

Caught up, but when?

Introduction

God's Garden is overrun with weeds. To get to the fruit can be a time-consuming work, but certainly it is worth the effort. What theoretically could be a wealth of comfort and joy for God's people has become a morass of complication. But no wonder. Both Jesus and Paul introduced their teaching about these matters with the same warning:

Matthew 24:4b, "Take heed that no one deceives you."

II Thessalonians 2:3a, "Let no one deceive you by any means."

If God has warned us of the possibility of deception, it follows that much deception is "out there." Look around. Every imaginable theory of His coming can be found in one book or another. Yet we are commanded not to be deceived. There must be a way to obey this word. That way is to pray, *wait*, study the original teachings of the prophets and apostles, *wait*, compare Scripture to Scripture, *wait*. Patience is the key ingredient in finding the perfect will of God. Teachers can take us so far. Study and prayer will take us all the way there but not by tomorrow morning. Keep digging, keep waiting, keep listening. Be wise. God wants us to get this, and all His issues, but they take time. There is no fast food in God's Word. Even our salvation came slowly, slowly, as God prepared our heart, perhaps for many years. Avoid the quick fix theologians. Dig it out piece by piece.

Why Study This Issue?

Before defining terms, these comments about why we even need to talk about the catching up of the Church. Let me start by sharing words of the beloved apostle Paul, words of comfort to the Thessalonian Church:

I Thessalonians 4:17-18, 5:10-11, II Thessalonians 2:2, 16-17: "...thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words....whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other...(do) not be soon shaken in mind or troubled...may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself...comfort your hearts..."

What was going on in the Church there that so shook the believers and elicited this shower of comfort? Well, someone was circulating the false teaching that Jesus *had already come*, and that they, the Thessalonian Church, had been *left behind*. The letters making the rounds actually bore Paul's signature! (II Thessalonians 2:2) Paul rapidly does away with that notion and any similar notion for all time by giving to the Church a sign of Jesus' coming, the very same sign that was given by Jesus Himself in Matthew 24: The entrance of antichrist into the Temple of God and the subsequent desolating conflict that follows.

II Thessalonians 2:3b, "...that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who...sits in the temple of God."

Compare this to what Jesus said in response to his disciples' request for a sign. "What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" they asked. The answer:

Matthew 24:15, 16, 21, "...when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...flee...for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." Jesus (or is it Matthew through the Spirit?) adds: (24:15) "Whoever reads, let him understand." So this is not only for the persons who experienced 40 years later the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but for those who will in generations to come read this prophecy and try to make sense of it, for the sign is still *ahead of us*.

In order for this event to occur, there must first *be* an antichrist, and a Temple for him to enter. The antichrist, called "the man of sin" is still in earth's future, and I have dealt with it in my study of the book of Revelation, *The Scroll of Revelation (January, 2003)* . As for the Jewish Temple, it has been in the planning stages on earth, let alone Heaven, for many years, and will rise when the time is near.

And the rise of antichrist will be made possible when there is an atmosphere on earth that is so foreign to the things of God that he will be welcome. Paul calls it in II Thessalonians 2:3, the "falling away" and here he uses a word from which we derive the word "apostasy." It is a negative word, a word connotating revolt and rebellion, much like the description of the days of Nimrod in Genesis and Josephus (See my *Scarlet Threads*, Part I).

Paul sees an entire world basically unconcerned about God with only pockets of on-fire believers here and there, a church given over to this world culturally, musically, and all the rest, including its basic philosophy. So the professing church will help to create a vacuum which antichrist will fill. Oh what manner of men we ought to be! It is not a time for letting go, but for going deeper and deeper into the love, holiness, power, and revelation of God.

Why study this issue? That we not wind up like the Thessalonians, totally vulnerable to false teachers who will tell us of "secret" comings in remote places (see Matthew 24:26-27). And for several other reasons:

1. The integrity of Scripture is at stake. Is the Bible true? Can we trust its statements, even when they speak against our pet doctrines, cultural ways, and even our "common sense" and human logic?

2. The method of Biblical interpretation is important. Shall we look at Scripture literally whenever possible or only when it suits our theories? Shall we adamantly affirm with Agur in Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God is pure", or shall we cloud the meanings of Scripture with "revelations" that have come later? Certainly when Jesus is telling a parable we look for "interpretation" but if no obvious figure is intended we must trust God's Word as it is.

