The Doctrine of the Rapture

A Case for the Post-Tribulational View

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8th ed. — Oct 23, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Earlier in my training at an evangelical seminary, I was taught—and I fully believed—that the rapture of the church would occur before the period the Bible calls the "great tribulation." This view, commonly known as the **pre-tribulation rapture**, holds that the church will be taken up to meet Christ in the air roughly seven years (or more) before His Second Coming.[1] In this framework, the sequence unfolds as follows: first, the church is raptured; then the earth enters an unprecedented time of suffering known as the great tribulation, during which the Antichrist rises to power; and finally, the Lord Jesus Christ visibly and physically returns to defeat the Antichrist and establish His kingdom on earth.

The pre-tribulation rapture is not the only view, of course, though it remains widely held among evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, many evangelicals embrace alternative positions, the most common being the **post-tribulation** view—namely, that Christ will rapture the church at the end of the tribulation in conjunction with His Second Coming. Some have held to a **mid-tribulation** view, believing that Christ will rapture His church at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation period (approximately three and a half years before the Second Coming).[2] Although relatively few evangelicals today maintain a mid-tribulation position, a more recent and somewhat similar view has gained a measure of support: the **pre-wrath** theory.[3] According to this perspective, the church will remain on earth for most of the seven-year period preceding the Second Coming but will be raptured near the end, just before God's final

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[1] A few of the more influential books and articles defending the pre-trib rapture are: John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958); John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976); Paul D. Feinberg "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* ed. Richard R. Reiter (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 9-86; John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (SP Publications, 1990); Craig Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture*, ed. Alan Hultberg (Zondervan, 2010), 25-73, 103-108; and John F. Hart, ed., *Evidence for the Rapture; A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2015).

[2] Gleason L. Archer, "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth Week Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* ed. Richard R. Reiter (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 113-45. Although it has often been stated that J. Oliver Buswell held to a mid-trib view, he actually believed that the rapture would occur at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962], 450).

[3] Marvin J. Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990); Charles Cooper, *God's Elect and the Great Tribulation: An Interpretation of Matthew 24:1–31 and Daniel 9* (Milesburg, Pennsylvania: Strong Tower Publishing, 2008); Alan Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 109-154, 178-83; Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2013); and *Prewrath: A Very Short Introduction to the Great Tribulation, Rapture, and Day of the Lord* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2015).

outpouring of wrath. In other words, the church experiences most of the tribulation but is removed prior to the climactic segment in which God's judgments are unleashed upon the earth.

After much reflection, I must acknowledge that I find the pre-tribulation rapture theory lacking in solid biblical support, even though I hold deep respect for many Christian brothers who remain committed to it. In contrast, the historic position of the church has been the post-tribulation view, and I am persuaded that this remains the interpretation most consistent with Scripture.[4] I want to emphasize that the Bible clearly presents the great tribulation as preceding the Second Coming of Christ. I also affirm that when Christ returns, He will establish His kingdom on earth and reign for a thousand years, in accordance with Revelation 20 and other passages describing His millennial rule. For this reason, I remain committed to **premillennialism**—the conviction that Christ will return before His earthly reign of a thousand years.[5]

In this paper, I intend to evaluate several of the more significant scriptural passages pertaining to the rapture of the church and to set forth the reasons that compel me to reject the pre-tribulation rapture theory in favor of the post-tribulation view.[6] This survey will include an examination of passages commonly cited to argue for the church's exemption from the great tribulation, as well as a consideration of other objections raised against the post-tribulation position.

THE TERM "RAPTURE"

As many have noted, the word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible. The term is derived from the Latin Vulgate, which uses *rapiemur* (from the root *rapio*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the "catching up" of believers to meet the Lord in the air. The NASB95 renders this verse, "Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The phrase "will be caught up" translates the single Greek word *harpagēsómetha*, from the Greek verb root *harpázō* (ἁρπάζω). Thus, as a theological term expressing a biblical concept, the word *rapture* is entirely legitimate—the church will indeed be caught up to meet Christ. The question, however, is **when** this event occurs. Does it take place before, during, or after the period Scripture identifies as the "great tribulation"?

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[4] Some of the more helpful works defending the post-trib rapture position include (in order of publication): George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956); Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation; A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973); Robert H. Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997); Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism; An Alternative to 'Left Behind' Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009); Douglas J. Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulational Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture*, ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 185-274; and Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist; Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen Books, 2019).

[5] For a helpful and up-to-date defense of premillennialism, see Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 155-227.

[6] For a more detailed defense of the post-tribulational view of the rapture, see my book, *The Rapture Promise: Its History and Fulfillment at Christ's Return: A Defense of Post-Tribulationism* (Independently published, 2024).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE RAPTURE ISSUE

One of the reasons that has led me to question the pre-tribulation rapture theory is the recognition that, for most of church history—particularly prior to 1700—this teaching was not held by any evangelical denomination or church, nor was it affirmed by even a single credible, *mainstream* Christian theologian. More significantly, it was not seriously considered or debated by major Christian thinkers or pastors. Advocates of the pre-tribulation view have attempted to identify evidence of anyone holding this position before the early 1800s, often appealing to statements from early church fathers that they believe support an understanding of the Lord's "imminent" return. However, these references do not actually teach a pre-tribulation rapture; rather, they reflect the early church's expectation of Christ's return without specifying a removal of the church prior to the tribulation.[7] I will address the issue of "imminency" more fully later in this paper. For now, it is worth noting that some have claimed that certain individuals prior to the eighteenth century made statements *implying* a belief in a pre-tribulation rapture. However, the evidence offered in support of these claims has been sparse, not firmly convincing, and has been effectively challenged by others. In short, no clear or credible documentation exists demonstrating that any major Christian figure or tradition held to a pre-tribulation rapture before the modern era.[8] What we

[7] Some advocates of the pre-tribulation rapture argue that evidence for their position can be found among the early church fathers through appeals to "imminency," claiming that certain fathers believed in the "imminent return of Christ" (i.e., that He could come at any moment) and that this implies a pre-tribulational rapture. This argument is quite weak, depending as it does on a definition of "imminency" imposed upon the New Testament rather than derived from it. If imminency simply means that Christ may return in any generation, the argument carries little weight.

[8] For attempts to claim early attestation of the pre-tribulation view, see James F. Stitzinger, "The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation," *Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (2002), 149-71, esp. 153-56; and William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby; Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015), esp. 135-78 and 225-63. The earliest claim for an individual advocating any kind of a pre-trib rapture supposedly comes from a sermon by someone identified as Pseudo-Ephraem (see Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 [Jul 1995], 306-17). Demy and Ice imply that this document dates to the period 565-627 AD (p 312). Yet their understanding of Pseudo-Ephraem has been challenged by Bob Gundry (*First the Antichrist* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997], 161-88). Gundry concludes that the reference to the "gathering" of God's people is <u>not</u> a gathering in rapture but an evangelistic gathering. He writes, "In summary, then, Pseudo-Ephraem urges Christians to forsake worldliness in preparation for meeting Christ when he returns after the great tribulation. Meanwhile, Christian evangelism is taking people to the Lord and gathering them into the Church" (188). A further problem has to do with which text one cites from. Those who have appealed to Pseudo-Ephraem have relied upon a later Latin text (not earlier than the 8th century AD). However, others have pointed out that the translation from an earlier Syriac text does not support the rapture.

A second claim is that of an eleventh-century Bulgarian text known as the *Narration of Isaiah* (see Francis X. Gumerlock, "The Rapture in an Eleventh-Century Text," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176 [Jan-Mar 2019], 81-91). According to this work, there will be a lifting up of saints prior to a three-year burning of the earth. Yet there is no mention of the Lord's appearance, and not only are saints "lifted," but (strangely) so are churches, christened graves, sacred books and the true cross.

