and consistently maintained the distinction between Israel and the church."

So...once you put the church age into a "dispensation" you've got to keep it there. Sounds man-made to me. But I'll investigate...

Darby: a trusted brother?

The more I read of Mr. Darby, the more I am reminded of Charles Taze Russell of the Watchtower/Jehovah's Witness movement. Turned off by the current church. Starts home studies. Makes "amazing" discoveries in his personal study. Gathers a group of fanatical followers. Focuses much on the end times, and rearranges Scriptures to match his "findings." Has people expecting Jesus' return in ways that Jesus Himself did not reveal. Oh, and of course, nineteenth century. These two men had overlapping lives in more ways than one.

Yet he has a reputation as a man of God, too...

Spurgeon lived in that day. I quoted him above. But that is not all he said about Mr. Darby. In the June 1869 edition of his *Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon releases a Mr. James Grant to pour fire all over Mr. Darby's teachings. Spurgeon was especially concerned with Darby's views on the atonement which denied that it "consisted even in Christ's death." Darby denied "the vicarious purpose of Christ's obedience."

In addition, Darby said that "the moral law is a thing with which believers in Christ have nothing to do, even as a rule of life!" Followers of Darby would not use the Lord's Prayer, or in any other

way admit sinfulness, since Christ had forgiven them.

Spurgeon was not perfect in doctrine or life. Neither am I. Or you. But Spurgeon has gained a good reputation as a sound minister of the Gospel. When he is agitated about a fellow preacher of his day, I think the church should take notice.

Not only Darby, but his followers, the Plymouth “Brethren”, are suspect. Not convicted, mind you, but suspect.

“Brethren”. Indeed?

I’m still quoting Spurgeon/Grant in that *Sword and the Trowel* article mentioned above.

Spurgeon: “... *that section of Plymouth Brethren who follow Mr. Darby... are laboring to seduce the members of our churches to the subversion of the truth and the overthrow of the needful order and discipline of our Zion...*”

He calls it “... *this malignant power, whose secret but rapid growth is among the darkest signs of our times...*”

Grant: “*The Plymouth Brethren, meaning the Darby section, are, indeed, at once the most active and most noisy sect of Christians of which we have any record in the annals of Christianity...there is no Congregational minister, either Baptist or Independent, who is not ready to denounce them as the greatest troublers of the peace of Israel since the days of Ahab... the Plymouth Brethren will compare with [the Jesuits], both in respect to stealthy slyness and persistent effort to make converts.*”

He speaks not here of the unsaved coming to Christ by means of Brethren evangelism, but the reaching out to those few dissatisfied souls one finds in every congregation, upon whom the “brethren”

prey at will, pointing out the weakness of a pastor, and the new truths found by Darby.

Again, sounds much like the cults of our own day.

I know not of their stance today, but in these days, the Darbyites recognized no other denomination. *They were the church. Period.* And Mr. Darby was their Pope. Never admitting error. Constant controversy with everyone, a spirit his people picked up and magnified. Churches and families were forever divided, not over Christ, but over Darbyism.

Heretic and cult?

I can't take any more time searching out details of Darby and his exclusive group, the Plymouth Brethren. (Plymouth, England, was where Darby's section of the "Brethren" got started.)

But the little net-surfing I did on the subject makes me very glad I am not a part of that association. Yes, Darby is called a heretic by some. The Brethren are called a cult by some. I will let it go at that. Others who research will come to different conclusions.

I was talking about the pretribulation rapture. Let me swerve back onto the pathway, with my only comment on all of the above being, *"Why would anyone trust a man or group with such strange ideas?"*

We know that Darby and others were confused about the end-time events. They saw what seemed to be contradictory images of the future in passages in Matthew, Thessalonians, Revelation, etc. They set out to solve those differences, and came up with a theory that seemed to do the trick. And a lot of people bought it.

They proudly admit, the "Brethren" do, that *"a number of doctrines that are now widely held within evangelical circles were first*

discovered by the Brethren (post 1830) or were promoted and propagated by the Brethren. In no particular order these include: pretribulational rapture, dispensationalism..." (Plymouth Brethren: Theological contributions of the Brethren: FAQ # 16.)

In 1850, Darby himself said that twenty years earlier, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 *"made me understand the rapture of the saints before -perhaps a considerable time before – the day of the Lord."* (William Kelly quoting Darby in "The Rapture of the Saints...")

But there are those who believe Kelly was defending Darby's claim to be the originator, when in fact it was Edward Irving... Oh my...

Who was Edward Irving? And was he really first in line?

Edward Irving was a [Scottish](#) minister, whose ideas eventually formed the "Catholic Apostolic Church." He was what might be called a forerunner of the "apostolic" movement of our own day. He believed the gifts of the Spirit, along with the five offices of the early church, especially apostles and prophets, were being restored to God's people.

He was also called by some a heretic, due to his unusual teachings about the nature of Jesus Christ the Man. Unfortunately, heresies regarding Jesus often accompany gifts-related works. We all must be wary of those who claim to speak for God in these days. The Word of God, after all, speaks for Itself.

In short, Irving believed that Jesus took upon Himself, not only human nature, but *sinful human nature*. That idea caused him to be excommunicated.

He also had a serious interest in the second coming, as did many of his day. As was true of his fellows, often this obsession was to the

detriment of the church. One teaching he clearly got hold of was the idea that Jesus would come and take His holy people out of harm's way *just before the Tribulation*.

Dave Mac Pherson's *The Rapture Plot* goes to great lengths to burst a common bubble among dispensationalists, one that I was about to buy into, namely, that John Darby was the founder of the pretribulation doctrine. While very careful pretribbers will insist that it was Jesus and the apostle Paul who gave us this doctrine, insiders still squabble about whether it was...

Irving or Darby, or Margaret Macdonald?

(we'll meet Margaret in just a little while...) who gave us this new twist to the second coming promises.

The beauty of this argument is that outsiders like myself can stand back and look at it with a smile. All three of these people lived at the same time. The dates involve are within 5-10 years of each other. Voila! We have seen the end of the silence regarding the pretribulation rapture in the church! Suddenly history is overflowing with claimants to the *new teaching*.

Let them fight. The author of this confusing teaching should not be honored, when they find him or her, anyway.

Doesn't matter to me whether Pentecostal Macdonald had a vision which was picked up by fellow-Pentecostal Irving, then assumed by a Mr. Darby, or...

Irving's studies and writings prove that he was the inventor of strange doctrines, confirmed by an ailing fifteen-year-old prophetess, then imbibed by Darby, or...

Bible student and respected gentleman John Darby, also ailing in

the late 1820's, started to figure it out all by himself, then later had it confirmed by a prophetess and her supporting pastor...

Doesn't matter at all! Fact is, somewhere in the 1820's or 1830's, in England and Scotland, pretribulation rapturism was born and raised and from thence sent to the church world.

Clear as day. As is everything else about this teaching, once one begins to study it in detail!

Pretribulationism: In the air, but not in the Word!

In addition to the quotes above, let me add these:

"When the theory of a secret coming of Christ was first brought forward (about the year 1832) it was adopted with eagerness; it suited certain preconceived opinions, and it was accepted by some as that which harmonized contradictory thoughts, whether such thoughts... rested on the sure warrant of God's written Word." (The Hope of Christ's Coming... S. P. Tregelles)

Ah! I understand that one. Many years back I did a study on Romanism (*Scarlet Threads*). I documented how the false doctrines concerning Mary crept, then galloped, into the church. Their justification? A little piece of human nature called "the piety of the people." That is, the people already believed it! All it needed was a push from an authority figure.

So these notions were floating around in the church from somewhere. People were looking for a way to harmonize it all. Along comes John Darby, and Irving, and Macdonald, and the pretribulation rapture is born.

So also says scholar F. F. Bruce in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol XLVII, no. 1. (By the way, Bruce was a member of the Plymouth

Brethren!) *“Where did [Darby] get it? ... it was in the air in the 1820’s and 1830’s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy.”*

Not in the Book. Not in the “fathers”. Not in the creeds or the confessions or the doctrinal statements, but in the “air” around Darby’s and Irving’s head.

Scary, so very scary. A doctrine can be picked out of the air and pushed upon the church to the point where now, in the West, to speak against pretribulationism is itself seen as a heresy.

So, a new teaching? Any further proof?

Harry Ironside, Darby disciple and past pastor of Moody Church, had this to say in his 1908 *“The Mysteries of God”*:

“Until brought to the fore through the writings and preaching and teaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr. J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century [1800’s], it [rapture theology] is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through a period of sixteen hundred years [230-1830 AD]”

Agreed, Mr. Ironside, agreed! ***Then why did you get on board***, when it was obviously a new teaching you were following? Why?

Next up, Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 18: *“About 1830 a new school arose within the fold of Premillennialism that sought to overthrow what, since the Apostolic Age, have been considered by all premillennialists as established results, and to institute in their place a series of doctrines that had never been heard of before. The school I refer to is that of ‘The Brethren’ or ‘Plymouth Brethren’ founded by J. N. Darby.”*

Robert Cameron says it even better in *Scriptural Truth About the Lord’s Return*: *“Prior to that date, no hint of any approach to such*

belief can be found in any Christian literature from Polycarp down... Surely... a doctrine that was never taught by a Father or Doctor of the church – that has no standard Commentator or Professor of the Greek Language in any Theological School until the middle of the 19th century... such a fatherless and motherless doctrine, when it rises to the front, demanding universal acceptance, ought to undergo careful scrutiny before it is admitted and tabulated as part of ‘the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.’”

‘Nuff said?

Of restoration.

My earliest voluntary church relationship was with the “Restoration Movement,” born out of the Cane Ridge Revival meetings, also in the 1800’s. It was a desire to “restore” the New Testament church.

Well and good. This movement became later the churches of Christ, the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ... well, you see already how the move splintered and was defeated in some of its idealism. Yet many were/are brought into contact with New Testament principles and life.

Darby and others have desired restoration. A noble goal. May their tribe increase, but not the way Darby took it, excluding all but his little club of believers.

It is one thing to re-discover a truth buried in Scripture that needs to be brought out to end-time people. The Tribulation. The antichrist. Jesus’ literal return to earth. The Millennium. The whole book of Daniel, sealed all these centuries because un-needed. I get that. Or the old “Ezra” or “Josiah” spirit. “We have discovered the book! Repent!”

But it is another thing altogether to revive *heresy* that has long

been forgotten, as in the Arians parading around today as Jehovah's true witnesses. Or to create new systems and teachings that never were taught, and were never meant to be taught. All the cults have done it. And they all did it promising to restore what was lost. The Witnesses, the Mormons, the Pentecostals...

And the pre-tribbers. Some things were never lost *because they never existed*. Discernment turned up high will divide between the things that need to be restored and the things that need to be abandoned... like now.

Dispensationalism. Must I?

There's no way around it. I must say more about Darby's main offering to the Christian church, dispensationalism. The conclusions he and others around him reached at this time did indeed affect his eschatology. If his interpretation of the division of the ages is true, there has to be some room to fit in an extra "coming" of the Lord.

But of course, man-made theories must step aside in the light of clear revelation on a matter. I will show the clear revelation on this matter when I come to the Scripture portion of this journal. For now, to unentangle eschatology from dispensational thought.

What's it all about? Is the word in the Bible? Sure is, several times in the New Testament. "Dispensation" translates the Greek word *oikonomia*, but so does the word "stewardship." Strong says the basic meaning is "administration." How put all that together? Take apart the Greek, to start with: "house law" is what you get. The law or rule or administering of a household.

Jesus used it in a parable about a servant who needed to be fired. He was going to lose his "stewardship", his administrative tasks over the household.

Paul talks about being given a stewardship, or responsibility, over the household of God, an entrusting by God to Paul of truth regarding the Gospel.

And in Ephesians Paul mentions the “dispensation” or plan of God regarding the fullness of times, all to be gathered together in Christ. That’s Biblical dispensationalism. God’s plan for the ages. All ages.

Dispensationalism. Darby’s take on the word and idea.

Did the word “dispensation” change over time? Webster still has it, “a general state or ordering of things.” That fits the Bible’s idea, but not Darby’s.

In Darby’s thinking, God had many plans for many ages. We understand that a little when we read Jeremiah 31. God had given His people the law, in stone and scroll. Holy and good but unable to be kept. So He says, never again. I’m going to do a new thing, make a new covenant. They broke the original, but I’m not giving up. I’ll write my law on their hearts. New Covenant. Covenant number two. Plan number two. Dispensation number two.

Darby and those who followed him wanted to make further divisions of God’s dealing with men by going back to Adam, and Noah, then looking ahead to the Millennium and beyond. Fine. But those parts of the theory – and it was a theory, corrected by his disciples – do not affect the subject of this journal.

The big question concerns the Bible’s two main dispensations, plans, covenants, agreements. We carry them around with us all the time. The Old Testament, and the New Testament, and the people they represent.

Ah. Now I said it. *“The people they represent.”* That’s where the problem comes in. Darby drew such heavy lines between the

people "Israel" and the people "Church" that he was blinded to some things clearly stated in Scripture about those two groups. Or are there three? Why not add "kingdom" while we're at it? And do "kingdom", "Israel", and "church" all have distinct and clear divisions of time...

...or is there some overlap? So important a question!

The kingdom. Israel. The church. Rightly dividing...

Israel began with Abraham. 2000 B.C. The kingdom began with Saul/David. 1000 B.C. The church began on Pentecost, AD 30.

Three totally separate entities, right? With three separate timelines and endings, right? Three plans of salvation and deliverance, yes?

Wrong on every count. So wrong.

So, they are all one, yes? Israel is really the church and the kingdom, and they rise and fall together?

Still wrong.

First comes Abraham and the promises. Abraham and circumcision. Covenant relationship. But Paul says that anyone saved by grace is of the faith of Abraham and will be saved forever as will he. A link between the people of God today, and faithful Abraham.

Eventually Abraham's seed leads to Israel, the nation. But Paul says they are not all Israel who are of Israel. Rather, the children of God are the children of promise. A nation is being formed here, but it is a nation of grace and faith. Only a remnant of physical Israel will receive this grace, and the rest will be hardened.

Yet, one day, all "Israel", the true Israel, will be saved. We in the church are heirs according to the promise: Abraham's true seed.

Confused yet? How about “kingdom” talk? What began with David continued with Jesus, and shall find its fullest expression when King Jesus comes and reigns. A totally Jewish kingdom? Not at all. We Gentiles shall reign with Christ also.

Put all that together!

The One People of God.

It is not an easy task to sort out kingdom and Israel and church. People continue to fight over it. Matthew 16 doesn't help.

Upon this Rock I will build my church. Yes, Day of Pentecost. I give to you, Peter, *the keys of the kingdom.*

Oh, I see. Kingdom is already here, from David. A very Jewish thing. Only a remnant of Jews, though, will inherit it, the ones with the true faith of Abraham. That leaves some room. Let some more people in, Peter. Some Gentiles. Here are the keys. Preach.

And so it happened. Now the kingdom, Israel's kingdom, enters its New Covenant status and opens its doors to – unbelievably – the Goy. The nations. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord.

Israel, kingdom, church. Three entities, separate for sure, but in the end, one people of God.

That's how I put things together. Lots of overlap. Now, how to fit that into an eschatology that the Bible also spells out, without rewriting that Bible, as did Darby and followers.

Brother Daniel to the Rescue.

I suppose Daniel's “seventieth week” prophecy is a good place to start. Daniel 9. Seventy “sevens” of years (490 years) are to be lived out by the Jews to finish God's Jewish dealings. I take my stand with

the overwhelming majority of conservative evangelical scholars, and my own observations, in saying that 483 of these years (sixty-nine “sevens” or “weeks” of years) came to an end in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

That leaves one week, one seven, or seven years, unfulfilled.

The big gap between “week” sixty-nine and “week” seventy.

Daniel 9:27 and 28 tell us what is to happen in week seventy, after which all pre-millennial history ends. The world ruler will make an agreement with Israel regarding their temple and temple worship, including sacrifices and all that Israel was commanded to do.

Halfway through the agreement, that is, three and one-half years later, the agreement is broken, and trouble ensues. Big trouble. That three and one-half years is the very length mentioned in Revelation several times, as the time of the [Great] Tribulation.

This is Israel’s time, *say the dispensationalists*. In between Israel’s times, the church has come and gone, they speculate. From the time of Christ until the time when antichrist makes his “deal” and the seven years kick in, that is the church age. The prophets never saw it. And when they are removed, the Jewish clock starts ticking again.

Never saw it, Mr. Darbyite?

Didn’t Joel see the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost? Didn’t Jeremiah see a New Covenant being instituted?

Walking and chewing gum at the same time may be hard for some, but I for one can do it. I can even see a church here on earth while God is specifically dealing with the Jews. Why not? Yes, this is Jewish time for sure, but who is saying it is not also Christian time?

Not me.

Just think of that first century church: Jews! Apostles and their early congregations: Jews! The prophecies of Joel and Jeremiah coming to pass.

But the slam dunk idea that refutes Darby: Revelation 12:13-17

Jews AND Christians the target of antichrist!

Didn't want to get into purely Scriptural ideas yet. They will be coming by the bucketload later. But dispensationalism dragged me into a fight early. Take a look at John's vision, Revelation 12.

Verse 13. Satan is cast to earth.

Verse 14. Satan goes after Israel (the woman). Matthew 24 tells of this day when all are to flee!

Verse 14-15. Israel finds a place of safety, while Satan keeps trying to hurt her.

Verse 16. Satan's attempts to hurt Israel are finally thwarted.

Verse 17. Satan is enraged.

Verse 17. He then goes after the rest of her offspring (Christ being the firstborn).

Verse 17. Definition of these children: they *keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

That's called "church."

We need to send the Darbyites back to the drawing room. Their plan, their "dispensation", doesn't work. Jews and Christians side by side enduring the wrath of the enemy here on earth during the

Tribulation, the end of Daniel's seventieth week.

I must rest my case for now. I have shown you where dispensationalism came from, and how it must be answered, at least in part. **See more under TOPIV VI, the elect, below...**

But wait, someone is at the door. Oh no, another claimant to the beginnings of pretribulation rapturism...

Margaret Who? In 1830?!

Margaret MacDonald. Fifteen-year-old Margaret Macdonald, a "prophetess" of the newly arising Pentecostal movement in Scotland, in 1830 (what a year that was!) has a "word from God" about the end times.

This event, which has been documented by many, surely causes a whole host of folks, especially the Pentecostals of our own day, to give pause. Why, if something was spoken by a word from the Lord, we cannot take it lightly, they reason. Yet these same people would have to take the words of *Jesus and Paul* very lightly, to believe Margaret. One sadly lacking gift in the explosion of charisma over the years has been the gift of *discernment*, whereby utterances can and should/must be, but are not, challenged and compared to what God has already said. And when it is discerned that deception is at hand, a further discernment is needed, namely the *identification* of the spirit coming forth into the meeting and the subsequent repudiation of it along with the teaching it promotes. One doesn't see this too often. It seems Margaret was not challenged at the time of her utterance, and is not now.

But wait. I have just read her entire "utterance", and find nothing in it that demands pretribulationism. Rapture yes, but that is not the issue. Dispensationalism is the issue, and Darby could have found

no solace in her words regarding that! In fact, Darby considered this whole business demonic. Yes, Darby rejected the “word” though he was fascinated enough by it all to go and visit her, we are told.

If indeed he thought her to be hearing from demons, it is unlikely he used her information as the basis for his theories. And though researchers push 1830 as the beginning point of his pretribulation rapture, it is known that some of these thoughts were in his brain two to three years earlier, just not fully formed.

So what did she say, exactly?

Much of her “revelation” was pure Scripture. Other of it seemed to be her own response to the cold church of her day. Still other parts seemed a bit “Gnostic” in character, for example:

“I saw the error to be, that men think that it [the coming of Jesus] will be something seen by the natural eye; but ‘tis spiritual discernment that is needed, the eye of God in His people.” She repeats this sentiment later, the idea that only the spiritual people will be aware of the *“sign of His appearance.”* This sounds holy, but does not line up with the very visible appearing of Jesus recorded in Scripture.

But in a totally different vein, yea a posttribulation vein, she claims that the people of God are “about to be tried” when the wicked is revealed. There is coming a *“fiery trial which is to try us. It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus...”* Later she simply adds, *“The trial of the church is from antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept.”*

Some say that her “Gnostic” section is the *partial rapture* of the church, the rapture of the “holy” part. And that the rest are tried. I’m not so sure. As many “prophetic” words, there is much

vagueness in her utterance.

Maybe this is why Darby was not too happy with it. It must have confused his ongoing musings about the timing of things.

Darby and Irving continued to grow and nurture their new ideas, and their individual followings caught fire too, but the world might not have known about what was going on in nineteenth-century Britain had it not been for another player in this drama, Mr. C. I. Scofield.

The Scofield Reference Bible and beyond.

The reviews about C.I. Scofield are mixed and scary. I'll spare myself the agony of printing the things I found about him. Much of it happened before he was converted. But not all. Serious question marks about his life, his scholarship, his connections. But it still cannot be denied that he published a church-changing document in his Reference Bible.

It came out in 1909 and by 1917 was the go-to source for dispensational thought. Now earnest Christians around the world could read about a pretribulation rapture *in their own Bible*, thanks to the notes of Scofield, inspired by the Darbyites.

Needless to say, the theory took wings after that. I have to keep reminding myself that this also was the century in which Mormonism took flight. And the Watchtower. And John Wilson's British-Israelism, and Ellen White's Seventh-Day Adventists.

The more people read it, the more people liked it. The Moody Bible Institute, the Dallas Theological Seminary, and other places of Christian learning, were now sold on a pretrib rapture. Young people's theologian Hal Lindsey, author/movie-maker Tim LaHaye, and a host of Christian media greats came along to bolster this

idea...

...this idea which was still, in spite of all the hype, not in the Scriptures.

The Scriptures! Here I am on page 57 and we haven't seriously visited the Scriptures. But I wanted to be sure I was relatively thorough on the history thing. I believe I have proved that this theory is indeed new. That just because something is in print, or in a miraculous vision, it's not necessarily the truth.

Let's look at the Bible now.

The Scriptures

Two passages of Scripture are obvious. On them we build the others.

We can only build where the Lord built. Solomon said in Psalm 127:1, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”* Any doctrine not firmly supported by a word from God will fall, regardless of how many good and brilliant men believe and teach it, or how many movies have been made to support it.

There are two chapters of Scripture that indicate clearly the order of events of that fateful season of earth’s history known as the Day of the Lord: **Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians 2**. Both of these passages say that *signs will tell us of the season of Jesus’ coming*. Signs first, then Christ comes. Please read:

Matthew 24:12-31: *“...because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold...When you see the abomination of desolation...then will be great tribulation...Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days ...the sign of the **Son of Man will appear** in heaven...and He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will **gather together** His elect...”* “After” is post. “Tribulation” is *tribulation*. The “gathering” of the elect is what is called today *rapture*. Posttribulation rapture.

Not complicated, right? And this other one,

2 Thessalonians 2:2-3. *“...the day of Christ...will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed...who...sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”*

Again, simple and straightforward: First the falling away of professing Christians, then the works of the antichrist, which bring on the Matthew 24 Tribulation, then the day of Christ.

It's embarrassing, really,

to have to make this point from these Scriptures. The language is so obvious. Unprecedented tribulation (trouble) followed by the gathering together (catching up, rapture) of the saints.

Why can't the conversation end right here?

Someone might say, "*Show me the verses that give the time order the way the pretribbers see it. Be fair!*"

Sorry, the pretribulation rapture position is **not** stated in any passage of Scripture and is dependent totally on logic and assumption. In fairness we must add that the logic is quite sensible at times and even has the *appearance* of Scriptural backing, but the theory is man-made, connects ideas randomly and without proof, and thus cannot stand. Many have forsaken this theory already.

