

A Case for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church

Jordan P. Ballard

Introduction

The doctrine of the pretribulation 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 fifty years or so. Some believe that the Rapture of the Church will occur before Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:27), known as the Tribulation.¹ Others believe that the Rapture of the Church will occur halfway through the 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; the two events are one and

¹ E.g., John F. Walvoord, *The Return of the Lord* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958); Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); 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; Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003); 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; Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, *The Essential Guide to Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2012); Ron Rhodes, *The End Times in Chronological Order* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2012); Ed Hindson, *15 Future Events that will Shake the World* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014); John F. Hart, ed., *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015); Tim LaHaye, *Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2016); Ed Hindson & Mark Hitchcock, *Can We still Believe in the Rapture?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018); Jeff Kinley and Todd Hampson, *A Quick Reference Guide to the End Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2020); Amir Tsarfati, *Has the Tribulation Begun?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2023); David Jeremiah, *The Great Disappearance: 31 Ways to be Rapture Ready* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2023).

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 midtribulation 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).

the same.³ The reason for the various interpretations is that the timing of the Rapture is not *explicitly* stated in the New Testament. One may detect hints about the timing of the Rapture in certain places, but the timing of the Rapture is largely deduced from the overall teaching of the New Testament.⁴ This paper will dispel two common Rapture myths, discuss the major Rapture passages, and then construct a case for the pretribulation Rapture of the Church from the ground up. Pretribulationism best harmonizes the apparent discrepancies between Rapture passages and Second Coming passages, best resolves the tension between the *imminence* of Christ's return and the *signs* of Christ's return, best accounts for the protection from divine wrath promised to the Church in light of the wrath poured out on the world during the Tribulation, and best solves the problem of populating the millennium after Christ returns.

Two Common Rapture Myths

At the popular level, some Christians believe that the Rapture of the Church is not taught in Scripture. Since the word “rapture” is not found in Scripture, one may easily conclude that the Rapture is unbiblical. However, this is a simple misunderstanding. That

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); Robert H. 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], 100–12; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2d ed. [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christians Economics, 1997]; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* [Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999]).

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 term “rapture” does not appear in the English Bible 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” that are taught in Scripture even though the exact words do not appear. The term “rapture” comes from the Latin translation (*raptus*) of the Greek word for “snatch away” (ἀρπάζω) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and elsewhere (see below).⁵ Perhaps scholars should refer to the event as *the harpazo* instead of *the Rapture* to be more precise. Either way, the concept of the Rapture *is* taught in Scripture. All Christians should believe in the “snatching away” event in 1 Thessalonians 4. The debate should be shifted to the *timing* of the event rather than to the reality of the event itself.

A second myth is that the doctrine of the pretribulation Rapture was nowhere taught in the history of the Church before J. N. Darby (1800–82) promoted the idea in his dispensationalism teachings. 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 probably false.⁷ While this sort of assumption may prove true in many cases, it commits the logical fallacy of chronological

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.

⁷ Posttribulationists often present their view as “classical premillennialism” or “historic premillennialism” with the suggestion that posttribulationism was the common view of the early Church (e.g., 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), but this can be misleading. Most of the Church Fathers were chiliasts/premillennialists (see Fairbairn, “Contemporary Millennial/Tribulation Debates,” 105–119), but they were confused on the subject of timing of the Rapture.

snobbery, which states that if a view is late in origin, then it is untrue.⁸ The timing of when a doctrine developed is interesting, but it has no direct bearing on its truthfulness. Plus, the truth of a doctrine is not determined by an appeal to patristic authority. Scripture must be the final arbiter of truth.⁹

Although an explicit doctrine of the pretribulation Rapture does not appear in the earliest Christian writings, the Church Fathers did believe in the imminent return of Christ, which is a major feature of pretribulationism. Some Church Fathers believed they were in the Tribulation and that the Lord's coming was imminent.¹⁰ This may be deemed "imminent intratribulationism" to distinguish the view of the Church Fathers from modern posttribulationism.¹¹ The imminence in the writings of the early Church supports pretribulationism, but the intratribulationism supports posttribulationism. For this reason, Walvoord concludes 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."¹² At the same time, though, scholars have discovered a handful of pretribulation 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

⁸ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 631–32.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 15–16; cf. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 19–20.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope," 103.

