

A CASE FOR THE PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

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Introduction

The doctrine of the pretribulational rapture of the church has been the subject of heated debate between dispensationalists and covenant theologians for over one hundred years. Additionally, the timing of the rapture has been controversial among scholars for the past forty years or so. Some believe that the rapture of the church will occur before Daniel's seventieth week known as the Great Tribulation.¹ Others believe that the rapture of the church will occur halfway through the Great Tribulation or even sometime later, before the wrath of God falls upon the world.² A third group believes that the rapture will occur at the same time as the Second Coming of Christ – that the two events are one and the same.³ Why is there so much division on this matter? The truth is that the timing of

¹ E.g., John F. Walvoord, *The Return of the Lord* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1955); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1958); Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981); Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 45-86; Craig Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25-73.

² E.g., Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990); Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Alan Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. idem. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 109-54. According to Hultberg, the prewrath position is an improvement upon the unsuccessful midtribulational view of Gleason Archer (Alan Hultberg, "Introduction," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. idem. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 21; cf. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth Week Rapture Position," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. idem. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 113-45).

³ This includes premillennialists such as George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Douglas J. Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 185-241. Amillennialists and preterists also view the rapture and the Second Coming as the same event (e.g., Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 100-112; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christians Economics, 1997]; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* [Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999]).

the rapture is not explicitly stated in the New Testament. If it were, then there would be no difference of opinion. The timing of the rapture may be hinted at in certain places, but it is largely deduced from the overall teaching of the New Testament.⁴ Because many Christians and scholars believe in the unified coming of Christ – that the rapture and the Second Coming are the same event – the pretribulation rapture of the church seems like a strange idea with the result that pretribulationism is often maligned and misrepresented. The goals of this paper are to dispel three common rapture myths, to discuss the three major rapture passages, and then to construct a case for the pretribulation rapture of the church from the ground up. Pretribulationism best harmonizes the apparent discrepancies between rapture and Second Coming passages, best resolves the tension between the imminence and the signs of Christ’s coming, best accounts for the protection from divine wrath promised to the church, and best solves the problem of populating the millennium.

Pretribulation Rapture Myths

Before examining the rapture passages and arguments for pretribulationism, it is important to first consider three common myths about pretribulationism. Some of these ideas have been circulated at the popular level, but others have been promulgated by those trying to debunk pretribulationism. If any of these myths or misconceptions were to be proven true, then pretribulationism would be doubtful at best and debunked at worst. Before pretribulationism can get off the ground, these myths must be dispelled.

⁴ The author recognizes that there are degrees of certainty with eschatological matters and that a measure of grace should be extended to others who hold to a different view of the timing of the rapture. Many who write on the subject of the rapture (from all views) often use the terms “clear” or “clearly” in arguing their cases against their opponents. However, many of the arguments about the timing of the rapture are logical deductions or implications from Scripture which are only “clear” to those holding that particular view. Therefore, the terms “clear” and “clearly” will be avoided here. While pretribulationists should hold to their convictions, they should also exercise more humility and charity towards their brothers and sisters in Christ, even if such grace is seldom reciprocated.

The Rapture is not found in Scripture

At the popular level, some Christians believe that the rapture of the church is not taught in Scripture. It is sometimes stated that if one looks up “rapture” in his concordance, he will not find the term listed. Therefore, it is argued that the rapture is unbiblical. However, this is a gross misunderstanding. The term “rapture” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word ἄρπάζω which means “to snatch away” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and elsewhere (see below). The Latin Bible uses the word *raptus* to translate ἄρπάζω.⁵ The fact that the term *rapture* does not appear in the English Bible or in the Greek text does not negate the fact that the concept is taught in Scripture. There are other terms and concepts such as “Trinity”, “Sunday”, and “the Lord’s prayer” which are taught in Scripture, even though the exact words do not appear. Perhaps scholars should refer to the event as *the harpazo* instead of *the rapture* to be more precise. The concept of the rapture *is* taught in Scripture, but the timing of the rapture is debated.

The Pretribulational Rapture was not taught before the Nineteenth Century

Scholars have often averred that the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture of the church was nowhere taught in the history of the church before J. N. Darby (1800-1882) promoted the idea in his dispensationalism. For example, G. E. Ladd famously stated, “We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early Church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the Church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century.”⁶ The implication is that since pretribulationism is a recent doctrine, then it is likely false. This

⁵ Tim LaHaye and Richard Mayhue, “Rapture,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 311.

⁶ Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 31.

implication commits the logical fallacy of chronological snobbery, which states that if a view is late in origin, then it is untrue.⁷ This has no direct bearing on its truthfulness of pretribulationism. Neither would it matter if some church fathers had unambiguously taught pretribulationism because the truth of a doctrine is not determined by an appeal to patristic authority. Scripture must be the final arbiter of truth.⁸

Posttribulationists often present their view as “classical premillennialism” or “historic premillennialism” with the suggestion that posttribulationism was the common view of the early church.⁹ While most of the church fathers were chiliasts (premillennialists),¹⁰ they were confused on the subject of timing of the rapture. They believed both that they were in the Tribulation and that the Lord’s coming was imminent (any moment).¹¹ Crutchfield prefers the designation “imminent intratribulationism” to distinguish the view of the church fathers from modern posttribulationism.¹² The imminence in the writings of the early church supports pretribulationism since

⁷ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 631-32.

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 15-16; cf. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 19-20.

⁹ Donald Fairbairn, “Contemporary Millennial/Tribulation Debates: Whose Side was the Early Church on?” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, eds. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 119-28.

¹⁰ See Fairbairn, “Contemporary Millennial/Tribulation Debates,” 105-119.

¹¹ See Larry V. Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 85-103. Ladd states that the early fathers had an attitude of expectancy, but “this is not the same as an any-moment coming of Christ” (Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 20). This is essential to his claim that the early church believed in posttribulationism, but Crutchfield claims that the any-moment imminence in the church fathers cannot be denied (Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope”, 91). See also James F. Stitzinger, “The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation,” *TMSJ* 13 no. 2 (Fall 2002): 153-56; Thomas Ice, “A History of the Rapture Teaching,” in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds., Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 60-64.

¹² Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope,” 103.

imminence is a central feature of pretribulationism, but the idea that the church will go through the Great Tribulation supports posttribulationism. Walvoord's summary statement is instructive: "It must be conceded that the advanced and detailed theology of pretribulationism is not found in the Fathers, but neither is any other detailed and 'established' exposition of premillennialism."¹³ All eschatological views must rely upon Scripture, not upon a precedent (or lack thereof) in church history.

Although the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture does not appear in the earliest Christian writings, scholars have discovered a handful of pretribulational writings from church history which predate Darby. For example, a sermon by Pseudo-Ephraem (4th-6th century) titled "On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World" states, "All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins."¹⁴ In this sermon, Pseudo-Ephraem develops an elaborate biblical eschatology, including a distinction between the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ. The sermon describes the imminent rapture, followed by a three-and-one-half-year-long Great Tribulation under the rule of Antichrist, followed by the coming of Christ, the defeat of Antichrist, and the eternal state. Pseudo-Ephraem saw a parenthesis between the fulfillment of Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks (Daniel 9:24-27), and he believed that the rapture will precede the Tribulation and is

¹³ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: A Comprehensive Biblical Study of the Translation of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 52.