All Biblical doctrines must *begin* in the Bible, not merely *find support* there. For example, we are all aware of church teachers who follow with great admiration ungodly secular geologists. These scientists find bones they claim are millions of years old. And the church, not wanting to be considered out of touch, tries to find Scriptural ways to justify an old earth, which is the scientific community's conclusion about those bones. A twist here and a change there, and before you know it, the secular scientists start to sound good. On the other hand, Bible-believing scientists see the same bones and demand that the evidence pass the test of the revelation already given in Scripture. They adjust science to the Bible and come up with different findings altogether.

Logic won't do it. Give us the Word!

Some believers of a few generations ago concluded either through a "revelation" as from God or through a false conclusion of Scripture,

that it would be impossible for Jesus to fulfill all the Scriptures about His coming by only one appearance. Therefore, they reasoned, there must be two. It made sense to many, and the teaching has hung on.

Before ordinary believers had a chance to study the pretribulation issue, they were told that Jesus will appear in the sky and take them to heaven the moment it looks like the world is going to go through its greatest trouble. Sounded good. Scriptures here and there that seemed to back up the position were deposited in their minds, and the doctrine settled in as truth.

It is time for ordinary believers to search the Scriptures, and begin their formation of theology with clear words from God, not with an unverified statement of a Bible teacher, not even with a “supernatural” manifestation. The Thessalonian church experienced all of that and even received a letter with Paul’s name on it stating the same thing:

II Thessalonians 2:2 “[do not] be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”

Jesus and His most published author Paul have both spoken. The word is **after**. Who can miss this? I confess that I did for some time. When teachings are repeated by well known brothers and then even incorporated in the motion picture industry, they certainly seem to be authoritative.

Matthew 24 in more detail.

In order for pretribulation teachers to get around the clear teaching of Matthew 24, they will have to assume that this chapter is written to and about someone else. They will have to say that this subject is

for Jews only, and has nothing to do with the Christian Church. They will point out that it is Israel that is going to be punished for its rejection of God's program, especially their treatment of Messiah. Being told that, believers skip over the clearest evidence in Scripture for a posttribulation catching-up with Jesus. After all, if Jesus was talking to Jews, that explains why He doesn't mention the "secret" coming for Christians.

I find it incredible that the words of this chapter are assigned to Israel only. Using that logic there are many other Gospel teachings that must be so assigned. For what have we here? The *disciples of Jesus*, triggered by a statement made by their Lord regarding an utter destruction of Jerusalem in the future, ask him some questions, and receive some answers.

Verse 3, *"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* The question seems to be in three parts. Some can find three answers to match.

Question one: *When shall these things be (Jerusalem's buildings literally torn apart)?*

Question two: *What shall be the sign of your coming?*

Question three (or question two, part two): *What shall be the sign of the end of the age?*

Did the disciples think everything Jesus mentioned was going to happen at once? Were they right?

Three questions? Or one question with three parts?

Before I go directly to that answer, I want to look a little more closely at the words that started all this: Verse 2.

“... not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

Scholars, in the discussion which follows, point people to the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. It surely looks like it. Problem with that is, immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem in that terrible day of trouble, Jesus is supposed to return. Didn't happen. That must mean we are talking about another destruction of the city, yet to come?

How can I say that? Jesus said, *“Not one stone upon another...”* Of the temple? No, the text says that the disciples were showing Jesus *“the buildings of the temple.”* Every word is important.

In AD 70, the Romans came indeed. They destroyed indeed. Horrifically. *But they left one wall.* Except perhaps for the Wall of China, and the Berlin Wall, this wall is the most famous in all the world. We call it the “wailing” wall, or the “Western” wall. It is a place of holiness to the Jew. Even Gentiles will go there and place their prayer notes in cracks of the wall.

Could all this mean that the prophecy Jesus is about to give has not taken place? I mean, the answer He gave to them doesn't start until verse 15. All else is a buildup to the main climax of His words.

So now they are curious. Hopefully, so are you. I offer you no new teaching, but the very words of Matthew 24.

The non-signs of Matthew 24. Verses 4-14.

I grow weary of the surface knowledge of most believers today. Every time there is an earthquake or a rumor of war or a famine, the cry goes out, *“Jesus is coming!”*

Oh He is coming! But these “signs” in verses are not the signs the

disciples were asking for. In fact, they wanted only one sign, a clear one. And they got it.

But first the non-signs. Deception will come through false Christs (5), and troubling events (6-8), such as wars, human suffering, etc. Awful things, *“but the end is not yet.”* ***These are not the signs!*** *“Beginning of sorrows,”* yes, but not signs of His coming!

Then persecution and betrayal (9-10). And that has happened from the beginning, and will continue to the end. *Not the sign.*

Then false prophets and deception (11). Again, an ever-present pest among us. *Not the sign.*

Verses 12-13 gets us to the edge of the precipice, but doesn't take us over. Lawlessness on a worldwide scale. Apostasy, mentioned by Paul as a pre-requisite for antichrist to bring his program to power. This too has happened off and on. Apostasy and coldness brought us into the Dark Ages of Romanism's rule. But the church bounced back. There will be a day when lawlessness will rule and antichrist will have destructive authority over the saints. Verse 13's mention of *“the end”* is the other clue we need to tell us that we are getting close to *“the sign.”*

Verse 14 is often given as a sure sign. The Gospel preached in all the world. But has it not been preached there already? How do I know what *“world”* means? And the *“nations”*, are they *tribes* that still have not received the Gospel, or *nations* as we know them?

The sign. The real sign. 24:15.

It is called by Jesus and Daniel, *the abomination of desolation*. It is an unthinkable evil occurrence that causes destruction, annihilation, a scattering, a desolate state of affairs. What in the world could do that? Well, another clue is given: it *“stands”* in the

holy place (24:15).

The Jewish listeners knew that Jesus was speaking of their temple. Remember that John, who wrote more than twenty years after the temple of Jesus' day was destroyed, is seen in the Book of Revelation measuring a temple on earth.

Oh, there will be a temple. Even as I write, preparations are being made to raise it up. Those who object to the idea of a temple should read the latter portions of Ezekiel's book. Other prophets saw the house of the Lord in the latter days (Isaiah, Micah). This is a study in itself. For now suffice it to say that a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture demands such an edifice.

History records two other times when the Holy Place was desecrated by something "standing" in it. Both Antiochus Epiphanes in 163 BC and Roman General Titus in 70 AD placed in the temple things abominable to God (a pig, a statue of Zeus).

Both times desolations occurred. There was a massacre of Jews, destruction, desolation both times. But Daniel who along with Jesus prophesied *the* abomination that makes desolate must have had in mind something even more horrible, for they both tie it to a time of incomparable agony. That time has not come yet because the agony itself is tied to the very end of all things, and that end has not come.

Antiochus and Titus were only showing us a little of what will happen when the temple is occupied again.

But can a temple even be the real House of God again?

I ask this: Was the temple ever the *real House of God*, or was it merely a picture of heaven, the church, and the very Body of the Lord Jesus Who is the true Temple? The point we are making here is

that antichrist and the Jews of that day will *consider* the temple in Jerusalem to be holy, and a watching world will know exactly what is being said by its occupation.

Daniel in his eighth chapter speaks of daily sacrifices being taken away, an army's opposition, a transgression of desolation, and the trampling of the sanctuary. He is told in the same chapter that all of this is to happen in the time of the end (8:9-19). Then in the retelling of these events in chapter 11 and 12, the same events are tied to "*a time of trouble such as never was...*"

Jesus mentions not only the same desecration of the temple, but the surrounding of Jerusalem with armies in Luke 21:20-24, the parallel passage to Matthew 24. Here is mentioned the "times of the Gentiles," making many think that the period from Titus' devastation until the Jews return to their temple is such a time. In fact, Revelation 11:1-2 clearly states that the time of total Gentile domination in this context is three and one-half years.

Daniel and Jesus both saw the end times. The abomination that made desolate in Antiochus' day was already history when Jesus prophesied. And now in our day, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus is history, yet the predicted coming of Jesus has not materialized. So we must look to the future for fulfillment of both of these prophesies.

And let's not leave out Paul...

Paul and the abomination of desolation. 2 Thessalonians 2.

Paul adds the final piece to the puzzle when he describes in 2 Thessalonians 2 one who will himself sit in the temple of God! If a pig or a statue has such a horrible effect, what happens when the arch-enemy of God, living in a man, declares his own deity and

challenges God face to face? As Nimrod of old, he will “stand before the Lord” (Genesis 10:9), defiantly demanding “*It’s mine! It’s all mine.*” The true abomination that makes desolate is Satan himself. (More on this abomination on P.130 in the Topics section)

Back to Paul in a little while, but first I must finish Matthew 24.

So the disciples got their sign. Now the description of the Tribulation:

Jesus gives directions to anyone in the area in that day: get out! Did it happen before? Yes. The scene was lived out in AD 70. But it will happen again. Revelation confirms an end time hiding place for those who flee during this period (12:6, 14-16).

Notice Jesus gives a note (some say it was Matthew’s addition) to last day people who will be *reading* about all this, and understanding what they are to do. This is where we come in. It was good that Jews fled in AD 70. But end time dwellers of Israel need to read this record and flee, too.

Verses 16-28 picture the Tribulation time. People running for their lives. Unprecedented trouble, never to be repeated in history or the future. Signs and wonders to deceive the elect. The events here match descriptions in the book of Revelation and Daniel.

This is the beginning of the end! Most agree. Pretribulation people agree. This is the Great Tribulation! *The Great Tribulation!*

Why do I repeat myself, with exclamation points?

Because, according to the pretribulation people, Jesus has already appeared in the sky and taken His own to be with Him in heaven for the next seven years (some say three and one-half years).

I will now turn my Bible upside down. I will shake it. I will get a magnifying glass and look it over very carefully.

No, it's still not there, folks! No rapture. No secret coming. The Tribulation of all tribulations has just begun... and as the old song says, "*You've been left behind.*" You were a second class saint. You didn't live enough for God.

Ah! But you get another chance, in seven years!

Does your Bible even hint at any of this?

Back to the beginning of the chapter. Who is Jesus addressing? The Jews? Not at all! When the term "Jews" is used in the New Testament it is talking about those Israelites who refused the Gospel, who were outside the faith of Jesus. Jesus addressed the Jews often, usually very negatively, though some came to faith.

Who is he talking to? The disciples! The chosen ones who would lay the foundation stones of the church. If anyone is in the saved church of God, it is these men! And in answer to their question about His coming, *not one word* of a two-phase event! Nothing secret. No escape route.

The pretribulation rapture theory is completely debunked right here, in God's Word. *An appeal to silence is no appeal.* Give us the **Word of God** on any issue.

And that **word** is *after*. Verse 29.

I said, the word is *after*. Matthew 24:29-31.

Ah, brighter and brighter it gets. No guesswork. The disciples understood it and passed it on. This is what Jesus said:

*Immediately **after** [as in, 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 shake. 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 **in the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And He will send **His angels** with a **great sound of a trumpet**, and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Amen! That's what He said. The saints raptured, caught up, gathered together, AFTER the Tribulation! What could be plainer?

The same elements listed above are listed in passages that pretrib people refer to as "rapture" passages:

Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Jesus heralded by the sound of a great trumpet? 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, and Revelation 11:15-18.

Jesus accompanied by angels, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

Jesus gathering the elect from heaven and earth, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

It's the same event.

Now let me look at Paul again, in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Paul's sign of Jesus' coming. Same as Jesus' sign.

2 Thessalonians 2 is the second place in Scripture, the last that I could find, that actually gives an *order of events* for tribulation and rapture. As in Matthew 24, the order is clear, unmistakable. Let me

read it: (verses 1 and 3, in part.)

“... concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him... that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed...”

Though two “events” are described, the coming and the gathering, they happen on one day, the “day of Christ”, v.2. Notice the order of the events: Jesus comes, then He gathers. Just as in Matthew 24, they will see the Son of Man coming, and then He will gather.

First, though, an apostasy. That too is in accordance with Matthew, where we read that *lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold* [due to extreme persecution, for one thing] and he that endures to the end will be saved. An end-time falling away. Paul and Matthew [Jesus] in agreement.

Then the man of sin takes over, and here Paul waxes eloquent, using Daniel and his own revelations from God to finish the picture. Antichrist is then destroyed by Jesus at His coming, the very coming Paul started with in the chapter.

The sign of Jesus’ coming is the abomination of desolation created by the antichrist. When the apostate church/world is taken over by the man of sin, and he enters into the temple showing himself to be God (v. 4) we are within three and one-half years of the end of it all.

Harmony prevails in these two texts. Leave them alone.

No end-time revival?

A world with no law. Democracy run amuck. Indeed, the spirit of the age in America is gradually becoming saturated with lawlessness. Nothing is wrong any more. No one should be punished, at least severely. Chaos. One day the world will be this

way, and the one who follows no laws but his own will take charge.

The idea of a deteriorating faith situation, taught specifically here by Jesus, negates the concept of a worldwide revival ushering in the return of Jesus. Rather, a great cooling off is coming, a vacuum of faith, filled by the Liar from the Pit.

When the world has been reached by the Gospel, and that can happen through a relative handful of committed believers without a worldwide revival, there will come a clearly visible identifiable sign for those “watching”: the abomination of desolation that triggers the worldwide tribulation.

Paul’s letters to Thessalonica are gold mines of truth regarding the coming of Jesus. I will certainly revisit them at another time.

Two solid Scriptures. Not enough?

Yes, of course, enough! Even one no-doubt word from God is enough. But the pretrib people have muddied the water to such an extent that it is necessary to look at some of the things they say. There are a few verses that do indeed seem to point their way, but in the light of the clarity of Matthew and Thessalonians, we will be able to show why those “pointers” are not what they seem.

Let’s look at a few relevant topics as we continue to search. In doing so we will cover many of the other Scriptures involved in this study.

Post-Trib Topics

TOPIC I. THE CHURCH

“The church, the Body of Christ, is not mentioned from Revelation 4:1 to the end of chapter 18.” Yes, that’s what they tell me. How sad.

If the church is the Body of Christ, then the Church is not mentioned in the first three chapters of Revelation, either! What? No, there are seven letters to seven *congregations*. Nothing is addressed to the “Church” at large.

So there you have it. No church in Revelation at all! Oh, and by the way, that includes those last glorious chapters where the Bride of Christ descends from heaven. Since the *word* “church” is not used, I guess that can’t be the church either.

I hear someone say, foolish! I see your “foolish”, and I raise you one: wrong! Incredibly naïve and unscholarly. I am ashamed to list the names of modern day Bible teachers – I mean good ones! – who actually teach most of what I just said, based on Revelation 4:1. And what does that verse say? John hears a voice saying to him

“...come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

And that, my friends, is the rapture of the church! You heard it first here. How I wish you had heard it last here. Yes, they are teaching this in Bible Colleges and Seminaries! Because John was invited to heaven, the church, the whole church, was raptured in that verse. And from then on, you won’t see the church in Revelation. That’s what they say.

But it’s wrong from start to finish.

Yes, John was invited to heaven. And many more...

And in Revelation 11, the two witnesses, Elijah and perhaps Enoch, are given the same invitation: Come up here! Another rapture? No. Why not?

Paul was invited to heaven for a while. Rapture time? No. Why not?

It is true that the word “church” does not appear in Revelation 4-18. This proves *nothing*. If by “church” we mean more than just a congregation, as in chapters 2 and 3, it stands to reason that a different term can be used.

Jesus is given many names in the book. So is the antichrist. What does that prove?

Is not the church made up of the saints? Don't New Testament writers refer to the church as “saints” forty times or more? Are they not martyrs, many of them? Look at these passages that do indeed mention the church of Jesus:

- Prayers from *the saints* are received, 5:8.
- Martyrs go to God in 6:10-11.
- Those who have come out of great tribulation – not by rapture but by slaughter – are mentioned in 7:3.
- Prayers of the saints seen again in 8:4.
- Saints mentioned again in 12:11.
- Those who have the testimony of Jesus are in 12:17.
- The saints are to be conquered by antichrist says 13:7, in accordance with Daniel 7.

- In 14:6, the Gospel is being preached.
- 14:13 mentions those who die in the Lord. Who else but the saved church dies in the Lord?
- In 15:1-4, saints sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.
- In 16:15, a message from heaven to saints still remaining on earth.
- God's people are called out, but not up, from Babylon in 18:4.

No church in Revelation? Which Bible version do you own?

“God” is not in the book of Esther.

The word “God”, that is. But would you not say that God is all over Esther? Can you not see the hand of God throughout that story?

More bad news: the word “church” does not appear in Mark, Luke, John, 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John. And that proves...

Nada.

The existence of the church as we understand it and have seen it at the lips of Jesus and the history of Luke and the writings of the apostles, does not change because the Greek *ekklesia* does not appear in the text for a while.

Jude uses the word “saints” to refer to the church in verses 3 and 14. Just like John in the Revelation. Are we getting the point yet?

The Bible does not contain the word “trinity” at all...

Enough. Listen to this word from Brian Schwertley:

"The argument from silence consistently applied would not prove the rapture of the saints but the annihilation of the saints, for not only is the word church (ekklesia) not used of the saints on earth in chapters 4 through 18, it also is never used of the saints in heaven. Does this mean that all the saints have vacated heaven?... An argument that proves too much is worthless."

TOPIC II. IMMINENCE

"Jesus could come at any time." I know what the people who say this mean, but we must take objection to that statement as it stands. In fact, heaven has a day circled on the heavenly calendar when Jesus must come. (Acts 17:31), *"(God) has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by the Man Whom He has ordained."* That is to say, *God* knows when Jesus is coming. It is not random. It is clear. Jesus cannot come at just "any" time, but only on the day He has appointed.

So the problem is not that there is uncertainty in heaven, but that we are uncertain. The question is, just how far is that uncertainty to extend? When the disciples asked Jesus, *"What shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matthew 24:3) why did Jesus even suggest a time frame? Why did He answer such a thing at all, if we are not to know something? Why not say, as we hear commonly today, *"Don't worry about it! It will all pan out. I'll come when I come."*

That was not His approach. Jesus for all time laid out a clear description of a particular generation, a season, if you will, when He will come, so that those believers living in that generation will know it is time! All others of all time, not totally certain of what He was saying, since the time was not ready, have been commanded to watch, and be ready. Of course, the coming of Jesus *at a man's*

death is reason enough for any person, any time, to be on guard against foolish behavior.

But isn't Jesus coming as a thief in the night?

A thief in the night! To some...

The importance of knowing a particular season is confirmed by brother Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5. First he says (verse 2) that Jesus is coming as "*a thief in the night.*" This is unfortunately the concept that some Bible teachers have passed on to godly people as their own norm for looking for Jesus to come!

But moving just one more verse leads us to : "*...for when they say, 'peace and safety', then comes sudden destruction upon them...*" Who are "they" and "them"? The world! The unbelievers! The ungodly! Verse 4 insists, "*You are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief!*"

That means we can and should know the general time of His coming, especially if we are living in the last generation. That generation is described further by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. In words that could not be clearer, Paul demands that that Day will not come unless there is a noticeable world-wide apostasy and the revealing of the man of sin. Oh my! Jesus could come at any moment? Yes, in death. Yes, theoretically to those who walk in darkness and have not read the words of the apostles. But in fact? No! He must come when Paul says He must come, and that is after the great apostasy, and after antichrist.

The man or woman who is seeking God with all the heart about the coming of Jesus will see the plan unfold clearly and will indeed be watching when He comes. The ungodly "carnal" Christian will be loudly proclaiming His love for a Jesus who might come just any

time, and for him the coming will be a surprise, for that person has never dug deeply into God's Word to find the truth. I am saying that more light is revealed to those who seek,

and those who do not seek will be still in darkness,

and fulfill their own prophecies about how "we can never really know."

The only thing that has been denied to us is the very day on the calendar and the very hour on the clock when Jesus will come. Let us be diligent, though, to comprehend with all the saints what are the times and seasons God has revealed to us.

A word about the specific teachings of Jesus on this matter. In Mark 13:32-37, all are admonished to watch, for "*you do not know when the time is.*" Even if Bible prophecy is a muddle to us, we are to be diligently living for Jesus, ready for Him at any moment. But as we grow in grace, we grow in understanding, and as He sees He can trust us with more knowledge about His coming, He gives us that light. For some, the knowing that Jesus will not come until after antichrist arrives would be a signal to let down and let up. These babies need to grow awhile before these other truths can sink in.

In Luke 21:34-36, Jesus tells people to watch and pray all the time, to be worthy to escape the horrible judgment that will come on the Day of His return. This is not to be taken lightly. Again, if prophecy makes no sense to you, and you are not sure of the validity of any of the books out there, and the Scriptures are not yet clear, just watch and pray. You will miss nothing! But, ask for more grace as the days go by to, little by little, get a hold of the hope of the calling of God. It can bring sunshine to a dark day, and downright overwhelming floods of joy when it is discovered even more.

Clues for a long wait for the coming of Jesus are in the Scriptures. Peter (II Peter 3:3) says that in the last days people will scoff, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" That is, it has been a long time.

The long wait for Jesus... and the sudden return.

Jesus told stories of men going into far countries (Matthew 21:33, 25:14). It takes a long time to get to a far country.

Some of us say that Matthew 24 is all about the final coming of Jesus, not the "secret" coming. We question those who say that, "*if you "know" exactly when he is coming, you will not need to watch.*"

But **in Matthew 24 itself** are three warnings about watching:

36) *"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven..."*

42) *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."*

44) *"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him."*

Here is the classic doctrine of "imminence" admittedly *in the context of the return of Jesus to earth*. Others who interpret these verses have caught their mistake, and decided that in the latter portions of Matthew 24, Jesus is actually talking about the "first phase" of His second coming. But one must ask by what system of Biblical interpretation such a division is justified. It would seem that the driving force here is the need to prove one's position by any means.

The above quoted verses are only a few sentences away from clear

signs and clearer illustrations:

Signs and Illustrations of His coming.

(15) The abomination of desolation, the signal for the beginning of the end, discussed above and from page 130.

(32) The fig tree. When you begin to see leaves, summer is near. This is the beginning of the end. I am giving you a sign of the season, but not the exact day.

(37) Noah. Though judgment was only a week away (Genesis 7:10) only Noah and his family knew. He walked with God and was not caught unaware. But the world that rejected God's ways was caught *totally off guard* though the word had been going out for a century. Noah becomes a picture of those who will see the end coming when no one else does. But for the world, the picture is "thief in the night." For Noah-like saints, no major surprise.

So the key is what we know and don't know. Times and seasons we know if we watch. Apostasy season. Antichrist season. Abomination season. Fig tree season. Paul agrees in I Thessalonians 5:1, where "times and seasons" are what we are encouraged and expected to know. Day and hour? Not necessary to nail it down that close. Only watch. Be ready. *The watchers will not be caught off guard.*

There is more evidence of this concept in the Book of Revelation. In the midst of the worst of the Tribulation days, sores, blood, scorching, darkness, Jesus speaks to His own, **who really are still there (16:15):**

"I am coming as a thief! Watch! stay righteous before Me. Don't give up now!" Here is a context just before Jesus' final return, all will agree. *But the "thief" message is still being given!* The warning to "watch" is still there.

Let the doctrine of imminence be believed in the light Jesus has given us.

No matter how much we know or don't know, we are told to watch! "Watching" and knowing when He is coming do not cancel each other. We are not watching with fear and ignorance, but watching with knowledge and expectation.