¹² John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: A Comprehensive Biblical Study of the Translation of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 52.

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.”¹³ 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 return 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 “imminent or overhanging.”¹⁴ Other examples of early pretribulationism include Codex Amiatinus (ca. 690–716),¹⁵ Brother Dolcino (d. 1307),¹⁶ Increase Mather (1693–1723),¹⁷ John Gill (1697–1771),¹⁸ Morgan Edwards (1722–1795),¹⁹ and others.²⁰ These examples do not *prove* that pretribulationism is correct, but they discredit the claim that the pretribulation Rapture was invented by Darby.²¹ Like all

¹³ Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation,” *BSac* 152 (July–September 1995): 311.

¹⁴ 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), 108–18.

¹⁵ Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 317–18.

¹⁶ Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,” *BSac* 159 (July–September 2002): 349–62.

¹⁷ Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 319.

¹⁸ Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” 119–22.

¹⁹ 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), 69–74.

²⁰ See Ice and Stitzinger, “Rapture, History of,” 319.

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

Examining Rapture Passages in the New Testament

There are three main passages²² which are recognized as “Rapture passages.”²³

The first major Rapture passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18:²⁴

²¹ A third myth 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 that were allegedly instrumental in Darby’s own formulation of pretribulationism (the actual prophecy is recounted in Tim LaHaye, *Rapture Under Attack* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1998], 235–38). According to Dave MacPherson, Darby and others devised a plot to cover up the truth that the idea originated with a cultic prophetess. See Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas City, MO: Heart of America 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).

There are at least five problems with the idea that pretribulationism is false because it originated with Margaret MacDonald. First, 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. Second, Darby had already formed his beliefs about the pretribulation Rapture *before* MacDonald’s utterance in 1830. Third, 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. Fourth, MacPherson’s implication commits the genetic fallacy in discounting the truth of a view based on its origin. Even if Darby had adopted MacDonald’s view of the Rapture, this in itself would not make the view incorrect. Fifth, 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. 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; James F. Stitzinger, “The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation,” *TMSJ* 13 no. 2 (Fall 2002): 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.

²² Many pretribulationists 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

¹³Brothers, 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. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According 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. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up (ἀρπαγησόμεθα) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Several observations are in order here. First, the term παρουσία in verse 15 indicates that the return of Christ is in view since the term is used of Christ's return elsewhere in the New Testament.²⁵ Whether the coming of Christ has one part or two parts is a separate question. Second, Paul included himself ("we" in verses 15 & 17) in those who would be raptured, indicating that he thought the Rapture was imminent.²⁶ Third, there will be a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God at this

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), 205–11; 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 posttribulation interpretation, see Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 201–12.

²³ Labeling these as "Rapture passages" is not question-begging in favor of pretribulationism because the timing of the Rapture event is open to debate.

²⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV (1984).

²⁵ See Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7–8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4; 1 John 2:28.

²⁶ Thomas L. Constable, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 704.

event (v. 16),²⁷ making it likely that this will be a public event.²⁸ Fourth, this passage does not depict the general resurrection of all people or even of all saints.²⁹ Only the dead “in Christ” will be raised at this time,³⁰ followed by believers who are alive at the time of the Rapture (cf. 1 Cor 15:51–52). Fifth, 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.³¹ One sense is “to steal, carry off, drag away.”³²

²⁷ 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 trumpet in Matthew 24:31 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 or one of the seven trumpets in Revelation 8–11 (see n37 below).

²⁸ 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). Whether or not the Rapture will be a secret event is debated, though it is not essential to pretribulationism. Darby was ambivalent as to whether the Rapture would be secret (Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, 123–24). Walvoord affirmed it when he wrote, “There is no indication that the world as a whole will see Christ at the time of the rapture of the church” (John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1966], 39). The Rapture portrayed in *Left Behind* is instantaneous and perhaps only visible/audible to the Christians experiencing it, though 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.