¹⁴ Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation," *BSac* 152 (July-September 1995): 311.

“imminent or overhanging.”¹⁵ Other examples of early pretribulationism include Codex Amiatinus (ca. 690-716),¹⁶ Brother Dolcino (d. 1307),¹⁷ Increase Mather (1693-1723),¹⁸ John Gill (1697-1771),¹⁹ Morgan Edwards (1722-1795),²⁰ and others.²¹ These examples do not prove that pretribulationism is correct, but it is no longer credible for scholars to state that the pretribulational rapture was not taught before Darby.

The Pretribulational Rapture Originated with Margaret MacDonald

The third popular myth about pretribulationism is that J. N. Darby, the father of dispensationalism and popularizer of pretribulationism, adopted his theory of the rapture of the church from Margaret MacDonald, a teenage girl who was a part of the cultic Irvinite Movement. In 1830, MacDonald gave a series of prophetic utterances which were allegedly instrumental in Darby’s own formulation of pretribulationism.²² According to Dave MacPherson, Darby and others devised a plot to cover-up the truth that the idea originated with a cultic prophetess.²³ There are at least five problems with the idea that

¹⁵ Thomas Ice and James Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 317; cf. Grant R. Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” in *When The Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 108-118.

¹⁶ Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 317-18.

¹⁷ Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,” *BSac* 159 (July-September 2002): 349-62.

¹⁸ Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 319.

¹⁹ Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” 119-22.

²⁰ Ice, “A History of the Rapture,” 69-74.

²¹ See Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 319.

²² The actual prophecy is recounted in Tim LaHaye, *Rapture Under Attack* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1998), 235-38.

²³ See Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas City, MO: Heart of America

pretribulationism is false because it originated with Margaret MacDonald.²⁴ 1) There is no direct evidence that Darby borrowed any ideas from MacDonald's prophecy. Darby even denied that MacDonald's utterance was from the Holy Spirit. 2) Darby had already formed his beliefs about the pretribulation rapture *before* MacDonald's utterance in 1830. 3) MacDonald's prophecy does not teach a pretribulation rapture of the church. She saw a series of raptures and had a historicist view of the Tribulation, believing that the church should prepare itself for the appearing of Antichrist. 4) MacPherson's implication commits the genetic fallacy which discounts the truth of a view based on its origin. Even if Darby did adopt MacDonald's view of the rapture, this in itself would not make the view incorrect. 5) As shown above, pretribulationism had already appeared in church history. Darby was not the first to teach the pretribulation rapture, although he certainly developed and systematized his eschatology in much more detail than others in church history.

Summary

Like all doctrines, the truth of pretribulationism must ultimately rest on its Scriptural basis, not on its antiquity, origin, or popularity in church history. The

Bible Society, 1973); *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City, MO: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974); *The Incredible Cover-up: Exposing the Origins of Rapture Theories* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975); *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983); *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1995). MacPherson's books are sometimes referenced in order to cast doubt on pretribulationism (e.g., DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 228-29n16; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to "Left Behind" Eschatology*, eds. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009], 62-63).

²⁴ For a summary of these points, see John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 42-48; Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture did not begin with Margaret MacDonald," *BSac* 147 (1990): 155-68; idem., "MacDonald, Margaret," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 244-45; LaHaye, *Rapture Under Attack*, 119-36; Stitzinger, "The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation," 166-67; Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 201-206; Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 184-97.

pretribulational rapture was not explicitly taught in the early church writings, but the church Fathers did believe in the imminent return of Christ which is a major feature of pretribulationism. Pretribulationism was most fully developed by J. N. Darby in the nineteenth century, but it is not entirely absent from church history as some have claimed. Even though the word *rapture* does not appear in the English Bible, the concept is taught in three central passages of the New Testament.

Rapture Passages in the New Testament

There are three main passages which are recognized by scholars as rapture passages: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, and John 14:1-3.²⁵ Labeling these are “rapture passages” is not question-begging in favor of pretribulationism because the nature of the event is here described, even though the timing of the rapture event is open to debate. This section will point out a few key observations about each of these passages by way of background information.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The main rapture passage is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose

²⁵ Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, 50. Pretribulationists often believe that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 refer to the rapture of the church as well. Space does not permit a discussion here, and a case for pretribulationism does not rest solely on these passages, although this author does believe that pretribulationism is taught there. See Zane C. Hodges, “The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 67-79; Thomas R. Edgar, “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 205-211; H. Wayne House, “Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 261-96; Paul D. Feinberg, “2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 297-311; Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995), 199-208; William W. Combs, “Is APOSTASIA in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?” *DBSJ* 3 (Fall 1998): 63-87. For a prewrath interpretation, see Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” 117-29. For a posttribulational interpretation, see Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 201-212.

again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.²⁶

Several observations are in order here. 1) The term *παρουσία* in verse 15 indicates that the return of Christ is in view since the term is often used of Christ's return elsewhere.²⁷

Whether the coming of Christ has one part or two parts is another matter. 2) Paul included himself in those who would be raptured ("we" [vss. 15, 17]), indicating that he thought the rapture was imminent.²⁸ 3) There will be a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God (4:16) at this event,²⁹ making it likely that this will be a public event.³⁰ 4) This passage does not depict the general resurrection of all people

²⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

²⁷ So Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4; 1 John 2:28.

²⁸ Thomas L. Constable, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 704.

²⁹ The loud command may be the voice of the Lord Himself (cf. Rev 1:10; 4:1) in addition to the voice of Michael, the archangel (cf. Jude 9). The trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 may be the same as the trumpet in Matthew 24:31, 1 Corinthians 15:52, or one of the seven trumpets in Revelation (see note 39).

³⁰ Pretribulationism is often characterized as teaching a "secret rapture" by its critics, presumably to cast doubt or suspicion on the view (e.g., Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 860; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 1197-1224; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 141). Walvoord stated, "There is no indication that the world as a whole will see Christ at the time of the rapture of the church," though all would see Him at the Second Coming (Rev 1:7; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1966], 39). However, the idea of a secret rapture is not explicitly taught by most pretribulationists. Darby himself was ambivalent as to whether the rapture would be secret (Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, 123-24). The rapture in *Left Behind* is instantaneous and may only be visible/audible to the church, but the devastating effects upon the earth are apparent to all who remain (See Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995]). The rapture may be secret, but that idea is not defended here.

or even of all saints.³¹ Only the dead *in Christ* will be raised at this time,³² followed by believers who are alive at the time of the rapture (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52). 5) The verb ἄρπάζω, from which the word “rapture” is derived, is found in verse 17. The verb appears fourteen times in the New Testament and has two basic meanings: “to steal, carry off, drag away”,³³ and “to snatch or take away” either forcefully (with resistance)³⁴ or without resistance.³⁵ This last idea of being snatched away without resistance is what is depicted here in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.³⁶ 6) The church will be snatched away in the clouds to “meet” (ἀπάντησις) the Lord in the air, either to return immediately with

³¹ The “first resurrection” of Revelation 20:5-6 is best taken as qualitative instead of chronological. Several resurrections precede the “first resurrection” which takes place before the millennium. These include the resurrections of Jesus (Rev 1:18), selected Old Testament saints (Matt 27:50-53), the church (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:16-17), the two witnesses (Rev 11:9-11), tribulation martyrs (Rev 20:4-6), and Old Testament saints (Dan 12:1-13; cf. Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28). The unbelieving dead will not be resurrected until *after* the millennium in the second resurrection (Rev 20:5, 11-13; cf. John 5:29) at the time of the Great White Throne Judgment (Gary Frazier and Timothy J. Demy, “Resurrections,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004], 331-32). The resurrection/translation and judgment of the non-glorified saints who populate the millennium is not mentioned in Scripture, though this truth may be revealed sometime in the millennium (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 307).