A third alleged example of someone advocating a pre-tribulation rapture in early church history is found in a fourteenth-century figure, the Catholic schismatic Father Dolcino (d. 1307), leader of the movement known as the Apostolic Brethren. For details, see Francis Gumerlock, "A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July–September 2002): 349–62. Yet Dolcino can hardly be regarded as a reliable source for eschatology: (1) he was executed as a heretic by the Catholic Church; (2) he taught that the tribulation and the Lord's return would occur around A.D. 1260; and (3) he promoted eccentric doctrines—for example, interpreting each of the

can safely say is that the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture, as a popularly held belief among evangelicals, originated sometime around 1832–1833, most likely in Ireland. I am not concerned here with pinpointing the exact year or identifying the precise individual responsible—this remains a matter of debate. What is clear, however, is that John Nelson Darby began teaching this view during that period, and he is widely recognized as the figure most responsible for shaping and popularizing the theory. Some scholars argue that the idea may have originated with Edward Irving in England (or with someone associated with him), but based on my own study, I am persuaded that it did not begin with Irving. The essential point is that prior to the early 1800s, we find no considerable evidence of a pre-tribulation rapture being taught within mainstream Christianity—whether Catholic or Protestant. The doctrine simply does not appear in any meaningful or recognizable form before the modern era.

On the other hand, we do have evidence that a post-tribulation understanding of the rapture was taught in the early church. One clear representative is **John Chrysostom** (c. 347–407), who later became Archbishop of Constantinople. Chrysostom was a major theologian of the early church, renowned for his preaching and prolific in his writings. In his sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4, Chrysostom explicitly identifies the rapture as occurring at the time of the Second Coming, not years prior. Here is an excerpt from that sermon:

> "And the dead," he says, "in Christ shall rise first. Then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."
>
> **Verse 18**. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."
>
> If He is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him; but the condemned await the judge within. And upon the coming of an affectionate father, his children indeed, and those who are worthy to be his children, are taken out in a chariot, that they may see and kiss him; but those of the domestics who have offended remain within. We are carried upon the chariot of

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seven churches in Revelation 1–3 as representing a key Catholic figure, with the "angel" of the church of Thyatira supposedly referring to Dolcino himself (and the church of Thyatira corresponding to the Dulcinian movement).

A fourth claim is that of Grantham Killingworth, a General Baptist layman, whose 1761 work *Immortality of the Soul* is sometimes cited as evidence for an early pre-tribulational rapture view. Killingworth taught that "the pious faithful dead in Christ" would be raised approximately three-and-a-half years prior to the commencement of the Millennium. For details, see Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, 257–59.

A fifth claim to an earlier figure supposedly holding some form of a pre-tribulation rapture is that of Morgan Edwards (1722–1795), a Baptist clergyman and church historian who originated in England but later settled in Philadelphia in the American colonies. In 1788 he published a tractate in which he presented a rapture occurring three-and-a-half years prior to the Second Coming. For details, see Thomas Ice, "Morgan Edwards," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 100–102. However, this view was based on a hypothetical exercise he had written years earlier while in school, and there is some question as to whether Edwards himself continued to hold this position during his later ministry.

In mentioning these four claims of earlier advocates of a pre-tribulation rapture, I neither wish to affirm nor deny their credibility. At best, they represent only marginal voices on the periphery of Christian history and in no case reflect the teaching of any significant evangelical church or movement.

> our Father. For He received Him up in the clouds, and "we shall be caught up in the clouds." (Acts 1:9.) Seest thou how great is the honor? and as He descends, we go forth to meet Him, and, what is more blessed than all, so we shall be with Him.[9]

For Chrysostom, the rapture was inseparably connected to the Second Coming of Christ. He taught that the Lord would first descend in the clouds and that the church would then be caught up **to meet** Him. In this way, believers could accompany Christ as He proceeds to the earth, honoring Him at His arrival. Chrysostom saw no difficulty in the church being caught up only to immediately descend with Christ—an idea fully consistent with how the term *coming* (*parousía*) was understood in the ancient world. In Greco-Roman contexts, a *coming* often referred to the arrival of a dignitary, and it was customary for citizens to go out **to meet** the honored guest and then escort him back into the city.[10] This concept of going out to meet and then accompanying the dignitary back is closely associated with the Greek word *apántēsis* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the term translated "to meet." Other biblical uses of *apántēsis*—such as Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15—reflect this same pattern. Chrysostom's interpretation aligns naturally with this cultural and linguistic background.

I find it telling, then, that no notable Christian leader who might be considered even remotely "evangelical" believed in—or even recognized—the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture before the 1700s (and arguably not until the early 1800s). This fact alone causes me to doubt that such a doctrine has any legitimate historical or biblical foundation. Nevertheless, as valuable as historical testimony is, it cannot serve as our final authority. Ultimately, we must turn to Scripture itself to settle the matter. And so, to the Word of God we now turn.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES CONSIDERED

The debate over the timing of the rapture involves a number of New Testament passages.[11] It is also important to recognize that some of these texts are major passages, while others function as secondary passages in the discussion. The major passages are those that explicitly describe the rapture event—

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[9] Chrysostom, Homily 7, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 13.

[10] The word translated "coming" in 1 Thess 4:15 is the Greek word *parousía*. This word was sometimes used in the Hellenistic period for the visitation of a ruler to a city. According to the abridged version of Kittel, the word *parousía* was used "for the visits of rulers or high officials. . . . On the occasion of such visits there are flattering speeches, delicacies to eat, asses for the baggage, street improvements, and wreaths or gifts of money. These are paid for by voluntary contributions or, if necessary, unpopular levies. Under the empire the ceremonies become even more magnificent and visits are marked by new buildings, the institution of holy days, etc. Complaints and requests are customarily addressed to rulers on such visits" (G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, & G. W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985], s.v. "*parousía, páreimi*," by A. Oepke, 791).

[11] There is no Old Testament passage that teaches the rapture, so the discussion can be confined to the New Testament. At times, the calendar of ancient Israel is appealed to in support of the pre-tribulation rapture, the argument being that each of Israel's feasts has an eschatological counterpart and that the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1–6) signifies a pre-tribulational rapture. However, if the Day of Atonement depicts the national cleansing of Israel at the Second Coming, then—even granting for the sake of argument that the Feast of Trumpets represents the rapture of the church—we are still left without any certainty as to whether Trumpets corresponds to a rapture before or after the tribulation.

namely, **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18** and **1 Corinthians 15:50–57**. Secondary passages are numerous (and I will highlight several of them as our study progresses), but major passages should rightly carry primary interpretive weight. It is also worth noting that no biblical passage explicitly states when the rapture will occur in relation to the tribulation. Nevertheless, I believe that one of the major passages—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18—provides a strong indication of its timing. For that reason, we begin our examination with this foundational text.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 And The Parousia Of The Lord

Let us first observe the entire passage from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

> [13] But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. [14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. [15] For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain **until the coming of the Lord**, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore comfort one another with these words.[12]

I would like to emphasize the words in bold above, "the coming of the Lord." What is unmistakably clear is that the rapture event will occur **at the coming of the Lord**. It is therefore important to examine the Greek term translated "coming." The word is *parousía* (παρουσία). Like many Greek words, *parousía*—which occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament—has a range of meanings. In some contexts, it refers simply to the **arrival** of a person (e.g., 1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:6). In other contexts, the emphasis falls more on the **presence** that results from one's arrival (e.g., 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 2:12).

The crucial issue, however, is how *parousía* is used in eschatological contexts, especially when the future coming of Christ is in view. Thus, the key question we must ask is this: When Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 4:15, what did he most likely intend by using the word *parousía* to describe this future event involving the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The word *parousía* is rarely used in the gospels and appears only in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, where it occurs four times. After Jesus predicted that the stones of the magnificent Jerusalem temple would be torn down, the disciples responded by asking, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming (Gk *parousía*), and of the end of the age?" Jesus then delivered a lengthy discourse concerning the future of the nation and the implications for His disciples. Importantly, the destruction of the temple would not occur at the same time as His *parousía* and "the end of the age." Although Matthew does not include Jesus' explanation of the temple's fall, Luke records it (Luke 21:20–

[12] Unless otherwise stated, all scriptural quotations are taken from the NASB95.