²⁹ The “first resurrection” of Revelation 20:5–6 is best taken as “first” in a qualitative sense rather than first in a chronological sense. 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).

³⁰ 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.

³¹ BAG, 108.

³² See Matthew 11:12; 12:12; 13:9; John 10:12, 28, 29.

The second is “to snatch or take away” either forcefully (with resistance)³³ or without resistance. This last idea of being snatched away without resistance is what is depicted here in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.³⁴ Sixth, the Church will be snatched away in the clouds to “meet” (ἀπάντησις) the Lord in the air, either to return immediately with 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.³⁵

³³ See John 6:15; Acts 23:10; Jude 23.

³⁴ There are four other verses where ἀρπάζω 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.”

³⁵ The term ἀπάντησις has been the subject of much discussion. Some posttribulationists argue that ἀπάντησις is a technical term that 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 posttribulation reading of ἀπάντησις is not demanded, though, for four reasons. First, 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; Jud 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).

Second, 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. Third, the Church does not “go out” to meet the Lord at its own discretion. Rather, the Church is caught up by the Lord Himself (Blasing, “A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” 28). Fourth, 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). For further discussion, see Michael R. Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s Use of ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,” *BBR* 4

The second major Rapture passage is 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, which describes the instantaneous resurrection and translation of Christian believers: “⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in 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.” A few observations are in order here. First, Paul refers to this specific teaching as a “mystery” (μυστήριον). As with Paul’s other uses of μυστήριον, the Rapture is something which was not revealed in the Old Testament.³⁶ The general resurrection was previously revealed (Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; cf. John 5:29; 11:24), but the Rapture was not. Second, several ideas in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 run parallel to the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. In both passages, the imminence of the event is seen in the fact that Paul includes himself (“we”) with those who would be raptured (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:15, 17). Both passages mention falling asleep (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:13–15), where “sleep” is a euphemism for death (cf. 1 Cor 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20). First Corinthians 15:52 states that the dead will be changed (ἀλλάσσω) and raised (ἐγείρω), and 1 Thessalonians 4:16–7 states that the dead in Christ will be raised up (ἀνίστημι) and caught up (ἀρπάζω). That a physical, bodily resurrection is in view in 1 Corinthians 15 is indicated in verse 53: “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (ESV). Additionally, both passages mention a trumpet (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). Paul clarifies two points in 1 Corinthians 15:51–51: the translation of believers will happen instantaneously (“in a

(1994): 15–34; Robert H. Gundry, “A Brief Note on ‘Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s Use of *ΑΙΙΑΝΘΗΖΙΖ* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,’” *BBR* 6 (1996): 39–41.

³⁶ See Romans 11:25; 16:25; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Colossians 1:26; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 800.

flash, in the twinkling of an eye”) and will occur at the “last trumpet,” which is probably the same trumpet as the one in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.³⁷

The third major Rapture passage is John 14:1–3:

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In 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. ³And 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 takes them to the Father’s house to be with Him forever. No judgment is mentioned as in other passages which

³⁷ Posttribulationists typically equate the “last trumpet” with the posttribulational 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 necessitates that the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments happen simultaneously (Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 198, 226–27). There are several responses to the posttribulational interpretation. First, Paul could not have had the seventh trumpet in mind in 1 Corinthians 15:52 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. Second, the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 may be the last in sequence but not the last trumpet in time. Third, the trumpets in Revelation 8–11 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). Fourth, 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 (see 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). If the judgments in Revelation are sequential rather than overlapping, then the trumpet before Christ’s return (Matt 24:31) follows the trumpet judgments in Revelation. Fifth, 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 pretribulational perspective, there are several plausible explanations for the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 at the time of the Rapture (see Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Come!* 259–69). First, 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 the Israelites 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. Second, 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 associated with the Feast of Trumpets, which occurred before the annual Day of Atonement in the Jewish calendar (see Lev 23:23–32). 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. Third, 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). Fourth, 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.