³² The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ is distinctly used of the church, the body of Christ, in the New Testament (Rom 6:11; 8:1; 12:5; 16:3, 9; 1 Cor 1:30; 15:18, 22; 16:24; 2 Cor 5:17; 12:2; Gal 1:22; 3:28; 5:6; Eph 1:1, 13; 2:13; 3:6; Phil 1:1; 4:21; Col 1:2, 28; 1 Thess 2:14; Philemon 23; 1 Pet 5:14). The phrase does not appear in the Gospels or in the book of Revelation.

³³ See Matthew 11:12; 12:12; 13:9; John 10:12, 28, 29.

³⁴ See John 6:15; Acts 23:10; Jude 23.

³⁵ BAG, 108.

³⁶ There are four verses where ἄρπάζω expresses the idea of being “caught up” or “raptured.” In Acts 8:39, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly catches Philip away from his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul wrote about a man (probably himself) who was “caught up” to the third heaven (12:2). He was not sure whether this experience was bodily or not (12:3), but he was “caught up” to paradise where he apparently received special revelation (12:4). Finally, in Revelation 12:5, the male child who will rule the nations (Christ) is “snatched up to God and to his throne.”

Christ to earth (posttribulationism) or to return with Christ to heaven for a period of time (pretribulationism, prewrath) before the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation.³⁷

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

The second major rapture passage is 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 which describes the instantaneous resurrection and translation of believers:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed –
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The first observation here is that Paul refers to this specific teaching as a “mystery.” As with Paul’s other uses of *μυστήριον*, the rapture is something which was not revealed in

³⁷ The term *ἀπάντησις* has been the subject of much discussion. Some posttribulationists argue that *ἀπάντησις* is a technical term which describes “the formal reception of a visiting dignitary, in which a delegation of citizens or city officials would go out to meet a guest on his way to the city and escort him back into town with appropriate pomp and circumstance” (Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 151; cf. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* [New York: Harper & Row, 1973], 561). This is how the term appears to be used in its two other occurrences in the New Testament (Matt 25:6; Acts 28:15), and this would favor posttribulationism since the church would meet Christ in the clouds and immediately accompany Him back to earth. The posttribulationist reading of *ἀπάντησις* is not demanded, though, for four reasons.

1) The word *ἀπάντησις* simply means “meeting” or “to meet” when used with the preposition *εἰς* (Matt 25:6; Acts 28:15; 1 Thess 4:17; cf. BAG 79). The phrase *εἰς ἀπάντησιν* occurs frequently in the LXX without the idea of a welcome party. Sometimes it is used of friendly meetings (Judg 4:18; 11:31, 34; 19:3; 1 Sam 6:13; 9:14; 13:10, 15; 25:32, 34; 30:21; 2 Sam 19:25; 1 Chron 12:17; 19:5; 2 Chron 12:11; 15:2; Jer 28:3 [MT 51:31]; 34:3 [MT 27:3]; 48:6 [MT 41:6]), and other times it is used of hostile meetings like in warfare (Judg 14:5; 15:14; 20:25, 31; 1 Sam 4:1; 15:12; 2 Sam 6:20; 1 Chron 14:8; 2 Chron 19:2; 20:17; 28:9; 1 Esdr 1:23; Judith 5:4; 1 Macc 12:41). Therefore, the context must determine the kind of meeting in view, as even some non-pretribulationist scholars admit (Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 151n18; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC vol. 45 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982], 102-103; D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC vol. 33 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995], 153n86; Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 200-201).

2) The verb form of the noun appears in Mark 14:13 and Luke 17:12 and describes a meeting *within* the city. This militates against the idea that *ἀπάντησις* must describe meeting a dignitary outside the city in order to escort him back into the city. 3) The church does not “go out” to meet the Lord at its own discretion. Rather, the church is caught up by the Lord Himself (Blaising, “A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” 28). 4) The “welcome reception” idea does not support posttribulationism since Christ would be returning with the church to a hostile world (Richard L. Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulation Rapture?” *TMSJ* 13 no. 2 [Fall 2002]: 250). See also Michael R. Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s Use of *ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,” *BBR* 4 (1994): 15-34; Robert H. Gundry, “A Brief Note on ‘Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s Use of *ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,” *BBR* 6 (1996): 39-41.

the Old Testament.³⁸ The general resurrection was previously revealed (Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; cf. John 5:29; 11:24), but the rapture was not. There are also some parallel ideas to the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Paul states that “we will not all sleep” (1 Thess 4:14-16) where “sleep” is a euphemism for death (cf. 1 Cor 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20). The dead will be raised (ἐγείρω), and “we will be changed” (ἀλλάσσω). As in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17, the imminence of the event is seen in the fact that Paul included himself with those who would be raptured (“we”). The translation of believers, both living and dead, will happen instantaneously (“in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye”), and unlike 1 Thessalonians 4, there is an indication here of when the rapture will occur—at the “last trumpet.” The trumpet here is likely the same as in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.³⁹

³⁸ Cf. Rom 11:25; 16:25; Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:26; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Tim 3:16 (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 800).

³⁹ Posttribulationists typically equate the “last trumpet” with the posttribulation trumpet in Matthew 24:31 and the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15, which is followed by the declaration, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” This requires a simultaneous view of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments (Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 198, 226-27). Those representing the prewrath and pretribulation views equate the trumpets in the rapture passages but do not equate them with the seventh trumpet in Revelation or the trumpet before the return of Christ in Matthew 24:31. Several reasons are offered. 1) Paul could not have had the seventh trumpet in mind because Revelation was not written until after his death (Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” 152). This would make no sense to his audience. 2) The “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 may be the last in sequence but not the last trumpet in time. 3) The trumpets in Revelation issue judgment (a great earthquake follows the seventh trumpet in Rev 11:19), but the trumpet at the rapture is one of blessing (Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 189-90). 4) There are good arguments for a chronological view of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments in Revelation which would place the trumpets in the middle of the Tribulation (John McLean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995], 313-51). The trumpet before Christ’s return (Matt 24:31) follows the trumpet judgments in Revelation. 5) The trumpet calls in Matthew 24:31 and Revelation 11:15 do not include an explicit description of the resurrection of the dead.