3. Though such matters as the timing of the rapture are not on a par with the teachings regarding salvation and the Deity of Christ, do we have a right to classify any Scriptural theme as "unimportant" when so often we fill our minds with Hollywood fantasies, or the triviality of game-playing known as "sports", or the ramblings of the stock market? Are those who glibly say, "Well, Jesus is coming, that's all that really matters," occupied in the collecting of the *world's* knowledge and calling *that* important? Why shouldn't God's people be excited about even the smallest of the Bible's issues?

The teacher in particular is warned in Matthew 5:19, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom

of heaven...” This passage refers to the eternal law of God that His people keep by their new life in the Spirit, but shows us how God values everything He says to a prophet or an apostle. Things we want to call “little” are not necessarily so.

Perhaps by the time you have examined the evidence you will see that this issue is not so trivial anyway. Returning to the Thessalonian context, the issue was big enough to warrant two letters of Paul to correct! A misplaced return of Jesus brought confusion and desperation to that assembly. In our day, imagine the plight of those who fed on the Hollywood-style dramas made by pre-tribulation rapturists, when they see antichrist arise before them, and Jesus has not yet returned. At best these people will be angry with those who sold them a bill of goods with no clear Scriptural evidence. These folks were expecting years of bliss in Heaven while hellish things happened to “tribulation saints” on earth. They will bitterly reflect that some very godly-sounding men led them astray.

The Basics

Let’s define what we are going to be discussing.

1. Rapture. What do we mean, first of all, by the term “rapture” ? In my opinion, the term itself, not found in the Bible, is part of the problem we are having to confront. By giving a new label to this portion of the second coming of Jesus, the teachers who promote this message cause their hearers to understand it in a separated way. Different name, different event, they reason. The word itself means the state of being “caught away in body or spirit.” The idea roughly corresponds to the Greek *harpadzo*, used several times in Scripture, and translated several ways, but always with the idea of taking something away. Consider the following passages (the words in quotes come from *harpadzo*):

Matthew 13:19 speaks of how the enemy “snatches” what of God’s Word is sown in the heart of man.

John 10:12, in a similar vein, speaks of the wolf who “catches” sheep and then scatters them.

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

II Corinthians 12:2- 4, speaks of Paul’s “catching up” into Paradise. Here is a preview of our own “rapture.”

I Thessalonians 4:17 uses *harpadzo* to speak of the subject at hand, the “catching up” of all believers to be with the Lord.

In Revelation 12:5, the elect child is “caught up” to God.

So, the idea of a “catching up”, from Enoch to Elijah to Jesus, to our own future appointment with Christ, is a legitimate one, and the term “rapture” seen in this light is surely a descriptive helpful word. However it is unfortunate that the *catching away* of Christ’s Bride has been disassociated from the *destination* of the believers. We *will* be caught up. Of this there is no doubt or contention. But when? And then what? We are not left suspended. What happens before and after our rapture?

2. Tribulation. Most students of prophecy also believe in the time of “trouble”. It is

well documented by prophets, Jesus, and John:

Prophet Jeremiah in his 30th chapter sees a future era he calls “Jacob’s Trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). The reference is to the father of the Jewish nation, also known as Israel. He says that this time will be unprecedented in its devastation, the same thing an angel who appears in the book of the prophet Daniel says about a “time of trouble” coming to the planet, in association with resurrections and judgments (Daniel 12:1-3). In other words, this tribulation period is at the end of all things.

That same line of thought is repeated by Jesus in Matthew 24:21. Here the word is “tribulation” , but that is simply another translation of the same Greek word translated “trouble” in other passages. Jesus too is speaking of the end of all things, which he says immediately follows this tribulation. And John’s Book of Revelation describes the horrors of God’s wrath, leaving no doubt to the reader that the time he describes is also the time of the end.

3. Pre- or post- ? So there is some major trouble coming. Unprecedented. Final. And, there’s a “snatching up” , a “catching away” , a “rapture” coming too. The whole issue we deal with here is , Which comes first, the trouble, or the flight? If one believes the catching up is first, he is a “pre-tribulation rapturist” , whether he particularly likes labels or not. If he believes the rapture is after the tribulation and in fact a part of the second coming of Jesus, he is “post-trib.”

How did the church ever get divided on this issue? Let’s trace the teaching back to Bible days.

History

What have God’s people historically believed about the “catching away” down through the many ages of the Church? Has it always been like today, with these two major opposing views, drawing people into one group or another? No, absolutely, no.