depict the Second Coming. There are a number of similarities between John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Note the following words and concepts:³⁸

troubled (John 14:1)	grieve (1 Thess 4:13)
believe (John 14:1)	believe (1 Thess 4:14)
God, Me (John 14:1)	Jesus, God (1 Thess 4:14)
told you (John 14:2)	say to you (1 Thess 4:15)
come again (John 14:3)	coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:15)
receive you (John 14:3)	caught up (1 Thess 4:17)
to myself (John 14:3)	to meet the Lord (1 Thess 4:17)
where I am, there you may be (John 14:3)	always with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17)

These similarities indicate that the same event is likely in view. Most believe that John 14:1–3 describes the return of Christ for believers, though some posttribulationists have offered alternative interpretations that are unconvincing.³⁹ Putting the three passages together, the Lord will come again for his own, and the dead in Christ will be resurrected

³⁸ See Mal Couch, “Gospels,” in *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 365.

³⁹ 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). However, Moo’s interpretation does not adequately account for Jesus’ reference to the many rooms in His Father’s house. Why would He be preparing a place for the disciples if the disciples never go there?

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 on them (John 20:19, 22; Gundry, *First the Antichrist*, 110–12). Against this interpretation is the larger context that indicates that Jesus is talking about going to His Father in heaven (John 14:4–6, 25–26, 28), not to the cross, and the promise to receive the disciples *to Himself* so that the disciples would be with Jesus, which cannot be equated to Jesus returning from the grave to breathe the Holy Spirit on the disciples.

Blomberg believes that the Father’s house is an allusion to the temple because Jesus referred to the temple as “my Father’s house” in John 2:16. Jesus’ promise in John 14 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 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 that demonstrates 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. 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).

before the living believers are translated into glorified bodies, exchanging the perishable and mortal for the imperishable and immortal. This will happen instantaneously 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 to return to the Father’s house and will be with the Lord forever. With the Rapture event firmly established in these three passages, it is now appropriate to consider the *timing* of this event.

A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture

Building a case for any Rapture view requires looking at Scripture as a whole, comparing Scripture with Scripture, making logical deductions, and harmonizing Scripture. My case for the pretribulation Rapture here will be cumulative and will present what are, in my opinion, the four strongest arguments.⁴⁰ My operating assumptions are that Scripture is inspired and thus fits together and 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.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ There are obvious overlaps 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 as convincing. 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.

⁴¹ 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

application of a literal hermeneutic results in the distinction between Israel and the Church in God's program with a future for national Israel,⁴² but this assumption is not strictly required for pretribulationism⁴³ and is seldom shared by non-pretribulationists.⁴⁴ Likewise, a literal hermeneutic leads to a futurist view of both Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24–27)⁴⁵ and Revelation 6–19⁴⁶ and to the premillennial return of Christ to reign

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).

⁴² 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).

⁴³ 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 but also *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 written, "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 then since "the Church" (Israel and the Tribulation saints) also goes through the Tribulation in this view.

⁴⁴ E.g., Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," 113–15, 130; Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," 75–77.

⁴⁵ 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.

on the earth as depicted in Revelation 19–20.⁴⁷ 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, though they arguably comport best with pretribulationism.

Differences Between Rapture Passages 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.⁴⁸ 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),⁴⁹ the first hint

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ 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 Pretribulationist 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.