24), indicating that Jesus addressed both events. Jesus taught that His "coming" (*parousía*) would be preceded by the appearance of "the abomination of desolation" (Matt 24:15) and by what He called a "great tribulation" (Matt 24:21). He then proceeded to predict His own return at the Second Coming. He stated, "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming (*parousía*) of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:21). Jesus went on to say, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming (*parousía*) of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah" (Matt 24:36-37; cf. vs 39).

From the teachings of Jesus Himself, we observe that He deliberately used the term *parousía* to describe His Second Coming in power and glory. Although this does not, in and of itself, prove that the Apostle Paul would employ the same term in precisely the same way, it certainly establishes the possibility. In the absence of any clarifying statement to the contrary, does it not seem more likely that when Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 that the rapture would occur at the *parousía* of the Lord, he would have had the same event in mind that Jesus described? For the sake of discussion, we may agree that this does not prove Paul intended such an identification. Nevertheless, we should also be able to agree that Paul could very well have meant exactly that.

What we need to do at this point is survey all other places where Paul—and the other New Testament writers—use the term *parousía* to refer to the future return of Christ. Outside of the gospels (which we have already examined with Matthew 24), there are twelve verses in which *parousía* is used of Christ's future coming. Seven of these occur in Paul's epistles (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1; and 2:8). The remaining five appear in the general epistles (Jas 5:7–8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4; and 1 John 2:28). As we consider the eschatological use of *parousía* in both Paul's letters and the general epistles, we must acknowledge that some instances are indecisive with respect to the timing of the rapture. James 5:7–8 provides a good example: "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming (*parousía*) of the Lord. . . . You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming (*parousía*) of the Lord is near." James, writing in the first century, clearly expected that the Lord's *parousía* was near. In itself, this expectation does not settle the timing of the rapture; the text can be argued either way. I would note, however, that among these twelve New Testament uses of *parousía* for Christ's future coming, not one conclusively refers to a "coming" of the Lord **before** the tribulation, whereas several unmistakably point to a "coming" **after** the tribulation. This observation may not prove the timing of the rapture, but it does establish an important pattern in the New Testament's eschatological use of *parousía*.

A key passage to compare is Paul's own use of *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 2:8. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote to correct confusion that had arisen regarding "the day of the Lord." He had already addressed this subject in his first epistle (1 Thess 5:1ff.), but rumors were circulating that Paul—or perhaps those claiming to speak for him—were teaching that "the day of the

Lord" had already arrived (2 Thess 2:2). This was a false report, and Paul wrote to dispel it. He therefore opens the chapter with the following statement: "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming (*parousía*) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together (*episunagōgḗ*) to Him . . . ." (2 Thess 2:1). This issue of "the day of the Lord" is closely tied to both the *parousía* of Christ and the gathering of the saints to Him. What, then, does Paul mean by these two expressions—the *parousía* of Christ and "our gathering together to Him"? The latter phrase, "our gathering together," translates a single Greek noun, *episunagōgḗ*. This is a rare term in the New Testament, appearing only one other time (Heb 10:25). However, its cognate verb *episunágō* does occur in an eschatological context involving God's elect in Matthew 24:31 (cf. Mark 13:27; Luke 17:37). The "gathering together" of the elect in Matthew 24:31 takes place at the time of the Second Coming, not at a pre-tribulation rapture. This strongly suggests that the "gathering together" Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 is concurrent with the Second Coming rather than prior to it.[13]

Of greater importance is Paul's use of *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. In light of the surrounding context—God's final judgment upon the "man of lawlessness," the Antichrist—there is no doubt that this event takes place at the end of the great tribulation, not prior to it. Paul writes, "Then that lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming (*parousía*)." Here Paul unmistakably uses *parousía* to describe the Second Coming itself. This observation is significant: Jesus used *parousía* in Matthew 24 to denote His Second Coming in power and glory, and Paul uses the same term in precisely this way in 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

Therefore, the most natural and consistent way to understand Paul's use of *parousía* in 1 Thessalonians 4:15—when he describes the rapture—is as a reference to the Second Coming, not to an imagined event occurring several years beforehand. Paul's own usage of *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 2:8 ought to guide our interpretation of what he meant in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, especially since there are no clear instances in Paul's writings where *parousía* refers to a "coming" of Christ before the great tribulation.

Those who advocate a pre-tribulation rapture are, of course, aware that Paul uses *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2 to refer to the Second Coming of Christ **after** the tribulation. They attempt to evade the significance of this fact by proposing that *parousía* can refer to a two-stage coming of Christ—first, a supposed pre-tribulation, secret rapture of the church, and then, after the tribulation, Christ's public return in power and glory. In this view, the *parousía* is treated as an extended period encompassing both events.

[13] I am aware that the "gathering together" of God's elect in Matthew 24:31 may represent the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to regather Israel, especially in light of the use of *episunagōgḗ* in Matthew 23:37. Even if that is the case—and I leave the question open for now—we should still remain receptive to the possibility that the "gathering together" of God's elect in Matthew 24:31 includes the regathering of those in Christ to be united with their Lord in His final descent at the Second Coming. It is even conceivable (though I am not fully certain of this point) that both Israel's regathering—following her national repentance—and the rapture of the church are encompassed within this angelic "gathering together."

Yet this argument lacks merit for two reasons. **First**, there are *no* clear examples in the New Testament where *parousía* describes any coming of Christ *before* the tribulation. By contrast, there are unmistakably clear examples where *parousía* refers to the Second Coming *after* the tribulation. **Second**, a thorough study of *parousía* in literature outside the New Testament shows that when the term is used of the "coming" of any person, it is never employed to describe a "two-pronged coming"—that is, a single coming divided into two distinct stages separated by multiple years.[14]

1 Thessalonians 3:13 And The Parousia Of The Lord

In the previous section, I argued that Paul's understanding of *parousía* in 1 Thessalonians 4:15—where he identifies the timing of the rapture—ought to be governed by his own usage of the term elsewhere, particularly in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, where he unmistakably applies *parousía* to the Second Coming of Christ **after** the tribulation, when the Lord destroys the "man of lawlessness." This, as noted, aligns perfectly with Jesus' own use of *parousía* in Matthew 24. I would now like to strengthen that argument by pointing out that Paul uses *parousía* yet again in 1 Thessalonians to refer to the Second Coming after the tribulation. For this reason, we now turn our attention to 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13:

> "May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming (*parousía*) of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

Even those who advocate a pre-tribulation rapture acknowledge that *parousía* in this context refers to Christ's Second Coming **after** the tribulation. They observe that Jesus, in this instance, comes *with* all His saints, and from this they infer a prior coming *for* the saints—namely, a pre-tribulation rapture—followed later by His coming *with* the saints in His final descent at the Second Coming. Yet in making this claim, they implicitly concede that *parousía* in this verse refers to the Second Coming, not to a pre-tribulational event.

This admission is significant. It demonstrates that Paul clearly uses *parousía* of the Second Coming in both 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8. This pattern of usage strongly shapes what one should expect Paul to mean by *parousía* when he identifies the timing of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:15. If Paul consistently employs *parousía* to denote the post-tribulational Second Coming—and if there are no clear instances in his writings where *parousía* refers to a coming of Christ before the great tribulation—then the most natural reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:15 is that Paul is describing the rapture as occurring at the Second Coming itself.

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[14] I have examined a wide range of sources outside the New Testament and have not found a single instance in which *parousía*—when used of the coming or arrival of a person—refers to a two-stage coming or a coming that unfolds in separate phases over multiple years. This includes a review of the Greek Septuagint (where the term occurs four times), Josephus (thirty-two uses), the Apostolic Fathers (four uses), and the Old Testament Greek Pseudepigrapha (thirteen uses). I have also carefully consulted the evidence presented in Moulton and Milligan's *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. All of the data points in the opposite direction.