Upon our return from a recent trip to Mexico, we were told that within a couple of weeks our Mexican friends who actually live in the States, would be coming back to America also. Since we love them dearly and enjoy their fellowship, we started "watching" for their coming. We weren't told the exact day of their arrival, for they did not know when it would be. But we knew that some day soon they would arrive. We knew some things had to happen first. They had to purchase bus tickets. They had to go to the bus station. They had to make the long trip. But we were anticipating their arrival, living with it mentally every day.

So antichrist rises, and we know that within a few years Jesus will come. Are we watching any less? Oh my no! The anticipation and excitement grows as we see prophecy so dramatically fulfilled. Those who say that such specific knowledge of the time of His coming would cause us to stop watching are speaking only of wicked servants, spoken of by the Master in 24:48ff:

"But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants..."

No brothers, we are not in such darkness as this. We will know generally when He is coming, and we will be rejoicing until the end, knowing that His return is what our life is about.

Both Peter and Paul knew that the Lord could not come at "just any

moment.” How? *Jesus told Peter he would live to be an old man and die to glorify God, in John 21:18-19.* Later Jesus told Peter that *soon he was about to die*, thus Jesus would not be coming at least until after that death (II Peter 1:14). Paul knew he was a *chosen vessel who would stand before Gentiles and kings* (Acts 9:15). It is not likely that they wore lapel pins announcing “perhaps today”, but their hope in His return was rock solid nonetheless, and a source of constant comfort and joy.

If the coming of Jesus was not “imminent” in the modern sense, in Peter’s day, how could it be today? Signs must be fulfilled. The preaching of the Gospel worldwide. The coming of the Great Tribulation following apostasy and the rise of antichrist. This the church has believed and still believes for all these centuries because the Word says so.

Still, at the very end of all things, despite what has been happening around them, the sin-darkened, deluded world will be in shock when the Day finally comes. God will have given them a strong delusion so that they will believe the Lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11). Professing Christians will be *“weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will... come on ... them like a trap.”* (Jesus, Luke 21:34.)

Jesus’ Bride will be ready. And she will be made ready by the fires of persecution. The call to the cross and suffering is still ours and must be obeyed. Those saints who go through earth’s final tests are not leftovers from a so-called Laodicean church. They are the godliest saints that have ever graced the planet, of whom the world will not be worthy. *Oh that men will stop re-writing the Bible!*

Following is a paper I wrote on imminence in the summer of 2004, for those who need a bit more understanding of it:

The Doctrine of Imminence examined in the Light of the Scriptures.

The doctrine of imminence, that is, the joyful expectation of the soon, yea any time, meeting with our Lord Jesus Christ, has taken some turns which, in my opinion, were never intended by the writers and Fount of sacred Scripture. I would like to define the doctrine, and examine its true meanings, in the light of the Spirit-inspired men of God who first told us about Jesus' return.

Definitions.

The word "imminence", like "rapture" and "trinity", is not found in the English Bible. That in itself is not proof of anything. But it seems to me worthy of note that believers often label doctrines based on the descriptions they have given those teachings rather than labeling them based on what the Scriptures say. For example, though the term "rapture" certainly describes a Biblical concept, it does not in its normal usage today convey a Biblical meaning. Those who speak of rapture in our day speak of an added coming of the Lord seven years before His "final" coming. But even they would have to agree that at the "final" second coming, believers will be "snatched up" in the air (that is, "raptured") to be with Jesus where He is. Yet rapturists would never refer to this final event as "rapture" at all.

So it is with "imminence." There is an English meaning, a Scriptural meaning, and a third meaning that has been assigned by those who have assumed a theological position about the word. The third meaning, theology attached, is something like: *"Jesus can come at any time. Do not look for signs. Do not worry about times and seasons. Any day is as good as the next for the rapture of the church."* And yes, here the two doctrines – rapture and imminence - come together and feed one another

I would like to challenge this current thinking regarding imminence.

Our word "imminent", says one dictionary, means "*likely to happen without delay. Impending. Threatening. Often said of danger, evil, or menace.*" So from the outset we have a problem with the label given by man. Theologians when speaking of imminence are not talking of some evil threatening event. They are talking about the benign "appearing" of Jesus for His own, seven years before the "return" of Jesus. But as far as they are concerned the "return", which is indeed a threatening time for humanity, will never be imminent in this or any sense. To speak therefore of an "imminent" - that is to say menacing - threatening "rapture" is not the best English, to say the least. I believe it to be poor theology also, as the remainder of this discussion will point out.

So, the concept of imminence as it appears in pretribulation rapture settings is simply that Jesus could come at any time and catch up His Bride, the church, into the heavenlies. Unlike the pretrib doctrine itself, the imminence teaching does have a number of Scriptures that seem to point in the intended direction. It is fair to say, though, that there are other Scriptures that speak of signs in relationship to Jesus' coming, and not imminence. The solution to this dilemma for the pretribulation people has been to allow for two "comings", one by surprise, and one with clear signals.

It could be said that pretribulationism arose to explain this seeming conflict of the Holy Record. But alas! The explanation creates even more confusion, for there simply is no one Scripture that spells out such a thing as two comings. For the record, there is a verse that points to the "second" coming, but none that imagines a third! "*...To those who eagerly await for Him He will appear a **second** time...*" (Hebrews 9:28).

It behooves us to look at all the Scriptures being heralded as teachers of imminence, to see if they say what they are purported to say. Why not begin with texts that use the word "quickly" or "soon" in reference to the appearing of Jesus.

Tachu.

Using the King James Version, there are 17 usages of this Greek word. But this word makes no distinction between **speed** of action and **manner** of action. Where English would differentiate between the concepts of "soon" and "speedily", *tachu* can mean either.

In Matthew 5:25, Jesus tells us that when we have an enemy, we should agree with him, *tachu*. In Matthew 28:7, the angel says to go *tachu* and tell the disciples of the resurrection. Notice the two variations already. When one agrees with any future enemy, he ought to do it in a speedy **manner**. That is not to say that one has an enemy at this moment, but when one does, there is to be no lingering, no hesitation in one's actions. This speaks of "how." But the message of the announcing of the resurrection is a "right now" event, speaking of **when**. Jesus has risen. My disciples don't know it. Go **immediately, now!** You see how the word can lend itself freely to either direction of thought.

Revelation 2:5 and 16 speak of warnings by Jesus to sinning church members. They are told that if they do not repent, He comes *tachu*. We know that Jesus is not saying he is coming "soon", but only after a space of time in which they can repent. And when He comes, it will be "sudden, immediate". We know these verses are not talking about the *end-time* coming of Jesus, yet note the similar language, and how Jesus promises to "come" locally in judgment in the same language that He promises His entire church.

There have been many unrepentant churches through history. Jesus

did not come back, but He did come to these churches. In the Spirit realm He confronted those churches and stopped their forward progress. Invisible, still He was there doing His work. And His promise to come in judgment against wayfaring saints remains to this day. Believers may think they are "getting away with it" and *suddenly*, life is over. Jesus has come for that lukewarm unfruitful saint. In an instant Jesus says, I am here!

So yes, there is a sense of "imminence" that every believer must deal with, namely the personal judgment of Christ on the personal believer who may be cut off if he does not repent See John 15:1-8 for a discussion of branches that need to be cut back or cut off. In that sense alone does the Bible speak of an imminent return of Christ. But regarding the appearing and/or revelation of Jesus Christ we see clues leading us away from "imminence" as it is used today. More of this in a moment.

For now, what are we to make of statements made later in the Apocalypse (chapter 22), to a local church, but seemingly announced to all Christians of all time:

v 7: *"Behold I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

v. 12: *"And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give everyone according to his work."*

v. 20: *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"*

Declarations like these deserve our notice and meditation.

What could He possibly mean, since nineteen hundred years have passed? Do these statements teach "imminence"? There are at least three interpretations advanced by those who study

eschatology:

1. John expected Jesus to come back soon and so He put these words into Jesus' mouth. Persons who teach things such as this do not believe in the power of the Spirit of God to give us a true accounting of spiritual things. They believe that revelation is dependent as much on man's contriving as God's breathing. Those who believe in a dependable written document must reject this first choice outright, though it may seem the "logical" one from a human standpoint. No, this Book came from God.

2. Jesus is saying that he will come soon (*tachu*) by heaven's standards, not by man's ideas of time. After all, a "day is with the Lord as a thousand years," said Moses (Psalm 90:4) and later Peter (II Peter 3:8). This is the commonly accepted view, and we certainly cannot anathematize it, for it brings in Scriptural truth to attest to it. But one wonders whether it is possible to have a readable account of spiritual truth if it is constantly necessary to question whether a thing being said is literally true or not. Could not Jesus say what He meant and have us understand it too, even though it be hidden a bit by a word with a double meaning? It is true that believers who read these things in the first centuries certainly did believe that Jesus was coming "soon" in the normal sense. But they were wrong. And they have been wrong in every other generation! Could they not be wrong today too?

3. "Soon" is not used in the text, though *tachu* could bear that meaning. Instead the more ambiguous "quickly", also supported by *tachu*, is supplied by the translators. This seems to be a better way to look at it. "In a speedy manner" is what Jesus is telling us through the centuries. And there is evidence that Jesus has used this thought of speed, and not imminence, elsewhere. Let's paraphrase Matthew 24:23ff :

"If people tell you that Jesus is back, don't believe them! They'll say he's in the desert or some inner room waiting to be manifested. No! Here's how I will come: like the lightning! (tachu) One second not there, the next second, there. Or like a bird of prey. First a dead animal, then immediately after, the birds are there ready to eat."

But first there must be the rolling in of the storm. Then the lightning. First there must be the hunting and killing of the animal, then the vultures. Delay is implied in both of these illustrations, along with sudden appearance.

In the case of Christ's coming, first there is business to be taken care of on the planet. The preaching of the Gospel must go into all the world until the last person that Jesus saw before the foundation of the world has been called and sealed. He cannot come until that time! The nations must be aligned in such a way that they look exactly like they do in the picture given to us in Sacred Text concerning the end of time. And the Scriptures themselves give other conditions of Christ's coming, which we will address soon (*tachu*).

Tachu. Without delay? Or in a speedy manner? Which is it to be? If "without delay" it seems to this writer difficult to justify two thousand years of waiting, knowing how Jesus so often talks to us in plain understandable terms. Would Jesus say to every generation, "I'm coming without delay!" and then delay for centuries? Would He "stretch the truth" to motivate His people?

Or, does He come quickly, suddenly, without fanfare? Not, as some liberal scholarship theorizes, that He will slowly be recognized by the Body of Christ to be here. One day, they say, we will look around and realize, after many years of this growing awareness, that "He is among us." They confuse the coming of Christ with

Pentecost and the subsequent workings of the Spirit. Oh yes, He has come to us already in that sense. But His Body returns *tachu!* in an instant.

Thief in the night.

But, say you, shall Jesus not come as "a thief in the night"? Does not such a figure imply that there is no way we can know when Jesus will come, that He will surprise all? Not all, but many. There are six "thief" passages in Scripture. Let's look at them.

1.-2. In the Gospels, Matthew and Luke give nearly identical accounts of Jesus' words about the thief. In Matthew (24:43-44) Jesus says that if someone knows that a thief is planning a visit, he prepares himself for that visit. No thief ever surprised a man waiting for him to arrive! Jesus goes on to tell His people to watch and be ready, since the Son of Man will return at an hour one could not guess.

It is clear from the words of Jesus that "imminence", in its truest meaning, a threat of danger, only applies to the ignorant, to the unwatching, the uncaring. Yes, multitudes will be caught unawares, sleeping in their dark patterns of sin, woefully and willfully ignorant of the promises of God and the clues Jesus gave His own disciples about His coming. These multitudes will be surprised beyond measure when Jesus comes. But, says Jesus, there is the possibility of a spiritually intelligent believer getting wind of the fact that something is coming, and being ready for that event.

In connection with this it is important to explore another passage of Jesus' words before we go to Paul's. In Matthew 24:45-51 Jesus talks about two kinds of servants. There are faithful and wise ones who have been entrusted with the proper and timely feeding of the household. At the time the Master returns for the evening meal,

they will be doing what they were supposed to do. The timing of the Master's coming was not an issue with these servants. They simply served until he came and were appropriately rewarded at that time. No "surprise", no threat, only pure joy when the Master came.

The other servants were evil from the start, though they seemed well-behaved when the Master was around. When he was gone their true nature emerged, and when they saw that the time of the Master's journey was unexpectedly long, they got even worse, until they forgot about the return altogether, and were consumed by the shocking advent of the ruler of the house.

Here then are other elements to consider when discussing Christ's return. First, faithfulness, and not exact time reckoning, is the main issue. Second, only evil men will be surprised at Jesus' coming. Third, there is here one of the Bible's clues that the second coming of Christ will indeed be "delayed" in human terms, namely the long journey of the Master of the house.

3. Paul is in perfect agreement with Jesus' pronouncement about thieves and approaches to them. He too sees two groups of people in I Thessalonians 5:2-4- *"For yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief."* The multitudes will be shocked. The believers will be totally aware of what is going on. The pattern holds. "Imminence" is a threat to the unschooled in the prophecies of Christ, the uncaring.

4. In 2 Peter the different groups are not so obvious. Peter makes a blanket statement that the "day of the Lord" will come as "a thief in the night." Later he encourages believers to holiness and watchfulness. Men called to watch, however, are in the same

category as the ones Jesus and Paul mentioned: they are ready!

And one disturbing fact about this passage for those who believe that "imminence" and the "pretribulation rapture" go hand in hand: this passage is clearly about *the final coming of Christ*, and not the (supposed) coming seven years earlier! There is judgment, and fire, and new heavens and earth, etc. Why then talk of a "thief in the night" here, when even according to pretrib people, saints on earth during the Tribulation *know* when Christ will come? Because even when there is pending judgment on a world gone crazy, most of the world will have lost all touch with the promises —and threats - of Almighty God.

5. **John the Revelator in Revelation 3:3** quotes Jesus as telling the Sardis Church to be warned about a coming thief. Yet Sardis lived in another age. Even those who divide church history into ages based on these seven churches of Revelation cannot by any stretch place Sardis at the end of history! So the "thief" concept applies in any time when there are Christians who are too busy to watch for Jesus' coming. And the promise of a "coming" is not only Jesus' bodily return, but His personal coming to believers or groups in judgment and death, as we established above.

6. **Jesus gives the final word** about the approaching thief in Revelation 16:15. Here again the context is the posttribulation coming of Christ to earth. And here again is the encouragement to keep watching so as not to be surprised. "*Behold I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.* "

We conclude then that *it is possible to watch for Christ's coming*. First we walk in holiness to such an extent that we will not be ashamed at His coming, no matter when it is. We must also allow

that His coming may be merely a personal one for us. Peter knew he was going to die (II Peter 1:14) before the coming of Christ, and that knowledge may be communicated to us also.

Another conclusion we gather from all of this is that there must be a generation who will be ready for His coming in a secondary sense. These are the ones who have been watching the signs Jesus and Paul gave for Christ's return. They are men who know the times and the seasons prophesied hundreds of years ago. Do you know those signs, dear reader? Jesus made sure that the answer to His apostles' questions regarding "signs" would be duly recorded for your perusal. Have you discovered them? Are you looking for them? (See my comments above on Matthew 24 in addition to the following...)

...The disciples wanted specifics. Jesus could have said, as He was to say later on His way to heaven, "It is not necessary to know these things. Just go and wait for the Spirit, then be my witnesses everywhere! That's all that matters."

And yes, the Spirit-filled life of witnessing Jesus is all that matters still, ultimately. But even knowing that does not erase the fact that at one point in His ministry the disciples, the first Christians, the foundation stones of the church, asked specific questions and got specific answers about the coming of Christ. This original church of twelve was told nothing of a secret rapture. They were not told here that there is no way of knowing when Jesus will come.

They were given for all time, to be put in writing, an outline of history with a close-up of the last several years of that history. This summary of things from the Master perfectly matches what Daniel had already said, and what the apostle Paul would say later. One Spirit tells us: Not only should you watch, I will tell you what to watch for! And when you see these things happening you will be

able to rejoice!

Now how did Daniel's prophecies lead the way? Why would the very Son of God refer to Daniel's work in answering the apostle's questions? Let's look at Daniel 8:9-19. Again.

I summarize...

Daniel sees a vision of a male goat with a large horn. The horn is broken and four other horns grow in its place. Out of one of the four horns grows a little horn which grows up to be a mighty power on earth. He exalts himself against God as though he were God and stops the daily sacrifices. While Daniel is contemplating all this, an angel informs him that these things will take place at the time of the end. Later, in chapters 11 and 12, the same (evil) man is seen attempting to conquer the world. An incomparable time of trouble arises. Then comes judgment, and the final kingdom of God is established.

Daniel sees the same man, the same event, the same world-wide trouble, and the same revelation of Jesus to the billions of earth. Nothing "secret" here. Clearly visible events lead up to the end of this age.

Paul is in perfect agreement. See II Thessalonians 2:2-9, and once more let me paraphrase

There are people saying that Christ has already come! Don't be deceived. That day will not come unless a great falling away [from the faith] comes first, allowing the man of sin to arise- this man exalts himself above God, even sitting in God's temple! The Lord will destroy him when He comes.

Do you see the pattern? Trouble, man of sin, then Jesus comes. This pattern is attested to by Daniel, Jesus and Paul. None of them talk

about a surprise for the believers, but the events of the end are spelled out for them so that they can know of His coming. He has no desire to hide it from us, but wants us to be watching history, the Word, current events, looking excitedly for signs of His coming, all the time remembering that such an approach to the coming of Christ in no way sets aside personal preparedness for Jesus to "come" at any moment!

This is not to say that any man can pinpoint the coming of Jesus to the very day and hour, as many have attempted down these centuries. In Mark 13:32 Jesus says that only the Father knows those exact facts. But only three verses before He says (paraphrased) *"when you see these things happening (the Great Tribulation, the rise of antichrist, the shaking of the heavens), know that My coming is near, at the very doors. [In fact] the generation that sees the beginning of these specific signs I have given will also see the end of them!"*

It would seem we are close. The Gospel travels farther and farther as the days pass. Stirrings in the Middle East are unprecedented. The need for a temple, the need for a world ruler, it's all in the making. We may well be in the "times and seasons" spoken of. But Paul says so emphatically that that day will not come until antichrist rises. Let no man come against the Spirit's words through Paul.

Let us learn the lesson Jesus taught in the parable of the fig tree. Three times has it been recorded in Scripture for us, matching the importance the Spirit has given to only a handful of Biblical teachings (Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-30, Luke 21: 29-32). It must be serious!

When the fig tree, or for that matter, as Luke adds, any tree, shows evidence of blossoming, it is obvious that summer is upon us. Don't

know the exact moment it will be ushered in, but it is definitely on the way soon now. Jesus then refers back to the things in the verses just behind the fig tree parable as the "evidences" that have been given us.

He says that Jerusalem shall be the focal point of these evidences. I am well aware of the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in AD 70. But careful investigation of Matthew 24 shows that there is an unbroken chain of events from the "abomination of desolation", that is, the exaltation of the antichrist in the temple, to the unprecedented Tribulation, to the advent of Christ in the clouds. There is no break in the action. This is a prophecy of the end times, and it matches perfectly the series of events foreseen by Daniel. Jerusalem, it would seem, must fall yet again, as Luke portrays even more graphically. When antichrist rises and Jerusalem falls, "summer" is near. Then will come the true Christ and the new Jerusalem. All we have seen in history so far is only a preview of the final spectacle foreknown by our God.

A long time.

Did the Bible ever tell us that Jesus would be "right back"? Let's look at clues that point the other way.

1. The far country. Matthew 25 relates the parable of the man who went to a far country, leaving his servants in charge of the work until he returned. (An abbreviated form of this parable is in Mark 13, and a similar one in Luke 19). It was only after "a long time" that the lord of those servants returned. This story is said to be a demonstration of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus took that long journey beginning at the ascension, and has left His church to take care of His business. After a long time, He will return.
2. The last days. Peter (2 Peter 3) points out that in the last days,

days in which Peter did not live, people will laugh at believers because so much time has passed since the promise of His return. The last days will be a long time from the first days. No imminent rapture is seen by Peter!

3. Prophecy. If a prophet says something must happen, it is clear that Jesus will not come until that prophecy is fulfilled. Such a prediction was given in Acts 11:28, where Agabus the prophet foretold a world-wide famine. Surely no one who heard that prophecy believed in an "imminent" return of Christ.

From the beginning, Jesus never meant, "I'll be right back," when He said, "I come quickly." He meant, *"When I come back, it won't be through some slow rise to power, some hidden prolonged entry into the world of men. I will come with the clouds, suddenly, like the eagles, like the lightning."*

Yes, the early disciples and disciples of every age have lived with a certain expectation that "perhaps" Jesus will come in our age. This present time is no exception. But it is improper to put into Jesus' words a promise of imminent return, Himself knowing that that return was not at all imminent. Those who have dug deeply into the Word that He left us have eventually found that such imminence is not there.

Does it matter that Jesus might not come today? Isn't it just as true that any one of us could be called out of the body today to meet the Maker? Isn't that a more profitable and verifiable imminence that will keep us watching? James did say, didn't he, that our life is a vapor that appears only for a little while (4:13-16). We are to have such an attitude of imminence about our personal lives that we should never even state a future plan of ours without adding, "If the Lord wills."

Watch.

Yes, Jesus calls His followers to watch. Let's take a look at the "watch" Scriptures to see what the Lord is requiring of us.

While Jesus was here, He was especially insistent on watching during the "Olivet" discourse recorded for us three times (Matthew 24:42 and 25: 13, Mark 13:33- 37, and Luke 21:36). In Matthew, the command to watch occurs following Jesus' use of Noah as an example of the judgment coming on the earth. Those who believe in a "pretribulation rapture" must agree that here Jesus is calling people to watch, not for a surprise "snatching away" but (for the world) a surprise end of history as we know it.

He tells us to watch as the master of the house watches when he knows a thief is coming. We also know terrible loss is coming, but only to those who are not living for Christ when He comes. In this passage, watching is equated to being ready. It is not concerned with dates and times but a godly life, as the following verses (45-51) point out in speaking of ungodly servants. Far from the joyful expectation of a soon escape from the planet, the command is a call to holiness and fear of the Lord lest we too, like the evil servants, be caught unawares.

The exact time of the end of the world is not given us, as also says Mark's account. Mark gives an abbreviated version of the parable of the talents just before the command to watch, a command given to the disciples, and to "all", says the text. It is interesting to note throughout that at the time of this speaking, *Jesus Himself did not know the Day of His coming*. It seems likely that He does now, and that in fact there was much light given to Paul and John about the Day. Those who live in the time spoken of will surely be given light to understand the times. Until then we are all under the blanket

command to "watch", that is, be careful about our lives of holiness.

The apostle Paul picks up a bit on the "watch" theme in I Corinthians 16: 13, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong... " and in I Thessalonians 5:6, specifically talking about end times, *"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."* This is the passage where believers are contrasted to unbelievers as being those who walk in the light, and will therefore know the time of His coming. But notice that they are told to watch even now, so that the patterns of godliness established will serve them well regardless of the time. So it should be said to us.

Finally, John records Jesus' final usage of the idea of watchfulness in Revelation 3:23. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die... remember how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief... See again that only those not "watching" will be unprepared for Jesus' coming and unaware of the actual event's nearness.

"Imminence" as it is taught today is simply not implied in any of these texts. Rather, holiness in every generation is enjoined. Those holy and watching in the final generation will be ready. And they will also be informed, for the Word is clear as to when Jesus comes.

Summary.