⁴⁹ The main Rapture passages are John 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. There are many other verses, but these are the main passages. Geisler includes these additional Rapture passages: 1 Corinthians 1:7–8; 16:22; Philippians 3:20–21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 5:9, 23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7–9; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28–3:2; Jude 21; Revelation 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20. He includes these additional Second Coming passages: Daniel 2:44–45; 7:9–14; 12:1–3; Zechariah 12:1–9; Matthew 13:41; 26:64; Mark 14:62;

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 and that the differences are difficult to harmonize if the Rapture and Second Coming happen together.⁵¹

The Rapture and the Father's House

As examined above, Jesus promised to prepare a place at the Father's house and then to come again to receive His disciples (or all believers) to be with Himself (John 14:1–3). It is easy to conceptualize this from a pretribulational (or prewrath) perspective: Jesus comes for the Church, takes believers to heaven, and then returns with believers at the end of the Tribulation to usher in the millennial kingdom. The posttribulational view is that Jesus will rapture the Church at the end of the Tribulation, meet the believers in the air, and then immediately return to the earth to usher in the millennial kingdom; the Rapture and Second Coming are one and the same event. The problem is that the promise of taking believers to the Father's house in heaven is never fulfilled in a posttribulational scheme. The Church meets the Lord in the air and comes right back to earth without ever

Luke 13:25–28; Acts 1:9–11; 3:19–21; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10; 2:8; 2 Peter 3:1–14; Jude 14–15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–20:6 (Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four*, 624; cf. Hindson, “The Rapture and the Return,” 156).

⁵⁰ The prewrath and midtribulational 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, 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.

seeing heaven.⁵² This appears to be a major discrepancy that is best explained by a pretribulational (or prewrath) Rapture.

The Rapture and the Olivet Discourse

Reading the three major Rapture passages in light of the Olivet Discourse reveals a few interesting differences.⁵³ First, there are many signs that lead up to the Second Coming (Matt 24:33), but the Rapture passages have no hint of signs. Second, 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. Third, the Olivet Discourse teaches that judgment will follow the Tribulation and the return of Christ, and then 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. Fourth, the Olivet Discourse, the angels gather the elect (Matt 24:31), but the Lord *Himself* (αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος) comes down to meet the Church at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:16).⁵⁴ Posttribulationism would be more apparent if there were more overlap in the details, but the differences are better explained if two separate events are in view.⁵⁵

⁵² Some posttribulationists believe that John 14:1–3 is *not* a Rapture passage, thereby side-stepping the problem, but the alternative interpretations of John 14:1–3 explored in note 39 above are unconvincing.

⁵³ See Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” 80–86.

⁵⁴ 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 that does not change the fact 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.

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 concerning His return, 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). At that 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.⁵⁶ A pretribulation (or prewrath) Rapture averts these apparent discrepancies.

⁵⁵ 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. The Jewishness of the Olivet Discourse favors the pretribulationist view in my opinion. Why the focus on Jerusalem and Judea, though? There are more Christians living in many other cities around the world in the Church Age, so one would expect the persecution to center in Dallas or Atlanta, for example. The fact that the Second Coming focuses on the Jews and Jerusalem points toward the fact that the Church and Israel are separate and that the Tribulation primarily concerns Israel, though there will be great multitude of Tribulation saints from the Gentile nations (Rev 7:9). Consider the following Jewish elements in the Olivet Discourse: First, the background to the Tribulation is the time of *Jacob's* trouble (Jer 30:7; see also “labor pains” in Jer 30:6 and Matt 24:8), and Daniel's seventieth seven is for “*your* people” and “*your* holy city” (Dan 9:24), referring to the Jews and the city of Jerusalem respectively. Second, 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, but the future abomination of desolation (Dan 9:27; 12:11) will stand “in the holy place” (Matt 24:15), which is arguably the rebuilt *Jewish* temple during the Tribulation (cf. 2 Thess 2:4). Third, *Jerusalem* will be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20) and will be trampled until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Fourth, those in *Judea* are to flee to the mountains (Matt 24:16). 5) The Jewish *Sabbath* will be observed (Matt 24:20).