From a pretribulation perspective, there are several possible explanations for the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 (see Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Come!* 259-69). 1) Paul may be using “last” in contrast to “first”, as he does with the “first” man (Adam) and the “last” man (Christ) in 1 Corinthians 15:45. The first trumpet in Scripture was used to assemble the nation of Israel to meet with God on Mount Sinai where they received the Law which began the ministry of death (Exod 19:10-20; cf. 2 Cor 3:7-9; Heb 12:18-21). The last trumpet will call the church to assemble together to meet the Lord in the air, and the resurrection/translation of the church will signal the end of death. 2) Paul taught the Corinthians the eschatological association of Israel’s seven feasts (e.g., 1 Cor 5:6-8; 15:20-24). The last trumpet is

John 14:1-3

Of the many passages in the Gospels where Jesus speaks of His return, John 14:1-3 is considered to be a rapture passage because it speaks of Jesus' coming to take the disciples to His Father's house to be with Him:

1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

In this passage, Jesus comes specifically for believers, and no judgment is mentioned as in other passages which depict His second coming. Also, Jesus takes the believers to the Father's house to be with Him forever. Finally, there are similarities between the language of John 14:1-3 and that of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, indicating that the same event is in view.⁴⁰ Most believe that John 14:1-3 describes the return of Christ for believers, either in a pretribulational or posttribulational rapture.

Summary

The three main rapture passages in the New Testament are 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, and John 14:3. The Lord will come again for his own, and the dead in Christ will be resurrected before the living believers are translated into their

associated with the Feast of Trumpets which occurred historically before the Day of Atonement (Lev 23). The Day of Atonement will be fulfilled in the Tribulation, so the Feast of Trumpets will precede it and will be fulfilled by the rapture of the church. 3) Trumpets were used in war in both the Old Testament times and in the Roman army (e.g., 2 Sam 18:16; 20:22; cf. 1 Cor 14:8). The first trumpet gathered the troops for battle, and the last trumpet called the troops home. The "last trumpet" at the rapture will end the spiritual battle that the church has been fighting (2 Cor 6:7; 10:3-4; Eph 6:10-18; 1 Thess 5:8) and will call the church to its heavenly home (Phil 3:20). 4) The Roman army used trumpets to signal the beginning and ending of a guard's watch. The "last trumpet" will signal the end of the church's watch on the world.

⁴⁰ The similarities between John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 include the following words and concepts: troubled (14:1)–grieve (4:13); believe (14:1)–believe (4:14); God, Me (14:1)–Jesus, God (4:14); told you (14:2)–say to you (4:15); come again (14:3)–coming of the Lord (4:15); receive you (14:3)–caught up (4:17); to myself (14:3)–to meet the Lord (4:17); where I am, there you may be (14:3)–always with the Lord (4:17). See Mal Couch, "Gospels," in *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 365.

glorified bodies. This will happen at the “last trumpet” and will include a loud command and the voice of an archangel. The believers will meet the Lord in the air and will be with the Lord forever. The only time indicator from these passages is the “last trumpet”, but the timing of the last trumpet is debatable.

A Case for the Pretribulational Rapture

Building a case for any rapture view requires looking at Scripture as a whole, making logical deductions, and harmonizing Scripture. The case for the pretribulational rapture here will be cumulative, and the four strongest arguments will be presented.⁴¹ The operating assumptions are 1) that Scripture is inspired and thus fits together, and 2) that prophecy is to be interpreted in a normal, literal manner. The first assumption makes the present task worthwhile, for without the inspiration and unity of Scripture, no one could make sense of eschatological passages. The second assumption is for the purpose of objectivity in interpretation.⁴² The application of literal hermeneutics results in a distinction between Israel and the church in God’s program and a future for national

⁴¹ There is obvious overlap between the arguments in this paper and the arguments used by other pretribulationists of the past. However, pretribulationists sometimes overstate the case. For example, Walvoord lists fifty arguments for pretribulationism (Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 191-99), but many of these arguments can be easily countered or reinterpreted by those holding other views. This paper seeks to avoid the peripheral arguments and to just use the four best arguments. The other arguments for pretribulationism fit well with the view once it is established, but pretribulationism as a whole appears weak when appeals are made to some arguments which are not demanded. One example is the argument from 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit who can only be taken out of the world if the church is raptured (ibid., 196). This very well may be true, but since there are other interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, the argument will not carry much weight with non-pretribulationists.

⁴² Of course, literal interpretation is not the same as literalistic interpretation. Figures of speech are recognized by pretribulationists. See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 1-64; Elliott E. Johnson, “Apocalyptic Genre and Literal Interpretation,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 197-210; idem., “What I Mean by Historical-Grammatical Interpretation and How that Differs from Spiritual Interpretation,” *GTJ* 11 no. 2 (1990): 157-69; idem., “Literal Interpretation: A Plea for Consensus,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 211-20; Thomas D. Ice, “Dispensational Hermeneutics,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 28-49; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 79-104; Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

Israel,⁴³ but this assumption is not strictly necessary for pretribulationism⁴⁴ and is not always shared by non-pretribulationists.⁴⁵ Likewise, literal hermeneutics typically leads to a futurist view of both Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27)⁴⁶ and Revelation 6-19⁴⁷ and to the premillennial return of Christ to reign on the earth as depicted in Revelation

⁴³ See Donald K. Campbell, "The Church in God's Prophetic Program," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 149-61; Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "The Future for Israel in God's Plan," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 163-79; S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 181-96; Robert L. Saucy, "Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 239-59; H. Wayne House, ed., *Israel: The Land and the People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *JETS* 44, no. 3 (Sept 2001): 435-50; Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism must be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); H. Wayne House, "The Future of National Israel," *BSac* 166 (October-December 2009): 463-81; Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

⁴⁴ For example, pretribulationists Bock and Blaising do not recognize a sharp distinction between Israel and the church (Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 50-51). This view is compatible with pretribulationism, but it fails to explain the reason for removing the church from the entire Tribulation. If those saved during the Tribulation (both Jew and Gentile) are also a part of the church, then the result would be that the church is removed from the Tribulation and the church goes through the Tribulation. See John Brumett, "Does Progressive Dispensationalism Teach a Posttribulation Rapture?" in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke, Jr. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 285-306. In reply, Blaising has recently stated, "For progressive dispensationalists, the rapture occurs at the beginning of the tribulation because God wills it so, as revealed by Paul in his Thessalonian correspondence, not because it is necessary to separate the program of the church" (Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," 71). Again, there does not appear to be any purpose for removing the church from the Tribulation.

⁴⁵ E.g., Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 113-15, 130; Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," 75-77.

⁴⁶ See John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 216-37; Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9:24-27," in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke, Jr. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 215-56.

⁴⁷ See Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 268-310; idem., "The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1-6," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 227-38; Robert L. Thomas, "A Classical Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 177-229.

19-20.⁴⁸ Many of these views are shared by proponents of pretribulationism, the prewrath rapture, and posttribulationism, but pretribulationism can be established without necessarily addressing these other matters.

Differences Between Rapture and Second Coming Passages

The first step in building a case for pretribulationism is demonstrating that the rapture and the Second Coming are separate events.⁴⁹ While it is readily acknowledged that there are similarities between passages dealing with the rapture and the Second Coming (e.g., the trumpets in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Matthew 24:31), the first hint that the rapture may be a separate event is that there are a number of significant differences between rapture passages and Second Coming passages.⁵⁰ The contention here is that pretribulationism best harmonizes these differences.⁵¹ The main rapture passages are John

⁴⁸ See Jack S. Deere, "Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6," *BSac* 135 (January-March 1978): 58-73; Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, eds. *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 353-435; Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 155-227.