Yet there is a further exegetical issue that must be considered in connection with 1 Thessalonians 3:13. The verse speaks of the *parousía* of the Lord Jesus **with all His saints**, but who exactly are these "saints"? The term *saints* translates the Greek *hagíōn* (ἁγίων), derived from the adjective *hágios*. Although "saints" is a legitimate rendering, there is another translation that fits the context more naturally. The basic meaning of *hágios* is "holy," and when used substantively it can refer to a "holy one"—either a holy person or a holy being. If we translate *hagíōn* as "holy ones," a different interpretive possibility emerges: the coming of our Lord Jesus **with all His holy ones**, that is, His angels.

Why would I argue that "holy ones" in this context refers to angels? First, we should note that *hágios* can indeed refer to angels rather than human saints (cf. Job 15:15; Dan 8:13). Psalm 89:5 [LXX 88:6] speaks of God's faithfulness "in the assembly of the holy ones," where angels (*hagíōn*) are clearly in view. Likewise, Zechariah 14:5 indicates that angels will accompany the Lord at His return to deliver Jerusalem at His Second Coming: "Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones (*hágioi*) with Him." This pattern of usage establishes that "holy ones" can legitimately refer to angelic beings.

Second, this interpretation aligns with the broader biblical portrayal of the Second Coming. Jesus repeatedly taught that He would return **with His angels** (Matt 16:27; 24:31; 25:31). Paul himself echoes this theme elsewhere (2 Thess 1:7), describing Christ as being "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels." Thus, the expectation that Christ will come accompanied by angels is deeply embedded in both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament eschatology.

Third, if 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is looking at the evaluation of the saints for purposes of reward, as some have advocated, then there is biblical precedent for the participation of angels.[15] In Jesus' challenge to those who would be His disciples, He declared, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mk 8:38).

Even if one is not convinced that the "holy ones" of 1 Thess 3:13 are angels, the fact remains that even those who advocate a pre-trib rapture agree that this verse uses *parousía* in reference to the Second Coming after the tribulation. Hence, we see the Apostle Paul using *parousía* in multiple places for the Second Coming, but not once—outside of 1 Thess 4:15—for a coming before the tribulation. My point is that the evidence strongly favors the conclusion that *parousía* in 1 Thess 4:15 refers to the Lord's coming *after* the tribulation, not before it. All other arguments, whether for or against a pre-trib rapture, ought to

[15] That 1 Thessalonians 3:13 has the evaluation and rewarding of saints in view at Christ's Second Coming is very likely. Wilkin writes, "When Paul speaks of having hearts *blameless* (*amemptos*) *in holiness*, he is not speaking of their position in Christ. A recurring theme in Scripture refers to seeking to be blameless *in one's experience* at Christ's coming. (cf. Phil 2:15 [*amemptos*] and 1 Thess 2:10 and 5:23 [*amemptōs*]. . . . If the Thessalonian believers remain blameless, they will be rewarded at Christ's return (1 Pet 5:1-4); see also Heb 13:17)" (Bob Wilkin, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2, Romans–Revelation [Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010], 938).

be considered secondary to what 1 Thess 4:13–18—the clearest passage on the timing of the rapture—actually says.

1 Corinthians 15:23 And The Parousia Of The Lord

At this stage of our investigation, we have seen that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul used the term *parousía* to refer to the Second Coming in power and glory, that is, after the tribulation. Before leaving our study of *parousía*, we ought to take into account one more reference found in 1 Cor 15:23. This chapter is noteworthy as Paul's defense of the doctrine of resurrection for every Christian. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will all those who are in Christ. Paul explains that each has its own proper order in God's economy:

> [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. [23] But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming (*parousía*), [24] then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. [25] For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. [26] The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Jesus Christ was resurrected in the first century AD. Those of us who are Christ's will be resurrected at His coming (*parousía*). Following an interlude of time after that event, there will be "the end." Premillennialists typically understand "the end" to refer to the end of the millennium.[16] So the only resurrection of believers that Paul mentions between the time of Christ's resurrection and the end of the millennium is the one at "His coming" (*parousía*). If one insists on a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, then "His coming" in 1 Corinthians 15:23 must refer to the pre-tribulation rapture. But that presents a problem for those who hold a pre-tribulation view, because all agree that there will certainly be a resurrection of believers at Christ's Second Coming at the end of the tribulation. This is evident in light of Revelation 20:4 regarding the martyrs from the tribulation who "came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Pre-tribulation proponents also typically include the Old Testament saints at this same time, in light of Daniel 12:2, which is clearly a post-tribulational event. Since 1 Corinthians 15:23 only mentions one "coming" (*parousía*) of Christ between His own resurrection and the end of the millennium, then this has to be an event at the end of the tribulation, not before it.

If the pre-tribulation theory of the rapture were true, there would be one resurrection of the "church-age" Christians at least seven years before the Second Coming and another resurrection at the end of the

[16] David Lowery (a pre-trib writer) makes this very point: "Following the resurrection of the church, another period intervenes until **the end** when Christ will deliver His **kingdom to God the Father** (cf. Matt. 13:41-43). Some interpreters dispute that an interval of any sort was hinted at by Paul and find instead the coming of Christ and the consummation of all things as virtually simultaneous events. As in the preceding verse, no time frame was specified and the chronological sequences set forth may indeed be almost momentary (1 Cor. 15:5) but then again they may be prolonged (cf. v. 23). If about 2,000 years can elapse between the first and second phases in this selected presentation of events, a lapse of half that time, that is, a millennium, between the second and third phases should cause no consternation" (*"*1 Corinthians*," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures,* ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985], 544).

tribulation for the Old Testament saints and those martyred in the tribulation. Not only does 1 Corinthians 15:23 not allow for this, but such a theory also runs into conflict with Hebrews 11:39–40. After describing the lives of numerous Old Testament saints who displayed enduring faith while on earth, the author of Hebrews concluded:

> [39] And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

The words *"be made perfect"* represent a single term in the Greek text (*teleiōthōsin*, from the root *teleióō*). This word conveys the idea of being brought to completion or reaching an intended goal, and in this passage refers to something not attained in the present life but reserved for the future consummation of God's plan. Significantly, however, the author of Hebrews insists that his new covenant readers will attain this **together** with the Old Testament saints he has just described. What, then, does this refer to? In the context, he has already mentioned the "better resurrection" awaiting those who suffered for their faith (Heb 11:35), and he clearly has in mind their entrance into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 12:28). From this we may deduce that all God's people—both old covenant saints and new covenant believers—will experience this resurrection and kingdom entrance **at the same time**. For that to occur (especially in light of 1 Cor 15:23), it must be an event **after** the tribulation, not before.

2 Peter 1:16 And The Parousia Of The Lord

As demonstrated above, Jesus and Paul used the term *parousía* to refer to the Second Coming after the tribulation. We also find that the Apostle Peter used the term in precisely the same way. In 2 Peter 1:16 he wrote, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming (*parousía*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." In light of the following verses (1:17–18), it is clear that Peter is speaking of their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John heard the divine pronouncement, "This is My beloved Son." As we look back to the gospel account where this was recorded (Matt 17:1–8), we find the description of that event when Jesus was transfigured before them. What must be observed, however, are the words at the end of chapter 16 that precede this and inform us of the event's significance:

> [27] "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. [28] "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt 16:27-28).

What the three disciples saw that day was a glimpse ahead in time of how Jesus, the Son of Man, will appear when He comes in His kingdom. He will look quite different—no longer as an ordinary human man. Significantly, Peter's reference to Christ's "coming" (*parousía*) in 2 Peter 1:16 clearly points to

Jesus' coming at the time of His kingdom, that is, after the tribulation. Once again, then, we see consistency in the New Testament's use of *parousía* when referring to Christ's future coming.