A belief in "imminence", the modern teaching that Jesus could come at any time is reserved for those who have not dug deeply into God's Word, who in fact often despise deep studies of the Bible in favor of easy "fashionable" teachings that blast through the church with regularity. These people have not seen the clear pattern of events that will take place before the return of Jesus to the earth, and prefer to believe that they will be "escaping" before

these events take place. So, they reason, why study the details, if I'll be gone anyway?

Though all should be ready to go to Jesus with their next breath, there is a clearly spelled-out time when Jesus will return to us. The details are in Daniel, Matthew, both Thessalonians, and Revelation. I commend my readers to go to these books to discover what God has said.

When Jesus comes, He comes suddenly. Many will be ready, having watched the signs unfold. However, some believers in every age leading up to the last one, will go to be with the Lord equally ready, for they will have discovered that it is not the return of Jesus but the love and life of Jesus that motivates them day by day to be holy and obedient, always abounding in the work of the Lord. May it be so with you, dear reader.

TOPIC III. WRATH

I Thessalonians 5:9, "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

A question that pretrib people ask: Since the Tribulation is the wrath of God upon unbelievers, how can the church be present?

Let me ask in return a more difficult question from the pretribulation perspective: If people can indeed be saved during the Tribulation, as most who teach this theory believe, since they see saints all over the Book of Revelation, why are the saints not raptured out of the world immediately upon their salvation, since the same wrath will be falling all around? Are these new believers a separate category of saints?

To put a possible end to the dilemma of both questions, let us call upon brothers Bethel and Schwertley [from their online sites].

From Bethel

“What is the wrath to which we are not appointed? And, can saints go through the Great Tribulation without suffering the wrath of God, as did the Old Testament saints in Egypt when God sent His plagues because of Pharaoh? ...”

The first question, regarding the nature of the wrath, needs a careful answer. For the wrath of God is indeed poured out during the three and one-half years called the Tribulation. During these times, believers will possibly be separated from unbelievers, as they were in Egypt. Nevertheless, there will be other forms of death for believers, and as Bethel says,

“Tribulation and persecution is not the wrath of God...persecution and martyrdom is the New Testament norm.”

Protected, given grace?

He adds that, ultimately,

“The wrath of God that Christians will be kept from is the wrath of the last day and, of course, the wrath of the Lake of Fire.”

It is clear at the end of the Book that believers are indeed caught up before Jesus pours out His vengeance on all His enemies (19:11-21). There is definitely **no one** called saint on the planet at that moment.

Bethel continues, *“Even a casual reading of the Scriptures will reveal that God takes His people through tribulation rather than delivering them from it. [He cites Noah, the three Hebrew youth, and Daniel as examples of this.] ... Like the Old Testament saints listed among the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 and all the Apostles who were martyred except John... God sometimes lets His saints suffer and die*

for His glory.

“Beloved, let no man deceive you. The saints will go through the tribulation depicted in the Revelation. The antichrist will be given power ‘to make war with the saints, and to overcome them’ (Rev. 13:7). The prophet Daniel wrote concerning the antichrist, ‘He will speak against the Most High and oppress His saints...The saints will be handed over to him for [three and a half years]...He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people’ (Dan. 7:25, 8:24). Christians who are compromisers before the Great Tribulation are not going to be overcomers through it.”

Schwertley analyzes the Revelation passages that show how God’s people might be kept from the “wrath”, before the ultimate wrath, during this Tribulation time:

No wrath on believers...

“God’s people are protected from His wrath during the Tribulation. In Revelation 6:16 it is the heathen that ask the mountains and rocks to protect them from the wrath of the Lamb, a wrath that falls as a response to the prayers of persecuted and martyred saints (Rev. 6:9-11). After the fifth trumpet is sounded, the locusts of destruction are ordered by God only to harm ‘those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads’ (Rev. 9:4). God’s saints are specifically protected from harm. In Revelation 9:20-21 we are told that these plagues were directed to wicked men. Revelation 14:9-10 says that those who are to experience God’s wrath and undiluted indignation are those who receive the mark of the beast and his image. This obviously excluded Christians. Revelation 16:1-2 says that God’s wrath (the first bowl) is only to be poured out on the worshipers of the beast, who have his mark. Once again believers are excluded. In 16:9 and 11 those who receive God’s plagues are

identified as blasphemers who refuse to repent. A careful reading of Revelation demonstrates that although God's people experience persecution, death, and harm at the hands of wicked men they are carefully and lovingly excluded from every act of God's wrath..."

God's wrath is falling in drops even now.

Do you really believe that Satan acts on his own when there are mass killings, a 9-1-1, a natural disaster? Can't you see the beginnings of the wrath of God about to be poured out in full measure? Yes, the wrath is visible already.

The Bible talks of a time when more evils will be poured out on the earth. Remember, Calvary has already taken place. But in that great Tribulation, we see bowls of wrath being poured out. Where are God's people?

I know how some answer that question,

but even they agree that there are some holy, holy people still here on the earth. Surely if God calls them holy, these so-called "Tribulation" saints, they are covered by the blood of Jesus. What happens to them? Not the wrath of God, but the persecution promised to all His people. Martyrdom. Which is not a threat, but a dear promise given to only the finest of the people of God.

Who are the uncounted multitude John sees after the 144,000 are dealt with? *"These are they who have come out of Great Tribulation."* Not victims of God's wrath, but court favorites who gave their lives for the Master in the midst of earth's worst hour.

So what wrath are we saved from at Calvary? The wrath that sin brings on a man eternally in the Lake of Fire. The ultimate blaspheming of the Holy Spirit, speaking against that Spirit of grace that called him to salvation, which call he denied flatly.

That wrath God is bringing with Him, in Jesus, when He comes. Revelation 19:11-16 reads, in part, *“I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him... the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen... followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations... He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God...”*

That’s the wrath that God’s people will be delivered from. Eternal destruction and separation from God, poured out on all the world except the saints caught up to be with Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 says it all: “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but [to the opposite of wrath] to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”

The opposite of receiving wrath is being saved,

whether we die now or wait for His coming when He will keep us from being destroyed with the wicked. Wrath, for the Christian now, is not persecution, not martyrdom, not trouble or sickness. All those things will happen around us because wickedness keeps increasing, and will increase to the point where a wicked man will finally be allowed to take over this planet. Then more wickedness, and more wrath, but not on us or for us. Finally then we will be removed from the ultimate wrath when He comes. As later in the epistle, Paul will say (2:5) *“... you [evil men] are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...”*

Or as John brings out in his Revelation: (14:9-10) *“... If anyone worships the beast and his image [during the Tribulation], and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall*

also drink of the wine of the wrath of God... shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

God has not appointed us to this wrath, for sure.

See Paul's distinction regarding what God's children must endure and what they will not experience.

1. Romans 9:22-23. *"What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction..."*

2. Acts 14:22. *"We [disciples of Jesus] must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

The early church went through these things. The persecuted church of today likewise. What makes us any better?

God's wrath, NO! Satan's wrath, YES!

Revelation 12:12. Even though the church will never be the object of God's wrath in the last days, it will be the object of Satan's wrath when he is cast down to the earth knowing that *"his time is short..."* It is granted to the Satan-filled antichrist *"to make war with the saints and to overcome them"* (Revelation 13:7).

Arrest. Torture. Death. As Satan has done for these 2,000 years, but intensified, with a desire that some parts of the world experience now, to eliminate the Christian population altogether. He will be well on his way to doing this when Christ returns. Hence the arrival in chapter seven of those who *"have come out of great tribulation."* Conquered by antichrist, received by Christ in heaven.

If believers are not subject to God's wrath, what does the pre-

tribulation theory do to the poor “Tribulation Saints”, acknowledged as believers, yet experiencing the downpour of curses from on High? Why is “wrath” falling on them, if it was not allowed to fall on the believing church? Another non sequitur. Does not compute.

John 17:15. Jesus prays that the disciples be kept from the evil one, not taken out of the world when things get tough. How much Christians will be shielded during the Tribulation is debatable and speculative, but there is no question that there are Biblical precedents for the wrath of God being poured out, while God’s people stayed on the planet, safe from the evil.

Exodus 7-11. The ten plagues fall on Pharaoh’s Egypt. Israel remains, protected. Genesis 6-9. God destroys the world by water. Noah and family remain, protected. Genesis 19. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and family remain, protected.

What about those bowl/vial judgments?

Robbins and others point out that, that which is specifically called wrath during the Tribulation does not occur until the very end, in the vial judgments. Revelation 16:1, the angels are directed to “*pour out the bowls of wrath of God on the earth.*” Notice in verse 2 that the only ones affected by the first bowl are those who have the mark of the beast and worship his image.

We are not specifically told this, but it is quite possible that God’s people are being protected from the other bowls too. But none of that requires a catching-up from earth as is verified in verse 15 of the same chapter, where the Lord calls out to His own to be ready!

The point being made here by Robbins is that these wrath bowls, including Armageddon, all happen at the end of the Tribulation, or

after it, and could be therefore a part of the judgment of Christ on the world. From these things God's people will be hidden.

The great day of Jesus' wrath actually comes early in Revelation, a book that is obviously not in chronological order. 6:17, "... *the great day of His wrath has come...*" The spectacular happenings in the heavens described earlier in the chapter match exactly the signs mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24. Sun darkened. Moon like blood. Stars falling. The wrath of God, for the most part, follows the Tribulation, and thus is not affecting God's people.

The sixth seal of Revelation 6 and the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, match up. Notice how the twenty-four elders describe this time, 11:18. "*The nations were angry, and your wrath has come...*" At this second coming of Jesus to judge the earth, the wrath of God is unleashed, and shortly after, God's people receive their rewards. But why would they not have received them seven years earlier?

Because no resurrection or judgment happened seven years earlier!

TOPIC IV. THE RESTRAINER

2Thessalonians 2:6-8. "*And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time...he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed...*"

Question from pretrib world: "*Since the restrainer is the Holy Ghost, does not His removal from the earth mean that the church is lifted up just as antichrist takes power?*"

Jumping at conclusions is not as good an exercise as digging for facts. I cannot prove to you that I have dug enough, but please consider the following from one who has wanted with all his heart

to know what God has said.

In Scripture, angels are often the “restrainers.” Do you see the angel of the Lord stopping Balaam’s donkey, Numbers 22:23-24?

Look at the curse on David being administered by an angel to whom God eventually says, “Restrain your hand.”

Consider Daniel who reported that an angel shut the lion’s mouth, Daniel 6:22.

Consider also in that same book the restraining of the nations by Michael and Gabriel, Daniel 10:20-21.

More to the point of our present study, examine Revelation 9:1-2 and see who is in charge of the bottomless pit, out of which antichrist will rise, Revelation 17:8. Is it not an angel? Does he not have authority to lock and unlock the “pit”? When he is taken out of the way, from this pit will come the man of whom Paul speaks. Isn’t that what it says?

Now if the Holy Ghost is not the restrainer, two points follow:

1. There is no need for a rapture at this time.
2. There is no need to explain how people can be “saved during the Tribulation without the Holy Spirit,” as pretrib theologians must do if they insist that God essentially leaves the planet. The Spirit will be here doing the work He always does until the last man avails himself of the blood of Christ.

Somehow the Thessalonians knew something that we don’t know, at least of a certainty (*2 Thessalonians 2:6*, “*Now you know what is restraining...*”). But the pretribulation people have it all figured out. The standard teaching is that the restrainer is the Holy Ghost. He is

restraining the world, through the church, from the worst of the evil that is possible on a planet. But when He is removed from the earth, the planet will grow increasingly wicked under antichrist's rule. Imagine, they say, no Holy Spirit.

I find this to be an incredible thing to imagine also, especially since those same people will tell you that there are some "saints" alive during this time. What is a "saint" but a holy one? And how is holiness brought about but by the Holy Spirit? How will the two "witnesses" do their miracles? How will people be born again?

No, the Spirit of God will be here for the duration, comforting the godly ones who are trapped in the Trouble of all Troubles. But, the Holy Spirit, they say, is in the church, and the church will be removed, therefore the Spirit with it. I have a better suggestion, though in fact no one is told who or what the "restrainer" is.

I believe that the restrainer is that angel I mentioned above. I believe he is holding the antichrist back from appearing on the earth. When God gives the nod to him, antichrist will appear. The beginning of the end.

TOPIC V. A "SECRET" COMING?

What's wrong with the "secret rapture" idea? Jesus tells us: Matthew 24:27,

*"As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the **coming of the Son of Man** be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together."*

Paul speaks of that same day by the same expression in I Thessalonians 4:15-16. At the "**coming of the Lord**" will be a shout, an angelic voice, and a trumpet, as the Lord is descending from heaven.

No secret here.

If Jesus or Paul knew of a prior trip, why did neither of them mention both events in the same place? Why allow such confusion in the text? Or is it the teachers of the last 175 years who have added the confusion?

Plainly, *every eye will see Jesus* when He comes (Revelation 1:7) just like everyone in the vicinity of a lightning bolt sees it plainly.

An even more interesting analogy is suggested by eagles, or more properly in context here, vultures. You've seen them hovering, circling, and when the death is confirmed, swiftly pouncing on the dead body. Vultures go where the action is. Once the body is clearly dead, they are not in the air, they are down.

Once Jesus decides to come to earth, he will come to the center of the fray, with an army of believers in his train. No hesitation. No mention of what modern "scholars" and movie-makers promulgate so freely. No preliminary flight. Lightning strike! Vulture landing! It's over. "The Son has come, and you've been left behind," to be judged.

But the pretribulation people claim something different...

...that when Jesus catches up His own to the clouds, seven years before His arrival on the planet, it will be a hush-hush moment, a secret known only to them, but the results of which will be chaos on earth. Let's examine that idea a little further...

1 Thessalonians 4:16.

This is a passage they use to define the rapture, as opposed to – say they – the second coming.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”

Are you kidding me? Really, a secret coming? Shouts, Voices, supernatural trumpets? Here is where “Macdonaldism” kicks in. I speak of Margaret Macdonald, whose “word”, described earlier, helped to put the pretribulation rapture on the map. She says,

“Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance... ‘tis Christ in us that will lift us up... ‘tis only those that are alive in him will be caught up to meet him in the air...”

Gnosticism. The inner knowledge. No one else will know, but we will know. The Scriptures may be silent about this coming, but we will know. The earth will not see, only we will see...

This theory has been revised a lot lately, to the point where some of the official teachings of this doctrine pinpoint the fact that utter chaos would reign if all true Christians were suddenly pulled out. A chaos which itself is not mentioned in Scripture, by the way! But though the outcome has been revised, the “secret” concept remains.

Unaccountable. Just believe us, they say.

The angel and the trumpets are also mentioned in Matthew 24, a “second coming” passage, but so very much like Paul’s Thessalonian words that simple believers like myself see the same event occurring in Paul’s and Jesus’ words.

No, this is no secret!

Acts 1:9-11 tells us the gazing disciples were informed that Jesus, who was going up to heaven with a cloud, would return from

heaven in the same way.

Matthew 24:30 also mentions the clouds of heaven.

I Thessalonians 4:17 also mentions the clouds.

Oh, and Revelation 1:7 cannot be left out...

*“Look, He is coming with the clouds, **and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.**”*

One event, three passages. Who divided this coming of Jesus? More importantly, why?

TOPIC VI. THE ELECT

Does anyone doubt that the term “elect” refers to the people of God, the church? Yes, there is an elect Israel, 144,000 that John references, but Paul, Peter, and John too are otherwise consistent in applying this term to the chosen generation known as Christians, or the church. Fact is, the elect church shows up in the Tribulation, according to Jesus! Matthew 24:21 tells us that an unprecedented tribulation is coming. And during that Tribulation,

Matthew 24:22. *“... unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”*

Matthew 24:24. *“...false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*

So the elect are present, not raptured, during the Tribulation! These are not some new breed called “Tribulation Saints” after all. This is church!

But wait, are we sure this is the church and not the Jews?

Mark 13:27. Notice what extra information brother Mark brings to the table, in case there is any question about where and how the rapture takes place, *and with whom*:

“And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven...”

Saints on earth, known as *the elect* will be raptured when He comes, after the Tribulation is cut off by God’s mercy. *Same elect as the ones mentioned in Matthew*. And for them, no escape, except death, until the Lord returns!

We ask the following question of those who wish to keep drawing such a sharp line between Israel and the church:

1. Was Pentecost a Jewish event or a Christian one? Do I mean the old Jewish feast or that special day recorded in Acts 2? Aye, there’s the problem. A very Jewish feast day saw the birth of a very Christian Church. And not by accident!
2. When Paul concludes his lengthy Romans 11 argument about Israel with, “all Israel will be saved,” what does he mean by Israel here? Hasn’t he been talking about a “tree” called “Israel” into which *Jews and Gentiles* have been grafted?
3. The New Jerusalem: Is it a Jewish or a Christian city? Do the gates not have the names of the twelve tribes of **Israel** inscribed on them? But wait: the foundations of that same city, do they not have the **Christian apostles’** names? Two entities overlapping and forming one new entity, right? Is that not the description of the people of God now?

The church has not replaced Israel, but redefined it. One new man, composed of two separate peoples, not separate anymore, because both going back to the faith of Abraham.

Thus, to speak of the elect in the New Covenant is to speak of all those who have been chosen of God to eternal life!

TOPIC VII. THE RESURRECTION(S)

Timing is everything. Notice how usage of the words “last” and “first” in connection with the coming resurrection give further evidence of a posttribulation rapture.

In John 6:39, 40, 44, and 54, Jesus claims He will raise up all that the Father has given Him in the “last day.” A resurrection is coming, of the righteous dead, and **only one**: at the “last day.” But the pretribulation thinker would have us believe that Jesus meant seven years *before the last day*. Is this “last day” not the “day of the Lord” (I Thessalonians 5:2) that will come as a thief in the night? Is this not the day that pretribulationism points to? The very end of everything? But it is not the end, if they are correct. The end comes seven years later!

I Thessalonians 4:14-17. “...God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus [have died in Christ] ...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

No doubt, a resurrection. Same as the one mentioned in Matthew and I Corinthians. The first resurrection referred to by John also. *The only resurrection for God’s people!* Perfect unity here.

How many “last” trumpets, and “first” resurrections and “second” comings...?

1 Corinthians 15:52. Does not Paul, in this so-called “rapture” passage, teach us that the resurrection will occur at the “last trumpet”? And is that idea of a last trumpet not a reference to a seventh (and last) trumpet heard by John in heaven, Revelation 15:11? And at that last trumpet is it not said that *“the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ...”*? And does that not mean that Jesus has returned to the planet? Yes, the rapture and the second coming are parts of the same event, not separated by seven years, but a matter of minutes!

Revelation 20:4-5. Two resurrections are coming. Jesus said it in John 5 and labeled them the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation. John points them out here, and simply labels the first one, “the first resurrection.” Martyrs and all those faithful to Jesus during the Tribulation [and we have assumed, even before it] are here raised from the dead. There is no resurrection before this one, and this one takes place at the arrival of Jesus on earth. Here Satan is bound. Now the Millennium begins. This is the first resurrection. *It didn’t happen seven years earlier.*

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 teaches that Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection... “then afterward they that are His *at His coming.*” The scriptures do not teach two “comings”. There will be one changing “from mortal to immortal.” It happens at the first resurrection as described in Revelation 20:4-6.

Could it be plainer? Two resurrections coming. One before the Millennium (to life) and one after (to damnation). The first one occurs just before the Millennium begins.

TOPIC VIII. THE DAY OF THE LORD

From the Berean Christian Bible Study Resources site:

“The rapture is associated with “the day of the Lord”. (1Thessalonians 5:2, ‘for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,’ for example, which corresponds to the rapture mentioned in 1Thessalonians 4:16,17.)

“But while I agree that the day referred to may extend over a period of time, there are verses which indicate certain events to precede the start of that day. Notice Joel 2:31 says, ‘The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.’ (And Peter quotes this in Acts 2 as applying to the church)

“And 2 Thessalonians 2:2,3 ‘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. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.’

“Since the rapture occurs on the day of the Lord, and since the day of the Lord doesn't start until after events associated with the Great Tribulation occur - the rebellion/apostacy, the revealing of the antichrist, the sun turned to darkness - this disproves the idea of a pretrib rapture.”

The “Day of the Lord” is all over Scripture. It is not secret. It is not “nice.” And it only happens one time.

Another Joel passage (3:14-15): *“Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness...”*

The awful DAY of the LORD.

The prophets speak:

Amos 5:18. *“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light...”*

Zechariah 14:1-2. *“Behold the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all nations to battle against Jerusalem... then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations... and in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives... Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with Him...”*

Malachi 4:5. *“...before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord...”*

Now, of that same day, the “Day of the Lord,” the apostles speak:

1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 16:14-15. *“... the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night...”* Judgment! Jesus! Rapture! All at once! Paul and Peter and John agree!

2 Thessalonians 2:2. (KJV) Believers in Thessalonica thought the Day of the Lord [here, Day of Christ] had come. Paul says, *No, it won't come unless the apostasy and the antichrist come first.* This is that same “Day of the Lord” of which the prophets spoke.

But if the KJV is correct, we have here the crossover verse that connects “Day of the Lord” to “Day of Christ” and proves they are the same. Thus:

Philippians 1:6,10 ; 1 Corinthians 3:13, etc. speak of the same day.

Revelation's Day of Wrath.

At the risk of a little repetition (see "wrath" above) I must point out here that the great day of the Lord, as in His coming to earth again, is prophesied not once, but three times in the Book of Revelation! Those who have studied the Bible's final book for very long will discover that it is not written in chronological order. Some struggle to find any order at all. But there is a pattern. And the pattern revolves around three sets of happenings: seals, trumpets and bowls.

By the time one comes to the end of a set, he has come to the end of the world and the wrathful return of Jesus yet again.

Revelation 6 tells of the sixth seal, and the "great day of His wrath" having come. This is not Tribulation talk. This is the very end. Sun and moon and stars out of whack as in Matthew 24.

Then come the trumpets. By 11:18, we are at the seventh trumpet, where once again God's wrath is mentioned, and the time of the dead being judged, and rewards being given out. Again, this is after the Tribulation, not during.

Then there are the bowl judgments. They are even called "wrath" early on, but they are followed by the fall of Babylon, earthquakes, lightnings, and in chapter 19, the very return of Jesus. No matter how bad it gets in the Tribulation, it will be worse for the wicked when Jesus comes.

But we will then, at His coming, be raptured out of harm's way... that is, the few that are still alive after antichrist's onslaught.

And don't forget. During that "bowl" time, Jesus is still saying that His coming is imminent! In the right sense. *One huge day is circled on God's calendar! Oh be ready! Watching!*

TOPIC IX. A *SECOND* COMING, ONLY!

Yes, we've heard the "two-phase" theory of the second coming of Christ, first phase being the "rapture" and then the second, the "revelation." But really, would you have gathered such a thing, reading the following simple verses?

Hebrews 9:28. *"So Christ was offered once [His first coming, The first time He came] to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a **second time** [clear enough?] apart from sin, for salvation."* He came once. He's coming again. Who muddied this clear water?

So, He comes in "phase one" for His church, and in "phase two [the Glorious Appearing, the revelation]" for the elect Jews, right? Titus 2:11-13 begs to differ: *"... the grace of God has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and **glorious appearing** of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."* Not just the "secret" rapture, but the appearing. All one event.

1 Peter 1:3-7, in part, states, *"... God has begotten us again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... who are kept by the power of God ... for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time... though for a little while... you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the **revelation** of Jesus Christ."* Not the catching away only, but the **revelation**, the final coming. All one event.