⁴⁹ Pretribulationists are often charged with imposing their system upon Scripture because they believe that the return of Christ will happen in two parts (e.g., Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 142-45), but all views must recognize that there are two phases to Christ's coming – the rapture first and then the return to earth to judge the world and set up the kingdom (Mayhue, "Why a Pretribulation Rapture?" 250). It may appear simpler to read all of the passages as if the rapture and the Second Coming were one event, but this is just an assumption which also needs to be supported by biblical arguments (Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," 203). Doing a word study will not answer the question since there are many words for Christ's return and since some of them are used in both "rapture" and "Second Coming" passages (e.g., *παρουσία* in 1 Thess 4:15 and Matt 24:27) without an indication of the timing. See Edward E. Hindson, "The Rapture and the Return: Two Aspects of Christ's Coming," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 153-54.

⁵⁰ The prewrath and midtribulation views both see differences which distinguish the rapture from the Second Coming, so the debate here is mainly with posttribulationism. As Feinberg points out, all pretribulationists must demonstrate is that it is possible that two separate events are in view (see John S. Feinberg, "Arguing About the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995], 193-94).

⁵¹ Pretribulationists often present upwards of a dozen or more differences (e.g., Tim LaHaye, "The Second Coming: A Two-phased Event," in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds. Tim LaHaye,

14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The main Second Coming passages are Zechariah 14; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; and Revelation 19.⁵²

The Rapture and the Father's House

In John 14:3, Jesus promised that after He goes to prepare a place at the Father's house, He would come again to take believers to be with Himself. If there will be a pretribulational (or prewrath) rapture, then Christ will meet the church in the air and take believers immediately to the Father's house in heaven before returning at the end of the Tribulation with the church to the earth. However, posttribulationism teaches that Jesus will rapture the church, meet them in the air, and then immediately return to the earth. The promise of taking believers to the Father's house in heaven is never fulfilled because the church never sees heaven. This appears to be a major discrepancy that is best explained by a pretribulational (or prewrath) rapture. Posttribulationists have offered a number of responses which state in one way or another that Jesus is not promising to take believers to heaven, but none of these is very convincing to this author.⁵³

Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011], 55), but some of these can be harmonized or explained by posttribulationism. For example, the fact that the coming of Christ is called the "blessed hope" in Titus 2:13 (a "rapture passage") and the fact that all the peoples of the earth will mourn when Christ returns (Rev 1:7) can be harmonized from a posttribulational perspective. The blessed hope may be for believers who are raptured as the Lord returns, and the mourning may come from unbelievers who are facing impending doom when Christ returns.

⁵² There are many other verses, but these are the main passages. Geisler lists the following as rapture passages: John 14:3; 1 Cor 1:7-8; 15:51-53; 16:22; Phil 3:20-21; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:9, 23; 2 Thess 2:1; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28-3:2; Jude 21; Rev 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20. He lists the following as Second Coming passages: Dan 2:44-45; 7:9-14; 12:1-3; Zech 12:1-9; 14:1-15; Matt 13:41; 24:14-31; 26:64; Mark 13:14-27; 14:62; Luke 13:25-28; Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:6-10; 2:8; 2 Pet 3:1-14; Jude 14-15; Rev 1:7; 19:11-20:6 (Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four*, 624; cf. Hindson, "The Rapture and the Return," 156).

⁵³ Posttribulationists do not all agree on the interpretation of John 14:3. 1) Moo believes that the Second Coming is in view but that one should not read "heaven" into Jesus' promise that he would take believers to be with Himself (Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 196-97; cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 567-68). Moo's interpretation does not adequately account for Jesus' reference to the many rooms in His Father's house.

The Rapture and the Olivet Discourse

Reading the three major rapture passages in light of the Olivet Discourse reveals a few interesting differences.⁵⁴ 1) There are many signs that lead up to the Second Coming (Matt 24:33), but the rapture passages have no hint of signs. 2) In the Olivet Discourse, the elect are gathered from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matt 24:31), but there is no mention of the resurrection of dead believers or the translation of living believers. 3) The Olivet Discourse teaches that judgment will follow the Tribulation and the return of Christ and that the kingdom will follow the judgment (Matt 25:31-46), but there is no mention of immediate judgment or the kingdom in the rapture passages. 4) In the Olivet Discourse, the angels gather the elect (Matt 24:31; cf. Matt 13:39), but the Lord *Himself* (αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος) comes down to meet the church at the rapture (1 Thess 4:16).⁵⁵

Why would He be preparing a place for the disciples if the disciples never go there? 2) Gundry believes that Jesus is saying that He is going away to the cross to prepare spiritual abodes for His disciples through His death and resurrection. His coming again to receive the disciples was fulfilled after the resurrection when Jesus came to the disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit upon them (John 20:19, 22; Gundry, *First the Antichrist*, 110-112). Gundry's view does not adequately address the context of John 14, which indicates that Jesus is going to His Father in heaven (14:4-6, 25-26, 28) or the promise to receive the disciples to Himself so that the disciples would be with Jesus. 3) Blomberg believes that the Father's house is an allusion to the temple and that Jesus' promise will be fulfilled after the millennium in the new heaven and new earth (Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," 78-79). However, Blomberg's interpretation is doubtful since there is no temple ("my Father's house") in the eternal state (Rev 21:22). Additionally, placing Jesus' promise to "come again" to receive the disciples at the end of the millennium is odd because Jesus will already be with the disciples during the millennium. Finally, there is an important difference between "my Father's house" in John 2:16 and John 14:2 which shows that Jesus did not have the earthly temple in mind. In John 2:16, the masculine noun οἶκος is used, but in John 14:2, the feminine noun οἰκία appears. Dean notes that this difference shows that Jesus was not speaking of the temple in John 14:2, since οἶκος is typically used in the LXX with "of God" to refer to the temple, but οἰκία is never used this way (Robert Dean, Jr., "Three Foundational Rapture Passages," in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds., Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011], 98).

⁵⁴ See Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," 80-86.

⁵⁵ In response, posttribulationists argue that the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:31 is a reference to the rapture so that Matthew 24 is a rapture passage where these teachings occur (Douglas J. Moo, "Response," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 98). But this is just an assumption which does not change the fact

The Rapture and Separating Believers and Unbelievers

In the rapture passages, the dead in Christ are raised, and the living believers are translated instantaneously. However, in two of Jesus' parables, there is no mention of the rapture at the end of the age. Instead, Jesus taught that the angels would separate the wicked from the righteous at the end of the age (Matt 13:47-50) when the King returns to establish His kingdom (Matt 25:31-46). But Jesus taught that at this time the nations will be gathered together and separated before the Lord "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:32). This gathering appears to take place on the *earth* where the King has taken His throne, but the gathering at the rapture happens in the *air*. Furthermore, the gathering in Matthew 25 includes *all the nations* (wicked and righteous), but the gathering at the rapture is for the church only. Finally, the separation of the sheep and goats seems redundant if the sheep have already been separated in the rapture. It appears that the gathering and separating of Matthew 25:31-46 is a separate event from the gathering of the church to meet the Lord in the air.⁵⁶

that there is no mention of signs, judgment, or the kingdom in the rapture passages and that there is no mention of the resurrection of believers in the Olivet Discourse. This would not account for the difference of who gathers the elect (angels or the Lord Himself) either. These differences do not *prove* that two separate events are in view, but they at least raise this suspicion.