There are numerous instances where *parousía* is used of Christ's coming after the tribulation; there are no clear instances where it refers to a pre-tribulation coming. Advocates of the pre-trib rapture may argue that *parousía* is not a technical term and therefore could refer to a coming of Christ other than the Second Coming. While that may be theoretically possible, one must acknowledge that the New Testament usage does not support that conclusion. When Paul states plainly that the rapture of the church takes place at the *parousía* of Christ (1 Thess 4:15), the most natural understanding is that he is speaking of the Second Coming, not a coming prior to the tribulation. Only compelling evidence to the contrary would justify concluding that Paul has a pre-tribulation event in mind, but such evidence does not exist in the New Testament.

1 John 2:28–3:2 and The Anticipation Of The Lord's Appearance

As we turn to the epistle of 1st John, we once again find one of the apostles using the word *parousía* to describe the Lord's coming—this time by the Apostle John. Yet the details John includes in his discussion support the case that the rapture of the church will be post-tribulational. In 1 John 2:28 the Apostle John wrote,

> [28] Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (*parousía*).

Several times in this epistle, the Apostle John exhorts his readers to "abide" in Christ. According to John, abiding comes about through walking obediently with the Lord (1 John 3:24; cf. 2:6). In 1 John 2:28, he is emphatic about the importance of the believer abiding in Christ, because it will make a difference when the Lord returns. When He does return, it is essential that a believer have "confidence" and not shrink away in shame. The question this verse raises is whether this moment of facing Christ—either in confidence or shame—occurs at a pre-tribulation rapture or at the Second Coming. John indicates that it will be at the *parousía* of the Lord. As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this paper, this term is commonly used elsewhere for the Second Coming after the tribulation. The question, then, is whether *parousía* carries that meaning here as well.

1 John 2:28 provides an important clue to that question. The *parousía* is also described as "when He appears." This latter term is a form of the Greek verb *phaneróō* (φανερόω). This is a commonly used verb in the New Testament (appearing some 49 times) and basically means (1) to become visible, reveal, or expose publicly, or (2) to cause something to become known, disclose, show, or make known.[17] The term is used in 1 John 3:5 and 3:8 to indicate the visible appearance of Christ in His first coming. At other

[17] Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1048.

times, the verb can refer to Christ's future appearing (Col 3:4; 1 Pet 5:4). John himself uses the same verb again in a comparable way in 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

A crucial question is what it means for Christ to "appear." Does this describe what happens at a pre-tribulational rapture (in which case it would be limited to those caught up in the clouds who would secretly view the Lord), or is this term better suited to Christ's visible appearance to the whole world when He returns in power and glory after the tribulation? Closely related to the verb *phaneróō* (φανερόω), "to appear," is the noun *epipháneia* (ἐπιφάνεια), translated "appearance," used six times in the New Testament. This noun is used once of Christ's first coming (2 Tim 1:10) and five times of His future appearing (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Upon examination of these five verses, all are perfectly suitable with respect to Christ's Second Coming—though, admittedly, it may be difficult to prove they must refer to that event rather than a pre-trib rapture. Titus 2:13, for example, says that believers are to be "looking for the blessed hope and **the appearing of the glory** of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." The fact that Paul mentions "glory" in conjunction with "appearing" suggests that the Second Coming is in view, for Jesus Himself predicted that He would come "with power and great glory" after the tribulation (Matt 24:30). Similarly, we read in Matthew 25:31, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him . . . ." Thus we are anticipating the full revelation of His glory at the Second Coming *after* the tribulation.

Of further interest is the use of the word "appearance" (*epipháveia*) in 2 Thessalonians 2:8:

> Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance (*epipháneia*) of His coming (*parousía*).

There is a striking similarity between this verse and 1 John 2:28, where the concept of Christ "appearing" is joined with the word *parousía*. The weight of the evidence, then, is against the idea that Christ's future "appearance" refers to a secret manifestation for those raptured prior to the tribulation. Rather, His future "appearance" most likely corresponds to the Second Coming after the tribulation, when His glory will be visible to the entire world. This leads to the conclusion that the word *parousía* in 1 John 2:28 means exactly what we have seen elsewhere when used of Jesus in an eschatological context: the Second Coming of Christ after the tribulation. Furthermore, 1 John 3:2 states that it is at this time—"when He appears"—that "we will be like Him." To be made like Him is what occurs in our resurrection when we are glorified, and thus the rapture (which includes our resurrection) takes place in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ after the tribulation. With this, Colossians 3:4 agrees: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Matthew 13 and the Rapture In Relation To The Kingdom Parables

In Matthew 13, the Lord Jesus taught a series of parables concerning His kingdom. One of these is the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24–30), which Jesus Himself interpreted for the disciples in Matthew 13:36–43. The issue concerns the "tares" (the sons of the evil one) that are allowed to grow alongside the "good seed" (the sons of the kingdom) until the time of the harvest—the end of the age. At that time, the reapers (the angels) are to first "gather up" the tares in preparation for burning, whereas the wheat is gathered into Christ's barn (v. 30).[18]

What is important to our discussion concerning the time of the rapture is how we understand "the end of the age" (the harvest) in this parable. Two reasons demonstrate that "the end of the age" refers to the time of Christ's return—His Second Coming—after the tribulation.[19] First, the "harvest" includes the gathering up of the tares (the sons of the evil one) in preparation for judgment, which will mean for them being cast into "the furnace of fire," where they will experience "weeping and gnashing of teeth." According to pre-trib teaching, there is no comparable judgment involving "fire" for the unrighteous at the time of the supposed pre-trib rapture. The church is simply removed from the earth. Divine judgment upon the unrighteous, however, is expected at the Second Coming after the tribulation. Second, the blessed outcome for the righteous is described in Matthew 13:43 with words that clearly allude to Daniel 12:3: "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Significantly, the resurrection of Old Testament saints is described in Daniel 12:2, so this verse in Matthew (drawing from Dan 12:3) is portraying their post-resurrection victory and glory. Yet Old Testament saints are not resurrected until after the great tribulation and the Second Coming—a truth that even pre-trib advocates readily affirm.

So if "the end of the age" (the harvest) refers to what takes place at the Second Coming after the great tribulation, how does this bear upon the time of the rapture? Matthew 13:30 must not be overlooked: "Allow both to grow together until the harvest"—that is, until Christ returns and enacts a separating judgment after the tribulation. Then each respective group will be "gathered" accordingly, either for "the furnace" or for "shining brightly as the sun" (resurrected). There is no imagined pre-trib rapture that

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[18] Of some interest is the fact that different terms for "gathering" are used for the tares and for the wheat. When the tares are "gathered up" (v. 30), the verb is *sullégō* (συλλέγω). When the wheat is "gathered," the verb is *suvágō* (συνάγω). The distinction is noteworthy: *sullégō* typically conveys the idea of collecting or gathering together for removal or disposal, whereas *sunágō* more commonly denotes gathering together in a positive or constructive sense—often associated with assembling, uniting, or bringing together for preservation. The use of these two different verbs subtly reinforces the contrasting destinies of the tares and the wheat in Jesus' parable.