A warning here before we proceed. After the Bible, which is apostolic and inspired, there is no perfect book. There is no perfect teacher. In the years that followed the death of the apostles, many men began to write, some building as closely as they could on the revelation in existence, from the apostles and prophets, others veering off from time to time. This “veering off” has left us with a great variety of teachings published in the name of the Lord, making it easy for the promulgator of any new doctrine down to this day, to establish his cause somewhere in the chaos. An appeal to the “church fathers” is often a settlement to an otherwise shaky point. Now there were good men and good books, but as I say, many of the teachings found in those days were not grounded in God’s Word.

In spite of individual problems in individual teachers, and it seems even the best of men missed it sometimes, there were streams of thought that continued down to us, both in our Scriptures and in the *collected* works of the great writers. The Deity of Christ, the Second Coming, salvation by grace through faith, it all was picked up and passed on. God had faithful witnesses who were able to see and communicate necessary truth to the next generations.

Having said that, we ask, what about the theory of a pre-tribulation rapture historically? In fact, it falls far short of verification. It is found only once from the fourth century all the way to the *eighteenth century*, and not in any substantial body of literature until the nineteenth. This view-point is a newcomer to the world of theology.

The teachers of this doctrine believe they have Scriptural grounds for their beliefs. We will examine Scripture in detail later, but for now let's trace the doctrine through history, and I must say, it will be a short journey, for there's not much there.

Ephraem. We go first to the Persia of the Roman Empire days. It is the fourth century. The teacher is a dedicated deacon named Ephraem who seems to have been a most holy man, to the point where he is said to have been a hermit for the last ten years of his life. The record shows he was greatly revered by Syrian, Orthodox, and Nestorian believers, the "denominations" of his day. His writings, evidently quite numerous were read just after the Scriptures in some churches. One of those writings contains a passage that may indeed be a preview of what will come many hundreds of years later in its fulness. Now remember, *three hundred years* have passed since the apostles wrote, and this is the first hint of a pre-tribulation rapture.

Ephraem believed the end of the world was near, and that the Holy Spirit confirmed this to him. In his thinking, there was only one sign which remained, "the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman Kingdom." That actually sounds like a *post-tribulation* view, but several sentences later he adds:

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

Ephraem here appeals to logic rather than to revelation. No authority is given for his conclusion, though his statement "makes a lot of sense". This type of reasoning is the fuel of pre-tribulation thinking. There is much "sense" to it, but no solid Scriptural backing.

Morgan Edwards. We must travel 1400 years before we find another word about a pre-tribulation rapture, and the source we find is not altogether convincing. On the website www.lasttrumpet.com, Tim Warner suggests that Mr. Edwards was in his 20's at the writing of this paper, and wrote it for a college professor who wished Edwards to defend the literal interpretation of Scripture, a process not in vogue in that day. To do so, Morgan invented "a new doctrine" which it seems he did not espouse for himself, but rather he theorized as an intellectual pursuit. He even used Acts 17:19, 20 on his title page:

"May we know what this *new doctrine* is of which you speak? For you are bringing some *strange things* to our ears." Morgan actually quoted the words of pagan philosophers! And Mr. Edwards certainly would have delighted the men of Mars Hill, for not only does he come up with a pre-tribulation rapture, he also speculates that the lake of fire is *in the moon*, and that all planets in the solar system are inhabited. Some historians looking for the modern beginnings of pre-trib teaching discount Edwards altogether.

Margaret MacDonald. So far we have a fourth-century hermit and a Bible college student on assignment espousing the pre-trib view, and they lived 1400 years apart. Not ex-

actly a part of the stream of revelation I was discussing earlier. Why would the Church be bereft of a doctrine so important for all this time?

Referring now to www.bethelministries.com/pretrib.htm, I suggest that 1830 is a more substantial date for the beginning of this doctrine in modern times. It was during this year that 15-year-old Margaret Macdonald, a prophetess of the newly arising Pentecostal movement in Scotland, uttered a vision that stated that Christians were to be raptured just prior to the Great Tribulation.

This event surely causes many, especially the Pentecostals of our own day, to give pause. Surely 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 must be 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 then and is not now.

Edward Irving. Within a year or two afterwards, Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving, of "Irvingite" fame in London (The Catholic Apostolic Church), heard about this dream, developed it theologically, and began teaching it to his congregation.