An important and related question is whether the Olivet Discourse concerns only Israel (pretribulationism) or all believers (posttribulationism). See Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," 35-52; Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 212-23. Many assumptions are made in the interpretations, but the Jewishness of the Olivet Discourse favors the pretribulationist view in the opinion of this author. The Jewish elements include the following: 1) The background to the Tribulation is the time of *Jacob's* trouble (Jer 30:7) and Daniel's seventieth seven which is for "*your* people" and "*your* holy city" (Dan 9:24), referring to the Jews and the city of Jerusalem respectively (cf. "labor pains" in Jer 30:6 and Matt 24:8). 2) The abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15) comes from Daniel's prophecies concerning the nation of Israel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The abomination in Daniel 11:31 was fulfilled when Antiochus IV Epiphanes defiled the Jewish temple, and the future abomination of desolation will stand "in the holy place" (Matt 24:15) which is arguably the *Jewish* temple in the Tribulation (cf. 2 Thess 2:4). 3) Those in *Judea* are to flee to the mountains (Matt 24:16). 4) The Jewish *Sabbath* will be observed (Matt 24:20). The fact that this distress will be unequalled in history (Matt 24:21) argues against the historical fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse in the destruction of the temple in AD 70. See also Larry D. Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws in the Olive Discourse," *TMSJ* 13 no. 2 (2002): 177-80.

The Rapture and Revelation 19

In the account of the Second Coming in Revelation 19:11-21, it is surprising that there is no mention of the rapture of the church.⁵⁷ The saints appear to already be with the Lord when He returns, clothed in white linen (Rev 19:7; cf. 19:14; Jude 14). Moo's response is that there is not a progression of events in Revelation 19-20. Rather, the events described appear to happen in conjunction with the return of Christ.⁵⁸ But if this view were maintained, then there would be no time for the judgment seat of Christ and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The church would be raptured as Christ returns to earth and would receive the white garments before going to the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10).⁵⁹ But if Revelation 19-20 is sequential, then the church has already been glorified and returns with Christ from heaven. A pretribulation (or prewrath) rapture would account for the glorified church being with Christ when He returns.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Gundry has argued that the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 happens at the end of the millennium and is the same as the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 (Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973], 137). This interpretation is fraught with difficulties because of the many differences between Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15. See Eugene W. Pond, "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats," *BSac* 159 (April-June 2002): 215-18; Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four*, 620.

⁵⁷ Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," 81-82.

⁵⁸ Moo, "Response," 100.

⁵⁹ Feinberg, "Arguing about the Rapture," 204-205.

⁶⁰ Pretribulationists often argue that since the terms "church" and "churches" are missing from the chapters depicting the Tribulation (Revelation 6-18), then the church must not be on earth during the Tribulation. It is peculiar that these terms are not mentioned, but the church is not directly mentioned in the heavenly scenes of Revelation 4-19 either. Revelation 18:20 may be the closest reference since it mentions "saints and apostles and prophets." However, there are several interesting arguments that the church is already in heaven before the Tribulation begins. See Robert Gromacki, "Where is 'the Church' in Revelation 4-19?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 353-67.

The Imminent Return of Christ

One of the tensions that pretribulationism helps to resolve is that which exists between the imminent return of Christ and the signs which accompany His return. The New Testament teaches 1) that Christ will come like a thief in the night (e.g., Matt 24:43; 25:13; Luke 12:39; Rev 3:3; 16:15); 2) that the Day of the Lord will also come suddenly (e.g., 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10); and 3) that there will be signs before Christ returns to the earth. The signs include the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Mark 13:10; Matt 24:14), the Great Tribulation (Mark 13:19-20; Rev 7:14), false prophets who work signs and wonders (Mark 13:22; Matt 24:23-24), signs in the heavens (Mark 13:24-26; Matt 24:29-30; Luke 21:25-27), the coming man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:1-10; 1 John 2:18; Rev 13), and the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:25-26). Is the church to expect Christ to return at any moment, or will there be signs which indicate that His return is “near, right at the door” (Matt 24:33)? How does one resolve this tension?

The doctrine of imminence has been difficult for both the prewrath and the posttribulationist views because of the belief that the church will go through the Tribulation (either partially or entirely) and because the church will see the signs leading up to the prewrath rapture or posttribulationist rapture/return. Some deny that the term *imminence* means that Christ can return at any moment because the church is to expect the signs mentioned in the New Testament.⁶¹ Some redefine imminence to mean that Christ can come during any generation instead of any moment. Yet the explanations given are often awkward and confusing,⁶² and there are too many teachings about the

⁶¹ See Gerald B. Stanton, “The Doctrine of Imminence: Is it Biblical?” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 228-33.

sudden return of Christ in the New Testament to dismiss it or redefine imminence.⁶³

Pretribulationism, on the other hand, offers a better solution because it maintains that both the rapture and the beginning of the Day of the Lord are imminent in that they can occur at any moment, even though there will be signs leading up to the Second Coming of Christ as predicted by Jesus.⁶⁴

Promised Exemption from the Tribulation

The New Testament teaches that the church is not appointed to God's wrath.⁶⁵ In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul states that Jesus "rescues us from the coming wrath." In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul states, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." The context of the Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians, the futuristic idea of "coming wrath" in 1:10, and the mention of "labor pains" (ὠδίν) in 5:3 (cf. Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8) point toward deliverance from God's

⁶² See the examples in Robert L. Thomas, "The Doctrine of Imminence in Two Recent Eschatological Systems," *BSac* 157 (October-December 2000): 460-63. Grudem's attempt at preserving imminence by stating that it is unlikely but possible that the signs have already been fulfilled is equally unconvincing (Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 432-36).

⁶³ See Earl D. Radmacher, "The Imminent Return of the Lord," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 247-67; Robert L. Thomas, "The 'Comings' of Christ in Revelation 2-3," *TMSJ* 7 no. 2 (Fall 1996): 153-81; John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Is Christ's Return Imminent?" *TMSJ* 11 no. 1 (2000): 7-18; Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *BSac* 158 (April-June 2001): 138-51; idem., "Imminence," in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 144-48; idem., "The Doctrine of an Imminent Rapture," in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds., Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 77-90.

⁶⁴ For a full development of the dual imminence of the rapture and the beginning of the Day of the Lord, see Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," *TMSJ* 13 no. 2 (2002): 191-214.