⁵⁶ In response, 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*

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. 3:4–5; 6:11; 7:9–14; 19:14; Jude 14). Moo’s response is to deny that there is a progression of events in Revelation 19–20. Rather, the events described appear to happen in conjunction with the return of Christ.⁵⁸ But 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 already being with Christ when He returns.⁶⁰

Posttribulationism [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973], 137). Thus, the Rapture separates believers from unbelievers *before* the millennium, and the separation of sheep and goats takes place *after* the millennium. While this interpretation deals with the many differences presented above, it 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). A better explanation is that the gathering of the Church to meet the Lord in the air is one event, the gathering and separating of Matthew 25:31–46 is another event and the destruction of the wicked at the end of the millennium leading to the Great White Throne judgment is a third event.

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. I find these arguments persuasive; it is at least peculiar that these terms are not mentioned. Plus, 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) To be fair, though, “the church” is not directly mentioned in the heavenly scenes in Revelation 4–19 either, and there

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 that Christ will come like a thief in the night (Matt 24:43; 25:13; Luke 12:39; Rev 3:3; 16:15). Peter and Paul taught that the Day of the Lord will come suddenly too (1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10). These passages make it sound like the Lord's return and the Day-of-the-Lord judgments could happen suddenly. However, Jesus also taught that there will be signs before He 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 national 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 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

are differences of interpretation as to the identity of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4. However, Revelation 18:20 mentions “saints and apostles and prophets” and is the closest referent for the armies clothed in white returning with Christ in Revelation 19, so that may bolster the argument that the Church is already glorified and with Christ before His return.

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 confused.⁶² There are too many teachings about the sudden return of Christ in the New Testament to dismiss it or to 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 suffer God’s wrath.⁶⁵ In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul writes that Jesus “rescues us from the coming

⁶¹ For a discussion, 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.

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 For a fuller discussion, see 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 Believers,” in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds., Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 129–39.

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.” What is the wrath to come? If Paul is referring to God’s wrath during the Tribulation, then it would seem that Christians will be rescued from it before it comes. If Paul has in mind God’s eternal wrath, then these verses are simply teaching that Christians will not go to hell. Looking a little closer at the context reveals that Paul has in mind the former idea. The “Day of the Lord” is mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. The futuristic idea of “coming wrath” appears in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. First Thessalonians 5:3 mentions “labor pains” (ὠδίν; cf. Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). These three contextual clues point toward God’s eschatological wrath,⁶⁶ not God’s eternal wrath (cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5; 5:9; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). Premillennial scholars find agreement here, though they disagree on the exact fulfillment of these promises.

The pretribulational view is that the Church is not appointed to wrath and therefore 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 view is that the Church will suffer the wrath of Satan and the Antichrist in the first half of the Tribulation,⁶⁷ but 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

⁶⁶ Wallace argues that a better text-critical reading of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is 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, though, since both the prewrath and posttribulational views under consideration interpret 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as deliverance *from* God’s eschatological wrath.

⁶⁷ Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 144–45; Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” 150.

the Tribulation.⁶⁸ The posttribulational view is that the Church will go through the entire Tribulation, but the Church will be shielded or 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.⁶⁹

The major difficulty with the prewrath view is that it imposes an artificial distinction between God's wrath and man's/Satan's wrath. At the opening of the sixth seal, the unbelievers hide themselves from "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16), which means that the seal judgments constitute God's wrath (not Satan's). The seals, trumpets, and bowls are all from God, so it is inaccurate to portray earlier judgments as the wrath of Satan that Christians will experience before being raptured halfway through the Tribulation before the divine wrath starts. Plus, 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.⁷⁰

The posttribulational view is likewise unfounded. There is no indication in the book of Revelation that believers living in the Tribulation will be shielded from the *effects* of God's wrath such as the sword, famine, plagues, wild beasts, earthquakes, a scorched earth, waters turned to blood, bitter waters, and darkness. Believers are not the targets of God's wrath, and there are a few judgments that only affect unbelievers,⁷¹ but the entire

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 192–94, 232–33; Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 84–85.

⁷⁰ See Craig Blasing, "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.

planet will be devastated by the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. Nothing in Revelation indicates that believers will be protected. In fact, there are numerous martyrs during this time (Rev 6:9–11; 7:9–17; 20:4–5), which seems to point in the opposite direction.