TOPIC X. THREE GREEK WORDS DESCRIBE HIS ONE COMING/APPEARING/REVELATION

There are three Greek words used in the New Testament for the Second Coming:

1. *Parousia*, usually translated “coming.”
2. *Apokalupsis*, usually translated “revealed.”
3. *Epiphaneia*, usually translated “appearing.”

A close study of these words shows what we already have learned many other ways: **There is one event coming.** This one event is pictured with these three Greek words, used interchangeably.

To show the fallacy of the two-phase theory, I will use the words “rapture” and “second coming” *in the way the pretrib people do.* You will see that their definitions don’t hold up.

Parousia is used in the following passages:

Matt. 24:27- Jesus: *“As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.”* (second coming)

1 Cor. 15:23 – (Regarding the first resurrection) *“But each one in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at His **coming**.”* (rapture)

1 Thes. 3:13 – *“... that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”* (second coming)

1 Thes. 4:15 – *“... we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.”* (rapture)

***Parousia* happenings are so very interchangeable. What about *apokalupsis*?**

Apokalupsis is used in the following passages:

2 Thes. 1:7 – “... to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is **revealed** from heaven with His mighty angels...” (A promise of vengeance on our enemies, not of a catching away) (Second Coming)

1 Peter 1:7 – “... that the genuineness of your faith... though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory, at the **revelation** of Jesus Christ.” (Testing of faith first. Praise when He is revealed. Rapture or second coming possible)

1 Cor. 1:7-8 – “... so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the **revelation** of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rapture)

And *epiphaneia*, used in the following passages:

Titus 2:13 – “...looking for the blessed hope and glorious **appearing** of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (Rapture)

2 Thes. 2:8 – “... the Lord will consume [antichrist] with the breath of His mouth and the **brightness** [epiphaneia] of His coming.” (Second coming)

2 Tim 4:1 – “Jesus Christ... will judge the living and the dead at His **appearing** and kingdom.” (Second Coming)

Putting it all together:

At the *Parousia*, Christ comes with his saints, and resurrects (raptures) all those “asleep” in Christ. First one, then the other. Seven years in between, not needed.

At the *apokalupsis*, at the end, at the day of the Lord, after the testing of our faith by fire, He comes with his angels taking vengeance on His enemies, to be glorified in His saints. Why isn't this considered one event?

And at the *epiphaneia* is our blessed hope, at which time antichrist will be destroyed, our work on earth will be ended, and the living and the dead will be judged (1 Thes. 4:16, 2 Cor. 5:10).

CONCLUSIONS:

The three Greek words are used interchangeably.

There is no distinction made between rapture and return.

They all take place at the same time.

They are not separated by seven years.

Who said they were?

TOPIC XI. APOSTASY

Regarding 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the great falling away:

Desperate pretrib arguments try to re-define Greek words. For example, *apostasia*. Our friend Mr. Strong says the word means "defection". It is translated "falling away" in the Thessalonians text. The Greek word is used in Acts 21:21, where Paul is being advised that the Jews think he is teaching other Jews to *forsake* Moses. To apostasize, or fall away from, Moses. Same as Thessalonians.

The verb form derived from *apostasia* in in 1 Timothy 4:1. "Some shall *depart* from the faith."

Isn't it clear that the direction being traveled is downward, and the motivation is from self? A deliberate departure in the wrong

direction caused by my own stubbornness and self-will?

How in the world can that concept be carried over into a “rapture” idea, which is upward in direction, and totally out of control of the human being affected? Rapture is a passive idea. Apostasizing is quite active.

Worse problems for the would-be word-maker is the context of 2 Thessalonians 2. If *apostasias* does indeed mean “rapture,” here is Paul’s thought:

“Brothers, be comforted! Our gathering together to Jesus will not take place until... our gathering together to Jesus...”

Doesn’t work for me...

I have never found the end-time revival in Scripture. Revivals here and there, sure. But slowly, an end-time apostasy, created in part by a professing church, smothers the world and makes it ready for the rule of antichrist. And when antichrist rules, the love of many more will grow cold. Beware!

Some see apostasy around us already. Some trace it back as far as the Middle Ages, and the slow but sure rise of Romanism, not in the world, but in the church. Paul mentions “forbidding to marry” and “abstaining from foods” as part of the problem. But then, the Reformers came out of that.

Some see the slow dying of anything valid in European Christianity and the evil that is taking over America. Where the apostasy stands now and how far it must go before it is universal, we do not know. But it is coming. Let it not be said of you and your church that your love has grown cold, that you have lost the zeal you once knew. Apostasy can strike anywhere, as a cancer on the body.

TOPIC XII. PRETRIB-SOUNDING VERSES

An honest student of this subject must be aware that there are texts that seem to lean toward pretribulationism, without stating that doctrine. Let's look at them.

Luke 21:36. *"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Question: *Does not Jesus here imply that there is an escape from the Tribulation, and that we ought in fact to seek it?*

In the light of all that we have learned so far, the explanation of this verse becomes relatively easy. Let's try to determine first what "these things" are that Jesus is talking about. In the chapter, a parallel to Matthew 24, he has spoken of days of vengeance, distress, wrath, falling by the edge of the sword, signs in the heavens, men's hearts failing them, the coming of Jesus Himself, carousing, drunkenness, cares of this life, the snare of His return.

What are the "things" we should watch for and pray to escape? Why, the fate of this world's evil men! The judgment of God on sin!

And how is it that we will "stand before the Son of Man?" First, our salvation, then, the rapture! Before this touching down to earth, before the ultimate wrath falls, before He annihilates His enemies, He will catch us up to meet Him in the air.

Remember, the rapture itself is not in question, only its timing. Jesus is coming back to wreak vengeance on His enemies. Oh how angry He will be! Revelation 19:15: *"... He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."*

Be sure you are saved! You will escape this wrath of God!

Revelation 3:10. *“Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”*

There is no direct evidence anywhere in Scripture for a pretribulation rapture. But passages like this one are used as *indirect* proof. Here the “hour of trial” is assumed to be the Great Tribulation, and in “church-age” thought, the Philadelphia Church becomes the end-time church. Thus the faithful are promised they will not have to go through this Tribulation because, it is further assumed, they will be here “caught up” before that time comes.

Problems with that view: 1. Can we prove that the “hour of trial” is the Tribulation? Could it not just as easily be the terrible day of His coming? Then indeed the saved will be caught up to be with Jesus.

2. Is it not possible that this message is indeed given to a church known in the days of John, and that the promise was kept? Are there not churches in every generation who can claim this promise of escaping the judgment of God if they are faithful?

3. Is it not possible at the very least, that God is able to keep His people from harm in the midst of judgment? Were either Noah or Lot removed from the earth? Do not the 144,000 escape Satan’s plan? Other than persecutions allowed, are God’s people ever harmed when God is pouring wrath on His enemies?

5. It is not proper to make the promise given to an individual church in Asia some generalized promise for all churches of all time. Schwertley says, *“The church of Smyrna is told that they ‘will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death.’ They are not promised protection from the coming tribulation.” To make the behavior of a particular church in Asia Minor universal in its application “is to render the commendation to the Philadelphians meaningless.”*

Not necessarily an end-time promise!

Jesus indicates strongly here that the time is about to happen. This is not talking about an end-time scenario, but the persecution of their own time, the difficult political situations of their own day.

The Philadelphian church was not beamed out of the Roman Empire, but kept from the evil of the days, as Noah and Lot in their generations.

Was it not Jesus who said to the Father, *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one”* ?

That’s how it works: in the world, but kept from evil. That is what Philadelphia is no doubt being promised.

TOPIC XIII. RAPTURE IN THE OTHER TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Taken and left. Matthew 24:40-42.

Is not the rapture the time of “chaos” when some will be taken, some left? Pretribulation people have made movies to this effect. Trains will stop running. Human life will be confused. People missing. What to do?

Yet here we are in Matthew 24, a chapter claimed by the pre-tribbers as a “second coming” chapter, and look what happens.

Just after telling of that coming, Jesus goes back and explains more details about what will transpire:

“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.”

What does that sound like to you?

Sounds to me like a rapture, right? A catching away to glory, while those left behind are subjects of the wrath of God pictured in Revelation 19 at the coming of Jesus. The second coming of Jesus. The only coming of Jesus. In judgment, but not on His people. They are caught up to be with the Lord.

In reality, this post-rapture world will be far from confused! They'll know exactly what happened, and regret it forever, if they are left behind.

The Wheat and the Tares. Matthew 13:24-30 and 37-43.

After telling the story of bad seed being sown in a field of good seed, Jesus has the owner saying to the field hands,

“Let both [plants] grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then in explaining all of this to the questioning disciples, Jesus says,

“As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire... then the righteous will shine...”

A simultaneous harvest, at least. Quite possibly though, this scene matches up better with Matthew 25, where Jesus judges the nations who are now gathered before Him just after His coming.

The saints are with Him at that time, participating in this judgment. Bottom line: There is no seven-year period required between the cursing of the wicked and the blessing of the righteous. It all happens at the same time!

The evil servant: Matthew 24:45.

An evil servant is punished at Jesus' return, and a good servant is rewarded. At the same time. Same pattern as the dragnet and the wheat/tares stories earlier in Matthew.

The Dragnet: Matthew 13:47-50.

Same story line. Those who understand the wheat and the tares will understand the dragnet. Lots of fish in a net. Some thrown out, some kept.

"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace..."

Simultaneous gathering and pitching of fish. No time in between.

The talents:

Talk of a "far" country, hint that His return will not be soon when He is telling the story. The man returns, rewards the good, punishes the bad. Simultaneous.

Coming of the kingdom: Luke 17:20-37.

Normal life proceeding, then sudden destruction. As in the days of Noah. Then the righteous are removed from this scene. The others are left behind to be judged. This is the second coming of Jesus, just before His setting up of the kingdom.

TOPIC XIV. SOME RELIGIOUS EVENTS of the NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. 1830. Joseph Smith publishes Book of Mormon, forms first church. **Mormonism**
2. 1830's. William Miller and others form **Adventism**.
3. 1830's. Edward Irving/John Darby, and others introduce pretribulation rapture, an outgrowth of **dispensationalism**.
4. 1859. Charles Darwin publishes *Origin of Species*. **Evolution**.
5. 1863. Formation of **seventh-day Adventist** church, Ellen G. White.
6. 1870. First meetings of **Russelites** (Jehovah's Witnesses).
7. 1872. Mary Baker Eddy publishes *Science and Health*. Beginnings of **Christian Science**.
8. 1879. The beginnings of organized **British Israelism**.
9. 1884. Watch Tower Tract Society formed. **Jehovah's Witnesses**.

TOPIC XV. OUR BLESSED HOPE

Pretrib people like to accuse posttribulation people of stealing the hope of believers, that "blessed hope" of His soon, yea imminent, return.

Suppose I tell you that Jesus could come at any minute. And suppose I tell you that *for twenty years*. And He doesn't come. Is that a blessed hope, or a false hope?

Jesus cannot come at any minute but only on the designated day set from the foundation of the world. There is nothing random or haphazard about His return. And the more I search His Word the more I begin to see a description of the season during which He will come. And that does not change my day-to-day work for the Lord.

This constant quoting of Titus and our blessed hope has caused the unbelievers to laugh. As Peter said they would. What was Peter's answer to their predicted scoffing? (And by the way, the fact that he predicted people would be scoffing after many years, proves that the church was not to live with an "imminent" expectation of Jesus' return.)

"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," as Paul and Jesus said. And what will that day of the Lord look like? Everything burned up! Catastrophe!

No hint here of an escape of the evil. Before the new heavens and earth that he prophesies, shall come horrid times. Did that take away their hope? Not at all. It strengthened it.

He was not talking of the Tribulation here, but of the coming of Jesus and the ensuing judgments. He was simply saying that hard times will precede good times, and *"what manner of persons ought we to be"* because of the hard times coming.

His advice: "keep looking up" ? No. Be sure that you are in Him. Our hope is solid and real but not immediate. Not right this minute.

Hope says Jesus will come. The church collectively has a hope that this world is going to be in order one day. But to go around broadcasting that Jesus may come today is not in accordance with the Scripture.

Earlier in the letter of Peter (1:14) he lets us know that Jesus has told him that he is to die soon. No imminent rapture for him.

Our blessed hope is not that Jesus is coming soon, but that He is coming. Our hope from day to day is *"I will never leave you or forsake you."* That promise can be cashed in every day. The other may be in the distant future, but just as real.

I know that this world will not always be this way. I have hope.
I know that my sickness will not always be in my body. That is hope.
I know that sin will not always dwell in this flesh. Hope.

Hope is not about the moment. It's about the future. Faith is what I need to get me to that future.

TOPIC XVI. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

It has been my privilege and responsibility in my writings to burst bubbles. It must be painful to read such things, and the following is no exception. But I am convinced the church needs to re-examine the revelation of God's Word, as opposed to rewriting it. Here, as far as I can tell, is what God has said about the abomination that makes desolate. (Forgive again, repetition of some material already covered above.)

Something that God hates will cause Jerusalem to be emptied of Jews and overrun by Gentiles. Paul tells us what it is in 2

Thessalonians 2. The man of sin will sit in the temple of God. Twice in Jewish history a pollutant has been placed in the Jewish temple, and twice, disaster followed. A third time is coming.

A pig and a statue of Zeus defiled the first two temples. A man filled with Satan will defile the third. And plans for such a building have been in the works in Israel for many years. This is a great study on its own, but I must stay focused.

Matthew 24 and Luke 21 tell us what happens next.

I politely refuse the standard teaching about these two chapters, which states almost dogmatically that the scenes that unfold there are merely descriptions of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

They are more than that.

1. First recall that there is still standing in Jerusalem an entire wall of the temple buildings of the first century. Jesus said not one stone would be left upon another when the final event takes place.
2. The final abomination will produce unprecedented trouble. Not just Jerusalem trouble or Jewish trouble. Worldwide Trouble. Tribulation unheard of. Never before. Never again.

What happened in AD 70 cannot be trivialized. Josephus reports that 1.1 million died. And those were the non-combatants. Nearly 100,000 were enslaved and deported. There was famine and fire and nearly total destruction of all that the Jews had held dear, and that had at one time been holy to them. Elements of Jewish worship, even from the Holy Place, were paraded down the streets of Rome.

So awful.

But worse things have happened since. Hitler's Holocaust slaughtered six million Jews. Their suffering, starvation, torture, during this period are subjects of large amounts of gruesome history.

Worse. In the war that Hitler invited, fifty to eighty million Gentiles were killed. The war ended with the massacre of 150,000 Japanese in Hiroshima.

Famine? Many have been worse than Jerusalem's. The Irish lost one and one half million in the 1840's and 1850's. The Vietnamese saw two million perish in their 1945 event. And the worst of all, in China, witnessed the end of life for thirty-six million Chinese.

3. Why include Gentiles in these figures at all? Isn't the promise being made only to Jews? No, Jesus says here that if the Tribulation that begins in Jerusalem is not halted – and it will be – all flesh will be destroyed. All human life gone.

That is where this catastrophe totally separates itself from AD 70. Oh, it was awful, but not universal. Matthew 24 is a worldwide conflagration.

4. Another serious clue that Matthew 24 is not AD 70. Jesus told us to look to Daniel for a reference to the coming abomination. Daniel does indeed mention it. Of course, the critics come along and tell us that Daniel, in all his visions,

was really just seeing Antiochus Epiphanes, another antichrist type man with evil intentions toward Israel.

Indeed, Antiochus was responsible for desecration, destruction, horror, in the Holy City. But Daniel was not seeing him. Daniel 8:13 tells us of a conversation going on between two “holy ones” about the timing of the final purging of Israel. A little later, verse 17, a Voice comes from heaven telling Daniel that what he is seeing is for the time of the end. Chapter 12 tells of that time also, in perfect agreement with Jesus and Paul. Again, a great study on its own, but we hasten on...

Daniel saw the end. Jesus says, “What I am about to tell you is the same thing Daniel told you. It’s about the end.

But it looks like A D 70! Yes, and Daniel’s prophecy *looked like* Antiochus. These two events in Israel’s history are visible reminders of what is coming. They are previews of events that can only transpire at the end of history, a history that will repeat itself and then some.

Not convinced? Keep reading.

5. This abomination will make Jerusalem desolate. Hence, Jesus says, “Run!” But Luke adds other details, and when we read these, we are truly tempted to think A D 70, but we must think otherwise, so as to believe only what the context demands.

Luke tells us that not all of the Jews will get away. As in AD 70 they will be captured and sent out of Israel. Remember

your Holocaust history? Jews rounded up, placed in suffocating boxcars, and sent to concentration camps in a number of countries (Austria, Poland, Germany, Netherlands, France, etc).

6. Luke's account adds, "they will fall by the sword." That was hard to figure out at first. Sword warfare is basically defunct. But we are not talking about warfare. By the time antichrist has power, warfare will not be necessary. Execution will be the work of the day. And execution by sword is still among us on the planet. Think Saudi Arabia, or a fringe Islamic group, such as ISIS. Very little imagination is needed to understand how this verse can be fulfilled in our time.

More?

7. One other reason I believe Matthew and Luke are still in our future is that *all things* must be fulfilled at this coming devastation, Luke 21:22,

"For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

If all things had been fulfilled, in terms of vengeance, in AD 70, no Holocaust would have occurred. The nation would have been formed, Messiah would have returned.

In the Matthew 24/Luke 21 prophecy, Messiah does indeed return to Israel in the Second Coming. Matthew and Luke both place that coming at the very end of this passage. Matthew even says "Immediately" after the tribulation of those days. Here is Luke (21:25-27):

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

One cannot help but hear this tragic moment echoed in Revelation 6:12-17 (in part):

“... the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth...and the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

One more thing. Proof that the seven-year period spoken of by Daniel is not the same as the time of the Tribulation. The seven-year period is triggered by an agreement which leads to some good things in Israel and the world. But the Tribulation (three and one-half years) is lit by the abomination of desolation, and leads to horror unspeakable.

**John F. Walvoord:
A response**

I was ten years old

when John Walvoord wrote his classic work on the rapture (1956). I was no match for him then, and sixty-two years later, I am still no match for him. Look at his credentials (Wikipedia)...

John F. Walvoord (May 1, 1910 – December 20, 2002) was a Christian theologian, pastor, and president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986. He was the author of over 30 books, focusing primarily on eschatology and theology, including The Rapture Question [the book we will consider], and was co-editor of The Bible Knowledge Commentary with Roy B. Zuck. He earned AB and DD degrees from Wheaton College, an AM degree from Texas Christian University in philosophy, a ThB, ThM, and ThD in Systematic Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a LittD from Liberty Baptist Seminary.

As for my own claim to the right to speak in response to this giant, I suggest only a strong desire to know and share truth of Scripture. Not that he did not, but simply that I do, and our findings differ.

I have just completed his book, and was taken aback at the strength of some of his arguments. I was also blessed by his non-combative spirit. There was little of rancor in his tone, but a definite assurance of his position.

He has many disciples. Most of the leaders of western conservatism espouse his view. Nevertheless, the discussion must continue. And I am far from the first to try to unseat this master from his stance. Of course, since 2002 he has been with the real Master, we presume, and some might think it impertinent to attack a man who cannot respond.

But I think the Doctor would be gratified to know that his statements inspired thoughtful challenges.

I shall trace through Dr. Walvoord's book those ideas with which I differ and offer a rebuttal of sorts.

Chapter I. The Promise of His Coming (introduction and preview)

The good Doctor, who shall be "JW" from this point on, states that the literal interpretation of Scripture should be the norm. He believed in the authority of God's Word.

I was a little surprised to hear this at first, since some of pretribulationism's [pt from now on] viewpoints seem to come from sources beyond the Word. Nevertheless, the pt scholars, as a whole, believe they are taking God's Word literally, and we must give them the benefit of the doubt.

JW states early on that the pt "teaching was espoused by Darby and the Plymouth Brethren and popularized by the famous *Scotfield Reference Bible*." He stops short of saying that Darby invented this system of thought, and even tries to say that such thought was present before Darby, but in this very first chapter he admits that pt as a church-wide system, is a recent phenomenon [my words].

His first premise, and the subject of his first section, is that "the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology [the study of the church] than eschatology [study of last things]. This notion matches exactly the findings of posttribblers that it was *dispensationalism* that ultimately gave rise to pt.

Darby himself would agree. It was while examining Scripturally the program of God for the church vs Israel that he “saw the light” about pt. These two ideas rise and fall together in the mind of a studied pt person.

Chapter II. The Meaning of the church

The church not in the Tribulation?

JW says that to be premillennial one understands that the church as a body is distinct from Israel “and from saints in general.” That last phrase has to be added to include those troublesome “Tribulation Saints” that appear all over the Book of Revelation.

He freely admits that if “the term *church* includes saints of all ages, then it is self-evident that the church will go through the Tribulation.”

So in JW’s mind, all I have to do to prove pt incorrect, is to prove an all-inclusive definition of *church*. I should think he would even be satisfied if I could prove that just the saints *in Revelation* are indeed a part of the church.

In Topic I above, I did just that. Allow me to copy from myself to save you a trip back:

*Is not the church made up of **saints**? Don’t New Testament writers refer to the church as “saints” forty times or more? Are they not martyrs, many of them?*

[In Revelation] Prayers from the saints are received, 5:8. Martyrs go to God in 6:10-11. Those who have come out of great tribulation –

not by rapture but by slaughter – are mentioned in 7:3. Prayers of the saints seen again in 8:4. Saints mentioned again in 12:11. Those who have the testimony of Jesus are in 12:17. The saints are to be conquered by antichrist says 13:7, in accordance with Daniel 7. In 14:6, the Gospel is being preached. 14:13 mentions those who die in the Lord. Who else but the saved church dies in the Lord? In 15:1-4, saints sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. In 16:15, a message from heaven to saints still remaining on earth. God's people are called out, but not up, from Babylon in 18:4.

Since that listing, I have discovered something of interest in Daniel 7:25-27. Note the chain of events and descriptions carefully:

1. Verse 25. Daniel is viewing antichrist. Antichrist is persecuting people he calls "the saints of the Most High." Very special saints living during the Tribulation. But then, pt allows for that. Read on...
2. Jesus comes. Verse 26. Judgment ensues.
3. The kingdom is then turned over to the same folks mentioned in verse 25! "The saints of the Most High"! What? The *Tribulation Saints* get everything?
4. Now turn to Revelation 20:4. A scene that matches exactly Daniel 7! After antichrist is punished and the Devil bound, judgment ensues. (Jesus has already come, at His final coming.)
5. Those who were faithful to Jesus, His martyrs, are rewarded by being allowed to reign with Jesus 1000 years. That is, they are given the kingdom, as in Daniel.
6. Who is given the kingdom? *The participants in the first resurrection!* Jesus called it the resurrection of life. It's the only resurrection promised for 1000 years, when the resurrection of damnation takes place.

7. Do you follow me? Those “Tribulation Saints” are none other than the last expression of the church of Jesus Christ that even now awaits that first resurrection with Jesus. Not at just “any time” but exactly in the season when Scripture says it will happen.

The big “gap”/parenthesis.

A much stronger pt argument is his mention of the church age as “parenthesis.”

First, the idea of “Church Age.” That is the Dispensational way of describing the time in which we as Christians live now. And since they have coined the phrase, the pt people feel justified in describing its parameters, its beginning and ending times.

We cannot quarrel with the beginning time of the church. It was predicted in Matthew 16:18.

“... on this rock I will build My church...”

And the prediction came to pass on the Day of Pentecost. Peter had been given the keys to open God’s kingdom to Jew and Gentile alike. The combining of Jew and Gentile into one holy temple infused by the very Spirit of God was the new entity called “church”.

All agree on this.

But you will note that Jesus went on to say that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it...”