⁶⁵ E.g., Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 216-217; Tim LaHaye, Richard L. Mayhue, and Wayne A. Brindle, "Pretribulationism," in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 289-90; Tim LaHaye, "The Wrath to Come is Not for Believer," in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds., Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 129-39.

eschatological wrath,⁶⁶ not just God's eternal wrath (Rom 5:9).⁶⁷ The pretribulational argument is that since the church is not appointed to wrath, then the church must be removed before the time of God's wrath upon the world. The rapture is God's means of protecting the church from the Tribulation. The prewrath and posttribulational views also interpret 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9 as promises of protection from the wrath of God.⁶⁸ The prewrath view is that the church will suffer the wrath of Satan and the Antichrist in the first half of the Tribulation⁶⁹ but that the church will be raptured before the outpouring of divine wrath, which begins at the opening of the seventh seal judgment sometime in the second half of the Tribulation.⁷⁰ The posttribulational view is that the church will go through the entire Tribulation but that the church will be protected from divine wrath, which only falls on unbelievers (cf. Rev 9:4; 16:2), and from the final outpouring of God's wrath at the return of Christ.⁷¹ The major difficulty with the prewrath and posttribulational views is that they impose an artificial distinction between

⁶⁶ Wallace argues that a better text-critical reading of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 has ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης instead of ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης. This would make the idea of deliverance "from" wrath stronger, since ἐκ with ῥύομαι is used elsewhere of deliverance "through" deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10). See Daniel B. Wallace, "A Textual Problem in 1 Thessalonians 1:10: Ἐκ τῆς Ὀργῆς vs. Ἀπὸ τῆς Ὀργῆς," *BSac* 147 (October-December 1990): 470-79. Wallace's point is inconsequential for this paper since both the prewrath and posttribulational views under consideration interpret 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as deliverance *from* God's eschatological wrath.

⁶⁷ Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position," 53. Eschatological wrath is also mentioned in Romans 1:18; 2:5; Ephesians 5:6; Colossian 3:6.

⁶⁸ See Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position," 50-63.

⁶⁹ Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 144-45; Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 150.

⁷⁰ Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 35; Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered*, 57; Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 141-50.

⁷¹ Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 192-94, 232-33; Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 84-85.

God's wrath and man's/Satan's wrath. It is better to view the Day of the Lord as the entire seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy instead of the second half or the end.⁷²

In addition to the promises in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, Jesus made a promise to the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Much ink has been spilled over this one verse because it provides a possible proof-text for pretribulationism if the church is promised removal *from* the Tribulation.⁷³ Posttribulationists believe that the promise is to protect the church *through* the Tribulation,⁷⁴ and either interpretation would fit with the prewrath view.⁷⁵

Before evaluating the arguments for the pretribulationist and posttribulationist interpretations, a few observations about Revelation 3:10 are in order. 1) The promise of

⁷² Craig Blaising, "A Pretribulation Response," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 166-67, 245-51; cf. John A. McLean, "Another Look at Rosenthal's 'Pre-Wrath Rapture,'" *BSac* 148 (October-December 1991): 387-98; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Is There a Pre-Wrath Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 381-411; Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 57-81.

⁷³ Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *BSac* 137 (1980): 252-66; reprinted in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 367-79; David G. Winfrey, "The Great Tribulation: Kept 'Out of' or 'Through'?" *GTJ* 13 (1982): 3-18; Thomas R. Edgar, "Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10," *GTJ* 3 (1982): 19-49; Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, 113-18; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 283-90; Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," 211-17; Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Come!* 208-18; Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," 63-72; Michael J. Svingel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reassessment," *TJ* 22ns (Spring 2001): 25-28; Keith H. Essex, "The Rapture and the Book of Revelation," *TMSJ* 13 no. 1 (2002): 221-27; Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," 62-65.

⁷⁴ See Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 85-86; Douglas J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 197-98; Gundry, *First the Antichrist*, 53-60; Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 224-26; Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," 81-82.

⁷⁵ See Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 231-41; Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 149-50.

protection to the Philadelphian church is not just for that local church. The statement, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:13; cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) is an invitation to any of the churches.⁷⁶ The whole testimony of Revelation is for the churches (Rev 22:16). This cannot be limited to just the churches in the first century.⁷⁷ 2) The protection in Revelation 3:10 is from the eschatological judgment which unfolds in the rest of Revelation. Unlike the local persecution in Smyrna that lasted for ten days (Rev 2:10), the hour of trial here is about to come upon “the whole world” (cf. Rev 12:9; 13:3; 16:14).⁷⁸ Also, the definite article (τῆς) points to a particular hour of trial, namely the Tribulation period.⁷⁹ Finally, the hour of trial is for testing “those who live on the earth.” The phrase κατοικούντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς occurs ten other times in Revelation and nowhere else in Scripture, and it always refers to the wicked who follow the beast and experience God’s wrath in the Tribulation (Rev 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2]; 13:8, 12, 14 [2]; 17:2, 8). 3) The difference between the pretribulational view and the posttribulational view lies in the meaning of the phrase τηρήσω ἐκ (“keep from”). The verb τηρέω is used seventy times in the New Testament and has the basic meaning of “to keep, guard, preserve, protect, observe.”⁸⁰ The context must determine the nature of the keeping or protection. The preposition ἐκ could likewise favor either

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 150, 294.

⁷⁷ Contra Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 449-50.

⁷⁸ Osborne notes that the participle μελλούσης (“which is about to”) is used in an eschatological sense elsewhere in Revelation (1:19; 8:13; 10:7; 12:5; 17:8), although the context must determine the sense (cf. 2:10; 3:16; 6:11; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 193).

⁷⁹ Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” 259-60.

⁸⁰ BAG, 822-23.

pretribulationism or posttribulationism. It often implies emergence, but it sometimes implies separation (e.g., John 20:1; Acts 12:7; 2 Cor 1:10; 1 Thess 1:10).

There are several arguments in favor of pretribulationism here. 1) Edgar points out that while ἐκ is often combined with verbs of motion when conveying the idea of “emergence”, ἐκ cannot be combined with a verb of nonmotion (such as τηρέω) to mean “emerge.”⁸¹ 2) Although John could have used τηρέω ἀπὸ (cf. James 1:27), which would perhaps be stronger than τηρέω ἐκ,⁸² to communicate the idea of separation, it seems that he would have certainly used τηρέω with ἐν, εἰς, or διὰ if he had wanted to communicate “preservation in/through” the Tribulation. The phrase τηρέω ἐν occurs three times in the New Testament and connotes the idea continued existence within a state of conditions (Acts 12:5; 1 Pet 1:4; Jude 21). Since this is the established meaning of τηρέω ἐν, then it cannot also be the same meaning for τηρέω ἐκ.⁸³

3) The phrase τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15b supports the pretribulational view of Revelation 3:10. Since this is the only other place where this exact phrase appears in the New Testament, it is important to study the text carefully. In John 17:15, Jesus says, “My prayer is not that you take (ἄρῃς) them out (ἐκ) of the world but that you protect (τηρήσῃς) them from (ἐκ) the evil one.” Posttribulationists interpret John 17:15b as “preserving from the power of evil when in its very presence.”⁸⁴ Even though believers

⁸¹ See Edgar, “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” 212-13. Wallace also states that stative verbs override the transitive force of prepositions so that all that remains is the stative idea (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 359).

⁸² See Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” 69-70.

⁸³ Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulational Rapture?” 248.

⁸⁴ Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 85.

are to remain in the world which is under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19), they will be preserved from the power of Satan in a spiritual sense.⁸⁵ This is in contrast to being taken out (ἄρῃς ἐκ) of the world (17:15a) which communicates the idea of separation better than τηρέω ἐκ. However, since the believers were already in the world, then ἐκ with αἴρω must mean “out from within” – the very sense in which posttribulationists interpret τηρέω ἐκ.⁸⁶ John 17:15b, however, is in contrast to 17:15a, as indicated by ἀλλά which begins the second clause. Being “kept from the evil one” (τηρέω ἐκ) must be understood as “preservation from an outside position”⁸⁷ or something similar which contrasts with 17:15a.⁸⁸ The teaching of John 17:15b, then, parallels the idea in Revelation 3:10 of protection *from* something, not protection within.⁸⁹

4) The pretribulation interpretation best preserves the promise of protection to the Philadelphian church. Thomas’ summary statement here is helpful.