[19] The expression "the end of the age" appears five times in the New Testament (Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; cf. "end of the ages" in Heb 9:26). Of particular relevance to the discussion of the rapture is its use in Matthew 24:3, where the disciples ask Jesus what will be the sign of His *parousía* and of "the end of the age." The answer Jesus provides is explicitly tied to His future coming in power and glory **after** the great tribulation. This is entirely consistent with the use of the same expression in Matthew 13, where "the end of the age" marks the time of final separation and judgment at Christ's return. In both contexts, the phrase points not to a pre-tribulational event but to the climactic moment of the Second Coming following the tribulation.

separates the two (the wheat and the tares) before this harvest. A pre-trib rapture would contradict what our Lord taught in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

THE QUESTION OF THE CHURCH'S EXEMPTION FROM THE TRIBULATION

Those who advocate the pre-trib rapture theory claim that the New Testament promises that the church will be exempted from the period of great tribulation. They defend this view by appealing to passages such as 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 and Revelation 3:10.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 and Being Rescued from God's Wrath

Let us begin by considering 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10:

> [9] For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, [10] and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Pre-trib proponents understand "the wrath to come" to refer to the wrath that God will pour out upon a Christ-rejecting world in "the day of the Lord," since the Apostle Paul discusses this event in chapter five of the same book (1 Thess 5:1-11). They would further argue that 1 Thess 5:9 confirms this fact: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Is this really a promise that the church will be exempted from the great tribulation? A closer study suggests that this is not the point Paul is making at all. Key to a proper interpretation of these verses is the word translated "rescue" in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. This is the participial form of the verb *rhúomai* (ῥύομαι), for which the standard Greek New Testament lexicon gives the meaning "to rescue from danger, save, rescue, deliver, preserve."[20] Yet when we examine the usage of this term in the New Testament, we learn something important about the nature of this "rescue." The verb *rhúomai* occurs 17 times in the New Testament, and 12 of these are in Paul's epistles. A survey of all 17 occurrences reveals that it nearly always (in at least 13 instances for sure) refers to rescuing someone from a dangerous situation they are already experiencing—not to preventing them from ever encountering that danger. Observe just a couple of these situations:

> 2 Corinthians 1:10 - Here, *rhúomai* is translated as "deliver":
> [10] who delivered us from so great a *peril of* death, and will deliver *us,* He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,
>
> 2 Timothy 3:11
> [11] persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!

[20] Arndt, William, et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 907.

Finally, I would highlight the use of the participial form of *rhúomai* (ῥύομαι) in Romans 11:26: "and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER (*rhuómenos*) WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." The verse pertains to the mighty work of God to deliver (i.e., rescue) Israel at the end of the tribulation. Obviously, He did not keep them out of the tribulation (i.e., exempt them from it). Both the Old and New Testaments teach plainly that Israel will suffer significantly during the great tribulation. The point is that before being exterminated, the Lord graciously intervenes to deliver them from further suffering. [Zechariah 12–14 reveals much about the sufferings awaiting Israel in the tribulation period when they come under attack.]

Armed with this understanding of what *rhúomai* (ῥύομαι) typically means, we should be very hesitant—even skeptical—that 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is promising Christians that the church will not have to enter the tribulation period (the "wrath to come"). Rather, it is a promise of God's intervention to bring rescue. In fact, we find a corollary to this in Christ's own teaching in the Olivet Discourse: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short" (Matt 24:21–22; cf. 24:13). In the latter verse, Christ spoke of life "being saved," a concept similar to "rescue." The term in this instance, however, is the Greek verb *sōzō* (σῳζω). But the use of "save" (*sōzō*) in this context dealing with the tribulation is important to our understanding of 1 Thessalonians 5:9, to which we now turn.

I mentioned 1 Thessalonians 5:9 a moment earlier: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Once we recognize that Paul is not using "salvation" in this verse to refer to one's initial experience of being saved from sin at the moment of trusting Christ as Savior, we can rightly understand his use of "salvation" as referring to a future work of Christ in connection with the great tribulation and His Second Coming. First, we should observe the preceding verse in this context, namely, 1 Thessalonians 5:8. Paul wrote to those who were already Christians at Thessalonica, "But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation." The salvation Paul urges them to place their hope in is a future salvation. In this context in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul has been discussing "the day of the Lord." For unbelievers, it will come like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). But for Christians, "the day" will not overtake them like a thief (1 Thess 5:4). This statement seems rather pointless if they would not be present to experience "the day of the Lord." There is nothing in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 that promises these Thessalonian believers they will not have to face the possibility of encountering "the day of the Lord." Rather, Paul's point is simply this: if "the day of the Lord" were to occur in their lifetime, they would not be taken by surprise. Because of the biblical instruction they have received, they know that this unique period is coming when God will bring judgment and "destruction" upon the earth. Thus, it will not overtake them like a thief—catching them completely unaware—as it will those who are "in darkness."

The protective "helmet" for the Thessalonians is "the hope of salvation" (5:8), the hope that Christ will intervene to rescue His people from the horrors of that period when the Antichrist will seek to martyr believers. The point of 1 Thessalonians 5:9 ("God has not destined us for wrath") is simply to affirm that "the day of the Lord" is not aimed at Christians, but at the Christ-rejecting world that refuses to repent (cf. Rev 16:9). Yes, many believers will lose their lives during that time, but the purpose of "the day of the Lord" is not to inflict wrath on them—God's wrath was not designed for them. What awaits the church is "obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." As we noted earlier, Jesus taught that those days would be cut short so that the elect might be saved (Matt 24:21–22). Christ will return a second time for salvation (Heb 9:27–28), a salvation that includes not only His intervention against Satan's worldwide rebellion but also the inauguration of His kingdom on earth.

Revelation 3:10 and Christ's Promise to the Church at Philadelphia

Pre-trib advocates often appeal to Revelation 3:10 in support of their theory: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will **keep you from** the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." In the context of the book of Revelation, the "hour of testing" (they argue) must be the future tribulation prior to Christ's return. They maintain that believers will be "kept from it," since they will be raptured before the tribulation begins.

A great deal of discussion has focused on the precise meaning of the phrase "keep you from" (Greek *tēréō ek*). Does this mean that Christ will keep them from ever entering this period of time, or does it mean He will "keep them" during this time in a protective sense? In light of the same combination of Greek words in John 17:15, some have argued for the latter.[21]

Apart from the issue of the precise meaning and implication of the words "keep you from," I would like to make a few observations. First, nothing in this passage says anything about the rapture. Whatever the promise is, and however it is fulfilled, the text does not state that it is by means of the rapture that the promise is carried out. Second, the promise in Revelation 3:10 is made to the church at Philadelphia, a congregation living in Asia Minor at the close of the first century. Can we safely assume that it applies to all Christians of all times? Third, pre-trib advocates also maintain that all believers on earth at the time of the rapture—regardless of their spiritual condition—will be taken. The blessing of the rapture is not limited to believers who are obedient at the moment it occurs. Yet the promise in Revelation 3:10 is explicitly based on the obedience of those at Philadelphia. What Christ promises to do for them is because they have kept the word of His perseverance. (The NET[2] Bible translates this as "my admonition to

[21] Arguing in favor of the *protective sense* for *tēréō ek* ("keep you from") are Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 54-61; and Douglas J. Moo, *Three View on the Rapture* (Zondervan, 2010), 225-26. Arguing in favor of "exclusion from the period" is Jeffrey Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (Jul-Sep 1980), 252-66.

endure steadfastly.") If this is a promise that the Philadelphian church has merited as a result of their obedience, how then can it truly be equated with the rapture of the church?

The most decisive argument, however, against this verse implying a pre-tribulation rapture is simply the very next verse: "**I am coming quickly**; hold fast what you have." The same phrase ("I am coming quickly") appears again at the conclusion of the book (Rev 22:7, 12, 20), where it clearly refers to the Second Coming—the major theme of Revelation. If John is urging them to hold fast until Christ's Second Coming, then it would be illogical to argue that Revelation 3:10 was a promise the Christians of Philadelphia would be raptured prior to the great tribulation.

Elsewhere, I have made a more detailed study of the words "keep you from" (*tēréō ek*), especially how these words are used in John 17, and concluded with these words:

> . . . the promise to those at Philadelphia was one of "protection." That is, Christ will *keep* them *safe* from the spiritual harm of the coming Tribulation period and any threats against their faith for not taking the mark of the beast. No matter what might happen, they have the assurance that they possess eternal life which can never be taken from them.[22]

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE POST-TRIB RAPTURE CONSIDERED

One way of arguing for one's position is to give positive evidence in favor of it. Another way is to state possible objections to an alternative position. I have sought in this paper to present the positive evidence for a post-tribulational rapture, and I have done so by arguing from the key passages that pertain to the rapture doctrine (namely, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15). While space does not permit a response to every argument used to justify a pre-trib view of the rapture, I would like to briefly address a few of the more prominent objections to the post-tribulational rapture that are voiced by pre-trib advocates.