No end? As every *member* of this kingdom/church had a beginning but no end, so too, the eternity of the church is just as real as its Pentecost beginning. The “Church Age” will not end!

Not so, say the Dispensational people. It must have an end, they say, as far as this earth is concerned, so that God can finish His program with Israel. Here then is inserted into the system, by them, Daniel 9:26-27. A very compelling look at a very compelling prophecy. One with which I have been acquainted for some time. My interpretation matches almost exactly with Darby and company:

Seventy “sevens”, or four hundred ninety years are “determined” on the Jewish people. Everything God intends to do with them will be completed within the four hundred ninety years of this prophecy.

Well, sorta. In fact, four hundred eighty-three of those years have already come to pass, and ended in the life and death of the Messiah. An astoundingly accurate prediction.

But a pause was put on Jewish dealings at that moment. A gap ensued. A huge gap.

It is still with us. The Jews have still not experienced their seventieth “week”, that is, that final period of seven years. And in the middle of that week, the abomination of desolation, aka known as the beginning of the Great Tribulation, or “Jacob’s Trouble.” When all of that has happened, the Millennium of peace can begin.

Darby and now Walvoord and all the others teach that Israel will not experience this seven years until the church age ends. That is, until the church is taken out of the way, raptured.

Thus, the church age is seen as the great “parenthesis.” And the great hindrance to the Jews finalizing God’s plan for them.

All makes sense, yes? An overwhelming argument for many. But can the plain sense of so many other New Testament passages be ignored because of this prophecy?

We have to go deeper.

First, the claim is made that Daniel and all the other prophets never saw the Christian “age.” Not true.

Joel (2:28) states that God is going to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The sons and daughters will prophesy. Old men will dream dreams. Young men will see visions. Even the servants will experience the gifting of the Holy Spirit. And after that, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Sounds like church to me, especially when coupled with Peter’s claim on the birthday of the church that Joel was speaking of the proceedings going on at that moment. Joel saw the first day of the church and even some of its early life. He saw a remnant whom the Lord was calling to Himself.

No prophet ever saw the church? Wrong. Add Jeremiah to the visionaries who prophesied of church-related things. In 31:31 and following Jeremiah predicted that the days would come when God would abandon that first covenant, written in stone, and write His law into the very minds and hearts of men. All within that covenant would know the Lord, says God Himself. Hebrews 8:7-15 claims that very promise for the New Covenant people.

The prophets didn't understand what it was all about, but they saw the church. And there was no conflict involved. The Jewish people would be coming into better things from God's Spirit. Here is where the church and Israel come together, overlap.

That doesn't mean there is no natural Israel. It means that there is no reason for the church to be lifted out of the world simply because God wants to finish His dealings with the Jews.

So my second point is made. Israel and the church can stay on the planet without colliding, without hindering God's program.

I ask Darbyites to consider another body of humans that will indeed need to be rearranged before that seventieth week can begin, and the Jewish "clock" be allowed to start ticking out its final countdown.

I believe that question's answer leads to the Gentiles. The nations. As things stand today, I speak specifically of the Muslims.

Go back with me to Daniel. Four hundred and eighty-three years, then boom! the clock stops. Jewish history is suspended. Why? Because the Christians show up? Not at all. When Jesus was crucified the covenant with Israel was broken. By Israel. The aftermath of that breakdown is the destruction of the city and the "sanctuary", the temple, in AD 70: *"... the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary..."*

From that day to this, Jerusalem has had no temple. In the Jewish mind, the temple and its sacrifices must be restored. Israel will bypass the New Covenant, to create a covenant of its own with the

coming world ruler. That's what Daniel 9:27 says. I believe that covenant will involve a new temple. A new start.

In order for full vengeance for all things, Jewish and Gentile, to be meted out (Luke 21:22), God will, it seems, consider this to be the beginning of Israel's final span of time, seven years. The promise of the ruler to allow Israel its sacrifices, ignoring the Sacrifice of Calvary, will be broken half-way through. But the temple will still be used, as a place for antichrist to enter and receive worldwide adulation, as God.

In order for all of this to happen, those who control the temple mount at present will have to step aside. Though the seven years begins as final Jewish history, the final three and one half years will be tragedy and a time for Gentiles led by antichrist to solve, finally, the "Jewish problem."

So, it is not a church age that fills the gap between weeks sixty-nine and seventy, but a Gentile Age. Even now, today, Gentiles control some of the holiest places of Jerusalem. The Jews are not in charge yet. But when the seventieth week begins, they will enjoy a brief reprieve from the evil of the centuries.

Bottom line: None of the prophets saw a removal of God's saints to heaven so that God could work with Israel. No New Testament passage speaks of such a time either. The church is here, next to Israel, even receiving Israel's punishment when the antichrist finally is frustrated in trying to find the Jews he has been chasing.

Revelation 12:13-17 details Satan's persecution of Israel, then the "rest" of Israel's "offspring" who have the testimony of Jesus, that is, the church.

Translation vs resurrection.

JW now adds a word to our eschatology vocabulary, muddying the waters a bit more for those trying to see simple promises being fulfilled simply. The word is *translation*. As with *rapture*, you will search high and low for this word in Scripture and come up empty. But also as rapture, the *idea* of a translation is there.

The word, used in the context of which we speak, simply means “a change to a different substance, form, or appearance.”

Which compels us to look at the two kinds of resurrections in the Bible. One is merely “resuscitation,” an ordinary body dying, then coming back as that same ordinary body. Think Lazarus, and all the Old Testament raisings.

But something new is in the works for us. It started with Jesus. His resurrection was not just a waking up in the tomb and groggily wondering around Jerusalem hoping to be strong enough to meet His old friends.

It was glorious. And powerful. And all-changing, except that He indeed was still the Son of Man. Human. Scarred. Hungry. But translated, too. Changed. Unrecognizable. Yet recognizable. A miraculous body.

1 John 3:2 says we shall be like Him in this glory.

So, resurrection and translation go hand in hand. In our case, you can't have one without the other.

JW goes to I Corinthians 15 to make his case. *"We shall not all die, but we shall be changed in a moment."* Granted. But why bring this up and how does it prove pt?

JW flatly states that *"Scriptures provide no such teaching [regarding translation] in connection with the second coming to the earth."*

This is called "begging the question." It means you are using as proof the very thing you are trying to prove! We'll just ignore that statement, as we believe that every Scripture that seems to be a separate rapture to JW is actually the second coming.

He goes on in a more difficult vein, teaching God's people that the saints who are on the earth at the time of Jesus' second advent will enter the millennial kingdom *in the flesh*.

That's what he says. Page 36. Those "saints of the Most High" that Daniel showed us, persecuted and martyred by antichrist, then awarded the kingdom at the first resurrection are really not the church at all, and therefore will not be translated!

He makes no mention of the fact that some of these "Tribulation Saints" have already died and cannot enter the Millennium "in the flesh" unless they are resuscitated. Oh what a tangled web he weaves...

He is concerned that God made many promises of normal life on earth to His people through the prophets. True. Therefore, we must have some "saints" who people the earth. False. The judgment of the nations in Matthew 25 addresses that issue. There will be "saved" nations and "lost" nations. Plenty of people. Not to worry.

All the church will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. All of it. And whether they are alive or dead, they will be translated as they rise through the skies. Glorious day!

Chapter III. The Tribulation

Again, no church there!

JW rightly clarifies the difference between “tribulation” in general, which all are promised, and the specific time period, in our future, called “Great” Tribulation, or Jacob’s Trouble, an unprecedented period of agony for this world.

He then tells us what three classes of people will be in this Tribulation time: 1. Israel, 2. Pagan Gentiles, and 3. The saints or elect. He claims positively that “every Scripture which describes the participants... refers to Israelites as Israelites, Gentiles as Gentiles, and the saints as saints, *without ever once using any of the distinctive terms that apply to believers in this present age.*”

Good Doctor W., a major mistake. The term “saints” itself is a term that applies to believers in this present age. Every letter of Paul from Romans to Colossians, minus Galatians, is addressed to “saints.” *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* talks of people *in this present age* who suffer like the coming martyrs of the Tribulation. And what about those who “die in the Lord,” even now, as they will then? How about the call out of Babylon, spoken by John and echoed by Paul for believers *in this present age*.

The purpose.

Another unsupported passage in JW concerns the purpose of the Tribulation, which, he says, is “not to purge the church.” Yet Daniel 12:10, speaking of these last days says, “Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly.” Yes, the original purpose of the Tribulation is the beginning of the meting out of God’s judgment, but to say God is not going to use this for purification may be a misstatement.

No church in Matthew 24.

Fascinating. *Members of the church-to-be* ask Jesus a question about His coming. He mentions *the elect* in His answer, even saying that it is this “elect” group (obviously the church) that He will gather from the four winds of heaven! Yet JW writes all that off and says, “*no mention is made of the church or of any other term which would identify the believers of that period as belonging to the present dispensation.*”

Stubborn thinking. You see how “dispensationalism” makes the rules, and scholars have to follow those rules, trying to be consistent. But here it does not work.

You have disciples asking. Not “the Jews” asking. His future church is asking. And His answer is likewise not to a crowd but to them. You have the elect being gathered. You have the personal pronoun “you”. What more do we need to see “church” in this passage?

Chapter IV. Historical / Hermeneutical Basis of Pretribulationism

History.

JW argues that no doctrine of the church received a full treatment and development quickly. It took centuries, says he, for things like the Trinity and the sufficiency of Scripture, the priesthood of the believer, etc. to develop. So we should not be surprised that there is little in history to confirm a pretribulational rapture.

Is this evolution of doctrine something we should accept? Are doctrines going to get even more detailed as time goes by? If the Trinity doctrine was not revealed for hundreds of years, does that mean it was not revealed in the Scriptures from the beginning? Of course not.

We do not expect full explanations about eschatology. But we would like to see at least one statement that makes the doctrine have a starting point in Scripture. For pt, there is no such Word. All of the “development” came from the nineteenth century on. And this is not development, this is new teaching altogether.

There were many new teachings in the nineteenth century, by the way, as I have documented above.

Expectation of His coming.

Yes, the early church on down to the present one has expected Him to come. Those who have dug deeper into the Scriptures have put away their “perhaps today” pins, however, and simply accept the coming of the Lord as a given, in His time, not our own. Our hope is not that He comes today, but that He comes. It will all be made

right one day. Until then, we cling to His promise that He will never leave or forsake us.

Hermeneutics.

I am especially disturbed by JW's characterization of posttribulationism as being nonliteral in its interpretations, as opposed to the literal meanings promoted by pt. Nothing could be farther from the truth in my case. It is because of my love of a word for word understanding of Scripture that I have felt compelled to speak against a system that brings imaginary or, at best, logic-implied doctrines into a study of last things.

His reasoning is that posttribbers ignore the distinction between Israel and the church. Anyone who has read this far realizes that I honor that distinction without demanding an escape from the planet.

He claims that we use the word "Israel" for the church. Not so. He says we believe that saints of all ages are in the church. Not so. He says posttrib people brush off "a more literal interpretation as too trivial to answer." Not so. He says we minimize the severity of the Tribulation and avoid any detailed exegesis, especially the book of Revelation. Not so. My commentary on that book is online.

Very disappointing talk from a man who later in the book will attack Posttrib people as being bad-spirited in their teachings.

Chapter V. The Nature of the Tribulation

The church is promised deliverance from the Tribulation.

The famous 1 Thessalonians 5:9 is brought in as a witness that God “has not appointed us to wrath...” True, of course. The wrath that Jesus brings with Him at His coming is being referenced, and JW does posttrib a service by immediately quoting Revelation 6:17 as another proof of this:

“For the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?” (ASV, 1901)

KJV has it “His” wrath, but no matter. This verse at the end of the sixth seal is a no-doubt passage about the return of Jesus to the earth, not about the Tribulation! Both the seals and the trumpets in fast succession take us to the end of the age, with this same scene. The bowl judgments too, deliver us to the end, after a quick destruction of Babylon. Look at the sun and the moon in this passage and call to mind Matthew 24. This is the very end, the wrath from which, indeed, all God’s people will be delivered. After the Tribulation.

Aphistemi

Earlier in this work I spoke of the Greek word *apostasia*. I showed how it was used in Scripture. It definitely means a falling away, a departure from truth, an apostasy. Very clear.

JW says that “the word” is derived from the verb *aphistemi*. He means “the Greek word”, not the English word “apostasy.” And that is true. He then quotes some old English Bible versions as having

used this word, which can mean “depart”, in 2 Thessalonians 2. *“That day will not come unless there be a ‘departing.’”*

Wishful thinkers of the pt movement believe that “departing” could mean “rapture” and immediately their case is now solved in Scripture.

Not so fast. Let’s see how that same word is used elsewhere:

Paul talks about his desire that a thorn in the flesh “depart.” Leave him. Get away.

Paul also says that in the last days many will “depart” from the faith. Apostasy.

It is translated “refrain” as in, keep away from. Another negative usage.

And, “withdraw”, as from the ungodly.

Strong says the basic meaning is to “instigate to revolt.” Generally, to desist, or desert.

All told, the original meaning, namely, “apostasize” or “fall away”, holds. It is amazing to me that JW, while not insisting on this word, would introduce it, knowing what he knows about the Greek language.

Chapter VI. The Imminency of the Return of Christ

Received into heaven?

John 14:3 is the next setting for discussion. Jesus here promises to go to heaven and prepare a place for the disciples. He then promises to come again and receive them to Himself, that wherever He is, they will be.

Pt's distortion of this passage makes Jesus say, I will come again and receive you *to heaven*. Which is not in the text. We will be received *to Jesus*, personally, so that *wherever He is or goes*, we will be.

Of course, those who have long been absent from the body are present with Him now. But when He comes, they will come with Him to earth.

It is distressing to read JW's opinion, which he states emphatically, that in John 14 Jesus is "holding before His disciples an entirely different hope than that which was promised to Israel as a nation."

What he willingly forgets is that the disciples are part of that Jewish nation which was promised a kingdom. They were asking about it as he ascended to heaven. He never denied the coming kingdom, only said it was not time to discuss it at present.

The hope of the church is not only heaven. The hope of the church is a kingdom on earth for one thousand years, blended as it is with Jew and Gentile, saved by the blood of the same Savior.

Imminence.

I have dealt with the "Jesus could come at any minute" mentality of pt. I will only briefly address JW's comments about it.

First he claims that the John 14 promises produce the hope of an imminent event, and they are told not to be troubled.

Think of it. They are now to expect Jesus to come at any minute, but He does not come until their death. What comfort was this to them?

But if they knew, as they did in Matthew 24, that serious trouble was coming, and at the end of it, Jesus would come, that would be a better source of comfort. JW's mindset needs to be opposed in today's church. The deliverance from all trouble or the great trouble of the future, is not promised any believer.

Grace is promised. And eventual deliverance and return, for sure. It's a different way of looking at life. Real hope, not imagined. How many people have been told, "Don't worry, Jesus is coming soon..." but He didn't?

JW goes on record as saying that if we declare that people will have suffering and persecution before the return of Christ, "in no sense can this coming be declared imminent." You see, he has boxed himself in by his own definition of imminence.

Revelation 16 is an imminence passage. It occurs at the height of the Tribulation, the very worst of the judgments falling. Here is Jesus saying He is coming as a thief! Then He pronounces blessing on all those who watch! Be ready. Watch. I am coming. You may have trouble still, but I am coming.

That's the Biblical imminence. We may have to pass through many tribulations, but we never stop believing He is coming. And if He doesn't come right away, we never stop believing in His presence.

Comfort one another.

There is no question as to why the Thessalonians were troubled and why they needed comfort. Their saved relatives were dying. Where

were they? What was their status? Paul reassures them that those who have died will actually be raised first! Not to worry.

But JW states with no reason, "This comfort was not merely that their loved ones would be raised from the dead..." and then he goes on to make his case that a posttribulation rapture would offer them no comfort at all.

I ask, what if these Thessalonians knew that persecution was coming, or sickness, or death? Can we not comfort people like this? Must we delude people into thinking that nothing negative is coming before Jesus comes?

Can we not look for Christ's coming during troublous times and have as much hope as those who do not suffer at all? Perhaps more? Who "hopes" for deliverance when no issue is pressing?

Chapter VII. The Work of the Holy Spirit in This Age

JW and the pt people believe that, just as Jesus returned to heaven after His work was finished, the Holy Spirit will do the same. You read it right. No Holy Spirit during the Tribulation. When the church leaves, the Spirit leaves with her.

This subject too I have answered above in the Topic section. I can only comment here that JW has once more added words to the text to prove a point. Second Thessalonians talks about a "restrainer." I treated that subject. But JW adds the words "of sin," which is not in Paul's writing. To say "restrainer of sin" is to interpret the text and to bolster pt thinking.

All we know for sure is that something or someone is restraining something or someone. If an angel is restraining the antichrist in the pit as we speak, grammatically that idea fits right here. I don't see where the restraining of sin fits into the context, grammatically or otherwise.

JW's studied conclusion about all this is that the Spirit will behave during the Tribulation as he did before Pentecost. His power may touch certain people, but He will not be an abiding Presence as he has been in His church.

Leaves a lot of questions, yes? How can a "Tribulation Saint" get saved without the Spirit? And when he is saved, how can he be filled with the Spirit? And if he cannot be filled, therefore inviting a "Presence" of God on the earth, how can he be called a "saint" or holy one? What about the two "witnesses" and their miracles? No abiding Presence in them also? But if so, how can we say the Spirit has departed?

JW does admit at the end of this chapter that his suggestions are "debatable conclusions." Glad to hear that.

Chapter VIII. Intervening Events

I have no comment on this chapter, except to say, all very conjectural. He claims that certain things *must* happen between the rapture and the coming, things in heaven, on earth, in Israel, and among the Gentiles. Everything he mentions, in short, can happen at the very end, without a seven-year space needed.

Chapter IX. The Translation and the Second Coming Contrasted

JW is clear about this one: "Those who attempt [to make harmony of these two events] must resort to wholesale spiritualization of details that clash, and avoidance of striking differences in general character."

Okay. I've been warned. Now let me have a go at it. First note that now the second coming is opposed to the *translation* and not the *rapture*. More and more difficult to find Biblical truth in the new system...

In the following contrast we will allow "T" to stand for *translation* and "SC" to represent *second coming*. "R" will mean the *resolution* of the (supposed) conflict. And, I will abbreviate his arguments.

T. The saints meet the Lord in the air.

SC. Christ returns to the Mount of Olives.

R. The Lord leaves heaven, meets His saints in the air, and proceeds to the earth.

T. Living saints are translated.

SC. There is no translation.

R. Once more he is "begging the question." Trying to prove his case by using his conclusion! Jesus leaves heaven. Meets His saints as they rise and are translated, then comes to earth. Why is this so unthinkable?

T. Christ returns with the saints to heaven after meeting them in the air.

SC. Christ remains on earth and reigns as King.

R. Here he has left Scripture altogether. No passage anywhere says that Jesus meets His people then goes back to heaven, only that they will be with Him where He is. And where He is, is setting up a kingdom on earth, with His saints given places in that kingdom.

T. The earth is not judged and sin continues.

SC. Sin is judged and righteousness fills the earth.

R. Same resolution as all of above. There is no reason why Jesus cannot do all His judging and all His receiving of His saints at the same time.

T. Before the day of wrath.

SC. Outpoured judgment.

R. The day of wrath is the second coming of Jesus Christ, Revelation 19.

T. Imminent.

SC. Following signs.

R. Even the second coming is "imminent" in Revelation's bowl judgments and Matthew 24 teachings. See my "imminence" section in the Topics above.

T. Revealed only in the New Testament.

SC. Subject of prophecy in both Testaments.

R. The catching up of the Bride is a New Testament revelation, a mystery. But the idea that it is seven years before His coming is revealed nowhere.

T. Deals with only the saved of this age.

SC. Deals with saved and unsaved.

R. First one, then the other, in the same huge event. No need to separate them by seven years.

T. Only those in Christ.

SC. Men and angels and Satan all affected.

R. Of course only the dead in Christ rise and are rewarded. But this does not necessitate a seven-year gap for the rest of the story to take place.

Chapter X. Partial rapture theory

This is the idea that the cream of the crop will be raised first, then the others later. It is pretrib in nature so I see no need to deal with it further.

Fact is, Margaret Macdonald's "prophecy" hinted at such a distinction. Later it was mellowed into a saved Christian vs professing Christian distinction, but it is hard to tell the difference, practically speaking. Surely the pretrib people do not deny that those saved during the Tribulation will be admitted into the kingdom. The only difference between this and the partial rapture is that some truly saved - but not holy enough - believers will be left behind.

"Partial rapture" is a (small) minority view, and needs no further comment at present.

Chapter XI. Posttribulationism

JW states initially that *"posttribulationism has long been a common doctrine held by the majority of the church."* Indeed? Then he goes on to dampen the enthusiasm by stating that *"among premillenarians... the majority accept the pretribulationist*

position...” He adds that at the present time (1950’s) there is a resurgence of posttribulationism.

Already people were seeing through pt in the ‘50’s.

Then he tells us that the posttribulation view is relegated to those who are amillennialists or postmillennialists. Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and a lot of Protestant liberals. Not such wonderful company for a conservative evangelical.

He proceeds to state the premises of posttribulation thinking, and answer them, an exercise we will find redundant at this point. There are a couple of new ideas, though.

He quotes posttrib author George Ladd in his treatment of Revelation 20, where Ladd shows that *“the resurrection is placed at the return of Christ in glory.”* The obvious conclusion is that we will be raptured when Jesus come to earth.

Not so fast, counters JW. Why couldn’t there be a “resurrection both at the beginning and at the end of the Tribulation”? Here JW leaves the Scriptures again, and desperately tries to find a logical answer to the question. Pt must survive, though Scriptures are violated. Notice his further argument,

“The fact that Old Testament saints and Tribulational saints are resurrected after the Tribulation according to explicit Scriptures (Daniel 12:1-2; Revelation 20:4) raises the question why neither the translation nor the resurrection of the church is mentioned in this event. While silence is not explicit, it is nevertheless eloquent in this case.”

Oh indeed it is, good Doctor W.! The question does not need to be raised because there is no question. The resurrection is one, as is the event. All resurrections take place at the one resurrection mentioned by Jesus in John 5, the “resurrection of life”! After the Millennium there is indeed another resurrection, the “resurrection of damnation.”

Pt demands a third resurrection, but shall not have it, if my understanding of Scripture is true.

Chapter XII. Midtribulationism

Yet another view of the end times places the rapture three and one-half years into the seven-year Daniel reference, or “Midtribulation.” To call this view *midtribulation* is to concede the idea that the Tribulation is seven years, to begin with. But no such idea resides in Scripture.

Seven years is the period of restored favor, then tragedy to Israel and Jerusalem. The first half may not be problematic at all, as Jewish temple worship is restored by law. It is the second half, identified often in Revelation as a period of three and one-half years, that should be labeled the “Great Tribulation.”

After that distinction of the midtrib doctrine, the rest sounds eerily like just another pt view, as the rapture will still come before that Tribulation does.

For this reason, redundancy, I will not comment on this chapter.

Chapter XIII. Fifty Arguments For Pretribulationism

Sounds daunting, but in fact these arguments are only a summary of what has been covered in the book, arguments with which I have largely dealt. Those few things I have ignored are either irrelevant to the thesis of my present work, or covered by that work in other topics or Scriptures above.

Remarks.

Dr. Walvoord was a good man and an astute scholar. Like many who follow in his train, John MacArthur, Dave Hunt, David Jeremiah, to name only a few, he was a man of superb character and love of Jesus Christ. He and they have contributed strength to the defense of God's Word, and are not men to be taken lightly in any sense.