John Darby. At about this same time, the one called the "father of modern Dispensationalism" also got wind of Macdonald's dream, paid her a visit, also made some changes, and incorporated it into his theories. John Darby was also the "father" of the Plymouth Brethren movement, a church which was openly proud of what they called this "new doctrine." Brian M. Schwertley, in *Is the Pretribulation Rapture Biblical?* says "The Plymouth Brethren openly admitted and were even proud of the fact that among their teachings were totally new ones which had never been taught by the church fathers, medieval scholars, Protestant Reformers, or the many commentaries."

It is not clear to me about whom "prince of preachers" Charles Spurgeon was speaking in the following quote, but one wonders if it was not the "Brethren" themselves. Spurgeon lived in the day when the pre-tribulation rapture was freshly hatched. It is obvious what he thought of the idea. Hear him well:

"...there is a certain troublesome sect abroad nowadays," said he, "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 Great Mystery of Godliness*, preached December 22, 1867)

C.I. Scofield. The creator of the "Scofield Reference Bible" (1917) included Darby's teachings in his notes. Seeing such things "in the Bible" emboldened many other saints to trust this doctrine as though God had said it Himself.

There followed the inclusion of pre-tribulationism in the curriculums of well-known and greatly loved institutions such as Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Semi-

nary, and in the 1970's, a book and movie by young people's theologian Hal Lindsay. There seemed to be no stopping it after that. Today it has permeated much of the western evangelical world. It is *far* from universal in the church today, and far from historical, as I have shown, but there is as we say a very "vocal minority" of believers, mostly Western/American, who swear by this doctrine.

Laying the Foundation

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 again these statements:

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*. Post-tribulation rapture.

II 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." 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.

The pre-tribulation 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 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.

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 spread like wildfire. Before ordinary believers had a chance to study the pre-tribulation 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.

About Matthew 24

In order for pre-tribulation 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 post-tribulation 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 answers.

Matthew 24:3b : “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) ? Answer one: Though there is a buildup to the answer in verses 4-14, it seems He does not answer the question about Jerusalem’s fall until verses 15 and following. But verse 15 is connected to the great tribulation!

Regarding the “buildup”: Deception will come through false Christs (5), troubling events (6-8), even persecution and betrayal (9-10). There will be national and natural disasters, hatred of believers, false prophets.

Question two: What shall be the sign of your coming? Answer two: The preaching of the Gospel to all the world must come first. Just before mentioning this, Jesus says something that is overlooked, but that ties directly to Paul’s Thessalonian letter. Compare:

Matthew 24:12: "...because **lawlessness** will abound, the **love of many will grow cold.**" And II Thessalonians 2:3, "...that Day will not come unless the **falling away** comes first ...then the **lawless** one will be revealed." A world with no law. Democracy run amuck? The spirit of the age in America is gradually becoming saturated with lawlessness. Nothing is wrong. 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 (15-21). This is the only "event" that answers the second question.

Question three (or question two, part two): What shall be the sign of the end of the age? The only other "sign" given in the text is the "sign" of the Son of Man.

Others find one large question, with three parts, but still all the parts point to events of the final days of history. Whatever the number of questions, the answer comes to the same thing: The Gospel will be preached everywhere, then these buildings will fall during a worldwide tribulation, just before I come. That will be the end of this age.

Now to return to the question of the intended address of this Gospel of Matthew. To whom is it given, and about whom? Were the disciples Jews? Oh yes. But the Gospel story, especially in John (as in 5:10, 6:41, 7:11, etc) makes a clear distinction between unbelieving Israel, called "the Jews", and the Jews who were *disciples* of Messiah. When Jesus is addressing His own, He addresses us. These followers and their teachings later became the foundation stones of the Church. Teachings given them are crucial for us. Questions asked by them must be heeded, and likewise the answers given.

How many times during the life of Jesus, as we have it in the Gospels, do these Jewish apostles ask questions and receive answers? Are all the responses to their questions intended for Israel because the disciples were Jewish? No one is considering giving up the Lord's prayer or the Comforter using this logic. Yet it was two Jews who asked questions about prayer and the Spirit. The answers given them are classic Christian doctrine.

Is literal Israel involved in all this? Yes, I believe they are! But have we been grafted into the tree called Israel? (Romans 11:17-21) Yes we have! Our fates intertwine.

The disciples asked for a sign, and they received one. A very specific event is foretold, after which Jesus will come. Let's look at this event:

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 20 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 (*eg* pigs, a statue of Zeus etc) in the Holy Place. 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 anti-christ 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 8th 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, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus is history, and the predicted coming of Jesus has not materialized. So we must look to the future for fulfillment of both of these prophesies.