Revelation 20:7-10 and Satan's Rebellion after the Millennium

One of the key objections to the post-tribulational rapture view stems from Revelation 20:7–10. After the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:4–6), Satan is released for a brief time from his prison. At that point he will set out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth (Gog and Magog) and gather them together for one final war. The question, then, is who these are who participate in Satan's last rebellion. Since it is hardly imaginable that they could be any of the resurrected saints of the millennium, many

[22] J. Paul Tanner, *The Rapture Promise*, 291. Note especially the use of *tēréō* ("keep") in John 17:2-3 and 11-12. Based on these verses, I wrote, "When John 17:15 is closely studied in its context, the point is clear that Jesus "kept" the disciples *spiritually safe* in the sense that He gave them eternal life (except for Judas) and watched over them. Later, most of the original disciples were martyred, but Satan was never able to take away the eternal life that Jesus had given them" (289).

have concluded that they must be the children of people who entered the millennium in natural bodies—children who presumably never believed in Christ. Advocates of a pre-trib rapture argue that only their view accommodates this situation, since (they contend) a post-trib rapture at the Second Coming would mean that all who enter the millennium would be in resurrected bodies and none in natural bodies. Pre-trib advocates place the resurrection of the church before the tribulation, so that those who "believe" during the tribulation (and survive) can enter the millennium in natural bodies.

In response, I would first point out that this passage says nothing directly about the rapture. The rapture is not even being discussed—this is not a "rapture passage." Anyone who appeals to this text is relying on *theological deduction*, not direct teaching. Second, primary rapture passages (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13–18) must take precedence over secondary passages where one's conclusions depend on theological inference. Finally, I would urge caution regarding this passage. There are many things we do not know about the Second Coming of Christ, and it may be presumptive to think we understand precisely what will occur at that time. Yes, some matters are certainly clear—where Scripture has provided sufficient light. But much remains unclear. Are all unbelievers going to be removed from the earth at the time of the Second Coming? Some passages might lead us to think so, but others raise questions.

For example, Zechariah 14:16–19 issues a warning to certain nations **after** the Second Coming of Christ who may, in disobedience, refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. What need would there be for such a warning if all the nations were redeemed? (By the way, the details of this passage suggest that it is not unbelieving children long after the Second Coming who are in view, but rather those who were living at the time of Christ's return. Note Zech 14:16: "Then it will come about that **any who are left** of all the nations that went against Jerusalem . . . .") My point is simply this: a passage like Revelation 20:7–10 is exceedingly difficult to interpret from our present vantage point and is certainly not a clear text from which to draw conclusions about the timing of the rapture.

Matthew 25:31-46 and The Judgment of the Nations at Christ's Return

Jesus' teaching about His Second Coming in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 is followed by a series of parables that continues through the end of Matthew 25. The final parable, found in Matthew 25:31–46, concerns Jesus' judgment of "all the nations" as He separates them into sheep and goats. The sheep—the righteous—are then invited to come and "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34).

The parable itself does not directly address the issue of the rapture, but pre-trib advocates have used this passage in an effort to discredit a post-tribulational rapture. The parable begins in Matthew 25:31–32 with these introductory words: "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another . . . ." In light of the reference to His coming in glory and His being accompanied

by angels, this undoubtedly points to the Second Coming mentioned shortly before in Matthew 24:30–31. Advocates of the pre-trib view typically argue as follows: if the rapture occurs after the tribulation (as those holding the post-trib view believe), then all believers would already have been raptured at Christ's descent, leaving no "sheep" to be separated from the "goats" when He sits on His throne following His Second Coming.

This argument is not as convincing as it might first appear. First, we must remember that the issue of the rapture is not directly addressed in this passage, so caution is needed when drawing inferences from what we read. Second, although the parable is introduced within the setting of Christ's coming in glory (25:31)—the scene begins with the Second Coming—there is some question regarding the timing of how all the details unfold. For example, in Matthew 25:41 the goats are told to depart "into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels," later described as "eternal punishment" (v. 46). Yet according to Revelation 20:11–15, the judgment that consigns the unrighteous to the "lake of fire" does not occur until after the millennium, not at the time of the Second Coming. Third, while the main thrust of the pre-trib argument is that there would be no sheep left to separate following a post-tribulational rapture, the same logic exposes an incongruity within the pre-trib view itself. Pre-trib advocates understand the "taking away" in Matthew 24:38–39 (and possibly 24:40–41) to be a removal of the unrighteous in judgment, not a removal of the righteous in the rapture. For the sake of argument, let us grant that assumption. If the unrighteous are removed in judgment in Matthew 24:38–39, then there would be no "goats" left to separate from the sheep in the parable of Matthew 25:31–46. Thus, pre-trib advocates face just as much difficulty with Matthew 25:31–46 as do those who hold to a post-tribulational rapture.

A possible solution is that the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31–46 is not intended to teach an event *subsequent to* the Second Coming, but rather functions as a parable *describing* the Second Coming itself in terms of what it will mean for the eternal destiny of certain people. In Matthew 24:31 we are told that the angels will gather "His elect" in conjunction with Christ's Second Coming. Although this gathering could be the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises to regather Israel following her national repentance (see Deut 30:1–3; cf. Deut 4:25–31; Jer 30:1–11; Ezek 36:22–28; 37:21–28), it is also possible that the "gathering together" in Matthew 24:31 refers to the rapture of the church—or at least includes it. After all, the angels gather "His elect" (*toùs eklektoùs autoũ*), and the term "elect" (*eklektós*) is commonly used in the New Testament for all true believers, whether Jew or Gentile (note Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10).

Yet however one interprets the "elect" gathered in Matthew 24:31 at the Second Coming, Matthew 24 also contains references to people being "taken" (24:37–41). This prompts us to conclude that the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31–46 is not describing a separate event after the Second Coming,

but is instead a figurative portrayal of what has already been set forth in Matthew 24. If so, does this lend greater legitimacy to a pre-trib rapture or a post-trib rapture? What is rather striking, in my judgment, is that Christ does not mention a pre-trib rapture anywhere in the Olivet Discourse. This is especially noteworthy since the disciples specifically asked Him about His *parousía* (Matt 24:3). If *parousía* includes both a pre-trib rapture and the Second Coming (as pre-trib advocates maintain), why does the Lord Jesus describe the great tribulation and the Second Coming while omitting any reference to a pre-trib rapture in Matthew 24?

This leads me to believe that the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46 is a parabolic, figurative description of what the Second Coming will mean for the righteous and the unrighteous (and in particular for those Gentiles who live through the time of the great tribulation). The separation that occurs is the result of a post-tribulational rapture of the church, taught in Matthew 24:40–41 and possibly in 24:31 as well.[23] This is the more natural conclusion, especially in view of the complete absence of any reference to a pre-tribulational rapture in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24–25.

THE ISSUE OF IMMINENCY[24]

One of the arguments raised against the post-tribulational rapture position is the matter of *imminency*. Critics of the post-tribulation view contend that the New Testament teaches Christ's coming could occur at any moment, without any preceding events that must first take place.[25] Therefore, they argue, to hold a post-tribulation view of the rapture requires that all the events of the tribulation occur before Christ can return. In their thinking, this undermines the doctrine of imminency.

Actual statements from the early church fathers regarding the church's relationship to the tribulation reveal how flawed this appeal to imminency truly is. After a careful and extensive survey of the patristic era, Donald Fairbairn concludes, ". . . among early patristic writers who deal with the great tribulation,

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[23] We need not assume that the "taking away" in Matthew 24:37–39 is the same as being "taken" in Matthew 24:40–41. Although these passages appear consecutively, two different verbs are used. In Matthew 24:37–39—where the "taking away" parallels the judgment of Noah's day—the verb is *airō* (αἴρω). By contrast, in Matthew 24:40–41 the verb is *paralambánō* (παραλαμβάνω). That those taken away in Matt 24:37-39 are taken away in judgment seems confirmed by Lk 17:27, where those outside Noah's family are said to be "destroyed."