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 potential proof-text for pretribulationism if the Church is promised removal *from* the Tribulation.⁷² Posttribulationists believe that the promise is to protect the Church *through* the Tribulation,⁷³ and either interpretation would fit with the prewrath view.⁷⁴

⁷¹ These include the following: the locust creatures (demons) that do not torment those who have the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 9:4); the sores that only afflict those who take the mark of the beast (Rev 16:2); the sun that scorches those who curse God (Rev 16:8–9); the darkness of the fifth bowl that affects the Beast and his kingdom (Rev 16:10–11; though the earlier darkness of the fourth trumpet appears to affect both believers and unbelievers Rev 8:12).

⁷² See 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* 3 no. 1 (Spring 1982): 3–18; Thomas R. Edgar, “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *GTJ* 3 no. 1 (Spring 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.

⁷³ 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.

⁷⁴ See Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, 231–41; Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” 149–50.

Before evaluating the arguments for the pretribulational and posttribulational interpretations, a few observations about Revelation 3:10 are in order. First, the promise of 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.⁷⁵ Additionally, the whole testimony of Revelation is for the churches (Rev 22:16), so the promise in Revelation 3:10 cannot be limited to just the churches in the first century.⁷⁶ Second, the protection promised in Revelation 3:10 is from the eschatological judgment depicted later in Revelation. Unlike the local persecution in Smyrna that lasted for ten days (Rev 2:10), the hour of trial in view here is about to come upon “the whole world” (cf. Rev 12:9; 13:3; 16:14).⁷⁷ Also, the definite article (τῆς) points to a particular hour of trial—namely, the Tribulation period.⁷⁸ The hour of trial is for testing “those who live on the earth.” The phrase κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς occurs ten other times in Revelation and nowhere else in Scripture. 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). Third, the difference between the pretribulational view and the posttribulational view lies in the meaning of the phrase τηρήσω ἐκ (“keep from”). Pretribulationists read the phrase as keeping the Church *from* the Tribulation while posttribulationists read it as keeping/preserving the Church *through* the Tribulation.

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 150, 294.

⁷⁶ Contra Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 449–50.

⁷⁷ 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).

⁷⁸ Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” 259–60.

A careful study can adjudicate interpretation of Revelation 3:10 is more plausible. To begin, the verb τηρέω is used seventy times in the New Testament and has the basic meaning of “to keep, guard, preserve, protect, observe.”⁷⁹ The context must determine the nature of the keeping or protection, of course. The preposition ἐκ could likewise favor either 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). However, several arguments are advanced in favor of pretribulationism. First, as Edgar points out, ἐκ is often combined with verbs of motion when conveying the idea of “emergence”, but ἐκ cannot be combined with a verb of non-motion (such as τηρέω) to mean “emerge.”⁸⁰ Second, although John could have used τηρέω ἀπὸ (cf. Jas 1:27) to communicate the idea of separation, which would perhaps be stronger than τηρέω ἐκ,⁸¹ it seems that he would have certainly used τηρέω with ἐν, εἰς, or διὰ if he wanted to communicate “preservation in/through” the Tribulation. The phrase τηρέω ἐν occurs three times in the New Testament and connotes the idea of 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.⁸²

Third, 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

⁷⁹ BAG, 822–23.

⁸⁰ 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).

⁸¹ See Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” 69–70.

⁸² Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulational Rapture?” 248.

New Testament, it 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 (τηρήσης) them from (ἐκ) the evil one.” Posttribulationists interpret John 17:15b as “preserving from the power of evil when in its very presence.”⁸³ The idea is that believers are to remain in a world that is under the control of Satan (cf. 1 John 5:19), but they will be preserved from the power of Satan in a spiritual sense.⁸⁴ This is in contrast to being taken out (ἄρῃς ἐκ) of the world (17:15a), it is argued, which communicates the idea of separation better than τηρέω ἐκ. Against this interpretation is the fact that the believers were already *in* the world, which means that ἄρῃς ἐκ must mean “out from within”—the very sense in which posttribulationists interpret τηρέω ἐκ.⁸⁵ John 17:15b, contrasts with 17:15a, as indicated by ἄλλά, which begins the second clause. Being “kept from the evil one” (τηρέω ἐκ) must be understood as “preservation from an outside position”⁸⁶ or something similar in order to contrast with 17:15a.⁸⁷ The teaching of John 17:15b, then, parallels the idea in Revelation 3:10 of protection *from* something, not protection *within*.⁸⁸

⁸³ Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 85.