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

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).

Then will come the host of pretenders, even miracle-workers, to convince you that Jesus is already back, as they were doing in the Thessalonian church. Paul and Jesus say, don’t you believe it!

Matthew 24:26, “therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it.

What’s wrong with the “secret rapture” idea? Jesus said it: 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 name 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 the later teachers 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, now.

Matthew 24:29 “Immediately after the tribulation...they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven...and He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds.” The angels, the trumpet, the ingathering. It’s all here. This is the rapture, the catching up of the church.

But you say, wait, if it is so clearly spelled out, what about “imminence”? Couldn’t Jesus come at any minute?

Imminence

From *The Scroll of Revelation*, I borrow the following paragraphs:

“Regarding the doctrine of 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 then 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 rea-

son enough for any person, any time, to be on guard against foolish behavior.

“The importance of **knowing a particular season** is confirmed by our dear brother, the apostle Paul, in I Thessalonians 5. First he says (verse 2) that Jesus is coming as “a thief in the night.” This is the concept that has been passed on to godly people as their own norm for looking for Jesus to come! But moving even 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 II Thessalonians 2:3. In words that could not be more clear, 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, if there be such a thing, 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 babes 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 slowly 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*.

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 say that Matthew 24 is all about the *final* coming of Jesus, not the “secret” coming. They criticize 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” 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.

For the above quoted verses are only a few sentences away from clear signs and clearer illustrations:

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

(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. 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. For the world, “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. 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.

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 when He is coming, and we will be rejoicing until the end, knowing that His return is what our life is about.

One final line of thinking about “imminence”: 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.

The Supposed “Distinctions”

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 pre-tribulation rapture. Consider our brother 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 the-

ory.

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 II Thessalonians! But not to the liking of the pre-trib 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. II 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] 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, 1000 years later, the resurrection of the damned. By calling this pre-tribulation 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 midst 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 in the midst of 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 as to 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, so as 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 pre-tribulationists 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 Saviour who understands, because *He* went through earth’s rejections. 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 pre-trib 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 pre-trib 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 spite 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 II 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 2 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 "life time"? 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 2000 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 supercede *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 Saviour, 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 II 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.

Questions, questions...

If there were not some difficult questions that the *Scriptures themselves* raise regarding this matter, fewer people would give this theory the nod. We prayerfully submit the following explanations of passages that seem to point toward pre-tribulationism.

1. **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." **Question: *Isn't it God's will to remove His Church from trials?***

I have dealt with this passage in my Revelation study, and offer that explanation here:

(3:10) There is no *direct* evidence anywhere in Scripture for a **pre-tribulation rapture**. But passages like 3:10 are used as *indirect* proof. Here the "hour of trial" is called the Great Tribulation, the Philadelphia Church becomes the end-time church in the church-age theory, and the faithful are thus 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 full three and one half years? 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. To make Philadelphia the end-time church is to make Laodicea the church of the Tribulation, a group of "losers" who suddenly turn into martyrs for the cause of Christ. 3. 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? Did not Philadelphia escape the last times altogether? 4. Are there not churches in every generation who can claim this promise of escaping the judgment of God if they are faithful? 5. Is it not possible at the very least, that God is able to keep His People from harm in the midst of judgment? Was either Noah or Lot removed from the earth? Do not the 144,000 escape Satan's plan? When the bowl judgments fall, is it not stated explicitly who is being targeted? Other than persecutions allowed, are God's people ever harmed when God is pouring wrath on His enemies?

As Schwertley (quoted earlier) points out, it is not proper to make the promise given to an individual church in Asia some generalized promise for all churches of all time. As he says, “The church of Smyrna is told that they ‘will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death.’ (Rev.2:10) They are not promised protection from the coming time of 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.”

Also, 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. And 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.

2. Revelation 4:1, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” **Question: Isn’t John’s “rapture” here meant to indicate that the church is lifted out of the world before any talk of tribulation in the book? Is it not true that the church is not mentioned again after this?**

Again, I have dealt with this issue in *the Scroll of Revelation*:

“(4:1) **Come up hither.** Oh the strange work that popular ‘theologians’ have done with chapter 4, verse 1. In this simple passage, John is addressed by Jesus, and told to come up to heaven for further revelations. Incredible to me is the notion that here, Jesus is actually calling His *entire Church* to Heaven! The statement is made by believers in this interpretation, pre-tribulation rapturists all, that, from this point on, the Church is ‘absent’ in the book of Revelation! And when it is pointed out in several places that *believers are indeed on earth*, the response is made that these believers are really not the ‘Church’, but ‘tribulation’ saints, whatever that means. A conclusion is made, and facts to the contrary are explained away. This is not good exegesis, to say the least!