The parallel to Matthew 24:40–41 is found in Luke 17:34–37. When the disciples ask Jesus where those who are "taken" go, He replies, "Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered." Despite the translation "vultures," this need not be understood negatively. The Greek term *aetoì* [ἀετοὶ]) is commonly translated "eagles" elsewhere (Rev 4:7; 8:13; 12:14). The point is simply that the birds gather where the body is—they are destined to be together.

More significant is the verb Jesus uses for "be gathered." It is *episunágō* (ἐπισυνάγω) the same verb used for the "gathering together" of God's elect in Matthew 24:31. This lexical connection suggests that those "taken" in Matthew 24:40–41 (and Luke 17:34–37) are taken to be with the Lord—a scenario entirely appropriate to a post-tribulational rapture.

[24] For a more detailed examination of the subject of *imminency*, see chapter 9 ("The Argument of 'Imminency'") in my book *The Rapture Promise*, pp. 95-114).

[25] Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (Apr 2001): 138-51. Cf. John F. Walvoord, "The Imminency of the Return of Christ," in *The Rapture Question*, 75-82.

there is no evidence of a belief that the rapture of the church would come before the tribulation. . . . More important, the early church saw the tribulation as the final proving ground for the saints and thus indicated that the church would be present on earth during that time."[26] This conclusion is supported by numerous patristic statements suggesting that a post-tribulational view was typically held (e.g., *Epistle of Barnabas* 4).

I have actually met pre-trib advocates for whom this argument—more than any other—led them to embrace the pre-tribulational rapture view. In response, we must first point out that the word *imminency* is not a New Testament term. Like the word *trinity*, it is a non-biblical term used to describe what is thought to be the teaching of Scripture. Yet when one consults a dictionary, *imminency* simply means "something that is liable to happen soon." In James 5:8, the Lord's brother declared, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." But does a promise such as this really mean that Christ could come at any moment without any preceding signs or events? For those living in the first century, several events had to occur before the Lord would come again. Peter had to grow old and die a death on a cross, according to the Lord's prediction (John 21:18–19). The Romans had to surround Jerusalem and destroy the city and the sanctuary in AD 70 (Luke 21:20ff.). The "times of the Gentiles" had to be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). The list could go on.

The problem with the "imminency argument" is that one side is insisting on a definition of what imminency must mean—a definition not explicitly stated in the New Testament. The early church fathers certainly did not hold to such a view of imminency, since several of them embraced a post-tribulational understanding of the rapture and expected to endure the events of the tribulation. As an example, Irenaeus (d. ca. 202), standing in the line of disciples from the Apostle John, wrote,

> And therefore, when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be." For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption.[27]

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[26] Donald Fairbairn, "Contemporary Millennial/Tribulational Debates; Whose Side Was the Early Church On?", in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism; An Alternative to 'Left Behind' Eschatology*, 128.

[27] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 558. Elsewhere, Irenaeus wrote, "For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in [the times of] which [resurrection] the righteous shall reign in the earth" ("Against Heresies," 1:565).

Likewise, Hippolytus (c. 170–235), a prolific writer on eschatology and author of a commentary on Daniel, was explicit in teaching that the Antichrist would persecute the church during his three-and-a-half-year reign of terror (*The Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus*, "On Christ and Antichrist," paragraphs 60–66, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, 217–18). In the context of discussing the Second Coming after the tribulation, Hippolytus even cites 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 as being fulfilled at that time.

Douglas Moo offers a more *balanced* perspective when he writes, "It is better to define *imminency* as the possibility of Jesus' coming for his people at any time—'time' being understood broadly as a short period of time."[28] In my view, the Bible teaches that Christ's "coming" can occur *in any generation*, and therefore believers should always be "on the alert" and anticipating His return. In fact, the repeated calls to "be alert" stand in direct tension with the *imminency* argument, for it is Christ's Second Coming—not a pre-tribulational rapture—for which believers are commanded to be prepared. After describing His Second Coming in power and glory in Luke 21:25–28, the Lord Jesus went on to warn those whom He taught in the first century:

> [34] "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and **that day** will not come on you suddenly like a trap; [35] for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. [36] "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk 21:34-36).

These words would have had no meaningful force for the original audience if they were destined to be "raptured" *before* these events occurred.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have surveyed the use of the term *parousía* in the New Testament as it pertains to the future "coming" of Christ. This is significant, since the Apostle Paul stated that the rapture would occur at the *parousía* of Christ (1 Thess 4:15). What we have seen is that *parousía* is the very term Christ Himself used for His Second Coming after the tribulation. Moreover, Paul consistently used the term in this same sense elsewhere in his writings (1 Thess 3:13; 2:1, 8; 1 Cor 15:23), as did John (1 Jn 2:28) and Peter (2 Pet 1:16). In no instance can it be shown that any New Testament writer *unambiguously* used *parousía* to refer to a "coming" of Christ before the tribulation. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, there is every reason to conclude that *parousía* in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 refers to Christ's "coming" after the tribulation, and therefore the rapture is a post-tribulational event.

We also saw in this paper that the claim of an exemption for the church from the tribulation, based on 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, does not withstand careful scrutiny. There will indeed be a "rescue" by the Lord, but it is one effected by His Second Coming. The church will not be extinguished, and God's plan for humanity will not be thwarted. The Lord will intervene by His return in glory to ensure this, for His coming will bring an end to "the wrath to come" and will secure "salvation" for God's elect (Heb 9:28).

For further study of the early church fathers on this subject, see Thomas D. Lea, "A Survey of the Doctrine of the Return of Christ in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29.2 (June 1986): 163–177.

[28] See Douglas J. Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture*, 238. Moo has an extended discussion on imminency on pp 235-39 of this work.

This "salvation" is a deliverance in the sense of liberating the world from the tyranny of the evil one and from his efforts to persecute and destroy those whose faith is in Christ.

Neither does Revelation 3:10 demonstrate that the church will be exempted from the tribulation. In light of the following verse, with Jesus' call to "hold fast until I come"—a refrain repeated in Revelation 22 with reference to the Second Coming—John was not promising removal before the tribulation. Rather, he was assuring these believers that they would be kept *spiritually secure*, in the sense that no matter what occurred, their "eternal life" could never be taken from them (an important promise, considering that they faced the possibility of martyrdom on account of their faith in Christ).

We also saw that a post-tribulational rapture is required by Christ's parable of the wheat and the tares. Both the wheat and the tares are allowed to grow together without being gathered until "the harvest," which is the end of the age—the time of Christ's return in glory, when the tares will face His judgment, ultimately resulting in their consignment to the fiery furnace. Finally, several arguments raised against a post-tribulational rapture were considered but found inconclusive, and certainly not amounting to any uncontestable proof against the post-tribulational position. This includes the argument based on "imminency," which was shown to be contrary to the views of early church fathers such as Irenaeus and at odds with certain New Testament passages such as Luke 21:34-36.

In closing, I would like to draw out some practical implications of this study. For my part, I find that the post-tribulational rapture best accommodates all the biblical data. In saying this, I fully recognize that equally evangelical brothers—including many close friends—remain persuaded that the rapture must be pre-tribulational. Such disagreement does not trouble me; I am content to allow room for this difference of opinion. What I hope to have accomplished in this paper—if I have not persuaded my pre-trib friends otherwise—is to demonstrate that a strong and coherent case can indeed be made for a post-tribulational rapture, and that, in light of this, the evangelical church today ought to be more tolerant of differing views regarding the timing of the rapture.

One of the things that troubles me about the rapture debate is that this single teaching has become, in certain circles, something of a litmus test for orthodoxy. Several key evangelical seminaries and Bible schools today will not even consider a candidate for a faculty position unless he affirms the pre-tribulational rapture. Likewise, many evangelical churches will not permit someone to serve as a pastor or elder—and in some cases will not even allow membership—without adherence to a pre-trib rapture. I find this deeply troubling, given that almost no notable Christian leader who might be considered even remotely "evangelical" believed or even recognized such a teaching before the early 1800s (and certainly not before the 1700s). I plead with evangelicals everywhere not to be so rigid regarding the timing of the rapture.