Preservation normally means protection from death. What good does it do to be preserved from the physical consequences of divine wrath and still fall prey to a martyr’s death? The source of the bodily harm is inconsequential when incentive to persevere is in view. A promise of preservation is meaningless if the saints face the same fate as sinners during the Tribulation...[This] would be tantamount to a

⁸⁵ Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 225.

⁸⁶ Contra Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 226n84.

⁸⁷ Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” 258.

⁸⁸ Moo asks what “outside position” could mean in relation to the evil one, a person (Moo, Response,” 94-95). He takes issue with the spatial concept. Perhaps a different phrase would be helpful, but the idea of separation from the evil one and from the hour of trial is what is important. The posttribulation understanding of “protection from within” the evil one is equally bizarre. How can one be protected from within Satan? To solve this problem, Moo adds the phrase “from the power of” (the evil one). But “from the power of” is not in the verse, showing the difficulty of the posttribulation interpretation (Edgar, “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” 214). Additionally, 1 John 5:19 states that believers are not under the control of the evil one (Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulation Rapture?” 248).

⁸⁹ The argument for “spiritual protection” in John 17:15b also fails because uses of τηρέω in John 17:11, 12 speak of eternal security, not spiritual protection in this life (contra Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 225).

threat rather than a promise, a threat that for remaining faithful, they would experience worse persecution than they had already. Such is completely inappropriate at this point in the message where a promise to motivate the recipients is required. Rather, they were encouraged to bear their present suffering and continue their faithfulness and endurance, because of the promised deliverance from the time of trouble that would overtake the world, but would not overtake them.⁹⁰

For posttribulationism, the promised protection is only partial and selective since many saints will suffer and die at the hands of Satan and the Antichrist (Rev 6:9-11; 7:14). Moo asks, “Are we to suppose that God grants to the saints at the very end of history a protection from physical harm that he has not given to his saints throughout history?”⁹¹ The answer from the promise of Jesus is, “Yes.” The idea of *spiritual* (not physical) protection *within* the Tribulation misses the point of the promise. The focus of the promise is on protection from the “hour”, not from the “trial.”

In summary, the church is promised protection from the eschatological wrath of God on the basis of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9. The time of God’s wrath is the entire seven-year Tribulation, not just the second half of the Tribulation or the final outpouring of wrath before the return of Christ. Additionally, the church is promised in Revelation 3:10 that it will be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the entire world. The pretribulationist interpretation of Revelation 3:10 appears to be weighty, but pretribulationism does not rest on this verse alone. In fact, the rapture is not explicitly taught in Revelation 3:10. The verb τηρέω does not have the same forceful idea as ἀρπάζω in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Rather, Revelation 3:10 describes the results of the

⁹⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 286-87.

⁹¹ The participle μελλούσης (“which is about to”) modifies ὥρας (“hour”), not πειρασμοῦ, showing that the hour is the focus, not the trial (Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 288). The protection is from “the hour”, not from “the trial.”

rapture, not the rapture itself.⁹² The protection *from* this time presupposes the removal of the church.⁹³

Populating the Millennium

One final argument for pretribulationism is that it best solves the problem of populating the millennium.⁹⁴ Posttribulationism posits that all believers will be raptured just before the Christ returns to slay the wicked and establish His kingdom. However, if all believers are resurrected to glorified bodies, then there will be no natural (non-glorified) believers to repopulate the earth during the millennium in fulfillment of prophecy (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; 11:6-9; 65:20-25). Also, there would be no unbelievers to rebel against the Lord at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-9). On the other hand, pretribulationism teaches that although the church will be raptured and glorified before the millennium, there will be a large number of Jewish and Gentile saints who survive the millennium and who enter into the millennial kingdom in natural bodies. They will bear children and repopulate the earth, and many of their unbelieving offspring will join Satan's final revolt at the end of the millennium. Posttribulationists have offered various

⁹² Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John," 27;

⁹³ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 288.

⁹⁴ The prewrath view is similar to pretribulationism because there are still people who live on earth during the second half of the Tribulation after the church is raptured. However, Hultberg faces other problems. He believes that the church has replaced Israel (Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 113-14) and that the great multitude in Revelation 7:9 is the church. But if the church is raptured halfway through the Tribulation, then who are the believers in the second half of the Tribulation? Hultberg's supersessionism would only allow for one people of God (the church) so that anyone who is saved after the rapture will also be a part of the church. Thus, the church is raptured before the outpouring of God's wrath, but a later group (which is also the church) will experience the time of God's wrath (in opposition to 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9 which form the basis for the prewrath view). If Hultberg goes back on his supersessionism and allows for Jewish believers after the prewrath rapture, then there will be a problem repopulating the millennium since the 144,000 witnesses are eunuchs (Rev 14:4) and since the portraits of the millennium in Scripture include people from other nations (e.g., Isa 2:2-4).

solutions to this problem,⁹⁵ but the most common view is that there will be three groups of people at Christ's return: saints who are raptured, rebels who are slain, and others who submit to Christ sometime during the millennium.⁹⁶ The major problem with this rather novel view is that it teaches that unbelievers will inherit the kingdom of God which is contrary to Scripture (John 3:3, 5; 1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21). Pretribulationism, and the prewrath view to a degree, offers the best solution to this problem.

Summary

The case for the pretribulational rapture begins by recognizing some of the important differences between the so-called "rapture passages" and "Second Coming passages." Non-pretribulationists have offered alternative explanations, but the differences in the accounts suggest that two events are in view. The New Testament teaching on the imminent return of Christ requires an imminent rapture unless one wants to give up the doctrine of imminence. The signs of Christ's coming refer to the Second Coming, not to the rapture. The imminence of the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) is preserved in pretribulationism because after the church is raptured, the judgment of God will begin suddenly. The church is promised redemption from the Tribulation, but many will become believers during the Tribulation and will survive to populate the millennium.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the rapture is explicitly taught in at least three passages in the New Testament, that pretribulationism has precedents in the history of the church before the time of Darby, and that the Darby did not borrow his teaching on the

⁹⁵ See Feinberg, "Arguing About the Rapture," 201-204.

⁹⁶ "Many will simply surrender without trusting Christ and will thus enter the millennium as unbelievers" (Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 450).

pretribulation rapture from a cultic prophetess. Rather, he arrived at his views through a careful study of the Scriptures. The case for the pretribulation rapture begins by recognizing differences in the rapture passages and the Second Coming passages which suggest that two separate events are taught. The imminent return of Christ for the church and the promise of protection from the time of God's wrath strengthen the view that the rapture will happen *before* the Tribulation, especially in light of Revelation 3:10. Finally, pretribulationism best accounts for how the earth will be repopulated during the millennium. Although the arguments presented here have been challenged by non-pretribulationists, pretribulationism rests on a cumulative case. If one were to compare the pretribulation and non-pretribulation explanations of the timing of the rapture, it is the contention of this author that pretribulationism makes the best sense of the whole teaching of Scripture on the rapture and the return of Christ.

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