For that reason I am puzzled still at their defense of a teaching that has only emerged in the nineteenth century and that needs extra-Biblical support, as in logical thought, to make up for the absence of sound Scriptural proof.

I understand why shallow surface readers of Scripture will grab on to a teaching that promises escape from persecution and severe trouble. But I cannot understand why serious Bible scholars also go this route, though I have seen in reading Walvoord that there is at least some compelling reasoning initially.

We all have a long way to go. It must be our conviction, that by the time we approach the cataclysmic future of planet earth described in detail in our Bibles, the true church will have come to a realization of what God really said about it, and about those events.

Dave Hunt: Supposed Distinctions

Originally this section was a part of *Caught Up, But When?* (My first book on this subject, 2011.) Forgive just a little more repetition.

It is disappointing to read the works of men that are normally trustworthy in their treatment of Scripture, when it comes to their promotion of a pretribulation rapture. Consider our brother [the late] Dave Hunt, no lightweight in the Word. Over and over his publications define New Testament Christianity and its enemies. But on the subject at hand he falls woefully short of exemplifying his “Berean” philosophy. Brother Hunt sees distinctions between the rapture and the second coming, and describes them in his October 2003 *Berean Call*. I would like to comment on these distinctions, with the reminder that I mean absolutely no disrespect to this man of the Word.

Distinction 1: At the rapture, says Dave Hunt, Christ does not return to earth, but at the second coming He does. As proof, he offers the words of Jesus in John 14:3: *“I will...receive you unto myself that where I am you may be also.”* Further, he quotes Paul (I Thessalonians 4:17): *“...caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

Certainly Brother Hunt does not suggest that Jesus remains suspended “in the air”, that is, the atmosphere above our earth constantly for those seven years. We all assume that at this point, when the saints are gathered, Jesus either goes back “up” to heaven, or completes His journey by coming to earth. Does it seem logical that Jesus would have to descend part way to us to collect us? Why not give the Word from the Throne Room itself?

But setting logic aside, we have only statements of fact. And both of the quoted statements tell us that when we leave here we go to be

with Jesus, and remain with Him forever. No other point, especially geographical, can be extracted. Dave's argument is from silence. Since the text does not state here which way Jesus goes, Dave assumes that He goes up, to fit the theory.

True Bereans, as the originals in Acts 17, search the Scriptures daily *"to find out whether these things [be] so."* My brother Berean needs to compare Scripture with Scripture here: Look at Matthew 24:30 and 31. Compare it to the passage Dave has used in the Thessalonian letter. In both passages are clouds, angels, a trumpet, and a gathering. What distinction can be drawn? Consider :

I Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."*

(By the way, if we add in more of Paul's supposed "rapture" teaching from I Corinthians 15:52, we find that that "trumpet" is the last trumpet. That ties it in with Revelation 11:15, where the seventh and final trumpet is sounded at a time that is clearly the end of all things. There cannot be another trumpet after this. Yet Matthew 24, supposedly written about a period seven years in the future, mentions another trumpet! Something, that is, the number of trumpets, doesn't add up.)

Matthew 24:29-31: *"...after the tribulation...the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven ...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. And He will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they will gather together his elect from one end of heaven to the other."*

Paul knew the teachings about the second coming of Christ. He knew that they involved angels, trumpet, clouds, and a gathering. Is it likely that, in this confused Thessalonian church, he would introduce the same terminology used for the second coming of Christ without spelling out his meaning, that this “coming” is separate from the other? (In fact he did spell it out in 2 Thessalonians! But not to the liking of the pretrib scholar.)

In Acts 1:9-11, normally considered a “second coming” promise, Jesus ascends into heaven, and a cloud receives Him out of their sight. Angels promise that when Jesus descends it will be in the same manner, as John repeats: *“Lo he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him.”* (Revelation 1:7) It fits the pattern. Jesus comes down, and in the context of Acts, He sets up His kingdom. And like a magnet drawing nails, His own are drawn to Him at that time.

In Revelation 19:11-15, another picture of the second coming is portrayed. Here is conquering King Jesus, and behind him the armies of heaven, the saints and angels of God. Now how do we learn horseback riding in the sky so quickly? How do we appear as a victorious army so quickly, without a seven-year preparation in heaven? No instructions, no advance notice?

The answer to that question, still hidden from us, is the same as the answer to the question, “How shall we even rise up to meet Him in the air, with untried new bodies and absolutely no experience off the ground on our own power?” Somehow we will know what to do in that day. As for the ensuing battle, you will see that the believers do not have a lot to do! This is the day of God’s wrath, and God Himself will mete it out through the One He has ordained. We will

watch in reverent fear mixed with joy that He has saved us from this wrath. Oh what a day!

It is my guess that at the point of the gathering there will be at least a short interval of time for Jesus to welcome us and give us a quick briefing about what is to come. The "*sign of the Son of Man*" is seen long enough on earth for people to get the message and mourn before the actual coming. But seven years? Look again. It's not there.

Distinction 2: We are told that, at the rapture, all believers are resurrected, whereas at the Second Coming there is no resurrection until antichrist is defeated.

This is called "begging the question," using your preconceived conclusion as proof of your conclusion! Earlier I showed you from Revelation 19 an army behind Jesus, meeting Him in the air. They have just been resurrected and are on their way to conquer the earth. Dave cannot believe that they are fresh from the graves, so he assumes they have been with Jesus seven years and therefore are not resurrected. But Dave's theory calls for more than the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation called for by Jesus (John 5:28-29). It demands a third resurrection, for he sees one in Revelation 20:4-6.

John, relating things not always in order, but sometimes by topic, states in chapter 20 that the persons he sees are part of the first resurrection. He does not see a resurrection, but sees the ones who have been resurrected. That means that there was no resurrection seven years before, except in the Hollywood style movies of our own generation.

John is saying here that he saw thrones set up after antichrist is judged. The reign with Christ foretold here is for all those who suffer with Jesus. Romans 8:17, *“If we suffer with him”* we are *“heirs with Christ.”* The whole creation is awaiting our reign, 8:19. 2 Timothy 2:12, *“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.”* Revelation 5:10 quotes the “elders”, those who have gone on before us, as saying, *“We shall reign on the earth.”*

So in talking of the thrones he brings in a description of the persecuted saints who reign with Jesus. He is not implying that the whole army following Jesus is not a resurrected entity. He is in fact in perfect harmony with Daniel 7:25-27:

“He [little horn, antichrist] shall persecute the saints of the Most High...then the saints shall be given into his hand [tribulation] for a time, and times and half a time [the same three and one-half years of John’s Revelation]. But the court shall be seated, [judgment]...and the greatness of the kingdoms...shall be given to the saints of the Most High [resurrection]...”

There are two resurrections coming (John 5:28-29, Revelation 20:4-5). The first, and the second. The first, when Jesus comes to earth. The second, one thousand years later, the resurrection of the damned. By calling this pretribulation event a “rapture”, the fact that it is a resurrection is covered up. But, added to the two resurrections of revelation 20, well, that’s just one too many.

Distinction 3: *“Immortality is given believers at the rapture, but at the second coming they already obviously have it.”* Here again, the normally logical Dave Hunt breaks the rules of logic by using the conclusion to prove his point. He sees it as utterly impossible for saints to be raised, glorified, “immortalized”, and coming back to

earth in so short a time. He forgets, perhaps, what happened on “Resurrection Day”, commonly called Easter. Jesus in His new body began immediately to do the work God called Him to do, though He had been dead for three days. In our new bodies, made after the image of Christ, will be placed new instincts, skills, and powers. A simple flight to Jesus does not seem all that complicated for a God who can speak worlds into existence, and raise up Christ from the dead in an instant.

We shall all rise. We shall be changed. *In a moment! In the twinkling of an eye.* And since Dave brings up I Corinthians 15 here, we cannot resist looking at how similar this passage (vs 50-54) is to Matthew 24. Do you see it? Dead raised, caught up to be with Jesus. A trumpet! The “last trumpet” as in Revelation 11:15, where the reign of Christ on earth begins with the judgment of this world followed by the reward of the saints. Where is the distinction?

Distinction 4: *“The rapture occurs during prosperity and normalcy, but the second coming takes place in the midst of great devastation.”* Here our brother is referring to the portion of Matthew 24 assumed by him to be “before” the Tribulation, verses 36-44 , distinct from Revelation 19, where plagues of all sort have been laid on the sons of men. In Matthew, the reference is made to the days of Noah, and the very “ordinary” lifestyle they were leading when suddenly the flood came.

The argument implies that normal living does not take place in abnormal times, that there is essentially no “eating and drinking”, “marrying”, and working, and playing and all the rest, during world crises and wars. But is that conclusion justified in even the world in which we now live? What was it that President Bush called for in the days following our 9-11 tragedy? Normalcy! A quick nod to the

Creator, a “moment of silence”, then back to normal lives so “the terrorists don’t win.” How many weddings were cancelled? Maybe a few. Who stopped being over-indulgent in food and drink? Maybe a few. But normal life continues, even in disaster.

But you say, magnify 9-11 many hundreds of times, to the World Wars, and to that final series of tragedies slated for the planet. Surely the desire for “normalcy” ends somewhere, and men as a unit abandon all hope in things material and cry out for God? No. Never. This incredible truth is discussed in Revelation 9:18-21. At this juncture, one-third of mankind is dead! What of the rest? They do NOT repent! They continue their murders, their sexual abominations, thefts, drugs. Normal. Business as usual. They will have their needs and wants met, and that is all that matters. They have no clue about a coming judgment.

Consider Egypt of old (Exodus 7-12). In the midst of their own plagues, the likes of which will be coming to all the earth one day, we read of the unbelievable hardening of the hearts of all, from the one on the throne all the way down.

Truly when Jesus comes it will be after an unprecedented series of calamities, so bad that if he did not come at that moment all flesh would be annihilated. Yet in the middle of it all, men continue to defy God and ignore His ways, and are totally shocked at his coming. Normal life will thus continue until the very downfall of this present regime. No distinction here, only side-by-side truths.

Distinction 5: Brother Hunt says that a rapture occurs when the church is sleeping, but the second coming, during the devastation, when Christians must obviously be wide awake. The sleeping church idea he proves only by using the parable of the virgins (Matthew

25:25) when at least half of the young ladies are quite ready to go in to the feast. There is also a problem in his evaluation of believers during devastation, in my opinion. I showed earlier from Revelation 16 that Jesus must even at the very worst of moments warn His people not to show their “nakedness” by being polluted by the world. For, as we showed above, the world, in its panic will be trying everything to stay alive and stay happy, normal, so that they might ignore the evils falling around them.

How many entertainers came to fame during the [Second World] War years? Christians are warned not to sell out to the world with all its comforts and false peace, in order to avoid the harsh realities of life in this era. Though this is a message for all times, it is especially true in a society which will require the damnable mark of the beast to be able to prosper. But Revelation 16 implies that some have already slipped into the desire for a comfort zone, available now only to those who deny Christ.

Christians living in a prosperous economy even now would do well to examine their hearts and see if they too are compromising Christ in their present lifestyle. Harry Bethel of Bethel Ministries says,

“Most Christians in this country are not spiritually ready to go through what is on the horizon if it is as late as we think it is. The days of the Great Tribulation will be the worst time that this world has ever seen. And this earth has seen some very bad times. Probably not many Christians will be ready to go through the Great Tribulation, but believing that you are going to be raptured out before it begins is certainly not conducive to spiritual preparation for it.” (www.bethelministries.com/pretrib.htm , page 2)

But our point is that even on the eve of Christ's coming there will be believers sleeping, dreaming that eternal lukewarm dream that somehow there is peace and joy in this present evil age. These wicked servants will be dealt with by one look at the descending Jesus.

Distinction 6: Now Brother Dave labels the rapture "the blessed hope", a term used by Paul in Titus 2:13, and assures us that the second coming could not be a "blessed hope" for the few Christians who live to survive the devastation of the Tribulation. Again here is the using of a conclusion as part of his argument. The pretribulationists are the ones who have divided Jesus' coming into two parts and assigned them names. The Bible nowhere does this.

But I fear there is even a greater lapse in logic by our esteemed brother in this text. It would seem to me that the greater the tragedy, the greater the hope. As Jesus wipes away the tears of Tribulation saints in Revelation 7:13-17, He is truly received as a blessed sight.

How far the saints will be affected by all that goes on during these dark years is not clear. We are called to be persecuted, but not judged. God will sort that out. But we will go through it. And we will be greeted by a loving Savior who understands, because He went through earth's rejections and pain. It seems inconceivable that believers snatched up before the suffering could receive a greeting that matches this one.

The mentality that our brother echoes here borders on that elitism that is prevalent among us in the western church. Why do we think we are not called to suffer when the Scriptures repeatedly say we

are? Those that suffer with Jesus will reign with Him. But what of those who wish to be caught up before it all begins?

Again referring to the “Bethel ministries” website, pages 5-6:

“Persecution and martyrdom is, in fact, the New testament norm... Peter wrote, ‘For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps.’ (I Peter 2:21) ...Some church leaders teach that believing in an imminent pretrib rapture will influence Christians to live holy lives. But the Scriptures teach, referring to the heavens and earth being destroyed by fire [and not the catching up of the bride], ‘Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?...’ (II Peter 3:11-14) There has never been a time when so many Christians believed in an imminent pretrib rapture and yet the twentieth century church in America can be characterized by almost anything but holiness...Paul said, ‘We glory in tribulations...tribulation worketh patience’...[Jesus said] ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation...’ (John 16:33) ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.’ (Acts 4:22). ‘Blessed are ye, when men shall ...persecute you.’ ”

Who has more of a “blessed hope”, the one who looks forward to no tribulation, or the one who is in trouble now, but is assured that soon the troubles will be gone? The soldier who “hopes” to escape the draft or the one who hopes for the end of the conflict in which he has participated fully? The farmer who “hopes” no bad weather will destroy his crops, or the one who has bravely fought the

elements and now sees the fruits of his labor about to blossom in defiance of all of nature's blast?

Oh saints! When we sit in a dingy prison cell for our faith in Christ, when all of those whom we hold dear have been taken away, when our stomach is bloated from hunger and our body is mangled from beatings, what a blessed hope is ours! Christ shall come and release us! Christ shall come and restore our heavenly family! Christ will come and feed us with His own manna, and wash our scars and heal our bodies and we will be with Him forever. Could anything be more of a blessed hope than that?

And is it not equally true that those least looking for that "blessed hope" today are those for whom life is comfortable and secure? Why "hope" if we have what we need already?

Distinction 7: Next Mr. Hunt implies that if antichrist must come first, it is not logical to have people looking for that blessed hope as in Titus 2:13 and Hebrews 9:28. If we know that antichrist must come first, the thought goes, how can we be excited about looking for Jesus? I believe it's a fair question, yet I believe there is a sound answer in Scripture. I've talked about this earlier, but there are a couple more things that can be said.

Let's look at brother Peter's words in 2 Peter 3, as he speaks so forcefully of the coming of the day of the Lord. In the terminology of this debate, I think it is conceded that here is being discussed the final coming of Jesus. Peter here is looking toward the ultimate judgment and destruction of our earth, and he tells his people to live holy, knowing that these things are coming. Nevertheless, he exults in the fact that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, once the destructive acts are past.

Here is an example of one event that comes last, outshining events that must come first. Peter's readers had no less anticipation for the new world simply because the old world must be burned up to get to it. I ask you, why can we not look for both antichrist and Christ at the same time? A child whose father has been long in the military is promised: in two weeks Daddy will be home! But in one week, the same child has a dentist's appointment. There's no way to get to Dad's coming without that painful time in between. Even knowing of the discomfort of the Dentist's chair, the boy's heart is filled only with the bright prospects of Daddy's return.

There is no contradiction here.

Trouble is coming to the planet. Incredible trouble. But we look for the Solution, Who will come in the Person of Jesus. He will lead us through the trouble to Himself. We don't know exactly when He will come, but He will come and deliver us! Why, even those whom God knew would have no connection to the end time are told to watch! (Mark 13:37). Why tell us all to watch when God the Father knows Jesus is not coming until that certain Day?

Oh how excited many have been through the years about the possible appearing of Jesus. But all of them died. The odds are that all of us living today will also face death before we see Jesus coming in glory to the planet. Are we then "looking for death" simply because He may not come in our lifetime? No, all of us continue to look for Jesus' appearing, whether on this side of the grave or the other, whether on this side of antichrist or the other. It is Jesus who is the center of all the church's attention.

Brother Hunt, am I looking for antichrist? Yes, I believe he shall precede Jesus, but I am looking for Jesus! Will I die before He comes? Quite possibly, but still I look for Jesus! We who are told to watch, know that some negative thing may indeed stand in the way, but we still watch. Watching is an attitude of the heart. It's the prayer mindset of a true believer. It's not a fearful Damocles' sword hanging over us, it's an awareness of hope. No matter how bad things get, whether we must suffer or die or watch antichrist rise, whether the world goes crazy or nature fails, we still have the blessed hope that Jesus will come and set all in order.

Distinction 8: The next suggestion is that it is not proper to pray with John, "Come Lord Jesus," if we know He is not coming for seven years (at least). This seems to make Dave imply, in my estimation, that when we pray, we are changing God's plans. No, rather, when we pray, it must be in accord with God's will. That is, Jesus, I know you are coming, and you are welcome here! Your will be done, come as you plan to come, Lord Jesus!

Anyone who has prayed that prayer over the last two thousand years, including John the Revelator, understood that it might not be answered physically and immediately. But the prayer went up anyway, and continues to rise to Heaven. To suggest that a prayer is invalid because God has a fixed moment for its answer is to suggest that our desires should supersede His.

When we pray for healing, He hears us. Or for financial blessing. Or for deliverance. Or for the salvation of family members. He hears. But the answer may be down the road. Our knowing that we must wait upon God does not stop us from crying out to Him, yea, day and night (Luke 18:1-5).

The Spirit and the Bride call out for these many years, Come, Lord Jesus. But He doesn't come. But He will. When it is time. For now, the world is in a mess, the world needs the Savior, O come, O come, Emmanuel! Keep praying it, saints!

Distinction 9: Dave Hunt assumes, lastly, that the judgment seat of Christ and the marriage of the Lamb must take place in heaven and with the church present, and before His coming to earth. Yet he can offer no proof of the location and timing of these events, for, of course, such proof does not exist. Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 simply state that there will be a time when saints stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Revelation 19:7-8 describe the wedding, or at least the *announcement* of same. The marriage has come. The wife is ready. Blessed are those invited. But wait! Some serious work to do first, following this announcement. Now the church descends with Jesus (Revelation 19:7-21) to the earth, taking its first step toward the announced supper. There, as described by prophets and apostles, the kingdom is set up after Christ's victory over His enemies. Then Jesus keeps His promise to drink the fruit of the vine with His followers (Matthew 26:29). It seems to me that this is a more logical arrangement of details. But for a "proof text" that this will happen, neither the pre- or post- people can find one. It simply is not there. Seeing Mr. Hunt show such confidence in a non-existent detail of Scripture was perhaps the most disappointing aspect of this entire review.

The Tim LaHaye Movies: A Review

No study of the pretribulation rapture is complete without referring to the books and movies spawned by Tim La Haye. But then, it wouldn't be fair either, not to mention the man that gave Tim a lot of his ideas and inspiration, namely Hal Lindsey.

Lindsey's one-of-a-kind (at that time) prophecy book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* was ground-breaking in many ways, but especially stood out as a work that assumed a pretribulation rapture. Quick to admit he was no prophet, Lindsey still said a lot of things no one had said, at least said this effectively, regarding Israel, the one-world government, antichrist etc.

He was not 100% correct, as the pretrib notion proves. Where Jesus said that "this" generation would not pass away until the end of history, Lindsey suggested strongly that 1948 was the date from which to start counting, since that was when Israel, "the fig tree" blossomed after a sort. 1988 came and went, and another speculation was history.

But tons of young people, and twenty-five years later, LaHaye's *Left Behind* messages, followed Mr. Lindsey into some well-meant, but very wrong, theories.

So, who was Tim LaHaye? Pardon me while I copy freely from Wikipedia:

"TIM LAHAYE: *Timothy Francis "Tim" LaHaye (April 27, 1926 – July 25, 2016) was an American evangelical Christian minister, speaker, author and conservative activist. He wrote more than 85 books, both fiction and non-fiction, and is best known for the Left Behind series of apocalyptic fiction, which he co-authored with Jerry B. Jenkins.*

“...LaHaye received a Bachelor of Arts from Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. LaHaye held the Doctor of Ministry degree from Western Seminar and a Doctor of Literature from Liberty University. He served as a pastor in Pumpkintown, South Carolina, and after that he pastored a congregation in Minneapolis until 1956. After that, the LaHaye family moved to San Diego, California, where he served as pastor of the Scott Memorial Baptist Church (now called Shadow Mountain Community Church) for nearly 25 years. In 1971, he founded Christian Heritage College, now known as San Diego Christian College.

“In 1972, LaHaye helped establish the Institute for Creation Research at Christian Heritage College in El Cajon, California, along with Henry M. Morris.

[All great stuff by the way! He “left behind” quite a heritage!]

“LaHaye is best known for the Left Behind series of apocalyptic fiction that depicts the Earth after the pretribulation rapture which Premillennial Dispensationalists believe the Bible states, multiple times, will occur. The books were LaHaye's brainchild, though Jerry B. Jenkins, a former sportswriter with numerous other works of fiction to his name, did the actual writing of the books from LaHaye's notes.

“Jenkins has said, ‘I write the best I can. I know I'm never going to be revered as some classic writer. I don't claim to be C. S. Lewis. The literary-type writers, I admire them. I wish I was smart enough to write a book that's hard to read, you know?’

“The series, which started in 1995 with the first novel, includes 12 titles in the adult series, as well as juvenile novels, audio books, devotionals, and graphic novels. The books have been very popular, with total sales surpassing 65 million copies as of July 2016. Seven titles in the adult series have reached No. 1 on the bestseller lists for The New York Times, USA Today, and Publishers Weekly.

“Jerry Falwell said about the first book in the series: ‘In terms of its impact on Christianity, it's probably greater than that of any other book in modern times, outside the Bible.’ The best-selling series has been compared to the equally popular works of Tom Clancy and Stephen King: ‘the plotting is brisk and the characterizations Manichean. People disappear and things blow up.’

“LaHaye indicates that the idea for the series came to him one day circa 1994, while he was sitting on an airplane and observed a married pilot flirting with a flight attendant. He wondered what would befall the pilot if the Rapture happened at that moment. The first book in the series opens with a similar scene. He sold the movie rights for the Left Behind series and later stated he regretted that decision, because the films turned out to be ‘church-basement videos’, rather than ‘a big-budget blockbuster’ that he had hoped for.”

Nevertheless, the movies did quite well. There were three in the original series, based on two of the first novels. (And let's remember, they were novels. Fiction.)

How often are movie-goers able to discern what is true and what is not in a movie, even when the producers tell you it is only “based” on a true story? (Anyone ever seen *Noah*, the movie, “based” on the Bible story?)

There were later attempts to reboot the movie story, using Hollywood favorite Nicholas Cage. I'll leave those alone. My intent now is to show you how Tim LaHaye and company were able to teach a generation of Christians a series of ideas that led them to think a certain way about the future. And in so doing, led them astray. Many of those entertained people will be totally unprepared for what is really coming...

I did not see the movies when they came out (2000, 2002, 2005). Clips maybe. I knew the theology and decided to let them go. But for this report, I had to do the viewings. Today (August 24, 2018) I was at the Skokie Public Library and watched *all three* videos. Let me tell you my impressions while they are still warm.