⁸⁴ Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 225.

⁸⁵ Contra Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 226n84.

⁸⁶ Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” 258.

⁸⁷ Moo asks what “outside position” could mean in relation to the evil one, who is 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 posttribulationist 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 posttribulationist 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, so that is not even an issue (Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulationist Rapture?” 248).

Fourth, the pretribulation interpretation best preserves the promise of protection to the Philadelphian church. Thomas' summary statement 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 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.⁸⁹

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; 7:9–17; 20:4–5). 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?”⁹⁰ 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.”⁹¹

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

⁸⁸ The argument for “spiritual protection” in John 17:15b is equally unlikely because *τηρέω* in John 17:11–12 speaks of eternal security, not spiritual protection in this life (contra Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 225).

⁸⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 286–87.

⁹⁰ Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” 225n83.

⁹¹ The participle *μελλούσης* (“which is about to”) modifies *ώρας* (“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.”

of wrath before the return of Christ. Additionally, the Church is promised in Revelation 3:10 to be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the entire world. Revelation 3:10 is a strong indication of pretribulationism, though pretribulationism does not rest on this verse alone. The protection *from* this time presupposes the removal of the Church before the Tribulation arrives.

Populating the Millennium

One final argument for pretribulationism concerns the problem of populating the millennium. 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 Tribulation 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. Posttribulationism posits that all believers will be raptured just before Christ returns to slay the wicked and establish His kingdom since the Rapture and the Second Coming are one and the same event. The problem is that all believers will receive resurrected, glorified bodies at the Rapture, which means there will be no natural, non-glorified believers to enter the millennium, repopulate the earth in fulfillment of prophecy (e.g., Isa 2:2–4; 11:6–9; 65:20–25), and then join Satan's final rebellion at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7–9).

Posttribulationists have offered various solutions to this problem,⁹² but the most common view is that there will be three groups of people at Christ's return. First, there will be saints who will be raptured when Christ returns to the earth. Second, there will be rebels who are slain—those who have sided with the Beast. These two categories

⁹² See Feinberg, "Arguing About the Rapture," 201–204.

correspond to the sheep and the goats from Matthew 25, but that leaves no mortals to populate the millennium. Therefore, Grudem suggests that there may be a third group who survive the Tribulation as unbelievers but who submit to Christ sometime during the millennium. “Many will simply surrender without trusting Christ and will thus enter the millennium as unbelievers.”⁹³ While this solves the problem of populating the millennium, it also means 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).

The prewrath view is similar to the pretribulationist view in understanding that mortal people will survive the Tribulation and enter the millennium, but problems surface if the Church has replaced Israel, as Hultberg believes.⁹⁴ If there is just one people of God without distinctions, then everyone is a part of the Church. This means that the Church is raptured before the wrath of God is poured out, but the Church also goes *through* the time of wrath since any people who get saved in the second half of the Tribulation will also be a part of the Church, which defeats the whole point of the prewrath Rapture and runs counter to the promises in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9. Pretribulationism offers the best solution to the problem of populating the millennium.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the Rapture is taught in at least three passages in the New Testament, that pretribulationism appears in Church history before Darby and that the Darby did not borrow pretribulationism from a cultic prophetess, and that a case for pretribulationism is anything but far-fetched. The differences in the Rapture passages and

⁹³ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 450.

⁹⁴ Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” 113–14.

the Second Coming passages suggest that two separate events are in view. 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, and it resolves biblical tensions better than competing views.