“**Evidence.** For those who desire to look at it, the evidence for the **Church** being in the book of Revelation *after* chapter 4 is strong:

“**1. Definition.** First, we assume that **by ‘Church’ we mean the ‘saints’**, or as in Daniel, ‘holy ones’, a term used over *40 times* by New testament writers to refer to the Body of Christ, the people of God. We also assume we are talking about a people who have been promised by Jesus, Paul, and Peter a life of persecution often ending in martyrdom .

“**2. Passages that don’t say ‘Church’ but are Church:**

5:8, The worshipers in Heaven pour out before God **prayers from the saints.**

6:10-11, **martyrs** are here received to God and told that their fellow-martyrs will soon join them. They have been slain for the Word of God and their testimony.

7: 13 ff, the same **believers** referred to in chapter 6 are now standing before the Throne, having come out of the Great Tribulation by means of martyrdom.

8:4, The **prayers of the saints** are now seen as incense.

12:11, The **same saints** as in 6 and 7 are seen in a flashback in the context of the

Beast who persecuted them.

12:17, Those who keep the **commandments of God**, as brother John loved to talk about in his writings (John 12:49-50, 13:34, 14:15,21,31, 15:1-12, I John 2:3-8, 3:22-24, 4:21, 5:3-6, II John 4-6) *and* have the testimony of Jesus Christ, are distinguished here from the persecuted Israelites who are in the process of being hidden and sealed, and therefore unreachable by antichrist. He now vents his fury on the only 'saints' left, the Church.

13:7, As in Daniel 7, the man of sin is seen here being given the authority to **conquer the saints**. He overcomes their body, and they overcome him by going straight to Jesus.

14:6, The **everlasting Gospel** is being preached all over the world. I wonder who does this job? A company of angels? The 144,000? Why not the same group that has always preached it?

14:13, Blessed are the dead who **die in the Lord**. To die in the Lord is to be a member of Christ. Members of Christ are the Church.

15:1-4, Singing the song of Moses **and the Lamb**, those who died in the Lord, those who seemingly were conquered by antichrist, now are around the Throne.

16:15, In the worst of the worst hours comes a **message from Heaven**: I am coming. Keep your garments clean! Who is He talking to, if not the Church?

18:4, Also in the midst of devastation, **God's people are called** out, but not *up*, FIRST. Who are they? The Church!"

Schwertley adds these powerful words: "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...? The word church does not even occur in the book of Revelation until Revelation 22:16. Does this mean the church is not involved in the second coming, the resurrection or white throne judgment?...An argument that proves too much is worthless."

Further, he states that this argument [from silence] could also be used to prove many dangerous and heretical doctrines. "In the book of Esther the words for God and Jehovah do not occur even once. Does this fact mean that God does not exist...?"

3. II Thessalonians 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: *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 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 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 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.

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 pre-trib theologians must do if they insist that God essentially leaves the planet. He’ll be here doing the work He always does until the last man avails himself of the blood of Christ.

4. I Thessalonians 5:9, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” **Question:** *Since the tribulation is the wrath of God upon unbelievers, how can the church be present?*

Let me ask you in return a more difficult question from the pre-tribulation 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 once more:

From Bethel, quoted above, pages 4-7 of his article: “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 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.” 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 boys, and Daniel as examples of this.] [In addition] 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, also quoted above, on page 8 of his work, analyzes the Revelation passages that show how God's people are kept from the wrath before the *ultimate wrath* during this Tribulation time:

"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..."

5. 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.

**In Summary:
There is a rapture!
But...**

- ⇒ It 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.
- ⇒ It 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.
- ⇒ It is not a secret appearing ; rather, the most public act of all human history.
- ⇒ It 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.

and:

- ⇒ Saying the rapture comes after the Tribulation is in line with the historic as well as the Scriptural accounting. The pre-tribulation rapture theory is a modern invention with but scanty evidence before the 18th century.
- ⇒ Proof that the rapture is “post” is from Biblical statements. Proof that it is “Pre” is from logic.
- ⇒ There are absolutely no distinctions between the rapture of the saints and the revelation of Christ: these are two aspects of the same event!

therefore:

- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ 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.

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