- First, very effective. Great casting, good drama. I know the critics did not like what they saw, but I was frankly impressed. Not with the Biblical part, but with the human part. Tenderness. Love. Compassion. Real-life family situations. It was all very believable.
- Except the main issue: the pretribulation rapture. Oh, they did it up big. Airplane flights suddenly missing passengers. Crashes down below, freeways tied up, a total chaotic world. Trouble with that was, of course, no such picture is painted in Scripture! Now, at the second coming, which I believe – you must know now – is the same as the rapture, there are indeed pictures of people on earth. *They are crying for rocks to fall on them. They are hiding in caves. Screaming for mercy.* They see Jesus coming, and He is angry! But in those so-called rapture passages, nothing of that whatever. A meeting in the sky, evidently. No mention of things on earth. You see, when Jesus comes, it's quitting time. No

more things as they are. Kingdom set up in Jerusalem, Jesus King over all the earth. So the movie sets the table poorly. Total imagination, if we are talking about a time seven years before the Millennium. No Scripture to build upon, so imagination is all that's left. But then... it is fiction.

- Another glaring omission is the fact that, even in pretrib thinking, the rapture is the time of the resurrection from the dead. No such scene (of resurrection) is portrayed in the movie! The dead are forgotten altogether! Oh my!
- The movie (I'm still on the first one) then moves on to the "Tribulation" itself. A few possible facts mixed in with a lot of fantasy.
- There's talk of a one-world currency, there's the rise to power of antichrist (though the Scripture teaches he will be a resurrected figure – at least a resurrected assassinated figure. No such depiction in the movie.)
- The rapture is eventually considered to be the cause of the rise of this man of sin. A convenient plot addition, for sure.
- A new temple is being offered the Jews, world peace is being sought by all concerned. World hunger is addressed as a means of uniting people.
- The sinister antichrist is also a likable man, who knows how to control people naturally and even supernaturally.
- All children are gone, raptured. No age is mentioned.
- The pastor who is left behind prays earnestly for "one more chance." Really? Jesus has come, and you pray for one more chance? What happened to "*It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment*"? If more chances are out there, maybe purgatory is not such an alien idea after all, Mr. LaHaye? And is it possible that many thousands of people are banking on that "second chance" as they cool off

in their devotion to Christ. *Are we sure that “pretrib” is a healthy way to live the Christ life?*

- Ezekiel 38, which could well describe a battle after the Millennium, is brought in here as a real threat during the Tribulation.
- Movie one ends with the prediction that the next seven years are going to be the world’s worst. But the book of Revelation talks of only three and one-half years.

Movie 2: *Tribulation Force*

- The Christians decide to fight back, by mostly spiritual means. But not all spiritual...
- The two witnesses of Revelation are introduced in the first half of the seven-year period. If you read Revelation 11, I think you will concur that their ministry was in the actual Tribulation, the second half of the seven years.
- A bit far-fetched is the notion that the reporter, who is the “star” of the series, is sent to help the two witnesses. As though Moses and Elijah need an assist from a CNN reporter. (Called “GNN” in the movie, but we know...)
- Also out of character in this second movie is the idea that saved people will deliberately lie about whatever, to be able to infiltrate antichrist holdings, and somehow assist Christians. The story from the Bible is a bit more bleak. Christians are massacred by the antichrist.
- Meanwhile a very effective romantic story is woven into the episode, making you want to believe the rest of the tale, or at least making your exposure to Biblical non-truths enjoyable.
- The theory that antichrist will claim to be the Jewish Messiah is pushed in the movie. But in the movie his plan is

thwarted by the last-minute conversion of the “great Jewish scholar” Ben-Judah, who announces to the world on live T.V. That Jesus is that Messiah. Now *that* is a real stretch! And who sets up the conversion? You guessed it! “Buck” from GNN!

- An especially difficult scene shows Buck and a couple of others evading the guard of the now-restricted Wailing Wall, where the two prophets have been hanging out. They do it by means of an angel singing *Amazing Grace*... Yes, that is what happened. In the movie.
- Israeli Ben Judah, just about to claim Messiahship for the antichrist, gets preached to by the two witnesses, who quote John 3:16 and other passages. Hmmm.

And those two were the good ones, those first two movies. Things start to go the other way on movie three, *World at War*.

- Hollywood star African American Lou Gossett Jr. is now the President of the United States. (Just three years before Mr. Obama in real life.)
- The antichrist is stepping things up a bit. Anthrax attacks. Bombing countries. America is next. Gossett must do something. He tries to kill antichrist. The man can't be killed.
- Our reporter hero (a bit like Luke Skywalker or Robin Hood) shows up in D.C. to witness to the President, who seems to have a conversion experience, though it sounds more like a desperation prayer for wisdom on how to defeat the antichrist. Which he gets. He blows up the U.N. building, killing himself. But not the man of sin.

So much fantasy in one day. My head is spinning with it. And I got to thinking, if it had not been for that initial vanishing scene, this would have been a fiction thriller about what Christians will do in the Tribulation. Because from the first time we see these “Tribulation saints” they are doing everything Christians do. There are church meetings, there is prayer, there is repentance, there is Gospel witnessing, love of the Scriptures, lots of faith and love.

The rapture part fades in the memory after a while, and one just settles down to be entertained.

But the seed was planted. And people everywhere believed what they saw, subconsciously. Ask most evangelicals in America what they believe about the future troubles, and they will – almost smugly – tell you, “Not worried! I’m outa here!”

Such is the power of the cinema in our nation.

Yes. We Will.

Bits & Pieces

Don't want to leave anything out!

Here are some left-overs, crumbs, if you will, notes that accumulated during the research time, that won't easily fit into another compartment or topic...

From Zac Poonen: If your desire for holiness is because you might get caught, you have a problem. Pretrib people say that if we know when Jesus is coming, if it is not a "surprise", we will be more holy. Thus He made it a "secret" coming with no signs attached, to test our true devotion. But as Poonen points out, people who are only good because the Lord "just might come today" have not developed the right kind of relationship with the Lord.

"I'm looking for Christ, not the antichrist!" says a proud pretribber (not all of them are proud!). In fact, you can look for both at the same time! Why the clear description of the man of sin by Paul and John and Daniel if we are not to look for him? Jesus is the one that points us to Daniel and tells us to read and understand what we are reading in that antichrist passage!

"Don't worry! You'll all be caught up any day now! The proof of the second coming is the rapture!" That was not Paul's advice to the Thessalonian church. Instead he gives them clear signs about, not a pretribulation rapture, but the rise of antichrist, which must precede Jesus' coming. Not only that, says Paul, but a huge apostasy will come, too. Why did he "comfort" them this way, if the next event on the calendar (as we hear today) is the rapture?

The Day of the Lord is in two phases already, to be technical: His first coming, in Bethlehem, was phase one. We await phase two,

aka the “second” coming. We really don’t need a third, since He never promised it anyway.

A limited audience. I mentioned this at the beginning. It’s really hard for some to swallow, but “pretribulation rapturism” is limited to English speaking people in the free world, for the most part. Corrie ten Boom was told by the Chinese, when she visited, that the reason many lost faith during their times of trial, was that they were not told about persecution/tribulation. Try mentioning it in some Christian circles today. Some will sigh, and try to “feel” for those “other” people who are suffering. Some will pray. Many will not allow the thought to enter their mind, that they might be the next in a concentration camp...

Gleanings from *The Rapture Plot* by Dave McPherson, 1994.

The content of this book may help someone who wants to know *exactly* where pretrib comes from.

Plus the following snippets may be of help to you also...

- *The “any-moment pretribulation rapture view” [is the] most important ingredient in a system known as dispensationalism.*
- *Prophetic disagreement has often come about when an interpreter has read only his imagination into such “mystery passages.” Or when he has first assumed a view and only later fished around for “proof.”*
- *... the 1800’s, the century that saw the British inventing and promulgating various new theories including the theory of evolution with its idea of the “survival of the fittest”. In the theological realm... the British could offer brand-new views including the “heavenly survival of the worthiest.”*
- *...Margaret [Macdonald] could see persons labeled as “the church” both before and after her rapture. ...even Darby,*

when discussing this view, spoke of “the church” of Laodicea left behind and “the church” of Philadelphia, raptured.

- *After partial rapturism began its progress... another meaning of “secret” was added to the first one. The new meaning had to do with privileged vision or knowledge; only certain people would be able to see Christ during the rapture or know that this sudden event had happened...*
- *On the same evening that found her [Maragaret Macdonald] arriving at her pretrib rapture construction, she predicted that 19th century socialist Robert Owen would eventually become the antichrist...*
- *As late as 1868 Darby was still teaching... a Tribulation of only three and a half years.*
- *[Quoting Robert Cameron, Canadian fundamentalist writer] The first mention of this [pretribulation] view, so far as I can ascertain, during the whole period of Christian history, was in the church of Edward Irving, in London, in the latter part of 1831...John Nelson Darby followed Edward Irving in this novelty...*

Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross. The only way to the joy was the way of the cross, and He bids us follow Him along that same Via Dolorosa. I can have hope in the rapture even knowing that I must suffer first. There is no contradiction between that “blessed hope” and the promise of tragedy that must precede it.

Old heresies and false teachings have a way of recirculating. In the nineteenth century, the Arian heresy became the Jehovah’s Witness heresy. In that same century, the false report circulating at Thessalonica about a rapture that never occurred, came back to us as a pretribulation rapture.

Jeremiah 29:11 promises hope for Israel. But first, they had to finish those seventy years of exile. Hope is not escape. Hope is knowing God will keep His promises.

Jeremiah 30:7. The time of "Jacob's Trouble." *"But he will be saved out of it."* Trouble now. Salvation later. No escaping the trouble or the salvation. Hope does not imply the absence of trouble but the eventual deliverance from it. "That blessed hope" of Christ's return is no different.

Are we in the Apostasy now? David Kyle Foster writes:

"I believe we are living in the days of the Great Apostasy. Whether we are in the early stages or nearing the end will be known only in hindsight. But that we are in the throes of the greatest "falling away" the church has ever experienced is clear.

Jesus informed His disciples that the kingdom of heaven (His presence on earth through the church) would be infiltrated by the enemies of God (see Matt. 13:24-30,36-43). He prophesied that while everyone was sleeping, an enemy (the devil) would come and sow weeds among the wheat.

The wheat (that is, believers) and weeds (sons of the evil one) would grow together in the world. At the end of the age, Jesus will send angels to collect the weeds for burning and to harvest the wheat. He puts it this way: "The Son of Man will send out His angels and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matt. 13:41, NIV).

Jesus warned of a time when "many will turn away from the faith" and "many false prophets will appear and deceive many

people" (Matt. 24:10-11). We have seen this prophecy repeatedly fulfilled throughout history, and yet what we see happening today in the church has not been seen since the days of the Borgia and Medici popes..."

Progressive Apostasy (my own thoughts). From the beginning we have been falling away. After the great persecutions of the early church came a slide into the Dark Ages that had born-again people thinking the Apostasy had come. And it had. But the time of the End was not yet. Make way for the Reformation, a bloody battle fought for the restoration of God's Word to the people. Election, salvation, grace, faith, Christ alone. Wonderful days but days of fierce battle also.

The victories of that battle have largely been returned to the enemy, as another apostasy has set in. False teachings have brought division, denomination. Lukewarmness has settled over the fire and the Reformed and Presbyterian bodies that had emerged have today become cool and unresponsive to God's Spirit.

Revival? Some believed that the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal was just what the doctor ordered. But many of its gifts turned out to be human after all. Its enthusiasm also turned into new church splits, and the apostasy continued ...

Wave after wave of falseness and attack, with fewer and fewer willing to fight as the Reformers had. The cowardice of Bible believers has eventually led them into peace with Rome, the apostate church from which they came out. Confusion reigned and reigns as top of the line evangelical leaders one by one

praise Rome and its Papa, legitimizing Romanism in the eyes of other believers.

The pretribulation rapture, promising escape to all who were truly saved; the JEDP theory that attacked the inspiration of Scripture; Darwin's *Origin of Species* that attacked the Creator Himself; translations of the Bible that took a turn for the worse; Azusa Street and other Pentecostal moments that heralded the return of the gifts of the Spirit? (Not necessarily); then came the need for apostles and prophets, and they were supplied by men wanting to restructure the church... under them; the World Council of Churches, liberalism on steroids, denies holy tenets of the Christian faith; social justice becomes a new battle cry for the church; the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and others not only fascinated the world, but gave *the church* a new way to sing, leaving the hymns and the old folks behind; women's liberation attacked male leadership of the church; gay liberation rose up to take its ugly place behind the pulpit...

And so on and on. Are we in the Apostasy? Will the church rise up and fight these enemies or continue to roll over and let evil roll over it? If the latter, this apostasy will end in the great world church under Rome, and pave the way for the lawless one, who is powerless when the church is strong. He will be released when the church has apostasized fully, as Paul predicted. God have mercy on the world then.

No rapture of the church will be necessary. No removal of the Holy Spirit to heaven. The Spirit will be quenched and grieved to the point He will be unable to work.

Will we wake up again as did the Reformers, or are these truly the last days?

“Jesus is not a wife-beater.” Yes, I actually saw those words on someone’s pretrib website. A very desperate attempt to prove that Christians will not go through the Tribulation. Many false assumptions by this would-be theologian:

1. *The Tribulation is God’s wrath.*
2. *All that happens in the world that is evil, comes about because of God. (Actually, man is the reason for evil and its punishment.)*
3. *There is nothing of evil happening to the Bride of Christ today.* I’d love to take that writer to North Korea. If we could somehow get over the border, then by an even greater miracle get into a North Korean concentration camp, I would sit him across a table, if there is such a thing in the Camp, from an abused believer in Jesus, and let the brother tell his story. I hardly think that prisoner will be blaming Jesus for his hungry stomach and loss of dignity and all material goods.
4. *Trouble and persecution are forever.* The Scriptures make it plain to us that this little bit of suffering we endure here cannot be compared to the glory God has prepared for those who love Him, serve Him, and yes, are persecuted, not by Him, but by evil men.

Jesus loves His Bride.

Thirteen hundred thirty-five days. Angels giving Daniel some last-minute details about the coming Tribulation, tell him that from the placing of the abomination that causes desolation there are still one thousand, two hundred and ninety days. That figure compares

favorably to the 1,260 days, (three and one-half years, forty-two months), found scattered throughout John's Revelation.

But there is more. Somehow a very intense set of days is yet to follow. Perhaps this is when the "bowl" judgments fall, with God Himself now taking part as a preview of the wrath that Jesus will bring upon His arrival, a wrath from which we will be excluded by rapture.

Far from bemoaning those few saints of the church who will be left at that time (most will be gone by antichrist annihilation, genocide), the angel blesses those *"who wait, and come to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days."* Extra hardship means extra blessing.

Far from being a second-class group of "Tribulation Saints", these are the "Navy Seals" of Christendom, perhaps the holiest Christians who ever lived on the planet. American/western softies will bewail forever that they thought ease was pleasing to God, that their health and wealth was a signal they were on the right path. The way of the cross is the way of blood and death. Jesus went that way. That is the call to His people now, and *"few there be that find it."*

The parable of the unjust judge. Some call it the parable of the persistent widow. Since the judge is mentioned first and in some ways refers to Jesus, we'll go with the former title.

As to the interpretation, most of us see a model for praying and not giving up until our prayer is answered. But have you seen the other subject in this prayer, the coming of the Lord?

An evil magistrate withholding justice from a beleaguered woman. The woman pleading day and night for deliverance. The change in posture of the evil one.

Possible interpretation: God's elect suffering constantly in this world at the hands of evil men. Calling out to God for deliverance. *God bearing long with them*. Then a speedy deliverance. See that? Long wait, speedy deliverance!

The church is purged, made white, by suffering. But when the Deliverer comes, He comes quickly. Not soon, but quickly!

Here is a model for the Tribulation itself. The most intense difficulty of all time. God's people wait, and cry and pray. He bears long, He comes quickly at the very end.

How else do I know this parable has to do with the end? Jesus' words following it:

"...nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The Tribulation will weed out the professors from the possessors. The ones who talked about suffering from the ones who endured it successfully.

Yes, He will find faith on the earth, but in my opinion, precious little, after antichrist has already slaughtered most Christians and others turned away from Jesus in the Tribulation.

Timothy and the apostasy. To his son in the faith, Paul listed, in Timothy's two letters, over forty signs of a coming apostasy. Some

may read this as the condition of mankind in the end days. But Romans 1, written by the same apostle, lets us know that mankind has always been evil. Why list the evils of mankind in a pastoral letter?

I believe the evils of mankind will become *the evils of the professing church*, and that is why preacher Timothy must know what is coming. It will begin in Timothy's day. A stretch? Not at all, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that after his departing, grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock.

Wolves carry the apostasy gene. They have always been with us. The Spirit spoke explicitly to Paul to let him know that there was coming a day when this virus would take over the visible church, and the apostasy would be upon us. Then the great wolf will be free to take over the religious reins, for he will think like they do, totally opposed to the law of God. "The lawless one", he is called.

The church entered the apostasy early, and within a few hundred years the world was plunged into the Dark Ages. Rome, the apostate church, ruled the rest of Christendom with its darkness.

But God gave us a reprieve. The Reformers were raised up, and through a bloody vicious battle were able to restore God's Word to the people. But those battles have been largely overturned by capitulation to Rome in our own day. See article above on the apostasy.

We have entered, I believe, the second Dark Ages. Only the sharpest of vision can see what is happening. When this Darkness reaches its apex, antichrist, then Christ, will return.

My library visit, August 22, 2018. Go to the Directory. Type in “rapture” or “tribulation.” A whole series of pretrib books, mostly by Tim LaHaye come up immediately. Two or three on the “other” side, and the authors of those books hardly believe the Bible at all, much less a dispensational view of it.

Sixty million “Left Behind” (LaHaye/Jenkins) books had been sold as of 2006. There is a “kids” series, a “Military” series, a “political” series; there are devotional books, calendars, audio products, comic books, gift books, and of course, movies. Tyndale House never had it so good. Is it any wonder that a generation of Christians has been brainwashed into thinking that the Tribulation is no big deal for them?

Who can stem such a tide?

“Lord who will believe *our* report?”

Two Testimonies of Former Pretribbers

Mike Shreve, evangelist.

“I came into the kingdom of God during the Jesus Movement era, that phenomenal period when the Holy Spirit swept through the world in a powerful and unique way, changing millions of lives. Like many of that era, one of the first books I read was Hal Lindsey's classic, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In it, Hal proposes a pretribulation rapture, a doctrine I entertained for a brief period without questioning its validity or its scriptural and historical basis. But then, I began studying the Word without any preconceived notions about its interpretation and found, much to my surprise, a totally different perspective.

For almost five decades now, I have believed that the church will instead pass through the Tribulation until the last day of this age when the "catching away" (traditionally called "the rapture") will take place. However, as an evangelist, I have not felt impressed to emphasize this view. Far more important issues needed my focus, like true salvation, real discipleship, faith for the miraculous, the infilling of the Spirit and the revelation of our spiritual identity in Christ. Besides, many of my dear, long-term covenant friends and co-ministers in the body of Christ embrace a pretribulation view, and I didn't want to jeopardize loving kingdom relationships by emphasizing an issue, not essential to salvation, that might divide us.

Recently, however, I have felt compelled to be more vocal, for the good of the body of Christ, that we might be prepared, as we witness a tsunami of evil crashing over our world. So I invite you ... not to engage in a heated eschatological debate, but as fellow lovers of God who are humbly searching for the truth of His Word.

James and Carol Taylor of “End Time Overcomers” Ministry.

For a short time after we came to the Lord, we believed in a pretribulation Rapture because that's what was being taught everywhere we turned.

But before long, we saw in the Bible that it was not true. We saw the Bible teaches that those who are alive and belong to Jesus in the time leading up to his return (the last generation to be alive on the earth) will be on earth all the way through the Tribulation of those days.

When we first came to the Lord, He took us into the Book of Revelation almost before we ever knew there were Gospels or Commandments. At first, we didn't understand much of what He showed us in those early years of our service to him; but eventually - and in his perfect timing - He started bringing it all together.

This is not to say by any means that we think we know it all. It only means that the Lord took his time to show us connections and truths in his Word that today we understand much better than at first. And, it means to us that we have a duty to share it with others.

Our major concern for Christians - for the church on earth - is that people will not be ready for what lies ahead! If it's true - and we believe it is - that we must face the Antichrist and the Mark of the Beast, believing in a pretribulation rapture is only self-deception.

And those who believe that way are in great danger of "falling away" from their faith - and not believing the Bible at all - when they see they are still here when the Antichrist is revealed.

That is our concern! And that's part of the reason for this website. (posttribpeople.com)

Summary Statements

- ✓ The pretribulation rapture is a minority view, church-wide.
- ✓ There are few mentions in church history of a pretribulation rapture, and these are not clear.
- ✓ The nineteenth century, where most agree that this doctrine was hatched, gave birth to many innovative doctrines and movements.
- ✓ Pretribulation rapturism is an outgrowth of John Darby's dispensationalism.
- ✓ Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2 alone, give the end-time sequence of events clearly.
- ✓ The rapture was not meant to be an *escape* from the cross of Christ to which all are called; it is rather the *blessed hope* of those who carry that cross to the very end.
- ✓ Resurrection and rapture and translation are all essentially the same and happen simultaneously. There is one resurrection coming, at the return of Jesus on the Day of the Lord.
- ✓ The rapture was not intended to create a division of the saints whereby some are feasting in heaven while others suffer on earth. There is one church. The members of Christ will receive their bodies in one final resurrection of life.
- ✓ The rapture is not a secret appearing ; rather, the most public act of all human history.

- ✓ The rapture does not herald the evacuation of the Spirit of God; it precedes the entrance of the Son of God and His kingdom to Planet earth.
- ✓ Saying the rapture comes after the Tribulation is in line with the historic as well as the Scriptural accounting.
- ✓ Proof that the rapture is “post” is from Biblical statements. Arguments that it is “Pre” are from logic.
- ✓ The church does not disappear in the book of Revelation. It simply is called by other names.
- ✓ “Imminence” is taught even in Matthew 24 and during the bowl judgments, proving it is not being taught properly in our own day.
- ✓ Apostasy and antichrist will come before Jesus.
- ✓ Posttribulation rapture is taught in other of Jesus’ parables and teachings.
- ✓ There are absolutely no provable distinctions between the rapture of the saints and the revelation/return of Christ: these are two aspects of the same event!
- ✓ We should be looking for His coming and praying for it according to the will of God, even though we understand that other things must come first.
- ✓ We should be prepared to meet Him at a moment’s notice, as He can come to us by our death today.

- ✓ We should live in hope, not in fear, for we know His wrath is not intended for us.
- ✓ We should have the mind of Christ in us to suffer as He did, without complaining, and in fact with rejoicing as the apostles showed us.
- ✓ We should begin to buffet our bodies, and tighten our belts now, so that we will be ready to endure what must come. Why are we allowed such comforts while other saints endure horror?
- ✓ We must share the truth of this matter with other brothers in the Lord, who truly believe they will be exempted from the suffering of that day.
- ✓ The beginnings of the apostasy spoken of in Scripture may well be upon us now.
- ✓ The Holy Spirit will be so grieved at the Apostasy when it is fully here, as to be unable to do His work through the church. This does not mean the Spirit leaves the earth!
- ✓ Great men of God can sometimes teach error with no evil intent. There are no perfect teachers but Christ.

Yes. We Will.

“Surely I am coming quickly.” Even so, come, Lord Jesus!
(Revelation 22:20)

*May we not lose sight of the glory of His coming, which is far
more important than the rightness of our position.
Amen.*